

“BUILDING A BETTER PUBLIC IMAGE OF CONFUCIUS INSTITUTES”

President Chuck Staben, University of Idaho

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BUILDING A BETTER PUBLIC IMAGE OF CONFUCIUS INSTITUTES

Thank you for hosting me this week. I am pleased to be among so many distinguished leaders.

The University of Idaho is proud to partner with Hanban and SCUT in our Confucius Institute program.

This is a vital part of our university’s academic and cultural life.

The Confucius Institute is an important representative for our state. China is a top economic and trading partner for the state of Idaho. We believe cultural and language programming at our Confucius Institute can forge better ties between Idaho and China. Those ties will benefit our citizens and our state’s economic development.

Building a better public image of the Confucius Institute is important so that Idaho leaders and citizens understand the benefits of China-Idaho relationships.

PING-PONG DIPLOMACY

Cultural activities have helped China and the United States create closer ties.

Virtually no Americans had been on the Chinese mainland since 1949. The U.S. table tennis team made a momentous visit to China in April 1971. Nixon and Kissinger travelled to Beijing the following February. The Chinese table tennis team visited the United States in April 1972 - a trip seen as an important step in reciprocal trust-building. “Ping-pong diplomacy” led to the normalizing of diplomatic relations with Communist China in 1978-1979.

This shows how important sports and culture are in building ties between people. When people play sports together, they share an experience together, and learn to see each other as fellow human beings, not as “foreigners.” That spirit motivates the University of Idaho in its Confucius Institute, to offer opportunities for shared experiences.

A GROWING PARTNERSHIP

The Confucius Institute began at the University of Idaho in 2013. Today the University of Idaho hosts the first and largest Confucius Institute in Idaho.

We began with cultural programs in Moscow, a small, college town that is the home to our main campus. Programs included Chinese Movie Night and a food club. We also offered Chinese language instruction at the university.

In the time since 2013, our Confucius Institute has rapidly expanded its programs. Because our university has locations across the state, we can offer cultural and language programs throughout Idaho, especially in our largest cities. Those programs, as I will explain, are targeted at our students, but also available to the general community.

I am proud to have met with our Chinese partners many times as we build our Confucius Institute programs. I was delighted to visit Beijing this summer – and have a meeting with HanBan. I also visited with Guangzhou, the South China University of Technology. I met with the president of SCUT, Xichun Zhang, as well as Vice President Ming Zhu. Our Dean of the College of Engineering, Larry Stauffer, came with us. Our Director of the Confucius Institute, Hexian Xue, also participated.

We also met with Dr. Huanbin Liu, former director of SCUT. Dr. Liu is a University of Idaho graduate! It is indeed “a small world sometimes,” as we say in the U.S. We are proud a U of I graduate was in this important position.

As you can see in the bottom picture, my wife, Mary Beth, and I, have taken a personal interest in ensuring our Confucius Institute instructors are welcome. We had a dinner this fall – American-style food, steak and salad. Sharing a meal is a valuable way to learn about cultural differences, and to appreciate similarities.

Meetings are important to maintain a relationship – we appreciate the opportunities to continue to learn from each other and to develop strong programs.

ACADEMIC OPPORTUNITIES

The academic opportunities afforded by the Confucius Institute are available for U of I students and for the general public in Idaho. This access helps our students, who will go on to careers in many different areas, cultivate an understanding of China that they can share with current students, family members, and community members, as well as their future coworkers after they graduate.

It is also important that community members have an opportunity to learn Chinese language and culture, whether they just want to grow as people, or whether they want to use that language in their business. In each case, language and cultural instruction are valuable for forging a better popular perception of the Confucius Institute and China. We are proud to have 11 Chinese instructors in our program now, including one table tennis instructor and Director Hexian Xue. We also have two American administrators.

In Moscow, community language classes are available. Two levels of Mandarin language instruction are offered. A Chinese calligraphy class is also available.

As you can see on the slide, our newspaper for the region recently wrote a front-page story on the Chinese language and culture classes at U of I. Confucius Institute Co-Directory Hexian Xue helped share how the classes have drawn interest from community members. She invited the newspaper to a class. She highlighted how Chinese is actually easier to learn than many Americans might think.

Her quote in the story is important: “Not everybody can afford the time, afford the money, to travel over the world, to go to other places out of their own country. But to learn a foreign language, to learn Chinese, it gives people an intangible window to know what kind of way the people outside of your native country, how they live, how they work, how they communicate with the people around them.”

