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Spring 2010

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Confucius Institute opening ceremony dazzles campus and community

Western Michigan University celebrated its new "bridge" to China during the grand opening ceremony of its Confucius Institute on November 23, 2009 in the Dalton Center Recital Hall.

Confucius Institute Opening Ceremony photo gallery

Confucius Institute Web site

More than 200 guests from China, campus, the regional community and beyond were in attendance for the event, which included formal presentations and a one-hour program of festive Chinese music and dance performances.

A 12-member platform delegation representing WMU, the University’s educational partner for its Confucius Institute—Beijing Language and Culture University, the Chinese Consulate in Chicago, and local dignitaries were joined on stage at the ceremony’s opening by Phi Mu Alpha Sinfonica men’s choir for the singing of the Chinese and United States national anthems and WMU’s alma mater.

Distinguished guests from BLCU included Chair and Professor Luijiang Wang, Director of Confucius Institute Dept. at BLCU and Professor Lixia Chen, Director of President Office Yanchong Peng and Project Coordinator Qian Wen. Vice Consul General Maoming Chu and Educational Consul Qiang Liu from the Chinese Consulate General in Chicago also participated in the ceremony.

The Confucius Institute at WMU was established in July 2009, when WMU President John M. Dunn and a small campus delegation traveled to China to finalize a set of agreements forging a partnership between WMU and BLCU, China's premier international 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. (click here to read signing press release).

Dr. Donald G. McCloud, dean of the Diether H. Haenicke Institute for Global Education, served as Master of Ceremonies. He traveled with Dunn to China and is working closely with the director of the Confucius Institute at WMU, Dr. Xiaojun Wang, on outreach and other efforts underway to help launch Chinese language instruction programs in Kalamazoo County’s public school districts, and beyond. The new institute also made possible the offering of two cultural events open to the public free of charge in October—a Chinese film lecture/screening and a classical Chinese opera performance. McCloud said being selected to host a Confucius Institute is a “once in a lifetime opportunity for an institution,” and lauded WMU’s several-years effort to be awarded the honor.

In his speech at the ceremony, Dunn said the Confucius Institute will aid the University in reaching out to the community at large to foster cross-cultural understanding and increase opportunities for business and artistic exchange.

“We will reach out to children in our elementary, middle and high schools with new language and cultural opportunities,” Dunn said. “Our business community will learn how
to take advantage of the growing economic links between our countries, and our arts community will have new venues to consider and new international events available with which to build their programming.” (click here to read Dr. John M. Dunn's speech)

Professor Lujiang Wang of BLCU said during her speech that President Obama’s recent visit to China to sign new cooperation agreements has improved bilateral relations and will likely increase economic, cultural, educational and other types of exchanges.

“China and the U.S are two great countries that contribute to cultural heritage for the benefit of all human beings,” Wang said. “At present, the studying of Chinese language has gained much popularity in the U.S, thanks to the needs of international trade and communication. This Confucius Institute is founded with the aim of developing the teaching of Chinese as a foreign language and deepening cultural understanding. It will provide better access to more Americans.” (Click here to read Professor Lujiang Wang's speech)

Following their speeches, President Dunn and Professor Wang unveiled a plaque commemorating the founding of the Confucius Institute at WMU and exchanged gifts. WMU received a commemorative pewter plate and two large, hand-made scrolls with lines from Confucius’ Analects written in ancient Chinese characters. BLCU received a rare glass Bronco statue created for WMU’s 100th anniversary in 2003, and two framed photographs of Michigan trees in autumn splendor taken by Norman Carver, the renowned Kalamazoo photographer and architect.

Speeches were then presented by Vice Consul General Maoming Chu, Department Chair of Foreign Languages Dr. Cynthia Running-Johnson and WMU Confucius Institute Director Dr. Xiaojun Wang. In closing remarks for the formal part of the ceremony, WMU Provost Tim Greene applauded the Chinese Government for its commitment to education
about the history, culture and language of China through Confucius Institutes worldwide. (click here to read full text of speeches)

“With knowledge comes understanding and, perhaps, with understanding may come more peaceful ways of working on problems that we all share,” Greene said. “Western is grateful for the trust shown in us for undertaking this important educational project for the region of southwest Michigan and beyond. Western already has many substantial and growing programs aimed at global education and understanding, and the Confucius Institute program will enhance those programs and strengthen our commitment.”

