Innovation and Practice of College Student Leadership Education—A Case Study of Harbin Institute of Technology

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Abstract. Leadership education is considered as an important aspect of college students’ essential-qualities-oriented education. Starting from the analysis of the current research of essential-qualities-oriented education at home and abroad with the example of Harbin Institute of Technology, the author has drawn three typical pieces of experience: to strengthen the education of elites’ leadership and improve the building of leadership course; to introduce and cultivate pluralistic faculty and establish diversified training platforms; to launch leadership-training programs and build high-quality brands. Meanwhile, the author takes the student training camp - “making your future outstanding”- organized by the foundation education department for example and summarizes some innovative experience of how to cultivate students’ leadership.

Introduction

The Chinese version of “leadership” originates from English. The author agrees, to an extent, that leadership refers to the joint force of various factors shown in the ability of an individual or organization to guide or lead other individuals, teams, or entire organizations towards the goals to achieve them. Back in the 1940s, Zeleny, a foreign scholar, demonstrated by empirical research methods that leadership is a potential in college students and it can be nurtured through education and other means. Reflecting the history of the development of Chinese and foreign higher education, increasing colleges and universities have regarded the student leadership education as a core objective of talent cultivation and committed to the nurturing of future leaders [1].

It is pointed out in the “Outline of China’s National Plan for Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development (2010-2020)” that the adherence to the people-oriented and quality-promotion education is the strategic theme of education reform and development. From the perspective of higher education for college students’ essential-qualities-oriented education, leadership competence is increasingly being seen as one of the important indicators of the overall quality of college students and leadership education is also considered as an important aspect of college students’ essential-qualities-oriented education.

The Current Research of College Student Leadership Education at Home and Abroad

The research and cultivation of college students’ leadership has witnessed more mature implementation in foreign countries, especially in the United States. Dr. Tao Siliang concludes through literature review that the college student leadership education in American colleges and universities has shown the following characteristics. First, the curriculum system is specialized and personalized. Higher education institutions offer not only theoretical courses but also supplementary
classes of extracurricular activities to assist students in the practice of theoretical knowledge of leadership. Second, the common ground of the philosophy of leadership education is to nurture leaders for the community, the nation and the world. Third, although education has a wide scope, each business school has different requirements of education recipients, leading to the fact that not all students have access to leadership education. Fourth, in terms of social functions, leadership education functions as a social service, so the community service provides students a way to practice their leadership. Fifth, we should pay attention to the general education and education of the humanities [2].

The research and practice of college student leadership education in China is still in its infancy. Projects of college student leadership education launched by various higher education institutions become increasingly mature, including the 12-year-old “Qizhen Talent School” and 9-year-old “Qiushi Eagle Growth Program” by Zhejiang University, “Siyuan Program”, “Xinghuo Program” and “Tang Zhongying Program” and other programs launched by Tsinghua University to nurture students’ leadership and innovation, as well as many other programs like “Leadership Training Camp” organized by other institutions[3]. Apart from these, the Association of Youth Leadership Development and Communication at Peking University held the “Youth Leadership Forum” in November, 2009, and Harbin Engineering University set up the “Leadership Program” fund in June, 2011, making a commitment to cultivate student leaders for its top ten organizations and enhance the cultivation of leading and pioneering students.

The Tradition and Connotation of College Student Leadership Training at Harbin Institute of Technology

Harbin Institute of Technology has been known as the “cradle of China’s modern talents of industrial technology”. Since its establishment, more than 300,000 students have graduated to serve in many sectors. It is worth mentioning that, from the 1950s to today, this university has witnessed 85 provincial and ministerial leaders, more than 80 academicians and over 100 party secretaries and presidents of colleges and universities. It is the miniature of HIT leadership education and reflects the gene of leadership in HIT blood.

Harbin Institute of Technology sticks to making college student leadership education a way and perspective to complement, expand and deepen students’ essential-qualities-oriented education. Through the establishment of five platforms, including high-quality courses, special practice training, high-end exchange, mentor resource and system support, HIT aims to gradually build courses, programs and systems of college student leadership education, cultivate students’ sense, capability and quality of leadership, and guide their effort to become the top leading and innovative talents in all social walks.

The Main Practice of College Student Leadership Education at Harbin Institute of Technology

Over the years, Harbin Institute of Technology adheres to the idea of “course establishment serves as a guide, platform construction solidifies the foundation and program building produces high-quality brands” to promote the construction of college student leadership education. There are typically three main practices.

To Strengthen Elite Leadership Education and Improve Leadership Course Establishment

Harbin Institute of Technology has successively implemented the “Top-notch Student Cultivation Program of Basic Disciplines – Honors School” and “Engineering Leaders Cultivation Program” to deliver a concentrated cultivation of outstanding undergraduates. Founded in 2011, the Honors School has improved students’ ability of teamwork and leadership through the leadership training, the building of scientific and innovative teams and other forms in an effort to strengthen the leadership cultivation. “Engineering Leader Cultivation Program” kicked off at the end of 2012 and outstanding undergraduates were selected to participate in this program. The course module of
“Engineering Leadership” has been added into the curriculum as well as some management courses, such as “Leadership Theory and Practice” by professors from the school of economics and management. Some related courses, such as “Successful Mind and Individual Development” and “Management Communication”, have been also added into the general education courses and elective courses for the whole university. Meanwhile, courses like “Outdoor Quality Development Training” are opened in the graduate education and students have initiative to choose their own courses. The implementation of those above-mentioned programs and opening of these courses has constituted a solid foundation for student leadership education at Harbin Institute of Technology.

