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Research on an Evaluation System for Local Universities Serving High-Quality Development of Local Economies

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Abstract

As a result of the recent changes in regional development patterns, local universities have developed deeper connections with their local economies and regional societies. In comparison to earlier forms of interaction between universities and their communities, this relationship has evolved from a surface or shallow level to become much more deeply integrated with both economic and social development. Traditional evaluation methods, while helpful, have significant limitations regarding accurately measuring the contributions made through service by the university to its respective community. The primary objective of this research project is to fulfil this urgent or practical need through a comprehensive multidimensional model that evaluates universities based upon contributions, fit, and ability for growth. The intent of this model is not to focus solely on university research outputs or on graduate numbers; rather, it will evaluate in more depth the effectiveness and potential contributions of the university in the principal areas of human resource development, technological innovation, and cultural ecological development in building high-quality regional development. The ultimate outcome of this research will be to develop a scientifically based tool for evaluating and measuring both the diagnostic and growth potential of universities within their respective communities.

Keywords

Local Universities, Regional Economy, High-Quality Development, Service Performance, Evaluation System

1. Introduction

Local universities are currently evaluated based on various factors used to measure their contribution to their local economies. The majority of this evaluation process consists of using fragmented indicators

and relying on the value derived from the outputs produced in the short term, placing a high emphasis on quantifying these short-term outputs. The current evaluation model does not adequately capture universities' role as an innovator and, as such, is limiting the universities' ability to provide maximum benefit from the innovation services they provide. Therefore, university service behaviors must be understood, and a comprehensive evaluation method created to assess the university service behavior while allowing for flexibility in assessing universities based on multiple metrics. It will also enable deeper integration of industry/education and empower regional improvements and upgrades by providing services that meet the needs of local industries.

2. The Theoretical Implications of Local Universities Serving High-Quality Regional Economic Development

The high-quality evolution of regional economies by the universities in the area was initially thought to be due to the two different positions of these universities—the educational mission of the university and the university's role as an innovation engine for the region. In this capacity, universities adapt their curriculum and training programs to the industrial characteristics of their region, providing local companies with technologically and managerially trained individuals who can address the real demands of the company. The research activities conducted at the university also address the common technical issues that exist in the region's industrial supply chain, leading to the application of basic research to the actual production of goods. The cultural services that the universities provide to their surrounding communities and local governmental units are very much tied to the integration of the professional expertise and activities of the university and the development of the culture of the area. Collectively, these service functions all contribute to the creation of an interdependent and mutually counseled ecosystem based on the knowledge flows and shared resources between the universities and their regional economies as a result of the ongoing partnership of these two organizations (Zhang, 2024).

3. Examination and Reflection on Existing Evaluation Models

3.1 Value Orientation: Lagging Transition from Scale Quantification to Quality Contribution

When polled and assessed by universities, many still depend heavily on quantitative indicators of local economic benefit (e.g., funding received for horizontal projects, number of patents granted and number of published papers) because these provide a straightforward way to quantify the scale and scope of their accomplishments. While these indicators give some sense of the volume of activity, they do not adequately demonstrate the true value of the knowledge spillover and creative activity that results from collaboration. In addition, universities that place too much emphasis on quantifying or counting the results of their evaluation efforts may inadvertently direct their resources away from partnerships that require longer-term commitment and extensive collaboration—which typically result in beneficial upgrades to the local industrial base—toward new ventures that produce immediate financial gain. If evaluators continue using the numerical accumulation model for evaluating university participation in

local economies for any length of time, they will fail to appropriately recognize or reward the universities' distinctive contributions to local economies based on deeper dimensions such as technological advancement and improvement in the quality of the local workforce.

