

Optimizing the Undergraduate Social Work Curriculum in Applied Universities for the New Era

Shihai Chen, Daichao Cheng

Yibin University, China

Abstract: *With the establishment of China's four-tier social work departments, their functions—integrating petition coordination, leading grassroots governance, and advancing party-building integration—have imposed new demands on undergraduate social work education. However, traditional applied universities face challenges such as misalignment between curriculum content and governance needs, rigid course structures, delayed capacity development, and insufficient collaboration between institutions and local authorities. Oriented toward serving China-specific social governance, this paper establishes four optimization principles, including the unity of political guidance and professional integrity, and proposes four strategic pathways: modular restructuring, content updating, practice-oriented transformation, and capability enhancement. These include introducing core modules such as petition practice to fill knowledge gaps, updating teaching content through stronger integration of local practices and policy contexts, expanding frontline governance internship opportunities via university-local collaboration, and building a competency-based training framework centered on four key dimensions. This study aims to shift social work education from reliance on Western models toward a Chinese-characteristic paradigm, offering a systematic solution for cultivating interdisciplinary professionals suited to the operational realities of Party committee-led social work departments.*

Keywords: Party Committee Social Work Department, Applied Universities, Curriculum Optimization.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Second Plenary Session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China decided to establish the Central Social Work Department as a functional department of the Party Central Committee. By May 2024, China had completed the establishment of Party Committee Social Work Departments at all four levels: central, provincial, municipal, and county. These departments undertake functions such as coordinating and guiding public petitions and suggestions, grassroots governance, grassroots political power, Party construction in trade associations, chambers of commerce, and "Two Enterprises and Three New" sectors, building the contingent of social work professionals, and volunteer services. This represents a significant reform to improve the social governance system with Chinese characteristics and to implement the Party's mass line in the new era [1].

The aforementioned changes in China's social work management and implementation system have raised practical requirements for the cultivation of social work professionals. Currently, the discipline, major, and knowledge system of social work in China originate from Western countries, with modern social work talent cultivation having less than 40 years of history. It has formed a relatively fixed curriculum and content system covering social work theory and value ethics, three primary methods, services for various population groups, social welfare and policy, and practical internships [2]. This system significantly differs from the scope of management and service functions of the newly established Party Committee Social Work Departments.

In response to these new changes, undergraduate social work programs in universities, which are the main suppliers of talent, urgently need to explore curriculum additions and deletions, content restructuring, cultivation of new competencies, and reorientation of internships and practical training. This is essential to contribute to building a social work service system with Chinese characteristics.

2. NEW REQUIREMENTS FOR SOCIAL WORK GRADUATES IN THE NEW ERA

The establishment of the Party's Social Work Departments signifies a strategic shift in China's social governance from fragmented initiatives toward integrated planning. Their core mandates—systematically overseeing public petitions, leading grassroots governance, and integrating Party building with social services—create new imperatives for undergraduate social work education in applied universities. While traditional training has emphasized foundational methods like casework, group work, and community practice, today's social workers

must embed themselves within the Party-led governance framework. They are now expected to serve as vital bridges connecting policy implementation with public needs, Party leadership with service delivery, and governance structures with community demands [3]. Consequently, applied universities must develop talent cultivation frameworks centered on four core competencies, ensuring graduates can effectively operate within the governance contexts shaped by these Party institutions.

2.1 Policy Articulation Competency: The Critical Link from Policy Interpretation to Service Implementation

As the central coordinating body for the Party's social development initiatives, the effective functioning of the Party Committee Social Work Departments hinges on the implementation of a series of policy directives. These policies define the direction of social governance and set the practical boundaries for social work services. The required "policy articulation competency" for social work graduates, therefore, extends far beyond simply "understanding policy text." It encompasses a full-chain capability in "policy interpretation, needs matching, program translation, and outcome feedback," positioning them as both "implementers" and "feedback providers" in the policy execution process.

In terms of its core components, this competency first entails the capacity for accurate policy interpretation. Social workers must be able to clearly distinguish between the "core objectives" and "implementation pathways" within the policies issued by the Party Committee Social Work Departments. They need to grasp the underlying governance logic and value orientation of policies to prevent services from deviating from the overall strategic direction, while also precisely understanding the specific requirements and operational standards to ensure services are delivered legally and compliantly [4].

Secondly, it requires the ability to match policies with community needs. Policies from the Party Committee Social Work Departments are often macro-level guidance, necessitating "localized adaptation" based on different regional governance contexts and the diverse needs of various populations. By accurately identifying the actual demands of service recipients, social workers must translate uniform policy frameworks into targeted, actionable service plans, avoiding a rigid, "one-size-fits-all" approach to service delivery.

Finally, it involves the capacity for policy implementation feedback. Social workers must continuously monitor the effects of policy implementation during service delivery, keenly identifying misalignments between policy and practice—such as acceptance barriers among certain groups or resource gaps during execution. They are expected to formulate structured feedback reports with feasible recommendations, providing valuable input for the Party Committee Social Work Departments to optimize policies, thereby fostering a closed-loop cycle of "formulation-implementation-feedback-refinement."

From an educational perspective, developing policy articulation competency requires transcending the limitations of "theoretical learning." Through practical simulation exercises—such as policy interpretation, program design, and feedback report writing—students can master the methods for translating policy texts into practical operations and understand the intrinsic connection between policy and service [5]. This ensures that upon entering the field, they can promptly respond to the policy requirements of the Party Committee Social Work Departments and achieve seamless integration between policy and service delivery.

2.2 Competency in Grassroots Governance Practice: Core Support for Embedding into Party Committee-Coordinated Governance

The Party's Social Work Departments define grassroots governance as a core function, aiming to establish a governance framework characterized by "Party Committee leadership, government responsibility, democratic consultation, social collaboration, and public participation." Social workers, serving as professional forces in grassroots governance, must transcend the traditional role of "community service providers" to become "practical implementers" within this Party-led coordinated governance system. This requires comprehensive practical competencies in community governance, dispute mediation in public petitions, and the collection of public suggestions. Distinct from traditional micro-level service skills, this competency emphasizes meso-level coordination and macro-level collaboration, adapting to practice contexts led by the Party's Social Work Departments, such as multi-department joint operations and grid-based governance.

At the community governance level, social workers need capabilities in "integrating governance resources" and

"organizing deliberative consultations." Grassroots governance under the Party's Social Work Departments is not a single-department effort but involves coordination across multiple sectors and stakeholders. As coordinators, social workers must clearly delineate functional boundaries and resource advantages among different departments, directing resources toward areas with concentrated governance challenges and public needs. Simultaneously, they must master methods for organizing deliberative consultations, establishing platforms for multi-stakeholder communication, guiding rational expression of interests, and balancing diverse needs to ensure the governance process aligns with the Party Committee's overall direction, embodying the principle that "community affairs are discussed and resolved by the community."

In mediating public petition disputes, social workers must possess dual-track mediation skills that integrate "legal compliance and humanized engagement." With the Party's Social Work Departments overseeing petition-related work, the core objective is to "resolve conflicts at their inception and at the grassroots level." This requires social workers to be thoroughly familiar with relevant laws, regulations, and procedural norms, ensuring mediation adheres to legal frameworks and avoids escalating disputes due to procedural missteps. They must also employ professional techniques such as empathetic listening and emotional support to understand petitioners' emotional appeals and underlying concerns. Through compassionate communication, they can mitigate confrontational attitudes, guide parties from "confrontation" to "dialogue," and seek win-win solutions within legal parameters.

