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WMU's Confucius Institute offers educational/business links to China

Western Michigan University became home to a Confucius Institute this fall, a development that will provide new Chinese language and cultural studies options for WMU students and faculty and dramatically expand international opportunities for area K-12 schools and local businesses.

Pictured above (l-r): Carol McCloud, Dr. Wang, Dr. McCloud; Dr. Xu Lin, General Director and Chief Executive of Confucius Institute Headquarters and Hanban, WMU President Dr. John Dunn, Linda Dunn, Dr. Luijiang Wang, chair of the University Council of Beijing Language and Culture University; Mr. Cao, the Deputy Director of Development Office at Hanban.

Photo gallery

President John M. Dunn and a small campus delegation, including Dr. Donald G. McCloud, dean of WMU's Haenicke Institute for Global Education, and Dr. Xiaojun Wang, professor of foreign languages and head of the University's Chinese language program, traveled to China in early July to finalize a set of agreements that established the WMU Confucius Institute.

"The Confucius Institute program represents the commitment on the part of the Chinese government to extend and expand knowledge about China and its language and culture with people all over the world," McCloud said. "The program represents one of the largest intercultural education programs ever established, and although differing in format, in the area of international education, the Confucius Institute program holds many goals similar to our Fulbright scholar and student exchange programs."
The following goals have been set for WMU's Confucius Institute:

- Teaching Chinese language and culture to University students and members of the greater community
- Promoting international cooperation and exchange of students
- Strengthening collaborations with local schools and community businesses to train teachers and offer language and culture workshops, summer camps, fine arts events and travel opportunities
- Developing students ready to meet competitive market demands
- Aiding WMU's development as a dynamic international university with strong ties to Chinese partners

Four contracts were signed by President Dunn and the Chinese counterparts at the prestigious Beijing Language and Culture University, China's premier institution for language instruction. The related five-year renewable agreements make WMU a formal partner in an international effort to expand the teaching of Chinese language and culture. This effort is undertaken with the support of the Office of Chinese Language Council International of China's Ministry of Education, known more commonly as the Hanban.

Signing reception

"A major component of these partnerships and the entire Confucius Institute network is the commitment of each member to provide new opportunities for local school districts and business communities," says Dunn. "The Hanban recognized WMU's existing strengths in China studies and the caliber of our existing language specialists and researchers. They were convinced of this University's ability to leverage those strengths to extend benefits to the entire region."

*WMU President Dunn and Mrs. Linda Dunn*
The agreements signed in China July 7 will bring six or seven Chinese language faculty members, financially sponsored by the Chinese partners, to the WMU campus each year to help the University expand language arts and cultural offerings on campus. In addition, WMU's library holdings will be enhanced, and the Beijing school will designate WMU as one of its major study abroad sites and begin sending as many as 30 students to study in Kalamazoo each year.

"It was a very fruitful and productive tour," said Dr. Wang. "These contracts make history at our university and will increase WMU's presence on the international map. In the world there are only 350 Confucian Institutes. This partnership demonstrates that WMU truly is a national and notable university."

The WMU Confucius Institute will be supported over its first five years with funding from the Hanban, which will be matched by WMU largely with support for such things as office space and personnel needs, assistance to visiting professors, faculty time in several colleges for institute work, travel, curriculum development and designation of an institute director. In addition to faculty salaries, funding from Hanban will provide operating funds on an annual basis.

WMU's Confucius Institute proposal was developed by Dr. Wang, Dr. Roger Tang, professor of accountancy and Upjohn Chair of Business Administration; and Dr. Dewei Qi, professor of paper engineering, chemical engineering and imaging. Also involved were Dr. Cynthia Running-Johnson, chair of the Department of Foreign Languages; W. Wilson Woods, associate dean of the Haenicke Institute and Dr. Susan Stapleton, associate dean of the College of Arts and Sciences.

