



February 2019

# CHINA

## Agreements Establishing Confucius Institutes at U.S. Universities Are Similar, but Institute Operations Vary

Accessible Version

# GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-19-278](#), a report to congressional requesters

## Why GAO Did This Study

Confucius Institutes are partnerships between Chinese entities and schools in other countries, arranged and funded in part by Hanban, which is affiliated with the Chinese Ministry of Education. There are more than 500 Confucius Institutes worldwide and 96 located at colleges and universities in the United States as of December 2018. Some researchers, government officials, and others have raised questions about whether the institutes are sources of undue Chinese influence.

GAO was asked to review Confucius Institutes at U.S. colleges and universities. This report describes, among other things, (1) the contents of written agreements between U.S. schools and Hanban and how the institutes operate in practice; and (2) perspectives of school officials, researchers, and others on benefits, concerns, and suggestions relating to the institutes.

GAO analyzed 90 written agreements obtained from U.S. colleges and universities with Confucius Institutes, and interviewed institute personnel and school officials at 10 schools with Confucius Institutes—which were diverse in terms of geography, size, public or private status, and other characteristics. GAO also interviewed officials at the Departments of Defense, Education, and State; researchers; representatives from higher education associations; and officials at schools that closed or declined to open an institute.

View [GAO-19-278](#). For more information, contact Jason Bair at (202) 512-6881 or [bairj@gao.gov](mailto:bairj@gao.gov).

February 2019

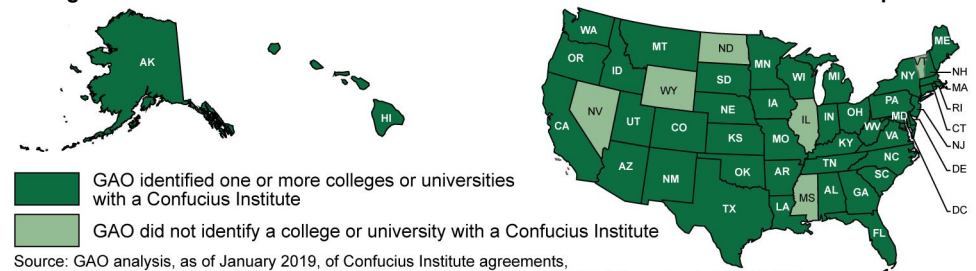
## CHINA

# Agreements Establishing Confucius Institutes at U.S. Universities Are Similar, but Institute Operations Vary

## What GAO Found

According to the Chinese Language Council International, also referred to as Hanban, Confucius Institutes are intended to promote Chinese language and culture in foreign countries. Agreements between Hanban and U.S. colleges and universities (which GAO refers to as U.S. schools) to establish Confucius Institutes are generally similar to one another, though institute operations vary in practice. GAO reviewed 90 agreements and found they describe generally similar activities, funding, and management. For example, the institutes primarily receive funding from Hanban and the U.S. school, and do not receive direct U.S. federal funding. GAO also examined the agreements for language on application of school policies to the institutes, curriculum, and confidentiality, among other things. One-third of the agreements explicitly addressed how U.S. school policies apply to institutes, and a few addressed curriculum. Officials GAO interviewed at case study schools noted that U.S. school policies, including policies on matters such as curriculum, apply to institutes at their schools, though we found schools vary from one another in institute activities and use of resources, including teachers and teaching materials. While 42 of 90 agreements include language indicating that the document was confidential, some agreements were available online or are shared upon request. Some officials at schools that did not post agreements online said this was consistent with handling of other agreements.

### Colleges and Universities across the United States Have Confucius Institutes on Campus



School officials, researchers, and others described benefits and concerns related to Confucius Institutes, and suggested ways to improve the institutes. Officials cited increased resources for Chinese language and cultural programs as among key institute benefits. Some researchers and others have expressed concern that the presence of an institute could constrain campus activities and classroom content. For example, several researchers stated that schools with Confucius Institutes might avoid hosting events on topics that could include criticism of China, such as Taiwan or Tibet, so as to not offend Chinese partners. However, school officials offered examples to illustrate that these various concerns did not apply to their institute. For example, officials at 10 case study schools told GAO that they do not use materials provided by Hanban for credit-bearing courses, and school officials stated that Hanban did not place limitations on events of any type. Nonetheless, school officials, researchers, and others suggested ways schools could improve institute management, such as by renegotiating agreements to clarify U.S. schools' authority and making agreements publicly available.

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February 13, 2019:

The Honorable Rob Portman  
Chairman  
The Honorable Tom Carper  
Ranking Member  
Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations  
Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs  
United States Senate

The Honorable Christopher H. Smith  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights and  
International Organizations  
Committee on Foreign Affairs  
House of Representatives

Confucius Institutes operate at hundreds of college and university campuses and other locations around the world, with approximately 100 institutes located in the United States. The institutes—partnerships between Chinese entities and schools in the United States—offer Chinese language instruction, cultural events, and funding for China-related research. They are overseen and funded in part by the Office of Chinese Language Council International, or Hanban, an affiliate of the Chinese Ministry of Education. Some observers have noted that the institutes provide valuable Chinese language instruction and other resources for programs related to China. Others have raised questions about the agreements signed between U.S. universities and Chinese partners establishing the institutes, including why some seem to be secretive or not publicly available, and the extent to which institutes may exert undue influence over campus and institute operations, such as events, curriculum development, and hiring of teachers. Members of Congress, researchers, academics, and others have highlighted Confucius Institutes' connection with the Chinese government, which has engaged in activities within China to restrict academic freedom or impose censorship at universities and other institutions.

You asked us to review Confucius Institutes on college and university campuses in the United States. This report describes (1) how Confucius Institutes are established, operated, and funded; (2) the contents of written agreements between U.S. schools and Hanban and how the

institutes operate in practice; and (3) perspectives of school officials, researchers, and others on benefits, concerns, and suggestions relating to the establishment and operation of Confucius Institutes.<sup>1</sup> Throughout this report, we refer to U.S. colleges and universities with Confucius Institutes as “U.S. schools.”

To address these objectives, we reviewed agreements signed between U.S. schools and Hanban to establish Confucius Institutes and interviewed school officials, researchers, and others. We received and reviewed 90 agreements to identify how these documents address issues such as funding, activities, and management. We also interviewed officials from a non-generalizable sample of 10 case study schools to learn about the establishment of Confucius Institutes and how the institutes operate. The schools were selected based on a number of characteristics, to result in a sample diverse in geography, size, and public or private status. At these schools, we interviewed a range of officials, including school administrators, Confucius Institute directors, and faculty members, among others. We also interviewed researchers and representatives from various organizations involved in higher education issues, including U.S.-Chinese educational issues. Throughout this report, we refer to these individuals as “researchers and others.” In addition, we interviewed or received written responses to our questions from officials at two schools that closed their Confucius Institute and three schools that actively considered establishing a Confucius Institute but ultimately declined to do so. Other schools with Confucius Institutes also provided perspectives on these topics, which we included in our review. To identify how much direct federal funding, if any, was provided to U.S. schools for the establishment and operations of Confucius Institutes, we interviewed officials from the Departments of Defense, Education, and State; reviewed the agreements described above and additional funding information provided by schools; and interviewed case study school officials. For more information on our objectives, scope, and methodology see appendix I.

We conducted this performance audit from January 2018 to February 2019 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for

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<sup>1</sup>Some government officials have also suggested that Confucius Institutes represent a threat to national security by facilitating Chinese espionage; this topic is beyond the scope of our review.

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our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

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## Background

Confucius Institutes are entities that seek to promote Chinese language and culture in foreign countries. They are overseen by the Office of Chinese Language Council International, commonly referred to as Confucius Institute Headquarters or Hanban, which is headquartered in Beijing, China, and, according to various sources, is affiliated with the Chinese government's Ministry of Education. The first Confucius Institute in the United States was established in 2004, and there are approximately 525 institutes worldwide as of September 2018, according to Hanban's website.<sup>2</sup>

Hanban's goals, according to its website, are: (1) to provide Chinese language and cultural teaching resources and services worldwide, and (2) to contribute to the development of multiculturalism and global understanding by supporting Chinese language programs at educational institutions of various types and levels in other countries. Hanban helps to arrange Confucius Institute partnerships between Chinese schools and schools abroad, including U.S. schools. This includes facilitating connections with Chinese partner universities for those schools that have not already formed such relationships, or by funding events or initiatives as requested by individual Confucius Institutes. Hanban identifies the Confucius Institute U.S. Center as its representative in the United States. The Center is a Confucius Institute located in Washington, D.C. It is not affiliated with a college or a university. It is primarily funded by Hanban and works to raise awareness among U.S. students and educators about Chinese language and cultural learning opportunities in the United States, according to Confucius Institute U.S. Center representatives.

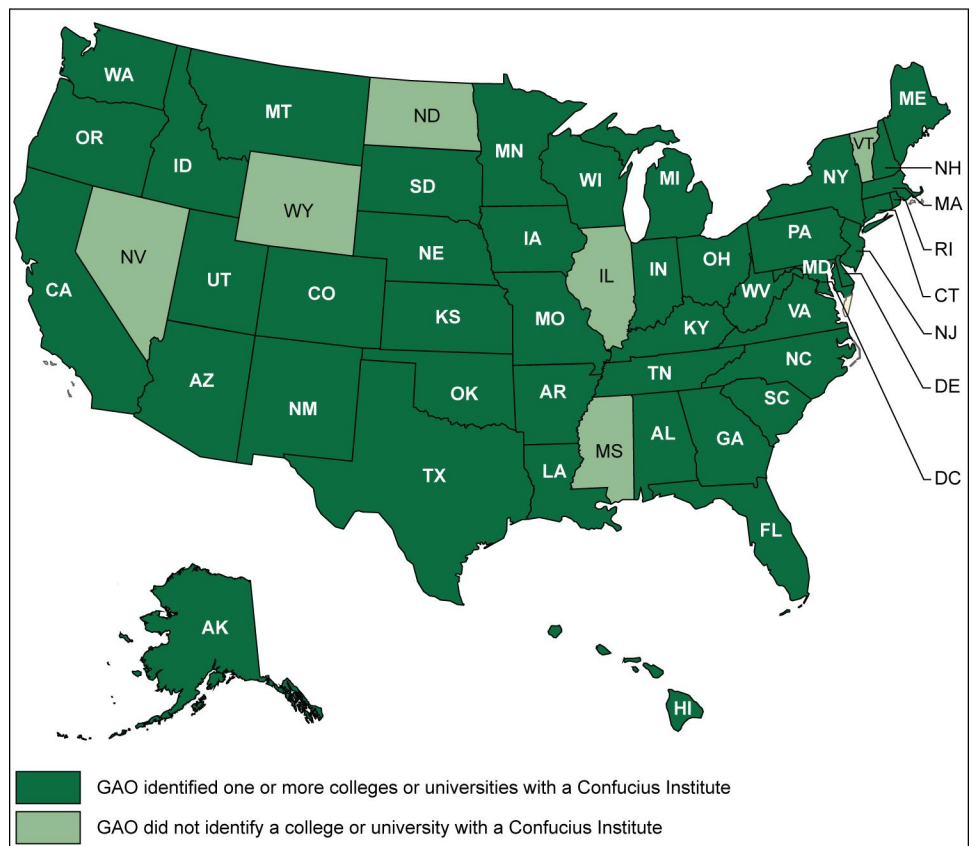
Most Confucius Institutes in the United States are based at colleges and universities. However, there are several Confucius Institutes established directly in partnership with U.S. public school districts (primary and secondary education) and at least two Confucius Institutes established

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<sup>2</sup>This number includes Confucius Institutes established at colleges and universities and other educational institutions (such as school districts), or established independent of any educational institution, according to Hanban's website.

independently of any educational institution.<sup>3</sup> We identified 96 Confucius Institutes in operation at U.S. colleges and universities in 44 states and the District of Columbia as of January 2019.<sup>4</sup> Figure 1 shows U.S. states with one or more Confucius Institutes.

