

УДК 378.4

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## EXPLORING THE MANAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT OF UNIVERSITY STUDENT UNIONS: TAKING JILIN UNIVERSITY AS AN EXAMPLE

*Under the new wave of University Student Union reform, through empirical research with Jilin University as a sample, we analyze the problems in the current Chinese university student union management construction in terms of personnel scale, mechanism system, organization construction, etc., and give corresponding measures and suggestions in order to provide general reference significance.*

**Key words:** Chinese university student union, management development, student union reform.

### **Изучение развития Управления студсоветами университетов на примере Цилиньского университета**

*В рамках новой волны реформы студенческих союзов университетов на основе эмпирических исследований, проведенных в Цилиньском университете, проанализированы проблемы построения современной системы управления студенческими союзами китайских университетов с точки зрения обеспеченности персоналом, внутренней структуры, организационного строительства и т. д. Даны соответствующие рекомендации и предложения по обеспечению общей реализации процесса совершенствования студенческих советов университетов.*

**Ключевые слова:** студсовет китайского университета, развитие менеджмента, реформа студенческого союза.

### **Introduction**

As an association for students to carry out self-management, self-education, and self-service, Chinese University Student Unions are not only the window for students to express their voice to the university, but also the link and bridge for the university to connect the majority of students. Chinese University Student Union plays an important role in enriching students' campus life and assisting the university to carry out management; However, there are still many practical difficulties in the management mechanism of the student union. Since 2019, the Central Committee of the Communist Youth League of China, the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, and All-China Students' Federation (ACSF) initiate a new round of university student union reform, and issued *Several Opinions on Deepening Reform of University Student Union (Graduate Student Union)* (hereinafter referred to as *Several Opinions*), which kicked off the reform [1]. In order to promote the reform to be more effective, the paper takes the Jilin University

(China) school-level and college-level Student Union as a research sample to explore the current problems in the management development of the University Student Union and put forward corresponding solution measures.

### **Overview of Research Targets**

Using social investigation methods, we conducted questionnaires and structured interviews among faculty and students at Jilin University(China). 220 questionnaires were distributed and 216 valid questionnaires were returned; structured online interviews were conducted with 22 faculty members and students. Among the Jilin University students who participated in the questionnaire survey, 159 of them, or 74.3 % them have served or are serving in the Student Union; 25.7 % of them have not served in the Student Union before. Among the 22 students and faculty who participated in the interview, there are 4 teachers of the Jilin University Youth League, 9 members of the college-level Student Union, 3 members of the school-level Student Union,

and 6 non-members of the Student Union. The research participants covered the main audiences, participants, and administrators of the Student Union.

### **Problems in the Management of Student Unions at Both Levels in Jilin University**

Through the field survey, it is found that there are still the following problems in the construction of Student Unions at both levels of Jilin University. To begin with, the number of Student Union members was redundant and this problem still exists after volunteer recruitment system was implemented. Moreover, considering from the perspective of mechanism and regulations, the Student Union at both school and college levels has not established an effective training mechanism. Last but not the least, in terms of the construction of Student Unions, the work style is far from being enough.

### **Unreasonable Amount of Student Union Members**

Ahead of the current round of reform among Chinese University Student Unions, there was a relatively serious problem at both levels of Student Unions in Jilin University, which is staff redundancy. *Several Opinions* requires that «the departments of Student Unions should not be overlapping and complex. In general, Student Unions at the school-level should have a staff number of about 40, and in principle no more than 60; Student Unions of colleges should have a staff number of 20 to 30». However, through the field survey, it is found that in the spring 2020 semester, Jilin University's school-level Student Union has reached a staff number of more than 400; some college-level Student Union presidents who accepted our interview said that the number of their Student Union members ranged from 40 to 100.

Since the *Several Opinions* was issued, the Student Union of Jilin University at both school and college levels has been reduced in size, i. e., the number of staffs recruited by each department was limited in the new round selection of the Student Union, in line with the principle of streamlining. However, this kind of rapid «downsizing» has led to the phenomenon of «inability to adapt» in Student Unions: the sudden decrease in the number of

staffs has led to a significant increase in the workload of individuals, and the organization and planning of large-scale events is even more strained and overstretched. Even if we recruit temporary volunteers in a project-based way as suggested in *Several Opinions*, it brings a series of problems such as how to carry out volunteer training, how to keep an effective communication between volunteers and Student Union members, and how to overcome the difficulty of friction pulling down efficiency. Therefore, while there is a need to streamline the redundant membership, the realities that come with it need to be continuously explored and addressed in practice.

### **Lack of Training Mechanisms for Student Union Members**

Based on our research results, it is found that Student Unions at both levels of Jilin University lack effective training mechanisms for their members. We noticed the qualities which students and teachers expect most from Student Union members are initiative, organizing capacity, collaboration and executive ability. Undoubtedly, it is important to attract students with excellent academic performance, good character, and strong comprehensive ability to join the Student Union through a reasonable selection mechanism. Whereas, a rational talent training mechanism is also fairly essential in the process of forging excellent student leaders in Student Unions.

