

Analysis for Undergraduate Teaching Quality Information Disclosure: Cases from Partially United States University

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Abstract

Education plays a crucial role in promoting social progress. Higher education is an important source of human resource reserve for social development. In order to improve the quality of “The Report of Annual Undergraduate Teaching Quality of China”, this paper researches annual teaching quality reports from 18 universities in the United States in the past several years, in terms of the paradigm and the content of information disclosure by the method of comparative analysis. The paper illustrates the main content and problems of quality reports of these universities and discusses the enlightenment from them.

Keywords

United States, Undergraduate Teaching, Quality Report.

1. Introduction

Under the process of globalization, nations attach great importance to its teaching level and teaching quality. In order to attract more students, many universities around the world decide to disclose their reports of undergraduate teaching quality (hereinafter referred to as “quality reports”) regularly, which are not only a crucial part of the interior teaching quality guarantee system but also an important information source that objectively reflects the teaching level and teaching quality.

The purpose of the quality report is to regularly release comprehensive and reliable teaching quality information of universities to the public so as to be under the supervision of society. These reports connect universities, governments and the public. As for universities, quality reports present their teaching status and academic level to society. Regarding governments, the release of quality reports is conducive to assessing and evaluating the teaching quality of universities effectively. Meanwhile, quality reports also facilitate the education department to formulate proper education policies according to the current situation of undergraduate teaching quality. Apropos the public, the publication of quality reports provides a platform for the public to obtain information about the teaching quality of universities quickly, benefiting to effective social supervision. The importance of these reports also makes them reflect the university's transparent and open attitude, positive and accountable to the public. The publication of the quality report is not only a concrete practice of government strategy, but also a positive attempt of self-evaluation by universities.

Because of different cultural background and the educational system, there are some differences in universities' teaching level and quality between Chinese and other countries. However, from the perspective of teaching management, teaching quality is the lifeline for all universities. Learning from each other and improve the quality of undergraduate education is an important issue in the development and the internationalization of higher education all over the world. Taking the report of annual undergraduate teaching quality from 18 American universities as an example, this paper discusses the structure, content and problems of information disclosure so as to draw some useful inspirations.

2. The Structure and Characteristics

Since the 1990s, the United States has established a system for annual responsibility report or educational accountability report which is similar to the undergraduate quality reporting system in

China. Trow (1996) believes that through the quality report with explicit and implicit evaluation criteria, universities are able to monitor their own teaching quality and are responsible for external supervision, in order to enhance their teaching quality,

The form and content of educational accountability report differ from each other in a different part of the United States. In terms of the content of the report, all regions published students' learning effectiveness, such as test scores, enrolment rates and graduation rates, etc. Regarding the form of the report, due to different object-orientation, five or six 500-page reports are published annually in some regions, while in other regions, there are only two or three pages of reports provided by local universities.

The author referred to data of several universities in the central and western United States, including well-known universities and some non-famous universities. The result shows that all these quality reports generally include eight parts:

- (1) The basic situation of undergraduate education including talent training objectives, professional settings, number of students, undergraduate enrollment, and enrollment quality.
- (2) Teaching staff and teaching level including the number and structure of teachers, the construction of teaching staff, the ethics of teachers, scientific research results of teachers and improving the quality of teaching, etc.
- (3) Teaching conditions including infrastructure, equipment, internet, library, and investment, etc.
- (4) Talent training system.
- (5) Teaching including professional construction, curriculum construction, textbook construction, undergraduate teaching engineering, graduation thesis or design and independent development of students, etc.
- (6) Teaching quality management system.
- (7) Learning achievements of students including the construction of study style, students' well-being, social engagement, innovation, learning satisfaction of students, graduation, employment, and social evaluation, etc.
- (8) characteristics and development.

To sum up, it can be demonstrated that the characteristics of the quality reports focus on describing the development of students as well as an overview of social engagement, innovation and learning satisfaction of students. It shows that undergraduate education in the United States pays more attention to the independent development of students and has a relatively specific summary of the learning development of students and the employment of graduates.

3. The Main Problems in Information Disclosure

3.1 The writing and publication of teaching quality reports are nonstandard

Normative writing and publication are important to the quality of the report. Comparing these quality reports, especially the previous two years, we can find that the length of the report of each university is different, and the format also has its own characteristics. All aspects of the report of each university are diverse, including font size, line spacing, paragraph layout, cover design, paragraph structure and content organization, etc. Moreover, there is no uniform channel or fixed time for releasing quality reports of every university, so universities have to publish their own teaching quality reports by themselves without a standard rule to follow.

