

Exploration of Pathways for the Characteristic Development of the Digital Media Arts Major under the Context of “New Liberal Arts”

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Abstract: The concept of "New Liberal Arts" addresses the evolving demands of talent cultivation, necessitating an upgrade and expansion of digital media arts. This paradigm integrates digital interactive technology, revolutionizing traditional knowledge and influence. This paper explores the foundational concepts and characteristics of "New Liberal Arts" and digital media arts, critically examining current teaching methodologies and program status. It proposes pathways for the development of digital media arts majors within the "New Liberal Arts" framework. This interdisciplinary approach merges technological advancements with liberal arts traditions, fostering creativity, critical thinking, and technological fluency. The paper highlights the need for curriculum innovation, resource allocation, and integrating cultural heritage with modern technology. These insights aim to enhance talent cultivation and meet industry demands, driving teaching reforms to prepare students for future challenges in digital media arts.

1. Introduction

The digital age fosters the comprehensive cultivation and advancement of digital media arts talents, especially within the context of China's digital development strategy, which requires a substantial number of digital art professionals for modernization. Integrating the concept and characteristics of "New Liberal Arts" with the development of the digital media arts major offers a transformative approach to cultivating high-quality talents essential for social construction. The "New Liberal Arts" framework blends traditional liberal arts education with contemporary technological advancements, broadening academic inquiry and fostering a holistic understanding of both humanities and technology. Embedding digital interactive technologies within the curriculum revolutionizes traditional educational methodologies, creating a more dynamic and engaging learning environment. This approach enhances students' technical proficiency, critical thinking, creativity, and appreciation of cultural and artistic contexts. Innovating teaching models to incorporate "New Liberal Arts" principles involves developing responsive curricula, promoting interdisciplinary collaboration, and emphasizing hands-on learning. This ensures that students are adept at using digital tools and understand the cultural, social, and ethical implications of their work. Ultimately, this integration holds significant scientific and modern value, contributing to social and economic development by producing skilled practitioners and visionary thinkers capable of driving innovation and progress in various sectors.

2. Concept Definition and Characteristics

2.1. Concept Definition

1) New Liberal Arts

The teaching concept of "New Liberal Arts" was first proposed by Hiram College in the United States in 2017. The college achieved comprehensive interdisciplinary cultivation of students by restructuring majors to integrate science and technology into philosophy, literature, and languages.

In March 2021, the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China issued a notice recommending research and reform practice projects for the construction of "New Liberal Arts". The guidelines include six fields and 22 directions, focusing on the integration of contemporary technology, breaking down the boundaries of traditional liberal arts, and combining rational and emotional knowledge.

2) Digital Media Arts Major

Digital media arts, an emerging field expanding from information sciences into the humanities and arts, was officially added to the professional directory by the Ministry of Education in 2004. In 2012, it was redefined to replace digital media arts and digital game design majors. This discipline integrates digital information technology and art design theory, combining natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities, aiming to cultivate students' creative and design abilities along with technical research capabilities.

2.2. Characteristics

1) Characteristics of New Liberal Arts

New Liberal Arts reflect the general characteristics of Chinese humanities and social sciences, incorporating strategic position, innovation capability, and integration ^[1]. It aims to address complex international situations and combines rational logic with emotional impulse. With the help of modern digital information technology, New Liberal Arts possess the physical attributes of continuous upgrading and restructuring, compatible with other disciplines' advantages, thereby addressing new social issues effectively.

2) Characteristics of Digital Media Arts

Digital media arts combine computer technology with artistic expression, encompassing design, computer graphics, and digital media ^[2]. Compared to traditional art, its key feature is the use of modern information technology in the creative process. With the advancement of technologies like 5G and AI, digital media arts continuously evolve, enhancing sensory experiences and breaking the boundaries of traditional art forms.

3. Current Teaching Status of Digital Media Arts Major

The digital media arts discipline in China, though relatively new, has grown rapidly. By March 2020, 248 institutions across 27 provinces had established programs. Among them, six universities, including China Communication University and Tsinghua University, were rated A+ level, while 26 universities, such as Central Academy of Fine Arts, were rated A level. Institutions have developed specific training programs based on their strengths, with art schools focusing on foundational theories and practical skills, and universities like Harbin Institute of Technology leveraging their engineering strengths. To ensure sustained development within the "New Liberal Arts" framework, digital media arts must adopt new concepts, methods, and models. Despite its rapid growth, the discipline faces challenges in talent cultivation, faculty development, curriculum content, resource allocation, and cultural heritage preservation.

3.1. Lack of Distinctive Talent Cultivation Plans

In recent years, the promising future of digital media arts education has led to a surge in demand for professionals in this field. Consequently, many domestic universities have rushed to establish digital media arts programs, resulting in homogenization. These institutions often lack clear goals due to the short establishment period or underdeveloped systems, leading to indiscriminate expansion and an emphasis on student numbers over quality. This results in students not receiving comprehensive training, and their theoretical and practical skills remain unintegrated. Additionally, some universities fail to tailor their programs to local economic and social needs, resulting in outdated curricula that do not meet industry requirements.

In the context of "New Liberal Arts," talent cultivation needs to be adaptable, personalized, and tailored to individual needs ^[3]. As Fudan University Vice President Xu Lei pointed out, "New Liberal Arts talent cultivation requires a school-specific approach, particularly avoiding the

standardization of liberal arts education. Each institution should develop unique training plans that reflect its strengths and characteristics. This is crucial for the effective teaching reform and talent development of digital media arts programs.