To Introduce and Cultivate Pluralistic Faculty and Build Diversified Training Platforms

Harbin Institute of Technology adheres to the coordination of education resources on campus, including academic experts, famous teachers, party and government leaders, student workers to select and cultivate a high-level faculty team for student leadership education. Moreover, it has been continuing to invite excellent alumni, social elites, famous teachers and masters, and pioneers both in China and around the world to further enrich this team. Those teaching resources take such forms as lectures, seminars and discussions to impart knowledge and leadership experience to students. What’s more, in the role of mentors, they integrate into all phases of study and practice during students’ training and implement the influence, guidance and cultivation of leadership from all perspectives during the whole process in an interactive and thorough way.

Harbin Institute of Technology has built a team leadership training platform for all graduates. Since 2005, it has been carrying out a team training course for all new graduates. It built outdoor quality development base for graduate students in 2011, and then recruited and trained relevant teachers to launch the course of “Outdoor Quality Development Training of Graduate Students”. So far, more than 30,000 graduates have participated in this team training course, improving their teamwork ability and involving everyone in the group leadership education.

Harbin Institute of Technology has built diversified platforms for students to practice leadership. It integrates leadership practices into community service, association running and international exchange programs. The school of Youth League has been selecting and sending outstanding students to carry out volunteer service or assume civilization director in the communities. The student association is another platform for college students to build leadership. There are now more than 200 student associations at university and school level in Harbin Institute of Technology. The cultivation of international leadership is a breakthrough point, since it has successively launched international study tour programs of Harvard leadership and West Point Leadership, and many outstanding students have been selected to visit well-known higher education institutions in the United States, where they listen to lectures, broaden their horizons, expand their thinking and enhance the comprehensive leadership.

To Launch Leadership Training Programs and Build High-Quality Brands

In recent years, with the support from the Leadership Training Center at student affairs office as well as party schools and Youth League schools at all levels, Harbin Institute of Technology has organized and implemented a number of student leadership training programs, including excellent college students leadership training camp, Marxist youth training project, and worked on the cultivation of top-notch innovative talents equipped with distinguished leadership. Among them, some programs have become brand programs of student leadership training, including leadership-building training class for the party school, HIT student pillars training class, “making your future outstanding” - student leadership training camp.

“Leadership-building Training Class for College Students” is a program for the pillar of student party members launched by the party school in 2003. This training class is one of the first student leadership training programs with distinctive teaching characteristics. The ways to lay out the teaching content are unique and it offers some distinctive high-quality courses apart from leadership-centered investigation and analysis, including “First-Class University and Leadership Training” and “Basic Methods and Art of Leadership”. The selection of trainees and management and implementation of activities by trainees have its own features. Trainees are backbones of party
members and recommended by schools, and the number is strictly controlled according to the proportion, valuing quality other than quantity, while the class is managed by trainees themselves because the management of class is the practice education of leadership, and trainees carry out investigation of hot social issues and other special practice activities and take training assessment by paper defense. So far, six training classes have been carried out with more than 400 trainees in total. After the opening of this training class, other training programs like the training class for core party members at the school level are launched one after another in Harbin Institute of Technology. “Leadership-building Training Class for College Students” has offered precious experience of the promotion and development of college student leadership training programs.

The training class for HIT pillar students was established in April, 2008 when the Youth League Central Committee launched the “Marxist Youth Training Project”, targeting at the pillar students in Youth League at all levels on campus. The teaching content of this training class covers lectures on theories, training of leaderless group discussion, practice research of special projects, subject research and other forms of training and practice programs so as to improve the ideological and political quality, understanding of policy and theory, creative ability, practical ability and organizational skills of pillar college students, Youth League cadres, young intellectuals and other young groups. It has been held for four times with a total of more than 400 trainees. During the building of “Marxist Youth Training Project”, a lot of pillar student training brand programs emerged in various schools and departments on campus prominently represented by the “Intermediate Class at Youth League School of Future Elites Cultivation Project”, which won the 2011 “Innovation Award for the Work of Communist Youth League”. The training class for pillar college students has motivated the wide implementation of the building of “Marxist Youth Training Project” and greatly increased the involvement of students in the leadership training programs in Harbin Institute of Technology.

The student leadership training camp - “making your future outstanding”- is organized and implemented by the Exceptional Leadership Training Center at HIT student affairs office. This program, through the building of platforms, the formation of mentor teams and dedication to the cultivation of a group of excellent students with outstanding leadership, innovation awareness and sense of social responsibility, has become the cradle of future talents in all walks of life. This camp carries out the work in stages and at different levels and includes three stages: student training camp, monitor forum and elite training, respectively targeting outstanding freshman students, class backbones and university-level pacesetters, and national scholarship winners. The centralized training of leadership courses, interactive teaching in the workshop of leadership training, radiation demonstration of senior students and mentoring inside and outside campus have provided targeted, effective and special practice programs for outstanding student groups who will become future leading talents in scientific research area, famous entrepreneurs and distinguished politicians that a society needs. The introduction of this training camp has pointed out the new direction for the student leadership training in Harbin Institute of Technology and pushed the work of student leadership training work into a new high.

Summary

After years of development, the brand programs of student leadership training at Harbin Institute of Technology have cultivated numerous pillar students. Among them, some assume the positions of student leaders, such as president of student council, president of the federation of Heilongjiang Province, and some win many national awards of science and innovation. Those pillar students, with what they have learned and gained from leadership training programs, strive to be the “pioneers” of HIT students in an effort to make a contribution to the construction of campus culture.

References
