

# Reforming Community Work Education to Strengthen Community Governance Capacity in the Digital-Intelligence Era

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**Abstract:** *This study explores the reform of the core social work course 'Community Work' within the context of China's digital intelligence era, emphasizing the development of students' grassroots governance capabilities. Guided by General Secretary Xi Jinping's directives on social work and governance modernization, the study analyzes current challenges in course structure, digital pedagogy, and evaluation systems. Through digital-intelligent integration, ideological-political embedding, and practice-based learning, the research proposes a three-tier teaching reform framework combining foundation, core, and expansion. It also outlines strategies for linking classroom learning with community governance practices through virtual simulation, online collaboration, and real-world project-based learning. The study provides an evidence-based pedagogical model that integrates digital empowerment with ideological guidance, aligning social work education with the modernization of China's grassroots governance system.*

**Keywords:** Social Work Education; Community Governance; Digital Intelligence; Curriculum Reform; Grassroots Capability Development.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

General Secretary Xi Jinping's important directives on social work emphasize that social work is an integral part of the Party and state's work, bearing on the Party's long-term governance and the nation's enduring stability, as well as social harmony, stability, and the well-being of the people. Under new circumstances, social work—which serves the broadest social domains, the most extensive grassroots organizations, and the widest masses of the people—must be strengthened. Since the 18th CPC National Congress, the Party Central Committee has prioritized strengthening and innovating social governance as a key strategic task. Professional social work, with its expertise in service delivery, has been entrusted with functions in social governance. The curriculum of social work programs increasingly incorporates social governance content, aiding in resolving grassroots social conflicts and maintaining social stability. Consequently, the reform of the core social work course “Community Work” directly reflects the profession's proactive integration into the modernization of the national governance system and governance capabilities.

Translating professional teaching outcomes into tangible community impact. Currently, grassroots governance faces prominent challenges such as “small horses pulling heavy carts,” alongside new demands from emerging service groups and the diversification of community governance issues in the era of precision and digitalization. Professional expertise is urgently needed to empower these efforts. As the core pillar course in social work, “Community Work” deepens students' understanding of socialist social governance with Chinese characteristics, strengthens their professional commitment to “rooting in grassroots communities and serving the people,” and cultivates social responsibility. It establishes a digital-intelligent teaching pathway integrating online and offline instruction, utilizing virtual reality (VR) technology to construct immersive community scenarios. Online collaboration platforms are employed for community project design, fostering students' digital thinking skills. Establish a three-tiered competency framework for community governance—foundational, core, and advanced—and implement a teaching system that precisely aligns the instructional chain with the governance chain for mutual empowerment. This ultimately achieves integrated teaching and learning in social work courses, effectively advancing the cultivation of professional social workers and nurturing talent to elevate the modernization of community governance.

## 2. CURRENT ISSUES IN COMMUNITY WORK COURSES

### 2.1 Course Structure Fails to Align with New Social Governance Requirements.

Following the establishment of the Central Social Work Department, social work has been incorporated into the core framework of Party and state governance systems. Traditional community work curricula cannot address the strategic transformation of the Social Work Department nor meet the new challenges and demands of community governance in Sichuan Province. Community work reforms aim to resolve the current dilemma where professional social work education fails to match emerging local community governance issues and needs.

## **2.2 Teaching Methods Lag Behind Smart Governance Requirements.**

The digital era has revolutionized community governance approaches, yet current teaching methods and digital resource development/utilization remain inadequate. Social work education has failed to effectively integrate digital tools like artificial intelligence and virtual simulation platforms into coursework, falling short of meeting the demands of smart community governance and emerging trends in intelligent communities.

## **2.3 Assessment Fails to Evaluate Grassroots Governance Competencies Holistically and Multidimensionally.**

Course evaluation models require more refined measurement of students' comprehensive competencies in values, practical skills, and innovative extension abilities. Implementing a dynamic, full-process course assessment mechanism enables efficient, multidimensional evaluation of student growth throughout their learning journey.

# **3. KEY CONCEPTS OF CURRICULUM REFORM**

## **3.1 Deep Integration of Ideological-Political Education and Professionalism**

“Party-building leadership” is not treated as an ornament but as a core methodology permeating the entire teaching process. It is also presented as a crucial module in community governance instruction, achieving the dual course objectives of value guidance and professional education.

