Original Research Article

Some Solutions for Student Affairs Management in Public Universities in the North Central Region

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Abstract: This study provides an overview of the theoretical framework for managing student affairs in public universities in the North Central region of Vietnam. Despite various efforts, student affairs management at these universities still faces numerous challenges and limitations. To meet the requirements of higher education management innovation and overcome these issues, a comprehensive approach with coordinated, effective, and standardized management solutions is necessary. The paper proposes five main solutions: raising awareness about student affairs and management for student affairs managers; innovating organizational structures and improving coordination mechanisms for student affairs management appropriate to the practical context; enhancing the capacity of dedicated staff and increasing the application of information technology and digital technology in managing student affairs; innovating the evaluation and inspection of student affairs management in schools; innovating the content and methods of organizing student affairs and managing student affairs. These solutions aim to improve the quality of student affairs management, thereby contributing to the mission of the university and enhancing the overall educational experience and the quality of the workforce. The proposed solutions are based on scientific and practical arguments from student affairs.

Keywords: Students; student management; solutions; public universities.

1. INTRODUCTION

Each university has different roles, statuses, scales, training qualities, academic reputations, and social impacts. In general, these universities pay significant attention to student affairs and consider it a central political task. However, like many universities across the country, student affairs management at public universities in the North Central region still faces numerous issues and limitations as mentioned above.

To meet the requirements for innovation in higher education management and address the current limitations in student affairs, student affairs management at these universities needs substantial innovation across various aspects with coordinated, effective, unified, and standardized management solutions within the schools to enhance the capacity and effectiveness of student affairs. Proposing such solutions needs to be based on scientific and practical arguments from student affairs. However, there is currently a lack of in-depth scientific research focusing on effective solutions tailored to the practical context to enhance the role of student affairs in fulfilling the mission of the universities, thereby improving the quality of their training of human resources.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Student affairs management (SAM) is a part of university management aimed at helping students develop comprehensively. From the characteristics of student affairs in Vietnamese universities, it can be understood that managing SAM involves the managerial process of implementing management functions to oversee objectives, content, methods, and conditions ensuring the execution of SAM. This is done to help students develop fully in terms of morality, intellect, physical health, and aesthetics. It is a process that creates unity and consensus among both internal and external forces in setting goals, planning activities, organizing, leading, directing, and evaluating SAM to enhance its effectiveness, thereby achieving the set objectives; maximizing favorable factors while minimizing negative societal influences on students' comprehensive development.

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Jame Rhatigan (2010) reviewed the historical development of student affairs from its early days to the present. He analyzed how social, economic, and cultural changes have influenced how educational institutions interact with and support students. Significant milestones and key events were included to illustrate the evolution of student affairs over time. Additionally, Rhatigan delved into the philosophy of student affairs, emphasizing the importance of placing students at the center of the educational process. He established fundamental principles and core values of student affairs, such as respecting diversity, encouraging personal development, and promoting lifelong learning. His research identified the role of student affairs managers in creating supportive learning environments and encouraging comprehensive student development, outlining strategies and methods for effective student affairs management. Rhatigan provided specific examples and lessons from practical experiences, helping managers apply this knowledge in their daily work. He also stressed the importance of building good relationships with students, understanding their needs and desires, and staying updated with new trends in education.

According to Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth (2016), the core values of organizing student affairs in schools include: students can learn in various ways and at different levels; respecting individual abilities and needs; and students' right to benefit from education. The standards for these organizational forms include policies, access, initial identification; assessment, educational planning; student discipline, dispute resolution, contracted services, professional support; and management, education, full human and civil rights of students with special needs, which are implemented annually by public universities and reported [10].

Michelle Cooper (2010) suggested that over the years, researchers have demonstrated that organizing student affairs is crucial for students' academic success in universities. According to the author, learning, guidance, and advisory support services are the most important aspects of student organization. Therefore, improving these services is essential as most students enroll with limited knowledge and ability to effectively participate in courses [3].

