



# Study on Quality Improvement Countermeasures of Graduation Thesis in Applied Undergraduate Colleges under the New Liberal Arts Background

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## Abstract

Graduation thesis (design) is an important part of undergraduate education and training system, and is a comprehensive index to evaluate the level of undergraduate teaching. At present, the quality of graduation thesis is stagnating due to the lack of guidance courses, unreasonable curriculum design, unrealistic topic selection sources and substandard writing standards. In this regard, countermeasures are put forward for the guidance teachers, curriculum design and evaluation system, so as to improve the quality of graduation thesis.

## Subject Areas

Curriculum Development, Higher Education

## Keywords

Graduation Thesis, Thesis Supervision, Undergraduate Colleges

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## 1. Introduction

Graduation thesis (design) is one of the important parts of undergraduate education, is the last important step in the undergraduate teaching program, its main purpose is to consolidate and strengthen students' knowledge of basic courses and specialized courses through the most basic academic norms, academic research methods and writing efforts, and cultivate students' ability to comprehensively use the knowledge and skills they have learned, combine theory with practice, and independently analyze and solve practical problems.

At present, undergraduate graduation thesis (design) lacks of professional course guidance, and there is also a lack of course foreshadowing for graduation thesis in the training program. Students in most majors start writing theses directly in their fourth year of college. Because there is no writing foundation and professional writing guidance, the graduation thesis generally exists big and empty topic selection, no new content, writing format is not standard, the logical structure of the article is disorder, most of the topic selection source is unrealistic, superficial analysis and interpretation, failed to study the essence of things and other phenomena, the quality of the paper is worrying.

## **2. The Influence of New Liberal Arts Background on Graduation Thesis Work**

With the deepening of reform and opening-up and the rapid expansion of university enrollment, from guarantee job assignments, to the enterprise-school two-way choice, to the current student himself to apply for the society, the environment in which undergraduate student place produced qualitative change. Employers have changed from state-owned enterprises and large enterprises to multinational companies, listed companies, private enterprises, Internet companies, IT industry and so on. Students also have a variety of channels and ways to choose a career, no longer just a single employment. With the deepening of the background of new liberal arts and the intersection of disciplines, students' employ ability is no longer single, but requires multilevel ability to find a better job. Those who are good at foreign languages should study economics or finance, and those who are good at law should study journalism or public opinion. The intersection of disciplines is a new round of scientific and technological revolution and industrial transformation.

### **2.1. Social Impact**

The social impact is mainly the change of recruitment form, recruitment time and recruitment requirements. For college graduates, job hunting can take up a lot of time, greatly affecting the time devoted to completing the graduation thesis (design) task. Some employers even require students to practice before graduation, the entire graduation thesis phase is in the internship period. Changes in recruitment timing and methods have greatly affected the time it takes for graduates to complete their thesis [1]. In the past, it was rather rare for employers to come to the school to recruit graduating students recommended by deans or heads of specific departments. Most of the employers held job fairs for students of the whole school or the whole college, aiming to recruit employees in a wider range. For the graduating students today, it is required that they exercise more initiative in job hunting, rather than waiting for the employer to recruit on campus. The old recruitment practices take up a lot of time and greatly affect students in completing their graduation thesis (design). The mutual selection of employers and graduating students has greatly advanced the recruitment time

for the employers want to recruit good employees. Some employers start recruitment in the 7th semester or at the beginning of the 8th semester from January to March every year, and the internship period last for 3 - 6 months. Upon graduation, many students are preparing for the postgraduate exam, the teacher's certificate exam, and the civil servant exam, which requires a lot of time and efforts. In Zhejiang Province, the civil service exam is generally held from December to January, and each city has its own time for the exam. The teacher's certificate exam is in June to December, and the time for review and training basically covers the entire graduation thesis stage. Social recruitment, postgraduate entrance exam.etc and other plans have seriously affected the schedule and quality of the graduation thesis (design).

## 2.2. Topic Selection Influence

It places greater demands on the thesis instructor's knowledge reserve and vision. Earlier, the content of the graduation thesis (design) is mainly aimed at the engineering practice, can have a certain amount of repetition, focusing on cultivating students' ability to solve practical engineering problems, the source of the topic is mainly aimed at the problems and solutions in internship or production practice. But now, with the continuous advancement of the construction of new liberal arts, the cross between disciplines is more and more fusion, the source of topic selection of graduation thesis (design) is more rich and varied, especially the topic selection of new things is more popular with contemporary college students. For example, combined with the current public opinion, Internet events, analysis of Internet companies' products, marketing planning analysis of leading companies in the industry, etc. More topics and interests are focused on the analysis and research of new things, and there are fewer and fewer topics derived from the reality of production and life, and the combination degree with the reality of production and life is also getting lower and lower [2].

