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A Study on Student Management in Private Undergraduate Institutions in Inner Mongolia, China: A Case Study of Inner Mongolia Honder College of Arts and Sciences

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Abstract: Against the backdrop of structural transformation and intensified competition in China's private higher education sector, student management has emerged as a critical determinant of institutional quality and sustainability. This study examines the current conditions, challenges, and improvement pathways of student management in private undergraduate institutions in Inner Mongolia, China, using Inner Mongolia Honder College of Arts and Sciences as a case study. Drawing on policy analysis, institutional documents, and comparative practices across private universities, the study systematically analyzes key problem areas, including academic culture development, daily behavioral governance, mental health education, employment guidance, counselor workforce capacity, institutional mechanisms, and regional and cultural adaptation. The findings reveal that student management in private undergraduate institutions is constrained by fragmented governance structures, insufficient professionalization of management teams, limited resource investment, and inadequate integration of digital and developmental approaches. In response, this study proposes a phased reform framework encompassing people-centered institutional design, professional workforce development, digital transformation of student services, culturally inclusive management practices, and regionally distinctive development strategies. By shifting student management from a control-oriented paradigm toward a developmental and quality-oriented model, this research offers actionable policy implications and a replicable governance framework for private undergraduate institutions, particularly those in ethnically diverse and less-developed regions of China.

Keywords: Private undergraduate institutions; Student management; Mental health education; Counselor professionalization; Digital governance

Introduction and Research Background

As of 2025, private higher education in China has entered a critical stage of structural transformation. According to the latest statistics released by the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, by June 20, 2025, there were 829 private higher education institutions nationwide, including 417 private undergraduate institutions^[1]. While the overall scale of private higher education continues to expand, its internal development has become increasingly differentiated.

On the one hand, a new generation of research-oriented private universities—such as Fuyao University of Science and Technology, Ningbo Oriental Institute of Technology, and Westlake University—has demonstrated strong competitiveness in student recruitment. Admission scores at these institutions have surpassed those of many programs at traditional "985 Project" universities, reflecting growing social recognition of high-quality private higher education. On the other hand, a number of traditional private undergraduate institutions are facing declining enrollment, intensified competition, and increasing pressure on institutional governance and student management.

Inner Mongolia Honder College of Arts and Sciences is a full-time private undergraduate institution approved by the Ministry of Education. The institution began enrolling undergraduate students in 2008, obtained approval to enroll international students in 2010, launched a dual-degree education model in 2016, and was designated as a pilot institution for the transformation and development of undergraduate universities in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region. In 2017, it was granted permission to conduct "associate-to-bachelor" programs. On March 18, 2020, with the approval of the Ministry of Education, the institution successfully completed its transition into an independently established private undergraduate university—becoming the first private undergraduate institution of its kind in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region^[2].

The university currently operates four campuses—the Main Campus, North Campus, Tali Campus, and Yunzong Campus—and is equipped with modern teaching facilities and a well-developed campus environment. It was recognized as a "Garden-Style Institution of Hohhot" by the Hohhot Landscaping Bureau in 2016 and as a "Garden-

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Style Campus of the Capital City" by the Hohhot Greening Committee in 2020. At present, the university enrolls more than 19,000 full-time students, offers 30 undergraduate programs, and covers six disciplinary categories, including economics, education, and literature. [2]

As the first independently established private undergraduate institution in Inner Mongolia, Inner Mongolia Honde College of Arts and Sciences faces both common challenges shared by private universities nationwide and unique responsibilities related to talent cultivation in border and ethnic regions. Under its development strategy centered on campus safety, connotative development, innovation-driven growth, and quality enhancement, the construction of a student management system that aligns with the requirements of the new era has become a core institutional concern. Based on an in-depth investigation of student management practices in private undergraduate institutions across China and grounded in the institutional realities of Inner Mongolia Honde College of Arts and Sciences, this study systematically analyzes the key problems and challenges currently confronting student management in private universities. It further explores innovative student management pathways with distinct private-institution characteristics, aiming to provide evidence-based recommendations for institutional decision-makers.

Methodology

The research design is centered on a thorough, contextual examination of Inner Mongolia Honde College of Arts and Sciences, selected for its representativeness as the first independently established private undergraduate institution in Inner Mongolia. This approach allows for an in-depth exploration of the complex, real-world phenomenon of student management, where the practices and challenges are deeply embedded within the specific institutional, regional, and national policy environment. The case is analyzed not in isolation, but as a means to provide insight into broader systemic issues and adaptive strategies within China's evolving private higher education sector.

Data collection was conducted exclusively through documentary analysis, ensuring a foundation in established texts and reported practices. Primary data was sourced from the case institution's official publications, including its website, policy manuals, annual reports, and official news releases. Secondary data encompassed a systematic review of national educational statistics from the Chinese Ministry of Education, relevant national laws and policy directives, and extant academic literature on private university governance and student affairs management in China. This triangulation of sources provided a robust evidentiary base to understand both the macro-context and the micro-level institutional reality.

