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Empowerment Mechanisms and Practical Pathways of Enterprise Attachment Programs for University Counselors in Promoting Employment-Oriented Education: A Perspective of Ideological and Political Education

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Abstract

Employment-oriented education is an integral part of ideological and political education in Chinese universities and a key link in fulfilling the fundamental task of fostering virtue through education. At present, graduate employment is under pressure from both aggregate supply and structural mismatch, and students' attitudes toward career choice are changing in visible ways. In practice, employment work often gives more weight to job placement than to value guidance, and more to job-hunting skills than to long-term career development, which falls short of the character-building mission of ideological and political education. Counselors are the backbone of students' day-to-day ideological and political education, and their own understanding of the occupational world directly conditions how effective employment-oriented education can be. Sending counselors to enterprises for temporary on-the-job attachments is an institutional experiment that aims to bridge the cognitive gap between campus and workplace and to strengthen counselors' educational capacity. Drawing mainly on the enterprise attachment program at South China University of Technology, and on earlier explorations at Tianjin University, Huazhong University of Science and Technology and other institutions, this paper examines the mechanisms through which enterprise attachments empower employment-oriented education at three levels, namely cognitive, competency-based and ecological, and proposes practical

pathways in five areas: value guidance, top-level design, process management, outcome transformation and institutional support. The study argues that counselor enterprise attachments are not job training in the ordinary sense; they are an effective vehicle for embedding the value guidance of ideological and political education into the whole process of employment work, and they carry positive implications for building a development-oriented system of employment-oriented education.

Keywords

ideological and political education, employment-oriented education, university counselors, enterprise attachment, fostering virtue through education

Employment is the most basic component of people's wellbeing; it bears directly on their vital interests, on the healthy development of the economy and society, and on the long-term stability of the country[1]. The employment of college graduates has always been high on the agenda of the CPC Central Committee. The class of 2025 numbered 12.22 million, and aggregate pressure on the labor market is compounded by structural mismatch. Meanwhile, students' views on career choice are changing in visible ways. Phenomena such as "delayed employment" and "slow employment" point to a degree of confusion in how some students judge the value of work, and the pluralistic discourses circulating online continue to shape how young people imagine their careers[3]. Under these conditions, employment work in universities cannot stop at providing information and drilling interview skills; it has to address questions of value: why one works, where one chooses to work, and with what attitude.

Employment-oriented education belongs, by definition, to ideological and political education. The Outline of the Plan for Building a Leading Country in Education (2024-2035), issued by the CPC Central Committee and the State Council, calls for reshaping the landscape of character-building education and implementing a new-era project of fostering virtue[2]. Employment sits at the exit end of talent cultivation; whether years of ideological and political education have worked is often put to the test in the concrete act of choosing a career. In practice, however, employment work and ideological and political education at some universities still run on two parallel tracks: employment guidance concentrates on technical matters such as résumé writing and interview skills, while value guidance rarely goes beyond general slogans, and the two are seldom woven together. The reasons are many, but one deserves particular attention. Counselors, who carry front-line responsibility for employment-oriented education, have mostly moved straight from campus to campus, without firsthand experience of the real workplace. Faced with students' career confusions, they find it hard to respond persuasively, and value guidance easily turns hollow.

In recent years, quite a few universities have experimented with sending counselors to enterprises for temporary on-the-job attachments. Tianjin University began the practice in 2014 and has since dispatched 182 full-time counselors to key employers[4]; Huazhong University of Science and Technology, the University of Electronic Science and Technology of China, and Southwest Jiaotong University have launched attachment programs of various forms (see Table 1). Most of these programs

were initially motivated by practical concerns, such as broadening employment channels and learning what employers need, but their effects have spilled well beyond routine employment affairs and taken on a distinctly educational character. From the perspective of ideological and political education, this paper takes the counselor attachment program at South China University of Technology as its main case, drawing on the earlier experience of several other universities, and asks three questions. What exactly does an enterprise attachment empower counselors to do in employment-oriented education? Through what mechanisms does this empowerment take place? And how should universities design and run such programs so that the educational resources of the enterprise front line can be converted into real educational outcomes?