Regarding the collection of public suggestions, social workers need competencies in "needs assessment" and "recommendation formulation." Tasked with "gathering public suggestions and responding to citizen appeals," the Party's Social Work Departments rely on social workers as frontline personnel. They must proactively engage beyond office settings, immersing themselves in grassroots contexts to observe daily public needs and identify governance challenges embedded in seemingly minor issues [6]. Furthermore, they must systematically collate, categorize, and synthesize fragmented needs information, refining it into targeted, actionable governance recommendations. This provides a evidence-based foundation for the Party's Social Work Departments to formulate governance policies and advance public welfare projects, translating "public needs into governance actions."

2.3 Party Building Integration Competency: Professional Aptitude for Understanding the Logic of the "Two Enterprises and Three New Sectors"

A key function of the Party's Social Work Departments is to deepen the integration of Party building with social governance, particularly by strengthening Party leadership within the "Two Enterprises and Three New Sectors" (private enterprises, foreign-funded enterprises, new economic organizations, new social organizations, and new employment groups). As professionals serving these sectors, social workers must overcome the conceptual separation of "Party building versus service provision." They need to develop a Party building integration competency encompassing an "understanding of Party building logic" and the "ability to embed services," making professional services a vehicle for Party leadership rather than a peripheral activity. The core of this competency lies in understanding that Party leadership is not about "issuing directives," but about building consensus through service and enhancing organizational capacity through professional empowerment—avoiding a simplistic "superimposition" of Party building onto services.

First, social workers must deeply comprehend the core objectives of Party building in the "Two Enterprises and Three New Sectors." The Party's Social Work Departments promote Party building in these sectors not merely to increase "Party organization coverage," but to address governance challenges specific to these domains—such as loose governance structures in new economic organizations, service deviations in new social organizations, and insufficient protection for the rights and interests of new employment groups. This requires social workers to consistently adhere to the logic that "Party building aims to enhance services, and services serve to strengthen Party building." They must design service content aligned with Party building goals, using professional services to solve practical problems faced by these groups. By enhancing people's sense of benefit through services, they foster identification with Party organizations, achieving "service unites people, Party building strengthens foundations."

Second, social workers need to master the methods and skills for "embedding Party building elements into services." Integration does not mean "affixing Party building labels" to services, but rather translating the "organizational advantages" and "resource advantages" of Party building into service strengths. For instance, when serving new social organizations, they can assist Party organizations in establishing service supervision mechanisms to ensure service directions align with the policy guidance of the Party's Social Work Departments.

When serving private enterprises, they can design "Party building + employee care" initiatives that address both enterprise development needs and employee concerns, thereby enhancing employees' sense of belonging and strengthening the enterprise's willingness to support Party building work. The key is to identify the "interface" where Party building and services connect, allowing Party building to integrate naturally into the service process rather than being awkwardly appended.

Finally, social workers must possess the ability to "articulate Party building policies with professional services." Policies for Party building in the "Two Enterprises and Three New Sectors" issued by the Party's Social Work Departments often contain specific practical requirements, such as "establishing response mechanisms for appeals from new employment groups" or "promoting the integration of new employment groups into community governance." These requirements need to be implemented through professional social work services. This demands that social workers accurately interpret the practical orientation within Party building policies and translate policy requirements into concrete service modules—for example, transforming "integrating new employment groups into community governance" into service designs like "new employment groups participating in community volunteer services" or "a representative council system for new employment groups." This achieves deep articulation of "policy requirements—service design—group needs," enabling Party leadership to be genuinely realized through professional services.

2.4 Mass Work Competency: Foundational Capacity for Party Committee-Coordinated Service Contexts

All functions of the Party's Social Work Departments ultimately focus on serving the people. Whether addressing public petitions, grassroots governance, or Party-building integration, people's needs must form the foundational starting point. This necessitates that social work undergraduates develop robust mass work competency, positioning them as a bridge linking the Party's Social Work Departments with the community. This competency differs from traditional social work communication skills [7], emphasizing instead the ability to operate within Party Committee-coordinated contexts, comprehend both public discourse and policy parameters, practice emotional empathy, and translate needs into action. It specifically encompasses three dimensions: public petition reception, communication with vulnerable groups, and grassroots needs assessment.

Regarding public petition reception, social workers require dual capabilities in emotional support and policy guidance. In petition work coordinated by the Party's Social Work Departments, individuals often present intertwined emotional appeals and substantive interests. Focusing solely on emotional support while neglecting policy guidance may lead to misperceptions regarding claim legitimacy, potentially resulting in repetitive petitions. Conversely, emphasizing policy explanation without emotional understanding can exacerbate confrontational attitudes and generate new conflicts. Therefore, social workers must first alleviate agitation through listening and empathy to build trust. They should then interpret policy boundaries and resolution pathways using accessible language, guiding petitioners toward a rational perspective and an understanding that legitimate claims should be resolved lawfully while providing proper guidance for other cases, thereby facilitating orderly resolution within a legal framework.

In communicating with vulnerable groups, social workers must master personalized and differentiated strategies. Vulnerable populations under the purview of the Party's Social Work Departments include low-income families, children in distress, persons with disabilities, and isolated elders. These groups exhibit significant differences in cognitive characteristics, communication habits, and needs expression. For instance, hearing-impaired individuals rely on non-verbal tools, elders with cognitive impairments require simplified language and repetition, and children in distress need established trust before effective communication can occur. This demands that social workers abandon a uniform approach, adapting their communication style, pace, tone, and information presentation to ensure effectiveness, accurately identify genuine needs, and prevent oversight caused by communication barriers.

For grassroots needs assessment, social workers need capabilities in needs identification and data analysis. Policy formulation and governance advancement by the Party's Social Work Departments require precise public needs assessment, yet grassroots needs are often fragmented and implicit. For example, an elder's loneliness might be concealed within a statement about hoping for companionship, while the rights concerns of new employment groups may be reflected in worries about occupational safety [8]. This requires social workers to not only master basic methods like questionnaires and interviews but also possess skills in observational research and in-depth interviewing to uncover latent needs. Simultaneously, they must classify, synthesize, and refine scattered needs information into structured, evidence-based assessment reports, providing reference for the Party's Social Work

Departments to develop targeted and differentiated governance policies, ensuring interventions effectively address root causes.

3. CURRENT STATUS AND ISSUES IN SOCIAL WORK UNDERGRADUATE CURRICULUM CONTENT AT APPLIED UNIVERSITIES

As integral components of China's higher education system, applied universities hold the core mission of cultivating practice-oriented talent that meets the demands of socioeconomic development [9]. Following the establishment of the Party's Social Work Departments and the ongoing profound transformation of the national social governance system, the social work undergraduate curriculum in applied universities—serving as the primary vehicle for training professionals—increasingly reveals a misalignment between its content design and structural organization versus practical requirements. These issues not only hinder the comprehensive development of students' professional competencies but also result in graduates being inadequately prepared to quickly adapt to new working environments led by the Party's Social Work Departments, such as grassroots governance, coordinated public petition systems, and Party-building integration. This situation necessitates a systematic diagnosis focusing on four key aspects: curriculum content, structure, competency objectives, and university-community collaboration mechanisms.