More than 100 students and performers participated in a full slate of entertainment offered during the second half of the opening ceremony. About 60 students in WMU’s Chinese language program gathered on stage in Confucius Institute T-shirts to sing and dance as a prelude to music and dance performances by area professional troupes, including the Kalamazoo Dancing and Musical Group and the Kalamazoo Lion Dance Troupe. Performances included traditional Chinese instruments, Chinese ethnic minority dances and Chinese renditions of English songs.

About 200 people attended a reception following the ceremony in the Richmond Center Atrium, which included a photo exhibit chronicling the history of U.S and China relations. Many were enthusiastic in expressing their enjoyment of the ceremony and support for the mission of the Confucius Institute at WMU. Following are some of the comments:

“This opening ceremony is the culmination of 30-plus years of WMU and China reaching out to one another. WMU’s first trip to China was in 1978, only two years after Mao’s death. Twenty-five WMU faculty and administrators attended that trip. China has been the most important country in the world eight of the last ten centuries. They are quickly returning to that position. It is truly unbelievable how far we have come and where globalization has taken us. As the Chinese say, “The sea is wide, but we are never far apart.””

Dr. Howard Dooley, WMU history professor

“The Chinese language community here at WMU is very close-knit. Dr. Wang’s passion and drive really brought the Confucius Institute together. His vision for the progress of the institute will benefit the students and make the program a success.”
Stephen Norton, sophomore majoring in computer science with a Chinese minor

We have already begun conversations with Portage Public Schools and local businesses to build a community connection with the institute. This institute is the more significant piece to really open up cultural connections in this region. It is through these connections that we can create new business operations. It is true when they say that every time you make a new friend, you create a new opportunity. Positive things come when we work together and understand each other. We cannot achieve more business deals without peace and understanding.”

Peter J. Strazdas, Mayor of Portage

As a representative of China, I am proud of WMU and the Confucius Institute for uniting our cultures. This opens a new window for WMU faculty and students to learn Chinese language and culture.”

Jin Qi, Chinese student enrolled at WMU in fall 2009, comparative religions major

“The ceremony was truly grand. WMU is very lucky to have so much involvement from its president and administrators. Their interest is critical to the development of this institute. WMU has such a solid background, which is very unique. Dr. Wang is very popular and can advise many people. This institute will be a great success.”

May Gao, Confucius Institute—University of South Carolina

“What I loved about the event was seeing all the kind words the delegates from BLCU and WMU had for one another. It shows how strong this partnership is and lays the groundwork for future collaborations. Having studied in Beijing, I can see how remarkable this institute will be for WMU and the future of Chinese studies here.”

Jake Lightner, senior majoring in global studies with a Chinese minor

Confucius Institute Opening Ceremony photo gallery
Japanese alumni reunion celebrates successful fundraising campaign

By: Jin Abe, WMU Japan liaison officer

More than 70 alumni and friends, including WMU Professor Emeritus Dr. and Mrs. Michitoshi Soga, attended a year-end reception held on Dec. 12, 2009 in Tokyo to celebrate the successful year of fundraising for Soga Japan Center.

“As you know, there are many Japan Center around the world,” said Dr. Michitoshi Soga. “Some of them are large, well-established institutions that can raise millions of dollars in donations. While our Japan Center is new and may not collect such large lump-sum donations, I don’t know of any other centers that are surrounded by this many passionate supporters who care about it. To me, that is an asset that’s invaluable, and I am so grateful for all of our supporters.”

The reception was hosted by Kalamazoo-Kai, a WMU alumni group based in Tokyo, Japan, which mainly consists of former WMU students, alumni, their friends and families in Japan. The reception featured a silent auction during which alumni bid for WMU memorabilia donated by Haenicke Institute for Global Education. The most popular items among the bidders were a set of golf balls engraved with WMU’s logo, which went to a winner at 8,000 yen (approximately $90 USD). Others went home with WMU athletic wear, shirts, clocks, pennants, and flags in their hands.