3.2 Structural Dimension: Systematic Gaps in Key Service Areas

The evaluation frameworks that currently exist examine mainly the technology innovation and talent cultivation portions of university services to the local area. However, the assessment of the soft dimensions, such as how local cultural ecology shapes and directs how universities provide decision consulting services, is typically very weak. The cultural ecology dimension describes the ways that universities engage with their communities through their disciplinary resources to help local communities protect and enhance their local cultural heritage, provide public cultural products and lead the civilizing trends of their communities (Ye, 2018). This type of engagement between universities and their communities is often difficult to translate into economic metrics. In addition, the decision consulting services that universities provide can be measured through the systematic research activities, policy recommendations and strategies developed by university think tanks for local development planning, grassroots governance innovation, etc. The impact of the decision consulting services of universities is indirect and long term. The absence of structural dimensions makes it difficult for the evaluation systems to depict the entire panoramic representation of the services universities provide to their local communities, potentially leading to universities having less motivation and sustainability to invest resources into these important, but non-explicit, parts of their service portfolios.

3.3 Implementation Process: Disconnect Between Static Assessment and Dynamic Feedback

Currently, evaluation practices are limited in that they are most commonly conducted on a centralized basis, with an end-of-two-year-cycle approach where reviewers evaluate only quantifiable outputs (e.g., number of papers published, number of patents registered). This single-evaluation point doesn't adequately represent the continuous, iterative process of university-industry partnerships and often fails to capture how technological pathways change and evolve over time, and particularly as university-industry partnerships continually collaborate and co-create technical solutions through long-term partnership arrangements. Because evaluations are often done without timely data sharing and feedback, universities' services and users are not able to adapt quickly to changes in demand locally, and thus evaluations cannot provide real-time support to promote growth and sustainability in both partnerships and their respective users (Zhou, 2025).

3.4 Outcome Utilization: Decoupling of Evaluation Findings from Resource Allocation

Most of the time when an evaluation comes to a conclusion it is in the form of a recommendation that may have little or no effect on the subsequent allocation of key resources (including funding, setting up projects and building structures). Resources are traditionally allocated according to established administrative practices and/or historical practices. When evaluating services there is generally not a high degree of correlation between the evaluation results and resource allocation. As a result, organized evaluations are merely procedural and cannot compel or provide limitations for university service

habits. If evaluations do not serve as a credible source of guidance for allocating resources, then university service investments in the resource sectors that meet the evolving needs of the local economy are going to be significantly limited (Huang & Deng, 2024).

4. Systematic Construction of the Service Performance Evaluation Framework

4.1 Core Principles: Contribution, Alignment, and Growth Potential

To create a new approach for how we evaluate efforts, there are three major themes that will guide our methods: contribution, fit, and growth. Contribution will shift our evaluation activities from just counting number of publications, patents, etc., to looking at actual application cases in which the results of university research efforts have made an impact on the manufacturing processes and products of local companies; the specific ways in which they benefit those businesses will also be included in our evaluations. Fit will refer to how well we can measure how accurately a university's professional area align with its R&D directions, the professional areas within local business sectors that are leaders in their industries, and the areas in the medium and long term planning periods. Growth focuses on measuring how well universities continue to grow their ability to serve the needs of local companies and communities; tracking and measuring how much technology has been accumulated through joint research and development between schools and businesses, the experiences that have been developed by the faculty teams as they have solved real-world industrial challenges, and the career development of former students as they work for local companies (Wang, 2021). All three of these themes feed into and support one another; fit is a prerequisite to developing contributions, and the deepening of contributions serves as the basis for creating and accumulating growth. In this way, fit, contribution and growth will produce an organic and evolving feedback cycle on how we evaluate our initiatives.

