

Research on the Management System for the Construction of “Double First-Class” in Colleges of Universities

Jingwen Zhou

Nanjing University of Finance and Economics, Nanjing, China

Abstract:

The implementation of the “Double First-Class” initiative is a significant strategic measure for the development of higher education in China in the new era. It is a crucial means to achieve the goal of building a strong country in higher education and enhancing international competitiveness. The foundation of the “Double First-Class” initiative lies in disciplines, with colleges being the direct responsible entities for discipline development. Currently, it is necessary to overcome challenges by establishing a management system for the “Double First-Class” initiative at the college level and actively promoting the implementation of the “college running university” model.

Keywords: Double First-Class, College management

1. Introduction

In October 24, 2015, the State Council issued the "Overall Plan for Promoting the Construction of World-Class Universities and Disciplines", marking the initiation of the construction of "Double First-Class" universities in China. The "Double First-Class" initiative is a significant decision made by the CPC Central Committee and the State Council to enhance the comprehensive strength and international competitiveness of China's higher education, in support of the "Two Centenary Goals" and the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. In February 2022, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Finance, and the National Development and Reform Commission issued the "Opinions on Further Promoting the Construction of World-Class Universities and World-Class Disciplines", unveiling the list of universities and disciplines selected in the second round of the "Double First-Class" initiative, officially commencing the second phase of the construction. The second phase of the "Double First-Class" construction aligns with China's development during the 14th Five-Year Plan period and is a critical phase for the initiative, crucial for the development of higher education and universities in China. The focus of the "Double First-Class" initiative lies in disciplines, with colleges serving as the carriers and foundation for discipline construction. Enhancing the leading role of colleges in universities and actively promoting discipline construction within colleges are fundamental approaches for the "Double First-Class" initiative. In other words, the model for the construction of "Double First-Class" universities should shift from "universities managing colleges" to "colleges managing universities", implementing a management system for "Double First-Class" construction at the college level.

2. The necessity of establishing a management system for the construction of "Double First-Class" in secondary colleges.

The goal of the "Double First-Class" initiative is to establish world-class universities and disciplines concurrently. The development of top-tier disciplines is a primary task for building first-class universities and advancing the higher education system. Modernizing the higher education system is a macro development goal, with building first-class universities as a ultimate goal, and developing top-tier disciplines as a micro-level goal. Therefore, discipline construction is crucial for the development of universities and higher education, serving as a top priority within the "Double First-Class" initiative. The essence of the "Double First-Class" initiative lies in categorized development, targeted growth, and achieving international competitiveness. It involves selecting a group of leading universities and disciplines to build several world-class universities and departments with world-class disciplines, leading the way in fostering innovative talent, enhancing the quality of higher education, and striving towards making China a strong higher education nation. In this sense, the construction of world-class universities and first-class disciplines involves policy inclinations and significant support towards universities and disciplines with high levels of academic development, quality talent cultivation, and comprehensive strength under the constraints of limited educational resources and financial investments. This approach also reflects the consistent focus on major initiatives in the education policy field in China and leveraging the advantages of developing countries. The connection between constructing first-class universities and disciplines, and the distinction between the two, show that building top-tier universities is based on discipline construction, yet differs in the mechanism of categorized development. Therefore, artificially separating the construction of world-class universities from top-tier disciplines is inappropriate, as building world-class universities should be grounded in discipline construction. The goal and fundamental path of the "Double First-Class" initiative lie in disciplines.

As China enters a stage of high-quality development, the previous university development system can no longer adapt to the new circumstances. Therefore, in the second phase of the "Double First-Class" initiative, there will no longer be artificial identity assignments for universities. Instead, the central focus will be on the primacy of developing "first-class disciplines," gradually providing categorized guidance and assessment for "Double First-Class" universities. This new policy and system highlight the central position of disciplines within universities, presenting a new concept and challenge for future university operations. The relationship between universities and colleges will also adjust accordingly, transitioning from the previous concept of "universities managing colleges" to gradually embracing the idea of "colleges managing universities." The former emphasizes an administrative-led approach, while the latter prioritizes an academic-led approach. Although they differ in their leading principles, they are not conflicting, but rather differ in their central focus, leading to distinct entities. Whether universities manage colleges or colleges manage universities, the goal remains to achieve a first-class university. The difference lies in the former focusing on the university as a whole, while the latter prioritizes disciplines and colleges. This change also affects the relationship between university governance and college governance. College governance is gradually moving away from university governance, running parallel to it, and ultimately unifying college governance with university governance within the framework of discipline construction. Some top foreign universities have successful cases of "colleges managing universities." However, at present, Chinese universities do not pay sufficient attention to college governance, making it essential to establish a "Double First-Class" management system at the college level.