At our College of Business and Economics, we offer cultural classes for credit to students. This is an advantage for students, as our economy is increasingly global, and especially for

students who want careers in international economic areas. We have also brought many classes to our pre-college, “K-12” system.

We offer two classes this fall at Moscow High School, and have 34 students for the two classes. We have Chinese programs at a Boise High School, in the state’s largest city. We have Chinese programs at Post Falls High School and Lake City High School, both in the fast-growing region of North Idaho. These programs have been added in the past two years. They help grow the reputation of the Confucius Institute across the state of Idaho.

This year we have expanded Chinese instruction to a kindergarten, elementary school, and middle school in Moscow. It is important, especially in language instruction, to reach children early. These classes will expose more students to Chinese language and culture.

The Confucius Institute Scholarship Program has generated interest and is a valuable program at U of I. This year we have one U of I student studying at South China University of Technology. In 2015 and 2016 we had two U of I students attend university in China with full Confucius Institute scholarship. I know that the experience adds to the perspective and understanding of the students. It will help them in their studies and their future careers. They return to the U of I and share that experience with fellow students and with community members, and that builds more interest in the program, as well as broader understanding of China.

CULTURAL OPPORTUNITIES

Often, academic and cultural opportunities intersect. The Confucius China Studies Program, created in spring 2015, helps U of I faculty, students, and other community members get involved in research on Chinese culture, philosophy, economic development and the features of Chinese Language.

This summer six Jazz Faculty with our Lionel Hampton School of Music went to China with the China studies, helping build connections. They met with students and gave performances, and were well-received. We have also had 11 educational administrators and teachers from across Idaho visit China in Spring 2016 under the Confucius China Studies program.

China Summer Camp provides access opportunities for students with U of I and across our state to visit China with partial Confucius Institute scholarship support. In 2015, 20 students from U of I and our local city of Moscow participated in the two-week China summer camp. They visited Chinese cultural sites, learned about architecture, and visited with host families. In 2017, there were 20 more students, this time from across the state of Idaho, who participated in the China Summer Camp program for two weeks. They visited Beijing, Zengzhou, and Guangzhou. In each case, the students have the special opportunity to serve as representatives of the University and of our country. They get to know Chinese people and families, and form friendships.

We hope they help the public image of the Confucius Institute programs at U of I here in China, and also in the United States. They will return to their communities and share their experiences of the Confucius Institute and of China, bringing a better understanding of each to many other people.

We also offer a wide range of cultural programs throughout the state. In Moscow, our Chinese food club has many well-attended dinners. Mary Beth and I attended a recent “Hot Pot” night at our local community center. We enjoyed watching many community members get acquainted with Chinese cuisine and traditions.

There is also a similar club in Boise. In Boise, the Confucius Institute has a presence at the Capital City Market, a popular outdoor market, where they offer information about the institute to community members.

A Chinese Movie night is very popular, in Moscow and in Boise. Our annual Chinese New year Gala exposes many people to the beautiful culture and traditions of China. Finally, the China on the Palouse series brings speakers and seminars to Moscow, and the China in the Treasure Valley does the same for the Boise area.

U OF I TABLE TENNIS

I want to conclude with where I started: the role of table tennis in building stronger public images and relationships. This fall the University of Idaho is grateful to have Caden Xue, a top table tennis player, as an instructor at our Confucius Institute. We have classes for credit – four class meetings per week.

Caden also participates three evenings per week with our U of I Vandal Table Tennis Club, a club that has existed for many years with the help of a long-time faculty member, Patrick Hrdlicka. We are glad that the club, drawn from students, faculty, and community members, has a chance to learn from an expert like Caden. Caden and Patrick represented the University of Idaho and our Confucius Institute at the 2017 Portland Stiga Open, in the doubles contest. They won the championship!

I had a chance to join the students in one of Caden’s classes this semester. We had quite a work-out. Caden is a talented player and a good teacher. I saw firsthand how the students enjoy learning from him. We are excited to have a unique program in U of I table tennis.

On a smaller scale than in the 1970s, table tennis is helping build connections at U of I and the state of Idaho. Many of our students are from places in Idaho where they do not have experience with Chinese culture. Playing the game, and learning from a Chinese instructor, gives them a new appreciation for China, and helps them see the Chinese people as similar to them. Sports truly does bring people together.

I am proud of how our table tennis activities, along with all our other language and cultural programming across the state, has helped build a better public image of the Confucius Institute. We will keep building on that success. Thank you!