

# The Role and Practice of University Counselors in Students' Career Guidance: Implications for Educational Management

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**Abstract:** This study explores the role positioning and practical approaches of university counselors in student career guidance. Through qualitative research methods, 28 counselors from a certain university in Fuzhou, China were interviewed using semi-structured methods. The specific roles, implementation strategies, and challenges faced by counselors in career guidance were analyzed. The study found that counselors are not only guides for students' career planning, but also supporters and disseminators of information. However, issues such as unclear role definitions, limited professional capabilities, and insufficient technical empowerment still need to be addressed. This study provides strategic suggestions for higher education administrators to enhance career guidance services, aiming to improve graduates' employment capabilities and career satisfaction.

**Keywords:** University Counselor; Career Guidance; Role Positioning; Practical Strategies; Educational Management.

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## 1. Introduction

With the transformation of higher education in China from an elite model to a mass education model, enhancing the employment capabilities of graduates has become an important issue in educational management. University counselors, as the main managers of students' daily affairs, have increasingly prominent roles in career guidance. However, current research on the specific roles and practical methods of counselors in career guidance is still insufficient. This study aims to clarify the role positioning of counselors in career guidance through systematic analysis, and propose strategic suggestions for strengthening career guidance services.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. The Importance of Vocational Guidance in Higher Education

The expansion of the global higher education system has intensified the competition in the job market for graduates. Career guidance has become a core component of university management (Hooley, Hutchinson, & Neary, 2017). It not only helps students prepare for employment, but also supports lifelong learning, career identity development, and career adaptability.

### 2.2. The Role of Counselors in Career Development

In China, counselors traditionally have been responsible for ideological and political education. However, with the changes in the labor market demand, their roles have expanded to include facilitators of career awareness, mentors for career exploration, and guides for career planning (Jin, 2019). The clarity of role positioning directly affects the effectiveness of career guidance.

### 2.3. Practice and Strategies of Counselor Career Guidance

The counselor identifies students' career needs through daily communication, designs activities, seminars and individual tutoring courses to cultivate career awareness and employment skills (Jiao, 2019). At the same time, employment training is integrated into student programs to enhance the connection between academic learning and job requirements.

### 2.4. The International Perspective on Vocational Guidance

International research has emphasized the significance of cultural awareness in career counseling. The integration of information and communication technologies has transformed the way of career guidance, enhancing accessibility and efficiency. Global best practices indicate that comprehensive career services include counseling, experiential learning, internships, and employer cooperation (Hooley et al., 2017).

## 3. Methods

### 3.1. Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design and deeply combines the phenomenological method, aiming to deeply and meticulously explore the role positioning and specific practical situations of university counselors in students' career planning. By focusing on the counselors' personal feelings, experiences, and perceptions during the career planning guidance process, it is possible to uncover the underlying motivations and meanings hidden behind the surface behaviors. It is expected to construct a comprehensive, accurate, and representative model of the counselor's role and practice in career planning, providing a solid theoretical foundation and reference basis for subsequent research and practice.

### **3.2. Participants**

This study will select 28 university counselors from Fuzhou University of International Studies and Trades as the research subjects. These counselors were selected through purposive sampling. By including numerous counselors with different characteristics, it is possible to more comprehensively reflect the overall situation of the counselor group in career planning guidance, thereby enhancing the universality and applicability of the research results. Moreover, this study did not group the participants but conducted the research on them as a whole, so as to grasp the role and practical model of counselors in career planning from a macro perspective.

### **3.3. Instrument**

The main research tool of this study is a carefully designed semi-structured interview guide. The design of the interview guide closely revolves around the core issues of the research, namely the perception, practice and professional development needs of counselors. To ensure the scientificity, effectiveness and reliability of the interview guide, multiple rounds of optimization were carried out before its formal use. For instance, experts in the relevant field were invited to review the interview guide. The experts provided valuable opinions and suggestions from aspects such as the research purpose, question design, and logical structure, and made preliminary improvements to the interview guide. At the same time, a pilot test was conducted. A small number of representative counselors were selected for pre-interviews. Based on their feedback and the actual situation during the interview process, further adjustments and optimizations were made to the interview guide to make it more complete and easier to operate.

### **3.4. Data Analysis**

Data analysis is a key component of this research, and it is carried out strictly following the three stages of the phenomenological method, namely open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. In the open coding stage, an open mindset is required to capture various pieces of information in the data as much as possible, without pre-setting any theoretical framework or assumptions, in order to ensure a comprehensive and accurate understanding of the counselor's statements and viewpoints. Axial coding is conducted based on the open coding stage. In this stage, by analyzing, it is found that there is a close internal connection between the counselor's role cognition, practical behavior, and professional development needs. Role cognition affects practical behavior, while professional development needs, in turn, promote the deepening of role cognition and the improvement of practical behavior. Selective coding is carried out on the basis of axial coding, further refining and focusing on core concepts. Through selective coding, the role and practical model of the counselors in career planning, as well as the interaction mechanism among various elements, can be clearly presented.

## **4. Research Results**

### **4.1. The Perception of the Role of the Counselor**

In this study, through in-depth interviews with 28 counselors, it was found that the majority of them generally

regarded themselves as career advisors, information disseminators and psychological supporters. In their daily work, they actively guided students to explore the characteristics and requirements of different career fields, and tailored initial career planning schemes for them based on students' interests, hobbies, professional skills and personal traits.

### **4.2. Practical Experience in Career Guidance**

In actual career guidance practice, counselors have adopted various methods to provide students with comprehensive career guidance services. One of the common approaches used by counselors is individual counseling. Through one-on-one in-depth communication with students, counselors can gain a more comprehensive and accurate understanding of students' career dilemmas, interests, hobbies, and personal strengths. Thus, they can offer more targeted career suggestions and guidance to students. At the same time, in combination with the actual situation of the job market, counselors analyze the development prospects and employment situations of different careers for students and assist them in formulating personalized career planning schemes.