3. The Dilemma of "Running a College as a University"

(1) Secondary colleges have cognitive biases. In terms of demand-driven factors, secondary colleges have the most inherent drive to promote the "college running a university" concept. However, in reality, the motivation of colleges is relatively weaker compared to the school's functional departments. While the idea of "college running a university" presents an opportunity for self-improvement and development for colleges, it signifies self-revolution for functional departments. Under the traditional university management system, the school's functional departments control a significant amount of resources and authority. The inertia of management thinking that has been formed over time leads to reforms often being led by the school's functional departments, with decisions on the extent, scope, and path of delegation controlled by them. This results in a series of issues: whether department opinions were adequately considered at the beginning of reform design, whether the direction of reform meets the needs of departments, and whether the decentralization of resources and authority can fulfill the requirements of departments, among others. Any deviation or miscommunication in this process can greatly undermine the enthusiasm of the departments.

(2) The personalized needs of departments conflict with the "one-size-fits-all" management approach of functional departments. The most significant feature of "college running a university" lies in departments formulating personalized development plans based on their disciplinary characteristics and needs, seeking personalized policy and resource support from the university. However, for the sake of administrative convenience, functional departments tend to implement uniform strategies, fundamentally deviating from the original intention of "college running a university." In the current university management system, it is the departments that must compromise first. This inevitably leads to the result where reforms fail to address the actual issues of departments, subsequently diminishing their participation in the reform process.

(3) Ambiguity in power and responsibility. Constrained by the current fragmented management system, each aspect of university affairs is overseen by independent departments, leading to policy barriers between them. The lack of coordination among departments reduces the effectiveness of delegated authority. Taking personnel management rights as an example, policies for talent recruitment and incentives are led by the human resources department. However, for these policies to be effectively implemented, corresponding resources are necessary, such as funds for talent recruitment, office space, laboratory equipment, graduate student enrollment quotas, and children's enrollment in schools, among others. This involves a series of departments like the human resources office, finance office, graduate school, research office, and labor union. Even if functional departments agree, factors like inconsistent policy-making timelines can still impact the effectiveness of policy implementation.

(4) Weak comprehensive management capabilities of secondary colleges are evident in three main areas: first, administrative management teams of departments often fail to consider issues from the perspective of the overall university due to their narrow vision. This leads to prioritizing departmental interests and making demands that exceed the university's autonomy or resource capacity. Second, there is inadequate understanding of the university's overall policies and underutilization of delegated authority. Third, when faced with conflicts in frontline work, departments often lack the necessary responsibility. The acquisition of power also entails increased responsibility, yet departments tend to pass on conflicts instead of addressing them, aiming to add rather than subtract. This situation is attributed to both practical and institutional factors. On a practical level, managers tend to seek benefits and avoid risks; institutionally, there is insufficient rotation between administrative teams of departments and institutions, limiting the perspective of department managers to their own colleges, rather than considering issues

from a university-wide standpoint.

(5) Disordered decentralization of power. University regulations mainly emphasize the responsibilities and positioning of colleges, lacking reasonable provisions regarding the decentralization of power between the university and colleges. This is particularly evident in aspects such as the source and management of college funds, asset usage and management, faculty team building, student enrollment, external exchanges, and cooperation, without clear regulations to define the responsibilities and powers of the university and colleges. This irregular delegation of power results in power being concentrated at the university and functional department levels, leading to excessive administrative intervention in college operations. The shifting of power is subject to arbitrary adjustments due to changes in university policies, leadership, or the size of colleges.

(6) Limited resources. In the process of promoting the "college running a university" concept, universities commonly adopt a strategy of "resource incentives" to stimulate the enthusiasm of secondary colleges. While using resources as incentives is justifiable, any slight misstep could trigger departmental self-centeredness. Departments may seek more school resources for their own benefit through reform, which is actually a misconception. Moreover, relying primarily on policy support and resource input for incremental reforms easily fosters a mentality of entitlement and impatience for quick results, which is not sustainable. Given the finite total resources of the university within a certain time and space, it is fundamentally impossible to meet the increasing demands for personnel, financial rights, material rights, and other needs as departments develop. Once the external impetus for reform disappears, departments lose the drive to continue advancing their educational goals.

4. Management approach for the construction of "Double First-Class" in the college.

Ensure the pivotal role of the college in the construction of the "Double First-Class" initiative, and advance the legalization of decentralized power.