**Figure 1: All but Six U.S. States Have at Least One Confucius Institute on College or University Campuses**



Source: GAO analysis, as of January 2019, of Confucius Institute agreements, school documents, and Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics data. | GAO-19-278

<sup>3</sup>We previously reported on U.S. universities operating degree-granting institutions located in China, which receive support for their institutions from Chinese government entities and universities and are different from Confucius Institutes located on school campuses in the United States. See *GAO, China: U.S. Universities in China Emphasize Academic Freedom but Face Internet Censorship and Other Challenges*, [GAO-16-757](#) (Washington, D.C.: August 29, 2016).

<sup>4</sup>There are no open Confucius Institutes at colleges or universities in Illinois, Mississippi, Nevada, North Dakota, Vermont, or Wyoming.



Of the 96 universities and colleges we identified as having open Confucius Institutes, 82 are public institutions and 14 are private. The schools range in student population size from fewer than 500 to more than 50,000 students. Half of the schools with open Confucius Institutes also have a major or degree-granting program related to China.<sup>5</sup> Sixty-six of the schools are located in a campus setting described by the Department of Education as a city, 22 in a suburb, and 8 in a town.<sup>6</sup> For a list of schools we identified with open Confucius Institutes, see appendix II.

Members of Congress, academics, the Director of the FBI, and others have raised concerns about Confucius Institutes in the United States, primarily regarding their connection with the Chinese government. As we have previously reported, the Department of State has identified human rights and academic freedom as longstanding concerns in China that have worsened in recent years, including restrictions on academic and artistic freedom at Chinese universities and other institutions.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, we reported that U.S. universities in China face various constraints, including internet censorship and self-censorship. Several members of Congress and academics have raised concerns about the institutes' agreements, operations, or hiring practices, or whether their relationship with Chinese entities hampers the ability of individuals at the institute or on campus to freely discuss, study, or hold events on certain topics related to China. Members of Congress have also noted concerns about Confucius Institutes being financed or used for propaganda purposes by the Chinese government; discussed the possibility of establishing a set of standards, including reporting requirements, which could apply to the institutes; or called for the closure of institutes in open letters to schools in their home states. The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2019, which was enacted in August 2018, included provisions restricting the Department of Defense from (1) obligating or expending funds for

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<sup>5</sup>Related degree programs include: Asian History; Asian Studies/Civilization; Chinese Language and Literature; Chinese Studies; East Asian Languages, Literature, and Linguistics; and East Asian Studies.

<sup>6</sup>The Department of Education uses U.S. Census Bureau's Population Division methodology for classifying locales for its data: a "city" is territory inside an urbanized area and inside a principal city; a "suburb" is territory inside an urbanized area and outside a principal city; a "town" is a territory inside an urban cluster; and "rural" is a Census-defined rural territory. None of the Confucius Institutes we identified are located in a rural campus setting.

<sup>7</sup>[GAO-16-757](#).

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Chinese language instruction provided by a Confucius Institute, or (2) obligating or expending funds to support a Chinese language program at an institution of higher education that hosts a Confucius Institute.<sup>8</sup> The law also included a provision allowing the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness to waive the second restriction after making certain certifications to the congressional defense committees.

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## Confucius Institutes were Established as Partnerships between Chinese Entities and U.S. Schools, and Receive No Direct U.S. Federal Funding

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### U.S. Schools and Chinese Entities Partner to Establish and Operate Confucius Institutes

Confucius Institutes in the United States that we reviewed were established as a partnership between a U.S. school and a Chinese college or university, funded and arranged in part by Hanban. Various parties at the U.S. schools, including faculty and school presidents, initiated the process to establish a Confucius Institute. For example, at some schools that were part of our review a professor in an academic department approached campus leadership with the idea to establish one. At other schools, school officials told us that the school president initiated or strongly supported the creation of a Confucius Institute. Officials at one school noted that Hanban had approached several area schools looking to open a Confucius Institute specifically in their city.

Schools sign agreements with Hanban to establish Confucius Institutes. Almost all of the agreements are valid for 5 years, most with an automatic renewal period of another 5 years. Schools also may sign memorandums of understanding or implementation agreements with their Chinese partner university, which may contain additional information about the structure, management, or activities of the institute.

Management of the institutes varies from school to school. Confucius Institute personnel generally consist of a Confucius Institute director or

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<sup>8</sup> John S. McCain National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2019, Pub. L. No. 115-232, §1091, Aug. 13, 2018.

directors, Confucius Institute teachers, and a board of directors. Some schools also have a U.S. assistant director. At the 10 case study schools that were part of our review, the Confucius Institute director was a U.S. school employee—either a school administrator, faculty member, or professional hired to manage the Confucius Institute.

Some Confucius Institutes at U.S. schools are part of an academic department or an administrative office, while others report directly to the school president or other school leadership. Figure 2 provides several examples of how Confucius Institutes are structured, and where they are located within U.S. schools' organizational structure.

**Figure 2: Examples of Confucius Institute Administrative Structures and Locations within the College or University**



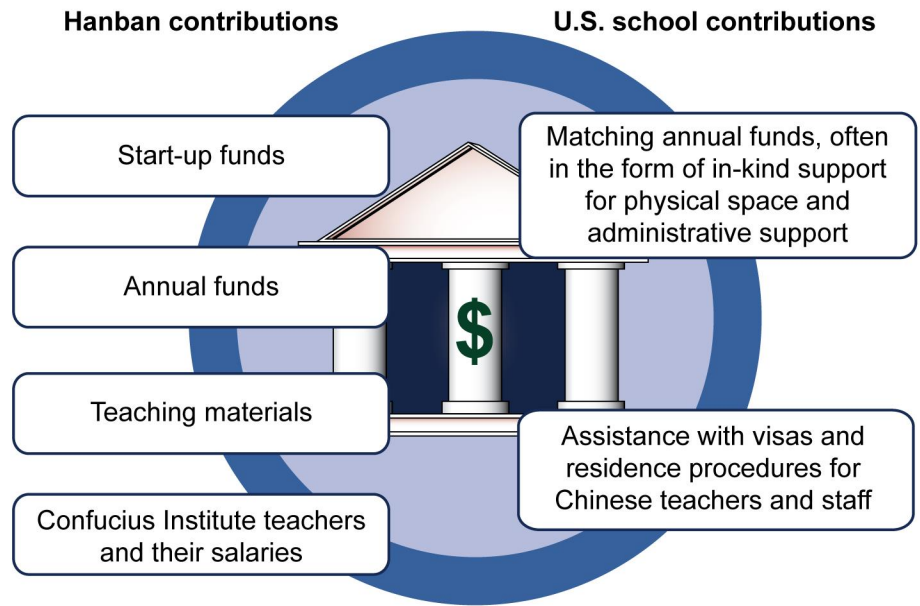
Source: GAO analysis of interviews with school officials and documentation from case study schools. | GAO-19-278

### Confucius Institutes Were Established as Partnerships between Chinese Entities and U.S. Schools, and Receive No Direct Federal Funding

Confucius Institutes at U.S. schools are primarily funded by Hanban and the U.S. school, according to agreements we reviewed and school officials we interviewed. Hanban generally provides start-up funds, annual funds, Confucius Institute teachers and their salaries, and teaching materials. Hanban has also agreed to provide funds ranging from

\$900,000 to \$1.7 million to construct new facilities for at least three schools designated “Model Confucius Institutes.”<sup>9</sup> The U.S. school hosting a Confucius Institute generally provides annual funds matching Hanban’s contribution, as well as physical space and administrative support, according to the agreements we reviewed. Figure 3 provides an overview of the types of support that Hanban and U.S. schools provide to Confucius Institutes.

**Figure 3: Types of Support Provided to Confucius Institutes by Hanban and the U.S. School**



Source: GAO analysis of school Confucius Institute agreements with Hanban and interviews with case study school officials. | GAO-19-278

Case study school officials indicated that U.S. schools generally provide their annual matching funds in the form of in-kind support for the campus space and personnel to staff or manage the Confucius Institute. For example, some institute directors are faculty members who receive a release from some of their other responsibilities (such as teaching fewer courses per semester) to serve as director. This “buy-out,” or portion of their time and salary dedicated to Confucius Institute activities, is considered an in-kind contribution towards matching Hanban’s funding,

<sup>9</sup>According to the agreements, the designation of “Model Confucius Institutes” provides funding to schools to improve educational facilities.

according to school officials. The agreements we reviewed also indicated that U.S. schools may assist with transition-related assistance for the Chinese staff and teachers traveling to and working at the Confucius Institute, such as assistance with visa application and residence procedures. Other sources of funding for Confucius Institutes may include Chinese partner university contributions or outside donations, according to the agreements we reviewed. Figure 4 shows examples of physical spaces on U.S. school campuses dedicated to Confucius Institutes.

