

Difficulties and Countermeasures of Interdisciplinary Talent Cultivation Under the Background of New Liberal Arts Construction

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Abstract: Against the backdrop of the global technological revolution and industrial transformation, the construction of new liberal arts has become a pivotal direction for higher education reform, aiming to cultivate interdisciplinary talents to meet the demands of the times. This paper thoroughly analyzes the connotations of new liberal arts construction and interdisciplinary talent cultivation, and clarifies their contemporary implications, training objectives and developmental requirements of the era. Meanwhile, it systematically sorts out the dilemmas in cultivating interdisciplinary talents amid new liberal arts construction from five dimensions: disciplinary philosophy, talent training models, faculty departmental structures, teaching resources and teaching staff, and evaluation systems. Targeted countermeasures are further proposed, including establishing a new liberal arts education philosophy for the digital age, constructing a novel teaching model for interdisciplinary talent cultivation, improving interdisciplinary cooperation platforms based on the faculty division system, optimizing the allocation of teaching resources, and developing a scientific evaluation system. The research provides theoretical support and practical guidance for advancing interdisciplinary talent cultivation within new liberal arts construction, and facilitates the deepening of higher education reform.

Keywords: New Liberal Arts Construction; Interdisciplinary Talents; Talent Cultivation; Interdisciplinarity.

1. Introduction

With the accelerated evolution of the global technological revolution and industrial transformation, interdisciplinary integration has become an inevitable trend in the development of higher education. Since 2018, the Ministry of Education of China has launched the “New Liberal Arts” construction initiative. By reorganizing disciplines, integrating liberal arts with science and engineering, and empowering education with digital technologies, this initiative strives to cultivate interdisciplinary talents with cross-disciplinary vision, innovative thinking and practical capabilities. This reform not only responds to the brand-new demands of the digital economy for talent knowledge structures, but also actively implements the national “Four New Disciplines” development strategy for higher education. The new liberal arts initiative emphasizes breaking traditional disciplinary barriers and promoting in-depth integration between philosophy and social sciences, modern information technology, artificial intelligence and other fields. Its core objective is to build a “Liberal Arts +” education model, delivering interdisciplinary talents with profound humanistic literacy and technological competency for social development.

Nevertheless, the cultivation of interdisciplinary talents faces numerous difficulties and challenges during the construction of new liberal arts. How to effectively resolve these issues has emerged as a core research topic in the current reform of higher education.

2. Connotation Analysis of New Liberal Arts Construction and Interdisciplinary Talent Cultivation

(1) Contemporary Implications of New Liberal Arts Construction

China’s new liberal arts construction is led by the Ministry of Education and independently explored by a host of high-level domestic universities based on their respective school-running conditions. It shoulders the critical mission of developing an independent knowledge system and independent talent training system for philosophy and social sciences with Chinese characteristics[1]. As a major strategy proposed by the Ministry of Education to address the global technological revolution, industrial transformation and developmental needs of humanities and social sciences, new liberal arts construction centers on dismantling traditional disciplinary boundaries and boosting interdisciplinary integration, so as to cultivate interdisciplinary talents with patriotism, global vision and cross-field competencies. The new liberal arts initiative advocates weakening disciplinary divides, continuously promoting disciplinary convergence and talent cultivation centered on major national, social and industrial issues. Meanwhile, it reshapes people’s values and thinking systems via modern technologies, and better interprets and responds to the logical correlations between technology and humanities and social sciences[2].

The construction of new liberal arts adheres to the principle of “upholding fundamentals while pursuing innovation”. It inherits the humanistic heritage of traditional liberal arts, and responds to contemporary challenges through technological empowerment and disciplinary restructuring, serving the modernization of national governance and the enhancement of cultural soft power. Based on explorations of new liberal arts construction in universities, people held the concept of “new liberal arts” in China was put forward amid reflections on the deficiencies in disciplinary development and talent training models of conventional liberal arts under new eras and new national conditions. It advocates integrating cutting-edge technological elements to advance interdisciplinary development, forming a new liberal arts system featuring Chinese schools, disciplinary frameworks, academic systems

and discourse systems, and nurturing master-level talents in humanities and social sciences[3]. In short, China's "new liberal arts" arises from the advancement of new technologies and the developmental demands of the information age and national conditions. It also stems from renewed recognition of the intrinsic value and significance of liberal arts education. Rooted in traditional liberal arts education and aligned with contemporary developmental needs, it realizes cross-disciplinary reorganization, breaks information barriers and educational limitations inherent to conventional liberal arts knowledge, reconstructs and flexibly adjusts the liberal arts system, and forms a novel liberal arts education and training mechanism oriented to educating, cultivating and shaping people.

