



Bridging the gap
with language,
a new
international
program
builds
understanding
and
opportunities
between China
and the rest of
the world.

“By nature, men are nearly alike,”
wrote the Chinese philosopher. *“By
practice, they get to be wide apart.”*

The philosopher, of course, was
Confucius; his teachings and commentary
are as germane today as when he penned
those words some 2,500 years ago.

Known as “the Greatest Master” by
the Chinese people, Confucius encour-
aged a pragmatic philosophy for daily life
that emphasized social harmony, cultural
and personal understanding, sincerity and
justice. His teachings have profoundly
influenced East Asian thought and life for
centuries and have had considerable im-
pact elsewhere around the world.

The **OU** Confucius Institute

BY DEBRA LEVY MARTINELLI

Now, Confucian thought has found a new home in the OU Confucius Institute, created in August 2006 with a few strokes of the pen by OU President David L. Boren and a delegation representing the People's Republic of China.

What is a Confucius Institute?

Started by the Chinese government's Office of Chinese Language Council International—also known as Hanban—the Beijing-based organization works to strengthen the understanding, opportunities and bonds between China and other countries.

There are more than 80 Confucius Institutes in 38 nations around the world. The OU institute brings the total in the United States to 11. It will serve the south central region of the country for which the Consulate General for the People's Republic of China in Houston is responsible: Oklahoma, Texas, Louisiana, Arkansas, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia and Florida, plus Puerto Rico.

The OU Confucius Institute will bring together the college-level Chinese language program on the Norman campus, which includes an undergraduate major, and the K-12 Chinese language programs of the Oklahoma Institute for Teaching East Asia at OU-Tulsa, both in the College of Arts and Sciences; and the Chinese language outreach programs of the College of Continuing Education.

The University will offer credit and non-credit courses to school children, college students, business people and travelers. It also will provide language programs for teachers in both Norman and Beijing in cooperation with Beijing Normal University, one of China's top universities, and training for teachers to help them become certified teachers of Chinese.

In addition, Beijing Normal University will support OU's language training courses and workshops by sending faculty who specialize in teaching Chinese as a foreign language. Hanban will help OU recruit qualified Chinese language teachers to teach at the K-12 level. There also are plans to establish OU's Confucius Institute as a testing site for the proficiency certification test in Chinese.

"The Confucius Institute at OU will enormously enhance the understanding

between our two nations," Boren says. "Not only will it encourage exchanges between students and faculty members at the university level, it also will begin to reach students as early as the elementary school years in educating them about China and Chinese history and culture.

"Clearly, China will be one of the dominant leaders in the world during this century. There is no more important relationship than that between the United States and China," Boren adds. "If the two countries can forge a partnership on the important issues faced by the entire world, the lives of all of us will be safer and more productive. An antagonistic relationship between our two nations, on the other hand, has the potential of creating a world situation far more dangerous than the Cold War that existed between the United States and the Soviet Union.

"We should seize every opportunity to bring our two nations together to work on mutually beneficial projects. It is critically important that the next generation of Chinese and American leaders understand and respect each other."

Paul B. Bell Jr., dean of the OU College of Arts and Sciences and vice provost for instruction, has led the effort to establish the institute here. But Bell, who himself is learning Chinese, gives much of the credit to the University's college-level Chinese language program, headed by Ming Chao Gui, associate professor of Chinese and linguistics.

"Since he joined the faculty, we've seen accelerated growth in the program that has enabled us to offer a major in Chinese, which is a requirement [for an institution] to be considered for a Confucius Institute," says Bell. "It's no exaggeration to say that none of this would be happening if it weren't for Professor Gui."

After earning a doctoral degree in linguistics from the University of Texas, Arlington in 1990, Gui moved his family to San Francisco, thinking there would be a demand for his bilingual skills. Supply of bilingual talent in the City by the Bay far exceeded demand, however, and he was unable to land a job in his field. So he sold carpet, worked in tea and noodle factories, and delivered medicine for a large pharmaceutical company.

Three years after landing in San Fran-

cisco, Gui received a telephone call from his father, Cankun Gui, who taught Chinese at OU. "He was in his early 70s, and my mother was quite ill. They wanted to return to China, where members of our large family could help care for her," Gui remembers. "My father wanted to introduce me to the [OU languages] department to see if they liked me."

