

A Study on the Impact of the Residential College System on Ideological and Political Education in Universities

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Abstract

As an innovative model of student management in higher education, the residential college system transcends the traditional boundaries of majors and class structures, extending the educational arena into students' living communities. This transformation creates new opportunities for ideological and political education by expanding its spatial dimensions and diversifying its methods. At the same time, it encounters real-world challenges such as the inertia of conventional models and the lack of consensus in educational philosophy. This study examines the positive impact of the residential college system on ideological and political education in universities, analyzes the practical difficulties—such as insufficiently smooth institutional transitions and limited professionalization of teaching staff—and further proposes optimization strategies. These include establishing collaborative mechanisms, strengthening conceptual alignment, building a more professional education workforce, and improving evaluation and incentive systems. The study aims to provide theoretical reference and practical guidance for enhancing the effectiveness of ideological and political education under the residential college system.

Keywords

Residential College System; Ideological and Political Education in Universities; Student Development Model; Educational Innovation; Management Mechanism

1 Introduction

The residential college system in student management breaks away from the traditional model organized around majors and class units, achieving a transition from class-based management to community-based management. This model not only facilitates the development of academic research and cultural activities while promoting interdisciplinary exchange and integration, but also strengthens faculty–student interaction and fosters a new, harmonious relationship of joint cultivation between teachers and students. Within this system, the environment for ideological and political education in universities extends from the classroom into the living community; the mode of instruction shifts from one-way transmission to immersive guidance; and the body of educators expands from specialized ideological and political instructors to encompass the entire faculty and staff. These transformations provide new approaches to overcoming persistent issues in traditional ideological and political education—such as disciplinary barriers and insufficient interaction—while also presenting

fresh challenges arising from institutional misalignments and differences in conceptual understanding. A thorough exploration of the intrinsic connections between the residential college system and ideological and political education in universities, along with the search for effective pathways of organic integration, is of both theoretical and practical importance. Such inquiry not only enriches the theoretical connotations of ideological and political education but also offers practical support for universities in implementing the concept of Three-Complete Education and in cultivating a new generation capable of shouldering the great task of national rejuvenation.

2 The Positive Impact of the Residential College System on Ideological and Political Education in Universities

2.1 Expanding the Spatial Dimension and Extending the Reach of Education

The residential college system breaks through the boundaries of the classroom by extending the field of ideological and political education into students' living communities [1]. The arrangement of mixed accommodation among students from different majors provides a natural space for interdisciplinary ideological exchange. Functional areas such as Party and Youth League activity rooms and student club rooms within dormitory buildings serve as practical platforms for cultivating values. Through joint participation in community activities and the management of public affairs, students are subtly immersed in collectivist values, allowing ideological and political education to permeate the details of everyday life—such as daily routines and interactions in student organizations. This spatial extension transforms education from a staged and one-directional process into one that is all-encompassing and immersive, thereby helping students deepen their understanding and recognition of ideological and political education within authentic life contexts.

2.2 Innovating Educational Methods and Enhancing the Effectiveness of Student Development

The residential college system transforms the traditional classroom-centered model of ideological and political education by creating life-oriented educational settings through arrangements such as faculty members residing in dormitories and mentors being stationed within residential halls [2]. In everyday interactions—including shared meals, participation in student clubs, and one-on-one conversations—mentors contextualize abstract ideological and belief education into concrete, life-related, and situational topics. By replacing one-way indoctrination with equal dialogue, this model achieves a fundamental shift in pedagogical approach. Leveraging its interdisciplinary resources and platform advantages, the residential college organizes diverse activities such as debates on revolutionary themes and experiential programs on traditional culture. These activities embed value guidance into processes of interest cultivation and skill development, encouraging students to consciously reflect on the relationship between the individual, the nation, and society. Such implicit educational approaches align more closely with the cognitive characteristics and emotional receptivity of contemporary university students, effectively avoiding the resistance that traditional didactic preaching might provoke, and thereby realizing an educational effect akin to "nourishing students silently and imperceptibly."