## **3.2 Precise Alignment and Mutual Empowerment Between Professional Education and Social Governance Chains**

The curriculum deeply integrates the School of Social Work's strategic framework with cutting-edge national governance concepts and requirements, including the “Fengqiao Experience” in the new era, Party-building-led grassroots governance, volunteer services, and governance of new economic and social organizations. Through authentic work scenarios, students design projects addressing real community needs, directly aligning teaching with grassroots governance practice. Students transition from observers to active participants and practitioners in community governance, truly realizing “bringing governance into the classroom and having the classroom serve governance.” The teaching process directly contributes to grassroots governance practice, with student assignments transforming into community service products, forming a virtuous cycle of “teaching-practice-governance.”

## **3.3 Distinctive Features of the Systemic Reconstruction of the “Panoramic Learning Platform-Curriculum Content-Curriculum Evaluation” System**

Systematic reconstruction and platform innovation: Creating an integrated online-offline “smart course learning platform and panoramic learning environment” to deliver rich authentic information, real work scenarios, and learning resources. Redesigned the “foundational + core + advanced” three-tier competency curriculum system, directly aligning with X-certificates, competition standards, and six grassroots governance modules. This achieves integration of “course-certification-competition-position,” multidimensionally facilitating students' effective competency development. Established a competency-oriented “1+3+5” multi-dimensional dynamic assessment mechanism. These three elements interlock to form a closed-loop talent cultivation ecosystem.

## **3.4 Distinctive Features of Digital Empowerment and Smart Teaching**

Current community work education faces challenges such as fragmented technology application and static teaching models. Educators generally lack awareness of digital instructional design, while students' understanding of technologies like AI, big data, and virtual simulation remains superficial. This study advocates building a “Smart Learning Community” to create a three-dimensional digital-intelligent ecosystem integrating teaching

content, methods, and evaluation. Leveraging AI algorithms to track student learning behaviors, pathways, and interaction quality enables teachers to deliver personalized guidance and precise feedback, thereby achieving a genuine shift toward learner-centered classrooms. Elevating digital literacy from a tool to a core competency goal cultivates students into digitally proficient social workers equipped to meet governance demands, adapting to the trends of smart communities and modernized governance.

## **4. PATHWAYS FOR TEACHING REFORM IN COMMUNITY WORK**

### **4.1 Guiding Community Work Instruction Through Ideological and Political Education in Curriculum**

Integrate ideological and political elements with social work's professional ethos of "people-centeredness, social justice, and helping others help themselves." Interpret and implement these principles within the broader context of "Party-building guiding community governance." Focus on contemporary issues to make ideological content vivid and relevant. Integrate course values with current events and the Party's latest policies (e.g., "modernization of grassroots governance," "new policies from the Ministry of Social Welfare"), concentrating on focal events in Party-led community governance and topics of student interest. Add specialized theoretical modules such as "Community Resource Mobilization and Integration Under Party Leadership" and "Party Building and Social Work Intervention in New Economic and Social Organizations," academically elucidating how the Party's organizational strengths translate into community governance effectiveness. Establish a "Practical Teaching Model for Localized Community Work Under Party Building Leadership" to refresh ideological and political content, making it more concrete and vivid.

Throughout the course, emphasize how to promote China's excellent traditional culture (such as neighborly mutual aid and respect for elders and care for children) under Party leadership, with a focus on uncovering and utilizing traditional cultural resources within grassroots communities (such as family traditions and precepts, traditional festivals, and local opera). These elements are integrated into community activities, enabling residents to strengthen cohesion through cultural inheritance and cultivate a new-era community spirit of "joint construction, co-governance, and shared benefits." This approach enhances residents' sense of community identity, belonging, responsibility, and honor. Students experience cultural appeal through hands-on practice. By participating in concrete community service projects, they naturally perceive, embrace, and internalize these ideological and political elements, ultimately achieving an educational effect that "nurtures silently."

Integrating community work practice with college student volunteer services encourages students to contribute to society and realize their value through service. This cultivates altruism and a spirit of dedication, shaping a professional commitment to grassroots service. Emphasis is placed on identifying ideological and political elements within specific community work cases through social work practice, guiding and nurturing students' volunteer spirit alongside crisis prevention and management capabilities.