### **4.3. Challenges and Opportunities Faced**

During the process of promoting career guidance, counselors encounter numerous challenges. Firstly, the lack of awareness regarding career planning among students is a widespread issue. Some students do not fully understand the significance of career planning and lack the initiative to undertake it. They do not have clear learning goals or career directions during their university years, resulting in confusion and helplessness when facing employment after graduation. Secondly, the failure to update employment market information promptly also poses certain difficulties for counselors' career guidance work. The employment market is constantly changing, with industry dynamics, enterprise recruitment demands, and other information constantly evolving. However, currently, the channels through which universities obtain employment market information are relatively limited, leading to a certain lag in the employment information provided to students and failing to meet their actual needs.

## **5. Discussion and Suggestions**

### **5.1. Define the Role Positioning**

Colleges and universities should clearly define the important role of counselors in career guidance. Counselors should focus on providing career support, offering professional career planning guidance, employment information services, and psychological support to students, helping them smoothly transition from campus to the workplace. Colleges can formulate detailed job responsibility lists and work process norms, establish scientific and reasonable assessment and evaluation mechanisms, incorporate career guidance work into the performance evaluation system of counselors, and motivate counselors to actively and proactively carry out career guidance work, enhancing the targeted and effective nature of career guidance.

### **5.2. Strengthen Professional Training**

Colleges and universities should establish a comprehensive training system for counselors. Based on the actual needs and

career development directions of counselors, personalized training plans should be formulated. The training content should cover various aspects, including the study of theoretical knowledge related to career planning, such as the basic concepts, principles, and methods of career planning, the characteristics and needs at different career development stages; training on the use of career assessment tools, enabling counselors to master the operation methods and interpretation skills of various career interest assessments, ability assessments, personality assessments, etc., so as to accurately assess students' career tendencies and strengths; crisis intervention training, enabling counselors to provide timely and correct guidance and assistance when students encounter employment setbacks, psychological pressure, and other crisis situations, and maintain their mental health. In addition, colleges and universities can also regularly organize counselors to participate in off-campus career guidance seminars, academic exchange activities, etc., allowing counselors to understand the latest industry developments and cutting-edge concepts, broaden their horizons, and continuously improve their professional level and comprehensive qualities.

### 5.3. Innovative Guidance Model

Colleges and universities should increase their investment in the construction of digital platforms, and build an online career guidance platform with complete functions and convenient operation. This platform can integrate various functions such as employment information release, career assessment, online consultation, resume submission, and mock interviews, providing students with one-stop career guidance services. Through the online platform, students can obtain employment market information and career guidance resources at any time, communicate and interact with counselors online, and improve the accessibility and efficiency of career guidance services. At the same time, introducing artificial intelligence tools to assist career guidance work, such as using an intelligent resume screening system to quickly screen resumes that meet the requirements of enterprises, improving recruitment efficiency; using career interest assessment software to provide students with more accurate career interest analysis reports, helping students better understand their career tendencies; using big data analysis technology to deeply mine and analyze employment market information, providing valuable decision-making references for counselors and students. In addition, colleges and universities can also explore the implementation of an online-offline combined career guidance model, combining the convenience of the online platform with the individualized and in-depth nature of offline counseling, to meet the diverse needs of students. For example, posting career guidance courses and learning materials on the online platform for students to study independently; regularly organizing offline lectures, workshops, and one-on-one counseling activities to provide students with face-to-face communication and guidance opportunities, enhancing the effectiveness of career guidance.

### 5.4. Strengthening Cooperation Between Schools and Enterprises

Strengthening cooperation with enterprises is an important way to improve the quality of vocational guidance and facilitate students' smooth employment. Universities should actively and proactively establish long-term and stable

cooperative relationships with enterprises. Through signing cooperation agreements, jointly building internship and training bases, and conducting customized talent cultivation programs, they can deepen the cooperation content and achieve mutual benefit and win-win results. During the cooperation process, universities can invite human resource experts from enterprises and industry elites to serve as part-time career guidance teachers. They can organize special lectures, career planning guidance, and internship training activities for students, enabling them to directly understand the employer needs and industry standards of the enterprises, and learn practical workplace skills and experiences. At the same time, enterprises can provide more internships and employment opportunities for university students, prioritize the recruitment of outstanding graduates from the cooperating universities, and build a good employment platform for students. Moreover, universities and enterprises can jointly develop vocational guidance courses and carry out teaching reforms based on the actual needs of enterprises, so that the talent cultivation is more in line with market demands and enhances students' employment competitiveness. To ensure the effective implementation of school-enterprise cooperation, universities should establish a sound management mechanism for school-enterprise cooperation, clearly define the rights and obligations of both parties, strengthen the supervision and evaluation of cooperation projects, promptly solve problems arising during the cooperation process, and promote the continuous deepening of school-enterprise cooperation.

## 6. Conclusion

This study conducted a comprehensive and in-depth exploration of the role and practice of university counselors in student career guidance. Through detailed analysis of the research results and comprehensive consideration based on the discussion suggestions, we clearly recognized that counselors occupy a crucial and irreplaceable position in the student career guidance system. At the same time, we also identified the challenges currently faced by career guidance work and the future development direction. This study provides beneficial exploration and suggestions for the role and practice of university counselors in student career guidance. However, there are still many unknown areas in the university career guidance work that require further research. We hope that through continuous future research, the university career guidance system can be continuously improved, providing more high-quality and efficient services for students' career development, and helping students achieve high-quality employment and life value.

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