Ajay Shankar Bidyarthy and Abhishek Kumar (2012) argued that a well-organized and systematic office is essential for all universities to manage student administration more effectively. All modules in university administration are interdependent and maintained manually; thus, they need to be automated and centralized. With this in mind, the authors developed an existing student database management system and identified necessary improvements to streamline processes. Administrators using the system will find that recording, retrieving student information, and managing their classes becomes easier. Essentially, this project aims to enhance efficiency and maintain the accuracy of useful information to save time and reduce paperwork [1].

Unnati A. Patel (2013) discussed the need for tools to control student attendance during final exams by creating a system that automatically tracks student attendance using "RFID technology" [7].

Regina M. Oliver, Joseph H. Wehby, and Daniel J. Reschly (2011) conducted research to identify individual practices with some evidence supporting classroom management. Their study found that monitoring student behavior allows teachers to recognize students engaging in appropriate behaviors and prevent misconduct from escalating [6].

Research conducted by Nguyễn Minh Đức (2012), Cao Xuân Tịnh (2012), Trần Thị Thúy Ngân (2011), and Trần Thị Kim Oanh (2012) addressed the challenges in managing student affairs, which arise from both objective and subjective factors. Based on this, they proposed solutions such as developing management competencies for managerial staff, raising awareness about the importance of student affairs among all staff and lecturers, improving the system of school regulations on student affairs management, building and enhancing the capabilities of student affairs management teams, strengthening political and ideological education for students, effectively implementing commendation and disciplinary policies, ensuring student rights and benefits, and increasing coordination between departments and other organizations within the school. Generally, these studies are specific and applicable to individual schools but lack extensive research on managing student affairs across groups of schools or regions. [2, 9, 4, 5]

3. RESEARCH METHODS

Literature Review: To build a solid theoretical foundation and identify key research issues related to student affairs management in universities, the research team conducted a comprehensive literature review. This process involved collecting, analyzing, and synthesizing academic documents, research reports, student affairs management policies, and previous studies from reliable sources. The selected materials aimed to provide a comprehensive view of the history, philosophy, and methods of student affairs management, while also identifying current trends and challenges in the field.

Survey: To collect practical and multi-dimensional data on the perspectives, experiences, and evaluations of stakeholders, the research team conducted a survey with two main target groups:

+ *Lecturers*: 246 lecturers from various faculties and disciplines at the university participated in the survey. The goal was to gather information on their views on

student affairs management, the challenges they face, and their improvement suggestions.

+ *Students*: 257 students from different courses and training programs were invited to participate in the survey. This survey aimed to gain a better understanding of students' experiences with support services, extracurricular activities, and current student affairs management policies.

Questionnaire Design: A carefully designed questionnaire (40 questions) ensured the comprehensiveness and accuracy of the collected data. The questions included both closed-ended (multiple-choice questions, Likert scale) and open-ended formats to collect quantitative and qualitative information.

For Lecturers: Questions included satisfaction with student affairs management policies, challenges in supporting students, and improvement suggestions.

For Students: Questions covered learning and living experiences, satisfaction with support services, and opinions on necessary improvements.

Data Collection: The survey was conducted online through the university's learning management system and directly in classrooms and extracurricular activities. Data collection lasted four weeks to ensure a sufficiently large and representative sample.

4. RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Solution 1: Educating awareness about student affairs and managing student affairs for staff, lecturers, students, and related forces inside and outside the school.

a. The solution includes the following specific contents:
Survey and evaluation: Assess the current awareness and capability of the school's staff and lecturers in managing student affairs. Identify the needs for enhancing awareness and developing the capabilities of those responsible for student affairs, and determine which areas require knowledge and skill development for effective management.

Specialized training: Organize thematic training sessions on student affairs management (covering key areas such as educational propaganda work, student management, and organizing support activities and services for students) in a series of activities to create coordination and linkage.

Regular supervision and motivation: Continuously provide close supervision, timely inspection, and motivation for staff in charge of student affairs to fulfill their assigned tasks effectively.

Training and thematic activities: Organize training sessions and thematic activities to enhance awareness and develop the capabilities of staff and lecturers in implementing and managing student affairs.

Core staff development: Ensure that key staff members in student affairs participate in training and professional development to enhance their own qualifications and capabilities.

