

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

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May 6, 2024

The Honorable Miguel A. Cardona
Secretary
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Ave., SW
Washington, D.C. 20202

Dear Secretary Cardona:

As part of a broad investigation into the work federal agencies are doing to protect Americans from Chinese Communist Party (CCP or the Party) political warfare, the Committee on Oversight and Accountability (Committee) is investigating CCP influence in the American K-12 and higher education systems and valuable taxpayer funded research. CCP operations have attempted to infiltrate every level of our nation's education system and academic research, both of which are essential for a prosperous future. The Department of Education (the Department) has important responsibilities in safeguarding against CCP influence that threatens the free exchange of ideas central to American society, economy, and culture.

Broader Committee Investigation

The Committee is conducting oversight of the federal government's work to protect the American people from CCP political warfare¹ and nefarious influence operations. For decades, the CCP has sought to infiltrate and influence every aspect of American society.² The CCP's goal is plain: defeat the "main enemy," which counterintelligence officials have identified as America.³ The fronts are multiple; according to the CCP itself: "[t]he battlefield will be

¹ "Political warfare seeks to influence emotions, motives, objective reasoning, and behavior of foreign governments, organizations, groups, and individuals in a manner favorable to one's own political-military objectives." Mark Stokes, *The People's Liberation Army General Political Department: Political Warfare with Chinese Characteristics*, Project 2049 Inst. (Oct. 14, 2013).

² See generally Constantine C. Menges, *China The Gathering Threat* (2005); H.R. Rep. No. 105-851 (1999) ("Cox Report"); Robert Spalding, *War Without Rules* (2022); Col. Grant Newsham, *When China Attacks: A Warning to America* (2023); Kerry K. Gershaneck, *Political Warfare: Strategies for Combating China's Plan to "Win without Fighting"* (2020); see also Larry Diamond & Orville Schell, *China's Influence & America's Interests: Promoting Constructive Vigilance*, Hoover Inst. (2019).

³ Menges, *supra* note 2; Gershaneck, *supra* note 2 ("The PRC is engaged in war against the United States. It is not mere competition or malign influence, but war by PRC definition."); Newsham, *supra* note 2, at 60 (The CCP "seeks global domination" and "will fight its main enemy, the United States, to achieve it.").

everywhere.”⁴ And the tools are myriad, with the “united front”⁵ leading as one of the People’s Republic of China’s (PRC)⁶ “magic weapons,”⁷ as described by General Secretary Xi Jinping,⁸ to advance the Party’s aim of global domination.⁹ United front work (UFW), which may be executed by the United Front Work Department (UFWD) or elsewhere in the Party, is a “unique blend of engagement, influence activities, and intelligence operations” that the CCP uses to “influence other countries’ policy toward the PRC and to gain access to advanced foreign technology.”¹⁰ UFW “generally involves covert activity and is a form of interference that aids the CCP’s rise.”¹¹ United front “networks” are used “to carry out relationship-focused influence campaigns through a multitude of proxies.”¹²

Despite years of false promises to the West, the CCP openly seeks to achieve its destructive ambition. In 1999, two People’s Liberation Army Air Force colonels authored *Unrestricted Warfare*, which has been described as a strategic military vision for the PRC to defeat America through political warfare.¹³ Retired Brig. Gen. Robert Spalding, who has served in senior positions in strategy and diplomacy with the U.S. Departments of Defense and State for decades, characterizes the book as “the main blueprint for China’s efforts to unseat America as the world’s economy, political, and ideological leader,” which “shows exactly how a totalitarian nation set out to dominate the West through a comprehensive, long-term strategy that includes everything from corporate sabotage to cyberwarfare to dishonest diplomacy; from violations of international trade law and intellectual property law to calculated abuses of the global financial system.”¹⁴ Kerry Gershaneck, former counterintelligence officer who wrote a seminal book on combatting PRC Political Warfare, has explained that *Unrestricted Warfare* details CCP use of “any methods” where “the boundaries between war and non-war and between military and non-

⁴ Qiao Liang & Wang Xiangsu, *Unrestricted Warfare: China’s Master Plan to Destroy America* (PLA Lit. & Arts Pub. House 1999) (China) (military colonels describing twenty-four varieties of warfare).