2.3 Highlighting Student Agency and Stimulating Intrinsic Motivation

The residential college system grants students greater autonomy in management, enabling them to play a leading role in community building. Students can independently design themed educational activities, establish volunteer service teams, and participate in the formulation of residential college regulations, thereby deepening their understanding of values such as responsibility, democracy, and dedication through practice. In coordinating public service initiatives, student self-governance organizations must allocate resources and build consensus, thereby embodying the spirit of collectivism; in addressing community conflicts, they must practice perspective-taking and rational communication, which enhances their moral judgment and conflict-resolution skills. This model of self-management and self-education shifts students from the role of passive recipients in traditional ideological and political education to active participants and co-creators. Through lived experience, students not only strengthen their identification with ideological theories but also effectively stimulate their intrinsic motivation to consciously practice the Core Socialist Values.

2.4 Integrating Educational Resources and Building Synergy in Student Development

The residential college system breaks down barriers between academic departments by integrating diverse educational forces—such as faculty members, counselors, and logistical staff—into a unified community platform. Faculty members, serving as mentors, instill both scientific spirit and a sense of national commitment through guidance in students' daily lives; counselors provide ideological guidance in connection with community life; and logistical staff convey the spirit of labor and professionalism through their services. Together, these actors form an educational community centered on student growth, overcoming the limitations of traditional ideological and political education, which often relied on fragmented and isolated efforts. Meanwhile, interdisciplinary resources provide multiple perspectives for ideological and political education—for instance, engineering and humanities students jointly engaging in discussions on the ethics of science and technology—thus integrating ideological content with professional practice. This fosters an educational structure characterized by participation of all staff and coverage across all domains, thereby enhancing the overall effectiveness of ideological and political education.

3 The Practical Challenges of Ideological and Political Education under the Residential College System

3.1 Institutional Inertia of Traditional Models Hindering Mechanism Transformation

For a long time, ideological and political education in universities has relied on a fixed management structure organized by academic departments and carried out within class units. This long-standing inertia generates significant resistance to the implementation of the residential college system [3]. The main challenges are as follows: first, blurred divisions of responsibility lead to inefficiency in coordination. Some departments continue to habitually assert dominance over ideological and political education, leaving residential colleges in a subordinate position when it comes to resource allocation and activity planning. As a result, overlaps, redundancies, or disjointed connections often occur in educational objectives and content

design, making it difficult to generate synergy greater than the sum of its parts. Second, rigid administrative procedures restrict innovative practices. The traditional top-down directive style of management conflicts with the collaborative, faculty–student co-construction ethos advocated by the residential college system. For example, when a residential college attempts to organize interdisciplinary ideological and political activities, it is often required to go through multiple layers of approval. Such bureaucratic procedures undermine the timeliness of education, preventing the flexible advantages of community-based student development from being fully realized.

3.2 Lack of Conceptual Consensus Limiting the Depth of Education

The holistic education philosophy advocated by the residential college system should, in principle, complement the value-oriented goals of ideological and political education. However, there are evident cognitive divergences between faculty and students regarding this integration. On the student side, a pragmatic tendency is widespread. Most students still regard academic performance and career prospects as their primary pursuits. When participating in ideological and political activities organized by residential colleges, they are more concerned with whether such involvement contributes to earning credits or gaining advantages in scholarship selection, while neglecting deeper reflection on the value-shaping significance behind the activities. As a result, participation in such education often remains at a superficial or formal level [4]. On the faculty side, misalignments in role recognition are evident. Some professional mentors perceive residential college responsibilities as an additional burden, merely fulfilling the required number of duty shifts or discussion sessions without proactively integrating ideological and political education into their academic guidance. Meanwhile, certain administrative staff members place greater emphasis on security management and disciplinary enforcement, while paying insufficient attention to cultural cultivation and ideological guidance within residential colleges. This imbalance makes it difficult for ideological and political education to penetrate into the spiritual core of student development.

3.3 Insufficient Professionalization of the Teaching Team Affecting the Quality of Education

Within the residential college system, a significant gap exists between the professional competence of the ideological and political education team and the practical demands of student development, which has become a key bottleneck restricting educational effectiveness [5]. Specifically, this is reflected in two aspects: First, the ideological and political literacy of mentors is uneven. Most residential college mentors are professional faculty members who, while possessing solid disciplinary expertise, often lack systematic training in ideological and political education theories. Consequently, when confronted with students' ideological confusion, they frequently fall into the dilemma of being capable of imparting knowledge but lacking effective methods for value guidance. For instance, when discussing socially sensitive or trending issues, they may find it difficult to elevate the conversation to the level of ideals and beliefs in order to guide students toward the correct understanding. Second, the coordination capacity of the management team remains insufficient. Regular communication mechanisms between residential college counselors, departmental ideological and political educators, and logistical service staff are lacking, resulting in fragmented efforts.



