

Practical Challenges and Reform Paths in the Modernization of University College-level Governance Systems

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Abstract: The modernization of college-level governance system is a core link in deepening the comprehensive reform of higher education and stimulating the vitality of grassroots school-running. Currently, this process is confronted with multiple practical dilemmas, mainly including unclear power and responsibility division within the governance structure, imbalance between academic power and administrative power, rigid resource allocation mechanism, poor channels for democratic participation, and insufficient efficiency of institutional supply and implementation. This paper systematically analyzes the underlying causes of the above dilemmas. On this basis, it explores feasible reform paths from five dimensions: optimizing governance structure, improving decision-making mechanisms, innovating resource allocation modes, strengthening institutional implementation efficiency, and building a collaborative governance culture. The research aims to promote the profound transformation of university secondary colleges from traditional administrative management to modern collaborative governance, and lay a solid micro-institutional foundation for the connotative development of higher education.

Keywords: University secondary colleges; Modernization of governance system; Practical dilemmas; Power and responsibility allocation; Reform paths

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1. Introduction

As China's higher education enters a new stage of connotative development, colleges, as the basic school-running units of universities, determine the overall operational performance and school-running quality of universities directly by their governance capacity and governance level. Promoting the modernization of college-level governance system is not only an inevitable requirement for universities to implement school-running autonomy and stimulate endogenous driving force and innovative vitality, but also an urgent need to adapt to the reform of knowledge production modes and improve the quality of talent cultivation and

scientific research. Nevertheless, in practical operation, deep-seated contradictions and obstacles still exist in college-level governance reform. Traditional management concepts and rigid bureaucratic hierarchy still restrict the overall governance efficiency of university secondary colleges.

2. Theoretical connotation and goal orientation of modernized college-level governance system in universities

The modernization of the college-level governance system refers to a process where secondary colleges adopt systematic institutional innovation and capacity improvement to build a standardized, efficient, and dynamic governance structure and operational mechanism matching their functional positioning. Its core transformation lies in shifting from the traditional management mode dominated by unilateral administrative orders to the modern governance mode characterized by multi-subject participation and negotiated co-governance. Supported by governance theory, stakeholder theory and higher education philosophy, this transformation insists on the leadership of the Communist Party of China, and focuses on coordinating four core relationships: academic power and administrative power, overall university administration and college independent operation, institutional standardization and innovative vitality.

A modern governance system takes clear power and responsibility allocation as the foundation, sound decision-making, implementation, and supervision mechanisms as the core framework, and an open, inclusive, and democratic governance culture as the internal support. Its ultimate goal is to fully release the school-running potential of secondary colleges, enabling them to become innovative entities that can respond flexibly to internal and external challenges and continuously improve educational quality and academic competitiveness. Specifically, its goal orientation covers three aspects: first, realizing rationalization and scientization of power structure; second, guaranteeing the independence and creativity of academic activities, supporting flexible and efficient resource allocation as well as differentiated and characteristic development of colleges; third, stimulating the participation enthusiasm and sense of responsibility of faculty and students, and building a stable and adaptive institutional environment to ensure the sustainability and standardization of governance activities. The construction of a modern college-level governance system is not merely a mechanical adjustment of operational mechanisms, but fundamental innovation of governance concepts and reconstruction of organizational culture, which provides optimal institutional support for knowledge creation, teaching, and application within colleges.

3. Practical dilemmas in the construction of a modernized college-level governance system

Despite growing theoretical consensus on college-level governance modernization, numerous complicated dilemmas remain in practical implementation, hindering further reform and full release of governance efficiency. The first prominent dilemma is ambiguous and unbalanced power and responsibility within the governance structure. Most universities lack clear and stable institutional arrangements for dividing responsibilities, powers and benefits between university headquarters and secondary colleges, resulting in poor operability in daily management. University functional departments control core resources and decision-making power over major affairs, while secondary colleges are only responsible for specific implementation and bear corresponding operational risks. The mismatch between power and responsibility, as well as

financial power and administrative affairs power, makes it impossible for colleges to give full play to their principal role in school-running.

Second, the relationship between academic power and administrative power has not been straightened out. The functions of internal academic organizations such as academic committees and degree evaluation committees are frequently eroded or replaced by daily administrative affairs, leading to a prominent administrative tendency within colleges. Academic communities lack dominant power and institutional guarantee in core academic affairs including discipline planning, talent evaluation and resource allocation, which severely inhibits grassroots academic innovation vitality.

Third, the resource allocation mechanism is rigid and opaque. The distribution of funds, campus space, staffing quotas and other core resources mainly relies on traditional base-based incremental allocation or case-by-case administrative adjudication, rather than objective performance standards, college development plans or actual academic demands. This mode prevents colleges from carrying out long-term stable development planning and triggers internal operational conflicts.