The central position of the college in the construction of the "Double First-Class" initiative is essentially delegated through the establishment of a "college operating as a university." Achieving the concept of "college operating as a university" requires the optimization of power structures through institutional decentralization. According to the laws of our country, universities have seven autonomous rights in enrollment, discipline and program establishment, teaching, scientific research and social services, international technological and cultural exchanges and cooperation, institutional establishment and personnel, as well as property management. Adhering to the principle of matching responsibilities with rights, empowering colleges with the autonomous educational rights as stipulated in the Higher Education Law is imperative. Based on the responsibilities of the college, powers can be divided into resource-based and operational-based. Colleges should function as relatively independent educational entities where resources are indispensable. Resource-based powers of the college pertain to human resources, finances, and asset allocation, encompassing authority over the establishment of positions for faculty, recruitment, talent introduction, title assessment, performance evaluation, budgeting, financial planning, and asset allocation. Colleges serve as the primary carriers of the university's functions, excelling in teaching, research, and societal engagement. Therefore, operational-based powers of the college include jurisdiction over discipline development and enrollment, educational administration, research management, student affairs, and community services.

Adjusting university statutes in accordance with the law, improving the rational allocation of authority between schools and colleges, and promoting the transformation of roles within institutions are crucial steps. Emphasizing the significance of statutes in university governance, it is essential to standardize the

legislative process of statutes, ensure democratic and self-disciplined construction and implementation of statutes, enhance the supervision and accountability of governmental and institutional democratic power bodies in statute enforcement, and refine the system of university statutes. Defining the boundaries of decentralized authority, resource-based authority stresses the importance of delegating power reasonably. This includes granting colleges relatively autonomous financial management, personnel, and resource allocation rights. Autonomous financial management allows colleges to be economically independent with principles of "centralized leadership, primary accounting, secondary management, and specialized control," rationalizing the allocation of funds, autonomously coordinating college finances, managing their own revenues and expenditures, and reducing school approvals. Autonomous personnel rights grant colleges the authority to independently establish positions, hire, and assess personnel within the overall control of the school and under acceptable policy conditions. Autonomous resource allocation rights expand colleges' autonomy in procurement, distribution, and management of teaching and research resources under the provided resource conditions and policy standards. Different disciplines lead to varying developments in colleges, making it challenging for school management standards to be uniform. Delegating responsibilities for teaching, research, subject construction, talent development, international exchanges, and social services to colleges allows them to return to their academic organizational essence, which is the direction for the development of "college-running universities." Therefore, functional authority emphasizes full empowerment, where colleges should have substantial autonomy in planning, party building, talent cultivation, subject construction, research, international exchanges, and social services within the legal limits.

Strengthening the construction of academic departments to enhance the level of research and teaching teams within disciplines.

The foundation of the construction of "Double First-Class" lies in disciplines. In the past, we have often focused on the development of disciplinary knowledge while neglecting the construction of disciplinary organizations. Disciplines can be divided into disciplinary knowledge as a form of knowledge and disciplinary organization as a form of organization. The construction of disciplines also has two levels of meaning: firstly, the construction of disciplinary knowledge, that is, promoting the continuous progression, development, and improvement of disciplinary knowledge systems horizontally and vertically. This represents the functional value of disciplines and is an external, explicit indicator of how well the disciplinary functions as the cells of universities are performed. Secondly, the construction of disciplinary organizations, that is, promoting the standardized and orderly operation of basic academic organizations such as departments, and enhancing the efficiency of academic output in knowledge operation activities at the grassroots academic organizations to achieve the goals and missions of the organization. This is the key to measuring the inherent value of disciplines. In the past, the emphasis on the output of disciplinary knowledge in disciplinary construction and evaluation, focusing on academic papers, major projects, and topics, often overlooked the construction of disciplinary organizations and the institutional guarantees of disciplinary organizations, neglecting the crucial role of academic communities. This undoubtedly reverses the primary and secondary priorities and shows a bias in the treatment of the importance of disciplines. In fact, the combination of disciplinary knowledge and disciplinary organizations constitutes the holistic concept of disciplines. Therefore, it is essential to strengthen the construction of disciplinary organizations, promote the standardized and orderly operation of basic academic organizations such as departments, enhance the important role of academic communities in knowledge operation activities, improve the academic output efficiency of basic academic organizations in knowledge operation activities, and thus achieve the goal of building a

"Double First-Class".

