

# Enhancing Ideological and Political Education in Law Courses: A Case Study of Legal Professional Ethics

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**Abstract:** China's practical demand for the rule of law dictates that "virtue and competence" will gradually become the key focus in cultivating legal talents, and ideological and political education will naturally become an important part of developing the legal elite. The ideological and political work in professional courses should not be fragmented but should be systematic. Legal professional ethics education must be intrinsically compatible with the concept of a socialist rule of law with Chinese characteristics, and the Legal Professional Ethics course can design ideological and political teaching content with this concept as the core focus. Of course, the design of ideological and political teaching content is a dynamic process that requires continuous refinement of the syllabus and enhancement and expansion of ideological and political cases or content.

**Keywords:** jurisprudence, curriculum ideology and politics, legal professional ethics, concept of socialist rule of law with Chinese characteristics.

## 1. Introduction

Ideological and political work in colleges and universities is related to the fundamental questions of what kind of people they cultivate, how to cultivate them, and for whom they are cultivated. "Curriculum Ideology and Politics" is a new requirement from the CPC Central Committee to strengthen the ideological and political work of colleges and universities in the context of the new era. It aims to form a complete ideological and political curriculum system by integrating professional courses with ideological and political content, so that students can acquire more knowledge of ideological and political theories. This educational process can cultivate their moral qualities, improve their comprehensive abilities, and ultimately enable them to become believers and practitioners of socialist ideology with Chinese characteristics, thus achieving the goal of educating people with moral integrity. "Curriculum Ideology and Politics" is essentially a curricular perspective rather than an independent course. "Fostering virtue through education is rooted in curriculum education. In the cultivation of talents, internalizing the ideological and political content into students' value orientation and externalizing it into students' value practice will achieve significant educational results." <sup>[1]</sup>

## 2. The Importance of Ideological and Political Work in Law Professional Courses

Law is a discipline that studies legal phenomena and related issues. The law major aims to cultivate professionals who have theoretical knowledge of law, are familiar with the laws of our country and the related policies of the Party, and are able to engage in legal work in political and legal organs, enterprises, social organizations, and so on. Taking Nanjing Normal University Zhongbei College as an example, the requirements for the cultivation of law majors are as follows: under the guidance of the educational concept of "subjectivity and individuality," to cultivate students who possess basic theories and knowledge of law, politics, and economics; to master the basic principles and interrelationships of jurisprudence and social development; to understand China's judicial system, laws, and regulations; and to receive training in the methodology and basic theories of jurisprudence. In accordance with the requirements for complex, applied, and innovative legal talents, through the innovation of talent cultivation modes, the optimization of curriculum system structure, the

reinforcement of practical ability cultivation, and the enhancement of professional ethics education, the goal is to cultivate politically correct, multi-talented, and high-quality legal professionals.

In the 21st century, the construction of socialism with Chinese characteristics has entered a new era. The establishment of the rule of law at this stage not only requires that legal professionals have excellent professional qualities but also that they possess good moral character. This directly determines that "virtue and competence" will gradually become the key focus in the cultivation of legal talents. Ideological and political education will naturally become an important part of developing the legal elite. Of course, "insisting on the inclusion of ideological and political education in the professional curriculum system is not to exaggerate the applicability of ideological and political education, but to emphasize that the concept of ideology and politics will be a golden thread running through the law professional curriculum system, and to give play to its value-guiding role in the professional curriculum." [2]

At present, the ideological and political work in professional courses is advancing steadily. Legal Professional Ethics, as a core course of the law major, attaches importance to teaching reform and strengthening its ideological and political construction. This has positive practical significance for cultivating legal students' awareness of legal professions, establishing their correct outlook on profession and justice, promoting the construction of the legal professional community, realizing a harmonious socialist society, and achieving the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation [3].

### 3. Exploration of Ideological and Political Work in the Legal Professional Ethics Course

#### 3.1. *The Nature and Characteristics of the Legal Professional Ethics Course*

Legal Professional Ethics is a new branch of law that has emerged alongside the development of legal professions in China. Its nature is cross-disciplinary, and it regulates the behaviors carried out by legal professionals related to their professional identities, such as lawyers, judges, prosecutors, notaries, arbitrators, and administrative law enforcement officers. According to the National Standards for Teaching Quality of Law Majors issued by the Ministry of Education in January 2018, Legal Professional Ethics is one of the ten compulsory professional courses that law students must study.

Legal professionals are the guardians of social order. To some extent, the rule of law is the rule of legal professionals; therefore, the development of the rule of law requires a team of legal professionals with both moral integrity and professional competence. Legal professional ethics education addresses questions such as how to shape the moral character of law students and how to promote the construction of the legal professional community. Therefore, the establishment of the Legal Professional Ethics course in law schools and the strengthening of its teaching and research are crucial for fostering moral integrity, cultivating good professional ethics among law students, and promoting the integrated construction of a state governed by the rule of law, a government governed by the rule of law, and a society governed by the rule of law.

