

The Ideal Role Orientation of the Director of the Office of the Secondary College of Higher Education

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Abstract: This paper explores the ideal role orientation of office directors in secondary colleges across 24 Chinese undergraduate universities. Through a comprehensive analysis of job descriptions, it identifies core responsibilities such as institutional coordination, administrative support, leadership participation, and procedural management. The study constructs a four-dimensional framework encompassing the organizational environment, institutional mechanisms, interpersonal trust, and professional identity. Positioned at the intersection of academic and administrative systems, office directors are required to manage complex tasks, navigate role ambiguity, and foster effective communication across departments. Their role is essential for maintaining operational stability, enhancing governance efficiency, and supporting strategic development within higher education institutions. This research offers theoretical insights and practical implications for improving the professionalism and effectiveness of grassroots administrative teams in universities.

Keywords: Office Director, Role Attributes, Ideal Role

1. Introduction

China's higher education sector is undergoing rapid development and diversification, with institutions expanding in scale, improving in quality, and integrating more deeply into the global education system. As universities gain greater autonomy, institutional management has evolved significantly in scope, content, and complexity, giving rise to a hierarchical governance model of "university-department-college-office." Within this structure, the college office serves as a central hub for coordination and execution, handling a wide range of fragmented administrative duties and acting as a bridge between internal units and external stakeholders. The office director, often seen as the institution's "steward," holds a pivotal mid-level role that integrates academic and administrative functions. Responsible for institutional coordination, academic affairs, and student services, these directors operate at the grassroots level and have become multifaceted professionals navigating the complex interplay between governance and administration. Faced with overlapping and sometimes conflicting role expectations—as educators, managers, or service providers—their professional identity often lacks clarity. This study analyzes job descriptions from 24 Chinese universities to define the ideal role orientation of college office directors, aiming to clarify role expectations, enhance self-efficacy, and support professional development in university administration.

2. Normative Role Attributes of Secondary College Office Directors

Obligatory role positioning refers to the responsibilities, functions, or expectations that a given role is normatively expected to fulfill within a specific institutional context or system. Such positioning is grounded in theoretical frameworks, normative standards, or value-based assumptions, and reflects an idealized vision of how the role should be enacted. In this study, job descriptions for office directors from secondary colleges affiliated with universities in Jiangsu, Guangdong, Fujian, and Anhui provinces were collected using online data retrieval methods (see Table 1 for details). Through the application of textual analysis techniques, the study seeks to identify and conceptualize the ideal role attributes of college office directors within the secondary tier of higher education institutions.

Based on job descriptions from 24 undergraduate universities, Python was used to conduct keyword frequency analysis. The top 100 terms were selected to build a network of role responsibilities.

Keywords such as "work" (205), "college" (204), and "responsible" (137) were most frequent, while "assistance," "management," "leadership," and "administration" emerged as central nodes, highlighting their importance in defining the core duties of office directors.

Table 1 Some examples of responsibilities of college office directors.

Colleges	Post duties
N University, School of Journalism	<p>1) Presided over the daily management of the school office;</p> <p>2) Prepare and receive college meetings and official activities;</p> <p>3) Keep good records of the council of the College and prepare meeting minutes;</p> <p>4) Assist in drafting college official documents and rules and regulations, and implement and supervise the resolutions made by the College Administrative Committee and the school office meeting;</p> <p>5) Assist in the coordination of work between the college and various departments of the university, and ensure that the upper situation is transmitted and the lower situation is reported;</p> <p>6) Responsible for various safety management of the college;</p> <p>7) Do other work assigned by the college.</p>
D University, School of Art	<p>1) Responsible for the daily operation of personnel, finance, assets, safety and documents of the college;</p> <p>2) Responsible for important meetings, important receptions, important activities, logistics and other service support work of the college;</p> <p>3) Supervise the college's decision-making and deployment, implementation of important tasks and important matters;</p> <p>4) Comprehensively coordinate the working relationship</p>

	<p>and related matters among departments and departments of the college;</p> <p>5) Assist in the construction of Party organizations;</p> <p>6) Complete other work assigned by the leadership.</p>
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This study used Python and Gephi to analyze job descriptions from 24 universities, applying keyword frequency and social network analysis to visualize the co-occurrence of role-related terms. The results are illustrated in Figure 1.

Table 2 Top 20 Label Words by Frequency and Degree Centrality in Office Directors' Job Responsibilities.

Label Word	Frequency	Degree Centrality	Weighted Degree Centrality
Work	205	99	874
College	204	98	840
Responsible	137	98	721
Do well	83	91	446
Assist	53	85	370
Management	46	88	307
Leadership	37	78	241
Administration	31	66	174
Organization	25	60	141
Management work	25	74	163

As shown in Table 2, keywords like “work,” “college,” “perform well [Comment: Replaced informal phrase with a more academic expression.],” “management,” and “assistance” have high degree centrality and frequency, indicating their central role in defining the office director’s core functions and highlighting the multifaceted nature of the position within secondary colleges.