## 2.3. The Influence of Students Themselves

With the deepening of the construction of new liberal arts, a new era and new concepts are emerging. When students choose topics and instructors, they tend to choose loose teachers and easy topics. It is best to copy similar content directly on the Internet, or fresh things can catch the eye and so on. Some students even take part in the scientific research projects directly for the convenience of their teachers, without considering whether their major meets the research requirements or whether they have the ability to solve and analyze problems independently. Some students are unable to select their own topics, and unable to effectively consult and collect relevant literature, which leads to the low quality of their "literature review" writing. In the process of writing the first draft of the paper, some students will even appear "irrelevant topic" phenomenon. This shows that some college students still lack logical thinking ability and basic scientific research accomplishment when they are near graduation.

### **3. Problems and Reasons Existing in the Graduation Thesis (Design)**

#### **3.1. Single and Nonstandard Topic Selection**

The supervisor selected topics for the students. Students choose unrealistic topics, most of which do not come from reality. Most of the supervisors set the topic from their own professional level, and did not well combine students' knowledge level, interests, professional expertise and other aspects, so students' writing is more passive. Even many topics are the fields that supervisors have studied or their own scientific research projects. Students just collect and sort out the materials without in-depth analysis and exploration. It is just a summary report. In addition, the level of the supervisor is uneven, resulting in a large difference in the difficulty of topic selection, simple topics are easy to write, but the content is not deep enough. Due to the limited level of students, difficult topics cannot be carried out in-depth research. There are also some students or supervisors who are perfunctory and re-publish the previous papers after modification, resulting in the repetition rate of topic selection has always been high, and the research method and content of the same rate is high.

#### **3.2. Unreasonable Allocation of Supervisors**

Take Zhejiang province as an example, at present, colleges and universities in Zhejiang province stipulate that a supervisor can guide at most 8 students' graduation thesis (design). However, due to the shortage of teachers in most universities, there are more than enough to satisfy the graduates. Colleges and universities often face the dilemma of excessive guidance, nominal guidance or external guidance, which are important factors that seriously affect the quality of students' graduation thesis (design). First of all, it takes more thought and energy for a supervisor to follow up a paper with his heart than to give a good class. Because the thesis (design) is a comprehensive embodiment of all the professional knowledge learned by students in four years, it is necessary to combine the structure and level of the student's professional knowledge to guide the direction and research of the thesis (design), and it is difficult to complete the thesis (design) guidance with high quality without certain experience. Secondly, due to the shortage of high-level and experienced supervisors, some students will be put under the name of those with high-level professional titles, but in fact, teachers with intermediate or even primary professional titles will actually guide them. Although the supervisor's attitude is serious, but after all, the level and qualifications are limited, the grasp of many key points is not comprehensive, the quality of the thesis (design) cannot be better improved. Finally, in the case of insufficient supervisors, many colleges and universities introduce external teachers to guide theses. Although the teachers have high professional titles and skills, they are not teachers of the school after all. The geographical and spatial distance makes it inconvenient for them to communicate with students face-to-face. Most of them communicate through emails and online, which leads to low quality and efficiency of guidance.

### 3.3. Lack of Writing Skills

When some students write, especially for foreign language graduation thesis, due to the poor professional foundation, there are many grammatical errors, unprofessional expression, poor rhetoric, fuzzy logical thinking and other phenomena. In addition, colleges or majors lack specialized thesis writing guidance courses, and students do not understand the norms and skills of thesis writing. At the same time, the present graduation thesis (design) work lacks sufficient preliminary preparation. First of all, students' writing level is not improved through daily teaching and social practice activities, and their scientific research ability is not well cultivated. Secondly, there are no early writing guidance courses to indoctrinate students with professional writing skills and infiltration of writing knowledge. So that students do not have a corresponding understanding of the method and process of writing graduation thesis, do not know how to select topics, how to access data, paper format requirements and so on. Many students still lack the ability to actively think and relate to reality, and more often use the Internet to search for information. Their research on things only stays in simple description and summary, instead of in-depth analysis of problems, and they lack logical thinking and the ability to write papers.

### 3.4. Insufficiently In-Depth Thesis Defense

Defense is the last important link of graduation thesis, but also the way to examine the thesis. One must sustain his effort when a task is nearing completion. As the last link of graduation thesis work, thesis defense not only requires students to be very familiar with their own thesis before the defense, but also in the specified time, clearly state the writing content. This requires students to have strong language organization ability and language expression ability [3]. The number of undergraduate graduates is far more than master and doctoral students, the school cannot carry out meticulous, rigorous defense. Some schools draw lots to determine the list of defense students, and some schools adopt the whole defense. Most of the defense is just a formality. In addition, the defense teachers do not have enough time to read the students' papers in advance, do not understand deeply, and the on-site questions are too simple or superficial, resulting in the defense in many cases become a formality and go through the motions.