4.2 Talent Development Dimension: Evaluation of Adaptability and Developmental Capacity

The evaluation of the talent cultivation dimension requires the establishment of an observational framework that spans the entire process from student enrollment to long-term career development. The adaptability assessment demands a systematic analysis of the alignment between university major offerings and the talent demand catalogs of local pillar industries and emerging sectors, specifically examining whether professional courses promptly incorporate industry certification standards, real-world cases, and the proportion of corporate technical experts participating in practical teaching. The evaluation activities must meticulously track the correlation between the initial employment positions of recent graduates in key local enterprises and institutions with the core skills they have acquired, comprehensively assessing employment quality factors such as starting salaries and social security rather than relying solely on signed employment rates. The development capability assessment should extend the temporal dimension to three to five years or even longer after graduation, collaborating with local human resources departments and representative enterprises to establish graduate career development records, continuously collecting data on their advancement in key technical roles, assumption of critical project responsibilities, and attainment of industry high-level

certifications (Song, 2024). This dimension advocates for universities to leverage these tracking feedback mechanisms to regularly revise training programs, update practical training content, and dynamically adjust enrollment structures, thereby transforming talent evaluation from static employment outcome statistics into a dynamic, continuous value assessment that spans the entire cultivation and utilization process, achieving a profound alignment between university talent supply and the quantitative, structural, and qualitative demands of local economic and social development.

4.3 Scientific Innovation Dimension: Evaluation of Supportiveness and Transformation Capacity

The evaluation of the technological innovation dimension aims to measure the substantive support of university research activities for local industrial technological progress and the effectiveness of transforming knowledge outcomes into practical productivity. The support assessment must go beyond simple comparisons of vertical project levels and funding amounts, delving into whether university research teams have organized sustained efforts to address common technological bottlenecks in local industrial clusters or specific process challenges faced by enterprises. The evaluation should focus on analyzing the outputs of these research efforts, such as newly developed material formulations, optimized production processes, or designed specialized equipment, and their demonstrated performance improvements and reliability enhancements in actual production line testing (Lu, Yu, & Song, 2024). The transformation assessment, in turn, centers on the specific pathways of knowledge spillovers and innovation diffusion, systematically tracking real-world cases of university patent technology transfers or licensing to local enterprises, while meticulously documenting their concrete impacts on product upgrades, cost control, and other aspects for the licensee. This dimension must also examine the operational quality of new collaborative R&D platforms jointly established by universities and local enterprises, such as pilot production bases, to assess whether they truly fulfill functions like technology maturation, talent sharing, and joint training. The evaluation process requires the involvement of third-party professional institutions to objectively assess the economic and social benefits of technology transformation, while establishing long-term tracking mechanisms for already transformed projects, thereby forming a closed-loop value judgment of the entire technological innovation service chain (Wang, 2024).

4.4 Cultural Ecosystem Dimension: Evaluation of Leadership and Shaping Power

The evaluation of cultural ecology aims to consider the spiritual guidance and long-term shaping ability of universities to the local social environment with their knowledge resources and cultural capital. Leading evaluation should focus on whether universities rely on their academic strength in humanities and social sciences, actively participate in the sorting of local historical and cultural context, the protective research of intangible cultural heritage, and the academic construction of regional cultural brands. The specific operations include system evaluation of relevant research publications by university scholars, undertaking cultural protection planning projects, and the social cognitive impact generated by a series of lectures and exhibitions held for the public. The evaluation of shaping power deeply examines the actual infiltration effect of cultural service activities in universities on

communities and grassroots, such as the continuous participation of university faculty and student teams in the aesthetic transformation of community public spaces, providing cultural consultation for grassroots governance, or conducting regular citizen literacy improvement courses. Evaluation activities should collect multi-channel feedback from service recipients and analyze the specific manifestations of these cultural intervention behaviors in changing the community cultural atmosphere, enhancing public aesthetic taste, or strengthening local cultural identity. This dimension requires the establishment of a method that combines qualitative evaluation with typical case analysis to track how the cultural output behavior of universities gradually infiltrates and optimizes the cultural soil of local development like a trickle, in order to make evidence-based judgments on the seemingly intangible but crucial contribution of cultural soft power (Chu & Chu, 2023).

