

Original Paper

Practical Exploration of Integrating Career Planning Competitions into Mental Health Education in Universities

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Received: July 14, 2026

Accepted: July 25, 2026

Online Published: August 11, 2026

doi:10.22158/elsr.v7n3p66

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/elsr.v7n3p66>

Project

Supported by: National College Students Career Planning Competition – Research on Effectiveness and Mechanisms of Career Education (No. 25JY0309).

Abstract

Mental health education is an inherent requirement of comprehensive quality education. In the new era, it is urgent for universities to innovate work methods to balance academic course education, career education, and student mental health education. As a key position for cultivating young students, universities should fully value and leverage the positive significance of career planning competitions for student mental health, establish environmental courses to create a harmonious atmosphere for students' physical and mental growth, develop activity courses to guide students to show their individual charm, explore evaluation systems to encourage teachers and students to strive for excellence, and help students establish correct views on employment, career selection, and professionalism, as well as make good career planning.

Keywords

Career Planning Competition, College Mental Health Education, Practical Exploration

Mental quality is an important component of comprehensive human qualities and a crucial aspect of implementing quality education for young students. College students are at an important period of mental health formation and development, and the mental health education they receive during this stage plays a pivotal role in shaping their individual personality and forming their values. Paying attention to the mental health education of young students is of great significance for the healthy and substantial development of the national education cause. Therefore, carrying out mental health education in colleges

and universities and leveraging the promotional role of career planning competitions are necessary for the healthy growth of students; and it is an inevitable requirement for promoting quality education, and a major issue that is concerned by the people and all sectors of society.

1. The Necessity of Integrating Career Planning Competitions into Mental Health Education in Colleges and Universities

National College Student Career Planning Competition, a nationwide annual career planning competition organized by the Ministry of Education, aims to further popularize knowledge about career planning among college students, enhance their employment, entrepreneurship, and practical abilities, and promote their employment and entrepreneurship. Mental health education in colleges and universities places greater emphasis on early prevention. The career planning competition, with “future possibilities” as an incentive, stimulates students’ intrinsic motivation. When students actively explore themselves for career goals, their cognitive anxiety about “who I am” and “what I can do” will be transformed into concrete action, thus forming a positive mindset, resisting external pressure, and preventing potential mental issues.

Contemporary college students generally face the dual pressures of “intense competition for further education” and “confusion about employment”, making them more prone to a sense of meaninglessness due to uncertainty about the future. The process of career planning competitions, including career assessments, interviews with career figures, and mock interviews, is essentially a mental desensitization training. During the competition, students can concretize the vague “employment pressure” into visual “competition tasks”, breaking down the vast future into executable phased goals through the competition, thereby significantly reducing students’ confusion and sense of loss of control over the future, and reducing the likelihood of mental issues such as anxiety and depression.

Meanwhile, contemporary college students often grow up in a comfortable environment and lack the “mental immunity” to cope with failure. The educational teaching forms commonly adopted by most universities, such as mental lectures and classes, are difficult to simulate real competitive pressure. Career planning competitions inherently carry challenges and uncertainties. Losing in competitions, being questioned by judges, and having proposals overturned are setbacks that occur within a safe boundary. For student participants, these setbacks are rare opportunities for mental growth. Through post-competition review and coaching, students can cultivate resilience, optimism, self-efficacy, and other qualities, accumulate substantial mental capital, learn to attribute failure to effort or strategy rather than ability, and form a positive mental state.

2. The Practical Challenges of Integrating Career Planning Competitions into Mental Health Education in Universities

The promotion of harmonious development of students' physical and mental health in higher education cannot be separated from mental health education. Implementing quality education should include mental health education aiming at improving students' mental quality, and mental health education is an inherent part of education. Mental health education is the main way to implement quality education, and the improvement of students' mental quality can effectively promote the cultivation of their overall quality. Currently, there are practical challenges in integrating career planning competitions into mental health education in universities.

It may face a misalignment of value orientation: from “self-exploration” to “elite performance”. Mental health education emphasizes “acceptance of imperfections” and “process-oriented growth”. However, competitions inherently carry the nature of “selection” and “elimination”. When some universities closely link competition results with additional points for graduate school admission and comprehensive assessment rankings, students are prone to excessively pursuing impressive resumes and achievements, turning competitions into tools to embellish their personal growth resumes. Those students who truly have mental distress and are confused about their future may dare not or are unwilling to stand on the competition stage and under the spotlight, which may lead to competitions becoming a one-time display for excellent students with excellent mental qualities, deviating from the original intention of serving the mental health of the majority of students.

It may face conflicts in role positioning: instructors are confronted with the dilemma of “dual identity”. In competition coaching, counselors, psychology teachers, and career planning mentors often need to work together, but their respective professional logics may conflict. Competition mentors pursue “the feasibility and competitiveness of the plan”, while psychology teachers focus on “students' emotional fluctuations and tolerance limits”. When students collapse or retreat under the high pressure of competition preparation, should teachers encourage them to “keep going” for the team's performance, or should they immediately call a halt out of protection? This rapid switching between the roles of “coach” and “counselor” can easily blur the boundaries of professional ethics and bring mental burden to students.