Table 1. Enterprise Attachment Programs for Counselors (Employment Service Staff) at Selected Chinese Universities

No.	University	Personnel attached	Host organizations (sectors)	Attachment arrangements
1	Tianjin University	Full-time counselors	Key employers (across industries)	Launched in 2014; 182 counselor-times dispatched to date; strengthens value guidance on employment, deepens university–enterprise cooperation and precise matching, and promotes close linkage between employment and cultivation
2	Nanjing Tech University	Full-time counselors	Key organizations including China Construction Third Bureau First Engineering Co., Wuxi Transportation Construction Group, and Jiangsu Planning and Design Group	Launched in 2021 as part of the university's "one industry, ten enterprises" employment work system; organizes student internships and practical training at enterprises
3	Huazhong University of Science and Technology	College deputy Party secretaries; full-time	Six organizations including China General Nuclear Power Group and Shanghai Electric	Launched in 2023; summer attachments of 15–30 days; at least ten deputy secretaries or counselors sent annually to key employers and

		counselors	Group	grassroots units to learn employers' selection criteria and improve the workforce's career guidance capacity
4	University of Electronic Science and Technology of China	Full-time counselors	More than ten enterprises including Dongfang Electric and the 10th Research Institute of CETC	Launched in 2025; summer attachments of 7–14 days; counselors work inside enterprise HR departments and take part in campus recruiting, résumé screening, interview organization and onboarding training
5	Southwest Jiaotong University	Full-time counselors	Twenty organizations including China Railway Eighth Bureau and VeriSilicon	Launched in 2025; summer attachments of 7–14 days centered on "engaging industry frontiers and serving educational needs," covering rail transit, defense, aviation and energy; a final report is required
6	North China Electric Power University	Full-time counselors	Nine energy and power organizations including State Grid Electric Power	Launched in 2025; new and backbone counselors participate in a senior–junior pairing model, sharpening their sense of industry talent cultivation needs
7	Nanjing Forestry University	Full-time counselors	Human resources and social security departments in eleven districts of Nantong	Launched in 2025; fifteen counselors on 14-day attachments, deepening understanding of regional economic and industrial development and strengthening university–locality and university–enterprise cooperation

Note: Compiled by the authors from publicly available information.

1. The Significance of Counselor Enterprise Attachments from the Perspective of Ideological and

Political Education

1.1 An Intrinsic Requirement for Fulfilling the Fundamental Task of Fostering Virtue Through Education

Fostering virtue through education is the fundamental task of education, and employment-oriented education is an important vehicle for carrying it out. Scholars have noted that employment-oriented education offers an effective way to build a new ecology and pattern for implementing this fundamental task, since employment work combines value shaping, competence building and knowledge transmission in a single process[5]. A student's career choice is never a purely technical decision; it concentrates his or her worldview, outlook on life and values. Whether to work at the grassroots or stay in a big city, whether to devote oneself to fields of national strategic importance or to chase short-term gains: choices like these test the actual effectiveness of ideological and political education. The value of counselor enterprise attachments lies, first of all, in rooting value guidance in the real world of work. Only when counselors genuinely understand the striving that takes place on the industrial front line, and the staffing needs of strategically important sectors, can their guidance to students go beyond abstract exhortation and become value guidance that is fact-based, emotionally resonant and clearly oriented.

1.2 A Practical Necessity for Strengthening the Practical Character of Ideological and Political Education

Ideological and political education is, in essence, a practical activity. Real life is the soil in which moral thought grows; ideological and political education cut off from social reality and from people's genuine needs is like water without a source or a tree without roots[6]. This judgment applies to educators themselves. The counselor workforce in Chinese universities is young and highly educated; most counselors stay on at the university immediately after graduation, and their social experience, especially work experience in enterprises, is limited. When a counselor's knowledge of the occupational world comes mainly from secondhand materials, his or her employment guidance can hardly escape the predicament of armchair strategizing. Enterprise attachments place counselors, in the role of quasi-employees, inside real organizations, where embodied understanding is acquired through concrete work tasks. This is at once a process of making up for an individual counselor's lack of occupational experience and an intrinsic requirement for ideological and political education to honor the principle of linking theory with practice and returning to lived experience.