During the interview, a college-level Student Union president reflected us that the current Student Union lacks an effective mechanism for developing student leaders. He also pointed out that neither work skills training nor organizational team building has been given sufficient attention in the Student Union. The results of our questionnaire survey also reflect this problem. More than 66 percent of the respondents suppose that Student Unions should «standardize the construction in selection, assessment, cultivation and work style of all student leaders» to better serve college students. When asked about what can be done to improve the efficiency of Student Unions, more than half of the 214 Student Unions members at both levels of Jilin University who participated in our survey agree that it is necessary to «improve the

executive ability of Student Union members, strengthen the intercommunication between them, and timely exchange their work methods and experience». Besides, they suggest Student Unions should «strengthen team building, enhance the consciousness of cooperation, and create a more positive team atmosphere». According to our findings, we can conclude that the current Student Unions at both school and college levels in Jilin University are still inadequate in terms of professional skill cultivation, team spirit building, and some other key aspects of member training.

### **Inadequacy of Student Union Work Style Construction**

Interviewees in our survey reflected that the current Student Unions of Chinese universities at both levels are generally inadequate in work style construction, which leads to the internal Student Union is prone to bureaucracy, loose atmosphere, lack of work initiative, and some other phenomena. The specific manifestation of these problems is that some members of the Student Union do not have a clear understanding of the purpose of the Student Union, which is «to serve the students». Besides, some of the students lack the awareness of theoretical learning, and even have a tendency to be utilitarian in the sense of «judging heroes by their positions» [1].

The work style of a Student Union fundamentally reflects its culture and enduringly (adv. 持久地) influences the way how Student Union members behave [2]. The pragmatic work style and progressive Student Union culture can benefit each other. Only by promoting, cultivating, and refreshing these two factors can we radically put an end to the tendency of bureaucratization, administerization (n. 行政化), and utilitarianism of the Student Union.

### **Suggestions for University Student Unions to Improve Management Construction. Optimizing the Scheduling of Student Union Members**

Based on the requirements of Chinese university Student Union reform, in order to redundancy the staff numbers of Student Unions at both levels, universities should further explore how to optimize the scheduling

of Student Union members and tap into concise and efficient ways of working.

Promoting a new round of university Student Union reform is not simply a rough reduction in the number of staffs, but at the same time has the significance of simplifying its institutional hierarchy. Before the reform, there existed some redundant positions in addition to the presidium and departmental members, which resulted in a complicated hierarchy within the organization. The distribution and approvals of work had to go through various levels, which seriously wasted time, reduced efficiency and stirred up bureaucratic atmosphere within the organization. Since the reform has launched, *Several Opinions* clearly required that «The presidium of Student Union is collectively responsible for major matters in the Student Union. The position of president and vice-president should be replaced by executive president». It also claimed that «no other positions should be kept except the presidium and the staffs in different working departments». As a result, the internal of the Student Union has been flattened, and the presidium can directly assign tasks to members of each department, which greatly saves the time and cost of confirmation and execution in the work.

In addition, University Student Unions should further explore a suitable and project-based approach to recruit its volunteer. For example, at the beginning of the school year, Student Unions can make an annual work plan, determine the large-scale activities which need to be carried out to recruit volunteers, make detailed volunteer recruitment regulations, institutionalize the system of volunteer training, the scope of volunteer participation in the work, the criteria for awarding volunteer hours, etc., so as to reduce the friction in the work, and smoothly achieve the goal of «employing volunteers according to activities, and dispersing them afterward».

### **Building the Talent Development Mechanism**

Student Union staffs are key advocates of the organization value, key shapers (n. 塑造者) of the organization culture, and direct bearers of the organization image [3]. The reform of university Student Unions in the new era should be carried out from two

aspects, including implementing more professional training and enhancing the team-building of Student Unions, which aim to cultivate young talents for all-round development and enhance the comprehensive quality ability of Student Union staffs.

In terms of implementing professional skills training, the Student Union should organize regular lectures and cultivating activities for its members, focusing on the use of common office software, newsletter writing and photography, professional communication etiquette, speech, and hosting, etc., so as to enhance the practical working ability of its members and improve the efficiency of the Student Union.

To promote the development of an excellent Student Union team, group discussions and team building activities should be regularly carried out within the department and the organization. Through all these activities, Student Union members can dilute their position concepts, discuss their gains and losses, create equal and free communication space, and develop a harmonious atmosphere. Moreover, quality development and other collective activities should be regularly

conducted, in order to deepen the mutual understanding between Student Union members, cultivate the cooperative spirit of all members, enhance internal cohesion, as well as make the Student Union more like a warm and united family.

### **Strengthening the Construction of Work Style**

A positive and pragmatic work style is a necessary condition for the healthy development of student organizations. To promote a clean and upright work style, university Student Unions should establish an effective supervision and evaluation mechanism, carry out various forms of self-improvement and supervision mechanisms, and build a comprehensive and effective evaluation system. For example, they can organize self-evaluation and mutual evaluation among Student Union members as an organic part of the assessment mechanism. Besides, carrying out the three-level linkage of school, college, and class through organizing mutual evaluation between the Student Union, the Class Committee and the Student Association is also a good method [4].

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*Рукапіс надіслано у редакцію 26.02.2021*