Fourth, democratic participation channels are obstructed. Core stakeholders, including faculty and students, lack effective approaches to participate in major college decision-making. Relevant consultation, hearing, and supervision mechanisms are either canceled or reduced to formalities, resulting in insufficient openness and inclusiveness in governance processes, as well as low recognition and poor implementation effect of administrative decisions.

Fifth, there is a noticeable gap between institutional supply and institutional implementation efficiency. Although universities have formulated a complete set of college-level governance rules and regulations, many systems are impractical due to disconnection from actual college operation, difficult to implement due to imperfect supporting measures, and lack binding force due to the absence of supervision and accountability mechanisms. This leads to suspended and ineffective institutional operation, and daily governance still depends heavily on personal authority and inertial management practices. These interrelated and interactive dilemmas collectively hinder the modernization of college-level governance, which requires systematic reform solutions urgently.

4. Reform paths for the modernization of the college-level governance system

4.1. Optimize governance structure and clarify power and responsibility allocation system

To build a modern college-level governance system, universities should first optimize the overall governance structure and clarify the power boundary and responsibility division among university headquarters, secondary colleges and internal governance subjects. University headquarters shall transform its management mode from whole-process intervention to objective management and resource guarantee. By formulating university charters and issuing detailed power and responsibility lists, universities shall grant secondary colleges substantive autonomy in discipline construction, talent introduction, fund use, internal institutional setup and salary distribution (within the total quota and policy framework formulated by the university). In particular, universities should delegate financial and personnel management authority matching corresponding management responsibilities, so as to realize the unification of power and responsibility for secondary colleges.

Internally, each college shall build a multi-dimensional governance structure: the Party and Administration Joint Meeting serves as the political core and administrative decision-making center; the Academic Committee acts as the supreme authority for academic affairs; the Faculty Congress (or Professors' Committee) undertakes democratic management and supervision functions. Colleges shall specify the scope of affairs, decision-making procedures, and implementation rules for all the above meetings to form a collaborative decision-making chain with clear division of labor. Academic committees shall make independent decisions on academic development planning, research achievement evaluation and talent training standards, instead of the Party and Administration Joint Meeting. For resource allocation, personnel appointment and daily administrative management, the Party and Administration Joint Meeting shall conduct collective decision-making after fully soliciting opinions from academic organizations and faculty. In addition, colleges should establish a College Advisory Committee composed of external stakeholders including enterprise representatives and alumni representatives, to provide external strategic suggestions and resource support for college high-quality development. A well-defined governance structure covering vertical hierarchical management and horizontal collaborative cooperation lays a solid foundation for efficient college-level governance ^[1].

4.2. Improve decision-making mechanisms to promote democratic participation and scientific demonstration

The essence of modern governance lies in democratization and scientization of decision-making processes. Optimizing college-level decision-making mechanisms is critical to improving governance credibility and operational efficiency. Universities need to build an open, standardized and multi-participatory whole-process decision-making system. All major decisions shall follow standardized procedures: topic proposal, preliminary research and scheme formulation, expert demonstration and risk assessment, democratic consultation and opinion collection, collective discussion and approval, decision publicity and feedback ^[2].

Pre-decision research and demonstration systems shall be implemented for discipline construction plans, major capital investment and key reform schemes. Special sub-groups under academic committees or independent expert committees shall conduct feasibility studies and professional consultation to ensure decisions are supported by sufficient empirical evidence and professional judgment. Meanwhile, universities should expand diversified democratic participation channels. On the basis of regular Faculty Congresses, colleges shall launch regular college situation briefings, dean/party secretary reception days and online discussion platforms to guarantee faculty and students' rights to know, participate in and supervise college affairs. Hearings, consultative meetings and referendums can be adopted to collect public opinions on issues closely related to faculty interests (title evaluation, performance appraisal standards, welfare benefits) and major public affairs (development plans, budget schemes). Colleges shall disclose decision-making contents, basis, processes and results in a timely and comprehensive manner via public notice boards and official websites, and accept supervision from all teachers and students. Decisions formulated through full democratic consultation and scientific argumentation feature higher quality, wider consensus and lower implementation resistance ^[3].

4.3. Innovate resource allocation modes and strengthen performance orientation and strategic guidance

Flexible and efficient resource allocation is a key leverage to activate colleges' endogenous development momentum. To reform the existing resource allocation mode, universities should break egalitarianism and administrative-dominated inertial management, and establish a competitive and stable dynamic allocation system guided by overall strategic planning and practical performance output.

The university's resource investment mode for secondary colleges shall be transformed from the traditional "base amount plus annual increment" model to a composite model combining basic operational guarantee, competitive performance rewards and special strategic development funds. The basic guarantee fund covers daily college operation and core faculty team stability; competitive performance rewards are distributed differentially based on colleges' key performance indicators (KPI) in talent cultivation, scientific research and social services to encourage healthy competition; special strategic funds are aligned with university overall development strategies and college characteristic development plans to support forward-looking disciplinary layout, interdisciplinary integration and key research breakthroughs.