⁵ “While the CCP’s United Front Work Department has functional responsibility for these [warfare] operations and activities, PRC united front work is a task of all CCP agencies and members.” Gershaneck, *supra* note 2, at 22.

⁶ It is essential to understand that Xi Jinping has removed any “veneer of separation between the [CCP] and the Chinese state.” Gershaneck, *supra* note 2, at 43 (quoting Ann-Marie Brady, *Exploit Every Rift: United Front Work Goes Global*, in David Gitter et al., *Party Watch Annual Report*, Ctr. for Adv. China Res. (2018)).

⁷ Ann-Marie Brady, *Magic Weapons: China’s political influence activities under Xi Jinping*, Wilson Ctr. (Sept. 18, 2017); *see also* Sel. Comm. on the Chinese Communist Party, *Memorandum: United Front 101*, at 7 (“United Front 101 Memo”).

⁸ Alex Joske, *The party speaks for you: Foreign interference and the Chinese Communist Party’s united front system*, Austl. Strategic Pol’y Inst. (Jun. 09, 2020) (quoting Xi Jinping at 2015 Central United Front Work Meeting).

⁹ *See, e.g.*, Newsham, *supra* note 2, at 43 (“The People’s Republic of China may settle for dominance rather than occupation, but it does indeed aim to rule us all.”).

¹⁰ United Front 101 Memo, *supra* note 7, at 1.

¹¹ Joske, *The party speaks for you*, *supra* note 8, at 19.

¹² Alex Joske, *Spies and Lies: How China’s Greatest Covert Operations Fooled the World*, at 63 (2022).

¹³ Gershaneck, *supra* note 2.

¹⁴ Spalding, *War Without Rules*, *supra* note 2, at xii; *see also* Robert Spalding, *Stealth War*, at 12-13 (2019) (*Unrestricted Warfare* “should be required reading for all branches of the US government and for business leaders, because it outlines, in no uncertain terms, the strategy behind China’s policies,” including stating that the “new principles of war” are “no longer ‘using armed force to compel the enemy to submit to one’s will,’ but rather are ‘using all means, including armed force or non-armed force, military and non-military, and lethal and non-lethal means to compel the enemy to accept one’s interests.’”).

military affairs [have] systemically broken down.”¹⁵ To successfully combat these highly organized and pervasive warfares spawned by China, federal agencies must first recognize and understand them.

The CCP “know[s] the strength of the American people, of the American idea, and that’s why China has launched so many warfares to try to weaken us, divide us, and get us to hate ourselves and each other.”¹⁶ Retired Col. Grant Newsham, former U.S. Marine Liaison Officer to the Japan Ground Self-Defense Force and U.S. Foreign Service Officer, has advised that “the way out of this is to rediscover why we are an exceptional country, get to know each other better, and fight side by side.”¹⁷

As all Americans are targets of the PRC’s warfare,¹⁸ federal agencies have responsibilities to (1) conduct outreach to citizens about the dangers they may encounter, and (2) provide appropriate incentives for Americans to proactively protect themselves—their communities, schools, houses of worship, businesses, finances, food, and more—from the threat. Federal agencies must prepare Americans to “take action.”¹⁹ To stop the CCP’s “destructive actions,” retired Brig. Gen. Spalding advises that it will “take macrolevel strategic changes by our government, but also microlevel actions by individuals, businesses and other civic institutions.”²⁰ The Committee is surveying each agency’s role to secure Americans and their communities.