They did. With his wife and two young children, Gui arrived on the Norman campus in early 1994 to fulfill a one-semester visiting professor's contract as OU's sole Chinese language professor. That first semester, he had just 14 students in one beginning Chinese course. But instead of being discouraged, he was optimistic about the prospect of building the program.

With unwavering support from Boren and Bell, Gui has nurtured the Chinese language program from those first 14 students in spring 1994 to more than 170 in fall 2006 with an estimated 300-plus for the 2006-07 academic year.

The program reached another milestone last year with the launch of a Chinese language major, which requires extensive language proficiency as well as instruction in Chinese literature, culture and history, both at OU and abroad. This past spring, six students majored in Chinese, and another 17 pursued the language as a minor. The first student with a Chinese major degree graduated in August 2006.

The phenomenal success of the program means Gui no longer is a one-person operation. His colleagues include two other full-time and one part-time faculty and two graduate teaching assistants. A search has been initiated for an additional faculty member to teach Chinese literature in Chinese, which currently is taught only in English translation. "Then I will consider the Chinese language program complete," Gui declares.

With the program humming and the formal Confucius Institute signing ceremony now a happy memory, Bell, Gui and a host of others are quickly putting into place an impressive array of specific initiatives, including:

- Enhancing college-level Chinese in-

RIGHT: OU President David L. Boren and Liu Chuansheng, chairperson of the University Council of Beijing Normal University, sign documents officially establishing OU as a Confucius Institute, one of only 11 in the United States.

BELOW RIGHT: Sharon Gou (right), the executive director of the new Confucius Institute at OU, admires calligraphy held by members of the delegation from Beijing Normal University during their visit to OU-Tulsa.

struction, including the development of Chinese courses to be taught over the Internet for college credit, which Bell says is the most immediate priority.

- Increasing Chinese language education for K-12 students statewide. “There’s a growing demand among schools to add Chinese to their curriculum,” Bell explains. “OU already is very active in promoting Chinese language instruction in the schools through the Oklahoma Institute for Teaching East Asia at OU-Tulsa. Its director, Jessica Stowell, will be the Tulsa-based associate director of the Confucius Institute and will continue to expand the K-12 program.” Eleven Oklahoma K-12 schools—four high schools, four middle schools and two elementary schools in the Tulsa area and Norman’s Madison Elementary School—currently offer Chinese language classes.
- Establishing a summer institute at OU and in China to train American educators to teach Chinese. The first summer a teacher would learn basic Chinese at OU; the second would be spent at Beijing Normal University to improve Chinese language skills to a level at which he or she could qualify to become a beginning teacher. Bell foresees the first summer institute up and running by summer 2007.
- Earning designation as a teacher certification site. Using a multi-level test licensed by Hanban, the OU Confucius Institute would serve as a regional proficiency testing center for



Robert Taylor



Anibal Cuervo

“It’s very important for our graduates to be prepared to operate on teams with colleagues from all over the world.”

individuals who want to teach Chinese or become proficient enough to seek employment where knowledge of the language would be an asset.

- Facilitating the teaching of Chinese in non-traditional school settings, including established Chinese schools (where children primarily of Chinese ancestry learn the language as supplemental instruction, typically on weekends) and providing resources to expand that instruction. Sharon Gou, the Confucius Institute’s Norman-based director, will lead this effort.
- Providing Chinese language instruction for business travelers and tourists. Also on the drawing board are short, non-credit courses in intercultural communication, Chinese art, music, cooking and martial arts. “The two goals of the Confucius Institute beyond language instruction are promoting economic development and trade and promoting cultural understanding,” says Bell.

The Confucius Institute is only one of the recent efforts to strengthen ties between OU and China. In July, China’s Nanjing Automobile Group Corp. announced that it will locate its MG subsidiary’s North America headquarters, assembly plant and research and development facility in Oklahoma. The R&D center, to be housed on OU’s Cy and Lissa Wagner Research Campus, will create high-tech jobs and give OU students the real-world, intercultural experience that is essential in today’s global economy.

In the early stages, engineering students will help analyze safety, fuel economy, emissions control and other field test data. As the program grows, the range of activities will expand to include a new technology laboratory and styling studio. Students in other disciplines ranging from business to fine arts also will be involved in the automaker’s R&D operations.