#### 3.2. *The Goal of Ideological and Political Work in the Legal Professional Ethics Course*

Ideological and political work in professional courses should not be fragmented, as this would make students' understanding of ideological and political elements superficial and formalistic. Instead, it should be systematic to deepen students' knowledge and comprehension of these elements. Based on my own teaching practice, I believe that legal professional ethics education and the idea of a socialist rule of law with Chinese characteristics<sup>1</sup> are intrinsically compatible. The Legal Professional Ethics course can take this idea as the core ideological and political focus and build a system of ideological and political points around it, including five aspects: governing the country according to law, law enforcement for the people, fairness and justice, serving the overall situation, and the leadership of the Communist Party of China (CPC).

By taking the idea of a socialist rule of law with Chinese characteristics as the core ideological and political point, the objectives of this course can be summarized as follows: to enable students to

<sup>1</sup> The idea of a socialist rule of law is a synthesis of the historical experiences of China's economic, social, and legal development in recent times, especially since the reform and opening up. Based on the realities and overall context of constructing socialist modernization, the Communist Party of China, as the ruling party, has formulated this concept by drawing on the world's experiences with the rule of law.

understand the basic theories and specific rules of professional ethics; to assess and prevent potential ethical risks; to understand the connotation of the idea of a socialist rule of law with Chinese characteristics; to further enable students to recognize the public nature of legal professions; to actively engage in public welfare; to use their legal professional knowledge to protect the interests of the public, especially those of disadvantaged groups in their practical work; and ultimately to promote the realization of a harmonious socialist society.

### 3.3. The Design of Ideological and Political Teaching in the Legal Professional Ethics Course

In terms of teaching content design, in addition to the course syllabus, teaching schedule, lesson plans, courseware, and other conventional teaching preparations that reflect ideological and political elements, I believe that special measures should be taken for ideological and political teaching, such as drafting an ideological and political teaching guidance plan, developing typical cases for ideological and political teaching, and creating ideological and political teaching video recordings.

The ideological and political teaching guidance plan can be formulated in the form of a table, which is more intuitive. As shown in **Table 1**, it is an excerpt from the ideological and political teaching guidance plan for my Legal Professional Ethics course.

**Table 1:** Excerpt of the Ideological and Political Teaching Guidance Plan for the Legal Professional Ethics Course

The Key Teaching Point	The Ideological and Political Point	Teaching Format and Methods	Expected Results
Rules for lawyers' fees	Fairness and justice	Theoretical instruction	Understanding of fairness and justice
<i>Specific Implementation Arrangements:</i>			
Through theoretical instruction, students will understand the basic principles and methods of lawyers' fees, the factors considered by lawyers in negotiating fees, the prohibited norms of lawyers' fees, the supervision and dispute settlement mechanisms regarding lawyers' fees, and other related rules.			
Taking the restrictive regulations on contingency fees as an entry point, the teacher can guide students in discussions, enabling them to deeply understand that behind the legal regulations is the state's pursuit of fairness and justice.			

Collecting and organizing ideological and political teaching cases is an ongoing process in education. As Rodin famously said, "The world does not lack beauty, but lacks the eyes to discover it." The same applies to the collection of cases. Ideological and political teaching cases are abundant; the challenge lies in organically integrating them with course content. This requires teachers to continually explore during the teaching process and to constantly enhance their understanding of professional content and ideological and political elements.

For example, in the Legal Professional Ethics course, there is a key topic called "The Connotation of the Legal Professional Community." After teaching this topic, teachers can introduce three representative figures who were named "Rule of Law Personalities of the Year" in 2020: Liaomin Chen, Chunyan Zhang, and Xueqian Zheng. They represent the three most typical legal professions—judges, prosecutors, and lawyers. By presenting their achievements, teachers can illustrate how different legal professional groups come together to form a legal professional community aimed at achieving the common ideals of legal professionals: the comprehensive promotion of governing the country according to law and the construction of a socialist country under the rule of law. Such ideals may seem grand, but young people should be ambitious. Only when every legal professional entering the workforce sets such lofty goals can the modernization of the rule of law be advanced. Only when different groups of legal professionals innovate and progress in their respective positions can social harmony and stability be maintained, and long-term peace and security be established.

In addition to the ideological and political teaching guidance plan and typical teaching cases, teachers can also create ideological and political teaching videos. Videos are more intuitive and can enhance students' enthusiasm to a certain extent. However, it should be noted that if videos are played during class, their length should not be excessive to avoid detracting from the main content. These videos can also transcend the limitations of classroom time and space, allowing students to watch them repeatedly after class to deepen their understanding of ideological and political content.

In summary, the design of ideological and political teaching content is a dynamic process. It is necessary to continuously refine the syllabus around the system of ideological and political points and to enrich and expand the ideological and political cases or content.

### **3.4. Expected Effects of Ideological and Political Teaching in the Legal Professional Ethics Course**

If, as mentioned above, the objective of ideological and political work in the Legal Professional Ethics course is to enable students to understand and internalize the idea of a socialist rule of law with Chinese characteristics, ultimately growing into professionals who are both moral and competent in the new era, and to promote the realization of a harmonious socialist society and a socialist China under the rule of law, then the expected effects at different stages of ideological and political teaching in this course are shown in **Table 2**. In the actual teaching process, teachers should communicate with students in a timely manner, constantly adjust the teaching content, and improve teaching methods to achieve better educational outcomes.