(2) Training Objectives of Interdisciplinary Talents

Interdisciplinary liberal arts talents firstly possess positive ideological awareness and moral standards, alongside specialized expertise and interdisciplinary competence. Specialized expertise means mastering cutting-edge knowledge within one's discipline and being capable of conducting innovative work in study and careers related to the major. Interdisciplinary competence refers to the command of knowledge, capabilities and thinking models from two or more disciplines with high integration across different fields, as well as the broad radiation of disciplinary thinking to equip talents with the capacity and sense of responsibility to tackle complex and unpredictable problems[4].

It can thus be concluded that interdisciplinary talents feature cross-disciplinary knowledge systems, diverse comprehensive competencies and sound communication and collaboration skills, enabling them to adapt to complex and volatile social environments and career demands. Against the background of new liberal arts construction, cultivating interdisciplinary talents is critical to advancing innovations in liberal arts education and boosting the competitiveness of liberal arts graduates. On the one hand, it helps dismantle internal disciplinary boundaries within liberal arts, integrate knowledge resources and inject new vitality into liberal arts development. On the other hand, it facilitates the infiltration of liberal arts into other disciplines, spawns emerging disciplines and research areas, and cultivates comprehensive talents adaptable to industrial transformation and social progress.

(3) Social Demands for Interdisciplinary Talents in the Contemporary Era

Currently, the global economy and society are undergoing dual transformations of digital restructuring and industrial pattern reconfiguration, which impose systematic upgrading requirements on talent knowledge structures and competency standards. The Fourth Industrial Revolution, represented by artificial intelligence and big data, has given rise to emerging sectors including the digital economy and smart governance, driving the transformation and upgrading of industrial structures and triggering profound shifts in social talent demands. Under such circumstances, knowledge structures confined to a single discipline can barely satisfy complex and diverse social needs, making interdisciplinary versatile talents an urgent developmental priority of the times.

First, interdisciplinary talents are better equipped to address complex issues. Their cross-disciplinary knowledge backgrounds and comprehensive capabilities allow them to identify innovative solutions amid multi-field integration. Second, global competition requires talents to possess not only professional expertise but also an international

perspective and cross-cultural communication competence. In addition, as social issues grow increasingly complex, governments, enterprises and social organizations have a rising demand for talents with multidisciplinary backgrounds. Therefore, cultivating interdisciplinary talents with profound humanistic literacy and proficient modern technological knowledge has become a core direction of higher education reform amid new liberal arts construction.

Overall, the construction of new liberal arts is not merely a rational choice for higher education reform, but an inevitable path to serve the national innovation-driven development strategy and respond to contemporary propositions. Through disciplinary intersection and technological integration, new liberal arts construction addresses these social demands and cultivates adaptive and leading-edge new liberal arts talents.

3. Dilemmas in Cultivating Interdisciplinary Talents Under New Liberal Arts Construction

(1) Conflicts Between Disciplinary Philosophy and Talent Training Objectives

From a theoretical perspective, integrating traditional disciplinary philosophies with talent training objectives of the new era encounters practical obstacles during the implementation of new liberal arts construction. The new liberal arts stands in contrast to traditional liberal arts and represents its advancement. Its core purpose is to break professional and disciplinary barriers, providing students with comprehensive, interdisciplinary and integrated knowledge structures that align with the new liberal arts era based on broad academic horizons, acute problem awareness and profound academic accumulation, as an active response to rapidly changing social realities[5]. Nevertheless, higher education systems have long prioritized disciplinary specialization, with relatively independent disciplines lacking effective interdisciplinary integration mechanisms and persistent disciplinary barriers, leading to unsatisfactory outcomes in interdisciplinary talent cultivation.