Dr. Wang with students in China

"We wouldn't have been able to establish the Confucius Institute at WMU without teamwork, joint efforts and support by the whole University community," Wang says. "It is a sign of our University's commitment to global education. It also marks a new step of our long journey. The Confucius Institute at WMU will serve as a window and bridge to China for our University and the region."

McCloud will chair the Institute Executive Committee and Wang will serve as the Confucius Institute director. Tang and Qi will serve as members of the advisory committee. The WMU proposal was supported by the University's existing China Study Group, which includes more than 30 faculty members from across the University whose expertise is in Chinese Studies. Dr. Wang became leader of the CSG in spring of 2009 and he says the group's mission is to increase friendship and understanding between people and to sponsor activities that will help people better understand China's culture and language. The CSG is one of about 10 groups in an
international brown-bag series initiated by McCloud in fall 2008 that host monthly meetings where guest speakers and lecturers share research and ideas. Brown Bag Series Schedule.

WMU's partner institution in China, the Beijing Language and Culture University, is one with which the University has had a long relationship. Dr. Timothy Light, professor emeritus of comparative religion, served as a visiting professor at BLCU in the early 1980s; Wang has been serving as a visiting professor there since 2002; BLCU's former president, Professor Lu Bisong, holds an honorary doctorate from WMU; and University students have routinely traveled to Beijing to study there since 1998. During the July visit, the delegation met with a group of WMU students who are now enrolled there, participating in one of the four study abroad programs the University hosts in China.

Dr. Donald McCloud, dean, Haenicke Institute

The international network of institutions WMU is joining includes the world's premier universities, each with a Confucius Institute and each in a formal partnership with a Chinese university or institute. American universities in the network now number 61, with the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor and WMU becoming the 60th and 61st members, respectively, this summer. Michigan is the only state with four Confucius Institutes, with Michigan State and Wayne State universities also part of the initiative.

Confucius Institute activities are expected to begin immediately, but the University will have a formal ceremonial launch for the initiative in November. That ceremony is expected to attract the directors of Hanban and the president of Beijing Language and Culture University.

President Dunn meets with current and former WMU students at BLCU, L-R: Daniel Hadley, Jaime LeBlanc-Hadley, President Dunn, Adam Chapa, and John Abbey and Verna Leung

Portions of this article appeared in a press release issued by WMU University Relations Aug. 1, 2009.

Story by Julia Valentine
Chinese linguist named director of WMU’s Confucius Institute

Being author co-author of more than 20 volumes of frequently used textbooks, worldwide, for Chinese language and culture instruction has keenly positioned Dr. Xiaojun Wang, professor of foreign languages and head of Western Michigan University’s Chinese language program, to serve as director of the University's new Confucius Institute.

Wang joined WMU President John M. Dunn, Dr. Donald G. McCloud, dean of WMU's Haenicke Institute for Global Education, and a small campus delegation traveled to China in early July to finalize a set of agreements that established the WMU Confucius Institute. Click here to read the story. The Confucius Institute at WMU will provide new Chinese language and cultural studies options for WMU students and faculty and dramatically expand international opportunities for area K-12 schools and local businesses.

Wang heads up WMU's China Study Group and is highly regarded across the globe for his research on the application of Chinese linguistics. He has authored more than eight books, co-authored more than 20, including "Integrated Chinese," the world's most frequently used introductory textbook for Chinese language instruction. His book, "A Business Trip to China," is widely used as a textbook in Asia, has been translated in four languages, and won the 2008 Beijing International Book exhibition award.