3.1 Disconnect Between Curriculum Content and National Governance Requirements

The primary issue in social work undergraduate curricula at applied universities lies in their failure to align closely with the new demands of national social governance following the establishment of the Party's Social Work Departments. This has resulted in a significant gap between the curriculum system and local governance practices, undermining the preparation of students for participation in social development work in the new era. This disconnect manifests mainly in two aspects: the absence of core modules and the inadequate coverage of policy content, leaving students without the necessary knowledge base for engaging with national governance contexts.

Regarding the absence of core modules, the existing curriculum system remains centered on traditional social work service domains. It has not incorporated key course modules corresponding to the functional orientation of the Party's Social Work Departments, namely "coordinating public petition systems, leading grassroots governance, and promoting Party-building integration." Public petition work, as one of the core functions of these departments, involves practical components such as handling public appeals, mediating disputes, and standardizing petition procedures. Currently, most universities only briefly mention petition-related knowledge within courses like "Community Work" or "Social Administration," without offering dedicated courses on "Public Petition Practices." Consequently, students lack familiarity with the policy basis and operational procedures of petition work, as well as the ability to apply professional social work methods to resolve petition-related conflicts. Grassroots political capacity building serves as an important tool for the Party's Social Work Departments to advance grassroots governance, covering aspects such as the structure of grassroots organizations, deliberative mechanisms, and the integration of governance resources. However, existing curricula predominantly focus on micro-level community services and have not incorporated "Grassroots Political Capacity Building" into the course system. This leaves students with vague understanding of the institutional framework and main responsibilities within grassroots governance [10], thereby preventing them from comprehending the operational logic of grassroots governance under Party leadership. Furthermore, "Party Building in Associations and Chambers of Commerce," as a key area for promoting the integration of Party building within social organizations, relates to the standardized development and governance participation of these organizations under Party leadership. Existing curricula neither interpret policies on Party building in social organizations nor cover methods for integrating Party building with social organization services. As a result, students struggle to achieve an organic combination of "Party leadership and professional services" in practice. The absence of these core modules means the curriculum content does not cover the governance scenarios led by the Party's Social Work Departments, requiring graduates to undertake significant relearning upon entering related positions, substantially increasing their adaptation costs.

In terms of inadequate policy content, existing courses such as "Social Welfare and Social Policy" exhibit a notable Western-centric bias, with insufficient interpretation of China's "social policy system under Party leadership," leading to deviations in students' understanding of local social policies. The curriculum content tends to emphasize the welfare systems, policy formulation logic, and implementation models of Western countries—such as their universal welfare systems and the involvement of non-governmental organizations in policy execution—while providing limited depth in explaining the value orientation of "people-centered" development in China's social policies, the operational mechanism of "Party leadership in policy formulation and implementation," and the

implementation characteristics of "balancing equity and efficiency." For example, when discussing social policy formulation, the courses do not adequately explain the central role of the Party in top-level policy design, the functional positioning of the Party's Social Work Departments in policy coordination and execution, or the bridging role of grassroots Party organizations in policy implementation. When analyzing types of social policies, there is insufficient coverage of policy content closely related to the functions of the Party's Social Work Departments, such as "livelihood security policies," "grassroots governance policies," and "social organization development policies." Moreover, students are not guided to consider how to integrate professional social work methods with policy implementation. This inadequacy in policy content prevents students from accurately grasping the local logic of China's social policies, hindering their ability to precisely interpret the policy requirements of the Party's Social Work Departments in practice and translate policies into concrete social work service plans. This directly impacts their professionalism and effectiveness in participating in national governance.

3.2 Rigidity in Curriculum Structure and Insufficient Interdisciplinary Integration

The undergraduate social work curriculum at applied universities has long exhibited a rigid structure characterized by linear segmentation, failing to adapt to the interdisciplinary governance demands emphasized by the Party's Social Work Departments. This has resulted in a fragmented knowledge system, weakened practical orientation, and hindered students' ability to develop systematic problem-solving skills across domains. These limitations primarily manifest in two aspects: compartmentalized modules and a diluted practical focus, which collectively constrain the curriculum's effectiveness in cultivating governance-oriented social work professionals.

Regarding module compartmentalization, the existing curriculum structure typically follows a linear progression of "theory and ethics – three core methodologies – population-specific services." These modules lack organic interconnection and are not deeply integrated with interdisciplinary needs such as grassroots governance and petition coordination, preventing students from forming a cohesive knowledge framework. The theory and ethics module often focuses on unidirectional explanations of foundational theories and professional ethics, without addressing ethical dilemmas in grassroots governance or ethical boundaries in petition work. The three core methodologies – casework, group work, and community work – are taught in isolation, with minimal connection to governance demands such as multi-stakeholder collaboration, conflict resolution, and resource integration [11]. For instance, community work courses do not explain how to collaborate with Party's Social Work Departments and grassroots governments in community governance, while group work courses fail to demonstrate how group activities could facilitate rational expression of petitions. Population-specific service modules are designed around micro-level needs of particular groups without incorporating content that links group needs with regional governance objectives. This compartmentalized approach leads to fragmented knowledge acquisition, preventing students from understanding governance needs from an interdisciplinary perspective or applying integrated knowledge to solve complex grassroots governance problems.

From the perspective of weakened practical orientation, the practical components of existing curricula remain confined to traditional service domains, with minimal internship opportunities in governance units such as Party's Social Work Departments and sub-district offices. This limitation deprives students of practical experience in governance contexts and hampers their ability to translate theoretical knowledge into interdisciplinary governance competencies. Traditional internship placements are predominantly located in micro-level service settings, focusing on activities that develop basic service skills but provide no exposure to core governance practices [12]. For example, internships in elderly care institutions typically involve direct care provision without participation in community aging governance planning, while placements in child welfare institutions emphasize protection services without engagement in child-friendly community development initiatives. Since the curriculum fails to establish partnerships with governance units, students cannot learn governance-oriented working methods or understand how to integrate professional services with grassroots governance. This inadequate practical focus confines students' competencies to micro-level services, leaving them unprepared for the interdisciplinary governance capabilities required by Party's Social Work Departments.

3.3 Lagging Competency Development Objectives Behind Practice Demands

The competency development objectives in undergraduate social work curricula at applied universities remain confined within the traditional framework of "micro-level service competencies," failing to adapt to the new demands for "meso-level coordination competencies" and "macro-level policy competencies" required by the practice contexts of the Party's Social Work Departments. Simultaneously, the absence of localized case studies prevents students from developing competencies with appropriate practical references, resulting in a significant

mismatch between acquired skills and actual practice requirements. This lag primarily manifests in two aspects: misaligned competency focus and insufficient localized cases, directly undermining the relevance and effectiveness of talent cultivation.