Based on the co-occurrence analysis, the top 10 keyword pairs with highest frequencies were identified, as shown in Table 3, which further demonstrates the interconnected nature of office directors’ core responsibilities.

Table 3 Top 10 Co-occurring Label Words in Office Directors' Job Responsibilities.

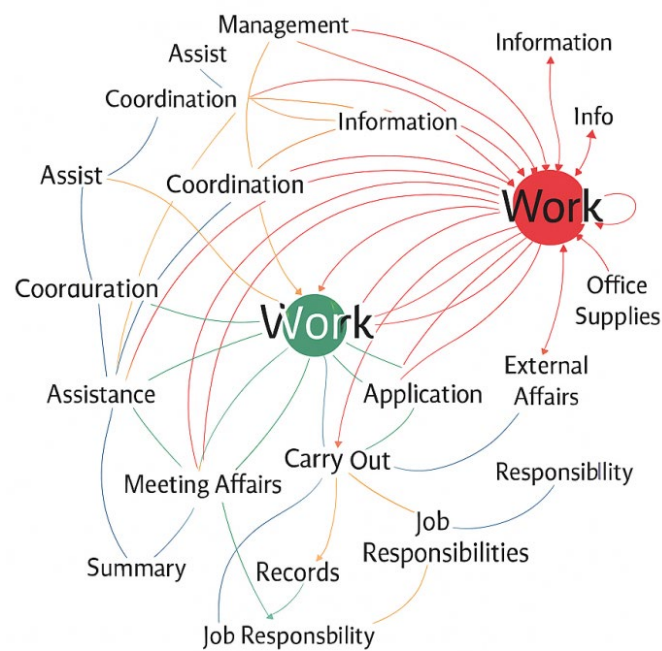


Figure 1 Network diagram of the key words of the office director's responsibilities.

Gephi visualizations show key co-occurrence relationships among role-related terms, with node size and color indicating centrality and clustering. Frequent keyword pairs like “college–work” and “work–responsible [Comment: Ensure correct use of en-dash.]” reveal the interconnected nature of core duties. Based on frequency and network analysis, office director responsibilities fall into five domains: procedural tasks (e.g., drafting reports), operational tasks (e.g., hosting visitors), support functions, financial oversight, and leadership coordination.

The core responsibility of the office director lies in facilitating the effective implementation of institutional priorities. This requires not only strong organizational skills and the ability to manage multifaceted tasks, but also a high level of political sensitivity and situational awareness. As shown in Figure 2, the co-occurrence network further illustrates the complexity of the role—particularly in balancing relationships with leadership, navigating between routine, strategic, and emergent tasks, and mediating between institutional principles and practical flexibility. These dynamics underscore the extent to which the role is shaped by both structural constraints and contextual contingencies^[1].



Figure 2 Co-occurrence relationship of office director's responsibilities.

An in-depth analysis highlights key competencies for secondary college office directors, including broad knowledge, refined skills, and a strong grasp of institutional culture. Serving multiple stakeholders, directors must demonstrate professionalism, strategic thinking, and a long-term focus on career development. The role demands efficiency and timeliness, acting as a bridge between leadership and faculty to support decision-making and daily operations. High adaptability is essential for managing vertical and horizontal coordination, maintaining smooth internal functions, and liaising with external parties. Ultimately, directors ensure effective policy implementation and follow-through.

3. The Construction of the Ideal Role Orientation of the College Office Director

Individuals engaged in specific social actions are typically assigned role expectations—that is, anticipated patterns of behavior associated with a particular social position. These expectations, shaped by both group norms and individual perceptions, serve as a conceptual bridge between social structure and role-based behavior. They define how a role ought to be enacted within a given institutional or cultural context^[2]. In the organizational structure of China's undergraduate universities, a three-tier governance model—comprising the university, college, and departmental levels—is commonly employed. A defining characteristic of this system is the coexistence of institutional diversity. From the perspective of power configuration, the governance structure typically encompasses three major forms of authority:

academic power, administrative power, and party-government power. These intersecting dimensions of influence contribute to a complex and multilayered organizational landscape^[3]. Chinese universities embody diverse subcultures—faculty, student, and administrative—and pursue three core missions: talent cultivation, knowledge production, and social contribution. Within this complex system, the college office has become a key administrative unit, vital to stable and efficient operations. Based on role theory and textual analysis, this study defines the ideal role of the office director across four dimensions: organizational environment, institutional support, interpersonal relationships, and individual role identity.