4.5 Policy Service Dimension: Evaluation of Responsiveness and Governance Capacity

The evaluation of the decision-making service dimension focuses on the actual process in which universities respond to local governance needs and participate in improving governance efficiency with their professional knowledge and intellectual resources. Responsiveness evaluation needs to specifically examine the speed and professionalism of university research institutions in responding to policy consultation needs issued by local governments, special planning research tasks, or scientific argumentation requests in emergency response. The specific operation includes analyzing whether the relevant research reports, planning schemes, or legislative proposals submitted by universities are closely related to local pain points in terms of content and provide feasible solutions. Governance evaluation further tracks the actual impact of these intellectual achievements after they are adopted and applied, such as how research suggestions from universities on optimizing the business environment are translated into specific measures to simplify administrative approval processes, or how planning schemes for community renewal actually guide subsequent project construction. Evaluation activities should carefully examine the adoption of suggestions and recommendations from university experts in local people's congresses and political consultative conferences, as well as their practical roles in various hearings and expert committees. This dimension requires the establishment of a normalized information communication mechanism with local government departments, long-term tracking and multi-source verification of the adoption levels, transformation stages, and governance improvement effects of decision-making and consulting achievements in universities, in order to transform the contributions of universities in soft science fields such as policy research and institutional design into measurable and comparable evaluation criteria, and complete a complete closed loop from demand response to effectiveness testing (Yuanyuan, 2025).

5. Guarantee Mechanisms for Effective Evaluation Framework Operation

5.1 Establishing a Multi-Stakeholder Collaborative Governance Framework

Multi-agency governance requires that all three sectors (local governments, industries, and universities) work together to create a permanent body for evaluation and coordination. Local governments must

clarify the specific responsibilities of each participant in the evaluation process, and designate the local department that is responsible for each task. For example, the Industry and Technology Department of local government should provide the list of required technological capabilities for that industry, while the Human Resources and Social Security Department should facilitate the connection with private sector employers to obtain relevant employer feedback on graduate development activities. The various representative firms that are involved in the evaluation of students should actively participate in the creation and revision process of many of the evaluation measures or criteria. In particular, representative firms may identify industry specific criteria for evaluating the practicum and experiential education of students. Finally, industry associations or other third party entities can perform various professional duties such as verifying data and conducting scenario research. The relatively independent nature of an industry association relative to other entities adds to the credibility of the evaluation results.The core of this mechanism lies in building an institutionalized and normalized platform for consultation and discussion, so that evaluation activities are no longer just a one-man show for universities, but a public governance process that truly consolidates consensus among key stakeholders in regional development, thereby ensuring that evaluation orientation resonates with regional strategic needs.

5.2 Design and Operation of a Routine Data Monitoring Platform

The normalized data Monitoring System platform should be designed to ensure that the overall objectives of the normalized data collection, integration and the dynamic presentation of the completed core dimensions of service evaluation are met. The design of the data Monitoring System platform architecture must have a defined set of standardised data specifications and interface specifications; as well as information on what type of information is stored within the various systems of the university academic management, scientific research, and the local community information management systems. As part of their responsibilities, the Technical Operating Team will need to regularly clean and structure the information from all the sources they are using to ensure that baseline data is being accurately maintained and issued on a timely basis. In addition, this platform should provide a Visual Analytics Module and include Permission Management capabilities. These features would enable universities, evaluation and coordination agencies, and businesses to extract insights and compile reports based only on their direct roles. Ultimately, allowing for a continual and stable operation of this platform will enhance the collection of factual basis and reporting for the dynamic and continuous diagnosis of service performance against established expectations and targets (Wu & Sheng, 2022).

5.3 Dynamic Adjustment Mechanism for Categorized and Tiered Evaluation Standards

The agency responsible for coordinating evaluations should be responsible for implementing a Standardized Dynamic Adjustment Process (SDAP). To accomplish this, the agency needs to first establish a framework for determining basic evaluation criteria based on the academic discipline of the institution (e.g., technology development) as well as its educational orientation and its host region’s principal industry sectors. Evaluating applied technology institutions may place greater emphasis on

indicators related to talent development by focusing primarily on these types of programs. To meet these needs, an independent Committee of Experts responsible for evaluating performance data collected by Evidence Code Monitoring Systems, as well as ongoing review and revision of Evaluation Criteria based on ongoing evaluation of existing University capabilities, will be established. The process whereby proposed adjustments to existing standards will occur should also be subject to wide-ranging consultation and negotiation among multiple stakeholders, including Universities, Industry, Government and Academic Institutions, in order to validate the scientific integrity of proposed adjustments before they take effect. Without an effective means of adjusting evaluation standards, the use of a fixed list of standards will ultimately result in an increasing gap between the speed of change occurring within the Regional Economy and the development of universities, and the decreasing accuracy of the evaluation results.