The analysis followed a structured thematic process. All collected documents were systematically reviewed and coded to identify key patterns, policies, stated challenges, and managerial responses. These codes were then synthesized into dominant thematic frameworks corresponding to the core domains of student management: fostering academic culture, guiding behavioral norms, providing mental health support, and delivering career services. The interpretive synthesis involved critically examining the alignment between formal policy and documented outcomes, comparing the case institution's approaches with innovative models from other private universities, and ultimately deriving evidence-based conclusions and recommendations.

A key methodological limitation of this study is its reliance on documentary and publicly reported data, which presents the official institutional perspective rather than the lived experiences of students, counselors, or faculty. As a qualitative case study, the findings are contextually rich but not statistically generalizable. To address these constraints and validate the conclusions, future research should employ a mixed-methods design, incorporating surveys, interviews, and focus groups to capture ground-level perceptions and measure the efficacy of management interventions directly.

Theoretical Perspective

This study is framed by an integration of Student Development Theory and Institutional Theory, providing a dual lens to analyze the structures and outcomes of student management. Student Development Theory, particularly the psychosocial models pioneered by theorists such as Chickering, offers a framework for understanding the holistic growth needs of undergraduates—including identity formation, autonomy, and purpose. This perspective posits that effective management must transcend mere behavioral regulation to actively facilitate these developmental tasks. It directly informs the critique of overly punitive or rigid management models observed in some private institutions, arguing instead for systems that provide challenge, support, and opportunities for integration, which are essential for student maturation and success.

From an organizational standpoint, Institutional Theory helps explain the structural and strategic behaviors of private universities within China's higher education field. This theory suggests that organizations seek legitimacy by conforming to established norms, rules, and blueprints from their institutional environment. The isomorphic pressures to mimic successful public universities or elite private peers can lead to a disconnect, where management policies are ceremonially adopted but may not align with the unique developmental profiles of their student population. This theoretical lens illuminates the tensions private institutions face between striving for prestige and fulfilling their distinct mission of serving a diverse student body through applied, student-centered education.

Synthesizing these perspectives, the analysis in this paper operates on the premise that optimal student management arises from the intentional alignment of institutional structures (Institutional Theory) with the developmental needs of

students (Student Development Theory). The national policy push for "Three All-Round Education" (all-round, whole-process, and all-member education) can be seen as a macro-level institutional script that gains substantive meaning only when implemented through a developmental lens. Therefore, the challenges and recommendations explored are evaluated through this integrated framework: assessing how management practices at the case institution can move beyond seeking legitimacy through compliance, and instead, design

I. Current Status and Characteristics of Student Management in Private Undergraduate Institutions

A. Development Status: Coexistence of Opportunities and Challenges

Between 2020 and 2025, private undergraduate education in China underwent significant structural adjustment. National statistics indicate that the number of private undergraduate institutions decreased from 434 to 417, a net reduction of 17 institutions. However, this quantitative contraction was accompanied by qualitative optimization: the number of independent colleges affiliated with public universities declined sharply, while independently established private undergraduate institutions increased. At the same time, the proportion between vocational undergraduate institutions and general undergraduate institutions became more balanced, signaling a transition from scale expansion to connotative and quality-oriented development in the private higher education sector ^[3].

Despite these structural improvements, enrollment pressure has intensified. During the 2025 National College Entrance Examination (Gaokao) admissions cycle, 14 of the 23 private undergraduate institutions in Guangdong Province failed to meet their enrollment quotas, resulting in a cumulative shortfall of over 25,000 students. In Henan Province, 11 of 17 private undergraduate institutions participated in supplementary admissions, with a total enrollment deficit of 5,827 students. Meanwhile, private universities in Hebei Province reported an average admission fulfillment rate of only 76.3%, the lowest level on record ^[4]. This pronounced polarization has compelled private institutions to prioritize improvements in educational quality and student management effectiveness.

From a policy perspective, the Outline of the Plan for Building an Education Powerhouse (2024–2035), jointly issued by the CPC Central Committee and the State Council in January 2025, explicitly identifies the enhancement of governance capacity and rule-of-law-based educational management as key measures for deepening comprehensive education reform ^[5]. In addition, the Private Education Promotion Law of the People's Republic of China mandates that private institutions establish standardized student status management systems and implement reward and disciplinary mechanisms in accordance with national regulations, thereby providing a clear legal framework for student management ^[6].

B. Student Characteristics: Increasing Complexity and Diversity

The complexity of the student population represents one of the most significant challenges facing student management in private undergraduate institutions. Student cohorts typically include current-year and repeat Gaokao candidates, graduates of vocational high schools, technical schools, and secondary vocational institutions, and in rare cases, students with unconventional educational trajectories. Compared with students at public universities, many private university students exhibit relatively weaker academic foundations, which leads to pronounced disparities in learning ability, behavioral norms, and value orientations.

