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Research Article

Current Situation and Improvement Countermeasures for Graduate Education in Public Administration Major in H University

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Abstract

The Master of Public Administration (MPA) degree education is not only an important subject of China's higher education reform, but also a platform for cultivating knowledgeable and professional high-level civil servants. This paper takes H University as an example, conducts a field survey to analyze the success achieved in the development of MPA education in H University, dissects the dilemma in teaching and education processes, and puts forward the basic idea and countermeasure that fit the development of MPA education in H University.

Keywords

Master of Public Administration (MPA) Degree Education • Practice Teaching • Case Teaching • Management System

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In 2005, H University was chosen as one of the third pilot units in the country to carry out MPA degree education, also one of first candidates in H province. Since the launch of MPA education, we take the advantages of rich resources integrated in H University and adhere to the core idea to improve the teaching quality, aim to cultivate high-quality talents in public management field, commit ourselves to transport high-level public management talents for H province and even the whole country. Over the years, we have explored extensively and profoundly the specialty education models, teaching management mechanism and quality assessment system. After years, our efforts have borne fruits: the teaching concept seems more definite and practical; the teaching management system tends to be scientific and standardized; the teaching curriculums get constantly abundant and renewal; the teaching modes are flexible and diverse; the practice teaching base has come to a considerable scale; the education evaluation system is improved day by day, and the characteristics of professional cultivation models are increasingly prominent. With high-quality education quality, perfect teaching facilities and integrative pedagogy services, we have not only won a stable and continuous source of students, but also achieved good social effects.

Overview of MPA education development in H University

As the leader of higher education in the province, H University has been developed into a preferred base for cultivating high-level, specialized and compound talents in public management field in H province and even in the whole country. Our university always adheres to the concept of “service supreme” and regards improving the public management level and the overall quality of cadres in H Province as the starting and standing points. In H University, MPA degree program has a solid foundation for discipline construction. There is a complete set of management disciplines. Only the master authorization unit for the public management level I discipline has set up the four-degree programs, i.e. social security, administrative management, education economics and management, and public health management; the public management discipline group is a provincial education innovation highland. It has provided a strong support for running MPA degree education. Based on its own school-running advantages and social demands, MPA education has set up definite cultivation directions such as finance and tax management, social security management, and government management.

Table 1
Description for Cultivation Directions

Professional degree field (direction)	Research topics
Government management	Public policy theory and practice, education management, health management, etc. Research features: From the local perspective to study the government to provide public services institutional mechanism, and combined with the coordinated development of Beijing, Tianjin and Hebei and the construction of male-security new area to study the actual problems in government management.
Social security management	Social security theory, precision poverty alleviation, social welfare. Research features: The use of Social survey methods for the long-term tracking of rural endowment insurance; Through field research, the effect of precision poverty alleviation and exit mechanism are studied, and the cost sharing of rural transfer labor force is measured by model.
Fiscal and tax management	Financial management, the optimization of tax system structure, the choice of macroeconomic policy tools. Research features: In the field of income tax internationalization and direct taxation system construction to carry out continuous research, fruitful research results, the use of space measurement methods to measure the spatial distribution of tax agglomeration, for regional local governments tax sharing and cooperation to provide reference recommendations.

H University's success in the exploration of MPA education reform practice

Clarify the cultivation objectives and set up a three-module curriculum system

As the market economy continues to be improved, the role of the government has started to change, and its public service function seems even more important. China has also presented the objective of building a "service-oriented government" in due time. There is a need for public managers who work in the government not only to have professional skills, but also to establish a sense of services. In MPA education, we closely combine this practice. Clung to the idea that the applied and compound talents are eventually fostered, the service-oriented talents in public management are regarded as the cultivation goal, which not only adapts to the social and economic development, but also presents breakthrough and innovation for the MPA education. For this purpose, we arrange three curriculum modules, i.e. theory, practice and vocation morality courses. In-campus case room and off-campus training base are also established, focusing on improving the practical application skills of graduate students; the morality course module is targeted to improve the awareness of the civil servants to fulfill their function of public services.

Ensure the cultivation quality and establish a high-level faculty team

Since the development of MPA education, we have fully depended on the advantages of H University as a comprehensive institution and its extensive influence inside and outside the province, establishing a team of teachers with high theoretical level and rich practical experience.

First, integrate the superior resources in university. We should take the teachers at the School of Management as the principal part, attract the excellent teachers from the School of Economics, the School of Politics and Law, the Marxism-Leninism Education Department, the Department of Public Education, and the School of Direct Units, ensure the theoretical level and teaching skills of the faculty;

Second, extensively access to practical resources. Combining the characteristics of MPA education, we should fully take advantage of H University's good reputation and cooperation relationship with the community to attract the leaders from those authorities such as the Finance Department, Tax Bureau, Human Resources and Social Security Department in H province as MPA mentors, who can give full play to their rich experience in practices.

Third, leverage social resources. We should invite domestic first-class experts and scholars to make academic reports, by which students can grasp the cutting-edge technologies in the development of disciplines, understand the latest explorations in the field of public management practice. Academic reports have become a periodic part of MPA education. The advanced teaching concepts of domestic first-class institutions and R&D organizations are also imbued into our teaching process.

