

# Study on Practical Teaching in Community Governance Courses from a Synergetic Perspective

Lu Sun

School of Business, Yangzhou University, Yangzhou 225127, China.

## Abstract

The community governance course aims to lay a solid foundation for cultivating interdisciplinary and application-oriented professionals with practical skills in community planning, governance and services. However, the current practical teaching of community governance courses in Chinese universities faces several challenges, including inconsistency in content, weak faculty capacity, and limited teaching methods. The training of application-oriented talents for grassroots governance should focus on enhancing overall functionality and fostering synergetic effects. This requires not only institutional coordination at the university, college and department levels to provide resources and incentives but also collaboration among various internal and external stakeholders to optimize resource allocation. By implementing a multi-dimensional synergetic approach to practical teaching, the effectiveness of practical education can be improved, ensuring a steady supply of much-needed talent for grassroots governance in China.

## Keywords

Practical Teaching; Community Governance; Talent Cultivation; Synergetics.

## 1. Introduction

As the most localized and fundamental component of the national governance system, communities play a crucial role in underpinning social development, governance and public services at the micro level. The community governance course is designed to align with the practical needs of community development and governance in China. It aims to lay a solid foundation for cultivating interdisciplinary and application-oriented professionals with strong practical skills in community planning, governance and services.

From the perspective of national top-level design, the orientation and incentive mechanisms encouraging university graduates to pursue careers at the grassroots level have become increasingly clear and well-developed. Traditionally, China's talent cultivation model has emphasized theory over practice, with teaching structures and management primarily centered around standardized regulations for theoretical instruction. However, as the talent cultivation model emphasizing both practical experience and a solid foundation has emerged, universities have gradually placed greater importance on practice-based teaching. If theoretical teaching focuses on imparting specialized knowledge and developing students' abstract and logical thinking skills, then practice-based teaching emphasizes the training of comprehensive professional skills, fostering students' innovation and practical abilities while enhancing their overall competence for future careers. Driven by the demand for modernizing grassroots governance systems and capabilities, there is a growing consensus among universities and society on the need to expand research and exploration of practice-based teaching methods in community governance courses to meet the demand for modern grassroots governance talent.

## 2. Challenges in the Practical Teaching of Community Governance Courses

Practical teaching methods are not constrained by traditional classroom settings. These methods enhance the authenticity, contextual relevance and engagement of the course. They allow students to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world scenarios, offering significant educational advantages while optimizing resource investment. This approach aligns with social demands for application-oriented talents and fosters students' innovation capabilities.

Currently, theoretical instruction in community governance courses at Chinese universities has been well-structured, with comprehensive syllabi, teaching plans, assessment schemes and evaluation standards. However, in contrast, practical teaching remains relatively unstructured and subjective, with significant variability in implementation. The process of integrating practice-based instruction still faces numerous challenges and shortcomings.

### 2.1. The Lack of Standardization in Practical Teaching Content

On one hand, there is no unified textbook for practical teaching, on the other, the plans, assessments and evaluation standards for practical learning remain incomplete. Some universities, even if they have developed a syllabus and plan for practical teaching, implement them in a highly inconsistent manner, often relying on the personal preferences of lecturers. In some cases, there is a misconception that simply taking students to observe a community is sufficient to complete practical teaching.

Additionally, when support conditions for practical teaching are insufficient, the practical teaching content is often arbitrarily changed and the teaching duration is cut due to cost-saving considerations.

### 2.2. Weak Faculty Support for Practical Teaching

Compared to instructors of theoretical courses, those engaged in practical teaching receive limited professional training and guidance and most of them get relevant knowledge by self-learning. Many instructors lack hands-on experience and expertise in community governance, excelling in theoretical research and teaching but falling short in practical teaching experience. In particular, the absence of a comprehensive instructional framework and strategic planning results in fragmented and superficial practical teaching activities. Instructors are not professional enough to guide students to develop a holistic understanding of community governance.

### 2.3. Limited Diversity in Practical Teaching Methods

Practical teaching generally takes two forms: in-class practice and extracurricular practice. Due to the limited resources, most universities in China primarily take in-class practice such as case-based teaching and scenario simulations. However, most of the cases currently used are secondary sources rather than being directly compiled by instructors based on first-hand experience. Because these cases do not align well with the actual teaching context, case-based teaching is often constrained by factors such as the discussion topic, discussion setting and even the number of students in the classroom. Thus students may fail to deeply engage in the case study.

Additionally, scenario-based simulations are restricted by factors such as time, space, the acting ability of participants and the instructor's management skills, making it difficult to fully develop students' practical abilities in handling real-life situations and solving problems.

Extracurricular practical teaching is often conducted at off-campus training bases, which allows students to leave the daily environment. In real operation, students tend to be more relaxed and unfocused, making it challenging for instructors to manage them. If supervision is inadequate, off-campus practical teaching may become a useless formality for formality's sake

rather than a meaningful learning experience. Therefore, with this teaching method, it is also difficult to realize the teaching goal.