1.3 An Effective Pathway for the Professionalization of the Counselor Workforce

The Regulations on the Construction of the Counselor Workforce in Regular Higher Education Institutions define counselors as a backbone force in students' ideological and political education and as the organizers, implementers and guides of their day-to-day ideological education and management[7]. Career guidance and employment services are among counselors' principal duties, yet the system for cultivating the corresponding competencies remains underdeveloped, and it is not uncommon for meetings to substitute for training, or training for education. Temporary attachment has

long been an important way for the Communist Party of China to train its cadres; the practice can be traced back to the tradition of sending cadres down to the countryside during the revolutionary years, and the 1991 Decision of the CPC Central Committee on Intensifying the Training and Education of Young Cadres was the first document to establish attachment as a formal channel of cadre training[8]. Bringing this institutional arrangement into counselor workforce development, and extending the attachment setting from government organs and inter-university exchanges to employer enterprises, amounts to turning the requirement that educators must first be educated into an operable institutional design. It opens a new route toward the professionalization of the counselor workforce.

2. The Empowerment Mechanisms of Counselor Enterprise Attachments in Promoting Employment-Oriented Education

Viewed from ideological and political education, what enterprise attachments empower is anything but a vague broadening of horizons. The empowerment works through three interlocking mechanisms, cognitive, competency-based and ecological, which together raise the pertinence and effectiveness of employment-oriented education.

2.1 Cognitive Empowerment: From Secondhand Knowledge to Embodied Experience, Consolidating the Factual Basis of Value Guidance

The persuasiveness of ideological and political education rests on authenticity, and how counselors come to know the occupational world determines how credible their guidance will be. Enterprise attachment brings about three shifts at the cognitive level.

2.1.1 From Observer to Participant: Immersive Workplace Experience

Counselors embed themselves in specific enterprise positions as quasi-employees and experience the full cycle of work assignments, teamwork, performance appraisal and organizational culture. Take the counselor dispatched by South China University of Technology to XPeng Motors. Rotating through campus recruiting in four second-level departments, including materials technology and quality operations, this counselor handled 25 recruiting requirements across seven positions and reviewed more than 400 résumés from fresh graduates. In doing so, the counselor saw directly how the company combines systematic assessment tools with human judgment to identify candidates, and what it really expects in terms of motivation, competence and professional character. Knowledge acquired at this front line is far more concrete than secondhand accounts from a training workshop, and it converts more readily into convincing guidance in conversations with students.

2.1.2 Collecting Career Narratives: Fresh Material for Value Guidance

Counselors on attachment conduct in-depth interviews with enterprise employees, especially alumni, and gather stories of success and failure along their career paths. The counselor attached to Guangzhou Shipyard International distilled several distinct growth profiles from alumni trajectories: deep-technology, project management, and cross-boundary hybrid. Counselors from Tianjin University organized forums to study the career characteristics of alumni across age groups[4]. Stories of alumni

working on major national equipment or at key construction sites are themselves vivid teaching materials for education in ideals and convictions. The transmission of the revolutionary red gene and the promotion of craftsmanship depend on concrete people and stories[10], and enterprise attachments open precisely such a mine of material for counselors. Employment guidance thus shifts from one-way inculcation of grand principles toward emotional resonance and meaning-making inspired by real stories.