Regarding misaligned competency focus, current curricula continue to prioritize operational skills in the three core methodologies—casework, group work, and community work—while neglecting the new competencies essential for practice within the Party's Social Work Departments, such as policy interpretation, coordination, and Party-building support. This misalignment renders students' competency structures inadequate for the roles of governance-oriented social workers. Traditional methodology training emphasizes micro-level service techniques, such as interviewing skills in casework, activity design in group work, and resident mobilization in community work. While these skills meet the demands of conventional social work services, they are insufficient for complex tasks like grassroots governance and petition coordination. For instance, the Party's Social Work Departments require social workers to interpret policy documents and translate policy requirements into service plans, yet current curricula do not cultivate abilities in policy text analysis, policy objective decomposition, or policy-service articulation. These departments need social workers to coordinate multiple stakeholders in conflict resolution, but courses provide no training in communication, interest balancing, or resource integration. The emphasis on integrating Party-building elements into services remains underdeveloped in the curriculum, leaving students unprepared to assist social organizations in establishing Party branches or communicate Party policies effectively in community services. This biased focus equips students with service delivery skills but fails to develop the comprehensive competencies needed to understand governance, coordinate resources, and facilitate linkages, limiting their professional effectiveness in contexts led by the Party's Social Work Departments.

Concerning insufficient localized cases, teaching materials and case studies are predominantly sourced from Western contexts, with a severe lack of cases relevant to the practice of the Party's Social Work Departments in China [13]. This gap impedes students' ability to connect theoretical knowledge with domestic governance practices through case-based learning. Cases serve as crucial bridges between theory and practice in social work education, and high-quality localized cases help students grasp the operational logic of practice contexts and master appropriate professional methods. However, existing curricula rely heavily on cases from Western countries, which reflect societal backgrounds, state-society relations, and governance models fundamentally different from those in China. For example, social organizations in Western contexts often operate with significant independence in policy implementation, whereas their Chinese counterparts participate in governance under Party leadership. Petition-related work in Western settings is typically addressed through judicial channels, whereas China's approach emphasizes Party committee coordination and grassroots resolution. Without localized cases—such as those illustrating how social workers assist the Party's Social Work Departments in mediating petition disputes or integrating Party-building with services in grassroots governance—students cannot comprehend the core logic of "Party leadership and multi-stakeholder collaboration" in China's governance contexts. Nor can they learn to apply professional methods to address specific problems in local practice. This absence of relevant cases reduces teaching to theoretical abstraction, depriving students of intuitive understanding of local practices and practical references for competency development, ultimately hindering their rapid adaptation to professional roles after graduation.

3.4 Insufficient University-Community Collaboration Mechanisms to Support Curriculum Optimization

The university-community collaboration mechanisms in social work programs at applied universities have long been plagued by issues of "limited partnership scope and lack of practice-oriented mentors," failing to establish deep cooperative relationships with governance entities such as the Party's Social Work Departments and grassroots governments. Consequently, curriculum optimization lacks practical support and cannot promptly adjust its content and structure according to the governance needs of the new era. These institutional deficiencies directly constrain the cultivation quality of governance-oriented social work professionals and have become a significant bottleneck in curriculum reform.

Regarding the limited partnership scope, existing collaborations are predominantly confined to traditional social organizations (such as elderly care social work agencies, child welfare social work agencies, and community service centers), without establishing curriculum co-development mechanisms with core grassroots governance units like the Party's Social Work Departments, sub-district offices, and township governments. This prevents the curriculum content from aligning with the latest governance demands. Traditional social organizations primarily focus on micro-level group assistance, emphasizing the need for "micro-service competencies" in talent. In contrast, the Party's Social Work Departments and grassroots governments, as entities coordinating governance,

prioritize "interdisciplinary governance competencies," "policy articulation competencies," and "Party-building integration competencies" in talent. The disparity in these needs determines the different directions in which collaborative partners can support curriculum optimization. Due to the absence of partnerships with governance units like the Party's Social Work Departments, universities cannot promptly obtain information on the practical needs of these units—such as the knowledge and skills required for social workers in petition coordination and grassroots governance—nor can they invite these units to participate in curriculum design. As a result, the curriculum content remains at the traditional service level, failing to incorporate new modules such as "Petition Practices," "Grassroots Political Capacity Building," and "Party-Building Integration." For instance, if universities established partnerships with the Party's Social Work Departments, they could jointly develop a "Social Work Practices in Petitions" module based on the departments' needs in petition work. Similarly, collaboration with sub-district offices could lead to adjustments in the "Community Work" curriculum regarding "multi-stakeholder collaboration," informed by grassroots governance practices. The limited partnership scope deprives curriculum optimization of demand-driven input from the frontline of governance, keeping it perpetually behind practical developments.

Concerning the lack of practice-oriented mentors, the external mentors in existing university-community collaborations predominantly come from traditional social work agencies, with a notable absence of frontline staff from governance units such as the Party's Social Work Departments and grassroots governments. This disconnects curriculum design and teaching processes from governance practices, preventing students from receiving guidance that aligns with job requirements [14]. External practice-oriented mentors are crucial forces linking the curriculum with practice. They not only provide practical perspectives for curriculum design but also convey the latest practical trends and methods in teaching. Mentors from traditional social work agencies excel in micro-level service skills, such as case counseling and group activity design, but they lack experience in governance practices led by the Party's Social Work Departments, such as mediating petition disputes, coordinating grassroots governance, and integrating Party building with services. Consequently, they cannot explain the practical essentials of these fields in the curriculum. In contrast, frontline staff from the Party's Social Work Departments, such as petition work coordinators and grassroots governance specialists, possess rich governance experience and are familiar with the operational functions and practical needs of these departments. If involved in curriculum design, they could help universities identify the focal points for cultivating competencies like "policy interpretation" and "coordination." If engaged in teaching, through specialized lectures or practical simulations, they could help students understand petition procedures, challenges in grassroots governance, and methods for Party-building integration. However, due to the absence of such mentors, curriculum design lacks professional input from the governance frontline, and teaching content fails to address the core of governance practices. Students cannot learn job-relevant competencies from these mentors, ultimately resulting in a disconnect between the talents cultivated by the curriculum and practical demands [15]. Furthermore, the lack of practice-oriented mentors means that even if students have internship opportunities in these governance units, they are unlikely to receive systematic practical training, significantly diminishing the effectiveness of their internships.

4. PRINCIPLES FOR OPTIMIZING UNDERGRADUATE SOCIAL WORK CURRICULUM CONTENT IN APPLIED UNIVERSITIES FOR THE NEW ERA

In response to the new realities of social governance following the establishment of the Party's Social Work Departments, optimizing the undergraduate social work curriculum in applied universities must break through traditional frameworks. Centered on the core objective of "aligning with national governance needs and cultivating governance-oriented social work professionals," it is essential to construct a curriculum system that integrates political alignment, professional depth, and practical relevance. This optimization process is not merely about adding or removing content but requires adherence to three core principles to achieve deep integration of the curriculum with the demands of the times, practical scenarios, and talent development goals. This ensures graduates can both uphold the original purpose of social work professionalism and competently undertake new governance tasks led by the Party's Social Work Departments.

4.1 Unifying Political Guidance and Professional Attributes

The integration of political guidance with professional attributes serves as the fundamental principle for optimizing undergraduate social work curricula in applied universities for the new era. This principle requires firmly anchoring the curriculum in the core direction of "social governance under Party leadership," embedding political cultivation throughout the entire educational process, while simultaneously upholding the professional values and ethics of social work, such as "helping people help themselves" and "respect and acceptance." It aims to

avoid the pitfalls of "prioritizing politics over professionalism" or "emphasizing professionalism at the expense of political alignment," thereby achieving an organic fusion of political and professional attributes.