WMU alumni also enjoyed video/text messages from Haenicke Institute Dean Dr. Donald McCloud, Dr. Steven Covell, director of the Soga Japan Center, and Ms. Michiko Yoshioka, SJC assistant. Yoshioka’s demonstration of teaching Japanese culture with local schools gave audience concrete ideas about various awareness...
programs that the Soga Japan Center conducts every day. It also showed the audience how far the Soga Japan Center has come since March 10, 2006, when several WMU delegates met with Kalamazoo-Kai board members to deliver the news that establishment of the Soga Japan Center had been approved by WMU Board of Trustees. Back then, pure will was all that existed to make the center possible and not much else—no office, no money, no staff members.

From 2006 to 2009, Kalamazoo-Kai has carried out two fundraising drives. In 2007, it raised nearly $7,000 at a Japan Center Kickoff gathering in Tokyo. In 2009, Kalamazoo-Kai launched a 9-month campaign in the midst of the worldwide economic crisis. Thanks to the leadership of Kalamazoo Kai President Mr. Eiji Oshima and many individual and institutional supporters, the campaign yielded over 110,000,000 Yen (roughly $120,000) by the end of 2009.

Thank you letter from SJC Director Dr. Stephen Covell
Juan Tavares, general manager of international enrollment at the Haenicke Institute for Global Education, knows firsthand what it is like to be an international student in the United States. Tavares grew up in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, where he spent much of his childhood developing as a competitive swimmer. A friend and fellow swimmer traveled to Michigan State University in East Lansing one year and raved about his experience, which inspired Tavares to seek an opportunity to study in the U.S.

“I talked to an American, Jim Henderson,” said Tavares. “He was the national team diving coach in the Dominican Republic. Jim called the coach of the MSU swim team and told him I was a prospect.”

Tavares then began to take the required college entrance exams to enroll in a U.S. university, including the TOEFL exam and the SAT. The SAT was only offered once a year in the D.R., a deadline that had expired by the time Tavares began the process, so he had to wait until the following year to take the exam and apply to MSU.

“My experiences trying to come to the U.S. help me relate to the international students here at WMU,” Tavares said. “There are many idiosyncrasies and difficulties when applying to a university that most people see as normal. I can look back on my own experience, the homesickness, the different climate, and meeting new people. That’s why I like this job. I can give helpful tips.”

Tavares swam freestyle events and majored in education—K-12 with an emphasis in health education and a minor in coaching—while attending MSU. He followed completion of his bachelor’s degree by earning a master’s degree in sports recreation management.

After graduation, Tavares was hired by Northwestern University in Evanston, Ill. and worked in recreation health club management in both the private and public sectors. Tavares ended up in Kalamazoo after being offered a job with Bronson Hospital’s health clubs. The job began to take a toll on Tavares and his family, as he had to work long
shifts and was always on call. Tavares began talking about a career change to a member of the health club who worked in admissions at K-College.

“At 41 years old, I started from scratch,” said Tavares. He accepted a position in admissions at K-College and worked there for three years. In 2006, he moved to an office just a few blocks away when he joined WMU’s international admissions staff as an admissions counselor. One of his major accomplishments in the three years he has worked at WMU is a major increase in student enrollment from the Dominican Republic.

“When my niece, Nayibe, was a junior in high school she became interested in studying in the U.S.,” said Tavares. “Her parents were reluctant to send her. I convinced my brother to let her stay with me. She ended up coming to Kalamazoo to attend Loy Norrix High School for her senior year. She liked Kalamazoo and the environment here and decided to go to college at WMU.”

Nayibe told her friends at home about her decision to attend WMU and five of them decided to enroll with her, entering the University in fall 2007. This initial cohort was joined in January 2008 by 56 new D.R. students and 60 more enrolled at WMU in August 2008. There are currently 131 Dominicans enrolled at WMU in a broad range of disciplines.