Psychological characteristics further complicate student management. Empirical research shows that 17.93% of students in private universities exhibit moderate to severe psychological problems, with obsessive-compulsive symptoms, interpersonal sensitivity, and depression being particularly prominent—rates that exceed the national average for college students ^[7]. At the same time, students' value systems tend to be increasingly pluralistic, characterized by weaker collective consciousness and stronger individual self-awareness, which presents new demands for counseling, ideological education, and behavioral guidance.

In terms of learning behavior, some students demonstrate insufficient self-discipline, manifested in tardiness, absenteeism, academic dishonesty, and plagiarism. Persistent problems such as examination cheating, low academic motivation, limited disciplinary knowledge, and weak innovation capacity remain prevalent. These issues pose sustained challenges to student conduct management and academic integrity governance.

C. Management Models: Tension Between Strict Control and Student Autonomy

Student management models in private undergraduate institutions differ markedly from those in public universities. Many private institutions adopt highly structured and discipline-oriented management systems, including compulsory morning study sessions, extended evening self-study hours, dormitory attendance checks, curfews, and scheduled power outages. This model is frequently described by students as a "Grade 13 Plus" or quasi-militarized management approach. While such measures can help maintain basic academic order, they may also constrain students' autonomy and suppress individualized development ^[8].

In terms of internal governance, private universities typically operate under a board-led, president-responsibility system, with substantial decision-making authority concentrated among major investors or shareholders. As institutional sponsors are often enterprises or individuals, management practices tend to emphasize efficiency, discipline, and performance outcomes. Although this "corporate-style" governance model can enhance responsiveness and execution efficiency, it also risks marginalizing the public-interest and developmental attributes of higher education.

At Inner Mongolia Honder College of Arts and Sciences, student management combines structured regulation with

developmental initiatives. The institution promotes student growth through the "Five Major Initiatives"—humanistic quality development, excellence-oriented leadership training, campus civility promotion, social volunteer service, and social practice. Simultaneously, it enforces daily behavioral supervision through the "Four-Inspection System", which monitors morning exercises, evening self-study attendance, overnight absences, and labor education participation. While this model has produced measurable improvements in discipline and engagement, it has also revealed limitations, including overly rigid management instruments and uneven levels of student cooperation.

D. Regional Characteristics: Ethnic Culture and Diverse Student Needs

As a private undergraduate institution located in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, Inner Mongolia Honder College of Arts and Sciences must address distinctive regional and cultural factors in student management. Ethnic and cultural diversity is particularly pronounced, and students from outside the region often face challenges related to environmental adaptation, lifestyle differences, and cultural integration. These factors increase the complexity of managing daily behavior norms, campus services, and student support systems.

The university currently enrolls more than 19,000 students, with the majority originating from Inner Mongolia, alongside significant numbers from Hebei, Shanxi, Henan, Guizhou, Gansu, and Ningxia. Students from different regions and ethnic backgrounds differ in living habits, value orientations, and learning styles, requiring student management practices that emphasize inclusiveness, flexibility, and cultural sensitivity. Effectively balancing standardized governance with differentiated support has thus become a critical issue for student management in ethnically diverse private universities.

II. Analysis of Key Domains in Student Management

A. Academic Culture Development: A Shift from Constraint-Based Control to Incentive-Oriented Governance

1) Analysis of Current Challenges

The development of academic culture in private undergraduate institutions faces multiple, interrelated challenges. At the student level, problems are primarily manifested in weak learning motivation, unclear academic goals, and superficial engagement with coursework. Many students exhibit passive learning behaviors, relying on short-term exam preparation strategies rather than sustained cognitive effort. Learning discipline is often lax, with high incidences of tardiness, absenteeism, and disengagement from classroom activities. Furthermore, deficiencies in disciplinary knowledge, limited intellectual breadth, and weak capacities for academic innovation remain persistent concerns.

Challenges are also evident at the faculty level. Insufficient pedagogical capacity among some instructors has been identified as a significant factor contributing to class absenteeism. Traditional teacher-centered instructional models, characterized by one-way knowledge transmission and limited classroom interaction, continue to dominate in some private institutions, thereby constraining students' intrinsic learning motivation and active participation [9].

At the institutional management level, deficiencies are most apparent in policy implementation and academic culture cultivation. Although most private universities have established formal regulations for academic conduct, gaps frequently emerge between policy design and execution. Moreover, sustainable incentive mechanisms that reinforce positive academic behaviors are often underdeveloped, resulting in limited long-term effectiveness of academic culture initiatives.

2) Innovative Practices and Representative Cases

In response to these challenges, several private undergraduate institutions have developed innovative and effective models for strengthening academic culture. Yantai Nanshan University, for example, has implemented a structured "2–4–8 Model" of academic culture governance. This framework establishes a joint leadership mechanism headed by both the university president and the party secretary, ensuring unified political and administrative oversight. Functional departments coordinate responsibilities, secondary colleges implement policies at the grassroots level, and both course instructors and counselors participate fully. Academic culture outcomes are incorporated as core performance indicators, with layered evaluations conducted at the levels of colleges, counselors, and student cohorts [10].

