

# Research on the Development of Characteristic Curriculum Resources in Universities for Nationalities

Taking Washington State University as an Example

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**Abstract**—In view of the influence of cultural background on students' academic achievements, multi-ethnic countries have explored and practiced to improve the academic achievements of ethnic minority students from a cultural perspective, and gradually built a complete characteristic curriculum system, providing a perspective other than politics and economy for improving the educational quality of ethnic minorities, and achieved remarkable results. Washington State University is one of the most outstanding universities in the United States that implement the characteristic curriculum. The analysis of the development of the characteristic curriculum resources of this university has certain reference significance for ethnic colleges to develop the characteristic curriculum construction, promote ethnic exchanges and integration, and enhance the academic achievements of ethnic minority students.

**Keywords**—universities for nationalities; characteristic curriculum development; academic achievement improvement; enlightenment

## I. INTRODUCTION

Education is the driving force of economic development in ethnic minority areas. However, the general minority groups are backward in the overall level of education development. The academic research also shows that minority students studying in colleges and universities have poor school adaptability, low enthusiasm for learning and low academic performance. Therefore, it is of great significance to improve the academic achievements of minority students in universities for nationalities. In the 1950s, American colleges and universities began to explore and practice the improvement of the academic achievements of minority students from a cultural perspective, and gradually built a complete curriculum system, which provided a new perspective for improving the quality of minority education other than politics and economy. Washington State University is one of the most outstanding universities that implement the characteristic curriculum. The analysis of the curriculum setting of this university has certain reference and enlightenment significance to the construction of characteristic courses in universities for

nationalities in multi-ethnic countries and to improve the academic achievements of ethnic minority students.

The characteristic curriculum refers to the organic integration of knowledge about different ethnic groups in the context of cultural diversity, the development of independent courses or integration into other related courses, the presentation of cultural diversity, the cultivation of students' correct attitude for cultural diversity. It also ensure students of different cultural backgrounds a fair chance to learning resources, helps students adapt to the school and the society, and ultimately achieves the goal of multicultural harmony and integration development.

## II. THE GOAL OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHARACTERISTIC CURRICULUM RESOURCES

Firstly, the process of implementing characteristic curriculum in Washington State University was analyzed. According to Bloom's classification of goals, the goals of characteristic curriculum in American colleges and universities are summarized into three aspects: knowledge, ability, emotional attitude and values:

### A. The Goal of Knowledge

It mainly includes: understanding the concepts of "ego, stereotype, prejudice, integration and assimilation". The characteristic curriculum helps minority students to understand the meaning of culture, the process of cultural formation and the changes of traditional culture, and improve students' sensitivity, cognition and understanding of culture, examine whether there is cultural bias in the education content and education process, ensure the integration trend of the characteristics of the courses, and master certain social norms, so as to prepare for their participation in globalization.

### B. The Goal of Ability

The implementation of characteristic curriculum can improve students' cooperative learning ability, form their faith in democracy and participate in social democratic activities, help them to correctly recognize the value of different groups in society and solve the conflict between the

real background and ideal in individual development, so that students have the ability to inherit and innovate their own national cultural traditions and heritage. Specifically, students' ability to interact with different cultural groups, participate in different ethnic and cultural exchanges, participate in social democratic life; overcome stereotypes about ethnic and cultural diversity, and form cross-cultural communication skills among different cultural groups. These abilities help to improve the academic achievement of minority students and are also essential for a qualified citizen.

### C. The Goal of Emotion, Attitude and Value

The objectives of this dimension include: through the study of curriculum, to cultivate students' positive emotions towards cultural diversity; to form the attitude of the appreciation of cultural diversity, to respect the values of different cultures for society and human beings; to understand and grateful for their own cultural background; to develop students' self-awareness and self-confidence; to enhance the national self-esteem and self-confidence of minority students, to form a correct attitude towards the contradiction between ideals and reality in the development of human history; to help students to face up to and understand the different styles of conduct, the concept of work, and the unique values, to develop democratic attitudes and values, thus promoting the harmonious development of all ethnic groups in society to meet the needs of the development of multicultural society.

## III. THE THEME CONTENT OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHARACTERISTIC CURRICULUM

Guided by the standards of NCSS, Washington State University has developed five characteristic curriculums: research on social problems of various ethnic groups, language of ethnic minorities, cultural diversity, history and art of ethnic minorities.