From the dimension of political guidance, curriculum optimization must incorporate "understanding the logic of Party-led social governance" as core content, strengthening students' political cognition and literacy. Social work, as a profession closely connected with the people, inherently involves practicing the Party's mass line and conveying the Party's care in its service delivery. Particularly within governance scenarios led by the Party's Social Work Departments, every social work service must align with the Party's governance objectives and policy directions. Therefore, the curriculum needs to systematically integrate content such as "the Party's social development theory," "the Party's mass line," and "the functional positioning of the Party's Social Work Departments." This will help students understand the Party's central role in social governance and clarify the political direction of social work services. For instance, an "Introduction to Social Work" course should add a chapter on "The Development of Social Work Under Party Leadership," tracing how Party leadership has consistently guided the profession from its initial introduction and adaptation to its localized innovation. In "Social Policy" courses, the focus should be on interpreting the mechanism of "Party leadership in social policy formulation and implementation," helping students recognize that the "people-centered" value orientation of China's social policies stems from the Party's governance philosophy. Additionally, the curriculum must cultivate students' political judgment and execution, guiding them to discern the nature of different appeals in their practice. This enables them to respond lawfully and appropriately to reasonable public demands while consciously maintaining social stability and the Party's governance foundation, thus avoiding service deviations due to a lack of political awareness.

From the dimension of upholding professional attributes, curriculum optimization must avoid weakening the core values and methods of social work in the emphasis on political guidance. "Helping people help themselves" represents the core ethic of social work, meaning social workers should not only provide direct assistance but also empower clients to develop self-reliance. "Respect, acceptance, and confidentiality" form the basis for building trust with clients and are prerequisites for effective professional service. During optimization, these professional ethics must be organically combined with political guidance, not treated as separate or opposing elements. For example, a "Social Work Ethics" course could explore the "convergence points between the Party's mass line and social work ethics," illustrating how "respecting the will of the people" is both a Party requirement and a core tenet of professional ethics. In "Casework" courses, service plans could be designed incorporating "conveying the Party's care," enabling students to interpret the Party's pro-people policies for clients while applying "interviewing techniques" and "problem-solving models," thus advancing "professional service" and "political guidance" simultaneously. Furthermore, the curriculum must retain the core methodological 体系 of social work, such as classic models of casework, group work, and community work, ensuring students acquire solid professional competencies. This prevents the overemphasis on political attributes from reducing social workers to mere "policy propagandists," thereby preserving the profession's unique value in addressing complex issues.

4.2 Aligning Demand Orientation with Competency-Based Approach

The alignment of demand orientation with a competency-based approach serves as the practical guiding principle for optimizing curriculum content. This principle requires that curriculum optimization be closely centered on the functional demands of the Party's Social Work Departments—"coordinating public petitions, grassroots governance, and Party-building integration." Starting from "job requirements" and focusing on "competency development," it integrates new competencies such as "policy articulation, grassroots governance, Party-building support, and mass work" into curriculum objectives and content. Ultimately, this forms a closed loop of "curriculum content — competency development — job requirements," ensuring that graduates can quickly adapt to governance-oriented social work positions.

From the perspective of demand orientation, curriculum optimization must precisely align with the job requirements emphasized by the Party's Social Work Departments, establishing clear "criteria for inclusion and exclusion" in course content. Traditional curriculum content has predominantly focused on micro-level group services, whereas the demands of social work positions in the new era have expanded to areas such as "policy interpretation and translation," "mediation of petition-related conflicts," "collaboration in grassroots governance," and "integration of Party building with services." Accordingly, the curriculum must adjust its content focus. For instance, to address the need for "policy articulation," courses should incorporate new content like "policy text analysis" and "translating policies into service plans," enabling students to master the logic of converting policy stipulations into practical operations. To meet the demand for "grassroots governance," content on "understanding

grassroots organizational structures," "methods for multi-stakeholder collaboration," and "techniques for integrating governance resources" should be added, helping students comprehend the operational mechanisms of grassroots governance. For the need to integrate "Party building," content such as "the logic of Party building in social organizations" and "methods for embedding Party-building elements into services" should be included, allowing students to learn how to reflect Party leadership in professional services. Demand orientation does not imply passive adaptation but requires proactively anticipating changes in job requirements. For example, with the advancement of digital grassroots governance, the curriculum should preemptively incorporate content on "using digital governance tools" and "conducting online public needs assessments," ensuring that the curriculum content remains at the forefront of practical demands.

From the dimension of the competency-based approach, curriculum optimization must center on "competency development," restructuring course objectives and teaching components to avoid a "knowledge accumulation" style of content design.[16] The competency-based approach requires the curriculum to move beyond "what knowledge to teach" and instead focus on "what competencies to cultivate" and "how to cultivate them." For example, for "policy articulation competency," course objectives should clearly state that "students can independently interpret relevant policies of the Party's Social Work Departments and design appropriate social work service plans." Teaching components should include modules like "policy interpretation workshops" and "plan design studios," allowing students to hone their skills in simulated scenarios. For "grassroots governance practice competency," course objectives should be set as "students can participate in grassroots deliberative consultations and coordinate multi-stakeholder resources to solve governance challenges." Teaching methods such as "role-playing" and "governance case studies" can be adopted to help students master collaboration skills through interaction. Simultaneously, competency development should form a "progressive" system, moving from foundational competencies (e.g., policy text reading skills) to core competencies (e.g., policy translation skills) and then to comprehensive competencies (e.g., cross-domain governance coordination skills). Course content should deepen progressively according to competency levels, avoiding the "fragmentation" of competency development. Additionally, the curriculum needs to establish a "competency assessment mechanism," making competency attainment the core of evaluation instead of traditional assessment methods focused primarily on "knowledge memorization," thereby ensuring that competency development is effectively implemented.

4.3 Integrating Local Characteristics with Global Perspectives

The integration of local characteristics with global perspectives serves as the cultural and professional positioning principle for curriculum content optimization. This principle requires that curriculum optimization be grounded in the local context of China's "Party-led social governance," eliminating Western theories and methods incompatible with China's governance reality while deeply integrating local governance philosophies and practical experience. Simultaneously, it must retain the internationally universal methods and advanced concepts of the social work profession, avoiding the extremes of "wholesale Westernization" or "isolated innovation," thereby achieving a balance between local relevance and international alignment.

From the dimension of local characteristics, curriculum optimization must center on "adapting to China's governance context" to reconstruct the theoretical framework and case resources. China's social governance follows a unique logic of "Party committee leadership, government responsibility, social collaboration, and public participation," fundamentally differing from Western governance models such as "pluralistic governance" and "limited government intervention." Accordingly, the curriculum needs to eliminate theoretical content unsuitable for the local context. For instance, certain radical Western social work theories emphasizing "confrontational change" conflict with China's governance philosophy of "consultative co-governance" and should be removed. Some Western community work theories overemphasize "the independence of social organizations from the government," which contradicts the reality of "social organizations participating in governance under Party leadership" in China, necessitating localized adaptation. Meanwhile, the course should systematically integrate local governance ideas and practical content, taking Xi Jinping's important discussions on social governance as the core theoretical module and incorporating them into courses such as "Introduction to Social Work" and "Social Governance", so that students can understand the theoretical foundation of social governance in our country. Transform the practical experience of the Party Committee's Social Work Department into teaching content, such as "Local Methods for Resolving Petition Conflicts" and "Practical Paths for Integrating Party Building with Services", to enable students to master governance skills that are in line with China's reality. In addition, the course also needs to explore beneficial elements in China's traditional governance culture, such as "neighborhood mutual assistance" and "moral governance and education", and combine them with professional social work methods to form a social work service model with Chinese characteristics.