“They liked WMU because it isn’t too big and the University has accessible faculty who are warm, welcoming, and helpful,” said Tavares. “Unlike many other schools where everything is done by separate offices, WMU has the Haenicke Institute, where international students will find all the services they need under one roof. The convenience is an advantage to students; we find retention rates by international students are the highest on campus.”

Tavares at a meeting in the Dominican Republic

Tavares is currently scheduled to travel to China in March for a 10 day recruiting trip in conjunction with our English as a Second Language Director Diana Vreeland. “China is a huge market,” said Tavares. “WMU is looking to get more students from that market.” Tavares will be leaving for China in November to begin recruitment.

Swimming is still Tavares' favorite way to work out and he does so most evenings with his three children at a Kalamazoo swim club.

Students seeking information about international admissions at WMU may contact Tavares via e-mail at: juan.tavares@wmich.edu

Story by Julia Valentine
Childhood experiences overseas spark interest in global studies

I became a globetrotter in April 1996 when my dad received a three-year job transfer to Koln, Germany. Our weekend getaways consisted of traveling throughout Europe, and I came back to the United States with fluent German skills and an entirely new world perspective.

Ready to tackle another foreign language, I fell in love with Spanish in 6th grade. Craving further international travel, I seized the opportunity to go to Italy and Greece during my high school senior spring break. Traveling with 100 fellow classmates was an experience of its own, however, the most profound part was receiving the Easter blessing from Pope Benedict. Cruising across the Ionian from Sorrento to Athens was breathtaking, and after all my traveling, when it came time to decide where to attend college, WMU became the logical choice.

After a little investigation, I decided on a Global and International Studies degree because I was able to structure it around my interests. I coupled it with a Spanish minor, an international business minor, and a Chinese minor. I was able to take a range of courses, including Asian Economics, Life and Culture of Spain, and Chinese Calligraphy. I strategically combined the GIS major and my three minors with a degree from the Lee Honors College, and synthesized my educational experiences from all these programs into my honors thesis.
Part of my degree program at WMU included traveling to Beijing, China for a short-term study abroad program in August 2008 with 12 other students. Our timing was fortunate as the summer 2008 Olympic Games were taking place in Beijing at the time. It was the opportunity of a lifetime. Our program was led by the director of the Chinese program at WMU, Dr. Xiaojun Wang, who accompanied us on tours of the city and even managed to get us tickets to two of the Olympic events. We were able to see the USA volleyball team play and saw a few of the track events that took place at the renowned Bird’s Nest.

Our sightseeing tours included visits to the Summer Palace, the Forbidden City, Tiananmen Square, the Temple of Heaven, and of course, the Great Wall. While staying at the Beijing Language and Culture University, we attended a Chinese language class every morning for two hours to earn 3 credits of Chinese language study. Towards the end of the tour, we also spent a day in a farming village outside of Beijing called Tianjin. There, we were treated to a multiple-course Chinese meal that included every part of a chicken ... the family wanted to make sure we knew they were not keeping any food for themselves.

Kaitlyn in front of the Bird’s Nest, Beijing, China
Part of being in Beijing during such an exciting time meant that we were there with thousands of other visitors and tourists. People from all over the world were in Beijing for the Olympics, and while we climbed the Great Wall we not only heard people speaking Chinese, but also Japanese, Korean, French, Russian, German, Flemish, Italian, and Greek. When we were there EVERYONE wanted to take pictures with Americans and we all slightly loved the fame.

After an intense amount of traveling and a whirlwind of experiences, our group took the 12-hour flight back to Kalamazoo to start the fall semester on time. For many of us, the trip was a defining moment. They always say the best way to learn a language is to spend time in the country where the language is spoken and all of us saw dramatic improvement in our Mandarin language skills. Our love for Chinese culture increased as well, and several students have since gone back for the long-term study abroad program. For those of us in the GIS major, the trip was the perfect supplement to our studies since we were able to go out and experience the world. It is something that I will never forget, and in the end, WMU has provided me with an incredible amount of opportunities and helped shape me into a global citizen. Additionally, I was hired by WMU for the 2009-2010 academic year to assist the Haenicke Institute with marketing efforts for the GIS major and with international admissions.