### A. Research on Social Problems of Various Ethnic Groups

The main purpose of this research is to let students understand the political status quo of the country, understand the development process of various ethnic groups in the multi-ethnic country and the main problems facing their survival, and train students to examine the issue of national development from a political standpoint, recognizing that only the common prosperity of all ethnic groups, the unity and cooperation of all ethnic groups can achieve the real development and prosperity of the whole country. The research topics offered by Washington State University include: study on contemporary African-American and Mexican families; study on contemporary Asian and Pacific islander; study on ethnic, and cultural diversity; study on Japanese-American; issue study on contemporary American Asian and Latino community; study on contemporary American aboriginal social issues; study on Indian tradition and innovation issues.

For example, the Asian Americans and Pacific Islander Americans curriculum consists primarily of civil rights and obligations, law and justice, immigration and national

security, economics and culture, education and language, gender, marital issues, and other contents. Teachers and students explore the ethnic issues, political and economic inequalities and the legacies of colonialism presented in the curriculum, and analyze the formation process of the national political system and judicial system. [1]

### B. Research on Language and Culture of Ethnic Minorities

Language is the link of cultural communication. Mastering each other's language is the most effective way to overcome the stereotype of different groups. Colleges and universities will offer some minority language courses depending on the school conditions. For example, Washington State University offers courses in Swahili and Tagalog. The purpose of these courses is not only to promote cultural understanding and communication through learning languages, but also to provide knowledge of cultural diversity, to form an attitude of respecting and appreciating cultural diversity, and to prepare conditions for cross-cultural exchanges among ethnic groups.

For example, Basic Swahili Course focuses on simple oral language, reading, and writing to understand the cultures and customs of people in eastern Africa. Intermediate Swahili focuses on children's literature, poetry and folklore. Basic Tagalog aims to master the vocabulary and basic structure of the Filipino language and practice listening, speaking, reading and writing. The goal of Intermediate Tagalog is to improve students' intercultural understanding and communication ability. The objective of Advanced Tagalog is to understand the important influence of cultural background in dialogue, mainly studying poetry, prose and drama in contemporary Philippine (Tagalog). [2]

### C. Research on Cultural Diversity

The contents of this module are typical general education, which only presents different cultural contents, helping students to feel, appreciate and respect cultural diversity. This module mainly offers courses including: history of Jewish national struggle; Overview of Russian and Slavic culture and civilization; Korean and Japanese female studies; religious diversity: medieval Russian literature; religious, culture, politics and social revolution in French; Chinese popular culture in the 21st century: Vietnam's urban development and culture. This module mainly studies the cultural diversity of various countries in the world, which is conducive to helping students of different ethnic groups to broaden their horizon, form a knowledge, understanding and tolerance of cultural diversity, and better cultivate the cross-cultural ability of students of different ethnic groups.

With the course Overview of Russian and Slavic culture and civilization by Washington State University in the spring of 2018 as an example, students study literature, historical classics, music, films and other representative works to discuss the cultural and historical changes of the Russian and Slavic nations from pre-Christian to contemporary times. The learning content covers myths, folk tales, moral anecdotes and music, painting, architecture and other contents of different cultural groups and religions. [3] Through the study, students will understand the development

of Russian and Slavic secular literature and the historical reasons for the formation of national cultural characteristics, which will help them to understand the cultural diversity of the world.

#### *D. Research on History of Ethnic Minorities*

The main purpose of this module is to make all ethnic groups and mainstream ethnic groups in the country realize the important contributions of ethnic minorities in the historical process, understand the status quo and causes of ethnic minorities' political, economic and social status, and cultivate students' ability to analyze and solve practical problems by learning the history and culture of ethnic minorities. This topic mainly includes: Historical studies of the American south after the Civil War; Historical studies of African American, Asian American, Mexican American and Filipino American; Ethnography on Southeast Asian/Asian; Study on Transnationalism and Community; History of overseas Chinese; Jazz Age; Food Sovereignty Movement in Mexico and the United States; Indigenous People Studies in the Northwest Pacific; History of American Indian.