Policy and legal education: Focus on thoroughly understanding the Party's guidelines, state policies, laws, and regulations from the Ministry of Education regarding student affairs. Emphasize the importance of political, ethical, and lifestyle education for youth and students in the current context. Highlight the Party's viewpoints on comprehensive educational reforms related to student affairs, and clarify the goals, roles, functions, and tasks of student affairs work.

Understanding regulations and roles: Ensure that staff responsible for student affairs are familiar with training regulations and regularly update themselves on changes in objectives, content, and methods of training programs. They should understand their roles, responsibilities, and the psychology and emotions of students to organize effective counseling activities, thereby contributing significantly to the school's student affairs management.

b. Implementation methods:
To raise awareness and responsibility among staff, lecturers, students, and other individuals and organizations involved in student affairs, the school can employ the following specific measures:
Issuance of Resolutions: The party committee and school council should issue thematic resolutions on student affairs. These should be disseminated to every department, youth union, and student class to promote the pioneering and exemplary roles of staff, particularly class leaders, youth union officials, and student Party members, in student affairs. Integrate student affairs content into thematic or regular meetings of each department, youth union, and student class.

Training and Development Plans: Develop specific and practical training plans to enhance the awareness and capabilities of staff in student affairs. The plan should have clear objectives and measurable outcomes. Design a comprehensive training program on student affairs for all related staff, and organize periodic training sessions and thematic workshops on managing student affairs for staff directly responsible.

Regular Meetings: Hold regular student affairs meetings weekly, monthly, and quarterly with related units throughout the school. Conduct dialogues between the school principal, training units, and class leaders and students to facilitate information exchange, enhance awareness, monitor student ideological trends, address emerging issues effectively, and adjust students' perceptions and actions according to practical requirements.

Political, ethical, and professional ideals training: Provide training on political, ethical, and professional ideals, enhancing the understanding of the role of student affairs in the school and the roles and responsibilities of staff in organizing and implementing student affairs. Encourage staff to participate actively and contribute ideas for innovating student affairs management in the school, thereby continually improving its effectiveness. Offer practical support for staff in self-directed learning and professional development.

Clear and appropriate task allocation: Assign clear and suitable tasks to staff in student affairs, avoiding cases where individuals handle too many roles, leading to inefficiency and insufficient time for personal learning and skill development. Support key staff in student affairs management with opportunities for training and professional development to enhance their qualifications and capabilities. Promote inter-school exchange and experience-sharing activities on student affairs to strengthen cooperation, engagement, and effective sharing in raising awareness and implementation capabilities.

Solution 2: Innovating organizational structure and perfecting the coordination mechanism for managing student affairs to suit practical contexts.

a. Solution content
Building Organizational Structure: Develop a structure for implementing student affairs management that meets the requirements of university organization and operations while being adaptable to the specific training characteristics of each university and the professional nature of student affairs management.

Coordination Regulations: Develop and implement regulations for coordination between relevant units in student affairs management. These regulations should maximize the role of functional departments, centralizing student affairs management as a foundation for other related departments such as academic faculties, the training office, financial planning office, Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union, and the Student Association.

b. Implementation Methods
Establish a dedicated student affairs department: Create a specialized department for student affairs that operates independently from other departments. This department will be responsible for student affairs management and will have autonomy in the school's student affairs. Clearly define the functions and tasks of this department within the organizational structure of student affairs management. Decentralize management from the university level to the grassroots level. Clearly and specifically define the functions and tasks of each individual and unit within the organizational structure. Develop detailed job descriptions, roles, and specific tasks for each position. This will help staff, lecturers, and administrative officers understand their roles and responsibilities within the school's organizational structure.

Work Processes and Coordination Regulations: Establish work processes and coordination regulations between related units for specific student affairs and management tasks.

Monitoring and Adjustments: Based on the established regulations, processes, and coordination mechanisms, the school will monitor, update, and supervise the implementation of tasks by departments and related units. Adjustments will be made as necessary to ensure the desired quality and efficiency in student affairs management.

Solution 3: Enhancing the capabilities of dedicated staff and increasing the application of information technology and digital technology in student affairs management.

a. Solution content
The solution "Enhancing the capabilities of dedicated staff and increasing the application of information technology and digital technology in student affairs management" includes the following contents:
Capacity Building Activities: Organize activities aimed at enhancing the capabilities of dedicated staff, including organizing specialized training courses on student affairs and management, scientific workshops, seminars, and experience-sharing sessions on student affairs and management.