Strengthen teaching research and improve the teaching level for professional masters

The specific school-running model for professional degree education has produced a profound impact on our educational thoughts, education and management modes. Relevant development works should be intensified as an important part to ensure the quality of professional degree education. In recent years, we have been adhering to the "two-way scientific development" to improve the scientific development and teaching levels. On the one hand, persistent scientific development is the premise and fundamental for improving the level of teachers and realizing the development of disciplines. In the study of the subjects, teachers have attracted more MPA graduate students to involve in it in order to achieve a win-win goal through joint cooperation. On the other hand, teaching development is also an important part of teachers' subject study. The MPA education has a short development course in China, and teaching development and exploration has become an indispensable part of MPA education.

Continuously innovate and realize the diversification of teaching models

Based on the characteristics of MPA education, we focus on the case-based, seminar-based, and scenario simulation teaching models. Based on these, MPA graduate students will improve their overall qualities from the involvement in a series of activities we launch such as "MPA Graduate Podium" and "MPA Graduate Classroom", which provide them with the opportunity to learn more about social practices and achieve a win-win situation for MPA graduate students and undergraduate students in university.

First, case-based teaching. We should advocate teachers to adopt case-based teaching model extensively in teaching process, and encourage them to self-compile teaching cases. The teaching model with the cases as a carrier for knowledge transfer can greatly enhance the appeal and practicality of the curriculums.

Second, seminar-based teaching. Teachers should make a full use of seminar-based teaching model in teaching process. In response to a certain problem, the students will be led to put forward their own opinions by combining the practices. In the teaching process, we also advocate the "MPA Graduate Classroom" seminar hosted by the class teacher, that is, ten minutes before each class, a classmate is arranged to exchange his or her opinions about the problems or advanced practices encountered in the management work with other students. Up till now, this practice has been implemented for more than a year, and the response is very strong.

Third, scenario simulation teaching. Scenario simulation teaching model closely combines real world with the students' learning process, and in the forms of simulations and performances, students are immersed in the situation, and think over something in this situation. They also apply the theories they have learned to guide themselves to real world situations and solve practical problems about public management. Currently, this model is being promoted.

In the training process of professional skills, it is worth mentioning that we have launched the "MPA Excellent Students in Classroom" activities during the MPA education process, where the outstanding students in MPA from the public sectors give special lectures or reports to undergraduates. They not only have blended their theoretical knowledge and their own work practices into the report, but also have tempered themselves with good expressing, communicating, and coordinating skills. Most MPA graduate students have a strong

interest in and great enthusiasm for this form of social exercise. They also have been fully recognized and widely welcomed by undergraduates.

Create normative degree awarding procedure

MPA master's degree program in our university implements a diversion and elimination system aimed to encourage students' scientific development and innovation. We focus on the serious style of study, and cultivate students' sense of responsibility and stringency as high-level management talents. The first is to develop strict study discipline. Oral warnings are given to students who are absent from class and do not finish the tasks prescribed by the school and the tutors on time. In severe cases, they are required to retake the course. The second is to develop a strict interim screening procedure. After the course examination and comprehensive assessment, the unqualified students will be talked, rework until the graduation qualification is cancelled. The third is to develop the strict dissertation writing, review and defense system. Each dissertation of graduate must pass the six assessment procedures such as the opening report, pre-answering, external expert review, internal review repetition rate, formal defense and assessment of the degree committee, otherwise they will not be granted with the master's degree. If any of six procedures does not meet the requirements, they cannot access the next procedure. If the opening report is unqualified, they need to be re-argued. If the pre-answering and the formal defense are unqualified, material amendment is required; the time for reply is postponed, and the degree awarding will also be deferred. If plagiarist is found in the paper content, everything will be denied and the degree awarding qualification will be cancelled.

Practical dilemma in the practice of MPA education reform developed in H University

The culture mode is conservative and lacks the flexibility. For now, the teaching is mainly concentrated in the university several times a year. The concentrated learning generally lasts for one year, followed by social practice and dissertation time.

Judging from the current training mode, the focus is put on "the purpose of learning is to succeed", but ignoring "the purpose of learning to use in practice", which rebels against the practicality of MPA education and lacks the flexibility. For MPAs, the learning motivation stems from the work practice, so that it more underlines the "learning for use". The cultivation model should not be formalized, but more flexible.

The lectures are based on theory and the practical content is supplementary. The curriculum provision more involves theoretical learning in the classroom, and neglects practical and applied instruction. It deviates from the objectives of cultivating applied and compound talents. The curriculum provision of "emphasize theories and diminish practices" diverges from the essential pursuit of MPA education, and weakens the practical needs of MPA students for "learning and speaking out" in professional learning.