**Figure 4: Examples of Confucius Institute Spaces on U.S. Campuses**



Source: GAO. | GAO-19-278

We did not identify any direct federal funding being used at Confucius Institutes. According to officials at the Departments of Defense, Education, and State, no federal funding from these agencies is used to support or operate Confucius Institutes at U.S. schools. In addition, no school officials at any of the 10 case study schools we interviewed reported receiving or using federal funding for their Confucius Institute. Further, none of the 90 agreements we reviewed mentioned any U.S. federal funding for the Confucius Institute.

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## Confucius Institute Agreements Generally Describe Similar Activities, Funding, and Management, Although the Institutes Vary in Practice

The 90 agreements between U.S. schools and Hanban we reviewed outline general activities which, according to school officials we interviewed, Confucius Institutes implement in different ways. While most agreements we reviewed do not specify how U.S. school policies applied to the Confucius Institute, school officials we interviewed indicated U.S. school personnel control curriculum and teaching materials. Confucius Institutes are managed by boards and directors, which include U.S. school officials. Additionally, nearly half of agreements we reviewed contain language about the agreement's confidentiality, though school approaches to sharing the agreements vary.

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### Agreements Outline a General Set of Activities that Confucius Institutes Implement in Different Ways

Nearly all of the agreements (84 of 90) between U.S. schools and Hanban that we reviewed contained a list of the same five activities that Confucius Institutes can implement, similar to the activities found in a sample agreement template that was posted on Hanban's English-language website.<sup>10</sup> Each of the six agreements that we reviewed that did not contain all five activities contained at least two of the five activities. The activities Confucius Institutes can carry out, according to these agreements are: (1) teaching Chinese language;<sup>11</sup> (2) training Chinese language instructors;<sup>12</sup> (3) organizing the Hanyu Shuiping Kaoshi exam, a Chinese language proficiency test; (4) providing information and

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<sup>10</sup>A sample draft agreement or template for an agreement between the Hanban and a foreign institution to establish a Confucius Institute was available on Hanban's English-language website as of early 2018. We downloaded a copy of this agreement from the website in late March 2018. As of November 2018, this document was no longer posted on Hanban's website.

<sup>11</sup>This activity may include teaching Chinese language, providing Chinese language teaching resources, or carrying out research on Chinese language teaching.

<sup>12</sup>This activity may include training Chinese language instructors or developing Chinese language teaching materials.

consultation services about Chinese culture or education; and (5) conducting language and cultural exchange activities. All 90 agreements indicated the Confucius Institute could, in some capacity, conduct language and/or cultural exchange activities. Some agreements specified additional activities for Confucius Institutes, including: providing classes and performances related to Chinese theatre, music, and art; providing information to students, individuals, businesses, and government officials planning trips to China; developing online materials for Chinese-language learning; sponsoring a professorship and fellowships for graduate students; hosting translation workshops; and supporting business exchanges.<sup>13</sup>

According to case study school officials we interviewed, Confucius Institutes conduct additional activities that are not specified in the agreements, which are generally oriented towards Chinese language and culture. Examples of such activities at these schools include the following:

- *Organizing or supporting Chinese cultural events or performances for the campus and the local community.* Such events include Chinese New Year celebrations, dragon boat races, calligraphy lessons, cooking classes, wine tastings, and tea education that take place on school campuses or in community spaces, including public libraries. Several schools' institutes have organized or co-sponsored Chinese cultural performances including martial arts, dance, and opera.
- *Hosting or co-sponsoring speakers.* Several Confucius Institutes host individual speakers or a speaker series, with external speakers nominated by school faculty. Officials at one school noted that the institute was established in part to fund and bring speakers to their campus, which is geographically isolated.
- *Organizing and funding conferences and workshops.* One institute sponsors interdisciplinary workshops and conferences on Chinese history, literature, food, geography, or other China-related topics, including urbanization and environmentalism. The events are typically

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<sup>13</sup>Examples of activities to support business exchanges described in agreements include: conducting seminars and speakers series on topics related to global financial systems, markets, and international trade; providing consulting services for companies or individuals wanting to invest or do business in China; providing links and training programs for small and medium-sized businesses in the United States and China; and developing collaborative partnerships with major businesses and industries in the United States to strengthen their understanding of Chinese culture and facilitate connection with Chinese commerce and education.

proposed by faculty members. Another institute hosts a public, annual faculty forum on China, at which speakers share their China-related research.

- *Supporting China-related research and associated travel for faculty and students conducting research.* One institute has provided small grant funding to faculty members to conduct research on topics of their choice or to write up research for publication. Students have also used Confucius Institute funding to extend their study abroad in China an extra week to conduct research for their thesis.
- *Providing Chinese teaching or cultural resources to public schools locally or statewide on Chinese language, Chinese art, and Tai Chi.* Some institutes have supported the development of online Chinese language classes for use in public schools, or provide teacher training or workshops for Chinese language instructors at the primary and secondary levels.
- *Connecting with the business community or supporting events focused on business.* One institute holds events on topics such as culture, economics, politics, manufacturing, import-export issues, and generally doing business with China. The same institute also organizes business-focused conferences in collaboration with school faculty. Another school's Confucius Institute has offered free Chinese language training and translation services to businesses in the state.

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## One-Third of Agreements Contain Language Explicitly Addressing U.S. School Policies, and School Officials Noted U.S. Schools Control Institute Curriculum and Materials

### School Policies

Thirty of the 90 agreements we reviewed referenced U.S. school policies in relation to Confucius Institute activities or operations or contained other language related to U.S. school policies, procedures, and/or regulations. Most of these agreements contained language about school policies that was not included in the sample template agreement that was posted on Hanban's English-language website. For example, 10 agreements contained language indicating that U.S. school policies applied to the



operation of the Confucius Institute and/or its activities.<sup>14</sup> One agreement noted that the activities of the Confucius Institute would be conducted generally in accordance with the Confucius Institute Constitution and By-laws, as well as the regulations, policies, and practices of the U.S. school, cultural customs in the United States and China, and the laws and regulations of both countries. However, this agreement also noted that the parties agreed that federal, state, and local laws of the United States, as well as the U.S. school's regulations, policies, and practices (including principles such as academic freedom and non-discrimination), would prevail in the event of a conflict. One agreement noted that nothing in the agreement shall be construed to limit the academic freedom of faculty or academic programs at the school. Sixty of the 90 agreements we reviewed did not contain explicit language about whether or how U.S. school policies, regulations, or by-laws apply to the school's Confucius Institute. Appendix III contains additional information on agreement language about U.S. school policies' applicability to Confucius Institutes.

While 64 agreements included language that institute activities would be conducted in accordance with the Confucius Institute Constitution and By-laws, some school officials we interviewed stated there had been no instance in which the Constitution and By-laws had been invoked or conflicted with school policies.<sup>15</sup> Some school officials we interviewed at schools with agreements that included language about the Confucius Institute Constitution and By-laws said the Constitution and By-laws play no role, or do not constrain or define the work of the institute.

### Curriculum and Courses

Agreements we reviewed occasionally specified the course topics that Confucius Institute personnel might teach or support, such as Chinese theatre arts or Chinese language for business, and 14 agreements discussed curriculum. For example, several agreements noted that

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<sup>14</sup>Five agreements contained language indicating that the Confucius Institute shall be operated in accordance with the relevant U.S. school policies and procedures. Another five agreements contained language indicating that U.S. school policies and/or regulations, in addition to the Confucius Institute Constitution and By-laws, were applicable to institute activities.

<sup>15</sup>The Confucius Institute Constitution and By-laws is posted on Hanban's English-language website and includes information about the mission, establishment, and administration of Confucius Institutes, and the duties and role of Hanban, among other topics.

Hanban acknowledges that the U.S. school and its faculty ultimately have the right to determine the content of the curriculum.<sup>16</sup> Another agreement contained language indicating that the U.S. school controls all academic matters associated with the Confucius Institute, including curriculum and texts.<sup>17</sup> Some agreements that mentioned curriculum noted a role for the Confucius Institute board or U.S. school faculty senate related to curriculum. For example, one agreement included language indicating that the board oversees and guides the institute in its development of curriculum design. Another agreement noted that the U.S. school's faculty senate is authorized to make decisions concerning curriculum policy and curricular structure. Appendix III includes additional information on agreement language about curriculum.

While none of the agreements specifically indicated that courses taught at Confucius Institutes would be for school credit, seven of them stated that Confucius Institute courses or programs would be non-credit. Through our analysis of Confucius Institute public websites, other school-provided information, and interviews with school officials, we identified at least 20 Confucius Institutes that offer credit-bearing courses on topics such as Chinese language, culture, and literature. According to school officials we interviewed, some case study schools offer credit courses, developed by the schools, which are taught by Confucius Institute teachers. These officials told us that Confucius Institute teachers conducting credit courses at the school use the school's own curriculum as taught, developed, or approved by U.S. school faculty. At other case study schools, institute teachers, if present, taught only non-credit courses or partial credit courses, or did not teach any courses.<sup>18</sup> Instead of teaching courses, they sometimes provided tutoring support to credit courses or organized logistics for Confucius Institute extracurricular and cultural activities, such as calligraphy or paper-cutting classes. None of the case study schools used Hanban-developed curriculum for credit-bearing classes, according to officials we interviewed.

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<sup>16</sup>These agreements also contained language indicating that the U.S. school and its faculty ultimately have the right to determine the manner of instruction for all programs administered by the U.S. school, and the U.S. school acknowledged that Hanban has the right to determine the programs to which it provides funding.