5.4 Capacity Building Pathways for Professional Evaluation Teams

To develop a professional evaluation team we must create a stable core of team members that includes individuals from multidisciplinary backgrounds; those who are experts in higher education management, industrial economic analysis and data statistical analysis. This core team will lead the development of annual professional development training programs. The core team will regularly engage the services of senior policy researchers, industry experts, and skilled professionals in the evaluation industry as facilitators of focused case studies and field research to enhance the knowledge of team members on the challenges posed by their local industries and improve the performance assessment skills of the team members. Team members should rotate through the roles of information verification and on-site observation for school-enterprise collaborations to gain real life, first-hand judgement experiences for specific service contexts. Evaluation activities will largely only consist of the review of written documentation without the establishment of a specialist team to build upon; this will not allow for an accurate identification of, and residual issues by way of the institution's service, and thus the diagnostic capability of the evaluation will not be precise (Fu & Tang, 2025).

5.5 Institutional Integration Design Aligning Incentives and Constraints

The design of incentive constraint compatible institutional linkage aims to effectively transform evaluation conclusions into institutional levers that drive universities to optimize service behavior. Local governments need to clearly state in the relevant resource allocation methods that the evaluation results will serve as an important reference for the next year's special support funds and targeted commissioning of scientific research projects, and provide stable funding support to universities with significant service performance. Within universities, the evaluation results should be included in the annual assessment of departments and the performance evaluation system of responsible persons, and directly linked to the allocation of disciplinary construction resources. The evaluation coordination agency shall establish a public disclosure and feedback rectification system for the annual evaluation report, and place the opinions of all parties and the improvement commitments of the university under public supervision. Without such institutional linkage, evaluation activities will be difficult to break

free from the shackles of formalism, and their conclusions will not effectively guide universities and teachers to invest more energy and resources in service activities that truly meet local development needs, thereby ensuring the formation of a closed loop from value judgment to action improvement in the evaluation system

6. Practical Transformation and Application Prospects of the Evaluation System

6.1 Empowering Universities for Self-Diagnosis and Strategic Adjustment

A structured data report created from evaluation system results gives all universities a straightforward view of their real capacity to benefit their immediate environment through serving their local community. The structured data includes the breakdown of graduate job placement and job development assessment by significant regional businesses by major, which allows for the identification of how effectively the institution's talent development programmes are preparing graduates for the current needs of the local economy, based on direct matching data. By reviewing this factual data, university administrators can evaluate the effectiveness of their research teams and assess potential areas for technology solutions to overcome local industry technology barriers, or assess the current use and potential for enhancing cultural think tank services in supporting grassroots governance. This data-driven evidence provides the basis to assist universities in realigning the focus of their academic clusters, adjusting the incentive structures for horizontal collaboration, and re-prioritizing their limited resources to support the development of workforce-ready graduates for those areas that have been demonstrated to be of significant economic benefit for the local region, allowing for the effective transition from the service strategy of a macro view to the professional activity of successfully implementing a service strategy based on precise needs identified by data.

6.2 Supporting Government Precision Policy Implementation and Performance Management

The authoritative data generated by the evaluation system provides key factual basis for the industrial decision-making and performance management of relevant departments of local governments. When planning the development path of local characteristic industries, local governments can directly refer to the in-depth analysis of the research strength, technology transformation success rate, and matching degree with the industrial chain of relevant disciplines in various universities in the evaluation report. The finance and technology regulatory authorities dynamically adjust the allocation plan of annual special support funds and the targeted commissioning focus of scientific research projects based on the performance ranking and contribution increment of universities in serving specific local areas. This evidence-based resource allocation model promotes a more precise alignment between government industrial policies and the service capabilities of universities, thereby significantly improving the guiding effectiveness of public financial investment and the overall operational efficiency of regional innovation systems.