IT Software Usage: Utilize IT software in student affairs and management within the school, specifically in educational propaganda work, student management, and organizing support activities and services for students.

IT Proficiency: Improve IT proficiency for dedicated and concurrent staff, ensuring that those responsible for this work can use IT applications effectively.

b. Implementation methods
IT Infrastructure Investment: Invest in computer systems, internet connections, and IT infrastructure to meet the needs of learners and enable functional departments in the school to operate efficiently, addressing work requirements promptly.

Establish IT Administration Department: Form an IT administration/network management team responsible for IT needs within the school, ensuring timely and effective updates and handling of IT-related issues. This team will also manage and update the school's website and management software. Utilize software to manage student information, aiding the school's administration in saving time and effort.

Training in IT Applications: Enhance IT skills and the use of IT tools for staff throughout the school. Organize

training courses and experience-sharing sessions to ensure staff can proficiently use management software.

Unified Management Software: Invest in and equip the school with standardized management software. Develop systems to handle student academic issues through software, monitor students' academic and extracurricular progress digitally, and ensure all school members can access relevant documents.

Develop School Website: Build and maintain the school's information portal, including sub-websites for academic units and related departments, to facilitate timely, quick, and convenient information access for staff and learners.

Regular IT Updates: Continuously update IT applications in the school to keep up with technological developments and apply them effectively in school management and administration.

Solution 4: Innovating the evaluation and management of student affairs in schools

a. Content of the solution:
- Develop a plan for evaluating and managing Student Affairs (SA).
- Implement the process of evaluating and managing SA according to the established plan.
- Discuss and draw lessons from the process of evaluating and managing SA.

b. Implementation method
Develop regular and periodic evaluation plans within the school. This should include identifying assessment standards and translating them into specific evaluation criteria.

Establish an internal process for evaluating the implementation of SA, making this process public within the school to ensure everyone is aware and can follow it.

Raise awareness among staff and faculty about the importance and requirements of evaluating SA within the school.

The internal evaluation process must be conducted objectively and in compliance with evaluation regulations. Establish a dedicated team responsible for monitoring and implementing the evaluation of SA within the school. This team should be overseen and directed during the evaluation process, and a reporting system should be established to clearly understand the evaluation results within the school. Conduct evaluations according to the established plan, ensuring the process is continuous throughout the academic year.

Summarize the evaluation activities at the end of each semester and the entire academic year. The results of these evaluations should be reported to the school management and made transparent within the school to ensure that all staff have access to the evaluation results.

Develop a fair and transparent reward and disciplinary mechanism for individuals and departments. Implement this reward and disciplinary mechanism rigorously and transparently to motivate school staff to strive in their work.

Organize summary activities of the evaluation process and hold sessions to discuss and draw lessons after the evaluations so that individuals and departments within the school can understand the practical work and find solutions to enhance strengths and overcome weaknesses, thereby improving the effectiveness of SA in the school. These summary and discussion sessions also serve as a foundation for organizing SA in the coming academic years.

Solution 5: Innovating the content and methods of organizing and managing student affairs
a. Solution content
Innovating the methods of organizing and managing extracurricular activities, self-study, and independent research of students. Although the credit-based training system in universities aligns with global standards, it presents certain challenges for organizing extracurricular activities, self-study, and independent research. This requires new approaches from academic advisors, youth union activities, and student union activities, organized according to course sections rather than initial administrative classes. Each course section usually lasts for one semester (approximately four months), allowing academic advisors to organize extracurricular activities suitable for each course section. Consequently, self-study and independent research activities of students will also be organized and monitored through the collaboration between course instructors and academic advisors.

Identifying new key contents of student affairs (SA) in the new context where higher education is strongly influenced by the fourth industrial revolution. This revolution presents both opportunities (through technology application) and challenges for SA and its management, such as students being more attracted to games and social networks than traditional direct communication methods, and spending too much time on online platforms. Therefore, some SA and management activities need to be and can be organized online, such as meetings, work discussions, networking, and entertainment, but with a reasonable weighting.