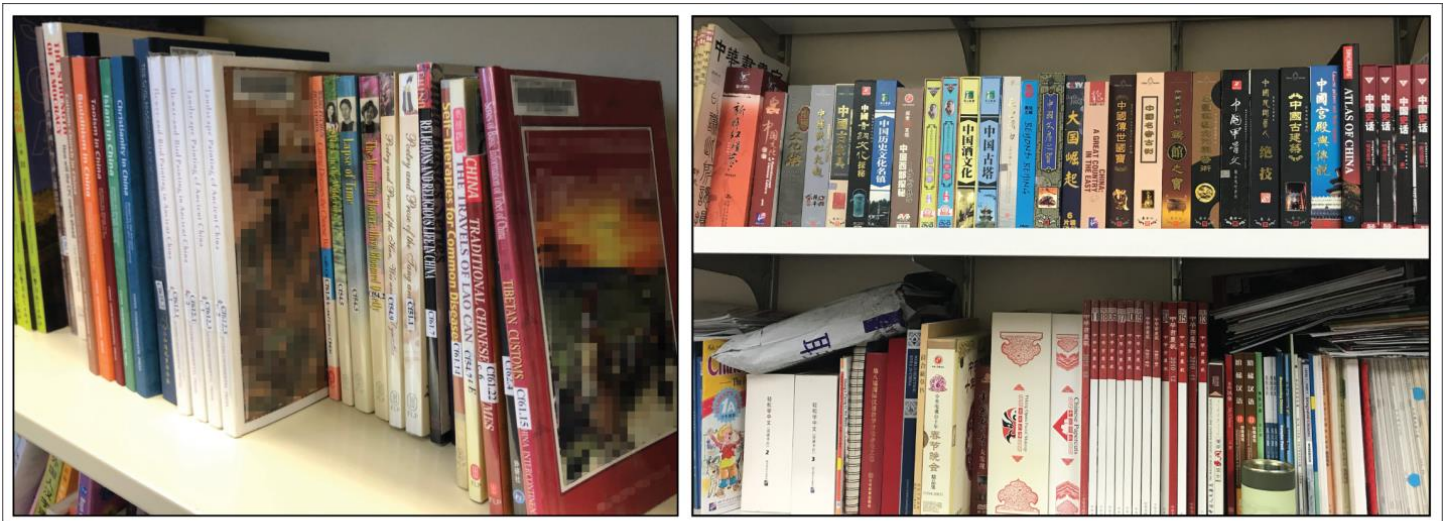
<sup>17</sup>The provision in the agreement also indicated that the U.S. school controls the approval of teachers.

<sup>18</sup>Partial credit courses included those for less credit than a regular university course or a part of one credit hour, such as a conversation course.

Teaching Materials, including Textbooks

Hanban is responsible for providing teaching materials to institutes, according to 85 of the 90 agreements we reviewed. Many of these agreements state that Hanban would provide up to 3,000 books and other supplies. At schools we visited, we observed that the institutes store these Hanban-provided books, DVDs, cultural decorations, and art supplies in small libraries, office closets, or rooms dedicated to the Confucius Institute. School officials described different ways the institutes use these materials—including as reference materials, texts for non-credit courses, or gifts. However, as noted earlier, officials at the case study schools stated that the materials are not used to support credit courses offered by the school or institute and instead such courses use a Chinese language textbook developed in the United States. Some officials stated that the Chinese language textbook provided by Hanban is not appropriate for American students learning Chinese because Chinese publishers have different ideas about how much time students can commit to language study. Other case study school officials noted that the U.S. textbook they use instead of the Hanban book includes traditional Chinese language, which is more complex than the simplified Chinese characters developed by the Chinese government. Figures 5 and 6 show examples of Hanban-provided materials and their storage at U.S. schools.

**Figure 5: Examples of Hanban-Provided Materials at Confucius Institutes, including Books, Textbooks, and DVDs**



Source: GAO. | GAO-19-278

**Figure 6: Examples of Storage of Hanban-Provided Materials at Confucius Institutes, including Books, Cultural Decorations, and Art Supplies**



Source: GAO. | GAO-19-278

## Confucius Institutes Are Managed by Boards and Individual Directors, Which Include U.S. School Officials

### Confucius Institute Boards of Directors

Most agreements provided for a Confucius Institute board of directors at each institute, though agreements varied in specifics about the board's structure or role. Of the 90 agreements we reviewed, 62 indicated that the Confucius Institute's board develops plans for the institute, and 65 indicated the board advises on, approves, or makes decisions on significant issues, such as teaching, research, or operations of the institute. These descriptions of Confucius Institute board activities largely resemble those found in the sample agreement template that was posted on Hanban's English-language website. Fourteen agreements specified the number of board members, with the boards ranging in size from 6 to 12 members (most commonly 6 or 7 members). The remaining 76 agreements did not specify the size of the board. Of the 13 agreements in which the board composition was addressed, 6 boards were to have majority U.S. members, while 7 were to have an equal number of U.S. and Chinese members. The remaining 77 agreements did not specify the board composition. At case study schools we reviewed, boards are staffed with members from both the United States and China. We noted

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that a selection of memorandums of understanding we reviewed between U.S. schools and Chinese partner schools contained additional detail about board membership, such as the names and roles of members.

The role of the Confucius Institute boards and how frequently they met varied at the 10 case study schools that were part of our review, though all included U.S. members, according to school officials. Two case study schools described their board as playing an occasional consulting role. At some schools, the board met once a year, sometimes at the annual Confucius Institute conference in China. One school official indicated that the school's board often went two or three years without convening in the institute's early years. Now, the board meets approximately once every 2 years, and the director solicits input from the U.S. board members on the direction of the institute. Some school officials stated that they incorporated input from other faculty or administrative organizations in managing their Confucius Institute, such as faculty working groups related to China.

### Confucius Institute Directors

Most agreements provided for a Confucius Institute director or directors. The role of the institute director described in the agreements varied, and some did not include such a description. A few agreements noted that the Confucius Institute director would be a faculty member of the U.S. school. Some agreements called for multiple directors, and, in some cases, noted that the U.S. school and its Chinese counterparts would each appoint one director. Thirty-three agreements indicated that the Confucius Institute board would nominate, appoint, or dismiss directors. Appendix III contains additional information on agreement language about Confucius Institute directors.

At all 10 case study schools, the Confucius Institute director was a U.S. school employee—such as a faculty member, staff member, or administrator—according to school officials we interviewed. However, schools varied in terms of other institute leadership positions. A few case study schools also had a deputy or assistant director who was also an employee of the U.S. school. In addition, several case study schools had a Chinese director, sometimes referred to as the deputy director or Chinese assistant director, who reported or was subordinate to the Confucius Institute director from the United States, according to U.S. school officials and Chinese staff at Confucius Institutes. The Chinese assistant director was described by U.S. school officials as a liaison between the Confucius Institute and Hanban, and often came from or was

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an employee at the Chinese partner university. One case study school did not have a Chinese assistant director. According to officials at this school, they did not find the position useful because of its 2-year term and lack of continuity. Another school we visited launched its institute without a Chinese assistant director, but later observed that other schools had them and requested and received a Chinese assistant director through Hanban, according to school officials.

### Confucius Institute Teachers

Of the 90 agreements we reviewed, 86 indicated that Hanban would provide one or more teachers and pay their salaries.<sup>19</sup> Of these 86 agreements, at least 3 contained language indicating that Confucius Institute teachers would be subject to U.S. school policies. One agreement noted that institute teachers would be supervised by the chairs of their academic departments. Appendix III includes additional information on agreement language about teachers.

According to officials at case study schools, these teachers generally report to the institute's Chinese assistant director. If they teach credit-bearing courses in a school department, school officials indicated these teachers also were supervised by that department's leadership as any faculty member would be supervised.

### Confucius Institute Funding and Support

All 90 agreements we reviewed contained some information on funding or support. As described earlier, funding includes start-up funds, annual funds, and in-kind contributions. Agreements included the following information on funding and support:

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<sup>19</sup>Three agreements did not specify what party, if any, provides teachers or pays their salaries. One agreement contained some information about hiring instructors, but did not clearly address who would be responsible for paying their salaries. While some agreements indicate that Hanban will provide teachers and cover their salaries, not all U.S. schools with this language in their agreements ultimately request or have Confucius Institute teachers, according to officials at several case study schools.

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- 61 agreements indicated that Hanban would provide start-up funds, ranging from \$50,000 to \$150,000.<sup>20</sup> In two agreements, the U.S. school or the Chinese partner school also agreed to contribute start-up funds.
  - 83 agreements specified that annual funds would be provided by both Hanban and the U.S. school.
  - All 90 agreements noted that the U.S. school would provide office or classroom space for the Confucius Institute.
  - 87 agreements indicated that the U.S. school would provide or pay for office or administrative support.
  - 89 agreements noted that the U.S. school would provide transition-related assistance, such as assisting personnel from China with visa applications and housing procedures.
  - 81 agreements specified that the U.S. school would establish or maintain a bank account or campus accounting line for the institute.

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### Nearly Half of Agreements Contain Language about Their Confidentiality, but School Approaches to Disclosing Agreements Vary

Of the 90 agreements we reviewed, 42 contained language about the agreement being confidential or the ability of either party to the agreement to share or release the agreement or other information. This language is similar to the language addressing confidentiality in the sample agreement template that was posted on Hanban’s English-language website.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>We reviewed the most current version of agreements available. As a result, in some instances, we reviewed renewal agreements, rather than initial agreements, for schools that have signed renewal agreements subsequent to signing initial agreements. Information about start-up funds may not appear in renewal agreements, but may have been addressed in the initial agreements.

<sup>21</sup>The language in Hanban’s sample agreement that addresses confidentiality appears in a section called “Other Terms,” and states “The parties to this Agreement will treat this Agreement as confidential and will not, without prior written consent, publish, release or disclose, or permit any other party to publish, release, or disclose, any materials or information which come to the knowledge of either party as a result of this Agreement except insofar as such publication, release or disclosure is necessary to enable each party to fulfill their obligations under this Agreement.”

Some agreements are publicly available on school websites, or available upon request, according to school officials. At least 11 agreements are publicly available on schools' websites, and 6 of these agreements contain confidentiality language. According to school officials, state open records laws or the fact that some schools are public institutions means some agreements can be obtained if formally requested.

According to school officials, some schools have posted their agreements online in response to increased focus on Confucius Institutes or requests for the document. At least one school made its agreement easier to find online in response to our request for it. Some school officials explained that their Confucius Institute agreements were not posted online because their schools generally do not post every agreement or any agreements on their websites. These officials stated that their treatment of the agreements was not due to any particular secrecy surrounding them, as some individuals have suggested, but rather was consistent with their handling of other agreements. They noted that historically their schools had not posted any similar agreements online or that posting and maintaining current versions of all such agreements would be challenging. Two case study schools had agreements containing confidentiality language. According to officials at these two schools, one school had signed an addendum to the agreement containing revised confidentiality language in mid-2018 and the other school was preparing to sign a renewal agreement without the confidentiality language in late 2018.

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## School Officials, Researchers, and Others Identified Both Benefits and Concerns, and Suggested Ways to Improve Confucius Institutes

School officials, researchers, and others described benefits and concerns related to Confucius Institutes, and identified suggestions to improve them. Officials we interviewed from case study schools stated that Confucius Institutes' benefits include opportunities for schools to forge international connections and receive funding and other resources for China-related programs. These officials, researchers, and others offered various perspectives on whether the presence of Confucius Institutes on campuses could bring about undue Chinese influence or interference over events and activities at the institute and on campus. School officials



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and others also suggested ways to improve the institutes, including changing the language in agreements between the U.S. school and Hanban and policies for sharing these agreements.