Wang earned his bachelor's degree and master's degree from Northeast Normal University in China and his second master's and doctoral degrees from the University of Arizona in 1989 and 1995. Prior to coming to WMU in 1997, he taught for seven years at the University of Arizona-Tuscon and served as the coordinator of the university's basic Chinese program. "WMU realized that we needed Chinese, Japanese, and Arabic programs," Wang said. "I came here in 1997 and helped initiate Chinese language and culture studies and develop a minor program. I served as the department chair of Asian and Middle Eastern Languages for four years, until it merged with the Foreign Language Department where we teamed up for the same goals." Additionally, Wang is the faculty director for WMU in Beijing Academic Year Program and WMU's Chinese Language and Culture Tour, which provide a total immersion experience in contemporary China each year that are open to undergraduate and graduate students.
Participants of study tour spend 15 days studying at the prestigious Beijing Language and Culture University, WMU’s partner institute for the Confucius Institute, and visiting Beijing and the surrounding area. Some of the cultural tours include travel to Confucius' hometown, Tai Mountain, Nanjing, Suzhou and Shanghai. The program offers students the unique opportunity to gain insight about Chinese culture and strengthen their language skills.

Click here to view the program profile

"As a professor, my research has to relate to my teaching," said Wang, who has served as a visiting professor at BLCU since 2002. "Working with students in the classroom and in China gives me ideas and motivation for my research as I consider 'what do my students need' and try to find the most effective ways to teach them."

Wang also mentors students in WMU's Lee Honors College, who have China-related thesis projects, doctoral candidates from BLCU and teaching assistants who come to the University through the Fulbright Program.

"It was sheer determination and persistence by Dr. Wang, Dr. Roger Tang of the business college, and Dr. Dewei Qi from our engineering college that ultimately brought the Confucius Institute to our campus," said W. Wilson (Bill) Woods, Haenicke Institute associate dean, who served on the committee working to create a Confucius Institute. "After three years of planning and garnering support in Beijing and on our campus, the dream of WMU being home to a Confucius Institute has been realized."

Story by Julia Valentine
Kim and crew on task planning cultural, recreational and entertaining events

An international festival, a Parade of Nations, game night at the student recreation center and a year-end formal ball are just a few of the exciting activities planned each year for Western Michigan University international students by the International Programming Office in the Haenicke Institute for Global Education.

Kim Ritter, Maran Subramain, Nick DiFranco and Lygia Mueller

The office is managed by Kimberly Ritter, international student activities program specialist, who assists with student's transition to campus, development, social and personal growth, as well as creating a family environment in which new students can develop a sense of belonging and friendship. "The best part of my job is witnessing the growth and development of each student, and being actively involved in that process," Ritter said.

Ritter is also the advisor for the student-run International Programs Council, and in that role she assists all international student organizations in developing and planning activities.

"We offer students the opportunity to share their culture and experience American culture through a wide variety of events," said Ritter, who has worked with international students since fall 2005. "I work closely with them to secure funding, develop their constitution, plan and develop programs, and advance their personal leadership and intercultural understanding. This diverse group of students create many enjoyable experiences and memories that continually reinforce my dedication to the University."

The programming office plans activities for all interests, including the Parade of Nations, Halloween Dance, International Education Week, Holiday Parade, Ice Capades, and the International Ball, among others.

The Parade of Nations is a tradition during the WMU Bronco Football Homecoming game each fall, in which about 100 students, faculty, administrators and staff carry their homeland flag, or the national flag of their choice, on the football field prior to the game.
The Halloween Dance is another popular event for which students dress up in costumes—as is customary for this American tradition—to eat, dance and be merry with their peers.

International Education Week is celebrated with a full slate of events and activities that increase global understanding. Most of the events are planned by WMU student organizations and feature the food, art, music, films and culture of many nations, as well as educational presentations and displays.

Ice Capades introduces, for many, the popular Michigan winter activity of ice skating. The event has a theme each year, which adds to the fun. The 2009 theme was Funny Hats; Ugly Sweaters was the 2008 theme.

The International Ball gives students the opportunity to attend a prom-like dance that includes a four-course meal, a horse-drawn carriage ride, professional photos, and dance lessons. The 2008 ball had a masquerade theme.