Similarly, Xi'an Peihua University has strengthened institutional guarantees by revising and issuing policy documents such as Several Implementation Opinions on Further Strengthening Academic Culture Development. The university integrates ideological and political performance into comprehensive student evaluations, establishes targeted incentive schemes covering postgraduate entrance examinations and professional certification attainment, and incorporates academic culture performance into grassroots party organization assessments [11].

At the micro-practice level, private institutions have adopted more flexible and student-centered approaches aligned with diversified student interests. For example, some universities integrate academic culture development with extracurricular life through initiatives such as "Dormitory Academic Culture Competitions." Evaluation criteria emphasize indicators such as skill-learning engagement and professional certification pass rates, encouraging dormitory-based collaborative learning teams. This approach fosters a collective learning atmosphere and moves beyond traditional achievement frameworks centered exclusively on examination scores.

B. Daily Behavioral Norm Management: Transition from External Regulation to Self-Discipline

1) Analysis of Management Dilemmas

Private undergraduate institutions encounter distinctive challenges in managing students' daily behavioral norms. One

major constraint stems from heterogeneity in student quality. To maintain enrollment scale, some institutions have adopted relatively flexible admission criteria, resulting in student populations with substantial variation in behavioral habits, academic preparedness, cognitive development, and family background. This diversity complicates the standardization of behavioral expectations.

A second challenge lies in conceptual deviations in management philosophy. In some private universities, insufficient emphasis is placed on student self-governance. Students are frequently treated as passive objects of regulation rather than active participants in campus governance. Management approaches tend to rely on top-down control mechanisms, prioritizing compliance and restriction over dialogue, empowerment, and developmental guidance [12].

Third, difficulties in institutional execution further undermine management effectiveness. Behavioral regulations often suffer from ambiguous accountability structures and weak enforcement mechanisms, leading to unclear responsibilities and administrative fragmentation. These structural deficiencies reduce operational efficiency and diminish policy credibility among students.

2) Innovative Management Models and Empirical Evidence

In response to the limitations of traditional control-oriented management, some institutions have begun to explore more humane and evidence-based approaches. Kunming Health Vocational College, for instance, has adopted a dual-track management model combining semi-militarized management with student self-governance. According to institutional reports, the university recorded zero major safety incidents throughout 2024, while the confiscation rate of prohibited dormitory electrical appliances declined by 67% year-on-year. Within its clinical programs, a "dual attendance verification system"—comprising a five-minute pre-class attendance check and dual sign-ins for practical training sessions—reduced the annual tardiness rate to 1.8% [13].

The effectiveness of this dual-track model lies in its ability to integrate rigid structural constraints with flexible developmental guidance. Semi-militarized management ensures baseline order and discipline, while student self-governance mechanisms enhance autonomy, responsibility, and collective accountability. The complementary interaction between these two dimensions fosters a virtuous cycle of behavioral regulation and internalized self-discipline, offering a valuable reference for private undergraduate institutions seeking sustainable student management reforms.

2.3 Mental Health Education: From Crisis Intervention to Developmental Counseling

2.3.1 Pressing Realities and Challenges

Mental health education in private undergraduate institutions in China is characterized by a pronounced imbalance between insufficient resources and rapidly growing student demand. The most critical constraint lies in inadequate staffing. National surveys indicate that the shortage of full-time psychological counselors in private universities exceeds 60%, while part-time counselors account for approximately 85% of the workforce and experience high turnover rates [14]. Although most institutions have established psychological education centers and counseling rooms in compliance with policy requirements, functionally integrated service systems and specialized support facilities remain severely underdeveloped.

Student mental health problems have become increasingly prominent. By the end of 2024, the total enrollment in private higher education institutions in China exceeded 2 million students, among whom approximately 60% reported varying degrees of psychological distress. The prevalence of anxiety, depression, and stress-related disorders among private university students is estimated to be about 15 percentage points higher than that of their counterparts in public universities [15]. These trends significantly heighten the urgency of strengthening preventive and developmental mental health services.

Another structural weakness lies in the low level of professionalization of mental health educators. Due to financial and resource constraints, many private institutions are unable to recruit certified psychological professionals. Existing personnel are often employed on a part-time or temporary basis and lack systematic training, supervision, and institutional support. Moreover, mental health education content remains relatively narrow, frequently oriented toward examination-related stress management, while insufficient attention is given to cultivating students' capacities for self-regulation, emotional management, interpersonal communication, and resilience development—competencies increasingly emphasized in international higher education research [16].

2.3.2 Exploration of Systematic Capacity Building

In response to these challenges, some private institutions have begun to construct more comprehensive and system-oriented mental health education frameworks. The practice of Chengdu Gingko Hotel Management College offers a representative case. The institution has advanced curriculum reform by incorporating mental health education as a mandatory course, achieving full coverage among lower-year undergraduates. Regular psychological counseling services and campus-wide mental health screenings are conducted, with one standardized psychological assessment per semester. By utilizing the SCL-90 Symptom Checklist, the institution systematically identifies students at psychological risk and implements targeted interventions [17].