Innovating and adjusting methods and forms of organizing SA to suit practical requirements. Accordingly, activities (educational and propaganda work; student management and the organization of support and service activities for students) must follow and intersperse with the study schedules of the courses

that students register for and participate in. Some contents of these activities (educational and propaganda work; student management and the organization of support and service activities for students) can be organized according to course sections, such as physical education, psychological counseling, career orientation. Innovating and adjusting methods and forms of organizing SA must harmoniously intersperse with the study schedules of the courses that students register for and participate in.

b. Implementation method
Managing student learning activities towards enhancing autonomy and responsibility:

Guide students to develop appropriate study plans for each period as well as for the entire course.

Innovate teaching and evaluation methods: Guide students to actively acquire knowledge through self-study, independent research, and exploration. Simultaneously, assess students' learning outcomes through tests, exams, and the entire learning process to accurately evaluate their learning abilities and creative capacities.

Perfecting and concretizing related documents in SA implementation:

Regarding political thought education, ethics, and lifestyle for students: Create an environment for students to experience, practice, and transform learned knowledge into their own awareness, skills, and lifestyle.

Concretizing the evaluation contents of students' training results: According to the Ministry of Education and Training's regulations on the evaluation of regular training results for students, the school must concretize each criterion to ensure effective, feasible, and high-quality implementation.

Concretizing the contents and activities of student counseling and support: These include diverse contents from study and living advice for new students to support for entrepreneurship, services, scholarships, skill training, and foreign language proficiency improvement throughout their university life to support and job introduction after graduation. To organize these activities effectively and meaningfully, the school must concretize the content and implementation methods.

Enhancing the application of IT and social networks in managing SA:
In the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, the school must perfect its facilities, equipment, IT infrastructure, and management software to build a comprehensive data management system for students. This will create a shared database for relevant units and departments within the school to interconnect, share, and utilize as needed.

Utilizing the benefits of internet and social network development, the school can implement SA contents online, via email, social networks, Zalo, etc., to create convenience for students and optimize work efficiency.

Use social networks (Facebook, TikTok, etc.) to timely update and understand student thoughts and orientations, and handle emerging situations. These are also effective channels for the school to receive feedback, suggestions, and criticisms from students about the quality of education, training, and school management to review and adjust policies, regulations, work attitudes, and responsibilities to bring satisfaction to most students.

Alongside utilizing the benefits of IT and social networks, the school should also educate students about the positive and negative aspects of social networks and guide them to use them reasonably and culturally for learning, healthy entertainment, and personal development. The school should also issue specific regulations to ensure students strictly comply with legal regulations on managing, providing, and using information on social networks.

Innovating Activities and Evaluating Student Training Results:
Many student clubs have been established in universities with diverse and rich contents and activities that reflect the needs and interests of young people, providing an environment for students to best utilize their capabilities during their university education and training. The common advantage of these clubs is that students participate voluntarily based on personal interests, managing their time to participate regularly. Therefore, student clubs are considered suitable environments for the school to manage and organize activities and use the participation and results of students in these clubs to evaluate their training outcomes.

Organizing startup support and skill training activities for students:
The school needs to develop a SA plan that aligns with practical conditions. In the current trend, attention should be paid to support activities and services for students to best meet their needs, providing a suitable environment for study, living, training, and acquiring professional knowledge and skills, preparing them for their careers and confidently entering the job market.

The school should promote and establish effective cooperation mechanisms with businesses and employers to support students in internships, real-world experiences, skill training, and job placement after graduation. The content of cooperation between the school and businesses or employers can be implemented in various forms and areas, depending on the needs, strengths, specific activities, and aspirations of each party, such as student visits and internships, scholarships,

professional advice, organizing training courses, recruiting graduates, cooperation in scientific research, and applying research results to production.

4. CONCLUSION

Research on student management at public universities has yielded important and practical results. Based on a literature review and surveys conducted with 246 faculty members and 257 students, the authors have developed and proposed five management solutions to enhance the quality and effectiveness of student affairs. This study has contributed to clarifying the current situation and challenges in student management at public universities, while also providing specific and feasible solutions to improve the situation. Implementing these solutions will not only improve management efficiency but also help create a better learning and living environment for students, aiding in their comprehensive development both academically and in life skills.

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