

An Interview with Louis Mangione, Director of the Confucius Institute

On May 19, 2015 Temple administrators and a delegation from China met at a signing ceremony to establish a Confucius Institute at Temple. The Institute will launch a Chinese language major in 2016 and may also offer non-credit programs teaching Chinese cultural appreciation. Other universities, however, have criticized the work of Confucius Institutes. Professor Louis Mangione, the director, was kind enough to sit down for an interview and answer some questions many have raised about the new institute.

Paul LaFollette (PL): Tell me about this new institute that we have at Temple.

Professor Louis Mangione (LM): It's a partnership between Zhejiang Normal University. It is in a program that is run in an organization whose short form name is Hanban. This is also often referred to as the Confucius Institute Headquarters. It is an office of the Chinese Government. There are a number of Confucius Institutes all over the country, including at some peer institutions.

Temple's institute will be in partnership with a university that I have had a relationship with since 1997. Five or six years ago, I discussed with my colleagues there the possibility that we could write one of these proposals. The original proposal was to have the Institute provide us with instructional support in order that we would have resources to offer a Chinese major. We planned to do this with a major so structured that it would meet the state requirements for a teacher's certificate in Chinese communication.

The current institute, which came into being in May but is still not in operation, maintains this as its mission. The associate director for this institute is Elvis Wagner from the College of Education. He will help make sure that the program is structured in such a way that it meets certification requirements.

It is important to emphasize that the major will be independent of the Confucius institute. It is a CLA major and was approved in the same way that all majors in our college are approved. It still has not been approved by the board. The curricula for all of the courses that will be credit bearing in the Chinese language program are CLA courses. The department will control the curriculum. The structural support we will take from the Confucius Institute will teach our courses using our textbooks and syllabi.

Besides for-credit courses, the Institute will probably offer non-credit courses in Chinese language. These would likely be directed towards special purposes such as travel. They may also offer courses in Chinese culture.

PL: These would be on-credit courses offered to the community?

LM: Depending on how the budget works out, the Institute may or may not charge tuition for the non-credit courses. They would be open to anyone.

The Co-Director from China will come here sometime in October. It is one of his plans to investigate offering non-credit courses in Chinese cooking, and to do this in a way that tries to embed the cultural practices surrounding cooking in China. This would include such topics as how to select food, cooking seasonally and with fresh vegetables.

PL: Has there been any discussion about getting involved with other colleges beyond Education?

LM: We have not discussed this possibility with other schools and colleges, but internally we have discussed this.

PL: So this is a project that has been in the works for about a decade?

LM: Well, five or six years.

PL: And what it is going to bring to Temple, an enhanced ability to teach credit bearing courses for a major?

LM: Yes.

PL: Will this Chinese major involve study of Chinese literature?

LM: Our strategy is to have the instructors from China teach skills level courses. This will free us up to teach the upper level that will necessarily include composition and conversation to meet state requirements for teaching certificates. We will also have a course on the structure of Chinese, again oriented towards the certification requirements, and courses in literature, film, and popular culture.

PL: I cannot ignore the fact that there has been a lot of criticism of some of the Confucius Institutes in this country. Several universities, such as University of Chicago and Penn State have not renewed their contracts with the Confucius Institute Center citing concerns about academic freedom and pressure on some universities to conform their curricula to the wishes of the Chinese government. Why will this not become a problem at Temple?

LM: I think that one of the reasons that this is not going to happen here is that I know the people I am working with. I have worked with some of them for a very long time, and I know people at that university who are involved in running Confucius Institutes successfully in other countries. We have a very clear understanding of what the Institute will be doing, and how we will be doing it. We have a frank enough relationship that I feel comfortable telling them when problems arise and we can just discuss it. An example is the coming of the Dalai Lama to Temple. I was asked by a faculty member in CLA, "What is the Confucius Institute going to do?" My initial reaction was "nothing," but I did contact the people in China and their reaction also was, "This has nothing to do with the Confucius Institute."

PL: So my understanding is that the content of the courses and the qualifications of the Institute faculty will be under the control of the CLA.

LM: That will be true for the credit bearing courses. One of the areas of controversy surrounding some of these Institutes is that courses will be taught by faculty that were not hired by the university. I am not sure what is going on in other Confucius Institutes, however, I was sent *vitas* for the two instructors from China, asked to review them, and asked whether or not they were qualified. I passed those *vitas* to people in the Dean's office. They agreed with me that these people were qualified to teach our language courses.

PL: How much collegial involvement was there in the creation of this Institute? Did this work its way through your collegial assembly?

LM: The Confucius Institute was never brought before the assembly. It involved little other faculty input. It is officially being operated out of the Provost's office.

PL: Is a Chinese major new to Temple, or is this something we are coming back to?

LM: It is new. Temple began offering Chinese in the early 1970s. At that time it was not part of a major. The program was moved into the Critical Language Center very shortly after that center was founded, and was taught there for a number of years. In the early 2000s we began to offer a minor in Chinese. Before that, since the mid-80s we had a certificate, which consisted of six courses in Chinese.

PL: It sounds like this could be a good thing for Temple, especially as one would expect Chinese language to become increasingly important in this century.

LM: We are very excited about it. We do have some concern that it is going to be a low enrollment major. We hope to address that problem by encouraging our students to double major. The other thing that we are hoping is that this will encourage more students to study abroad. There are a lot of opportunities with our partner institutions in China.

PL: Does the institute bring money into Temple?

LM: The partnership requires that Temple put up 50% of the money and the Chinese put up the other 50%.

PL: Thank you for taking the time to explain this to our readers.