2.1.3 Understanding the Organizational Logic of Talent Development

By participating in competency modeling, talent reviews and the building of training systems, counselors come to see how organizations systematically identify, evaluate and develop people's potential. Counselors attached from the University of Electronic Science and Technology of China produced a Talent Demand Analysis Report and a Guide to the Full Recruitment Process after completing their attachments, mapping new competency requirements in electronic information and advanced manufacturing and offering recommendations on internships and career awareness education[11]. Such knowledge reveals that individual career growth is never spontaneous; it is constantly shaped by organizational institutions and development channels. Equipped with this understanding, counselors can build a workable bridge between students' inner qualities and external organizational demands, bringing value guidance down to an operable level.

2.2 Competency Empowerment: From Administrative Processing to Developmental Guidance, Upgrading Professional Competence for Employment-Oriented Education

Employment-oriented education requires counselors to move from being employment information officers to becoming career development mentors. Career development theory treats one's career as a dynamic process running through the entire life course and stresses the individual's continuous interaction with the environment at successive developmental stages[9], which demands professional competencies well beyond administrative processing. Such competencies cannot be cultivated by on-campus training alone; enterprise attachment provides a key arena in which they are generated.

2.2.1 Reading the Industry Ecosystem

Through attachment, counselors move past the surface information of job postings into an industry's value chain, technological trajectory and talent-demand map. The counselor attached to the CGN Lufeng nuclear power project analyzed systematically the growth prospects of the nuclear sector under the dual carbon goals, together with the company's three-in-one selection standard of engineering competence, safety literacy and innovation awareness. The counselor attached to China Construction Fourth Engineering Bureau mapped the company's Y-shaped dual career path, in which professional and managerial tracks run in parallel, as well as its training programs for young employees. Structured knowledge of this kind allows counselors to place students' career choices within the larger pattern of national industrial development and to make clear the inner unity between going where the country needs you and realizing personal value.

2.2.2 Mapping Career Pathways

Inside the enterprise, counselors gain a full picture of job grading systems, rotation mechanisms and internal labor-market rules, and extract from scattered information the structured growth logic endogenous to the organization. During an attachment at Wuxi Transportation Construction Group, a counselor from Nanjing Tech University conducted in-depth interviews with senior experts and, in light of the company's training plan, formed a three-dimensional picture of career growth paths and competency requirements across positions[12]. When a counselor can explain concretely and credibly what one's career will probably look like three, five or ten years after entry, career advising becomes genuinely persuasive, and employment-oriented education gains a professional fulcrum.

2.2.3 Communicating through Developmental Dialogue

Performance conversations and career-planning talks between managers and employees inside enterprises give counselors opportunities for observational learning. Counselors from Southwest Jiaotong University went deep into project sites, recorded managerial experience and technical innovation, and held immersive exchanges with employees and alumni[13]. This development-oriented mode of communication differs from traditional exhortatory guidance. It helps counselors learn to prompt students' self-reflection through questions and to support improvement through constructive feedback, treating students as the subjects of their own career development rather than as objects passively receiving arrangements.

2.3 Ecological Empowerment: From One-Way Supply and Demand to a Collaborative Education Community, Expanding the Boundaries of Employment-Oriented Education

Ecological systems theory holds that human development takes place within a system formed by the interaction of multiple settings, including educational institutions, families and workplaces[14]. Employment-oriented education is not a solo performance by the university, and the effective conduct of ideological and political education likewise emphasizes the coordinated participation of multiple actors[15]. Counselor enterprise attachments build an institutionalized bridge between university and enterprise and push the employment education ecosystem toward reconstruction.

2.3.1 From Resource-seeking to Value co-creation

Counselors enter enterprises with a clear educational mission and look actively for points where the two sides' interests in talent cultivation converge. The counselor attached to Midea Group, drawing on alumni interviews and the company's competency requirements, summed up the qualities graduates need to enter large corporations, while also identifying the company's needs for deepening R&D talent pipelines and for patent collaboration, and in this way built a two-way communication bridge. Reciprocity of this kind changes the old model in which the university unilaterally asked for positions, and turns the enterprise from a demand-side client into a participant in the educational process.

