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China Cracks Down on Students Who Start Businesses Before Graduating

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BEIJING
E DUCATION authorities in China have required students for several years to pay more of the cost of their university education and have encouraged them to take more responsibility for finding their own jobs. Now, however, officials are warning students not to jump the gun by going into business before they finish their education.

The State Education Commission, a policy-making body, is cracking down on students who operate their own businesses. Instead, the commission said, they should concentrate on their studies.

Students attending one of China's 1,032 colleges and universities are now prohibited from applying for commercial licenses or engaging in commodity sales or service ventures.

Wang Xuetao, an official of the commission who is responsible for student affairs, was quoted in the state-run press as saying students should "practice academic fieldwork instead of money-oriented businesses that have little relation to their studies."

Mr. Wang said students who were not

successful in building their businesses or promoting their products may end up feeling defeated and in despair. "This can seriously affect their studies and the campus academic environment," he said.

The commission is using the state-run press to spread the word about the new restrictions, which were adopted officially two months ago. The commission has not taken any action to identify or punish violators.

SELLING COMPUTERS

Many students throughout the country have tried to start their professional careers by going into business before they graduate. Some open small businesses while others take jobs as sales agents for larger companies. Information technology is one area that has attracted many student entrepreneurs, who sell computers, com-

ponents, and software on a commission basis.

Students say their part-time jobs provide them with badly needed cash as well as useful work experience. Both are becoming increasingly important in China. About 900,000 job seekers are due to graduate from Chinese colleges and universities this summer, and they know that potential employers will look more favorably upon those who can claim some work experience.

Recent cuts in state support for higher education have forced universities to pass along more of their operating costs to students. Just last month, the government announced that starting in September, students at all of China's 1,032 colleges and universities will pay an annual tuition fee, averaging about \$180.

To provide financial assistance to stu-

dents, officials are developing loan programs and work-study plans. But many students say they prefer to help themselves. One young entrepreneur, who is studying engineering in Beijing—he would give only his surname, Chen—has made extra money for a year selling mobile pagers on his campus.

"I usually spend no more than five hours a week on this job, and it doesn't interfere with my studies," he said. "I still am doing very well with my schoolwork, and I easily earn 400 yuan each month," or about \$49.

Mr. Chen said he was confident that the authorities would not actively seek out violators of the new rules on work, but he did not want his full name or that of his institution identified.

Chinese students who want to test the working world while staying within the letter of the new rules can look for jobs that have a demonstrable connection to their academic work.

According to the State Education Commission, students may work as part-time tutors, researchers, or translators. They also may publish books and write articles for newspapers or journals.

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