For example, thematic education activities organized by counselors often fail to resonate with the dormitory culture initiatives carried out by logistical staff, leading to blind spots in the spatial coverage of ideological and political education and making it difficult to build an integrated, campus-wide educational network.

3.4 Absence of Evaluation and Incentive Mechanisms Reducing Participation Enthusiasm

At present, ideological and political education within the residential college system has not yet established a well-developed and scientific evaluation and incentive framework, resulting in a continual weakening of motivation among both faculty and students. On the one hand, vague evaluation criteria make it difficult to quantify outcomes. The implicit, value-shaping nature of ideological and political education, combined with the residential college system's emphasis on process-oriented growth, renders traditional evaluation methods—centered on examination results or participation rates—no longer applicable. However, new dimensions of assessment, such as improvements in ideological awareness or a stronger sense of social responsibility, lack concrete measurement indicators, making it difficult for educational outcomes to gain effective recognition. On the other hand, the absence of incentive mechanisms diminishes willingness to participate. For many faculty members, their involvement in ideological and political work within residential colleges is scarcely linked to professional title promotion or awards for excellence, leading most to passively fulfill only the basic requirements. For students, participation is typically rewarded with symbolic certificates or souvenirs, which remain disconnected from core benefits such as scholarships or postgraduate recommendation opportunities. This gap makes it difficult to stimulate sustainable intrinsic motivation, often resulting in a situation where organizers show great enthusiasm but participants remain indifferent.

4 Pathways to Optimizing Ideological and Political Education in Universities under the Residential College System

4.1 Establishing Collaborative Mechanisms to Clarify Responsibilities and Authority

To overcome the inertia of traditional models, universities need to rationalize the relationship between residential colleges and academic departments at the institutional level. On the one hand, universities should issue clear documents delineating responsibilities and authority, so that both residential colleges and departments can focus on their respective strengths in ideological and political education. Departments are responsible for integrating ideological and political elements into professional courses—for example, embedding a sense of national responsibility in science and engineering curricula that emphasize technological innovation, or enhancing cultural confidence through interpretation in humanities courses. Residential colleges, in contrast, focus on value guidance in community life, extending the educational chain through dormitory culture development and interdisciplinary discussion sessions. Both parties can share students' ideological trends through regular work exchange meetings, ensuring consistency in educational orientation and preventing disconnection between departments emphasizing professional skills and residential colleges emphasizing moral development.

On the other hand, universities should streamline the operational procedures of residential colleges and grant them greater autonomy. When planning interdisciplinary ideological and political activities, residential colleges need only register the plans with the Academic Affairs Office, without undergoing multiple layers of departmental approval. Universities can also establish dedicated funds under the colleges' discretionary control, enabling rapid responses to social hotspots and student needs—for example, quickly organizing thematic lectures on important anniversaries or facilitating timely discussions on socially relevant issues of concern to students. This approach fully leverages the flexible advantages of community-based student development, enhancing both the timeliness and practical relevance of ideological and political education.

4.2 Deepening Conceptual Identification to Strengthen the Ideological Foundation

To enhance faculty and student recognition of ideological and political education under the residential college system, universities need to address the issue at the cognitive level. On the student side, universities should implement diversified publicity initiatives to help students understand the significance of residential college-based ideological and political education for personal growth. For example, outstanding alumni can be invited to share how their participation in community service activities organized by residential colleges helped demonstrate responsibility and commitment during job searches. By using real cases, students can realize that engagement in residential college activities is not merely for earning credits, but also for improving social adaptability. Universities can also establish growth portfolios to document students' development in problem-solving abilities, enhanced awareness of teamwork, and other competencies through participation in residential college activities. Students can then visually perceive their progress, such as by comparing social practice reports before and after participation, demonstrating an increase in their sense of social responsibility.