**Table 2:** Expected Effects of Ideological and Political Teaching in the Legal Professional Ethics Course

<b>Time</b>	<b>Teaching Methods</b>	<b>Expected Effects</b>
Before Class	Propose learning requirements and recommend learning videos (e.g., MOOCs)	Fully mobilize students' interest in learning professional courses and related ideological and political content
During Class	Analyze typical ideological and political teaching cases and show teaching videos	Help students understand the intrinsic connection between ideological and political content—such as the idea of a socialist rule of law with Chinese characteristics—and the study of professional courses
After Class	Assign homework or tasks	Enable students to internalize their understanding of legal professional ethics and the idea of a socialist rule of law with Chinese characteristics, ultimately becoming new-era legal professionals with both virtue and competence

## **4. Dilemmas and Solutions in Ideological and Political Work in the Legal Professional Ethics Course**

### **4.1. Insufficient Attention to Legal Professional Ethics in Colleges and Universities**

From the perspective of employers, they often place more emphasis on civil law, commercial law, procedural law, and other legal expertise compared to legal professional ethics. Legal professional ethics education does not directly provide employment assistance for law students, leading both law schools and students to easily overlook the study of legal professional ethics. Therefore, compared with other courses in legal education, Legal Professional Ethics has a more urgent need for alignment with legal professions.

Since 2002, China has made legal professional ethics a compulsory part of the National Unified Legal Professional Qualification Examination (known as the National Judicial Examination until 2018). Test questions related to legal professional ethics are mainly included in objective questions, focusing on applicants' mastery of legal professional ethics norms. As both the legal professional qualification examination and legal education are entry thresholds for law students to engage in legal professions, the teaching of the Legal Professional Ethics course should draw on the valuable experience of the legal professional ethics examination in the qualification exam and fully utilize its function of cultivating students' professional ethics and shaping moral and professional legal talents [4].

Several scholars have suggested that the teaching of the Legal Professional Ethics course should be conducted in the form of case studies. This approach allows students to enter real-life situations, experience the professional ethics that legal professionals should abide by, conduct in-depth and specific analyses of various variables in cases and problems, inspire their thinking, and encourage them to find the best feasible solutions from the cases [5]. I share this opinion. I am convinced that case studies can enable students to experience the normative role of legal professional ethics, helping them grasp professional ethics knowledge and cultivate ethical awareness. However, finding the right cases becomes another challenging issue.

### **4.2. Professional Teachers' Insufficient Understanding of Ideological and Political Content**

In practice, those who teach the Legal Professional Ethics course in law schools are often teachers specializing in law. While they are proficient in legal professional knowledge, there is a gap between their understanding of the theoretical system, foundational theories, and scientific connotations of socialism with Chinese characteristics and that of teachers specializing in ideology and politics. Legal teachers' understanding is often not profound enough.

This problem can be mitigated to a certain extent by organizing regular collective theoretical learning. Corresponding measures can also be taken according to the specific conditions of different colleges and universities. For example, the School of Law and Politics at Nanjing Normal University Zhongbei College has both a law teaching and research department and a "two courses" (Marxist theory and ideological and political education) teaching and research department. By leveraging the resources of teachers specializing in the "two courses," legal teachers can promote the reform of professional courses' teaching modes and build mutual support teams for model courses. As shown in **Table 3**, a mutual support teaching and research team is formed around the Legal Professional Ethics model course by professional teachers. The team includes a professional Instructor E specializing in ideology and politics, who continuously guides and deepens the understanding of ideological and political content among the legal teachers. Teachers A, B, C, and D are legal instructors who regularly communicate and share their valuable experiences in ideological and political work within their courses, thereby continuously promoting the exploration and improvement of ideological and political work in law professional courses.

**Table 3:** Mutual Support Teaching and Research Team for the Legal Professional Ethics Model Course

Model Course	Teacher	Team Members	Major Mutual Support Courses	Major Mutual Support Achievements	Ideological and Political Instructor
Legal Professional Ethics	A	B	Contract Law, Property Law	Ideological and political teaching case database	E
		C	Criminal Law		
		D	Chinese Legal History		

## 5. Conclusion

General Secretary **Jinping Xi** emphasized the importance of effectively utilizing classroom teaching as the main channel, stating that in addition to ideological and political theory courses, "all other courses should guard a section of the canal and plant a good field of responsibility, so that all kinds of courses and the ideological and political theory courses go in the same direction and form a synergy effect." [6] Legal students shoulder the important missions of promoting the country's comprehensive governance according to law and maintaining social fairness and justice. Legal professionals should not only possess deep and solid theoretical knowledge and rich practical skills but also uphold high moral ideals and excellent professionalism [7]. Although Legal Professional Ethics is an emerging branch compared to traditional law courses, as one of the key courses for training law students, it should certainly insist on establishing the teaching concepts of "professional ethical literacy" and "ideological and political literacy" moving in the same direction. This approach helps future legal professionals to mold correct values and lays a solid foundation for cultivating practical talents who are both virtuous and competent.

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