Deeply entrenched traditional disciplinary classification philosophies draw clear dividing lines between disciplines and establish relatively independent knowledge systems. Although such classification facilitates refined disciplinary development, it hinders interdisciplinary talent cultivation in the context of new liberal arts. Disciplinary classification philosophies gradually took root in universities from the 19th century. China enforces a national disciplinary system, and administrative authorities issue the rigid Catalogue of Disciplines for Degree Conferment and Talent Training with disciplinary management functions. All disciplinary construction and talent training must undergo disciplinary approval under this catalogue[6]. While interdisciplinary studies have been listed as a disciplinary category, disciplinary frameworks still fail to transcend traditional classification methods, and secondary disciplinary management restricts the development of interdisciplinary subjects, making it difficult for them to be incorporated into the Double First-Class Initiative.

Under this classification philosophy, disparate knowledge systems and cultural disparities between disciplines form isolated "academic tribes" that impede interdisciplinary communication and collaboration among faculty and students. The exclusivity of disciplinary culture confines teachers and students to their own fields, limiting access to cross-

disciplinary knowledge and thinking modes. Furthermore, disciplinary classification dictates the allocation of academic resources: universities set up schools based on disciplines, resulting in narrow knowledge horizons for students that fail to meet social demand for interdisciplinary liberal arts talents.

(2) Limitations of Talent Training Models and Teaching Methods

Influenced by classification-based disciplinary philosophies, monodisciplinary talent training models prioritize specialized education and focus on indoctrination of theoretical knowledge within a single discipline, marked by prominent professional barriers. Graduates trained under such models possess fragmented knowledge structures and insufficient capabilities for cross-disciplinary thinking and problem-solving, struggling to adapt to emerging industries featuring “AI +” and “Big Data +”. For instance, based on research on ideological and political education major construction under the new liberal arts strategy, people found that normal universities, comprehensive universities and universities of science and technology lack differentiated development in ideological and political education programs. Their training objectives, curriculum planning and teaching methods rarely reflect institutional positioning and educational traditions. Overemphasis on uniformity in major construction fails to meet diverse industry demands for ideological and political talents[7].

The quality of interdisciplinary liberal arts talent cultivation is a decisive factor in advancing new liberal arts construction in depth. Some people pointed out a “top-down imbalance” in macro-level new liberal arts construction: at the micro university level, all prevailing training models including double/joint degree programs, micro-majors, liberal arts laboratories and college residential colleges suffer from insufficient experience summary, limited leading power of typical cases and narrow radiation effects[8]. Talent training models overemphasize “specialization, precision and depth” within a single discipline, and the absence of integrated curriculum systems creates bottlenecks for cultivating interdisciplinary talents. Professional courses feature scarce interdisciplinary intersections, restricting students from crossing professional boundaries. General education courses cover a broad spectrum of disciplines yet carry fixed credit hours with limited student choices; disjointed and unsystematic curricula cannot effectively support interdisciplinary liberal arts talent cultivation.

In terms of teaching methodologies, teacher-centered lecture-based instruction remains dominant, leaving students in a passive knowledge-receiving position with limited initiative and creativity. Based on a study of postgraduate Higher Education classrooms under the new liberal arts framework, some people emphasized that interdisciplinary teaching reform under new liberal arts centers on real-world problems rather than disciplinary boundaries, requiring multi-dimensional solutions to single practical issues and demanding greater practicality, interactivity and diversity in instructional organization. Traditional Higher Education pedagogy relies heavily on teacher lectures. While postgraduate teaching reforms have promoted student presentations in class, outdated instructional design concepts render such presentations perfunctory due to low student participation, weak interaction and flawed feedback mechanisms[9]. Evidently, such teaching methodologies hinder the cultivation of students’ critical thinking and practical problem-solving capabilities. The integration of

cross-disciplinary knowledge under new liberal arts construction requires diversified teaching approaches, yet many universities make slow progress in pedagogical innovation, failing to satisfy the demands of interdisciplinary talent cultivation.