3.1 The driver of organizational environment effectiveness

As a decentralized and loosely structured unit, the secondary college lacks full institutional independence, making the college office essential for coordination and cohesion. Its responsibilities span policy implementation, interdepartmental coordination, document processing, event organization, party-building, personnel, and financial management. Effective execution requires constant communication, flexible responses, and multi-level coordination. Rather than operating strictly top-down, the office aligns with broader institutional goals, exercising discretion to maintain efficiency. The office director serves as a key intermediary, ensuring smooth operations across teaching, research, service delivery, and overall administrative functions.

The college office director's goals align with university and college strategies, reflecting a shift from reactive governance to continuous improvement. In a loosely coupled structure, the director ensures operations remain organized and efficient by establishing rules, clarifying roles, and configuring authority structures. As a key administrative link, the director balances delegation and control, empowering staff while maintaining accountability. Effective coordination across departments is essential to avoid fragmentation or bottlenecks and to support smooth academic and administrative operations.

The college office director plays a vital role in supporting teaching and research by providing strong logistical and administrative backing, allowing faculty to focus on academic work. Administratively, the director serves as a key conduit for managing information flow and coordinating college affairs. Their operational efficiency directly influences both academic output and administrative performance, contributing to institutional cohesion, vitality, and overall effectiveness.

3.2 The effective implementation and guarantee of the system

Institutions are systems of rules and norms that regulate behavior and shape social order by setting standardized expectations. In administrative management, functional management translates responsibilities into clear objectives aligned with institutional standards. Effective role performance depends on a structured institutional “stage,” built through formal rules and procedures. For secondary college office directors, such frameworks are essential for executing core tasks like managing teaching, personnel, and resources. Without them, complex daily operations risk inefficiency and disorder^[4].

As the outcome of complex interactions among various actors and competing interests, institutional systems serve as the foundational framework shaping individual behavior within organizations. In the organizational structure of higher education institutions, each member is an active participant in the negotiation of rights, responsibilities, and rule formation, thereby playing a critical role in the ongoing evolution of the system. Within this context, the principle of good governance has emerged as a central paradigm guiding university management. It establishes the normative orientation and operational standards for institutional functioning, emphasizing the importance of clearly defined authority, goal-oriented leadership, mutual adaptation among stakeholders, and openness to change. Institutional systems also perform a fundamental legitimizing function: they provide the structural foundation for role identity formation and the formal delegation of authority. In doing so, they not only regulate behavior but also confer meaning, status, and empowerment to organizational roles, including that of the college office director^[5].

An ideal role of the college office director is to act as a key agent in institutionalizing governance, promoting efficiency and coherence amid diverse demands. A strong institutional environment provides both regulatory and structural support, enabling innovation and professional growth within clear boundaries. Without it, role clarity and effectiveness decline. System-building legitimizes authority, maintains order, and enhances administrative quality. Well-designed incentives further empower directors, fostering agency, engagement, and development. As frontline administrators, they implement

policies while exercising professional judgment, gaining psychological safety, belonging, and motivation for advancement through clear responsibilities and institutional support.

3.3 The trust builder in interpersonal relationships

Trust is essential in group dynamics, promoting collaboration, open communication, and organizational effectiveness. In university governance, external harmony with society, government, and markets is key, while internal governance must balance administrative authority, academic autonomy, and political influence. Multiple governance models coexist, each shaped by institutional goals and structures. Within this complexity, the college office director plays a central role in mediating relationships, facilitating communication, and maintaining the coherence of governance processes.

Organizational diversity in universities leads to varied roles, responsibilities, and professional needs, often creating ambiguity and tension in interpersonal relationships. Academic communities are shaped by top-down planning, intertwining academic, administrative, and political powers within a hybrid governance system. In this context, the college office director ensures academic operations run smoothly through administrative coordination, serving as a bridge between leadership and faculty. This role requires flexibility to navigate hierarchical and cross-functional relationships. While university administration resembles government bureaucracy in formality, it remains distinct in its mission to support teaching and research. The college office plays a key role in upholding academic norms, but cultural tensions between academic and administrative spheres can still cause conflict and misunderstanding.