### **3. Synergetic Exploration of Practical Teaching in Community Governance Courses**

Synergy is a value-driven concept that emphasizes the coordination of multiple actors to achieve a shared goal, highlighting the system's dynamism, self-organization, and coherence. In the early 1970s, German physicist Hermann Haken developed synergetics as a theoretical framework. Based on my experience in practical teaching for community governance courses, relying solely on individual instructors and isolated practical activities is insufficient to achieve optimal teaching outcomes. Talent cultivation should focus on enhancing overall functionality and stimulating synergistic effects. This requires a multi-actor synergy approach, where institutional synergy at the school, faculty, and department levels provides resources and incentive support, while internal and external stakeholders collaborate to implement integrated practical teaching.

#### **3.1. Synergetic Development of Practical Teaching Syllabus**

First, colleges and departments should collaborate to establish a practical teaching system that aligns with the course training objectives and syllabus requirements. In the teaching process, practical teaching methods should be clearly defined based on the needs of professional competency development and the characteristics of different practical activities. Various approaches, such as in-class practice, internship-based practice and project-based practice, can be adopted to build a diversified and multidimensional practical teaching system. This approach helps students develop comprehensive skills in problem identification, analysis, and resolution while strengthening their professional expertise and theoretical foundation. Ultimately, it facilitates the balanced development of students' knowledge, abilities, and overall competencies, ensuring they acquire the essential skills needed for future grassroots governance roles.

Second, efforts should be made to establish a synergetic monitoring and feedback system for practical teaching. A quality evaluation framework should be developed to assess both instructors and students participating in practical activities. Evaluation standards should be set, and an assessment team, comprising teaching supervisors, external mentors, practical training instructors and student representatives, should be formed to provide timely feedback on practical teaching activities. This ensures the stability, standardization and operational feasibility of practical teaching implementation.

#### **3.2. Synergizing Related Courses to Strengthen Practical Teaching**

Community governance courses are typically offered in public administration programs, which also include related courses such as community services, community social work, sociology, property management and urban management. Each of these courses incorporates its own practical teaching activities, but this often results in redundant or fragmented practical experiences, failing to create a cohesive learning process that enhances students' problem-solving abilities. Additionally, the scattered and overly frequent fragmented practical teaching sessions can deplete resources at designated training bases and disrupt the normal operations of urban communities responsible for hosting these activities.

By integrating practical teaching across multiple interrelated courses, a synergetic teaching approach can be established. Coordinating course clusters to form a systematic and structured practical teaching framework will not only expand the breadth of practical training but also deepen its impact. This, in turn, will significantly enhance students' practical capabilities in grassroots governance.

### 3.3. Synergizing Various On-Campus Social Practice Resources

Students majoring in public administration often participate in various social practice activities during vacations, such as student research projects, innovation competitions, the “Challenge Cup” and other academic contests. Many of these projects involve topics related to community governance, but students typically work independently, with limited collaboration between teams. Due to the dispersion of resources and constraints on time and effort, it is difficult for students to achieve impactful results in the short term.

Community governance courses can leverage these existing activities and competitions to create a more integrated and continuous practical teaching framework. Breaking down barriers between academic years can facilitate interaction and collaboration between senior and junior students, fostering a mentoring system where experienced students guide newcomers. This synergy can extend the practical learning process beyond a single course. Additionally, initiatives such as establishing “Student Community Studios” could provide hands-on training through field-based projects, equipping students with essential skills in grassroots research, critical thinking, and problem analysis. These efforts would ultimately enhance the effectiveness of practical teaching in community governance.

### 3.4. Synergizing Participation from Universities, Government and Social Entities

Community governance involves multiple stakeholders with diverse interests, making it an increasingly complex field. Therefore, practical teaching in community governance courses must integrate resources from various actors, including the government, society and the market. Expanding the number of practice-based training bases and enriching course-related practical resources can provide students with platforms to observe and analyze governance issues while encouraging them to explore the complexities of community governance from a multi-stakeholder perspective.

University-government and university-community collaborations should go beyond superficial activities such as visiting local administrative offices or cleaning public spaces. Instead, practical teaching should be deeply embedded in the daily operations of community governance. For instance, students can engage in long-term participation by assisting community organizations in conducting research, organizing public outreach activities, and facilitating volunteer services.

To achieve this, universities must actively connect and utilize resources from multiple stakeholders while innovating teaching methods. This can include an “outward approach”, where students conduct field investigations, participate in community services, and gain hands-on experience. Alternatively, an “inward approach” can be employed by inviting grassroots administrators, social organization experts, and practitioners to deliver lectures, share real-world cases, and provide first-hand insights into governance challenges.

Furthermore, the establishment of stable practice-based teaching bases requires continuous efforts to strengthen university-government and university-community cooperation. Leveraging alumni networks can also contribute to a sustainable talent development model, ensuring long-term benefits for both education and community governance.

## 4. Conclusion

Although practical teaching in community governance courses in Chinese universities has achieved some progress, significant shortcomings remain in terms of course content, teaching methods and faculty development. Moving forward, effective collaboration among multiple stakeholders including universities, local governments, social organizations, market entities,

educators, and students is essential. By integrating and synergizing diverse resources, a holistic and coordinated approach can be established to maximize the impact of practical teaching. Such a collaborative framework will not only facilitate the reconstruction and localization of community governance theories, but also contribute intellectual support to narrating China's grassroots governance story. Ultimately, enhancing the effectiveness of practical teaching in community governance courses will help cultivate innovative governance professionals equipped with both theoretical knowledge and practical experience.

## References

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