2.3.2 Building a Network of External Career Mentors

The personal trust and organizational identification established during an attachment are the social capital through which quality enterprise resources enter the university's educational system. After their

attachments ended, Tianjin University invited enterprise executives and technical specialists to campus to deliver career development lectures[4]. South China University of Technology set up on-campus enterprise studios and engaged outstanding HR managers as industry career mentors. The entry of enterprise mentors into the educational arena enlarges the faculty base of ideological and political education, and it is consistent with the direction of building a dual-qualified team that combines full-time and part-time educators[16].

2.3.3 Feeding Back into Industry–Education Integration

Counselors who have worked at the enterprise front line can spot the blockages in university–enterprise cooperation with particular acuity and provide the university with front-line references for improving collaborative education mechanisms. Counselors attached from Southwest Jiaotong University sat down face to face with enterprise leaders to discuss the connection points between what the university cultivates and what the industry needs, and pushed forward long-term items such as internship bases and industry–university–research cooperation[13]. This signals that the counselor workforce is shifting from administrative staff to a professionalized educational force with strategic thinking and a capacity for cross-boundary coordination.

3. Practical Pathways for Counselor Enterprise Attachments to Promote Employment-Oriented Education

3.1 Upholding Political Guidance and Keeping the Value Direction on Track

Ideological and political education has a pronounced ideological character[17]. A counselor enterprise attachment program must first answer the question: for what? It is not an ordinary round of enterprise visits to expand job opportunities, nor is it mere training in employment skills; its fundamental purpose is to make value guidance in employment-oriented education more pertinent and more effective. Three positionings should therefore be made explicit in program design. In terms of goals, the primary yardstick of an attachment's effectiveness should be whether it helps guide students to form a sound outlook on career choice and employment and to integrate personal development with national needs. In terms of content, counselors should be required, while learning about staffing needs, to pay particular attention to the educational resources an enterprise carries, such as its tradition of serving the country through industry and the spirit of model workers, the value of labor and craftsmanship, and to convert them consciously into reserves of material for moral guidance. In terms of discipline, the political requirements and behavioral boundaries during the attachment should be clearly stated, so that the work always serves the fundamental task of fostering virtue through education.

3.2 Improving Top-Level Design: A Selection Mechanism That Matches Supply and Demand

Enterprise attachment requires a three-way fit among the university's needs, the enterprise's resources and the counselor's development; there should be neither forced matchmaking nor nominal postings. In selecting host enterprises, four dimensions deserve attention: the industry's representativeness and its relevance to the university's disciplines (South China University of Technology focuses on advanced

manufacturing such as high-end equipment, robotics and automation, and new-energy vehicles); whether the enterprise has a sound talent development system able to offer real positions and deep participation; whether the enterprise is willing to collaborate, that is, to open core departments such as R&D and human resources, to assign enterprise mentors and to support the transformation of outcomes; and geographic fit, with preference given to regions where graduates are concentrated and sustained contact is convenient. In selecting counselors, three kinds of fit should be stressed: disciplinary fit, giving priority to counselors whose college specialties match the enterprise's industry; functional fit, assigning full-time employment counselors mainly to human resources departments; and motivational fit, requiring candidates to be willing to teach career-planning courses or offer employment counseling and to be clear about what the attachment means for their own role transition, so that no one is attached for attachment's sake. Most universities use a three-stage process of voluntary application, college recommendation and university-level review, striking a balance between individual willingness and the overall needs of the workforce.

3.3 Strengthening Process Management: A Collaborative University–Enterprise–Mentor Training System

Sending counselors out is not the end of the matter; the whole process needs organizational support. The university should take principal responsibility, setting a clear task list through pre-departure training and supporting counselors in reflective learning through resource integration and communities of practice, so that individual experience is converted into organizational knowledge. The enterprise should offer authentic practice settings, placing attached counselors in production and R&D, business management and human resources departments, where they can gather the information career guidance requires, such as job responsibilities and skill requirements, and at the same time observe the enterprise's internal talent development system and its expectations for employees' continued growth. Enterprise mentors should play an exemplary role. Each attached counselor is paired with a senior manager whose own career experience offers a replicable reference and lowers the counselor's cost of adaptation. After the attachment, the counselor is required to submit a research report covering staffing needs, the enterprise's talent development system and the space for university–enterprise cooperation, prompting the distillation of experience and the conversion of knowledge.