From the dimension of global perspectives, curriculum optimization must retain the internationally universal methods and advanced concepts of the social work profession, avoiding the loss of professional openness and innovation due to overemphasis on local characteristics [17]. As an international discipline, social work's core methods—such as case interview techniques, group dynamics analysis, and community needs assessment—have been tested through long-term practice and possess universal applicability. The curriculum must fully retain these elements to ensure students acquire professional competencies aligned with international standards. For example, the "Casework" course should preserve universal methods like "expressing empathy" and "problem definition techniques," while the "Community Work" course should retain internationally recognized practical tools like "participatory needs assessment" and "community mobilization strategies." Simultaneously, the curriculum should introduce advanced international experiences in social governance, such as mature practices in "standardized management of social organizations" and "volunteer service system construction," adapting them to China's context through localization to provide students with broader professional horizons. A global perspective does not mean "copying foreign models"; rather, it requires the curriculum, while grounded in local realities, to guide students in considering "how China's social work experience can engage in international dialogue" and "how international methods can serve China's governance," thereby cultivating students' professional inclusiveness and innovative thinking.

4.4 Coordinating Theoretical Restructuring with Practical Innovation

The coordination of theoretical restructuring and practical innovation serves as the dynamic development principle for curriculum content optimization. This principle emphasizes that curriculum optimization should not be confined to adjusting theoretical content in the classroom but must simultaneously reform the internship and practical training system. It requires establishing a dynamic adjustment mechanism of "theoretical learning – practical operation – needs feedback," allowing theory and practice to mutually support and refine each other. This avoids the disconnect between theory and practice, ensuring the curriculum system remains vibrant and adaptable.

From the dimension of theoretical restructuring, curriculum optimization must break away from the linear structure of traditional theoretical systems and construct a theoretical framework that "aligns with governance needs." Traditional social work theory courses often follow a linear logic of "foundational theories – professional theories – applied theories," [18] which is disconnected from the interdisciplinary governance demands led by the Party's Social Work Departments. Theoretical restructuring must reorganize theoretical content around the core of "social governance under Party leadership." For example, in "Social Work Theory" courses, "social support theory" should be explained in conjunction with "resource integration mechanisms in China's grassroots governance," and "empowerment theory" should be analyzed alongside "empowering the masses within the Party's mass line," ensuring that theoretical learning remains closely tied to local governance practices. In "Social Administration" courses, the theoretical content of "social service management" needs restructuring, adding modules such as "Service Coordination Management Under the Coordination of the Party's Social Work Departments" and "Administrative Coordination Theory in Public Petition Work," enabling theories to directly guide practice. Simultaneously, theoretical restructuring should emphasize "interdisciplinary integration," introducing theories related to social governance from political science and public administration (e.g., "collaborative governance theory," "policy implementation theory"). This helps students understand governance contexts from multiple disciplinary perspectives, preventing theoretical learning from being confined solely to social work and becoming inadequate for addressing complex governance issues.

From the dimension of practical innovation, curriculum optimization must concurrently reform the internship and practical training system, making practice the "testing ground" and "supplementary source" for theoretical learning. Traditional internships and practical training are mostly concentrated in conventional social work agencies, with monotonous content. Practical innovation needs to address three aspects: "expanding internship scenarios," "reforming training models," and "establishing feedback mechanisms." In expanding internship scenarios, it is essential to include the Party's Social Work Departments, sub-district offices, township governments, and Party-building-led social organizations as internship partners. This allows students to engage with new practical content such as "petition reception," "grassroots deliberative consultations," and "Party building in social organizations," compensating for the limitations of traditional internship settings. In reforming training models, there is a need to establish "simulated governance labs" and design training projects like "simulated petition dispute mediation" and "simulated grassroots governance collaboration." This enables students to repeatedly practice new skills in controlled environments. Additionally, introducing "project-based training," where students work in groups to complete tasks like "policy translation plan design" or "community governance micro-projects,"

enhances comprehensive practical abilities. In establishing feedback mechanisms, a closed loop of "internship/training – curriculum adjustment" must be created. Regularly collect evaluations from internship units on students' competencies and feedback from students on course content. Adjust theoretical course content promptly based on issues identified in practice. For instance, if students commonly report "insufficient policy translation skills" during internships, the "Social Policy" course should add teaching modules on "policy plan design." If internship units note that "students lack awareness of Party-building integration," the "Community Work" course should strengthen theoretical explanations on "embedding Party-building elements into services." Through this dynamic coordination between theory and practice, curriculum content remains in sync with practical demands, avoiding theoretical lag or blind practice.

5. SPECIFIC PATHWAYS FOR OPTIMIZING UNDERGRADUATE SOCIAL WORK CURRICULUM CONTENT IN APPLIED UNIVERSITIES FOR THE NEW ERA

In response to the new demands for professional talent in social governance following the establishment of the Party's Social Work Departments, undergraduate social work curricula in applied universities must advance systematic optimization across four dimensions: "module restructuring, content updating, practical reorientation, and competency enhancement." By aligning with governance practices, collaborating with practical departments, and focusing on competency alignment, the limitations of traditional curricula can be overcome. This will establish a curriculum system highly attuned to the job requirements for social workers in the new era, ensuring the cultivation of professionals capable of rapidly integrating into scenarios led by the Party's Social Work Departments, such as grassroots governance, petition coordination, and Party-building integration.

5.1 Restructuring Curriculum Modules: Adding Core Modules Aligned with the Functions of the Party's Social Work Departments

The existing curriculum modules fail to cover the core functions of the Party's Social Work Departments, resulting in a disconnect between students' knowledge base and practical demands. Curriculum module restructuring must be guided by the departments' functions of "coordinating public petitions, leading grassroots governance, and promoting Party-building integration." While retaining traditional core courses, three key types of modules should be added to form a composite curriculum system of "traditional services + governance adaptation," filling the gaps in students' knowledge of governance-oriented domains.

First, add a core module on "Public Petition Practices." This module should design content around the entire process of petition work handled by the Party's Social Work Departments, moving beyond the previous approach of "fragmented mentions" to systematically cover the policy foundations, practical procedures, and professional methods of petition work. The course content should include three sub-modules: interpretation of petition policies (e.g., the legal basis for petition work, the authority and responsibility boundaries of the Party's Social Work Departments in petition coordination), practical operations in petition work (e.g., standards for accepting public appeals, procedures for classifying and transferring petition matters, management of petition archives), and integration of professional methods (e.g., using casework skills to counsel petitioners, employing group work methods to facilitate collective negotiation of petition disputes, applying community work mechanisms to prevent petition issues). Teaching should emphasize the "integration of policy and practice," ensuring that students not only master the operational standards of petition work but also understand how to apply social work professional principles to resolve petition conflicts. This approach avoids reducing petition work to mere "administrative transaction processing" and highlights the value of social workers in "facilitated mediation" and "needs articulation" within petition work.