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### School Officials Cited Benefits of Establishing a Confucius Institute, Including Expanding Global Partnerships and Increasing Funding and Resources for China-Related Programs

Officials from over half of the case study schools that were part of our review stated that establishing a Confucius Institute offered benefits that aligned with the school's strategic plans to forge international connections and to expand the global reach of the campus. For example, school officials told us that establishing a Confucius Institute could provide exchange opportunities for faculty members and students and assist with recruiting students from China. Officials at several schools indicated that establishing a Confucius Institute helped them to launch a partnership with a Chinese university. Officials at other schools noted that they already had existing partnerships with their Chinese partner university, and establishing a Confucius Institute deepened those connections.

Case study school officials also stated that Confucius Institutes provide valuable resources and opportunities to increase knowledge of and exposure to China and Chinese culture within the school and in the broader community. School officials noted that Hanban provides financial resources for schools to organize cultural events and activities, fund research projects, and provide study abroad scholarships. For example, officials from several case study schools noted that the institute provides valuable cultural enrichment for the school and community through opportunities to host Chinese dance troupes and other performers. At schools where such funding was otherwise unavailable or limited, officials said that a key reason for establishing the institute was that it would allow them to offer such programs to the campus and the community. According to officials at two case study schools, the Confucius Institute provides the school and community opportunities for exposure to Chinese culture and language they otherwise would not have. Officials at these schools stated that the institute brings much needed diversity to the school and community. Figure 7 shows examples of cultural items presented by Confucius Institutes.

Figure 7: Examples of Confucius Institute Decorations and Items for Cultural or Educational Programming



Source: GAO. | GAO-19-278

Officials at several case study schools noted that Hanban funding and resources provided space for schools to create or develop Chinese language programs and majors. These officials noted that because Hanban pays the salaries of Confucius Institute teachers who teach language and assist with Chinese programs at schools, sparing the schools these costs, these schools could offer Chinese language courses even when enrollment was low. In some instances, Confucius Institute teachers also assist with outreach to the community and local elementary and secondary schools through language instruction and cultural events.

### School Officials, Researchers, and Others Expressed Various Views on Concerns about Chinese Influence on Confucius Institutes

Officials from case study schools, researchers, and others we interviewed offered various perspectives on whether having Confucius Institutes on

campuses could bring about undue Chinese influence. These parties discussed the potential for or absence of Chinese interference in events and activities at the institute and on campus, classroom content and curriculum, and teacher hiring and quality. School officials also noted that they regularly weigh the benefits and costs associated with Confucius Institutes, particularly given the recent increased scrutiny of the institutes.

### Perspectives on Potential Influence over Events and Activities

Several school officials, researchers, and others we interviewed expressed concerns that hosting a Confucius Institute could limit events or activities critical of China—including events at the Confucius Institute and elsewhere on campus. Several researchers stated that a school with a Confucius Institute could choose to avoid hosting events on certain topics elsewhere on campus, such as Taiwan, governance of Tibet, or the Tiananmen Square protests, so as to not offend its Chinese partners or out of consideration for the terms of the agreement. For example, one researcher referenced an incident at one school where the Confucius Institute Chinese director allegedly removed literature about Taiwan from another professor's door, while another cited a reported incident at an academic conference where a Hanban representative tried to remove information on Taiwan from the program provided to conference attendees. Several case study school officials we interviewed expressed concern or uncertainty about whether a Confucius Institute would sponsor a research project or organize an event on a topic that could include criticism of China. Two officials who expressed these concerns were faculty members at one case study school, and stated that they have not applied for Confucius Institute funding for a research project because they believed Hanban would not approve of the topic. According to an official at a school that closed its Confucius Institute, Hanban refused to fund a faculty research proposal in environmental studies as it did not align with Hanban's vision of Confucius Institute as an organizer and funder of Chinese cultural events, and Hanban wanted to limit institute activities to student events. In addition, officials at two case study schools stated that, while they did not face constraints imposed by their Chinese partners, they nonetheless felt the Confucius Institute was an inappropriate venue to host political discussions and other sensitive topics given its focus on Chinese language and culture.

In contrast, officials at some case study schools indicated that such concerns did not exist with regard to their Confucius Institute. Officials from multiple case study schools noted that U.S. school faculty members make all decisions regarding conference themes, guest speakers, and

topics for events at their institute. In addition, multiple school officials stated that Hanban has never rejected a proposal for an event at the Confucius Institute based on the topic. One Confucius Institute director stated that Hanban had rejected funding a conference idea once but only because it duplicated the theme of a similar Confucius Institute-hosted conference nearby. In addition, some faculty members we interviewed also said the presence of a Confucius Institute on campus did not lead to any restrictions on topics they taught in their classes, researched, or presented at conferences or other events.

Officials at some case study schools offered examples of events and activities their Confucius Institute had sponsored that addressed topics that could be considered critical of China. Specifically, they reported hosting a conference discussing intellectual property in relation to China and events on territorial disputes in the South China Sea, Tibet, and religion in China. School officials at over half of the case study schools also stated that having a Confucius Institute on campus did not preclude the school from hosting controversial events on campus that take place outside of the institute, on topics such as Taiwan or Tiananmen Square, or involving presentations by the Dalai Lama or Tibetan monks. These officials stated that they did not face any limitations on holding events on any topic, Hanban did not comment on any such events, and these events did not impact institute or Hanban funding.

#### Perspectives on Potential Influence on Confucius Institute Curriculum and Classroom Content

Officials at several case study schools and others expressed concerns that classroom content at Confucius Institutes could face restrictions due to Chinese influence over development of the curriculum and topics taught through the institute. For example, faculty members at two case study schools, researchers, and others noted that Confucius Institutes teach simplified characters rather than the traditional Chinese taught in the language departments at schools we visited. One researcher stated that those who learn only simplified characters would have limited access to certain information as they would be unable to read texts and literature written in traditional Chinese characters. Further, faculty members at several case study schools and researchers stated various concerns with Confucius Institute teachers teaching credit-bearing courses even if faculty members and the school's foreign language department created or approved the curriculum for those courses. Researchers and others noted that they believed Confucius Institute teachers could deflect answering sensitive questions—such as those relating to controversial topics in

Chinese history—if asked them during class or students could self-censor and choose not to ask such questions. Officials at several schools that considered but ultimately declined to establish a Confucius Institute cited concerns about potentially losing control over the institute’s curriculum as a primary factor in their decision not to establish a Confucius Institute.

Officials at case study schools acknowledged these concerns and discussed how they sought to maintain control over curriculum and classroom content. Several officials at these schools noted the importance of maintaining academic control over the Confucius Institute and ensuring there was freedom to discuss or study any topics at the institute and on campus. Officials at 7 of 10 case study schools explicitly stated that they felt the U.S. school maintained full control over curriculum. No school officials we interviewed at case study schools stated that they felt they did not have full control over their curriculum. Additionally, none of the 10 case study schools offered credit-bearing courses through the institute, or used Hanban-supplied materials for credit-bearing courses offered through the school’s language department. Instead, officials at these schools told us that any Chinese language credit-bearing courses at the school used curriculum and materials developed and selected by the language department.<sup>22</sup> In addition, officials from half of the case study schools stated that because the Confucius Institute is not an academic center, it could not influence curriculum, activities, or events on campus. Officials from another case study school stated that students do not shy away from asking sensitive or critical questions in class or at events. Finally, no faculty member or administrator we interviewed at the 10 case study schools had or was aware of any complaints related to teachers or students facing academic restrictions or feeling unable to freely discuss or study certain topics at the institute.

#### Perspectives on Potential Influence over the Hiring and Qualifications of Confucius Institute Teachers

Multiple researchers and others we spoke with expressed concerns with the Confucius Institute teacher selection process whereby Hanban or the Chinese partner school accepts initial applications from potential Confucius Institute teachers and proposes candidates to the U.S. school.

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<sup>22</sup>Officials at a few case study schools told us they used Hanban-supplied materials for other classes, such as non-credit courses, or those offered to the community or at elementary or secondary schools.

These individuals noted that the Chinese entities could use such a process to effectively screen out candidates based on inappropriate criteria, such as political or religious affiliation. Officials at two case study schools that did not have Confucius Institute teachers stated they did not think the Confucius Institute teacher hiring process, as implemented at other schools, followed their own teacher hiring procedures and protocols. In particular, they noted the process would not allow their school to have full control over selecting the teachers. Several case study school officials and researchers we interviewed also expressed concerns over the qualifications of Confucius Institute teachers, noting they may not meet the college or university's teaching standards. For example, officials at one case study school and others we interviewed noted that a few Confucius Institute teachers have had challenges in English language proficiency, limiting their ability to interact with students.

Officials we interviewed at multiple case study schools that had Confucius Institute teachers, however, expressed no concerns about the process for hiring teachers. While these school officials told us they followed a teacher hiring process similar to that outlined above—with Hanban or the Chinese partner school proposing an initial pool of teaching candidates from which the U.S. school made its selection—they stated that they believed their school generally controlled the hiring process and were thus satisfied with it. Most officials emphasized that while institute teachers often come from the Chinese partner university, and are referred by the partner or Hanban, the U.S. school makes the final hiring selection. Most Confucius Institute directors we interviewed stated that they review resumes and conduct interviews with teachers before making a final decision. Two Confucius Institute directors told us that they also shared applicant resumes with faculty to review and assist with the hiring process. In addition, case study school officials stated that clarifying English language requirements in job announcements helped to identify applicants with the right level of English-language proficiency.

### Concerns Related to Accepting Funding from China

Multiple officials we interviewed from several case study schools and several researchers expressed unease about schools accepting funding from the Chinese government, citing concerns that such arrangements could lead to restrictions on academic freedom or the perception of such restrictions given, as noted earlier, the existence of such constraints at Chinese universities. Officials at two case study schools and a researcher we spoke with noted that some faculty members choose not to apply for funding from the Confucius Institute due to its relationship with the

Chinese government. Officials we interviewed from a school that declined to establish a Confucius Institute stated that their school had concerns over receiving direct funding from the Chinese government and this was one reason they ultimately decided not to establish an institute on campus. Officials at about half of the case study schools indicated that concerns about foreign government funding were not limited to China, but extended to all foreign governments. Faculty members at two case study schools and others stated they did not believe their institution should accept external funding from any source that might limit their activities, including large U.S. corporations, private donors, or any foreign government or outside entity.