There is also a problem of homogenization in the evaluation system: it is difficult to quantify the implicit outcomes of mental health and mental growth. The rigid indicators of competitions, such as award levels and employment rate data, are easy to quantify and measure, but the improvement of mental resilience and self-efficacy is difficult to express in scores. In the process of competitions, universities often tend to select a small group of students with higher qualities for intensive training, rather than popularizing and promoting the activities to ordinary students. This results in a very narrow coverage of the activities and a lack of long-term tracking of the mental state of participants after the competition.

3. Practical Exploration of Integrating Career Planning Competitions into Mental Health Education in Colleges and Universities

Develop environmental courses to create a harmonious and joyful atmosphere conducive to the physical and mental health growth of students. Environmental factors play a significant role in influencing individual mental health, and a positive campus atmosphere can promote students' mental well-being. Integrating career planning competitions into mental health education in universities allows for the establishment of a career planning cultural wall on campus playgrounds, as well as the arrangement of a three-dimensional atlas showcasing career planning competitions and introductions to career perspectives. This immerses students in a strong atmosphere of "promoting education through competitions," highlighting the significant importance of career planning for student growth and personal development, while guiding them to cultivate optimistic and open-minded character traits. Creating an "Entrepreneurship Story Gallery" on the walls and ceiling of teaching building corridors, featuring narratives and promotional boards of youth stories about employment and entrepreneurship, presents golden sayings on employment and entrepreneurship education, guiding students to shape a positive, healthy, and stable mentality while experiencing successful employment and entrepreneurial journeys. Upgrading and renovating relevant functional activity rooms and mental counseling rooms, opening up small mental health education theaters and career and entrepreneurship competition consultation halls, provides students with diversified comprehensive quality education, cultivates healthy and positive hobbies, and enriches students' inner world through diverse and multi-form extracurricular activities, promoting their physical and mental health development.

Developing activity courses to guide students in showcasing their individual charm. Offering a variety of activity courses in diverse forms is an effective way to promote students' mental health. Based on the implementation of national and local courses, focusing on the positive role of career planning competitions in students' personal development and growth, and centering on students' mental health, various practical activity courses, club activity courses, festival activity courses, etiquette activity courses, and other thematic courses are developed. While enriching students' campus cultural life, these courses provide a platform for enhancing students' mental quality and supporting their comprehensive development. Universities can establish experiential thematic platforms centered around career planning competitions to empower mental health education, create rich practical activity courses, guide students to experience harmonious interactions with themselves, others, nature, and society during collaborative preparation for competitions, and gain spiritual nourishment. Based on students' different potentials, personalities, interests, and hobbies, career planning clubs can be established to offer club activity courses, improve students' career planning and entrepreneurial thinking abilities, cultivate correct career, employment, and job selection views, enhance students' ability to resist pressure and setbacks, and build an unbreakable mental health defense line.

Explore evaluation systems to motivate teachers and students to strive for excellence. While integrating career planning competitions into student mental health education, explore the development

of diversified evaluation systems. While cultivating and enhancing teachers' professional abilities in guiding and preparing for competitions, it is also necessary to pay attention to teachers' mental health, form positive incentives for the comprehensive development of teachers' qualities, shift away from focusing on quantitative indicators and evaluation models of teachers' teaching achievements, and focus on teachers' inherent moral character. Regularly holding mental symposiums, mental health development movie screenings, and other mental health education activities for teachers helps teachers alleviate teaching, educational, and life pressures during the identity transformation from educators to educatees, promote the development of teachers' mental health, and avoid imbalances between "teaching" and "learning" in the process of mental health education. For evaluation indicators for young students, abandon the evaluation system that focuses solely on students' academic performance, integrate career planning abilities and mental health development to construct a school-based expression of students' core development competencies. Focusing on the three major aspects and six core competencies, we concentrate on a four-dimensional system of harmonious interaction between students and themselves, with others, nature, and society. We aim to cultivate and enhance students' physical and mental comprehensive qualities, guide students to form correct cognition about physical and mental health growth with a reasonable and scientific evaluation system, encourage students to actively participate in career planning competitions, absorb positive energy, improve spiritual cultivation, and cultivate optimistic, positive, healthy, and upward mental character.

Empowering students' mental health education through career planning competitions and promoting the formation of correct career perspectives as well as sound and healthy mental character are important tasks for universities. Young students at the university stage are not yet mature in mindset, and correct mental guidance is particularly important for shaping their values and mental health development. Universities should broaden their thinking and innovate their practices, fully tap into and leverage the positive role of career planning competitions in students' mental health education, integrate them into campus external environment design, campus practical course establishment, and teacher-student evaluation system construction, providing perfect facility support, vivid practical carriers, and reasonable evaluation standards for students' mental health education and career perspective education.

Biographies

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