Congress has recognized the threat posed by the PRC for some time. Notably, in 1999, the U.S. House Select Committee on U.S. National Security and Military/Commercial Concerns with the People’s Republic of China concluded that in the preceding decade, the PRC used a “variety of techniques including espionage, controlled commercial entities, and a network of individuals that engage in contact with scientists, business people and academics” as part of its warfare operations.²¹

With varying degrees of effort and success, federal agencies have sought to address the CCP’s attack on what Col. Newsham has aptly described as “[t]he core of America.”²² However,

¹⁵ Gershaneck, *supra* note 2, at 16 (quoting Qiao Liang & Wang Xiangsu, *supra* note 4, at 6-7).

¹⁶ Newsham, *supra* note 2, at 341.

¹⁷ *Id.*

¹⁸ “The Three Warfares, the traditional foundation of PRC political warfare, include public opinion/media warfare, psychological warfare, and legal warfare.” Gershaneck, *supra* note 2. It “requires efforts to unify military and civilian thinking, divide the enemy into factions, weaken the enemy’s combat power, and organize legal offensives.” Elsa Kania, *China Brief: The PLA’s Latest Strategic Thinking on the Three Warfares*, Jamestown Found. (Aug. 22, 2016).

¹⁹ Spalding, *War Without Rules*, *supra* note 2, at 214.

²⁰ *Id.*; see also Peter Mattis & Matt Schrader, *America Can’t Beat Beijing’s Tech Theft With Racial Profiling*, War on the Rocks (July 23, 2019) (“The U.S. government’s difficulties in telling a convincing story about the Chinese Communist Party point to a[n] important step: addressing a serious lack of ‘China literacy,’ both within the enforcement portions of the federal bureaucracy, and in U.S. society as a whole.”).

²¹ Cox Report, *supra* note 2, at xxxiii; see generally Menges, *supra* note 2.

²² Newsham, *supra* note 2, at 33.

the threat is grave and work must be done across agencies to protect America.²³ Peter Mattis, former staff director of the Congressional-Executive Commission of China and counterintelligence analyst at the CIA counsels that

Only by being clear in public about the actions and intentions of the Chinese party-state, and being publicly accountable for the actions the U.S. government takes in response, will the United States be able to address Beijing's challenges while upholding our democratic commitment to fair, transparent justice for all Americans.²⁴

To this end, the Committee is conducting this investigation and implores each federal agency to uphold its duty to the American communities for whom they are responsible.

CCP Influence in American Schools and Theft of American Research

The CCP has aggressively sought to infiltrate American schools and universities. Academics and policy experts broadly agree the PRC is engaged in political warfare to immerse itself in the U.S. education system and the PRC is committed to ensuring it is the world leader in science and technology by 2050.²⁵ In order to achieve this goal, the CCP has taken a number of actions designed to strengthen China's position in the world while undermining American interests. The CCP, through the implementation of Confucius Institutes and recruitment programs like the Thousand Talents Program (TTP), has sought to break into the U.S. education system and to compromise taxpayer funded research. Retired Brigadier General Robert Spalding has explained that while there "is great value in Chinese students' coming to the United States to study, . . . the system has been abused and needs to be tightened."²⁶

In 2008, China launched the TTP as a recruitment effort aimed at enticing Chinese scientists abroad to bring their research back to China.²⁷ TTP was successful at pulling overseas scientists and researchers into the program, with more than 10,000 participants taking part in the program.²⁸ The CCP used lucrative salaries to lure scientists and researchers into the program, with the goal of eventually facilitating technology transfer and the repatriation of science and technology experts.²⁹ In 2019, the Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations issued a staff report detailing the significant threats posed by China's talent recruitment plans.³⁰ The

²³ See Newsham, *supra* note 2, at 309 ("We need to know, value, protect and build the strengths of the United States of America, and shed the light of truth on the corruption, in every sense of the word," of the CCP. "That could mean in discussions with family, community, at school or wherever that understanding needs bolstering." Education courses on PRC political warfare would benefit "[a]ny decision-makers who work with China."); see Gershaneck, *supra* note 2, at 153 (outlining such courses to "build[] internal defenses").