In addition, the college has diversified its mental health education activities through sustained outreach and engagement initiatives, including monthly thematic salons, the nationally recognized "May 25 College Student Mental Health Day" campaign, and experiential programs such as psychological drama performances. These activities

contribute to reducing stigma and enhancing students' psychological literacy.

With regard to faculty development, private undergraduate institutions are encouraged to adopt a "send out and bring in" strategy. This approach ensures that both full-time and part-time counselors have opportunities to participate in high-level academic conferences and professional training, while external experts are invited to campus for supervision, consultation, and professional exchange. Simultaneously, systematic training in basic psychological knowledge and counseling skills should be provided for student counselors and advisors, forming an integrated, multi-tiered mental health education workforce [18].

2.4 Career Guidance and Employment Services: From Job Placement to Lifelong Career Planning

2.4.1 Employment Challenges and Underlying Causes

Graduates from private undergraduate institutions face substantial disadvantages in China's increasingly competitive labor market. According to the National Survey Report on Undergraduate Employment in 2023, the overall employment rate of private undergraduate graduates was 56.7%, approximately 8 percentage points lower than that of graduates from public undergraduate institutions. Moreover, the average monthly starting salary of private university graduates was 1,100 RMB lower, amounting to less than half of the starting salary of graduates from "Double First-Class" universities [19].

The causes of these employment challenges are multifaceted. At the institutional level, employment guidance and service systems in some private universities remain underdeveloped. Career guidance personnel often lack specialized training and professional expertise, making it difficult to address students' increasingly diverse employment needs. In many cases, career services offices are understaffed and lack standardized operational frameworks.

At the student level, graduates' labor market competitiveness is relatively weak. Due to limitations in prior academic preparation, gaps persist between students' professional knowledge, practical skills, and career readiness and the expectations of employers. Deficiencies in workplace competencies, applied skills, and professional identity formation further constrain employment outcomes.

At the societal level, lower social recognition of private higher education continues to influence employer perceptions. Hiring biases against private university graduates remain prevalent, exacerbating employment difficulties despite ongoing improvements in educational quality [20].

2.4.2 Innovation in Career Service Systems

To address employment challenges, private undergraduate institutions are increasingly exploring precise and personalized career service models. In curriculum design, institutions should develop differentiated career guidance courses tailored to students' majors and academic stages. Strengthening deep, long-term cooperation with enterprises can facilitate internship pipelines, applied training opportunities, and employment matching. At the same time, effective governance of employment information platforms is essential to ensure timely updates and the authenticity of job postings.

In terms of digital infrastructure, universities can leverage campus wireless networks and big data technologies to establish integrated career guidance platforms that connect student profiles, employment systems, and employer databases. Through these platforms, students can access real-time labor market demand information, employment trend analyses, and updates on national employment policies, thereby enhancing informed career decision-making [21].

Regarding workforce development, it is recommended that institutions recruit professionals with backgrounds in human resource management, psychology, and career development, while simultaneously increasing training investment for existing staff. A systematic career guidance training framework should be established, and career education curricula should be expanded to include career planning, psychological adjustment, entrepreneurship guidance, and employability skill development, aligning private undergraduate education with contemporary global career development paradigms [22].

III. Key Problems and Challenges in Student Management

3.1 Student-Level Challenges: Insufficient Learning Motivation and Behavioral Deviations

Challenges at the student level represent the most direct and fundamental difficulties in student management within private undergraduate institutions. A weak academic foundation remains a primary concern. Compared with students admitted to public universities, many students in private institutions enter higher education with relatively limited mastery of foundational knowledge and weaker academic preparation. When this initial disadvantage is compounded by insufficient time investment and ineffective learning strategies during their university studies, deficiencies in professional competence become increasingly evident, particularly in terms of narrow knowledge structures and limited academic depth.

Problems related to learning attitudes are especially prominent. A considerable proportion of students lack clear academic goals and intrinsic learning motivation. Their learning behaviors are often characterized by passivity, limited critical thinking, and low levels of initiative in classroom engagement. Examination preparation frequently relies on short-term, last-minute efforts rather than sustained and systematic learning. These tendencies are further reflected in lax academic discipline, declining interest in coursework, and relatively high rates of tardiness and absenteeism, all of which hinder the formation of a positive and rigorous academic environment.

Behavioral norm violations further complicate student management. Instances of misconduct, including lateness, truancy, and academic dishonesty such as plagiarism, continue to occur on campus and disrupt normal teaching and learning order. Examination cheating remains a persistent issue, with some students resorting to dishonest practices such as carrying unauthorized materials, copying from peers, or engaging in impersonation. Such behaviors indicate weak rule awareness, opportunistic attitudes, and insufficient internalization of academic ethics, directly undermining the integrity of institutional assessment systems and campus learning cultures.