“It’s very important for our graduates to be prepared to operate on teams with colleagues from all over the world,” says College of Engineering Dean Tom Landers. “Even if they continue to primarily do their work in their home country, in the global supply chain context they still will work with suppliers and customers who are of a wide range of countries and cultures. China certainly is foremost in that group because of its rapid emergence as a global economic power and also as a major global market.”

By all accounts, the credit for the phenomenal expansion in China-related programs at OU goes to Boren and his team, which also includes Edward J. Perkins, former U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, who directs the International Programs Center; Millie Audas, director of Education Abroad and Interna-




Ming Chao Gui, associate professor of Chinese and linguistics at OU, goes over some text with Paul B. Bell Jr., dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. Bell, himself an avid student of Chinese, credits Gui with the program’s remarkable growth in the past few years.

tional Student Services, home of numerous travel abroad programs, including "Journey to China" [see sidebar]; and Robert Cox, associate professor and director of the School of International and Area Studies in the College of Arts and Sciences, which has added five faculty for enlarged Chinese-related programs and has some 40 students working on Asian Studies degrees.

"When he came here 12 years ago, President Boren said that all students must graduate with an international perspective, regardless of their academic discipline. He's also been very consistent in saying that China is very important to that," Cox says. "That's a good vision, and one we're trying to achieve. I'm really encouraged that so many students recognize they need to find their place in the global society."

A major step in the continuing expansion of Chinese-related programs is the creation of the Newman Institute of U.S.-China Issues and a corresponding endowed faculty chair made possible through a \$1 million gift from Ruth and Harold J. Newman (B.S. geography, 1951) of Connecticut. The new institute will focus on topics of great relevance to the two countries, including trade, the economy, natural resources, the environment and industrial policy.

Peter Hays Gries is the inaugural Newman Chair and institute director. "As we envision it, the U.S.-China Institute has two functions: to promote China studies at OU and around Oklahoma and to focus on research and policy at the national and international levels," Gries explains. "That includes networking with the Oklahoma business community and making it aware of what's going on in China and the opportunities and risks of doing business there. OU has the potential to become a big player in fostering these relationships."

Indeed. As the Greatest Master wrote so many centuries ago: "I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand." 

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Journeying to

While the burgeoning Chinese language program provided the foundation for establishing the OU Confucius Institute, another crucial requirement was the number and type of available opportunities for strengthening ties between the University of Oklahoma and China. Perhaps the most well known is "Journey to China," a summer program in which 25 to 35 students experience four weeks in four different locations.

"The Journey to China program has given OU a presence and identity in China," explains Paul B. Bell Jr., dean of the OU College of Arts and Sciences and vice provost for instruction. "Many universities send students abroad with their own faculty, so the primary interactions are between English-speaking faculty and English-speaking students. They're in a cultural cocoon. We immerse our students in Chinese culture and the local community—they live in Chinese dormitories with Chinese students and are instructed by Chinese faculty."

Josh Woodward, who took the Journey to China in summer 2005, is one of more than 150 students who have participated in the program in its nine-year history.

"We started in Xi'an, the ancient capital of China, where we learned 'survival Mandarin' and got some basic history of and orientation to the culture," says Woodward, who graduated summa cum laude from OU in May 2006 with a double major in economics and marketing and currently is employed in the University's Honors College Leadership Center and the Center for the Creation of Economic Wealth.

The group then traveled south to Kunming, where they studied environmental, economic and cultural issues, followed by a week at Beijing University, where the curriculum focused on politics. "It was especially fun for me to see Beijing because one of my OU Cousins (international student friendship program) lives there, and I was able to meet his family," says Woodward. "It was incredible to be able to see him in his own environment after he'd seen me and my family in ours."

The last leg of the memorable trip was in Shanghai, the country's commercial center. "We learned about foreign investment in China, emerging markets and economic development," Woodward recalls. "In Shanghai, they're finishing a skyscraper every fourth day. Twenty years ago there were fewer than 20 in the city; now there are 4,000. Half the world's concrete was poured in China last year. They run out of metal scaffolding all the time and start strapping bamboo together to continue the process."

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