The teaching model is single and should be plural

First, the traditional classroom expository method is still the mainstream in the MPA education process. There is less interaction between teachers and students, less knowledge derived from practices, and it is not attractive to MPA students who have practical experience. Second, it is the case-based teaching model, but the cases currently used in China are less, or directly copying foreign experience, lacking localized cases with practical value. It is thus clear that the construction of the case base is particularly important. From the personal expectations of MPA students, different teaching models are helpful to better learn and improve themselves. Diversified teaching models are also more conducive to combining the needs for practical works so as to improve the problem-solving skills in practical works.

Foreign exchanges and cooperation should be further intensified. In terms of domestic exchanges, it is required to increase the opportunities for MPA students to exchange information with other universities, invite more well-known domestic experts to make speeches in H University. In terms of international (overseas) exchanges, H University, as a local one, still has a gap in international exchange and cooperation opportunities from domestic first-class institutions.

Thoughts and countermeasures of the comprehensive reform of graduate education in MPA of H University

We should take the development tenet of professional degree education as the starting point, establish a correct MPA education concept, profoundly study the law of MPA education, focus on improving the teaching quality, and cultivate qualified talents required by the society.

Basic idea

We should take the comprehensive reform pilot of professional degree as an opportunity, and improving the management level of local party and government cadres as their own tasks, continue to adhere to the principle of quality supreme, constantly optimize the cultivation programs and teaching models to promote the economic and social development in the province, assume the mission of the human resource education base, improve the social service and influence in the national MPA education (Zhan, 2017).

Countermeasures and suggestions

Optimize MPA graduate education program. Based on the original education direction design, the focus will be on improving the work efficiency of the public administration division, adjusting the curriculum structure and determining the training direction by combining the work nature or particularity in different divisions. It should be further explored in the combination of the general public management and division directions.

Training objectives and teaching keynotes highlight application skills. We should continue to strengthen case-based and practice-based instruction models, establish 10 bases for social practices in the whole province

to give students more opportunities to participate in field survey, and recruit relevant leaders in the existing work divisions to participate more in the student training process, focus more on enhancing students' competences to discover and study practical problems (Li, 2017).

Focusing on the practicality of the teaching content, we will strive to build 2-3 high-quality courses applicable to MPA education in three years based on the existing three provincial classical courses, such as finance, social security and national taxation; On the grounds of the existing teaching materials, we should organize experienced teachers to write and publish 5-6 MPA series textbooks and series case sets.

Strengthen cooperation with the practical divisions in society. We will systematically draw on rich experience from running schools in cooperation with the provincial taxation and social insurance association in the past few years, actively expand the channels for cooperation in running schools, and struggle to get more supports from other functional authorities to develop large-scale school running for different divisions, recruit the leaders from relevant divisions to directly participate in the training process for MPA graduate students in this division, so that the MPA education seems more time-sensitive and purposeful (Zhou and Chen, 2015).

Along with the development of information technology, the application of information technology in public administration division has a marked impact on its organizational structure, management model, efficiency and costs. We should well use the platform of the Economic Management Experimental Center and focus on tapping the potentials of simulation teaching to improve the teaching quality (Peng, Wang, Xue and Wu, 2015).

Further strengthen the construction of the faculty. Based on the existing faculty, we should try hard to build an excellent teaching team with excellent quality; provide them with more financial support and time guarantee for improving their teaching standards, set up a special project to support the MPA degree R&D combining with the existing research training project in the colleges, select excellent teachers to go to key universities at home and abroad for targeted advanced studies, and actively contact the units for social practices to seek opportunities for them to work to improve their theoretical and social practice experience and teaching level. Meanwhile, it is required to improve the assessment mechanism for tutors, and attempt to achieve standardized and scientific management, including a complete set of systems such as dynamic selection of the mentor team, assessments on curriculums and dissertations, scientific results, and collective pedagogical activities. A specific indicator system should be established as well (Shen, Cao and Peng, 2014).

Improve the learning incentive mechanism for MPA students. We should establish a practical MPA incentive system, regularly organize the election of outstanding graduate students, comments for outstanding graduate dissertations ready for compilation and publication; appeal to MPA students to write dissertations in various forms; courage them to analyze practical problems based on the cases, establish and improve the employment service system to offer necessary career guidance and information provision mechanism for students who want to be employed, actively recommend them the employment units, follow up the employment situation of students, and accumulate more talent training experience.

Continuously improve management systems and mechanisms. We should further intensify the construction of three-level management systems, i.e. the professional degree education steering committee, the professional degree management office, and the professional degree education center. The MPA Professional

Degree Education Center is the office responsible for undertaking the professional teaching of MPA. We should clarify the specific functions and responsibilities of the organization, set up appropriate full-time management personnel, and define relevant management tasks. Preliminary envisions: given that MPA and MBA educations have the similar nature and are all managed by the School of Management, the corresponding management team construction will be considered in order to improve management efficiency (Zeng, Tianli, Huang, He and Cai, 2018).

In the management mechanism, we should attach particular importance to the establishment and improvement of the funding guarantee mechanism. Unlike other majors, the MPA degree education has a higher charge level and corresponding inputs of teaching funds. Its core is to guarantee necessary conditions adaptable to this degree education, and attain the training quality of talents that fit it. We will work hard to learn more from other universities and allocate funds scientifically and reasonably.

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