### **4.2 Reconstructing the "Foundation + Core + Extension" Three-Tiered Community Governance Competency Curriculum System**

During curriculum development, we aligned with contemporary social work industry trends and Sichuan's governance-economic demands. Guided by professional competency, we restructured courses into three tiers: "Foundation + Core + Extension." This corresponds to cultivating foundational service skills, strengthening core practical abilities, and unlocking innovative capabilities. Foundational content includes: - Professional ethics and regulations for grassroots governance - Social investigation and needs assessment methodologies The core dimension integrates X-certificates like "Community Governance," aligning with the "Community Governance Practice" competition standards. It encompasses modules such as "Care Services for the Elderly and Children," "New Social Groups," "Community Governance in the Digital Age," "Community Organization and Volunteer Group Development," "Community Foundation and Charitable Resource Integration," and "Conflict Prevention and Resolution." The advanced dimension focuses on deepening Party-building leadership integration and innovative community governance models. Address the prominent issue of "small horses pulling heavy carts" in grassroots governance by coordinating efforts to empower and reduce burdens on the grassroots level. Solidify work in uniting and serving the people, uphold and develop the "Fengqiao Experience" for the new era, advance the rule of law in petition handling, effectively collect public suggestions, and develop volunteer service initiatives.

### **4.3 Building a Comprehensive Online Platform for Community Work**

Online, we establish a digital teaching resource repository integrating standardized curricula from national-level teaching resources for community studies and social work, forming a professional course matrix. Offline, we undertake service projects such as the Ministry of Social Work's social work project bases, collaborating with over 10 NGOs including Yibin Ronghe and Yibin Jinjiang. We transform real social work service projects into teaching modules, achieving "classroom projects and assignments as final works." By integrating online teaching resources with synchronous online-offline practical guidance, carefully curated theoretical resources from diverse institutions and curricula, alongside practical resources from various organizations, enterprises, and public institutions, are utilized in classroom instruction. These resources transcend temporal and spatial boundaries, overcoming national, racial, and occupational differences, enabling efficient mobilization and utilization for unrestricted classroom presentations.

Using Meiya Lianchuang's virtual simulation system and online community governance scenarios, students engage in course learning, crisis intervention, and resident service training through the virtual simulation platform. AI technology is integrated to enable personalized instruction. By connecting to online volunteer matching systems and community governance platforms, students develop digital resource integration capabilities. AI technology records and analyzes student learning processes, enabling quantitative assessment of learning outcomes. Beyond teaching support, the platform evolves into a "hybrid virtual-physical laboratory" for social work education. Accumulated case data, student practice trajectories, and community feedback form a dynamic "Teaching-Research-Governance" database, providing data support for curriculum refinement, social policy evaluation, and local governance decision-making. Faculty can generate "Data-Driven Teaching Reflection Reports" based on this data, while communities gain access to visual service outcome displays through the platform. This facilitates data interoperability and outcome sharing between educational and governance systems, transforming teaching achievements into tangible enhancements in social governance capabilities.

Through establishing close partnerships with the **Yibin Municipal Civil Affairs Bureau**, local sub-district offices, and community organizations, the programme actively integrates external resources to strengthen government awareness, recognition, and financial support for social work development. This collaboration has led to the **purchase of professional social work services** by the Civil Affairs Bureau and sub-district administrations, which are then undertaken by university faculty and students. These projects enable participants to engage directly in addressing local community problems through practical social work interventions.

Using the **Yibin Ronghe Social Work Service Center** as a collaborative platform, the Department of Social Work mobilises both faculty and students to participate in community-based capacity-building initiatives across multiple districts and sub-districts of Yibin City. At each project site, students are required to uphold professional social work standards, engage with authentic work environments, and carry out systematic observation and reflective learning. University instructors assume the role of **external supervisors**, providing guidance to ensure effective linkage between theoretical knowledge and field practice. In addition, **experienced practitioners are invited as off-campus mentors** to deliver hands-on training and model professional behaviour.

Through this **cyclical model of "leaving the classroom – entering the community – returning to the classroom,"** students are able to apply theoretical learning to real social issues, transforming practical challenges into opportunities for academic reflection and classroom discussion. This process achieves an organic integration between classroom instruction and experiential community practice.