(3) Monolithic Discipline-Centered Faculty Departmental Structures

Discipline-centered faculty departmental structures represent the mainstream framework of contemporary higher education, organizing teaching and research activities around individual disciplines with relatively independent schools forming closed academic communities. Since China’s reform and opening-up, most domestic universities have adopted a three-tier university-school-department organizational framework built on disciplinary foundations, with rigid first-level disciplines serving as the primary benchmark for faculty restructuring [10]. However, within the context of new liberal arts construction, such monolithic discipline-centered structures constitute a major barrier to interdisciplinary talent cultivation. While this framework elevates specialized disciplinary standards, its inherent disciplinary closure raises obstacles to interdisciplinary education. Students are confined to single disciplines and majors, resulting in narrow knowledge horizons that restrict the transfer of cross-boundary thinking and multi-disciplinary capabilities.

Discipline-centered faculty construction solidifies disciplinary identities and reinforces isolation between schools, obstructing interdisciplinary teaching and research. As the primary bodies for degree education, schools form protective barriers over resources, raising the difficulty of integrating cross-school curricula and research resources. Students thus lack access to interdisciplinary learning opportunities, hindering the cultivation of interdisciplinary talents. Disciplinary barriers impede cross-school collaboration with unsound mechanisms for resource sharing and cooperation, confining faculty and students to monodisciplinary knowledge systems with limited interdisciplinary exchange channels. In addition, curriculum design and teaching content are constrained by monodisciplinary frameworks, making it challenging to incorporate interdisciplinary knowledge modules.

(4) Shortages in Teaching Resources and Faculty Teams

A core requirement of new liberal arts construction lies in integrating multi-disciplinary teaching resources to build enriched learning environments for students. Nevertheless, current universities exhibit unbalanced resource allocation across disciplines, with liberal arts majors at a comparative disadvantage in resource acquisition. Although major domestic law schools have begun leveraging comprehensive research platforms to realize cross-disciplinary integration of teaching resources, existing faculty frameworks for legislative studies still fail to fully address multi-dimensional and multi-level national governance demands for interdisciplinary legislative talents. In particular, structural deficiencies in curriculum systems prevent balanced allocation of cross-disciplinary faculty resources to law programs, restricting comprehensive interdisciplinary resource integration centered on legal studies[11]. Furthermore, many universities lag in constructing liberal arts laboratories with outdated equipment, unable to support cross-disciplinary research and practical training for students. Library literature resources also contain gaps in emerging interdisciplinary fields, limiting student learning and research.

Cultivating interdisciplinary talents demands faculty

equipped with cross-disciplinary knowledge and teaching capabilities, yet university teaching staff currently display prominent shortcomings in these aspects. Most faculty have long focused on research and instruction within a single discipline, possessing fragmented knowledge structures with limited experience in interdisciplinary teaching and research. People argued that faculty teams in traditional Chinese medicine are mostly assembled from separate cross-disciplinary institutions. On the one hand, teachers hold independent monodisciplinary academic backgrounds with limited experience guiding students to enhance practical capabilities across fields. On the other hand, research areas within faculty teams remain largely isolated with low cross-disciplinary integration, leading to fragmented academic work lacking mutual empowerment[12]. Consequently, faculty lack in-depth understanding of new liberal arts philosophies and requirements, impeding the formation of versatile interdisciplinary teaching teams and compromising the quality of interdisciplinary talent cultivation.

(5) Mismatch Between Evaluation Systems and Talent Training Demands

Stark disparities between traditional postgraduate academic evaluation criteria and benchmark standards for top-tier postgraduate assessment under new liberal arts construction, especially regarding definitions of innovation capacity and innovative outcomes[13]. Taking postgraduate programs in Chinese language and literature as an example, conventional evaluation systems center on academic achievements, prioritizing exam scores and the quantity of published papers while insufficiently assessing students' practical capabilities, innovative thinking and comprehensive literacy. Such evaluation frameworks drive students to overemphasize theoretical study and neglect practical competence development, obstructing the growth of interdisciplinary talents.

Existing evaluation systems overly prioritize academic outputs and examination results, lacking comprehensive assessment of students' cross-disciplinary learning, teamwork and social service capacities. Such monolithic evaluation metrics fail to fully reflect students' cross-disciplinary competencies and overall literacy, and restrict the cultivation of student innovative spirit and practical capabilities. Social service participation, cross-disciplinary competencies and comprehensive literacy are vital to new liberal arts education, yet current evaluation frameworks fail to fully incorporate these dimensions and cannot effectively guide all-round student development for interdisciplinary talent cultivation.