²⁴ Mattis and Schrader, *supra* note 20.

²⁵ S. Comm. on Homeland Sec'y and Governmental Affairs, Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, Staff Report, Threats to the U.S. Research Enterprise: China's Talent Recruitment Plans ("Staff Report") (Nov. 18, 2019).

²⁶ Spalding, *War Without Rules*, *supra* note 2, at 225.

²⁷ Ellen Barry & Gina Kolata, *China's Lavish Funds Lured U.S. Scientists. What Did It Get in Return?*, N.Y. Times (Feb. 6, 2020).

²⁸ *Id.*

²⁹ Staff Report, *supra* note 25, at 20.

³⁰ *Id.*

bipartisan report determined that China sought to exploit America's talent and technological expertise, and emphasized that, when it comes to international scientific collaboration, the CCP is interested in advancing science for the sole purpose of furthering China's national security interests.³¹ After the Federal Bureau of Investigation began investigating the TTP in 2015, China abruptly removed all online material and refrained from publicly discussing the program.³² TTP is still in existence today, and has reemerged under a new title, Qiming.³³

In 2018, Attorney General Jeff Sessions announced the "China Initiative," aimed at cracking down on the CCP's Thousand Talents Program and the transfer of U.S. funded research to China.³⁴ The China Initiative was created with a number of goals in mind, with one specifically being to "[e]ducate colleges and universities about potential threats to academic freedom and open discourse from influence efforts" on college campuses.³⁵ Until recently, most colleges and universities have maintained loose regulations pertaining to outside employment and income for professors and academics.³⁶ With no significant requirements for disclosures of foreign entity donations, it is difficult to understand just how much taxpayer funded research has been transferred to China through the CCP's TTP.

The Department of Justice (DOJ) is aware of threats posed by TTP. In January 2020, DOJ announced that the Chair of Harvard University's Chemistry and Biology Department, Dr. Charles Lieber, had been charged with making a false statement when applying for grant funding from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the Department of Defense.³⁷ Dr. Lieber had served as a contractual participant in the CCP's Thousand Talents Program and lied about this information to federal investigators when applying for federal funding.³⁸ A similar case arose in the arrest of Song Guo Zheng, an American professor with strong ties to China, who was apprehended as he was preparing to board a charter flight to China with luggage containing two laptops, three cellphones, and several USB drives.³⁹ Dr. Zheng had purposefully lied on applications to secure \$4.1 million in federal funding from NIH and did not disclose that he had participated in the TTP.⁴⁰

It is clear that the CCP's TTP (and any names under which it is rebranded) remains a significant concern despite DOJ abruptly and mistakenly cancelling the China Initiative in

³¹ *Id.*

³² Chad F. Wolf & James Jary Carafano, *China's Damaging Influence and Exploitation of U.S. Colleges and Universities*, The Heritage Foundation (Mar. 22, 2021).

³³ *China's Stealth Revival Of 'Thousand Talents Plan' Signals Semiconductor Ambitions Despite US Restrictions*, Business Insider (Aug. 24, 2023).

³⁴ Press Release, *Attorney General Jeff Sessions Announces New Initiative to Combat Chinese Economic Espionage*, U.S. Dep't of Justice (Nov. 1, 2018).

³⁵ Fact Sheet, *Attorney General Jeff Session's China Initiative Fact Sheet*, U.S. Dep't of Justice (Nov. 1, 2018).

³⁶ See Barry & Kolata, *supra* note 27.

³⁷ Press Release, *Harvard University Professor and Two Chinese Nationals Charged in Three Separate China Related Cases*, U.S. Dep't of Justice (Jan. 28, 2020).