Furthermore, supported by the **Sichuan Rural Community Governance Research Center** and the **Sichuan Community Correction Center**, students are encouraged to conduct applied research on real problems encountered in community practice. The aim is to enable social work education to serve **grassroots community governance and local economic and social development**, reflecting the university's mission of "rooting professional service in local needs." In this process, students not only enhance their analytical and professional competencies but also develop a strong **sense of belonging and civic responsibility** toward their home communities—thereby achieving the emotional and value-oriented objectives of the course

#### **4.4 A New Teaching Implementation Model: Precise Alignment and Mutual Empowerment Between Teaching and Governance Chains**

The "1+1+N" teaching team model (1 domain expert + 1 course instructor + N community leaders) is adopted to reconstruct interdisciplinary, cross-domain structured teaching innovation teams. These teams conduct collective lesson planning and modular teaching, ensuring theoretical grounding in pedagogy and policy while remaining

closely aligned with community realities and resident needs. Through “bringing real-world scenarios into the classroom and student outcomes into the community,” the education chain precisely empowers the talent and intellectual needs of the community governance chain. Conversely, the governance chain provides the education chain with vivid materials and value-validation scenarios, ultimately achieving the win-win goal of “student growth” and “community development.” Each class is divided into groups paired with corresponding communities, establishing a basic unit where one teaching class corresponds to one real community. From preliminary district research, community issue analysis, project planning, activity implementation, and governance model design, real-world community challenges are integrated into the classroom. This precise alignment between the education chain and community governance chain fosters student growth while simultaneously empowering communities. Post-project, insights, lessons, and case studies from practice are brought back for classroom discussion, generating replicable and scalable community governance recommendations. These are then fed back to communities, completing a continuous cycle where practice informs and renews theory. The teaching team structure embodies the principles of “cross-sector collaboration and dual-instructor co-education.” Beyond university faculty and community leaders, the team invites government officials, NGO directors, and corporate social responsibility representatives to jointly design and evaluate courses, forming a multi-stakeholder teaching community. This cross-sector collaboration not only expands students' learning horizons but also ensures curriculum relevance to policy realities and societal needs. Team members collaboratively design modular teaching units, each incorporating learning objectives, assessment metrics, and community engagement tasks. This ensures every classroom session has a clear real-world application.

#### **4.5 Establish a “1+3+5” Course Assessment Mechanism Focused on Enhancing Students' Practical Problem-solving Skills for Grassroots Community Governance.**

Leveraging the “1+3+5” assessment framework, we continue advancing assessment system diversification and refinement of evaluation metrics. Course assessments incorporate a three-party evaluation approach: integrating instructor evaluations, student self-assessments, and external supervisor/service recipient feedback. Instructor assessments shift away from traditional end-of-term exams, distributing scores across process-based evaluations that primarily gauge practical application of knowledge and real-world problem-solving capabilities within communities. Five-Dimensional Metrics: Assessment content spans five dimensions—theoretical knowledge application, foundational skill proficiency, core competencies, advanced skills, and depth of personal reflection. Evaluations are distributed throughout the project lifecycle, emphasizing student growth and outcomes-based learning. Assessment focuses on whether students have acquired relevant competencies based on their learning achievements and outputs, and whether their individual needs have been met.

### **5. RESEARCH SUMMARY AND OUTLOOK**

Through the teaching reform practices of this study, a new community work teaching system has been established, characterized by “grassroots commitment as its foundation, theoretical practice as its base, practical skills as its wings, and innovative thinking as its core.” This system achieves a paradigm shift from traditional knowledge transmission to a four-dimensional cultivation model integrating “values-knowledge-skills-competencies.” It aims to cultivate outstanding social work professionals capable of meeting the demands of the new era's “comprehensive social work” framework and advancing the modernization of grassroots governance. We deepen students' understanding of General Secretary Xi Jinping's important directives on social work, internalizing values such as Party-building leadership and grassroots commitment into professional character. This cultivates practitioners focused on addressing public issues in community governance and delivering grassroots services. We establish a training system oriented toward current community governance needs, guided by the progression of “foundational competencies—core competencies—expanded competencies.” Create an immersive learning environment integrating online and offline platforms, alongside a practice-oriented teaching model characterized by “classroom-community connectivity and teaching-governance synergy.” Emphasize practical application by tightly integrating classroom instruction with community practice, enabling students to apply professional knowledge in real-world community settings. Enhance their capacity to serve communities, resolve conflicts, and participate in social governance. Drive interaction between professional talent development and community governance practice through pedagogical reform. Establish an evaluation system that balances process and outcomes, involves multiple stakeholders, and clearly defines competency objectives: Implement multi-stakeholder assessments involving faculty, supervisors, service recipients, and community organizations; Develop a quantitative assessment system for competency attainment; Innovate educational mechanisms to explore an effective pathway for higher education to serve grassroots social governance.

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