### 3.5. Plagiarism

Nowadays, students' theses are mostly copied from the Internet, which is made up of large blocks of text and lacks logical coherence. Although colleges and universities have made use of TMLC systems such as CNKI and Wanfang, and students have also modified the text to be different from the original text, plagiarism is still common. The supervisor cannot judge whether there is plagiarism, but can only give corresponding guidance on the expression and structure of the text of the paper.

### **3.6. Imperfect Evaluation System**

The current graduation thesis course lacks the evaluation system. There is no assessment system like professional courses. The teacher could not evaluate whether the students were serious about the thesis, and neither could the students. Schools lack this evaluation mechanism, the quality of guidance does not affect the number of guidance fees, there is only reward without punishment, supervisors and students both have no certain constraints, all rely on self-consciousness.

## **4. Thesis (Design) Management and Quality Improvement Countermeasures**

### **4.1. Pay More Attention to Graduation Thesis**

First of all, from the school to the college to the department, and finally to teachers and students, all levels should attach great importance to the graduation thesis. Graduation not only depends on the results of other courses, graduation thesis is also an important part of the assessment. At the beginning of the thesis work, the teaching department of the college should do a good job of the implementation plan of the graduation thesis. In the thesis process management, the college needs to strengthen supervision, using the graduation thesis management system to control the upload of materials. In addition, professional systems such as CNKI are used to check and re-test the copy ratio of students' theses, objectively eliminating academic misconduct and serious academic atmosphere.

Universities or colleges should strengthen certain topics or fields in students' daily subject study, consciously and systematically train them to accumulate data and learn to think actively and do researches by themselves. Such learning, accumulation and exploration approaches will provide students with materials for their further project researches and academic writings. Meanwhile, full play should be given to the advantages of either universities or enterprises such as the teaching facilities, research resources and production environments, thus to establish a close cooperation of industry, university and research and form a collaborative innovation system integrating production development, talent training, and scientific research. Such a system can help to build students' innovative awareness, help students to produce more innovative graduation thesis related to practices, and accordingly make the thesis a valuable one instead of merely a collection cliches or dead facts.

### **4.2. Specialized Thesis Guidance Courses, Small Thesis System and Lectures**

Mastering writing skills and improving writing ability is not an overnight task. In the study of professional courses, the teaching of essay writing skills and the practice of improving writing ability should be interspersed appropriately and consciously, or set up a thesis writing guidance course in the training program, in the teaching objectives of the course focus on topic selection and data collection skills and methods, the selection of research methods, writing progress

management, communication skills and methods between teachers and students in the writing process, to avoid academic misconduct and other phenomena. In professional courses, students are consciously required to complete course assignments in accordance with the writing requirements of professional papers. Let students master the basic frame of the thesis as soon as possible to lay the foundation for graduation thesis writing [4]. Through step-by-step guidance and teaching, students' ability and skills in paper writing can be improved by osmosis. Or the examination of professional courses also adopts the form of small papers to train students' paper writing ability in advance. We can try to start from the third year of the university, in the assessment of some professional courses to increase some small paper writing assessment about a certain knowledge point in the discipline, theoretical methods, discipline development and other aspects. In this way, students can not only cultivate their interest in in-depth research of the course, but also improve their scientific research consciousness and paper writing ability. Before students start to write graduation thesis, at least have certain research objectives and direction, but also have the basic thesis writing ability, there will not be "no clue, no direction, no method" phenomenon in thesis writing. At the same time, because of the different characteristics of the major, the supervisors should stipulate the writing skills and norms of the professional thesis according to the characteristics of the major. At present, most of the retrieval of students' theses is limited to websites like CNKI and Baidu. Supervisors should teach students the method of reference retrieval, so that students can successfully retrieve the reference they need. At the same time, the school can offer lectures related to essay writing for juniors or seniors so that students can master the method of essay writing in a more comprehensive way.

#### **4.3. Adopt Teaching Methods Suitable for the Thesis Guidance Course**

Make full use of multimedia equipment, through modern means to teach students the key points of thesis guidance course, so that students establish a certain sense of innovation. And through group discussion mode, improve students' participation, enthusiasm and paper writing ability. In the course of teaching, teachers should teach students how to conduct literature retrieval through CNKI, Baidu Academic and other network resources. And train students' literature review writing ability with the help of periodicals, newspapers and other literature. At the same time, it also cultivates students' comprehensive practical ability to put forward, analyze and solve problems based on professional practice background.