On the faculty side, universities should strengthen guidance to help educators correctly recognize the value of residential college work. Through targeted training programs, professional mentors can understand that residential college responsibilities extend professional education; for instance, when supervising student theses, mentors can integrate discussions on research integrity and social responsibility aligned with the students' research focus. Administrative staff can be made aware that community service is also an essential part of student development; for example, when inspecting dormitory hygiene, they can guide students to understand the connection between maintaining collective environments and public morality. In this way, educational awareness is embedded into daily work, and every faculty–student interaction becomes an opportunity for ideological and political education.

4.3 Strengthening the Educational Team to Enhance Professional Competence

To address the insufficient professional capacity of the ideological and political education team, universities need to focus on both capability enhancement and collaboration promotion. On the one hand, universities should provide systematic ideological and political training for residential college mentors, covering both theoretical foundations and communication skills. Training can combine lectures and simulations: first, explaining the connotations of the Core Socialist Values, and then using role-playing exercises to practice guiding students when they express concerns about career prospects, helping them understand the connec-



tion between industry development and national needs; or assisting students in critically evaluating information when discussing trending topics online and fostering rational judgment. Universities can also organize mentor observations of exemplary ideological and political courses to learn how to translate abstract theories into concrete discussion topics, helping mentors naturally integrate ideological guidance into daily interactions while avoiding rigid didactic approaches.

On the other hand, universities should establish internal collaboration mechanisms within residential colleges to enable effective coordination among counselors, professional mentors, and logistical staff. Monthly work communication meetings can be held, where counselors report students' current areas of concern, professional mentors provide educational suggestions aligned with disciplinary characteristics, and logistical staff share observations from dormitory life. For example, if counselors identify significant student anxiety about employment, professional mentors can incorporate value guidance related to career planning into academic advising, while logistical staff can proactively listen to student concerns during dormitory visits and relay relevant feedback. This integrated approach forms a comprehensive educational network, ensuring that ideological and political education permeates all aspects of students' daily lives.

4.4 Improving Evaluation and Incentive Systems to Stimulate Participation

To address the absence of evaluation and incentive mechanisms, universities need to make improvements in both standards and procedures. On the one hand, universities should establish scientific evaluation criteria that go beyond merely counting the number of participants, focusing instead on the actual effectiveness of ideological and political education. For faculty evaluation, metrics may include the frequency of individual discussions with students and the quality of students' reflective feedback during thematic activities—for example, references in activity summaries to enhanced sense of responsibility or insights into national commitment. For student evaluation, assessment should consider the depth of their contributions during activities and the quality of their participation in social practice, integrating peer evaluations within groups and daily observations by mentors. This could include tracking whether students proactively assume responsibilities during volunteer service or demonstrate tolerance and understanding in teamwork, thereby avoiding superficial "attendance-based participation."

On the other hand, universities should improve incentive measures by linking performance in residential college ideological and political work to tangible benefits for faculty and students. Faculty achievements in residential college ideological work can be counted as bonus points in professional title evaluations. Each year, the university may select "Residential College Education Stars" and award monetary prizes, while incorporating specific evaluation indicators in annual performance assessments. Students' participation in residential college activities can be converted into comprehensive quality credits based on performance, with outstanding participants receiving greater weight in scholarship selection and priority consideration for postgraduate recommendations under equivalent conditions. Additionally, the title of "Active Participant of the Residential College" can be awarded in recognition programs. These measures aim to stimulate sustained intrinsic motivation among both faculty and students, prevent situations where organizers are enthusiastic but participants are indifferent, create a virtuous cycle, and continuously enhance the effectiveness of ideological and political education.

5 Conclusion

The deep integration of the residential college system and ideological and political education requires universities to rationalize responsibilities and authority at the institutional level, consolidate educational consensus at the cognitive level, enhance professional competence within the teaching team, and improve incentive systems in evaluation. Only by doing so can universities overcome practical difficulties and fully leverage the unique advantages of the residential college system in value guidance and competence cultivation. With the continuous advancement of higher education reform, ideological and political education under the residential college system requires ongoing exploration. It must not only inherit the educational essence of traditional residential college culture but also innovate in forms and content to meet contemporary needs. Looking ahead, by constructing a more collaborative, targeted, and effective educational system, the residential college system is poised to play a greater role in guiding students to uphold firm ideals and beliefs and enhance their comprehensive competencies, providing solid support for cultivating socialist builders and successors who are well-rounded in moral, intellectual, physical, aesthetic, and labor development.

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