Psychological challenges have also become increasingly visible. Under growing academic, social, and employment-related pressures, some students exhibit inadequate self-regulation and limited emotional resilience. Psychological distress, including anxiety, depression, and maladaptive coping behaviors, appears to be rising among students in private undergraduate institutions. When these issues are not identified and addressed in a timely manner, they may manifest as behavioral deviations and increase potential campus safety risks, highlighting the necessity of integrated psychological support and preventive intervention within student management systems.

3.2 Challenges at the Level of Management Execution

One of the most pressing issues concerns the development of the counselor workforce. In many private universities, counselors are responsible for an excessively large number of students while simultaneously undertaking teaching duties and, in some cases, research related tasks. When combined with the comparatively weaker academic foundations and limited behavioral self regulation capacities of some private university students, counselors face significantly increased workloads and management complexity [23].

Structural imbalances within counselor teams further undermine management effectiveness. Gender imbalance is widespread, with female counselors significantly outnumbering male counselors in most private institutions. In addition, disciplinary background mismatches are common. Many counselors lack formal training in Marxist theory, ideological and political education, or related fields, resulting in insufficient professional preparation for conducting systematic ideological guidance and values education [24].

Ambiguity in role positioning represents another critical constraint. In practice, counselors in private universities are frequently assigned multiple auxiliary roles, functioning simultaneously as administrative clerks, teaching assistants, party and government secretaries, student organization coordinators, and admissions or employment officers. This excessive accumulation of roles substantially dilutes counselors' core responsibilities in ideological education, moral development, and student guidance, confining them to routine administrative tasks and significantly reducing their professional effectiveness [25].

Furthermore, weak implementation of management systems remains a persistent problem. Student management models tend to be overly uniform, lacking personalized and diversified strategies responsive to students' individual needs. Mechanisms for family and school collaboration are often insufficiently developed, thereby constraining holistic student development. At the institutional level, policies are frequently implemented with inadequate rigor and sustainability, reflecting the absence of stable long term mechanisms. Although information based management platforms have been introduced in many institutions, their functional potential, particularly in data analytics, early risk identification, and intelligent decision support, has yet to be fully realized [26].

3.3 Institutional Mechanisms and Resource Constraints: Policy Gaps and Insufficient Investment

Limitations in institutional mechanisms and resource allocation represent structural barriers to the improvement of student management in private undergraduate institutions. In many cases, adjustments to governance structures have not kept pace with the demands of digital transformation, leading to a misalignment between traditional management practices and contemporary data driven governance requirements. As a result, institutional policy provision does not always align with the practical needs of improving talent cultivation quality. When administrative efficiency is prioritized over educational purpose, student management may gradually shift toward control oriented practices at the expense of holistic educational development [27].

Insufficient financial investment further constrains the enhancement of management capacity. Due to limited funding, private universities often struggle to recruit and retain qualified psychological counselors. Existing mental health educators are frequently employed on a part time or temporary basis and lack systematic training and sustained professional support. Given that effective mental health education requires continuous financial commitment, inadequate investment directly restricts the development of facilities, professional equipment, and structured intervention programs [28].

Institutional frameworks related to student support remain incomplete. In some private universities, systematic mental health education curricula have yet to be established, leaving students with limited access to foundational psychological knowledge and preventive guidance. More broadly, weaknesses in management systems, including unclear accountability structures and insufficient enforcement mechanisms, contribute to operational inefficiencies, role ambiguity, and reduced policy effectiveness [29].

In terms of resource distribution, many private institutions continue to prioritize limited funding for disciplinary development and research advancement, while mental health education and student support services are confined largely to basic crisis prevention functions. This pattern of resource allocation fails to adequately address students' comprehensive developmental needs and increasingly diverges from contemporary higher education principles that

emphasize student well being, resilience, and long term personal growth [30].

3.4 Regional and Environmental Factors: Cultural Differences and Adaptation Challenges

Regional environmental factors present distinctive challenges for Inner Mongolia Honder College of Arts and Sciences as a private undergraduate institution located in an ethnically diverse region. Cultural diversity significantly increases the complexity of student management. Students from outside the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region often encounter difficulties in adapting to local cultural norms, daily behavioral expectations, and campus support services, which requires management approaches that are sensitive to diverse backgrounds and student needs [31].

The wide geographic distribution of student origins further amplifies management challenges. Although the majority of students are from Inner Mongolia, a considerable proportion come from provinces including Hebei, Shanxi, Henan, Guizhou, Gansu, and Ningxia. Differences in regional culture, value orientations, and learning styles are evident among students, underscoring the need for inclusive, flexible, and context aware student management practices [32].

Issues related to cultural identity and a sense of belonging also merit attention. Some students from outside the region demonstrate relatively low levels of identification with local culture, which can hinder their integration into campus life and participation in collective activities. This situation highlights the importance of incorporating cultural integration, identity development, and value guidance into student management strategies, thereby fostering a shared sense of belonging, mutual understanding, and campus cohesion [33].