#### **4.4. Strengthen the Role of Supervisors**

The supervisor himself should have a high sense of responsibility and be willing to patiently guide the student's thesis. At the same time, the supervisor should respect the students' will, understand the students' professional level and knowledge structure, and teach the thesis according to their aptitude. When selecting

topics, we should pay attention to students' practical ability and independent thinking ability, assist students to choose appropriate topics, and provide students with corresponding reference materials. In the guidance process, the supervisor should combine their own rich guidance experience, emphasize that students should communicate with their supervisor in each writing link, so as to ensure that students complete the graduation thesis of high quality. When the school organizes mid-term examination, the supervisor should know and monitor the progress and quality of students' writing in time. Before the defense, they should help students to sort out the context, the highlights and innovations of the thesis, and teach some defense skills, to make up for the thesis again. Schools with teacher shortage can adopt the dual-tutor system to implement the role of "mentoring", senior teachers lead new teachers to participate in the student thesis guidance [5]. As the leading teacher (the research field is consistent with the direction of the thesis), the senior teacher is responsible for the grasp of the direction and the guidance of problem solving methods in the thesis, and can also improve the enthusiasm of the supervisor to guide the thesis. Junior teachers can act as auxiliary tutors (the research area is the cross-discipline appearing in the thesis) to guide and integrate the application of cross-discipline knowledge in the areas where the lead teacher is not good at. Graduation thesis is a process work which needs the cooperation of teachers and students.

#### **4.5. Select Topics Based on Practical Values**

Most majors will arrange professional practice in the summer vacation of the third year of the university, which lays the source and foundation for the topic selection of the graduation thesis [6]. Students should clarify the practical value orientation of thesis topic selection. The evaluation criterion of applied undergraduates should pay attention to whether the knowledge, ability and skills are compatible with the requirements of the society for application-oriented talents. Student graduation thesis topic selection should be more from the production practice, emphasize the certain practical significance, can make the students learn professional knowledge and skills that can be used to practice or essay writing, through constant communication between teachers and students, and combining the background of the student internship practice, in ensuring that graduation thesis on the basis of the selected topic significance, within the scope of the teachers research direction, according to their own rich research experience to give valuable guidance to students, to achieve the teaching goal of training practical and innovative talents.

#### **4.6. Establish the Evaluation System of Graduation Thesis Guidance Effect**

The school should establish and perfect the corresponding graduation thesis guidance evaluation system. Provide a complaint channel, during the thesis guidance, students can complain about the teacher's guidance, management department will carry out corresponding intervention, try to ensure the quality of



the thesis. Secondly, after the thesis writing, the supervisors and students should evaluate each other. If students do not give high evaluation to the supervisor, the college should consider whether to continue to hire him/her to instruct students in the next year. Supervisors with high evaluation can be given certain material or spiritual rewards to encourage them to be more devoted to guiding students. After the thesis is finished, the university shall organize a special institution to review the quality of the thesis. According to Ministry of Education newest document “undergraduate course graduation thesis (design) sampling check method (try out) notice” guiding requirement, universities should conduct random checks on the last undergraduate thesis (design), and the percentage of random checks should not be less than 2%. This document provides a strong guarantee for strengthening the process monitoring and evaluation of the quality of graduation thesis work, standardizing the management of graduation thesis and improving the quality of graduation thesis.

## 5. Conclusion

In summary, to cultivate applied talents, we should first establish the awareness that undergraduate graduation thesis (design) is to cultivate students’ comprehensive practical ability, and constantly reform the teaching of graduation thesis guidance course. Secondly, we should pay attention to the practical value of thesis topic selection, design a reasonable syllabus of thesis guidance course, use scientific and reasonable teaching methods, and complete the graduation thesis writing through the communication between the supervisors and students, so as to improve students’ practical ability to analyze and solve problems, and cultivate applied talents who can meet the market demand.

## Future Research Direction

The undergraduate students studied in this paper are mainly post-90s and post-95s, and the post-00s and post-10s are about to begin their graduation thesis writing. With the rapid development of society and technology, the research direction and methods of students’ graduation thesis should change accordingly. The topics of the current post-90s and post-95s papers are mostly derived from the phenomenon of the Internet, combined with the reality of life and production, and the references and materials are almost all from the Internet. In the context of the new liberal arts, with the application of new technologies, it is believed that the research directions and sources of the graduation thesis (design) of the post-00s and post-10s will be different, which poses new challenges and require reforms in both the writing skills and management of graduation thesis.

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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