³⁸ *Id.*

³⁹ Press Release, *University Researcher Sentenced to Prison for Lying on Grant Applications to Develop Scientific Expertise for China*, U.S. Dep't of Justice (May 14, 2021).

⁴⁰ *Id.*

2022.⁴¹ Thomas Klingenstein, President of the Claremont Institute, recently explained that “[i]n the case of China, state-sponsored students and researchers at American universities have even been convicted of spying for their home country,” and that some Chinese students have effectively become “outposts of a hostile regime.”⁴² Writing in *Tablet*, research fellow Neetu Arnold describes how some Chinese students engage in espionage on American campuses on behalf of the CCP, and highlights a case that arose at the Illinois Institute of Technology, where a Chinese student “recruited spies to steal top information from American companies focused on building aerospace and satellite technology.”⁴³

Unfortunately, there appears to be little appetite among American universities to limit their research partnerships with entities in the PRC.⁴⁴ Michelle Bethel, a former board member of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology’s (MIT) McGovern Institute for Brain Research, raised serious concerns over the lab’s research partnerships with Chinese entities.⁴⁵ Rather than addressing her concerns, MIT dismissed the issues Bethel raised as “racist” and “political.”⁴⁶ In 2021, Bethel resigned in protest and the issues she had identified remained unaddressed.⁴⁷ The Department of Education has responsibilities to ensure that universities implement stringent reporting requirements for academics to disclose funding or outside income from foreign governments and entities, particularly from the PRC.

Moreover, it has recently been reported that tutoring services in the U.S. have been influenced by the CCP. School districts in over 25 states have adopted Tutor.com as a resource for students.⁴⁸ Tutor.com is a Chinese-owned financial corporation that provides tutoring services and whose parent company, Primavera, is owned by Chinese nationals with a principal place of business in Hong Kong.⁴⁹ Reporting has confirmed that Primavera maintains an association with TikTok’s parent company, ByteDance.⁵⁰ The Committee is concerned that the Department has not taken the necessary steps to educate school districts about the threat posed by the CCP and Chinese-owned entities collecting student data and information.

CCP Propaganda via Confucius Institutes

The Chinese Communist Party has worked diligently to infiltrate America’s classrooms at every level of the nation’s education system. It has penetrated the U.S. education system, in

⁴¹ Katie Benner, *Justice Dept. to End Trump-Era Initiative to Deter Chinese Threats*, N.Y. Times (Feb. 23, 2022).

⁴² Thomas D. Klingenstein, *China and Saudi Arabia Are Invading Our Universities*, Thomas D. Klingenstein (Mar. 12, 2024).

⁴³ Neetu Arnold, *The Takeover: A massive increase in foreign money and students on American campuses is driving radicalization and subsidizing institutional failure*, *Tablet* (Nov. 14, 2023).

⁴⁴ Seth D. Kaplan & John Metz, *Concealed Crackdown: China’s Influence Across Campus*, Heterodox Academy (Oct. 4, 2022).

⁴⁵ *Id.*

⁴⁶ *Id.*; see also Spalding, *War Without Rules*, *supra* note 2, at 208-09 (explaining that “[r]acism is . . . frequently invoked to deflect criticism of the CCP.”).

⁴⁷ *Id.*

⁴⁸ Brian Flood & Jamie Joseph, *Chinese-owned tutoring company found in classrooms across America, anti-indoctrination group says*, Fox News (Mar. 13, 2024).