3.2. Lack of Interdisciplinary Collaboration and Integration of Learning Content and Practice

Currently, some local universities' digital media arts programs still follow traditional faculty construction models, with most teachers having backgrounds in arts or design. This lack of diversity leads to a narrow focus and isolated courses, hindering the integration of course content and the development of a comprehensive design theory system. Given the interdisciplinary nature of digital media arts, it is essential to incorporate faculty from fields like computer science, engineering, sociology, literature, and communications to create a multidisciplinary curriculum.

Additionally, the current curriculum often lacks coherence and comprehensive planning, making it difficult to teach complex, diverse content effectively. Many teachers still use traditional methods, emphasizing basic knowledge without adapting teaching techniques to foster creativity and innovation. Without practical training, students' understanding remains theoretical, confined to books and computers, without opportunities to apply their knowledge. This disconnect between theory and practice leads to superficial learning, where theoretical knowledge fades over time, leaving only a vague outline.

3.3. Inadequate Coordination between Teaching Philosophy and Resource Allocation

Compared to traditional programs, digital media arts require more resource support. Universities need to allocate funds appropriately to ensure the construction and updating of specialized hardware and software. This investment is crucial for both student learning and faculty evaluation. However, the high cost of digital teaching equipment, coupled with insufficient funding in some institutions, limits students' exposure to essential specialized tools. This resource allocation issue hampers the ability of universities to cultivate talents needed by the industry.

3.4. Lack of Integration between Traditional Culture and Advanced Technology

China has a rich cultural heritage, but its development in advanced digital technology lags behind that of more developed countries. The lack of standardized systems and educational theories means that teaching practices are often exploratory. Some teachers focus only on their specific field without integrating traditional cultural elements with digital technology. Students lack initiative and innovation, often passively completing assignments. This approach hinders the development of their logical and creative thinking, as well as their design and execution skills.

4. Pathways for the Characteristic Development of Digital Media Arts Major under the Context of “New Liberal Arts”

4.1. Understanding Market Talent Demand and Clarifying Teaching Objectives

"New Liberal Arts" is not a denial or subversion of traditional liberal arts education but an expansion and deepening of it. It responds to the evolving demands of the era and serves as a strategic response to the "crisis in the humanities" worldwide. By integrating high-quality resources and addressing the booming information industry, it aligns with market needs to clarify educational goals. Additionally, it encourages students to engage in targeted interdisciplinary studies, fostering autonomous learning and practical skills in digital media arts through their interests.

4.2. Updating Professional Development Concepts and Strengthening Interdisciplinary Links

The most notable feature of "New Liberal Arts" is the interdisciplinary integration. Strengthening the cultivation of innovative talents ensures continued advancement^[4]. This involves updating the development concepts of the digital media arts major with a holistic and scientific approach, enhancing the connection between different disciplines. Schools should incorporate culturally rich educational resources into the curriculum from the start, breaking down disciplinary

barriers and enabling students to find courses that suit their development needs. This approach helps students gain comprehensive understanding and expertise in areas like information visualization, digital cultural creation, and audiovisual language.

Additionally, employing group teaching methods for practical courses leverages the diverse nature of the digital media arts major. Instructors should update their teaching concepts, foster collaboration between different disciplines, and implement innovative curriculum reforms from the perspective of "New Liberal Arts." Focusing on student-centered learning and teamwork enhances students' initiative, creativity, and participation, ultimately improving their overall competencies.

4.3. Integrating Advanced Technology with Traditional Culture

Global economic globalization has diversified cultural education, social information, and digital technology, creating opportunities for the digital media arts major within the "New Liberal Arts" framework^[5]. Maintaining Chinese cultural characteristics by integrating modern technology with traditional arts enhances students' humanistic qualities, promotes the exploration of traditional Chinese arts, and combines theoretical foundations with practical experience, fostering a unique Chinese aesthetic in digital media arts. Digital media arts courses should integrate modern technology with traditional culture. Developing nationally cohesive projects and converting research into teaching outcomes link modern digital technology with traditional culture, enhancing students' professional skills and practical abilities. The immediacy, modularity, and digital nature of art technologies facilitate technical innovation in teaching. Cross-disciplinary development establishes a resource library for specialized teaching, creating unique textbooks and materials to address new challenges and meet classroom needs. Practical training projects expand student learning and foster innovative thinking.

Integrating social service functions within the "New Liberal Arts" framework emphasizes the practical application of theoretical knowledge, preparing students to serve society post-graduation. This comprehensive integration of practice and theory fosters multi-dimensional talents capable of contributing to modern economic development, ensuring graduates are well-equipped for their roles in socialist construction.

5. Conclusion

"New Liberal Arts" represents a transformative approach in higher education, embracing interdisciplinary integration and technological innovation. This framework is particularly relevant for the digital media arts major in China, an emerging field that benefits from this progressive model. Grounding the digital media arts major in the principles of "New Liberal Arts" fosters a blend of technological proficiency and cultural literacy. This approach enhances students' creative thinking and problem-solving abilities, preparing them to navigate and contribute to the evolving digital landscape. Integrating digital technologies with traditional cultural elements enriches the curriculum, providing a comprehensive understanding of both technical and cultural dimensions. The interdisciplinary nature of "New Liberal Arts" encourages collaboration across academic disciplines, promoting a holistic educational experience and fostering graduates capable of innovative thinking and diverse application of their knowledge. This approach aims to cultivate professionals adept at using digital tools with a deep appreciation for cultural and social implications, aligning with modern socialist construction goals. Embedding these principles into the digital media arts curriculum enables higher education institutions to shape the future of this dynamic field, driving educational innovation and societal advancement.

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