Second, add a core module on "Grassroots Governance Practices." This module must closely align with the function of the Party's Social Work Departments in promoting grassroots governance, moving beyond the micro-level perspective of traditional "community services" to construct a content system from a "meso-level coordination" perspective. The course should focus on the institutional framework, stakeholder collaboration, and practical skills in grassroots governance, specifically covering the construction of grassroots political capacity (e.g., the leadership role of grassroots Party organizations in governance, the functional positioning and operational mechanisms of village/community organizations), integration of governance resources (e.g., the logic of collaboration among government departments, social organizations, and public forces; methods for resource对接 and allocation), and solving governance issues (e.g., disputes over community public spaces, coordination of renovations in old residential areas, aligning service provision for special groups with governance objectives).

Teaching should guide students to understand the logic of "multi-stakeholder co-governance under Party leadership," rather than focusing solely on "individual or group services," cultivating their ability to analyze problems and integrate resources from a "holistic governance" perspective. This prepares them to adapt to the coordination and execution roles of the Party's Social Work Departments in grassroots governance.

Third, add a core module on "Party Building and Service Integration in Social Organizations." Addressing the need for the Party's Social Work Departments to promote Party building in "Two Enterprises and Three New Sectors" organizations, this module must resolve the teaching dilemma of "separation between Party building and services" by systematically explaining the logic of Party building in social organizations and the pathways for integrating it with professional social work services. The course content should include foundational knowledge of Party building (e.g., policy requirements for Party building in "Two Enterprises and Three New Sectors" organizations, the functional positioning of Party organizations within social organizations), methods for integrating Party building with services (e.g., how to incorporate Party leadership elements into the design of social organization services, how to coordinate social organization resources for governance participation through Party building), and practical skills in supporting Party building (e.g., assisting social organizations in establishing Party branches, participating in the planning of public welfare projects led by Party organizations). Teaching should avoid "merely lecturing on Party building theory" and instead focus on "what social workers can do," enabling students to master specific methods for assisting Party building through services and optimizing services through Party building. This ensures they can play a professional supporting role in the Party building efforts for social organizations promoted by the Party's Social Work Departments.

5.2 Updating Teaching Content: Strengthening "Local Practices and Policy Articulation"

Traditional social work education suffers from excessive Western-centric bias with insufficient focus on local practices, along with overly theoretical instruction lacking policy integration [19], failing to support students' understanding of governance practices led by the Party's Social Work Departments. Teaching content updates must address three key areas: textbooks, case studies, and policy interpretation, establishing "local practices as the core and policy articulation as the link" to ensure alignment with China's social governance realities and enhance students' comprehension of local practices and policies.

First, promote textbook restructuring through collaboration with Party's Social Work Departments to develop localized practice-oriented textbooks. Existing textbooks predominantly feature Western theories and cases while lacking coverage of departmental practices. Universities should proactively engage with these departments, forming textbook compilation teams combining academics and practitioners to create publications like "Social Work Practice in Grassroots Governance," "Case Studies in Public Petition Social Work," and "Guidelines for Integrating Party Building with Social Work Services." Textbook development should maintain practice-oriented approaches while avoiding theoretical overload. The grassroots governance textbook should explain social workers' roles and methodologies according to departmental governance tasks; the petition casebook should analyze common petition types and intervention strategies; the integration guide should provide operational guidance for Party building support in social organizations.

Second, enhance case-based teaching by prioritizing practical cases from Party's Social Work Departments. Current overreliance on Western cases impedes students' understanding of local governance logic [20]. Teaching must significantly increase local case proportions focusing on departmental governance scenarios including petition dispute resolution, community governance innovation, and services for new employment groups. Case instruction should evolve from simple explanation to integrated "analysis-role playing-solution design" processes: first guiding students to analyze departmental functions and intervention opportunities, then conducting role-playing simulations, and finally requiring service plan development. This immersive approach helps students grasp operational logic and application skills in departmental contexts.

Third, strengthen policy interpretation through involving departmental staff in teaching. Current insufficient coverage of Party-led social policies results in students' weak policy articulation skills. Universities should establish regular "policy in classroom" mechanisms with at least two departmental lectures per semester. Lectures should focus on policy implementation logic rather than textual interpretation: explaining background, implementation steps, and social workers' specific roles for digital governance policies; analyzing target groups, implementation challenges, and social workers' support roles for rights protection policies. Additional policy discussion sessions between students and practitioners can generate improvement suggestions, creating an "interpretation-discussion-application" cycle to enhance policy comprehension and translation capabilities.

5.3 Practical Teaching Transformation: Establishing a "University-Community Collaborative Grassroots Practice System"

Traditional practical teaching fails to cultivate governance-oriented practical competencies due to "limited partner diversity, projects disconnected from governance contexts, and evaluations emphasizing form over substance." [21] Practical teaching must undergo a comprehensive shift toward "university-community collaboration," establishing frontline governance units—including Party's Social Work Departments, sub-district offices, and "Two Enterprises and Three New Sectors" organizations—as core partners. This will create an integrated practice system encompassing "base expansion, project design, and evaluation reform," enabling students to hone practical skills in authentic governance environments.

First, expand internship bases to focus on frontline governance units. Existing internship bases predominantly consist of traditional social work agencies, which cannot provide practical scenarios related to the Party's Social Work Departments. Universities must proactively engage with Party's Social Work Departments at municipal and county levels, sub-district offices, township governments, and "Two Enterprises and Three New Sectors" organizations to establish stable internship bases, ensuring over 80% of interns can undertake placements within these frontline governance units. When selecting internship bases, emphasis should be placed on "practical relevance": Party's Social Work Departments can provide positions in public petition reception, policy implementation follow-up, and governance coordination; sub-district offices can offer roles in grassroots governance project execution and community deliberative consultation assistance; "Two Enterprises and Three New Sectors" organizations can provide opportunities in Party building support and practice integration between services and Party work. Through base expansion, students move beyond the limited context of "agency services" into the broader arena of "governance coordination," gaining exposure to core practices led by the Party's Social Work Departments.

Second, design specialized practical projects aligned with the actual work of Party's Social Work Departments. Internship content should avoid "fragmented tasks," instead developing specialized "social work + governance" practical projects centered on the key priorities of these departments, where students assume clear professional roles. For instance, in "social work + public petitions" projects, students could assist Party's Social Work Departments in conducting needs assessments among petitioners, participate in preliminary communications for petition dispute mediation, and organize petition cases to derive professional intervention recommendations. In "social work + community governance" projects, students could help sub-district offices collect resident suggestions for community governance, participate in organizing community public affairs deliberations, and design plans aligning services for special community groups with governance objectives. In "social work + Party building in Two Enterprises and Three New Sectors" projects, students could assist these organizations in identifying Party building needs, design social work service activities with Party building themes, and track service outcomes to provide optimization feedback. Project design must clarify "professional objectives," ensuring students apply social work methodologies while engaging in practice rather than merely performing administrative support tasks.