3.4 Advancing Outcome Transformation: Converting Attachment Gains into Educational Effectiveness

The value of an attachment is ultimately redeemed in the links of education. First, integration into teaching. In the formal curriculum, frontier technical requirements gathered from enterprises can, after review by the teaching committee, be written into relevant parts of the training program; in extracurricular education, counselors draw on what they saw during the attachment to tell true stories of serving the country through science, technology and industry, helping students appreciate the achievements of key sectors bearing on the national economy and people's livelihood and experience the beauty of labor and creation[19]. Ideological and political teaching needs to turn vivid contemporary practice into perceivable curricular resources[18], and the enterprise cases accumulated through

attachments are an important source of exactly such resources. Second, empowering research-based education. Drawing on the university–enterprise ties built during attachments, universities can set up enterprise practice positions for undergraduates and postgraduates, encouraging students to take part in frontier engineering practice, research problem-solving and thesis design, and to cultivate innovative ability while solving real enterprise problems. Third, upgrading employment-oriented education itself. Universities should build databases of key employers and pools of external career mentors, engaging executives, seasoned HR professionals and technical backbones in regular guidance on résumés, career planning and innovation and entrepreneurship. Tianjin University has transformed attachment outcomes into an extracurricular practice course on career planning and professional quality development in civil engineering and architecture, systematically incorporating enterprise cases into career education. In the transformation process, digital technologies should also be used to build case libraries, position databases and mentor resource pools, advancing the digital transformation of employment-oriented education[20].

3.5 Improving Institutional Support: A Long-Term Mechanism for Sustainable Development

First, a sound evaluation and incentive system. Assessment of attachment outcomes should go beyond short-term employment indicators to cover comprehensive benefits: improvement in counselors' educational competence, the landing of university–enterprise cooperation projects, and the quality of students' career development. Attachment experience should also be appropriately linked to rank promotion and awards for counselors, stimulating intrinsic motivation to participate. Second, broader industry coverage. While consolidating attachments in established key industries, universities should look for opportunities in enterprises of new industries, new business forms and new models. Innovative enterprises are concentrated among small and medium-sized firms whose organizational forms and hiring standards vary widely, which makes pre-attachment adaptive training all the more necessary. Third, better institutional articulation. The Administrative Measures for Industry-Based Part-Time Teachers at Regular Undergraduate Institutions, jointly issued by the Ministry of Education and seven other departments, is the first dedicated document regulating the selection, management and support of part-time teachers from industry[21], and it provides a policy interface for converting attachment outcomes into institutionalized teaching resources. Universities should actively align with these policies, exploring a chain that connects enterprise attachment, external mentorship and industry-based part-time teaching, while drawing on mature experience in cadre attachment management, such as precise selection, coordinated management and follow-up assessment[22], to keep improving program design and form a replicable, scalable model.

4. Conclusion

The deeper problems of employment work in universities usually lie not in poor information flow or inadequate skills, but in a rupture between value guidance and occupational cognition. Through its distinctive institutional design, the counselor enterprise attachment takes ideological and political

educators into the real world of work, where embodied experience brings cognitive renewal, competency reconstruction and ecological expansion, and converts the educational resources of the enterprise front line into actual educational outcomes. The lesson of this exploration is twofold. High-quality employment-oriented education must, at the level of ideas, insist on fostering virtue through education as the central link; and at the institutional level, it must open channels through which educators can step into society and into industry. Admittedly, the wider adoption of the attachment model still faces practical constraints, including the willingness of enterprises to participate, funding guarantees and outcome evaluation, and its long-term mechanism remains to be tested and refined at more universities. It is to be hoped that this exploration can provide a replicable sample of experience for the deep integration of ideological and political education with employment work in the new era.

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