Other school officials, however, offered various reasons why they did not share those concerns. Some school officials noted that school administrators and faculty are not naïve to the potential effects of Chinese or any foreign government influence. Officials at several case study schools also noted that the funding provided for Confucius Institutes was a small proportion of a larger budget related to Asian studies and/or Chinese language, and as a result did not have the ability to exert undue influence. Nonetheless, school officials stated that schools that receive funding from outside entities should remain vigilant and aware of potential threats to their independence and autonomy. Officials from multiple case study schools also stated that if any academic freedom issues were to arise as a result of having a Confucius Institute, they would take the proper steps to address it.

According to these school officials, researchers, and others, all countries pursue soft-power initiatives<sup>23</sup> in different forms and therefore Confucius Institutes are not altogether different from similar initiatives undertaken by other countries. Multiple officials at several case study schools and researchers cited France's Alliance Française and Germany's Goethe-Institut as examples of soft power, cultural outreach programs similar to Confucius Institutes. Some school officials and researchers, however, noted that the French and German programs are not established at schools the way Confucius Institutes are.

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<sup>23</sup>A term that originated with political scientist Joseph Nye, soft power in foreign policy includes measures such as cultural exchanges and public diplomacy with the intent of making a country's ideas or society more attractive. A country may apply soft power consistently long-term with the goal of encouraging cooperation.

### Additional School Perspectives on Preventing Undue Chinese Influence over Confucius Institutes

In addition to the case study schools that were part of our review, officials from other schools with Confucius Institutes provided us information on their institutes, with regard to preventing undue Chinese influence over campus or institute events or activities. Several comments provided by school officials emphasized the school's intent to protect academic freedom at the Confucius Institute and the school. For example, one school president stated the school "does not hesitate to discuss and teach about the topics that are considered taboo on many university campuses in China." An official at another school stated "a senior faculty member ... with input from other China Studies faculty makes all decisions regarding conference themes, guest speakers and their lecture topics, cultural events, and graduate student funding." A university administrator at another school stated the school is "strongly and consistently committed to academic freedom ... [which is] reflected in all Confucius Institute-related documents and in governance and oversight procedures." Another administrator noted the agreement with its Chinese partner university "was approved only after significant discussion between academic and financial officials, multiple translations, and legal review."

Several school officials also provided examples of events held at the institute and on campus on topics that could be considered critical of China. For example, a university administrator stated the "Confucius Institute ... supports the University's mission to foster liberal learning and intellectual discourse [and has organized] lectures and seminars on ... the historical evolution of China's relations with Inner Asia (including Tibet and the Islamic world), the US-China relations over North Korea and Taiwan, and China's rule over Hong Kong." An official at another school provided examples of events that the school organized, including "speaker programs that explored minority issues (e.g. treatment of Uyghur populations), maritime territorial and border disputes ... and natural resources constraints."

Source: GAO analysis of university email communications and documents. | GAO-19-278

### School Officials Weigh the Benefits and Risks Associated with Confucius Institutes

Multiple officials we interviewed at case study schools and others acknowledged the recent public scrutiny of Confucius Institutes in the United States, and noted that they regularly weigh the benefits and costs or risks associated with continuing to host their Confucius Institute, particularly in light of that growing scrutiny. Officials emphasized that their school considered potential drawbacks before deciding to establish a Confucius Institute, and thus monitor the institute on an ongoing basis to watch for signs of undue influence. Further, some case study school officials noted that they did not think concerns and criticisms about Confucius Institutes applied to their institute because each institute is unique to the school at which it operates. Several of these school officials told us that they believed such criticisms were not backed by evidence or based on specific incidents, but instead were rooted in a lack of understanding about Confucius Institutes. Officials at one case study school stated they are not planning to take the recent public scrutiny into consideration because they consider it to be another form of outside influence.

Nonetheless, officials at several case study schools acknowledged that the negative attention could influence their decisions on whether to continue hosting the institutes. One researcher who previously worked at a Confucius Institute at another school said that, despite seeing the value in Confucius Institutes, he would not choose to start one at his current school given the negative attention focused on the institutes and the risks this could present. Officials from schools that closed a Confucius Institute stated that its benefits did not outweigh its drawbacks, citing various reasons, including logistical challenges and limitations on the range of activities sponsored through the institute, such as the aforementioned school where the Hanban would not fund research in environmental studies since it did not relate to Chinese culture. Furthermore, schools with Confucius Institutes that also host Department of Defense-sponsored language programs<sup>24</sup> are subject to new restrictions established by

<sup>24</sup>Department of Defense-sponsored Chinese language programs include Chinese Language Flagship, Project Global Officer, and Language Training Centers.



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section 1091 of the John S. McCain National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2019.<sup>25</sup> As a result of these restrictions, according to a

Department of Defense official and several case study school officials we interviewed, several U.S. school administrators are weighing whether to close their Confucius Institute, move it outside the university structure and into the community, or seek a waiver so they may maintain both their Department of Defense-funded programs and their Confucius Institute.

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### School Officials and Others Have Made Suggestions to Improve Agreements and Other Aspects of Confucius Institutes

School officials, researchers, and others made several suggestions to improve the agreements associated with Confucius Institutes, as well as protect campuses against undue Chinese influence. Related to the agreements governing Confucius Institutes, school officials, researchers, and others we interviewed stated that schools should remove the confidentiality section of their agreements and make the agreements publicly available online. In addition, officials at the Confucius Institute U.S. Center and several representatives of higher education institutions told us that they believed the confidentiality language in agreements was unnecessary and schools should consider removing the confidentiality language from their agreements. As noted earlier, officials at one case study school stated that they signed an addendum containing revised confidentiality language during their most recent agreement renewal process, while officials at another case study school stated they were in the process of removing the confidentiality clause. In addition, several researchers and others emphasized that making the agreements publicly available would dispel questions and concerns over their contents. Also as noted earlier, some case study school officials we interviewed stated that their agreement is not publicly available online, but available upon request. As previously noted, most of these school officials stated their school generally does not post agreements online, while a few officials at other schools stated they posted their agreements online in response to increased scrutiny surrounding Confucius Institutes or our request for the agreement.

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<sup>25</sup>John S. McCain National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2019, Pub. L. No. 115-232, §1091, Aug. 13, 2018.

In our discussions with school officials and others, some offered suggestions to improve the content of agreements. One case study school official we interviewed stated that poorly negotiated agreements reflect negatively on all Confucius Institutes. A few case study school officials, researchers, and others we interviewed stated that schools should include stronger language in the agreements to make it clearer that the U.S. school has executive decision-making authority. One case study school official and others we interviewed stated that schools should ensure the Confucius Institute director, an employee of the U.S. school, is the sole authority to make decisions over all institute activities.

Case study school officials, researchers, and others we interviewed suggested other steps that schools could take to ensure they protect against undue Chinese influence:

- Several school officials stated that the schools should clearly delineate between the Confucius Institutes' programs and their own Chinese language programs, such as by locating the institute apart from these departments within the school's organizational structure.
- One school official suggested it would be advantageous to physically move the Confucius Institute off campus to a separate location in the urban center of the metropolitan area.
- A few school officials and others noted that Confucius Institute teachers should not teach credit-bearing courses, even if those courses use curriculum developed by the school's language department.
- One school administrator, who stated that his school's Confucius Institute would never have a Chinese assistant director because the position suggests an excessive degree of Chinese influence, recommended that other schools remove the Chinese assistant director position from their institutes.
- Officials from two case study schools and others we interviewed stated that schools should organize events through the institute specifically intended to address what some might perceive as a topic sensitive to Chinese interests to demonstrate the school and institute were not subject to undue Chinese influence.

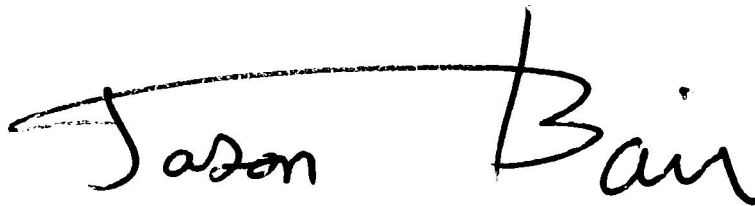
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## Agency Comments

We provided a draft of this report to the Departments of Defense, Education, and State for review and comment. The Department of State provided technical comments, which we incorporated as appropriate. The Departments of Defense and Education told us that they had no comments on the draft report.

As agreed with your offices, unless you publicly announce the contents of this report earlier, we plan no further distribution until 14 days from the report date. At that time, we will send copies to appropriate congressional committees, the Acting Secretary of Defense, the Secretaries of Education and State, and other interested parties. In addition, the report will be available at no charge on the GAO website at <http://www.gao.gov>.

If you or your staffs should have any questions about this report, please contact me at (202) 512-6881 or [bairj@gao.gov](mailto:bairj@gao.gov). Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. GAO staff who made key contributions to this report are listed in appendix IV.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jason Bair". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke underlining the first part of the name.

Jason Bair  
Acting Director, International Affairs and Trade

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## Appendix I: Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

Our objectives were to describe (1) how Confucius Institutes at colleges and universities in the United States (which we refer to as U.S. schools) are established, operated, and funded; (2) the contents of written agreements between U.S. universities and China and how institutes operate in practice; and (3) perspectives of school officials, researchers, and others on the benefits, concerns, and suggestions relating to the establishment and operation of Confucius Institutes.

The scope of our work included only Confucius Institutes at colleges and universities within the United States. There are also several Confucius Institutes in the United States established directly in partnership with public school districts (primary and secondary education) or independent of any educational institution, which we did not include in our scope. Some government officials and others have also suggested that Confucius Institutes represent a threat to national security by facilitating Chinese espionage; this topic is beyond the scope of our review.

To determine the number and locations of Confucius Institutes on college and university campuses in the United States, we reviewed lists on the websites of The Chinese Language Council International, or Hanban, and the Confucius Institute U.S. Center. We then reviewed the websites of those schools included on these lists, as well as media coverage and research identified through daily Nexis and news alerts on Confucius Institutes to check the accuracy of these lists. We contacted schools with Confucius Institutes that we had identified to confirm their operating status, and determined that most of these institutes were in operation. Subsequently, through school websites or media coverage we identified additional Confucius Institutes in operation that were not included on Hanban's or the Confucius Institute U.S. Center's lists. We also learned through press releases and media coverage (including content identified through daily media alerts) that several Confucius Institutes included on these lists had closed. We continued to monitor press reporting on Confucius Institutes through early January 2019. Through this process we identified 96 Confucius Institutes on U.S. campuses. We used data from the Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System to obtain information

about these 96 schools, including whether they were a private or public institution, their student population and geographic location, and whether they had a major or degree program related to China.