4. Countermeasures for Interdisciplinary Talent Cultivation Under New Liberal Arts Construction

(1) Concept Renewal: Establishing a New Liberal Arts Education Philosophy for the Digital Age

Talent training systems built on disciplinary classification philosophies can no longer satisfy national and social demands. New liberal arts construction emphasizes multi-disciplinary intersection and integration to reconstruct liberal arts talent training frameworks. Universities should establish a new liberal arts vision tailored to the intelligent era, equipping students with knowledge, competencies and literacy training aligned with an intelligent society based on broad academic horizons, cross-disciplinary thinking and

solid professional expertise.

Cultivation of interdisciplinary liberal arts talents must highlight the integrated advantages of the "Humanities +" model to realize comprehensive upgrading across all dimensions of talent training. Institutions should integrate modern information technologies, optimize liberal arts major structures, reconstruct knowledge systems and update teaching and research paradigms. Guided by national strategic demands and real-world social issues, universities shall cultivate interdisciplinary student capabilities for humanities and social science research, public cultural services and social governance practice.

(2) Model Innovation: Constructing a Novel Teaching Model for Interdisciplinary Talent Cultivation

Breaking disciplinary and school barriers constitutes the core of cultivating interdisciplinary talents under new liberal arts construction. In major development, universities should appropriately broaden professional scopes, integrate analogous majors into wide-spectrum programs with multiple core disciplines to achieve broader cross-professional integration. Postpone student major specialization to enhance flexibility in major selection, allowing students to take courses across majors, departments and schools, and integrate relevant undergraduate and postgraduate programs.

Curricula serve as the core carrier of talent cultivation. Top-level design of training programs must transcend secondary disciplinary constraints to build interdisciplinary composite curriculum clusters and restructure overall curricula systems. Universities should explore interdisciplinary teaching pathways, assemble teaching teams with cross-disciplinary backgrounds, develop faculty training mechanisms and integrate teaching with research. Cutting-edge technologies shall be embedded into curricula to elevate their intelligence and informatization levels. Teaching evaluation reforms should be implemented to build diversified, cross-disciplinary systems for assessing teaching quality.

(3) Platform Restructuring: Improving Interdisciplinary Cooperation Platforms Based on the Faculty Division System

Constructing cross-disciplinary academic organizations is critical to facilitating disciplinary integration and cultivating interdisciplinary liberal arts talents. Faculty division reforms consolidate schools with similar disciplinary attributes based on disciplinary clusters and categories, providing stable organizational and resource safeguards for interdisciplinary integration.

Centered on disciplinary development and academic advancement, faculties build cross-disciplinary cooperation platforms, organize teaching by disciplinary clusters and conduct research via research groups. They coordinate major research projects, assemble interdisciplinary research teams and break disciplinary and school barriers. In resource allocation, faculties integrate, share and optimize human, material and information resources simultaneously. Meanwhile, faculty divisions blur disciplinary boundaries, strengthen organizational identity and a sense of mission among faculty and students, cultivate cross-disciplinary collaborative awareness and mitigate conflicts between disparate disciplinary cultures.

(4) Resource Integration: Optimizing Allocation of Teaching Resources and Faculty Team Development

On one hand, universities shall increase investment in liberal arts laboratory construction and introduce advanced technological equipment including big data analysis platforms and artificial intelligence labs to provide cross-

disciplinary research and practical training platforms for students. Liberal arts laboratories should cooperate with enterprises and research institutes to conduct real-world project research, enabling students to enhance innovative capabilities and practical problem-solving skills through practice. Laboratory resource-sharing mechanisms shall be established to improve resource utilization efficiency and promote interdisciplinary communication and collaboration.

On the other hand, developing cross-disciplinary faculty teams represents a key pillar of interdisciplinary talent cultivation. Building faculty teams with diverse disciplinary backgrounds, abundant practical experience and advanced teaching philosophies constitutes an urgent priority for digital humanities talent cultivation. In terms of platforms, universities should rely on big data, artificial intelligence and other emerging technologies to build intelligent collaborative innovation platforms for teaching and research, providing students with all-time learning opportunities embedded with personalized learning guidance and intelligent evaluation services tailored to diverse learning needs.