In the secondary internal resource distribution within colleges, performance-oriented management should be further strengthened. Colleges shall formulate open and fair internal resource allocation rules, and link the distribution of funds, campus space and student enrollment quotas with the performance output, contribution and development potential of departments and research teams. Management modes such as lump-sum budget contracting and project-based management can be promoted to grant grassroots disciplinary organizations greater autonomy in overall resource arrangement. Besides, colleges shall build a performance tracking and dynamic adjustment mechanism for resource use, conduct regular benefit evaluation, and adjust subsequent resource support accordingly to concentrate limited resources on core development fields and maximize the effect of connotative development and quality improvement ^[4].

4.4. Strengthen institutional implementation capacity and build a closed-loop supervision and evaluation system

The modernization of the governance system is ultimately reflected in the full exertion of institutional effectiveness. The widespread suspension of institutional operation in current college-level governance mainly stems from insufficient institutional implementation capacity. Therefore, priority should be given to constructing an implementation-oriented institutional system.

Firstly, institutional design must be highly operable. College-level rules and regulations shall be formulated in combination with actual operational conditions, with clear clauses, standardized processes and clear responsible subjects, avoiding empty principled provisions or rigid copying of university unified documents. Key management systems including performance appraisal measures and fund management rules shall be formulated after extensive opinion collection and full collective discussion to gain recognition from all faculty and students.

Secondly, supporting implementation, supervision and accountability mechanisms shall be matched with formal institutions. Colleges shall clarify responsible departments and supervisory bodies for institutional implementation, and adopt information technology to strengthen whole-process supervision and data recording. Internal supervisory forces, including college disciplinary inspection groups, Faculty Congresses, and student organizations, shall give full play to their supervisory functions to form a joint internal

supervision force. Clear and deterrent accountability clauses shall be formulated for institutional violations to ensure strict compliance with all regulations.

Thirdly, a closed-loop evaluation and dynamic optimization mechanism for institutional operation shall be established. The implementation effect of core college-level governance systems shall be evaluated every two years via questionnaire surveys, in-depth interviews and data analysis, to test problems in institutional design, implementation and practical effects based on staff feedback and operational data. Outdated systems will be revised or abolished in a timely manner, and supplementary rules will be launched to form a virtuous closed loop of “institution formulation, implementation, supervision, evaluation and revision”, ensuring the governance system adapts to long-term college development demands.

4.5. Cultivate governance culture to consolidate value consensus and reform synergy

The transformation of the modern governance system relies on a compatible governance culture for long-term support and guidance. Advanced governance culture provides deep-seated spiritual support for institutional operation, reduces governance costs, and improves the humanistic temperature of university management.

First, universities shall establish and promote the core values of academic priority and talent cultivation orientation. A campus cultural atmosphere respecting academic laws and educational missions should be built nationwide, taking academic freedom, pursuit of excellence and student-oriented education as the unified value pursuit of all faculty and students. This lays an ideological foundation for balancing administrative power and academic power and preventing excessive administrative intervention in academic affairs ^[5].

Second, colleges shall develop a participatory culture featuring democratic consultation and win-win cooperation. University administrators shall set an example for democratic governance, build diversified participation platforms and recognize outstanding participants, so as to enhance faculty and students’ sense of ownership. Such measures can reverse passive attitudes such as indifference to public affairs and excessive dependence on superior arrangements, and build a governance community with shared responsibilities and joint efforts.

Third, colleges shall foster a responsibility culture emphasizing rule-abiding awareness and integrity dedication. Regular institutional publicity and typical case education activities can strengthen teachers and students’ awareness of rules, contractual spirit, and sense of responsibility, turning institutional compliance into spontaneous behavioral norms.

Finally, an innovative and inclusive reform culture shall be advocated. Colleges shall guide all staff to understand the necessity and complexity of governance reform, support all reform measures for improving governance efficiency, and tolerate reasonable exploration and minor mistakes in reform practice. Continuous cultural infiltration and value guidance will help modern governance concepts take root in the campus, and provide lasting spiritual impetus for the modernization of the college-level governance system.

5. Conclusion

Promoting the modernization of the college-level governance system is an in-depth reform involving power redistribution, interest adjustment, and cultural reconstruction, which cannot be completed overnight. The practical dilemmas analyzed in this paper reflect deep-seated contradictions of traditional governance modes in adapting to the new requirements of higher education development. The reform paths proposed in terms

of structural optimization, decision-making improvement, resource allocation innovation, institutional implementation reinforcement and cultural cultivation form a systematic and collaborative solution framework. Further targeted empirical research will be carried out in follow-up studies to optimize the reform paths for vocational college governance in particular.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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