As a chief coordinator within the university's administrative hierarchy, the college office director is responsible for facilitating communication across multiple departments and levels of management. This role necessitates active engagement in dialogue, the bridging of institutional and interpersonal differences, and the cultivation of a trust-based organizational climate. Building such a communication and collaboration system-rooted in trust as a core cultural value—requires sustained efforts to foster mutual understanding, interdepartmental cooperation, and stakeholder consultation. These elements are essential for shaping a new model of efficient and participatory governance in higher education. For university administrators, embracing and implementing this trust-centered governance approach is not optional but imperative. Informal communication plays a vital role in this process, serving as a catalyst for improving administrative responsiveness and coordination. By fostering interpersonal interaction and trust-building across organizational boundaries, institutions can enhance the flow of critical information, support transparent decision-making, and ultimately strengthen overall governance effectiveness^[6]. One of the core responsibilities of the college office director is to establish and maintain effective communication channels between institutional leadership and faculty and staff, while also serving as a mediator in the relationships between teachers and students. In this capacity, the director's ideal role as a trust builder within group interactions becomes critical to the effective functioning of the college's administrative system. By fostering mutual trust and facilitating constructive interpersonal engagement, the director helps to promote harmonious interactions with various organizational stakeholders. This trust-centered approach contributes to the development of a collaborative organizational culture, in which informal communication and relational dynamics serve as key mechanisms for enhancing institutional cohesion and governance effectiveness.

3.4 The professional identity of individual roles

The professional identity of university administrators has evolved in parallel with the development of the modern university itself. Unlike informal scholarly communities or voluntary associations, contemporary universities are highly structured and institutionally complex organizations. They possess distinctive organizational characteristics that necessitate formalized administrative roles and specialized management functions^[7]. Since the advent of modern higher education, there has been no instance in which the administrative structure of a university has been entirely dismantled due to external critique or skepticism. The rationale for this continuity is clear: while academic research is the defining feature of a university, it cannot be effectively sustained without a functional administrative apparatus. Particularly in contemporary society, the complexity of academic operations necessitates a stable and professional management system to support the coordination, regulation, and facilitation of scholarly activities^[8]. Martin Trow underscores the evolving and dynamic nature of university administrators' roles in tandem with the institutional development of higher education. During the early elite phase of higher education, universities operated with relatively simple structures, and faculty members held dominant authority over institutional affairs. However, with the transition to the massification stage, the internal complexity

of universities increased, leading to a diversification of functions and a growing demand for formal management. As a result, administrative personnel began to assume more prominent responsibilities, while faculty engagement in routine administrative tasks gradually diminished. In the current phase of higher education expansion, administrative staff have become central to the daily functioning of universities. Their roles have shifted from supportive to strategic, forming the organizational backbone that enables the efficient operation, policy implementation, and institutional coordination necessary in modern higher education institutions^[9].

As China's higher education system evolves, university organizational structures have become more defined, independent, and specialized. This transformation led to the rise of professional administrative units and the establishment of the secondary college office director—a key role in advancing standardized governance, resource coordination, and interdepartmental collaboration. Positioned between senior leadership and faculty, the office director plays a central role in administrative operations, requiring both domain expertise and interdisciplinary skills. Their professional identity reflects the need for multidisciplinary knowledge and high standards in planning, coordination, and adaptability. An ideal director is a service-oriented professional, aligned with institutional goals and committed to continuous improvement. Clearly defining this role helps universities develop capable administrators and advance national education objectives.

4. Conclusion

When an individual occupies a specific social position and their behavior aligns with the socially constructed expectations associated with that role—including corresponding rights, responsibilities, and behavioral norms—they are considered to be fulfilling the expected role. This expected role is often referred to as the ideal role, which denotes a normative framework established by society that defines the obligations, entitlements, and appropriate conduct expected of individuals in particular positions under specific social conditions^[10]. The essence of the ideal role lies in its function as a socially constructed behavioral standard—clear, normative, and aspirational—prescribing how individuals ought to perform within a given role. Whether shaped by external social pressures or internalized motivations, individuals embedded within social networks are required to assume specific role orientations. These orientations, governed by prevailing social norms, encompass both assumptions about the expected behavior of others and the standards of conduct that individuals themselves are expected to fulfill in accordance with their designated roles.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the role orientation of office directors within secondary colleges in higher education institutions. By constructing a framework for the ideal role orientation of office directors, the study seeks to clarify their functional positioning within the grassroots administrative structure of universities. These individuals constitute a core segment of the mid-level management team, operating within a dual system where academic and administrative powers intersect. They are tasked with translating institutional decisions into concrete actions and serve as key assistants and facilitators in the implementation of both academic and administrative functions. In practice, the office director fulfills multiple roles—acting as assistant, advisor, liaison, supervisor, and coordinator—while often situated at the base of the administrative hierarchy. By analyzing their job responsibilities, this study offers a refined understanding of the ideal role positioning for office directors. Such clarification helps address the ambiguity often associated with the role in real-world contexts, enhances the director's overall management competence, and supports more strategic career development and planning. Ultimately, this contributes to strengthening the managerial effectiveness of undergraduate institutions. In addition, the study offers practical insights for other grassroots teaching and administrative staff, fostering collective efficacy and promoting the internal governance capacity of colleges and universities.

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