

Getting the "First Button" Right in University Education: A Study on the Guiding Role of the "Labor, Safety, and Health Education" Course

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Abstract

The freshman year in university constitutes a critical period for value formation, where "fastening the first button correctly" directly impacts both individual growth and national development. As a core course in freshman education, "Labor, Safety, and Health Education" serves not only as a vehicle for knowledge transmission and skill cultivation but also as a vital platform for ideological and political education. From the perspective of university counselors and in compliance with the "Regulations on the Development of Counselor Teams in Regular Higher Education Institutions," this paper focuses on the fundamental mission of "cultivating virtue and nurturing talents." By analyzing the courses role in shaping labor values, fostering safety awareness, and guiding health perspectives, it identifies current issues such as superficial implementation and fragmented delivery. The study proposes an optimization pathway of "value guidance - practice empowerment - collaborative education," providing practical recommendations for universities to enhance ideological guidance for freshmen and cultivate well-rounded individuals excelling in moral, intellectual, physical, aesthetic, and labor education.

Keywords

University counselors; Freshman education; Labor safety and health education; Ideological guidance; Fostering virtue through education.

1. Introduction

General Secretary Xi Jinping emphasized: "Young people should start now and from themselves, making the core socialist values their fundamental guide, and actively promote them throughout society through their own actions, striving to create a brilliant life in the great practice of realizing the China Dream." As a crucial stage in youth development, university life presents freshmen with multiple challenges such as role transition, environmental adaptation, and value reshaping, making it the golden period to fasten the "first button" of ones life. The Regulations on the Construction of Counselor Teams in Regular Higher Education Institutions clearly state that counselors are the backbone force in conducting ideological and political education for college students, tasked with focusing on, caring for, and serving students to guide them in correctly understanding their responsibilities in the era and their historical mission [1]. Freshmen have just entered the university campus to embark on a new journey of learning and life, and laying a solid foundation is the first step. The "Labor, Safety, and Health Education" course is precisely designed to guide students in enhancing their labor literacy, safety literacy, and psychological literacy, laying a solid foundation for the rich and intense university life ahead. From this perspective, "Labor, Safety, and Health Education" is an important course that can help students "button up the first button" of their university life. Only with a correct view of labor, safety, and mental health can students have the perseverance and determination to

face the academic challenges of university, the career challenges after graduation, and the complex challenges of life, and grow into a new generation capable of taking on great responsibilities [2].

"Labor, Safety, and Health Education," as a compulsory general education course for university freshmen, covers three core components: labor literacy, safety skills, and health management. It serves not only as a key initiative to implement the "health first" educational philosophy but also as a vital bridge connecting health-oriented education, professional education, and practical education. Currently, with the comprehensive advancement of healthy campus initiatives, this course has become a crucial tool for universities in fulfilling their fundamental mission of fostering virtue through education. However, some universities still face challenges such as unclear course positioning, weakened value guidance, and limited practical formats, preventing the course from fully leveraging its unique role in guiding freshmen's ideological development. Therefore, exploring ideological guidance approaches for this course from the perspective of counselors holds significant theoretical and practical value [3].

2. The Core Dimension of Conceptual Guidance in the "Labor, Safety and Health Education" Course

"Labor, Safety, and Health Education" serves as the starting point of university academic life and plays a crucial role in guiding the thoughts of freshmen. Therefore, it is imperative to attach great importance to delivering this course effectively. However, in practical teaching, this course does not belong to any specific discipline, making the biggest challenge the lack of educational implementation entities, namely, the scarcity of teachers. Schools need to fully mobilize the cooperation of various functional departments both inside and outside the school to conduct this course, which leads to the marginalization of "Labor, Safety, and Health Education." Consequently, the curriculum system is imperfect, teacher resources are weak, teaching methods are monotonous, and it is difficult to stimulate students' interest and enthusiasm. Simultaneously, students also have misconceptions about labor, safety, and health education, not attaching enough importance to it. They perceive it as merely an auxiliary course and lack awareness of its significance. Furthermore, schools and teachers lack sufficient training in labor, safety, and health education, resulting in slow updates to teaching methods and content, a lack of innovation, and difficulty adapting to the requirements of the new era [4].

2.1. Labor Education: Cultivating Sound Labor Values and Strengthening the Foundation of Responsibility

Labor education serves as a vital vehicle for ideological guidance, with its core mission being to instill in students the value proposition that "labor is the most glorious, noble, great, and beautiful." Unlike primary and secondary education, which focuses on cultivating fundamental labor habits, university labor education must align with college students' cognitive characteristics, emphasizing value-oriented guidance, interdisciplinary integration, and practical empowerment.