6.3 Guiding Deep Industry-Education Integration and Ecosystem Development

The specific and verifiable cooperation effectiveness data revealed by the evaluation activities provide

clear decision-making basis for enterprises to choose partners. Based on this data, enterprises can more accurately connect with university teams with successful records in solving their specific technical problems, or jointly build customized talent training projects with departments that have outstanding career development performance for graduates. Universities, based on evaluation feedback, systematically sort out the input-output efficiency of cooperation models with enterprises in different industries, and then optimize resource allocation. For example, prioritizing the open sharing of key laboratories on campus towards business partners with long-term joint research and development sincerity and capabilities. This two-way selection and continuous adaptation based on factual evidence gradually eliminated superficial short-term cooperation and gave rise to a deep collaborative relationship guided by solving real industrial problems, sharing risks and achievements, laying a solid foundation for building a vibrant regional industry education integration ecosystem.

6.4 Addressing Potential Risks and Challenges During Implementation

The specific operational level of the evaluation system may face practical challenges such as inconsistent data collection criteria and insufficient motivation from some participants. The implementing agency needs to design a unified data collection template and clear definitions in advance, and arrange a dedicated person to be responsible for cross checking and logical verification of the initial information submitted by universities and enterprises. In response to possible negative coping phenomena, supporting systems should clearly include the evaluation of participation and the quality of data provided as one of the prerequisites for universities to obtain relevant policy support and for enterprises to enjoy priority in talent cooperation. Evaluation experts need to pay attention to implicit service interactions and contribution clues that are not fully reflected in the report during on-site visits and discussions, to ensure that the evaluation can touch on the real level of practice. These specific arrangements aim to identify and resolve potential deviations and obstacles that may arise during the implementation process through procedural and institutionalized means, ensuring that the evaluation work always operates on the track of pursuing real service contributions.

6.5 Promoting Collaborative Evolution of Regional Innovation Ecosystems

The continuous output of multidimensional performance data from the evaluation system provides a reliable reference for matching the capability profile and complementarity of each node in the regional innovation network. By referring to these data, enterprises can more effectively identify and collaborate with university R&D teams with deep accumulation in specific technological paths, and jointly apply for and undertake major research and development projects for market-oriented applications. Local governments can timely introduce more targeted guidance policies based on the flow characteristics and cooperation bottlenecks of regional innovation factors reflected in the evaluation, such as setting up a dedicated fund to support the concept verification and pilot maturity of universities. Universities use evaluation feedback to actively integrate their basic research advantages with the iterative needs of local industries, and integrate academic exploration into the practical scenarios of regional development. This continuous interactive process based on transparent information and shared value

cognition gradually brings together dispersed innovation actions within the region into a collaborative evolutionary force with consistent goals and mutual enhancement.

7. Conclusion

This research office created an evaluation system to establish a framework for systematically observing and making a value judgment about the university's social role in relation to the economy of its surrounding community. This evaluation system takes into account how universities are serving their communities' economic needs in a changing regional innovation environment. The successful use of this evaluation tool will help universities build closer, more effective partnerships with local governments and economic development organizations. The goal of using this evaluation tool is to enhance regional development toward a higher quality of living and a more sustainable new future and to continue to adjust as needed through a collaborative approach.

Topic source:

1. Key Research Project of the Chinese Society of Higher Education in 2025: "Research on the Evaluation Index System of Local Universities Serving the High Quality Development of Local Economy" (Project No. 25DF0206)
2. Shandong Federation of Social Sciences 2025 Humanities and Social Sciences Project Cooperation Special Project: "Research on the Construction of Evaluation Index System for High Quality Development of Preschool Education"

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