

Process-Focused Education Quality Assurance System of Full-time Professional Degree Graduate Students

WANG Huiyan

Graduate Affairs Office, Xihua University, Chengdu, China, 191758344@qq.com

LIU Xiaobing

Graduate Affairs Office, Xihua University, Chengdu, China, 2644580590@qq.com

LI Ling

Graduate Affairs Office, Xihua University, Chengdu, China, 892214894@qq.com

YAN Lihong

Discipline Office, Xihua University, Chengdu, China, 43762743@qq.com

Abstract

With the increasing of professional degree graduate students, the problems in their education become more and more prominent in China. To solve these problems, a process-focused education quality assurance system was proposed in this paper. First, the supervision process by universities, the government, various academic organizations, industries, and social institutions shall be strengthened, second, the implementation process of various policies shall be highlighted to guide their education; third, the course teaching process shall be enhanced to lay a solid foundation in theories; fourth, the mentoring process by supervisors shall be emphasized to improve students' abilities in study, research and practice; fifth, the process of training in practice bases shall be enhanced to equip students with much-needed industry-sought professional skills; last but not least, the process elimination mechanism shall be established to guarantee the quality of graduates.

Keywords: Professional degree, Graduate students, Education quality, Process.

1. INTRODUCTION

The first professional master's degree was established in China in 1990. Since then more and more professional master's degrees have been established, and currently there are 39 of them, including business administration (MBA), engineering (ME), architecture (M.Arch), social work (MSW), agricultural extension (MAE), translation and interpreting (MTI), urban planning (MUP), etc. China plans to further increase the amount of professional degree graduates and the ratio of graduates between professional degree and academic degree will be controlled at 1:1 in 2005. With the continuous increasing of the enrollment amount of professional degree graduate students, a large amount of them have graduated and been employed, which makes the problems in the education of professional degree graduate students more prominent. In theory, a professional degree prepares the conferee for a particular profession by emphasizing skills and practical analysis over theory and research [1]. However, due to the lack of knowledge in the education of professional degree graduate students, many universities and colleges in China borrow indiscriminately from the education of academic degree graduate students. So the education of professional degree graduate students can not meet the social and economical development, as well as the requirements of professional workers by employers. It is still a challenge in guaranteeing the education quality of professional degree graduate students in China. The control and guarantee of the education quality shall run through the entire process of education, including enrollment, drawing up curriculums, course teaching, dissertation guidance, practice training, degree awarding, etc. This paper proposes a process-focused education quality assurance system to equip professional degree graduate students with much-needed industry-sought professional skills.

2. STRENGTHEN THE SUPERVISION PROCESS

The education of professional degree graduate students shall be supervised by the degree conferring units (universities), the administrative department for education, and various academic organizations, industries, and social institutions.

The degree conferring unit is the main body in guaranteeing the education quality. In order to do that, the degree conferring unit shall establish a sound internal quality assurance system, a talent training and degree-conferring quality standard consistent with its running orientation, and a resource allocation mechanism focused on education quality.

The administrative department for education shall formulate some basic requirements for the professional degrees, establish a qualification evaluation system for the degree conferring units, make random inspection on students' dissertations to consolidate the quality consciousness of the unit, supervisors and students, set up a national education quality information system for professional degree graduate students to timely share information on education, carry out quality survey, and post education quality reports by the department, various units and organizations. In this way, the self-discipline of the degree conferring units can be promoted, the quality warning system can be strengthened, and a good quality environment can be created.

Various academic organizations play an important role in education quality survey, policy making, evaluation and argumentation, the construction of study style, etc. Industries play a positive role in talent training, demand analysis, standard making, practice training, and quality certification. The participation of social institutions in education quality supervision is necessary, because the social evaluation mechanism is independent, scientific and impartial.

3. HIGHLIGHT THE IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS OF VARIOUS POLICIES

As a Chinese saying goes, nothing can be accomplished without norms or standards. It is the same in the education of professional degree graduate students. We need to establish various standards, rules or policies to guarantee and improve their education quality. It doesn't mean we are done after establishing these standards. On the contrary, the implementation of them is a very important part in guaranteeing the education quality, which is conveniently ignored in most cases. Woodrow Wilson, the 28th president of the United States believed that the implementation of a policy is more difficult than the making of one. Relevant departments shall monitor and evaluate the implementation of various policies. Meanwhile, they shall also adjust the policies by collecting feedbacks from experts, supervisors, teachers and students. In this way, the policies will be more applicable and the implementation of them can be more effective.

4. ENHANCE THE COURSE TEACHING PROCESS

Furthermore, course teaching is an important link in the cultivation of professional degree graduate students. The traditional "teacher-centered" teaching mode shall be changed to the "student-centered" teaching mode. By implementing the problem-based learning method, the creative thinking skills of students can be developed, which effect has been proved by Esen Ersoy [2]. In addition, a teaching guidance committee shall be established. Members of the committee shall include professors, researchers and experts in corresponding fields. The committee shall make suggestions and give opinions for the teaching reform, teaching management, teaching study and quality monitoring. Members of this committee shall also check, evaluate, supervise and guide the entire process of teaching. Besides that enough attention shall be paid to the evaluation of teaching by professional degree graduate students. The evaluation results shall be collected at the end of each term. These results shall be summarized and fed back to teachers. Teachers shall provide rectification measures to improve their teaching effects. Through checking and feeding back, a supervision mechanism of course teaching focusing on teaching guidance with students evaluation as the supplement can be formed, which can supervise the teaching activities and improve the teaching effects.

