



Experts fear Confucius Institutes serve Chinese interests...but some colleges are keeping them

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University and intelligence experts around the United States are becoming concerned over Confucius Institutes operating within American institutions, but under control of the Chinese government.

In a February 2018 Senate Intelligence Committee hearing, FBI Director Christopher Wray said that China is exploiting the United States' academic environment, using it for non-American interests, according to the *Chronicle of Higher Education*.

"The level of naïveté on the part of the academic sector about this creates its own issues," Wray said during the hearing. "They're exploiting the very open research and development environment that we have, which we all revere. But they're taking advantage of it."

Robert Daley, director of the Kissinger Institute on China and the United States at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars told the *Chronicle* that U.S. officials are concerned that Chinese students and researchers are obtaining information that would help China and advance the country's economic and national interests.

"They think, 'Why should American universities be training China's top minds in things like AI when they will then just compete with the U.S. globally?'" Daley said. "After all, during the Cold War, we weren't training Soviet scientists in nuclear physics."

In response to growing fears, Congress passed a defense bill last summer that barred colleges from using Department of Defense funding for Confucius Institutes. Over a half-dozen colleges and universities said they will close their Confucius Institutes following the passage of the spending bill, *Chronicle* reported.

The University of Michigan specified that it will close its Confucius Institute because the structure gives the Chinese government too much authority over what the institute does. The University of North Florida cut ties with its Confucius Institute following the passage of the spending bill, stating that the partnership did not line up with the school's "mission and goals."

Sarah Spreitzer, director of government and public affairs at the American Council on Education, said that U.S. intelligence officials have gone into little detail regarding what degree to which the institutes pose a threat to the nation.

"We want to know how we can proactively address specific concerns without having broad policies mandating" actions that are put in place by the Trump administration or by Congress, Spreitzer told *Chronicle*.

Doug Bandow, a senior fellow at the libertarian CATO Institute and former special assistant to President Ronald Reagan, told *Campus Reform* that while there are areas of concern with Confucius Institutes, national security is not the most primary.

“It makes sense for them to be concerned,” Bandow said, acknowledging the U.S. government’s national security concern regarding the institutes, but claiming that it is not the most pressing issue. Bandow suggested that the U.S. government should monitor whether universities change their views because of these institutes, in addition to how much control the Chinese government exercises over the centers.

“I would expect the U.S. government to be vigilant if they expect any intel gathering [at the Confucius Institutes],” Bandow told *Campus Reform*.

Even with concerns expressed by U.S. Intelligence officials, the University of South Carolina is not convinced their Confucius Institute is being used to spew Chinese “propaganda,” as officials say, and will be keeping the institute open, as reported by *Campus Reform*.

“The only courses at USC taught by Confucius Institute staff are language courses. They do not teach culture, literature or film courses and are under the direct supervision of USC faculty,” a university spokesman said.

Some universities, such as Georgia State University, however, do not receive Department of Defense funding for their Confucius Institute, and are untouched by the spending bill.

“The [National Defense Authorization Act] language relative to Confucius Institutes does not affect Georgia State’s Confucius Institute because we don’t have Department of Defense funding for Chinese language programs,” Georgia State University spokeswoman Andrea Jones told *Campus Reform*.

The Confucius Institute at Georgia State University even won “Confucius Institute of the Year” at an award ceremony in China, a distinction only given to three American universities.

Campus Reform reached out to the University of Alaska, Webster University, and the University of Minnesota, all of which currently house Confucius Institutes, but did not receive responses in time for publication.