There are also many small group activities offered, such as the spring break trip, which landed students in the Big Apple—New York City—in March 2009, camping trips, festival visits, trips to Lake Michigan beaches, and many more organized by students working with Ritter and her crew.

"I am fortunate to have such wonderful student staff support," Ritter said. "Fresh ideas, enthusiasm, and efforts are the heart of the office. They really help me keep perspectives fresh, and provide great opportunities for our students."

**KIM'S CREW**

One of Ritters student staff members is Lygia Mueller, international programming graduate assistant, from Berlin Germany, majoring in higher education and student affairs.

Mueller has worked in the International Programming Office since fall 2008, and one of her major responsibilities is supporting WMU’s International Programs Council, which meets weekly. She assists the executive board in planning and facilitating events and managing the event budgets. The IPC is compromised of domestic and international students.

"International students really enjoy participating in IPC because it gives them a chance to work on a team with other students, and to have fun while planning informative and entertaining activities for the campus community," Mueller said. "Also, being so far away from home IPC often creates a family environment for incoming students, as many students stay after the weekly General Assembly meeting to go out for dinner or to the movies. Some American members even invite students to spend Thanksgiving with their family."

The image shows two students at the Halloween Dance.
Mueller also helps organizing WMU's International Student Orientation and Registration Program as an ISORP coordinator. Along with two other coordinators and ten student leaders, this team is the first WMU student body to officially welcome international students to the University. The weeklong program in the fall semester provides new students with a comprehensive overview of academic, campus and community life and resources.

Mueller works hard to make sure the three ISORP sessions held each academic year—at the beginning of the fall, spring and summer I semesters—provide a warm and information-rich introduction to WMU. The largest ISORP annually is the fall orientation that has welcomed up to 400 incoming international students.

Although Lygia's main job is guiding IPC in planning and facilitating their events, she also assists in completing office administrative tasks while Ritter is away on recruiting trips.

"Over the summer I have been writing letters to the faculty, presenters, and others involved in ISORP to keep planning rolling along, as well as organizing office meetings with the international programming interns, while Kim has been traveling for recruitment trips and annual leave." Mueller said.

Another member of Kim's Crew is International Programming Office Intern Nicholas DiFranco from Royal Oak, Michigan, a senior majoring in aviation administration, with a business minor.

DiFranco's major responsibilities include working with WMU's international registered student organizations, coordinating International Festival, the Halloween Dance, and Ice Capades, and other fun activities scheduled throughout the academic year. DiFranco manages reserves facilities and manages the volunteers and said he has great fun working with students to plan each event.

"The events we put on are a good time for all and offer new experiences for most," DiFranco said. "They give international students a chance to further adapt to American culture, while simultaneously giving American students insight into cultures from around the globe."

The largest event that the International Program Office plans is International Festival, a student showcase of life around the globe that WMU has hosted for 20 years. The festival includes
culinary delights and cultural displays, as well as ethnic music, dancing, and a fashion show featuring traditional clothing from the many countries represented in the festival. More than 3,000 campus and community members attended the 2009 International Festival, breaking existing attendance records. Profits earned by the festival through the sale of food are donated back to participating student organizations.

"The festival takes six months to plan," DiFranco said. "We hold weekly meetings with a ten-person planning committee, as well as members from 15 WMU registered student organizations."

Maran Subramain is the third member of Kim's crew, a graduate student in WMU's Communication Department. He is an international programming intern who came to Kalamazoo from Kulim, Malaysia in spring 2008. Subramain serves a special role as liaison for international students enrolled in the College of Engineering and Applied Science.

"I organize a meet-and-greet reception for University staff, the CEAS staff, and the international students," Subramain said. "Engineering students make up a large majority of our international student population and it's my job to make sure they are introduced to the many resources WMU and the Kalamazoo community has to offer for their academic, professional and personal success."

Subramain also organizes International Education Week activities for the WMU campus. This special week recognizing the importance of international education is a joint initiative of the U.S. Department of State and the U.S. Department of Education to expand global understanding in the United States and other countries.