To determine the amount of direct federal funding, if any, provided to Confucius Institutes, we interviewed officials from the Departments of Defense, Education, and State, which sponsor federally-funded Chinese language or exchange programs.<sup>1</sup> We also reviewed documentation provided by U.S. schools with Confucius Institutes, including agreements with Hanban that cover funding. We also interviewed officials from 10 case study schools with open Confucius Institutes about federal funding, if any, applied to Confucius Institutes. Our selection of these schools is discussed below.

To determine the contents of Confucius Institute agreements between U.S. schools and Hanban, we requested the agreements from each U.S. school that we identified with an institute. We received agreements from 90 schools, of which we determined that at least 87 were the most current version as of January 2018.<sup>2</sup> Eight schools with open Confucius Institutes did not respond to our request, or did not provide a Hanban agreement. Of the 87 most current agreements, we determined that 79 were current based on the dates included in the agreement or confirmation by school officials, and we assumed 8 were current based on the automatic renewal dates included in the initial agreement. As agreements were updated or more current versions became available after January 2018, we included them in our analysis. We also included agreements that expired after January 2018 and two agreements received from Confucius Institutes that have since closed.

To identify the contents of the 90 Confucius Institute agreements between U.S. schools and Hanban, including commonalities and differences across the agreements, we performed a content analysis, categorizing the content of the agreements into several topics including activities, policies, management, and funding. Specifically, two analysts independently reviewed the 90 agreements and recorded the contents or

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<sup>1</sup>Federally-funded programs for Chinese language based at U.S. colleges and universities include the Department of Education's National Foreign Language Resource Centers and Foreign Language and Area Studies programs and the Department of Defense's Chinese Language Flagship, Project Global Officer, and Language Training Centers.

<sup>2</sup>We analyzed agreements from 88 of the 96 schools with open Confucius Institutes, and 2 agreements from schools that closed after sharing their agreement.

presence or absence of multiple characteristics. Then the analysts compared their assessments and resolved any differences through discussion. We additionally requested from the same schools their memorandums of understanding or implementation agreements signed with their Confucius Institute Chinese partner university. Fewer schools provided these documents than provided their Hanban agreements. We did not include these documents in our formal content analysis of the 90 agreements. However, we reviewed the documents to understand their general contents and have included examples of those contents for illustrative purposes.

To determine the extent to which Confucius Institutes offer or support credit courses, we reviewed publicly available information, such as information on websites, for all identified Confucius Institutes at U.S. schools, as well as additional information obtained from schools, including interviews at several case study schools, as discussed below. Because we were unable to obtain clear information on this issue from all schools, it is possible that additional institutes also offer credit courses.

To understand the perspectives of school officials, including administrators and faculty on the benefits, concerns, and suggestions relating to the establishment and operation of Confucius Institutes, we selected a non-generalizable sample of 10 case study schools, in seven states in different regions of the United States, with currently operating Confucius Institutes, each of which had provided us a copy of their agreement with Hanban. We visited eight of these schools in person and interviewed officials at two schools by phone. We selected the case study schools to include schools that varied in terms of geography, size of the student population, public or private status, and length of time with a Confucius Institute. These schools included eight public schools and two private schools. At each of these schools, we conducted semi-structured interviews with various university administrators and faculty to obtain information on the establishment and operations of the Confucius Institute as well as institute activities, curriculum, and agreements, among other areas.

For each case study school, we requested to meet with the Confucius Institute director, an administrator with oversight or knowledge of the institute, relevant faculty members from Chinese language or Asian Studies departments, a representative of the faculty or academic senate, and Confucius Institute staff, including any Chinese director or assistant director and teachers. School officials then selected the officials for interviews. We interviewed case study school officials either individually

or in groups. For those we met with in groups, we generally met with like groups of officials (such as faculty) together, although some groups included a mix of types of officials. We interviewed administrators and institute directors at each of the case study schools to ask clarifying questions about their agreements and to understand Confucius Institute activities, management, and policies. We also interviewed other school officials, including faculty senate representatives and faculty members from the language and/or Asian studies departments to get their perspectives on the institute and their involvement, if any, in its establishment and operations. In addition, we spoke with Confucius Institute teachers to ask about their role and teaching experiences at the Confucius Institute.

Officials from other schools with Confucius Institutes also provided their perspectives on their own initiative through letters and other documents on these topics, which we reviewed and included in our report for illustrative purposes. We also interviewed officials at two schools with Confucius Institutes to gain background information before and separate from our visits to the schools we selected for case studies.

To gain additional perspectives on Confucius Institutes, we interviewed seven researchers who have studied Confucius Institutes and U.S.-Chinese relations, including academics from various universities and representatives from the National Association of Scholars and Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. We also interviewed six other individuals representing the Association of International Education Administrators, the American Association of University Professors, the American Council on Education, and the Confucius Institute U.S. Center, an organization directed and largely funded by Hanban that supports the teaching of Chinese language and culture in the United States. We selected these individuals based on our review of reports on Confucius Institutes and recommendations from researchers and others. Throughout this report, we refer to these individual researchers, representatives from higher education associations, and the Confucius Institute U.S. Center as “researchers and others.”

Additionally, we spoke with school officials, including administrators and faculty, from two schools that declined to establish a Confucius Institute, and obtained written responses to our questions from a third such school. In addition, we interviewed schools officials from two schools that closed their Confucius Institute.

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We conducted this performance audit from January 2018 to February 2019 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.



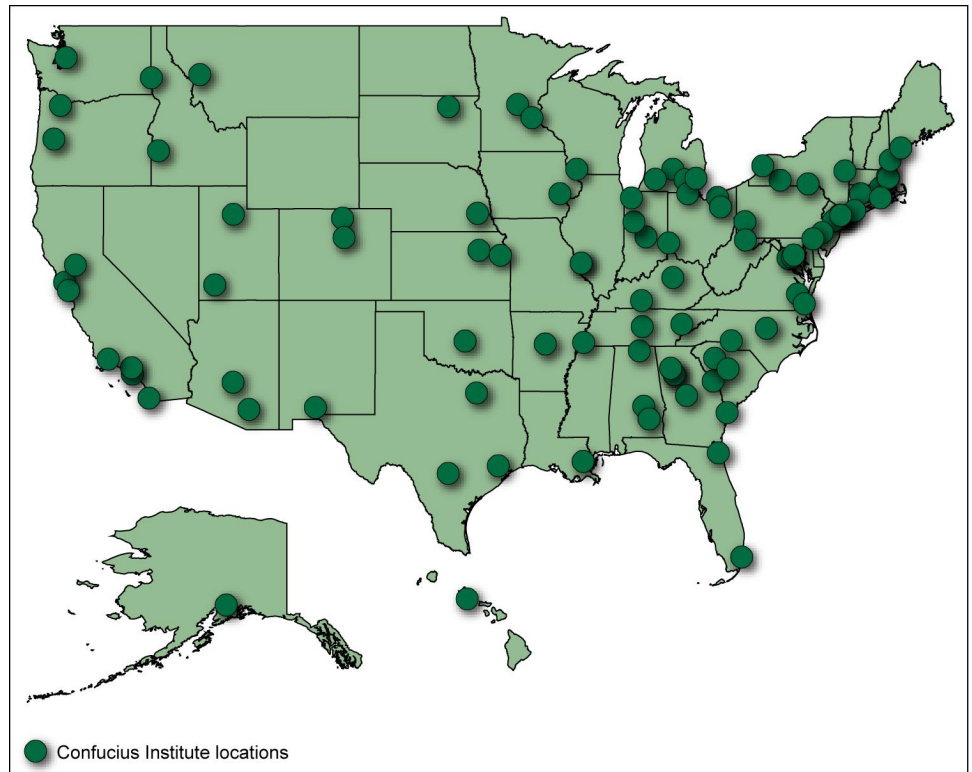
## Appendix II: List of Confucius Institutes at U.S. Colleges and Universities

We identified 96 Confucius Institutes at colleges and universities in the United States in operation, as described in appendix I. The website of the Office of Chinese Language Council International, also known as the Confucius Institute Headquarters or Hanban, lists 100 U.S. colleges and universities with Confucius Institutes as of October 2018. However, we observed that Hanban's list included five schools that have closed their institutes and did not include two schools with operating Confucius Institutes, as of October 2018.

The Confucius Institute U.S. Center, a Confucius Institute located in Washington, D.C. that is not affiliated with a college or a university, lists 91 U.S. colleges and universities with Confucius Institutes as of October 2018, which differs from the Hanban website list. We noted that this list includes 6 schools that have closed their institutes, and does not include 12 schools with established institutes, as of October 2018.

Figure 8 shows the locations of the 96 Confucius Institutes we identified at U.S. colleges and universities, as of January 2019.

Figure 8: Locations of Confucius Institutes Identified at U.S. Colleges and Universities



Source: GAO analysis, as of January 2019, of Confucius Institute agreements, school documents, and Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics data. | GAO-19-278

Table 1 lists the U.S. schools we identified with operating Confucius Institutes and the city and state where they are located. We identified five open institutes that announced plans to close in 2019, which are noted in the table below.