From the perspective of ideological guidance, labor education helps freshmen overcome the cognitive misconceptions of "emphasizing mental effort over physical labor" and "prioritizing theory over practice," fostering a correct view of labor. Through hands-on experiences in daily life tasks, productive work, and service-oriented labor, students gain a deep understanding of how labor creates value and grasp the philosophical principle that "labor shapes human beings themselves." By integrating the cultivation of the spirit of model workers, artisans, and scientists into labor education, it guides freshmen to align their personal growth with career development and national needs, reinforcing their commitment to a growth path characterized by both political integrity and professional competence, as well as moral integrity and talent.

2.2. Safety Education: Strengthening Rule Awareness and Bottom-line Thinking, and Cultivating a Rule-of-law Mindset

Safety is the prerequisite for students growth and development. The guiding principles of safety education are reflected in fostering awareness of rules, a bottom-line mindset, and a rule-of-law consciousness. As frontline responders to campus crisis incidents, counselors must use safety education to help freshmen embrace the "safety first" philosophy, internalizing rule awareness and translating it into practical actions.

At the level of ideological guidance, safety education primarily enhances freshmens self-protection awareness and sense of responsibility. Targeting high-risk areas such as online fraud, fire safety, and traffic safety, methods like case analysis and scenario-based simulations help students recognize that safety is not merely an individual responsibility but also a duty toward others and society. Secondly, safety education fosters freshmens legal consciousness. By integrating school regulations with legal knowledge, students are guided to understand behavioral boundaries and grasp the dialectical relationship between "freedom and rules," thereby avoiding disciplinary or legal violations due to a lack of rule awareness. Finally, safety education cultivates freshmens risk prevention mindset. Through emergency response training and education on psychological crisis intervention, students develop the ability to handle crises rationally, strengthen their mental health resilience, and cultivate a "rational, calm, optimistic, and positive mindset." [5]

2.3. Health Education: Promoting Healthy Physical and Mental Development and Cultivating Well-Rounded Personality Qualities

The core of health education is "student-centeredness," with its guiding philosophy reflected in the coordinated development of physical and mental health and the cultivation of a well-rounded personality. The Ministry of Educations "Guiding Opinions on Comprehensively Promoting the Construction of Healthy Schools" explicitly emphasizes the positive role of health education in regulating emotions, alleviating stress, and fostering a sound personality.

From the perspective of ideological guidance, health education primarily helps freshmen establish a scientific understanding of health, recognizing that physical and mental well-being forms the foundation of personal development. Addressing common challenges such as adaptation anxiety and academic pressure, it equips students with emotional management and stress-relief skills through mental health education and peer counseling, thereby enhancing their psychological resilience. Secondly, health education fosters self-discipline and a positive life attitude among freshmen. Through instruction on daily routine management, physical exercise, and nutritional health, it guides students to develop healthy habits and cultivate a "self-disciplined and self-reliant" outlook on life. Finally, health education improves freshmens social adaptability by providing training in interpersonal communication skills and teamwork abilities, enabling them to build strong relationships, integrate into campus communities, and lay a solid foundation for their future entry into society.

3. The Practical Challenges in Guiding the Curriculum of "Labor, Safety, and Health Education" with Philosophical Principles

3.1. The course positioning is unclear, and its value guidance is weakened.

Some universities equate "Labor, Safety, and Health Education" solely with skills training courses, neglecting its role in ideological guidance. Labor education suffers from issues of "marginalization" and "formalization," focusing merely on physical labor participation while failing to delve into the spiritual significance and value orientation inherent in labor; safety education emphasizes risk awareness and skill acquisition but lacks in-depth cultivation of rule consciousness and legal awareness; health education concentrates on disseminating

physiological health knowledge while overlooking the importance of mental health and personality development. This "skill-oriented, value-lightweight" approach prevents the curriculum from fully fulfilling its ideological guidance function.

3.2. Fragmented teaching content that fails to meet the needs of new students

Currently, course content in some universities suffers from fragmentation, with the three core modules—labor, safety, and health—lacking organic integration and failing to create a synergistic educational impact. Teaching materials are not updated promptly, failing to align with the developmental characteristics and practical needs of contemporary freshmen. Labor education content remains disconnected from academic disciplines and societal development, making it difficult to motivate student participation; safety education provides insufficient guidance on addressing emerging risks such as online fraud and campus loans; health education lacks targeted approaches to psychological issues like adaptation anxiety and interpersonal communication barriers among freshmen. Furthermore, course content lacks tailored design, failing to deliver precise instruction tailored to the characteristics of students across different majors.