IV. Improvement Strategies and Policy Recommendations

4.1 Institutional Development: Building a People-Centered Student Management System

To address the shortcomings identified in existing institutional arrangements, private undergraduate institutions should prioritize the construction of a people centered student management framework. The first step is to clearly define the primary objects of educational management and design differentiated policies accordingly. Student oriented regulations should focus on both academic development and daily life management. In the academic domain, institutions should establish effective attendance and incentive systems aimed at encouraging learning motivation, persistence, and academic engagement, rather than relying solely on punitive measures.

With regard to policy refinement and implementation, existing reward and disciplinary systems should be reviewed and updated to better align with the characteristics and expectations of contemporary students. Transparent communication of institutional rules is essential. Orientation programs should systematically introduce student codes of conduct, while class meetings and visible on campus displays should reinforce behavioral expectations. By embedding institutional norms into students' everyday learning and living environments, policies can move from formal compliance to internalized acceptance.

At a systemic level, student management should adopt a closed loop mechanism of needs assessment, policy design, and feedback evaluation, supported by a developmental assessment approach. Universities should establish a collaborative education framework that clarifies the educational responsibilities of all staff members. In particular, class advisors, counselors, and course instructors should be jointly involved in student development initiatives. Multidimensional educational mechanisms integrating ideological education, psychological well being, volunteer service, and civic engagement should be strengthened in line with institutional contexts and national higher education goals [34].

4.2 Workforce Development: Building a Professional Student Management Team

The professionalization of the counselor workforce is central to improving the quality of student management. Institutions should establish a tiered training and evaluation system that supports progressive professional development while integrating digital technologies to enhance governance efficiency and personalized student support.

Optimizing team structure is a priority. To address issues such as gender imbalance, disciplinary background mismatch, and inappropriate counselor student ratios, universities should implement evidence based recruitment and development strategies that promote diversity and specialization within counselor teams. A balanced and professionally trained workforce enhances both management effectiveness and student trust.

Clear role definition is equally critical. Counselors should be relieved of excessive administrative burdens and allowed to focus on their core responsibilities in ideological education, psychological guidance, and student development. Clarifying role boundaries can significantly improve work efficiency and professional identity.

Systematic training programs should be institutionalized, covering areas such as ideological and political education, mental health counseling, crisis intervention, and student development theory. Continuous professional development enhances counselors' capacity to respond to complex student needs in a rapidly changing educational environment. In parallel, incentive mechanisms should be improved through transparent performance evaluation systems that incorporate student satisfaction, innovation in practice, and developmental outcomes, alongside promotion and recognition pathways [35].

4.3 Service System Optimization: Advancing Digital Transformation and Precision Services

Modernizing student service systems is a key pathway to improving both efficiency and effectiveness in student management. In the area of mental health services, universities should establish comprehensive psychological profiles for students and implement early detection and early intervention mechanisms. Mental health literacy education should

be expanded to strengthen students' self regulation and emotional management capacities.

Professional resources should be actively integrated into campus services. Institutions are encouraged to recruit qualified mental health professionals and offer regular lectures, counseling sessions, and workshops. Mental health education plans should be incorporated into routine academic management to ensure broad student coverage and continuity of support.

Digital transformation plays a critical enabling role. By improving student information management systems and leveraging data analytics, universities can enhance early warning capabilities, policy enforcement, and decision making. Clear accountability structures, supervision mechanisms, and performance evaluations should accompany digital governance reforms to ensure institutional effectiveness.

Innovative service models should also address diverse student needs. A two way family school communication mechanism should be established to provide timely feedback on student performance and well being. Regular parent meetings, participatory governance initiatives, and online feedback platforms can strengthen collaboration and shared responsibility in student development [36].

4.4 Cultural Development: Cultivating a Positive and Development Oriented Campus Environment

Campus culture constitutes the foundation of effective student management. In strengthening academic culture, universities should leverage student residential communities as key educational spaces. The implementation of integrated student community management policies can promote the downward integration of leadership, service, and administrative resources, enabling more accessible and responsive student support.

Institutional culture should be reinforced through standardized student organization regulations and a multilevel communication mechanism linking student affairs offices, academic departments, counselors, and students. Integrity education, academic early warning systems, and behavioral habit formation programs should be systematically promoted.

Comprehensive reform of student community governance should continue, with emphasis on party leadership, staff engagement, service accessibility, cultural immersion, and student self governance. Regular psychological screening and dynamic mental health risk monitoring systems should be maintained, particularly for first year students.

Cultural activities should be diversified and aligned with student interests and contemporary trends. Academic lectures, skills competitions, volunteer initiatives, and innovation programs can enrich campus life and foster a positive, inclusive, and aspirational educational environment.

4.5 Distinctive Development: Leveraging Regional Advantages and Ethnic Cultural Characteristics

As a private undergraduate institution in Inner Mongolia, Inner Mongolia Honder College of Arts and Sciences should integrate regional characteristics and ethnic cultural resources into its student management framework. Rich local ethnic traditions provide valuable educational resources that can be embedded into student activities and cultural education programs, enhancing cultural identity and belonging.