"International Education Week activities at WMU include international movies, food festivals, lecture or discussion sessions, guest speakers on an international experience, art exhibits, cultural-display tables, conversation tables, and music performances," Subramain said.

With a seasoned crew at the Helm, Ritter said her office is looking forward to the 2009-2010 academic year and continuing to expand efforts to welcome international students to WMU, Kalamazoo, and other places in the U.S.

"This year we are hoping to expand International Education Week, as well as some of our other activities to include more student organizations in an effort to reach more students," Ritter said.

Story by Katherine Lynn
Fashion learning in London takes the runway in Kalamazoo

Models sashaying down a runway in the narrow entrance of the Kalamazoo Institute of the Arts may have marked the end of studies at Western Michigan University for Liza Nay, but showcased the promise of an exciting and satisfying career for the textile and apparel studies major. As a requirement of the thesis project required of her by WMU’s Lee Honors College, Nay coordinated and hosted a charity fashion show on June 27 that introduced the Kalamazoo community to design work she created while studying at WMU and in London.

“I decided to put on a fashion show featuring the collections I made while studying at Western,” Nay said. “I donated the proceeds to the Project Merchandising Opportunities and Design Association.”

Merchandising Opportunities and Design Association, also known as MODA, is a student organization at WMU that provides students an opportunity to gain experience in the fashion industry outside the classroom. Project MODA is a mentoring program set up as an affiliate of MODA for high school students in the Kalamazoo area.

Nay has been an active member of MODA since her freshman year in 2005 and has created eight collections that consist of swim and resort wear to full-length evening gowns.

“I came to Western with no experience in fashion and I had never taken a sewing class in my life,” she said. “I caught on fairly quickly and ended up loving it,”
Participating in MODA wasn’t the only beneficial experience Nay had while studying at WMU. During the 2007 spring semester Nay participated in a study abroad program at the American Intercontinental University in London, which was coordinated through WMU’s Haenicke Institution for Global Education.

“I would recommend studying abroad to everyone because it is much more than traveling,” said Nay “I have increased my global awareness, it was a great networking experience, and I got to take trips to Rome and Paris to compare and contrast fashion trends, which opened up my perspective on things.”

AIU is located in the center of London and is surrounded by the fashion industry, allowing students to receive a hands-on experience not available in Kalamazoo.

“I was able to relate what I learned in textbooks at Western to real life situations in London,” said Nay “In fact, some of the textbooks I studied at WMU were used as reference books at my internship, which was helpful.”

While in London, Nay interned with fashion designer Alice Temperley, of Temperley London, which is a line featured in more than 220 boutiques and department stores across 35 countries, along with stand-alone stores in London, New York, Los Angeles and Dubai.

“Through AIU I was able to apply for internships with some of the best designers,” said Nay “I literally stepped off the plane, took my bags to the flat and was on my way to interview for internships--it was amazing.”

Long term, Nay would like to own a small boutique selling her designs. She will be attending the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York in the fall to complete her bachelor’s degree in textile and apparel studies. Nay is also working on a minor in business and art.

“Western has offered me the opportunity to expand my knowledge of the fashion industry,” said Nay “I would not have been able to put on a charity fashion show if it weren’t for the opportunities I have had at WMU.”

Story by Sarah Clawson
Photos by William Barnard
French immersion points Michigan native to ESL career

David Parker, a faculty specialist in Western Michigan University’s Career English Language Center for International Students, was visiting Michigan during the 2007 holiday break that followed completion of his graduate degree in Vermont when his dream job landed in his lap.

In December 2007, after Parker graduated with an MA in TESOL from St. Michael’s College in Colchester, Vt. and had earned a Vermont public school teaching license, he returned to his hometown, Hastings, Mich. to visit family and look for a teaching position.