3.3. Monotonous teaching methods and insufficient practical experience

The course implementation remains predominantly lecture-based, featuring monotonous and dull teaching methods that lack interactivity and experiential elements. Labor education primarily relies on centralized voluntary labor, lacking creative and collaborative practical activities, thus failing to meet college students demand for "combining physical and mental labor." Safety education lacks immersive teaching approaches such as scenario simulations and practical drills, resulting in low student engagement. Health education is largely theoretical in nature, lacking hands-on practice and personalized guidance. This "passive reception" teaching model leads to superficial understanding and insufficient student acceptance of course content, with ineffective ideological guidance outcomes.

3.4. The collaborative education mechanism is inadequate, resulting in insufficient collective educational efforts.

Course implementation involves multiple departments such as the Academic Affairs Office, Student Affairs Office, Logistics Management Office, and secondary colleges. However, some universities lack an effective coordination mechanism, resulting in unclear departmental responsibilities and poor collaboration. As key participants in course implementation, counselors lack professional teaching training and resource support; the roles of families and society are not fully utilized, and a collaborative educational framework involving schools, families, and society has yet to be established. Additionally, the course evaluation system is overly simplistic, primarily relying on attendance records and written reports, while lacking process-oriented assessments of students ideological transformation and competency development, thereby undermining the evaluative systems guiding function.

4. Optimal Approaches to Ideological Guidance in Curriculum from the Counselors Perspective

4.1. Strengthen top-level design and clarify the core positioning of ideological guidance

(1) Focusing on educational objectives: With fostering virtue and nurturing talents as the core principle, ideological guidance is integrated throughout the entire curriculum, clarifying its threefold goals of "value orientation + skill development + competency enhancement." Labor education emphasizes cultivating the spirit of labor and the spirit of model workers; safety education strengthens awareness of rules and the development of legal consciousness; health

education focuses on nurturing a sound personality and healthy mindset, achieving a synergistic educational effect of "cultivating virtue through labor, clarifying virtue through safety, and enriching virtue through health."

(2) Refine the curriculum system: Establish a course content framework comprising "basic modules + specialized modules + distinctive modules." The basic modules cover general labor skills, common safety risk responses, and fundamental health knowledge; specialized modules are designed according to the characteristics of different disciplines—for example, science and engineering programs include research experiment safety and professional labor practice, while humanities programs incorporate labor activities such as social surveys and community service; distinctive modules integrate elements like the university's history and context, as well as red culture, to enhance the relevance and appeal of the courses.

(3) Inclusion in the Talent Development Program: Strictly implement the mandatory credit requirements for courses and integrate them into the overall talent development plan for freshmen, ensuring adequate allocation of class hours, faculty resources, and funding. Counselors should actively participate in the development of course syllabi and instructional content design, taking into account the ideological trends and growth needs of freshmen to enhance the ideological depth and practical effectiveness of the courses.

4.2. Innovate teaching methods to enhance the appeal of ideological guidance

(1) Implementing immersive practical teaching: In labor education, a corporate-style management model is adopted to establish job roles and define responsibilities, enabling students to develop a sense of responsibility and collaborative skills through simulated professional scenarios; service-oriented activities such as campus volunteer services and community health assistance are organized, allowing students to appreciate the value of labor through dedication. In safety education, practical training including fire drills and first aid skills competitions is conducted, with experts from public security and fire departments delivering specialized lectures to enhance students' safety competencies and crisis response capabilities. For health education, methods like psychological role-playing dramas and peer psychological workshops help students master emotional management techniques; sports competitions and outdoor team-building activities are organized to promote the balanced development of physical and mental health.

(2) Developing a "Curriculum+" integrated model: Promoting the deep integration of "Labor + Ideological and Political Education," "Safety + Ideological and Political Education," and "Health + Ideological and Political Education." For example, incorporate the exemplary deeds of "Great National Craftsmen" into labor education, combining typical cases with legal education in safety education, and embedding patriotism and collectivism education into health education. Tailor teaching content for students of different majors to achieve "precision-focused ideological guidance."

(3) Leverage new media technologies to establish an online platform for ideological and political education. Utilize platforms such as WeChat official accounts and short-video platforms to disseminate content including interpretations of the labor spirit, safety knowledge dissemination, and mental health tips. Conduct online interactive exchanges through live Q&A sessions and topic discussions to enhance the engagement and appeal of the courses, achieving coordinated education through both online and offline approaches.

