A Comparative Study of Student Services in China and Canada

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The Ministry of Education is in charge of policy making and supervision of the country’s education system. Public and private sectors (2442 in total, 707 private HEIs) are present. Public universities are under the jurisdiction of central, provincial, prefectural or municipal governments and are largely funded by respective levels of government. Hierarchical system: elite public universities (985 and 211 Project support universities), non-elite universities and vocational colleges (public and private). Reform and increased autonomy but less than that in Canadian context. Little opportunity for student mobility.

No federal ministry for postsecondary education. It is within provincial purview. Postsecondary education is largely publicly funded. Religiously-affiliated institutions may or may not have degree-granting authority. Two main sectors: vocationally-oriented colleges and theoretically-oriented universities. Mobility between the colleges and universities varies by the province. Universities are largely autonomous, created through legislative acts; colleges tend to be Crown corporations and report directly to the Ministry.
Cultural values related to student affairs work

- Education is a way for self-perfection to be a noble person; and a process of molding people to be members performing appropriately in a society
- Collectivism sets the consensus that the ultimate goal of individual development is for the prosperity and harmony of a society
- Virtues are fundamental for a harmonious society. This proposition leads to the emphasis of moral education
- Teachers’ responsibilities thus are to teach AND cultivate students (教书育人) for their all-around development (全面发展)
- Confucian ethical code for relationships (superior/senior and subordinate/junior) are bonded by duty consciousness and affections
- The influence of Confucian bureaucracy in organizational structure

- Education is a means for developing individuals’ ability and skills for their pursuit in life; and a way to prepare citizens to perform their roles and responsibilities in a democratic society
- Education should be aimed at students’ total growth
- Student affairs staff are educators as well as professional services providers
- Fundamentals of individualism for human relations: individual right and freedom
- The principle of contract regulates relations: binding agreements protected by law
- The principle of fiduciary: HEIs are proxy of the welfare of internal constituents based on mutual trust
Organizational Structure

- Student work instead of student affairs
- Two leadership lines: Communist Party Committee and administrative system
- Multi-level design of student work, a mixed structure of vertical and horizontal dimensions
  - Level 1: Vice party secretary or vice president (student work committee)
  - Level 2: Directors of student work office and other institutional student services units; college party secretary or associate dean (college level student work committee)
  - Level 3: Head teacher, class counselor, class Youth League secretary (student)
- Areas of student affairs portfolio is expanding
- Common areas in both contexts but maybe practiced in different ways

- No consistent title for senior officer
  - Vice President/Provost
  - Asst/Associate Vice President
  - Students, Affairs or Services
- May report directly to President, Provost, or AVP-Academic
- Varies in terms of centralization – from completely centralized to an embedded model
- Common areas in portfolio:
  - Campus/student life
  - Career services
  - Health, counselling & accessibility services
  - Orientation & transition
  - Enrollment Management
Organizational structure of student work in China (figure)

- vice party secretary or vice president
  - enrollment and employment office (center for career service)
  - student work office
  - graduate students office
  - Communist Youth League committee (student government and center for student activities)
  - counseling center
  - center for student financial aid

- college level vice party secretary or associate dean
college level student work office/committee

- Class teacher (班主任), class counselor (辅导员)
class Youth League secretary (团支书)

Figure cited from Wang and Hao (2013)
Organizational structure of student work in Canada (figure)

- Centralized

- Decentralized

- Hub & Spoke (Embedded)
Nature of student affairs work

- The mission of the educational institution is paramount
- Quality of life in a teaching and learning community is crucial to the educational mission
- Education should be aimed at students’ total growth
- This goal is best realized through a partnership of student services personnel with students, administrators and faculty members
- Student service staff are educators
- Students’ participation in student affairs administration
- Providing supporting environment, guidance and professional services for students

- The importance of moral-political education in cultivating socialist successors and constructors
- All faculty members, staff and administrators should engage in promoting the all-around development of students (全员育人)
- Key and comprehensive role of class counselors (辅导员)
- Students are under supervision yet student leaders (学生干部) can be active and supporting member to the goal of student development
- An approach underlines “to instruct with principles, move with affections, and guide with teachers’ own actions”
- In the process of learning and borrowing from developed countries including Canada
Professionalization

• Class counselor (辅导员) system
• Short training programs for on-service student work staff at different stages of their career
• The weakness of the current system and the call for professionalization
• The converging trends in student work:
  - Increased research interest on student development and student affairs
  - The growth of graduate programs on student affairs administration
  - The development of professional associations and special interest groups

• Emerging need for grad. credential
• Professional preparation programs
  • OISE/UT
  • Memorial University of Newfoundland
  • Simon Fraser University
• Professional associations – statements of principles
  • CACUSS – general student affairs organization
  • CACEE – career educators and employers
  • ARUCC – registrars and enrollment management

• Professional development
  • Annual conferences
  • Webinars, regional workshops
  • Journals, other media
Conclusions and implications

- The conceptualization, portfolios, organizational and administrative structure, and the nature of student affairs work are the products of the political and social context, the design of its higher education system, and shaped by cultural values.
- This study finds many similarities on the common ground in student affairs in the two contexts and some differences.
- A converging trend to Western models and practices in student affairs in China can be observed in recent years.
- Comparative research can highlight opportunities to adapt approaches from other contexts.
  - As student affairs grows in profile in China’s universities, there are opportunities to adapt the professionalization models to meet the needs of Chinese student affairs staff.
  - Canadian institutions may consider adapting the fudaoyuan model to provide tailored support to students. UBC has adopted something similar already.
  - Mutual learning of innovative models and good practices from each other.
Next Steps for Research

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