Personalized service mechanisms should be developed to address the diverse needs of students from different regions and ethnic backgrounds. Differentiated support in areas such as living services, academic advising, and psychological counseling can promote equity and inclusion. Ethnic unity education should be incorporated into student management through thematic activities and community engagement projects, encouraging interaction and mutual understanding among students from different cultural backgrounds.

Finally, the institution should capitalize on Inner Mongolia's strategic position in domestic and international connectivity by expanding international exchange and cooperation programs. Cross border educational initiatives can broaden students' global perspectives, enhance intercultural competence, and strengthen their competitiveness in an increasingly globalized labor market.

Strategic Recommendations and Action Plan

Based on the preceding analysis, this study proposes a phased strategic roadmap to ensure the effective implementation of student management reforms at Inner Mongolia Honder College of Arts and Sciences and comparable private undergraduate institutions in Inner Mongolia. The proposed framework integrates short-term operational actions, medium-term systemic development goals, and a long-term vision for sustainable and distinctive growth.

A. Short-Term Action Plan (1–2 Years)

Phase I: Foundational Capacity Building and Institutional Refinement (Year 1)

The first phase focuses on strengthening governance foundations and improving institutional readiness. Key actions include:

- Establishing a university-level student management leadership committee to coordinate policy design, implementation, and cross-departmental collaboration, with clearly defined roles and responsibilities.
- Revising and optimizing the student management policy system, with particular emphasis on reward and disciplinary mechanisms and codes of student conduct, to enhance fairness, transparency, and developmental orientation.
- Launching the professionalization initiative for the counselor workforce, including the completion of the first round of comprehensive training covering ideological education, student development theory, and psychological

support.

- Creating individualized student mental health profiles and improving crisis intervention protocols in line with national guidelines on university mental health education [37].
- Advancing the construction of an information-based student management platform to enable preliminary data integration across academic affairs, student services, and psychological support units.

Phase II: Pilot Implementation and Model Innovation (Year 2)

The second phase emphasizes experimentation and innovation through targeted pilot programs:

- Implementing "one-stop" student community management pilots in two to three academic colleges to integrate academic advising, psychological services, administrative support, and student self-governance.
- Introducing AI-assisted mental health service models, including intelligent screening and early warning systems, drawing on emerging practices in digital mental health governance in higher education [38].
- Improving the employment guidance and service system by establishing structured university-enterprise cooperation platforms and enhancing internship and career development pathways.
- Launching focused initiatives to strengthen academic culture, such as attendance improvement programs, learning motivation campaigns, and peer learning communities.
- Establishing a diversified evaluation mechanism and conducting the first comprehensive assessment of student management effectiveness using both quantitative indicators and student feedback.

B. Medium-Term Development Goals (3–5 Years)

Phase III: Systemic Integration and Quality Enhancement

During this stage, reforms transition from pilot-based innovation to system-wide consolidation:

- Fully institutionalizing the "one-stop" student community management model across the university.
- Achieving comprehensive digital transformation of student management, supported by data-driven decision-making, intelligent monitoring, and early risk detection.
- Building a highly professional, stable, and well-structured counselor workforce with clear career development pathways.
- Forming a student management system that reflects regional characteristics and incorporates ethnic cultural elements, enhancing inclusiveness and cultural relevance.
- Elevating the overall quality of student management to the advanced level among private undergraduate institutions nationwide, in alignment with national higher education modernization objectives [39].

C. Long-Term Vision (Beyond 5 Years)

Phase IV: Branding and Model Dissemination

In the long run, the institution should aim to achieve brand-oriented development:

Establishing a nationally recognized student management system among private undergraduate institutions.

Developing a replicable and scalable management model that can inform policy and practice in other regions.

Narrowing the gap between private and public universities in terms of students' comprehensive competencies and employment competitiveness.

Becoming a benchmark institution and reference case for student management innovation in China's private higher education sector.

D. Risk Prevention and Mitigation Strategies

The reform process may encounter several potential risks that require proactive management:

- Personnel turnover risk: Reform initiatives may lead to the departure of staff unable to adapt to new expectations. To mitigate this, the institution should establish a talent reserve system and strengthen succession planning and professional development pipelines.
- Financial pressure risk: Comprehensive reform requires sustained financial investment. Universities should diversify funding sources, enhance budget planning, and improve cost-effectiveness in resource allocation [40].
- Cultural resistance risk: Reforms may conflict with entrenched management cultures. Continuous communication, training, and value-oriented advocacy are essential to fostering institutional consensus and support.
- Technological risk: Digital transformation initiatives may face technical challenges and data security concerns. Strengthening technical safeguards, cybersecurity management, and contingency planning is critical [41].

To address these risks, the university should establish a systematic risk early-warning and response mechanism, supported by detailed contingency plans and regular evaluations, to ensure the steady and orderly advancement of student management reform.

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