4.3. Improve the collaborative mechanism to consolidate the synergy of ideological guidance in education

(1) Establish an on-campus collaboration mechanism: Form a course working group comprising the Academic Affairs Office, Student Affairs Office, Logistics Management Office, secondary colleges, and counselors, clearly defining each department's responsibilities to create

a coordinated management framework. Counselors should proactively enhance communication and collaboration with subject teachers, logistics staff, and mental health educators, integrating ideological guidance into all aspects of course instruction, practical activities, and daily management.

(2) Improve the home-school-community collaboration mechanism: Establish a parent communication channel through parent-teacher meetings and WeChat groups to convey curriculum concepts and teaching schedules to parents, guiding them to prioritize family labor education and safety education, thereby fostering a synergistic home-school educational effort. Strengthen cooperation with communities, enterprises, and research institutions to jointly establish off-campus practice bases, providing students with diverse labor practice and safety experience opportunities so they can receive ideological guidance in authentic social environments.

(3) Leverage the role of student leaders: Establish a three-tier guidance system comprising "counselors — student leaders — regular students." Select student leaders with strong political integrity and a high sense of responsibility to serve as "labor promoters," "safety supervisors," and "health instructors," assisting counselors in course organization, practical guidance, and peer support. Through the "1+3+N" mentorship mechanism, student leaders inspire their peers to progress together, enhancing the reach and effectiveness of ideological guidance.

4.4. Optimize the evaluation system and strengthen the guiding role of ideological leadership

(1) Develop a diversified evaluation framework: Move beyond evaluation models that prioritize solely participation levels or test scores, and establish a comprehensive system combining formative assessment, summative evaluation, and competency-based evaluation. Formative assessment focuses on students' classroom engagement, practical performance, and collaborative skills; summative evaluation includes skill assessments, practical reports, and project outcomes; competency-based evaluation emphasizes the evolution of students' perspectives on labor, safety, and health, as well as improvements in their moral character.

(2) Introduction of multiple evaluation subjects: Incorporate feedback from various sources such as teacher evaluations, student self-assessments, peer reviews, and feedback from service recipients to ensure objective and comprehensive evaluation results. Counselors should focus on daily observation and documentation, promptly monitoring students' ideological trends and behavioral changes, and incorporating these into the evaluation framework.

(3) Enhance the application of evaluation outcomes: Integrate evaluation results into the comprehensive student competency assessment system, linking them to scholarship awards, excellence awards, and Party membership recommendations to strengthen the motivational impact of evaluations. Additionally, utilize evaluation feedback to promptly identify issues in curriculum implementation, continuously optimize teaching content and methods, and improve the effectiveness of ideological guidance.

4.5. Enhance counselors' professional competence and strengthen the professional foundation for ideological guidance

(1) Strengthen professional competency training: Universities should regularly organize counselors to participate in specialized training programs in labor education, safety education, and mental health education, thereby enhancing their instructional capabilities and ideological guidance proficiency. Counselors themselves should proactively acquire relevant theoretical knowledge, engage in academic exchanges and research projects both on and off campus, and continuously improve their professional competence.

(2) Enhancement of Practical Competence: Encourage counselors to engage directly in course instruction, participate in the organization and guidance of practical teaching activities, and

accumulate teaching experience; strengthen collaboration and exchange with counselors from other universities, draw on advanced practical experiences, and innovate methods for ideological guidance.

(3) Improve the incentive and support mechanism: Integrate course teaching and research into the assessment and professional title evaluation system for counselors, provide corresponding workload recognition and rewards, and thereby motivate counselors to actively participate in curriculum development.

5. Conclusion

"Labor, Safety, and Health Education," as a core course for university freshmen, serves as a vital vehicle for laying a solid foundation during their academic journey. The effective exercise of its ideological guidance function directly impacts the formation of freshmen's values and their holistic development. Currently, the course faces practical challenges in ideological guidance, including ambiguous positioning, disconnected content, monotonous formats, and inadequate mechanisms. From the perspective of counselors, enhancing the course's ideological guidance efficacy can be achieved through strengthening top-level design, innovating teaching methods, improving collaborative mechanisms, optimizing evaluation systems, and elevating counselors' professional competence, thereby fostering deep integration of labor education, safety education, health education, and ideological and political education.

Looking ahead, with the comprehensive advancement of healthy school initiatives and the continuous refinement of the "Three-Comprehensive Education" framework, the ideological guidance value of "Labor, Safety, and Health Education" will become increasingly prominent. As key participants and promoters in curriculum implementation, counselors should persistently explore innovative approaches to the course, enhance the relevance and effectiveness of ideological guidance, help freshmen develop sound perspectives on labor, safety, and health, cultivate their sense of responsibility, legal awareness, and well-rounded character, thereby laying a solid foundation for nurturing a new generation capable of shouldering the great mission of national rejuvenation.

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