Third, reform the practical evaluation system to focus on practical outcomes as the core indicator. Traditional social work practice evaluations predominantly emphasize "internship reports and attendance," failing to objectively reflect students' governance competencies. Evaluation reform must establish "grassroots practical outcomes" as the primary assessment criterion, accounting for no less than 50% of the total evaluation, while incorporating comprehensive performance appraisal. Practical outcomes should be linked to specialized practical projects: for example, outcomes for "social work + public petitions" projects could include "needs assessment reports for petitioners" and "intervention plans for petition disputes"; "social work + community governance" project outcomes might comprise "summarized community governance recommendations" and "plans integrating services with governance"; "social work + Party building in Two Enterprises and Three New Sectors" project outcomes could involve "analytical reports on Party building needs" and "service design proposals with Party building themes." The evaluation process should incorporate input from practical units, where internship supervisors from Party's Social Work Departments or sub-district offices assess the "practical value" and "professional relevance" of outcomes, while university faculty focus on evaluating the "application of professional methodologies" within these outcomes. This creates a dual-dimensional "practice + professionalism" evaluation framework, ensuring assessments genuinely reflect students' governance practical capabilities.

5.4 Competency Development Upgrade: Building a "Four-Dimensional Core Competency" Development

System

Traditional competency development has focused on "micro-level service competencies," failing to meet the demands of the Party's Social Work Departments for "policy articulation, grassroots governance, Party-building integration, and mass work" competencies. Competency development must target these four core competencies, breaking the limitations of "single-mode classroom teaching" and establishing a comprehensive competency development system through the integration of "course instruction – practical training – practice feedback," ensuring graduates can quickly adapt to job requirements.

First, develop policy articulation competency through a "interpret-transform-feedback" training logic. The core of policy articulation competency lies in "translating policies of the Party's Social Work Departments into professional service plans." Development should progress in three steps. In course instruction, use "policy interpretation assignments" to have students analyze the core objectives, implementation requirements, and professional intervention opportunities within relevant departmental policies, mastering policy text analysis methods. In simulated training, conduct "policy application design" exercises, such as having students design specific social work intervention service plans for a given departmental policy (e.g., "refined grassroots governance policy"), clarifying how the plan connects with policy objectives. In practical placements, have students track policy implementation at the grassroots level, collect issues arising during execution, and formulate "policy implementation feedback suggestions," enhancing their policy feedback capability. Through this closed-loop "interpretation-transformation-feedback" training, students learn not only to understand policies but also to translate them into professional action.

Second, cultivate grassroots governance competency via a "participate-design-coordinate" training pathway. Grassroots governance competency must be developed in "authentic governance contexts," focusing on enabling students to master skills in "multi-stakeholder collaboration, resource integration, and problem-solving." Training can involve organizing student participation in "community micro-governance" projects, where they assume different roles: during the problem investigation phase, apply social work research methods to gather resident opinions on governance issues (e.g., parking difficulties, gaps in elderly care services); during the solution design phase, combine the governance objectives of the Party's Social Work Departments with resident needs to design governance plans that are both professional and feasible; during the implementation phase, assist in coordinating multiple stakeholders—government departments, social organizations, resident representatives—to advance the plan. Simultaneously, offer "governance case studies" in courses, guiding students to analyze issues like multi-stakeholder interest conflicts and resource gaps in grassroots governance, cultivating their ability to devise solutions from an "overall governance perspective."

Third, foster Party-building integration competency using a "cognize-investigate-design" training framework. The key to Party-building integration competency is "understanding the logic of Party building and mastering methods for integrating services with Party work." Development should avoid "indoctrination in Party building theory" and emphasize "integration with professional practice." First, utilize "foundational Party building courses" to help students comprehend the policy requirements for Party building in the "Two New" sectors and the functional positioning of Party organizations, establishing a correct understanding of Party building. Second, organize "Party building investigations in Two Enterprises and Three New Sectors organizations," enabling students to delve into these organizations to understand their current Party building status, needs, and challenges, mastering methods for analyzing Party building needs. Finally, conduct "social work service design with Party building themes," requiring students to design professional services incorporating Party building elements (e.g., "Party building + mental health services" or "Party building + vocational skills enhancement services" for employees in these organizations) based on investigation findings, clarifying how the services support the functioning of Party organizations. Through this "cognition-investigation-design" training, students master the integration techniques of "promoting Party building through services, optimizing services through Party building."

Fourth, develop mass work competency centered on a "simulate-practice-feedback" training core. Mass work competency is a foundational skill for social workers in contexts involving the Party's Social Work Departments, requiring focused training on three scenarios: "public petition reception, needs assessment, and communication coordination." In simulated training, set up "one-on-one public petition reception simulations," where students role-play as "social workers" and "petitioning masses," practicing skills in emotional counseling, appeal listening, and policy explanation, with guidance and feedback from instructors or practitioners from the Party's Social Work Departments. In practical application, arrange for students to conduct "door-to-door needs assessments," visiting households of community residents, new employment groups, and others to master communication methods with

diverse groups and accurately identify needs. In the feedback phase, organize students to review problems encountered in mass work (e.g., misunderstandings in communication, errors in needs identification), refining their methods based on suggestions from practitioners. Through this training approach of "building foundations through simulation, honing skills through practice, and promoting improvement through feedback," students acquire the core skills of engaging with and serving the masses, enabling them to play a professional role in mass work led by the Party's Social Work Departments.

6. CONCLUSION

This study analyzes the optimization of undergraduate social work curriculum content in applied universities for the new era, reaching the core conclusion that the fundamental aim of this optimization is to closely align with the functional positioning of the Party's Social Work Departments—"coordinating public petitions, leading grassroots governance, and promoting Party-building integration"—to deeply serve the needs of constructing a social governance system with Chinese characteristics, and to fundamentally reverse the current disconnection between traditional curricula and local governance practices. Regarding practical pathways, curriculum optimization requires focusing on four core levers: module restructuring, content updating, practical reorientation, and competency upgrading. Module restructuring fills gaps in governance-oriented knowledge by adding key modules such as Public Petition Practices, Grassroots Governance Practices, and Party Building and Service Integration in Social Organizations. Content updating centers on local practices, utilizing localized textbook compilation and strengthened policy interpretation to align teaching content with practice scenarios led by the Party's Social Work Departments. Practical reorientation relies on university-community collaboration mechanisms, extending internship scenarios to governance frontlines, allowing students to hone their skills in authentic practice. Competency upgrading focuses on the four core competencies of policy articulation, grassroots governance, Party-building integration, and mass work, constructing a competency development system suited to governance demands. Simultaneously, curriculum optimization must be supported by three guarantees—faculty, university-community collaboration, and evaluation—through establishing teaching teams comprising "university faculty + practice experts from Party's Social Work Departments," deepening collaboration with frontline governance units, and creating an evaluation system centered on practical outcomes, ensuring the effective implementation of optimization measures. Ultimately, social work education in applied universities must completely break away from the path dependency on Western models, fundamentally adhere to a "practice-oriented" approach, and promote the transformation of educational philosophy, curriculum systems, and training methods from "Western reference" to "Chinese characteristics." The final goal is to cultivate composite talents who not only master professional social work methods but also understand China's governance logic, can quickly integrate into social development scenarios led by the Party's Social Work Departments, and provide professional support for social governance with Chinese characteristics.

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