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## USF Wins Chinese Cultural Center

By ADAM EMERSON The Tampa Tribune

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TAMPA - The Chinese government has found a home in Tampa.

Starting in February, the University of South Florida will aid Beijing's efforts to spread Chinese language and culture to millions worldwide.

USF won over Chinese officials, including the country's consulate-general in Houston, in a competing bid to launch one of the newest Confucius Institutes, cultural centers that China has spread to universities globally.

The Chinese government will award USF \$100,000 annually for up to five years to teach introductory Chinese, contemporary political science and doing business in China, a country with the world's fastest growing economy. USF will match that with about \$200,000 for the first year.

USF's campus is the only Florida location for the cultural center, branches of which have proliferated in 64 countries since 2004, including 40 in the United States.

One of the first planning to enroll in the introductory language course at USF is the university's dean of international affairs.

"China is a dominant player in the world," said the dean, Maria Crummett. "This opens a door to China on multiple fronts."

Language has become an increasingly popular front. USF leaders say interest is widespread among students and faculty at its school, which has offered Chinese courses only sporadically.

Instruction in Mandarin Chinese, the most widely spoken dialect, has spread to public school districts nationwide, including schools in Hillsborough and Pinellas counties.

Eventually, USF wants to be the source in Florida that certifies teachers of Mandarin Chinese in the state, Crummett said.

One local school administrator would welcome that. In Pinellas, there are about eight Chinese nationals interested in teaching Mandarin in the county's schools, said Janet Kucerik, the district's supervisor of world languages.

They don't have the education background needed for the job, however, Kucerik said.

"We don't have a quick certification process for them like we do for the other subject areas," Kucerik said. "The state has not committed to developing one because the process is very expensive."

The College Board recently began offering an Advanced Placement course and exam in Chinese language and culture, which followed a 2003 survey that found that 2,400 American high schools wanted such a program.

In 2005, the New York-based Asia Society set a goal that 5 percent of American high school students would learn

Chinese by 2015.

Officials at USF anticipate 30 to 50 students will enroll each in the introductory Chinese language course and in the undergraduate political science course, both of which start in February.

USF is running the Confucius Institute with its longtime partner, Nankai University in Tianjin, with which it has exchanged students and faculty for nearly 25 years.

Two Nankai scholars will arrive at USF in February. A third will arrive in time for the fall semester, when the institute will begin a course on doing business in China.

Nankai helped launch the first Confucius Institute in the United States at the University of Maryland in 2004. The cultural centers quickly spread in New York, Chicago, Michigan and California, among other states.

USF Provost Ralph Wilcox said recently he didn't know which universities competed for the institute, but heard there was interest from several in Florida's public university system.

At USF, the institute will be directed by Dajin Peng, an associate professor of international studies at USF who earned his doctorate at Princeton University.

In time, the collaboration with Nankai University will grow, Wilcox said. In its proposal, USF foretold of scholarly and scientific partnerships with professors from China.

"The more I looked into our relationship, the more it seemed we shared some rather intriguing challenges," Wilcox said.

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