



## On Partnerships with Foreign Governments: The Case of Confucius Institutes

*This report was prepared by the Association's Committee A on Academic Freedom and Tenure in June 2014.*

Globalization has brought new challenges for the protection of academic freedom and other faculty rights. In the operations of North American universities in other countries, administrators often refer to local customs, practices, and laws to justify practices that the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) and the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) would not tolerate on North American campuses. In 2009, our two organizations adopted a joint statement—*On Conditions of Employment at Overseas Campuses*—setting forth appropriate employment standards for overseas campuses of North American universities and stating our commitment to see that those standards are met.

Globalization has also meant that university administrators have welcomed involvement of foreign governments, corporations, foundations, and donors on campuses in North America. These relationships have often been beneficial. But occasionally university administrations have entered into partnerships that sacrificed the integrity of the university and its academic staff. Exemplifying the latter are Confucius Institutes, now established at some ninety colleges and universities in the United States and Canada.<sup>1</sup> Confucius Institutes function as an arm of the Chinese state and are allowed to ignore academic freedom. Their academic activities are under the supervision of Hanban, a Chinese state agency which is chaired by a member of the Politburo and the vice-premier of the People's Republic of China. Most agreements establishing Confucius Institutes feature nondisclosure clauses and unacceptable concessions to the political aims and practices of the government of China. Specifically, North American universities permit Confucius Institutes to advance a state agenda in the recruitment and control of academic staff, in the choice of curriculum, and in the restriction of debate.

Confucius Institutes appear designed to emulate the cultural ambassadorship and programming associated with, for example, the British Council, the Goethe Institut, and L'Alliance Française. These latter three entities are clearly connected to imperial pasts, ongoing geopolitical agendas, and the objectives of "soft power," but none of them is located on a university or college campus. Instead, their connections to national political agendas and interests require that they be established in sites where they can fulfill their mandates openly without threatening the independence and integrity of academic institutions in host countries.

Allowing any third-party control of academic matters is inconsistent with principles of academic freedom, shared governance, and the institutional autonomy of colleges and universities. The AAUP joins CAUT in recommending that universities cease their involvement in Confucius Institutes unless the agreement between the university and Hanban is renegotiated so that (1) the university has unilateral control, consistent with principles articulated in the AAUP's *Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities*, over all academic matters, including recruitment of teachers, determination of

---

<sup>1</sup> For a recent and very informative article on Confucius Institutes, see Marshall Sahlins, "China U." *The Nation* (November 18, 2013). <http://www.thenation.com/article/176888/china-u>.

curriculum, and choice of texts; (2) the university affords Confucius Institute teachers the same academic freedom rights, as defined in the 1940 *Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure*, that it affords all other faculty in the university; and (3) the university-Hanban agreement is made available to all members of the university community. More generally, these conditions should apply to any partnerships or collaborations with foreign governments or foreign government-related agencies.