3.2 Incomplete information disclosure

Throughout universities, we can find that not all universities publish their quality reports on time and quality in recent years. Some universities only provide part of its quality report which cannot be downloaded as some universities do not provide quality reports at all. Although some universities, such as Stanford University, "publish" their teaching quality report, they have restricted to access to

it, however, requiring a university account which are difficult for outsiders to register. These phenomena have degenerated the value of quality reports.

3.3 Similarity and lack of characteristics

The contents of quality reports from various universities are similar to each other. Concerning the setting of curriculum concept, universities emphasize the adoption of general education with a "broad caliber and thick foundation". In terms of the measures for teaching reform, they all pay attention to talent training model and the cultivation of top innovative talents. Regarding achievements, universities elaborate and introduce in detail and provide data to support them. Nevertheless, they rarely mention their shortcomings and the mentioned points which like rambling slogans are innocuous. Such quality reports tend to be a formality and turn into the self-promotion of universities, which runs counter to the value of quality reports itself. In addition to being an advertisement promoted by the university itself. Moreover, the quality report should also be regarded as an access for the general public rather than a small group of the professional, to understand the teaching quality and teaching environment of the universities. Quality reports should not only mention the advantages but also propose existing problems and improvement methods. Students can also carefully choose their universities and majors after reading quality reports. As mentioned above, quality reports from many universities are generally identical, making it difficult for students and parents to understand the unique characteristics of universities.

3.4 Strong sense of self-praise

Judging from quality reports from various universities, many of them show their teaching achievements by the number of students enrolled, the number of graduates, the scientific research results, the employment rate, the number of papers published of students and social awards obtained by graduates, etc. However, the phenomenon of violating discipline, being punished and dropping out of the university for undergraduate did not be mentioned at all. Some of the universities even gave full marks to themselves in their quality report. That makes these reports are seemed to be more like a work report in favor of the superior than an objective assessment, showing achievements to the superior and covers up the shortcomings. Such perfunctory behavior reduces the value of quality reports. As mentioned above, most of the reports have a similar form that lacks in features, and most of them foster strengths and circumvent weaknesses. It is hard to fully understand the real situation of the universities.

3.5 Avoiding reality

The report of quality, as an important informational vehicle to help the general public understand the teaching quality of universities, should reflect the teaching quality in a thorough and objective way. All these universities have introduced respective fruits of educational reform comprehensively but the explanations about their shortcomings only reveal the common and obvious problems, such as minding updates, the studying attitude of students, academic atmosphere, the teaching technologies, insufficient immerse of teachers in teaching, etc. These problems occupy little space in the quality reports and merely been demonstrated symbolically. On the one hand, reports do not expose the root of problems in the educational development, on the other hand, reports that reflect the facts should hinge on the realistic data, but very few universities execute it actually. some universities only selectively disclose some glossy data to maintain its slick image or just cope with superior requirements perfunctorily.

3.6 Incomprehensive analysis

According to the quality reports, they all introduce their undergraduate teaching quality from the respects of the following: the guiding ideology of running a university, the construction of teaching staffs, education investment and teaching conditions, specialty construction, curriculum construction, practical teaching, teaching quality management and teaching effect, etc. However, the factors that are important to students' growth, such as campus culture and students' well-being, are less involved.

3.7 Lacks in feedback and supervision.

The report of quality provides an important way to promote teaching quality monitoring and an effective form to respond to the social accountability system. In substance, the production of the report of quality represent the process of self-evaluation and self-diagnosis of teaching quality of universities, and this report is an effective information carrier disclosure in universities that could deeper public understanding about teaching quality of universities. Since universities play the main role of autonomously publishing their report, although the education department of government has teaching quality evaluation centers, they do more evaluation by themselves. It is insufficient and unable to give university consumers and employers a satisfactory answer. Therefore, quality reports still need to be combined with other professional and social evaluations to reflect the education and teaching quality of universities comprehensively and objectively. Nevertheless, based on the current released reports, many universities do not have the courage to disclose their own problems faithfully due to social environmental factors and other factors.