⁴⁹ *Id.*

⁵⁰ *Id.*

large part, due to the presence of Confucius Institutes at American universities and K-12 schools. Klingenstein has aptly warned that the CCP “treats its engagement with the American academy as a chance to spread its own ideology” in America.⁵¹ Colonel Newsham has further cautioned that, under the influence of Confucius Institutes, “young Americans grow up well disposed to the PRC, internalizing the idea that the [PRC] and the CCP are just lovable pandas.”⁵²

Confucius Institutes were first discovered on American campuses in 2005 and quickly became a subject of controversy for their “effects on academic freedom and for their lack of transparency.”⁵³ They have proven to be an effective tool of the CCP’s united front, and have been accused of working to favorably influence public opinion towards China and of stealing intellectual property.⁵⁴ The PRC has shamelessly denied that Confucius Institutes have nefarious motives and has claimed that they exist solely to offer Chinese cultural and language programs for students and universities.⁵⁵ These claims by the PRC have been debunked as early as 2014.⁵⁶

As summarized in a report from the National Association of Scholars, Confucius Institutes are a product of the CCP and exist solely to “shape American attitudes towards” China.⁵⁷ The report emphasizes that Confucius Institutes remain under the direct control of the CCP and are “tightly managed” by an agency of the CCP.⁵⁸ By permitting Confucius Institutes to effectively dictate “Chinese language and cultural education . . . universities have been giving up control over hiring and curricula.”⁵⁹ Even as some Confucius Institutes have closed their doors, universities have “sought to preserve their ties to China in other forms, often retaining many of the trappings of a [Confucius Institute] while changing little more than the name.”⁶⁰ In doing so, universities have permitted Confucius Institutes to “guide student learning in a direction favorable to the Chinese government by, for example, avoiding all mentions of the Tiananmen Square Massacre.”⁶¹ Reporting on Confucius Institutes has also revealed that these organizations must “abide by the PRC’s laws, and contracts between universities and [Confucius Institutes] often feature broad nondisclosure requirements while empowering the [Confucius Institutes] to mandate that educators not damage China’s image abroad.”⁶²

There remains a significant degree of murkiness surrounding the financial operation of the CCP’s Confucius Institutes and the level of funding that American universities are receiving from these united front operations. In 2019, then-Deputy Secretary of Education Mick Zais

⁵¹Klingenstein, *supra* note 42.

⁵²Newsham, *supra* note 2, at 76.

⁵³Congressional Research Service, Confucius Institutes in the United States: Selected Issues (updated May 2, 2023).

⁵⁴*Id.*

⁵⁵*Id.*

⁵⁶*Id.* at 2 “In 2014, the American Association of University Professors called on U.S. universities that host Confucius Institutes to end their partnerships unless they met conditions related to managerial control, academic freedom, and transparency.”

⁵⁷Rachelle Peterson, *Outsourced to China: Confucius Institutes and Soft Power in American Higher Education*, National Association of Scholars, at 12 (Apr. 5, 2017).

⁵⁸*Id.*

⁵⁹See Kaplan & Metz, *supra* note 44.

⁶⁰*Id.*

⁶¹*Id.*

⁶²*Id.*

testified before the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, and stated that “[n]early 70 percent of colleges receiving Chinese-government funding for Confucius Institutes never reported those donations to the Department of Education.”⁶³ In addition to the funding that universities received from Confucius Institutes, Chinese students typically pay full tuition and are “more lucrative” for universities than American students.⁶⁴ Given the concerns with the CCP’s use of Confucius Institutes to advance propaganda, it is concerning that the federal government does not have an accurate understanding of the level of foreign donations pouring into American universities. The Department must ensure that universities are properly disclosing donations from foreign entities and engage with the education sector about the risks of CCP influence via Confucius Institutes.

CCP Targeting of American STEM

The PRC is quickly outpacing the U.S. in terms of the number of PhD graduates in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM).⁶⁵ A report from Georgetown University’s Center for Security and Emerging Technology found that U.S. universities awarded twice as many doctorates in STEM fields (18,289) as compared to China (9,038) in 2000.⁶⁶ However, as recently as 2019, Chinese universities produced 49,498 PhD graduates in the STEM field, compared to the 33,759 graduates that American universities produced.⁶⁷ The report also examined current enrollment patterns and predicted that, by 2025, China’s annual STEM PhD graduates (77,179) will approximately double STEM PhD graduates in the U.S. (39,959).⁶⁸ In his book, *You Will Be Assimilated: China’s Plan To Sino-Form The World*, David Goldman notes that “China now graduates more scientists and engineers than the United States, Europe, Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea combined.”⁶⁹