5. EMPHASIZE THE MENTORING PROCESS OF SUPERVISORS

In China, the education of graduate students adopts the supervisor responsibility system. According to John Crosby, "Mentoring is a brain to pick, an ear to listen, and a push in the right direction [3]. Supervisors' mentoring plays an extremely important role in the education of graduate students. For professional degree graduates, there shall be two supervisors, one from the university and the other from industries or governments. The roles of both supervisors shall be differentiated and the actual guiding effects shall be emphasized. The supervisor from the university shall guide their theoretic study and scientific research, and set an example for the academic morality and moral character. While the supervisor from industries shall cultivate their practical ability and innovative ability, help them to develop professional thinking and skills, and improve their ability to solve real problems.

The mentoring process of both supervisors shall be strengthened and supervised to avoid becoming a mere formality. Supervisors shall provide students with a motivation to begin a study or practice, a positive, but critical feedback, algorithms and explanation of research operations, and assistance in analysis and interpretation of the data, etc [4]. Meanwhile, the mentoring skills of supervisors shall be improved. The university shall design a supervisor training program, which aims to provide knowledge, skills, and practical experiences on supervision. Before becoming a supervisor, one is required to have a significant involvement or experience with a higher degree research candidate. A proper supervisor motivation and accountability system shall be established. The responsibilities and rights of supervisors in the cultivation of graduate students shall be specified and guaranteed. Both the supervisor and the student shall be comprehensively assessed in each year. The student recruitment index of supervisors shall be determined by the research level (practical level) of supervisors and by the assessment results of their students.

6. STRENGTHEN THE PROCESS OF TRAINING IN PRACTICE BASES

Practice bases shall be established for professional degree graduate students, which are basic requirements and important reassurance in guaranteeing their practical abilities. They shall be trained in these bases for at least half a year, and for fresh graduates without any work experiences, the training time shall be at least one year. These bases will give them much more exposure to the real world and more opportunities to engage with professionals in industries. Students can get a lot more practical with hands-on learning and job-focused training. A detailed training program shall be made while they are being trained in the base. The assessment requirements shall be specified, and the process of training shall be supervised. Through phase assessment and final assessment, the cultivation of practice ability and application ability of students can be strengthened. In addition, a diversified evaluation system of these bases shall be established.

7. INTRODUCE THE PROCESS ELIMINATION MECHANISM

Traditionally, the entrance of graduate study is very difficult in China. But once enrolled, only few of them can not graduate. This is completely opposite to that in U.S. In 1900, the Association of American Universities was established. This association discussed every link of the cultivation process of graduates, and give standards for the award of master's and doctor's degree. Those who can not meet these standards will be eliminated [5]. The establishment of the Council of Graduate Schools in the United States in 1961 symbolizes the maturity of elimination mechanism in the education of graduates in U.S. [6]. We shall learn from the successful experience of U.S., and be strict with the award of professional degrees. We can neither show sympathy for students who can not meet the requirements nor consider the supervisor's reputation.

To guarantee the education quality of professional degree graduate students, the elimination mechanism shall be introduced in the processes of enrollment, course learning, qualification appraisal, dissertation opening report, professional practice, and oral defense for graduation. This mechanism shall also be strictly implemented. Only in this way, students' enthusiasm in participation can be motivated.

8. CONCLUSIONS

There is a disconnection between what graduate schools tend to produce-the next generation of academics-and what employers seek. To solve this problem, a process-focused education quality assurance system is proposed to guarantee the cultivation quality of full-time professional degree graduate students. These processes include the implementation of policies, the course teaching process, the mentoring process by supervisors, the process of training in practice bases, and the process elimination mechanism. As long as we pay attention to these processes, the cultivated professional degree graduate students can meet the employers' requirements.

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AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHY



WANG Huiyan is a PhD student in Urban Water Conservancy and Water Safety at Sichuan University, China. He works at the Graduate Affairs Office at Xihua University, China. His field of interest is graduate student education, water conservancy and water safety.



LIU Xiaobing is a PhD holder in Fluid Machinery and Engineering at Huazhong University of Science and Technology, China. As a professor, he is the dean of the School of Thermal Energy and Power Engineering, the minister of the Graduate Affairs Office, and the director of the Discipline Office at Xihua University, China. His field of interest is hydraulic machinery and education management. His papers have been published widely in various international journals.



LI Ling is a PhD holder in Chinese Materia Medica at Chengdu University of TCM. As a professor, she is the vice minister of the Graduate Affairs Office at Xihua University, China. Her field of interest is the research of new drug preparation and new drug forms, and education management. Her papers have been published widely in various international journals.



Yan Lihong is a master in Education Economy and Management at Hunan Normal University, China. She works at the Discipline Office at Xihua University, China. Her field of interest is education.

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