Therefore, universities should formulate supportive policies to encourage faculty engagement in cross-disciplinary research and teaching. Measures include recruiting talents with interdisciplinary backgrounds, dispatching faculty to domestic and overseas universities for further training, and organizing cross-disciplinary teaching workshops to enhance faculty cross-disciplinary literacy and instructional capabilities. Cross-disciplinary teaching teams shall be established to promote communication and collaboration among faculty, enabling joint curriculum design and teaching research to deliver high-quality instruction for students.

(5) Evaluation Reform: Developing a Flexible and Diversified Comprehensive Evaluation System

Integrating international standards with Chinese characteristics, the new liberal arts initiative requires scientific evaluation frameworks to assess liberal arts education outcomes and drive continuous improvement of humanities and social sciences. New liberal arts construction relies on "promoting construction through evaluation", and establishing a diversified, flexible evaluation system guides the sound development of humanities and social sciences as a whole.

Universities shall construct multi-dimensional evaluation indicator systems to comprehensively assess students' overall literacy. Beyond academic performance, additional indicators shall be incorporated to evaluate practical capabilities, innovative competencies, teamwork and social responsibility. Practical competence can be assessed via student performance in practical projects and internship report quality; innovative capacity is measured through research project participation and discipline competition achievements; teamwork capabilities are evaluated based on group assignments and team project deliverables.

Diversified evaluation methods shall be adopted to objectively and comprehensively assess student learning outcomes, including process evaluation, project-based assessment and performance assessment. Process evaluation tracks student learning progress and deficiencies through classroom engagement, assignment completion and group discussion participation. Project-based assessment allows students to demonstrate comprehensive capabilities through completing real-world practical projects. Performance assessment evaluates student overall competence via

presentations, work exhibitions and other outputs.

5. Conclusion

From a connotative perspective, new liberal arts construction arises from contemporary developmental demands and reflections on liberal arts education, aiming to break disciplinary barriers and construct brand-new talent training mechanisms. Interdisciplinary talents feature cross-disciplinary knowledge systems and diverse comprehensive competencies with strong collaborative skills, which carry pivotal significance for liberal arts educational innovation and the improvement of liberal arts talent competitiveness. Nevertheless, current interdisciplinary talent cultivation faces multi-layered dilemmas spanning disciplinary philosophies, training models, faculty departmental structures, teaching resources, faculty teams and evaluation systems, all of which restrict the advancement of new liberal arts construction and the quality of interdisciplinary talent cultivation.

This paper proposes targeted countermeasures addressing the above challenges. In terms of concept renewal, universities shall establish a digital-era new liberal arts education philosophy to drive comprehensive upgrading of talent training. For model innovation, disciplinary and school barriers should be dismantled to build novel teaching frameworks for interdisciplinary talent cultivation. In platform restructuring, faculty division-based interdisciplinary cooperation platforms shall be refined to boost in-depth disciplinary integration. For resource integration, investment in liberal arts laboratories shall be expanded alongside comprehensive development of cross-disciplinary faculty teams. Regarding evaluation reform, scientific multi-dimensional evaluation systems shall be constructed to fully assess students' overall literacy.

Looking ahead, new liberal arts construction is a long-term undertaking. With continuous technological advancement and social development, the initiative requires sustained reform in response to evolving social trends. On one hand, universities must continuously explore new pathways for interdisciplinary integration, transcend entrenched conventional mindsets, facilitate in-depth dialogue and coordinated innovation across disparate disciplines, and cultivate more interdisciplinary talents capable of leading future social development. On the other hand, institutions shall strengthen international exchange and cooperation, draw upon advanced foreign experience, and develop a new liberal arts system with Chinese characteristics aligned with national conditions to elevate the global influence and competitiveness of China's higher education. In addition, emphasis shall be placed on the transformation and application of practical reform outcomes, translating achievements of new liberal arts construction into tangible support for all spheres of social development. This provides robust talent reserves and intellectual backing for the national innovation-driven development strategy, and propels China's higher education toward new heights.

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