For example, the Jazz Age course mainly shows the development of the United States from the First World War to the great art renaissance. Students learn about the interplay of African Americans and Anglo-Saxons in politics, economics, literature, race relations, and jazz culture that created a new era in America. [4]

#### *E. Research on Art of Ethnic Minorities*

This module presents the contributions of ethnic minorities in the development of human history, provides opportunities for ethnic minorities to understand each other's different ways of thinking, behavior and values, and promotes the understanding and communication between ethnic groups. The main content includes: study on African-American, Asian, Latino and Indian, such as African-American literature; study on African-American film and television; study on African literature schools; study on African-American women in film and television; African pop music; African-American folk festivals; comparative study of American minority literature; Asian American drama; Asian American poetry studies; Hawaiian literature studies; Latin American film and television appreciation; Native American traditional etiquette, traditional music, art and aesthetics.

The course Latino Film and Television Appreciation presents contemporary Latino theater settings and performing arts in the United States. By studying the course, students will learn about Latino art design theory, cultural traditions, script writing logic, Latino language, performing art forms, and film and television content innovation. [5]

For the convenience of students to choose according to their interests and major characteristics, the characteristic course modules of Washington State University are mainly offered in the form of general optional courses or professional optional courses. The school only sets requirements in terms of credits and class hours. In terms of class hours, the content of characteristic courses should

account for 12.9% of the optional courses of the colleges. Students must complete at least 24 credits of characteristic courses in the general optional courses to meet graduation requirements. The characteristic curriculum helps students from different cultural backgrounds adapt to the school environment, enhance their academic achievements, and cultivate the cross-cultural competence of minority students in today's international society.

#### IV. THE EFFECT OF DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING CHARACTERISTIC CURRICULUM IN AMERICAN COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

A 2013 report from the United States Department of Education showed that approximately 83.7% of US colleges and universities offer characteristic curriculum. Some of these schools require students to take a characteristic curriculum to qualify for graduation, and nearly 50% require students to take two characteristic curriculums to qualify for graduation; 25% of colleges and universities have achieved fruitful results in the field of characteristic curriculum in the past 10 years. Individual universities that do not have characteristic curriculum are also devoted to the development and implementation of this course. The Office of Minority Affairs and Cultural Diversity at Washington State University published a research report on the learning outcomes of characteristic curriculum in 2016. The research data shows that African American students have enhanced their academic self-confidence, shown more obvious interest in school life and social activities, and have stronger critical thinking ability. They can analyze problems with critical and dialectical thinking, and show a better trend of academic attainment. The graduation rate of minority students at Washington State University rose from 60.4% in 2006 to 71.4% in 2016. [6] Facts have proved that the development and implementation of characteristic curriculum has improved students' understanding of cultural significance, formed the ability to deal with mainstream culture and cultural diversity, and improved their ability to think and learn.

#### V. CONCLUSION

Here are some experience and enlightenment that can be learned from the development of characteristic curriculum in universities for nationalities.

##### *A. The Curriculum Objectives of the Development of Characteristic Curriculum Resources Are Clear and Specific*

Taylor's model of target curriculum development points out that clear target is the premise of ensuring curriculum development and implementation. Washington State University has developed a distinctive curriculum goal in terms of knowledge, abilities, emotion, attitude and value. The goal of knowledge is to require students to understand the culture and history of ethnic minorities, to know that cultural diversity is not a defect but a valuable asset; the goal of ability is to form communication and cooperation skills, to form dialectical thinking ability, to think and correctly

handle conflicts between people of different cultural backgrounds, to adapt to the school and participate in social democratic activities; while the goal of emotional attitude and value is to recognize the significance of cultural diversity, recognizing that the development of the country depends on the common development of all ethnic groups. In the process of developing characteristic curriculum resources, universities for nationalities should also determine the course objectives, select course materials according to the goals, and compile the course content.

#### *B. The Content of Curriculum Resources Should Be Rich*

According to characteristic curriculum objectives, Washington State University has set up five systematic and rich content systems, including the study of contemporary social reality, minority history and culture, art and language culture. Students are free to choose courses with different subject modules depending on their situation. These contents cover not only traditional cultural knowledge but also the practical problems of contemporary social development, which helps students understand social reality, understand the origin and development of today's social cultural diversity, and improve students' recognition of their own culture, and the cognition of different cultures, strengthen the experience of positive emotions and lay the foundation for the formation of mutual understanding, mutual respect and mutual exchange between all ethnic groups.

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