The release of quality reports becomes a platform to help the public in understanding the information of teaching quality of universities quickly, but the reliability should be questioned. There is no information feedback platform to respond to and cope with this problem at present and these drawbacks decrease the credibility of quality reports to some extent.

4. Enlightenment

High education institutes in China and the United States share a common concern in ensuring and improving the quality of undergraduate teaching. We draw numerous beneficial inspirations by the comparison of teaching quality between Chinese and American universities. Although the educational systems of China and America are quite different due to differences in cultural backgrounds and educational systems, the quality of teaching is always the central concern of universities. Therefore, we should learn from each other to ensure and improve the quality of undergraduate teaching, which is not only a crucial issue of higher education internationalization, but also the most basic requirement of university teaching quality in the 21st century.

4.1 Combination of diversification and individuation of cultivating modes

Whether undergraduate education is cultivating "generalists" or "specialists", it should be decided according to the special characteristics and employment direction of the subject. Some institutes basically adopt the "generalist" cultivating mode, such as the college of humanities, college of arts, part of the colleges of social sciences, etc. Institute of technology or something basically adopts the cultivating mode of "generalist + specialist". Medical college, college of oral medicine basically adopt the "specialist" cultivating mode.

In the curriculum provision, we should pay attention to the study of writing courses and cultural literacy. Freshmen must pass a writing test in the United States. This point is worth for us to reference, at present the writing ability of students is not strong in China. This problem has been exposed and no forceful measures have been taken for a long time. Meanwhile, due to the division of liberal arts and science and busy with the National College Entrance Examination in China, the cultural literacy of students is far from meeting the requirement of Chinese cultural inheriting and development.

4.2 Introducing third-party institutional assessment to strengthen teaching quality control

In China, due to the fact that the formulation and release of the quality report are the concrete implementation of *The Outline of National Medium and Long-term education Reforms and development Program (2010-2020)*, there remains the administrative accountability between universities and the government in the traditional sense while the public cannot participate in it. Moreover, there is no third-party evaluation institution to supervise it. Based on the problems in quality reports of universities, we believe that we can learn from *The Report of Education Accountability of the United States (2018)* and carry out a third-party evaluation so as to strengthen the reliability of the teaching quality assessment of universities.

The main body of American educational accountability is a third-party assessment agency. The third-party evaluation supervises and evaluates the project implementation process and results by the participation or leadership of intermediary organizations, including various social professional institutions, university research institutes, etc., there is no direct administrative affiliation with government departments, so it is also called "unofficial evaluation". Generally, the third-party evaluators include the public who are higher education consumers, employers and experts in teaching quality evaluation which shows that the personnel involved in third-party assessments are representative. However, there are only a limited number of people who can actually enter universities for on-site assessment, and it is necessary to select representatives from the third-party agency to form an evaluation institution. The third-party evaluation institution enters universities to conduct the on-site evaluation and other personnel will mainly supervise and give feedback as participants.

The third-party assessment agency needs the joint participation of three groups below:

(1) The general public. As direct or indirect consumers of higher education, the public is the real creator of higher education funds and the biggest stakeholder of teaching quality. Hence the public has the right to supervise and hold accountable to the authenticity of the quality reports.

(2) Employers. The most important strategic resource of employers is knowledge and technology and universities are the most vital source of them. Employers need talents with knowledge and skills in universities, meanwhile, employers also solve the employment problem for universities, which shows that the relationship between employers and universities is inseparable. They both have the responsibility to serve society. Thus, it is necessary for employers to supervise the teaching quality of universities and have the right to know the quality of universities.

(3) Furthermore, to ensure the reports' quality, there should be experts in teaching quality evaluation and the quality of the report needs to be tested by professionals.

In conclusion, although some relevant information about the teaching quality of universities has been provided, there are still some problems in terms of integrity, systematisms and importance of information disclosure in the reports of 18 universities in the United States, which situation is quite similar to China. Thus, in order to ensure the objectivity and comprehensiveness of information disclosure of teaching quality, education authorities of each nation need to strengthen guidance and supervision in terms of the macro-level and continue to improve the report of the annual undergraduate teaching quality so as to present the undergraduate teaching quality level of universities in an all-round way. Meanwhile, undergraduate teaching quality reports provide all-round, objective, fair and crucial information of the university teaching quality, so they can help the information users to make scientific and reasonable decisions.

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