We must continue to advance the development of academic knowledge. Disciplines are housed in secondary colleges, where academic activities mainly consist of scientific research and educational teaching. Secondary colleges should focus on establishing high-level academic research teams and teaching teams. From the perspective of scientific research, the overall level of university and discipline development is closely related to the strength of research capabilities and the academic level. Talent cultivation and social services also depend on the enhancement of first-class academic standards. As human society enters the era of science and technology, scientific and technological innovation advances, and the improvement of academic standards is key for universities and disciplines to stand out. Scientific research is an important mission and responsibility of the "Double First-Class" construction. The "Double First-Class" construction emphasizes openness, innovation, and people-oriented approaches. College management should further leverage the role of academic organizations, promote academic community culture, establish a management structure centered around academic power, and strive to highlight academic nature. From the perspective of education and teaching, universities generally form teaching teams based on courses, with majors and courses being relatively independent and fragmented. This leads to many majors and courses not being effectively integrated, resulting in convergence of talent development goals, lack of distinctive talent cultivation characteristics, and hindrance to the development of disciplines. By organizing teaching teams based on disciplines, corresponding talent development plans can be formulated from the overall direction of disciplines.

The cultivation of top-notch innovative talents is a key goal of the "Double First-Class" construction, as well as the ultimate objective of integrating research and teaching. Universities or disciplines that lack the ability to cultivate outstanding talents cannot meet first-class standards. The current lack of innovative and practical abilities in talent cultivation is a crucial issue that the "Double First-Class" construction needs to address. Universities need to innovate educational concepts, change the previous practice of copying each other's goals, consolidate their own disciplinary characteristics, develop specialized training programs around strong disciplinary research, establish a multi-level talent training goal system, focus on cultivating students' research abilities, and leverage the level of disciplinary research and teaching teams to achieve a synergistic effect between scientific research and teaching.

Strengthen the administrative nature of the college to enhance its governance capabilities.

First-class universities rely on sound management systems. The construction of "Double First-Class" requires accelerating the modernization of higher education management and enhancing the governance capabilities of colleges. For colleges, the key lies in the reform of "substantiality," streamlining the internal governance system, improving leadership management systems, strengthening academic autonomy construction, establishing risk prevention and control mechanisms, enhancing supervision and management, and establishing a synergistic governance ecology for internal self-management and improvement of colleges. Currently, the management tasks of the "Double First-Class" construction in colleges are generally carried out by the original administrative team of the college. The integration of "Double First-Class" construction into a large number of routine work affairs may lead to situations where key points are not highlighted and objectives are not clear. Therefore, it is necessary for colleges to establish a management body composed of college leadership teams, heads of discipline research teams, heads of discipline teaching teams, etc., specifically for discussing, coordinating, and implementing the "Double First-Class" construction. Chinese universities generally emphasize administrative power, while academic power is weakened. The college management system is based on administrative thinking, lacks institutional safeguards for academic freedom, and struggles to play a

positive role in academic power management. The establishment of the College "Double First-Class" Construction Committee can enable both administrative power and academic power to play a role in the "Double First-Class" construction, achieving effective balance of power between them. The concentration of various professional disciplines within the College "Double First-Class" Construction Committee is conducive to the cross-fertilization of professional disciplines, promoting the development of advantageous disciplines research and emerging disciplines through collaborative innovation.

As an administrative body, the college should enhance the training of leaders, improve the professional level of leadership, and strengthen trust between the college and the university; it should improve and standardize the system construction of the Party Committee, the joint meeting of the Party and government, the Academic Committee, the faculty representative assembly, and the student representative assembly, explore the participation of external entities in decision-making and supervision of college affairs, optimize internal assessment and accountability mechanisms, implement the "triple consultation and one decision-making" system of the college, construct a six-in-one power balance paradigm centered on students, led by the joint meeting of the Party and government, with administrative team members, professors in charge of academic affairs, democratic management, and institutional safeguards, coordinated by the construction committee for the "Double First-Class" of the college, improve the governance structure of the college, regulate the reasonable and efficient operation of internal decision-making, execution, and supervisory powers, promote the realization of lawful, scientific, and democratic management; at the same time, pay attention to the cultivation of the culture of the concept of "running the college as running a university", enhance the value identity of multiple entities, promote the harmonious coexistence of the governance concepts, systems, and behaviors of "running the college as running a university", form a synergistic governance model of "spiritual-institutional" integration, and thus ensure the reasonable succession of power.

5. Conclusion

"Double First-Class" is currently an important guideline guiding the construction of higher education institutions in China. The specific tasks of the "Double First-Class" construction are mainly entrusted to secondary colleges. It is necessary to ensure that the management philosophy and practices of the colleges are aligned with the "Double First-Class" initiative, and establishing a management system for "Double First-Class" construction at the college level is essential. However, the current practice of "colleges running universities" is still largely at the stage of slogans, facing many practical challenges in implementation. In promoting the construction of world-class universities and disciplines in China, universities should promptly shift the main body of education from the university to the college level, strengthen the organization of disciplines, enhance the level of research and teaching teams in disciplines, accelerate the improvement of the effectiveness of internal governance in secondary colleges, and promote the high-quality development of higher education in China.

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