**Appendix II: List of Confucius Institutes at U.S. Colleges and Universities**

**Table 1: Confucius Institutes Identified at U.S. Colleges and Universities**

<b>Confucius Institute (CI) School Name</b>	<b>City, State</b>
Alabama A&M University	Normal, Alabama
Alfred University	Alfred, New York
Arizona State University	Tempe, Arizona
Auburn University at Montgomery	Montgomery, Alabama
Augusta University	Augusta, Georgia
Baruch College, City University of New York	New York, New York
Bryant University	Smithfield, Rhode Island
California State University-Long Beach	Long Beach, California
Central Connecticut State University	New Britain, Connecticut
Cleveland State University	Cleveland, Ohio
College of William and Mary	Williamsburg, Virginia
Colorado State University	Fort Collins, Colorado
Columbia University	New York, New York
Community College of Denver	Denver, Colorado
Emory University	Atlanta, Georgia
George Mason University	Fairfax, Virginia
George Washington University	Washington, District of Columbia
Georgia State University	Atlanta, Georgia
Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis	Indianapolis, Indiana
Kansas State University	Manhattan, Kansas
Kennesaw State University	Kennesaw, Georgia
Miami Dade College	Miami, Florida
Miami University	Oxford, Ohio
Michigan State University	East Lansing, Michigan
Middle Tennessee State University	Murfreesboro, Tennessee
New Jersey City University	Jersey City, New Jersey
New Mexico State University	Las Cruces, New Mexico
North Carolina State University <sup>a</sup>	Raleigh, North Carolina
Northern State University	Aberdeen, South Dakota
Northwest Nazarene University	Nampa, Idaho
Old Dominion University	Norfolk, Virginia
Pace University	New York, New York
Portland State University	Portland, Oregon
Presbyterian College	Clinton, South Carolina
Purdue University	West Lafayette, Indiana

**Appendix II: List of Confucius Institutes at U.S. Colleges and Universities**

<b>Confucius Institute (CI) School Name</b>	<b>City, State</b>
Rutgers University	New Brunswick, New Jersey
San Diego State University	San Diego, California
San Francisco State University	San Francisco, California
Savannah State University	Savannah, Georgia
Southern Utah University	Cedar City, Utah
Saint Cloud State University	Saint Cloud, Minnesota
Stanford University	Stanford, California
State University of New York, Binghamton University	Vestal, New York
State University of New York, Buffalo State University	Buffalo, New York
State University of New York, College of Optometry	New York, New York
State University of New York, Stony Brook University	Stony Brook, New York
State University of New York, University of Albany	Albany, New York
Temple University	Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Texas Southern University	Houston, Texas
Troy University	Troy, Alabama
Tufts University	Medford, Massachusetts
University of Akron	Akron, Ohio
University of Alaska Anchorage	Anchorage, Alaska
University of Arizona	Tucson, Arizona
University of California-Davis	Davis, California
University of California-Los Angeles	Los Angeles, California
University of California-Santa Barbara	Santa Barbara, California
University of Central Arkansas	Conway, Arkansas
University of Delaware	Newark, Delaware
University of Hawaii at Manoa	Honolulu, Hawaii
University of Idaho	Moscow, Idaho
University of Iowa <sup>b</sup>	Iowa City, Iowa
University of Kansas	Lawrence, Kansas
University of Kentucky	Lexington, Kentucky
University of Maryland-College Park	College Park, Maryland
University of Massachusetts-Boston	Boston, Massachusetts
University of Memphis	Memphis, Tennessee
University of Michigan <sup>c</sup>	Ann Arbor, Michigan
University of Minnesota-Twin Cities	Minneapolis, Minnesota
University of Missouri	Saint Louis, Missouri

**Appendix II: List of Confucius Institutes at U.S. Colleges and Universities**

<b>Confucius Institute (CI) School Name</b>	<b>City, State</b>
University of Montana	Missoula, Montana
University of Nebraska-Lincoln	Lincoln, Nebraska
University of New Hampshire	Durham, New Hampshire
University of North Carolina at Charlotte	Charlotte, North Carolina
University of North Florida <sup>d</sup>	Jacksonville, Florida
University of Oklahoma	Norman, Oklahoma
University of Oregon	Eugene, Oregon
University of Pittsburgh	Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
University of Rhode Island <sup>e</sup>	Kingston, Rhode Island
University of South Carolina	Columbia, South Carolina
University of Southern Maine	Portland, Maine
University of Tennessee	Knoxville, Tennessee
University of Texas at Dallas	Richardson, Texas
University of Texas at San Antonio	San Antonio, Texas
University of Toledo	Toledo, Ohio
University of Utah	Salt Lake City, Utah
University of Washington	Seattle, Washington
University of Wisconsin-Platteville	Platteville, Wisconsin
Valparaiso University	Valparaiso, Indiana
Wayne State University	Detroit, Michigan
Webster University	Saint Louis, Missouri
Wesleyan College	Macon, Georgia
West Virginia University	Morgantown, West Virginia
Western Kentucky University	Bowling Green, Kentucky
Western Michigan University	Kalamazoo, Michigan
Xavier University of Louisiana	New Orleans, Louisiana

Source: GAO analysis, as of January 2019, of Confucius Institute agreements, school documents, and Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics data. | GAO-19-278

<sup>a</sup>Confucius Institute scheduled to close in June 2019.

<sup>b</sup>Confucius Institute scheduled to close in July 2019.

<sup>c</sup>Confucius Institute scheduled to close in June 2019.

<sup>d</sup>Confucius Institute scheduled to close in February 2019.

<sup>e</sup>Confucius Institute scheduled to close by May 2019.

## Appendix III: Sample Language in Some Confucius Institute Agreements Relating to U.S. School Policies and the Institutes

We reviewed 90 agreements between U.S. colleges and universities and the Office of Chinese Language Council International, also known as the Confucius Institute Headquarters or Hanban. Of the 90 agreements we reviewed, 60 did not contain language about whether or how U.S. school policies, regulations, or by-laws apply to the school's Confucius Institute. However, 30 agreements referenced U.S. school policies in relation to Confucius Institute activities or operations. This appendix provides examples of language related to U.S. school policies that were contained in at least one agreement but were not present in the sample template agreement previously found on the Hanban's English-language website, except where noted.<sup>1</sup>

Examples of language we identified in at least one U.S. school agreement with Hanban that mentions U.S. school policies applying to its Confucius Institute included:

- "Chinese citizens involved in activities of the [Confucius Institute] shall be subject to the laws and policies of [the U.S. school] and the United States of America. American citizens involved in activities of the [Confucius] Institute in China shall be subject to laws and policies of China."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>A sample draft agreement or template for an agreement between the Hanban and a foreign institution to establish a Confucius Institute was available on Hanban's English-language website as of early 2018. We downloaded a copy of this agreement from the website in late March 2018. As of November 2018, this document was no longer posted on Hanban's website.

<sup>2</sup>This language also appears in the sample template agreement previously found on the Hanban's English-language website.

- “[The Confucius Institute] shall have the status of a non-degree granting entity and be operated in accordance with policies and procedures applicable to institutes and centers at [the U.S. school] generally.”
- “The Confucius Institute... shall be operated in accordance with the relevant policies and procedures of the [U.S. school] and with the standards formulated by the Confucius Institute Head Office. Overall authority for management and operation of the Confucius Institute at the [U.S. school] shall be the responsibility of the Chancellor of the [U.S. school].”
- “The [Confucius] Institute is authorized to carry out the following activities so long as such activities are in accordance with the Constitution and By-laws of Confucius Institutes, all applicable laws, and [the U.S. school’s] policies, priorities, and needs.”
- “Nothing in this agreement shall be construed to limit the academic freedom of faculty or academic programs at the [U.S. school].”
- “The activities of the Confucius Institute will be conducted generally in accordance with the Confucius Institute Constitution and By-laws, the regulations, policies, and practices of [the U.S. school], cultural customs in the United States and China, and the laws and regulations of both countries (the “Standards”). However, recognizing that the Confucius Institute at [the U.S. school] will be based at [the U.S. school’s] campus, the parties agree that federal, state, and local laws of the United States, as well as [the U.S. school’s] regulations, policies, and practices (including principles of academic freedom and non-discrimination) will prevail in the event of any inconsistency or conflict among these standards.”
- “Students enrolled in the programs under this agreement will be governed [by the U.S. school’s] policy and procedures and any laws and regulations that [the U.S. school] is subject to under the [state in which the school is located] and the United States of America.”
- “[U.S. school] retains governance and management of academic, research, and other activities at [the U.S. school], including the Confucius Institute at [the school].”

Examples of language we identified in at least one U.S. school agreement with Hanban that mentions U.S. school policies related to curriculum included:

- “The headquarters acknowledges that the [U.S. school] and its faculty ultimately have the right to determine the content of the curriculum and the manner of instruction for all programs administered by the [U.S. school]. The [U.S. school] acknowledges that the headquarters ultimately has the right to determine the programs to which it provides funding.”<sup>3</sup>
- “[T]he headquarters recognizes that [the U.S. school] retains academic and research decision-making authority for all activities on [the U.S. school’s] campus, including those contemplated by this agreement.”
- “[The U.S. school] controls all academic matters associated with the [Confucius] Institute, including the approval of teachers, curriculum, and texts.”
- “All [Confucius] Institute activities involving [the U.S. school’s] courses, curricula, and faculty and staff will be subject to the relevant [U.S. school’s] administrative and academic policies, procedures and approvals.”
- “Nothing in this agreement shall override [the U.S. school system’s] [t]rustees’ authority to set policy with respect to the programs and instructional activities of the [schools] in the system. The [U.S. school’s] faculty senate is authorized to make decisions concerning curriculum policy and curricular structure, as well as requirements for degrees.”

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<sup>3</sup>For purposes of these agreements, “the headquarters” refers to the Confucius Institute Headquarters of China. This language also appears in the sample template agreement previously found on the Hanban’s English-language website.



Examples of language we identified in at least one U.S. school agreement with Hanban that mentions U.S. school policies related to Confucius Institute personnel, such as directors or teachers, included:

- “Confucius Institute personnel hired by [the U.S. school] will be contingent upon funding and go through the normal [U.S. school’s] hiring process. Teachers from China participating in the Confucius Institute will be jointly determined by headquarters and [the U.S. school].”
- “In addition to establishing the Confucius Institute at [U.S. school], [the U.S. school] also will establish a... Confucius Institute Directorship... The parties recognize and agree that the holder of the directorship shall be a faculty member of [the U.S. school], and accordingly, will be subject to [the U.S. school’s] routine policies, practices, and rules regarding faculty members generally at the [U.S. school].”
- “[The U.S. school] affords all of the [Confucius] Institute’s teachers the same academic rights and responsibilities as defined in [the U.S. school’s] policies.”
- “During their stay at [the U.S. school], visiting teaching faculty will be supervised by the chairs of their academic departments and subject to [the U.S. school’s] academic regulations, policies, and procedures.”
- “[Hanban is obligated to] [p]rovide funding for Chinese language instructors and pay for their international travel expenses, salaries, housing, and fringe benefits. Subject to [the U.S. school’s] approval, these instructors shall be retained by [the U.S. school] and shall be subject to [the U.S. school’s] applicable policies, rules and regulations.”
- “[The U.S. school is obligated to] provide necessary working conditions for the Chinese instructors, consistent with [the U.S. school’s] policies and procedures.”

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# Appendix IV: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgment

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## GAO Contact

Jason Bair, (202) 512-6881 or [bairj@gao.gov](mailto:bairj@gao.gov).

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## Staff Acknowledgments

In addition to the contact above, Joseph Carney (Assistant Director), Caitlin Mitchell (Analyst in Charge), Joyce Kang, Neil Doherty, Melissa Emrey-Arras, Meeta Engle, Elizabeth Repko, Aldo Salerno, Michael Silver, and Nicole Willems made key contributions to this report.

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