“I went home over Christmas break looking for a job with my K-12 training and was hoping to find a high school job close to home, when one day my aunt called to tell me WMU’s CELCIS office was hiring teachers,” Parker said. “She learned about the opening from her friend and former CELCIS employee, Laura Bowen.” Parker was successfully interviewed, and began teaching at CELCIS in January 2008.

The quick decision meant he had just five days to pack all of his things and move from Vermont to Kalamazoo, as well as finish his Vermont public school licensure portfolio, and start training for his teaching job. “Seeing the language development of my students is my favorite thing to witness and it is the reason I got involved with CELCIS,” he said. “It is not only rewarding for me to see the improvements made, but it’s rewarding for my students to see it, as well.”

Interim CELCIS Director Joel Boyd said Parker’s youth and vitality are assets to the program. “He has a good background in technology and understands much about using the Web and technology for instructional purposes,” Boyd said. “David often volunteers to go with the students on field trips and to participate in the many fun activities we offer our students. The students seem to really enjoy him in and out of the classroom.”

While attending college at the University of Michigan, Parker spent the 2003 spring semester studying abroad in Aix-en-Provence, France, which he greatly enjoyed and made him hope someday he would get a chance to return. After Parker studied abroad in France, he returned to Hastings and took a job as a substitute teacher with a plan to work in a public school system the
following September. “I taught anything I could, from third grade to high school,” Parker said. “From that subbing experience I realized I wanted to become a teacher.”

Combining his desire to gain teaching experience, and eagerness to return to France to improve his French language skills, Parker applied to the English Language Assistant Program through the French Ministry of Culture.

“I went through the application process while I was subbing in Hastings and, was accepted into the program in May 2004,” he said. “I was assigned to teach English as a Second Language at Lycée Technique Louis Pasteur in Hénin-Beaumont, Pas-de-Calais, France. I taught there from October 2004 till April 2005. Hénin-Beaumont was a small town, so I ended up moving to Lille and commuting with my co-teachers to campus every day.”

After Parker returned to the U.S. from France for the second time, he subbed again in Hastings over the 2005 and 2006 school years while applying to graduate schools. His experiences teaching in the U.S. and abroad helped Parker decide that the next course of action would be to earn a master’s in Teaching English as a Second Language so he could combine his interests in teaching and foreign languages. He considers it very fortunate that the CELCIS teaching position was available immediately after he finished that degree in December 2007. “There were four other teachers hired along with me at CELCIS because 60 students from the Dominican Republic had just enrolled for the upcoming semester,” Parker said.

Parker was given a thick curriculum book following his late-year hiring, and was told to review it as soon as possible to ready himself to began teaching classes the first week of January.

“CELCIS faculty helped us pick out our books for our classes, and also helped us develop our first syllabus,” Parker said. “CELCIS offers four levels of instruction—elementary, intermediate, pre-advanced, and advanced. Within those four levels of study there are three core classes. The three core classes that are taught every semester are: speaking and listening, grammar and communication, and reading and writing. What I teach depends on student enrollment, so we never really know what classes we are going to be assigned until we have the final number of students enrolled.”
One of the things about his job that Parker finds particularly enjoyable is the diversity of his classrooms. “In my summer I class of only seven students I had a Korean, Chinese, Vietnamese, and Japanese student,” he said. “It was a small class, but every student had a unique perspective—that is the best part of this job. Even though I work close to home, there are people from all over the world coming to my classroom every day.”

Parker is also pleased when former students drop by the CELCIS office to say hi—students, in some cases, he was able to help in three months time attain the language skills needed to enter University-level classes. Out of the office, Parker enjoys going to Indie rock concerts, running for fitness, and traveling around the world.

“Teaching in an international context has given me the opportunity me to visit fellow English teachers around the world, including a trip in August to Crete and Athens, Greece to visit friends from graduate school,” he said.

Visit CELCIS online: www.wmich.edu/celcis

Story by Katherine Lynn