

Academic Quality Committee
Western Kentucky University

Report to the University Senate
Submitted March 30th, 2015
From Laura DeLancey, Chair

The Academic Quality Committee met on March 17, 2015 to discuss the planned construction of a new Confucius Institute building and the relationship between CI activities and WKU's academic mission, as well as Doug McElroy's multi-term registration proposal.

1. The AQ committee solicited feedback about the past and future role of the CI on the WKU campus from numerous Asian Studies faculty, CI staff, and President Ransdell. We received no reply from CI staff, but our faculty consistently advocated for greater oversight of the CI's activities, and for input into the use of the planned building. President Ransdell has said that he will share the contract he signed with Hanban with the chair of the Academic Quality committee. He also stated that the CI should not be engaged with our academic course content. However, due to its physical presence on our campus and engagement with our faculty and students -- through exhibits, guest speakers, sponsored travel, the use of CI staff to teach WKU classes, and the creation of a teacher certification program -- it is. Its presence on WKU's campus has an impact on our academic mission, the learning experience of our students, and the professional development of our faculty.

We therefore make the following recommendations:

1. Create an advisory Board and/or Academic Steering Committee, to include WKU faculty and other stakeholders, to review CI activities, communications from Hanban, and allocation of funds for programs or speakers. (see information item: example from the University of Oregon).
2. Alter the existing reporting structure, so that the CI director and advisory board report to the Provost/Vice President of Academic Affairs.
3. Expand faculty and student input into the plans for the new building, and when not in use for CI activities, make the space available to other groups on campus.

The AQ committee also discussed the financial repercussions of the proposed CI buildings, both in terms of ongoing costs and precedent for reallocating Foundation funds. We recommend that the Budget committee look into these concerns more fully.

2. Multi-term registration: The Academic Quality committee does not endorse implementing multi-term registration, but consents to further study with the input of department heads. Based on feedback from committee members and their departments, we have drawn up a list of pros and cons regarding the proposal:

Pros:

- Easier to preregister developmental students into required developmental classes. Locking them into these classes will make it easier to track their progress.
- It will “help students stay on track.”
- Will free up advising time for something besides course selection.
- Will facilitate student planning, especially seniors trying to stay on track for graduation.

Cons:

- More initial work for departments in terms of planning.
- More work for the Registrar’s Office and the AARC.
- Burden on small departments who need flexibility in order to ensure qualified faculty are available to teach all courses (who may rely on adjunct faculty, or who may have only one faculty member qualified to teach a particular course).
- Many departments, particularly small ones, make course decisions based on enrollment from semester to semester. Planning further in advance would make it more difficult to offer courses that students are most likely to choose, leading to low enrollments
- Inability to be flexible in terms of course content – in many fields pressing issues and topic change quickly.
- No proof of causal relationship between multi-term scheduling and retention (though Cleveland found correlation).