The degree to which China is now outpacing the U.S. in producing STEM field PhD graduates is concerning, and threatens the U.S.’s ability to maintain leadership over the PRC in key technologies, artificial intelligence, and critical infrastructure.⁷⁰ The discrepancy is that much more concerning, given that the CCP has a long history of actively working to undermine American intellectual property gained through taxpayer funded research and has exploited the U.S.’s open academic environment and advanced expertise in the STEM field.⁷¹

Chinese nationals comprise a substantial number of undergraduate and graduate students in the U.S. who are pursuing degrees in the STEM field. In 2022, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) determined that from 2016 to 2020, Chinese nationals pursuing a

⁶³ See Wolf & Carafano, *supra* note 32.

⁶⁴ See Kaplan & Metz, *supra* note 44.

⁶⁵ Michael T. Nietzel, *U.S. Universities Fall Further Behind China in Production of STEM PhDs*, Forbes (Aug. 7, 2021).

⁶⁶ *Id.*

⁶⁷ *Id.*

⁶⁸ *Id.*

⁶⁹ David P. Goldman, *You Will Be Assimilated: China’s Plan To Sino-Form The World* at XXII (2020).

⁷⁰ See generally, *Id.*

⁷¹ James Carafano et al., *Winning the New Cold War: A Plan for Countering China*, The Heritage Foundation (Mar. 28, 2023).

STEM field graduate degree at a U.S. university totaled 722,765.⁷² GAO noted that Immigration and Customs Enforcement officials have determined Chinese nationals studying in STEM fields are at a higher risk of transferring technology back to the PRC.⁷³ It is imperative that the federal government do all it can to safeguard taxpayer funded research and education, and help students and researchers thrive, create, and innovate in the essential STEM field.

CCP Targeting of Students on American Campuses

Not only has the CCP sought to influence curricula in American schools, steal valuable research, and surpass American leadership in STEM, it has targeted individual professors and Chinese students on American college campuses. The problem has become so pervasive that “[m]any academics err on the side of caution and self-censor before they can be censored by the Chinese.”⁷⁴ There are numerous instances of Chinese students being retaliated against by Chinese student associations that often serve as mouthpieces for CCP propaganda.⁷⁵

The State Department has explained that beginning in the 1970s, the CCP’s united front formed the Chinese Students and Scholars Association (CSSA) to “monitor Chinese students and mobilize them against views that dissent from the CCP’s stance.”⁷⁶ While CSSAs are “nominally independent and outwardly similar to other student affinity groups, in practice they function as the eyes and ears of the Chinese government on campuses, creating immense pressure for Chinese students not only to conform to their government’s standards but to inform on one another to demonstrate their own loyalty.”⁷⁷ Recent reporting has revealed that CSSAs “receive funding directly from PRC diplomatic staff, with whom they communicate regularly, often to provide information on fellow students or to receive orders to help ensure ideological uniformity in the local Chinese community.”⁷⁸

In a policy brief published by Alex Joske, an author and researcher who focuses on the CCP, he explains that these united front associations are overseen by the PRC’s Ministry of Education and “often seek to speak for, influence and monitor Chinese students abroad.”⁷⁹ It is apparent that the CCP is actively monitoring Chinese nationals on campus and using a combination of tactics to pressure and intimidate students.⁸⁰ Chinese intelligence officers routinely utilize online surveillance and “an array of informants motivated by money, ambition, fear, or authentic patriotism to scrutinize student behavior.”⁸¹ An example of this behavior can be seen in the persecution of Vera Yueming Zhou, a U.S. permanent resident who was detained “at an internment camp in Xinjiang for using a VPN to access her University of Washington

⁷² U.S. Gov’t Accountability Office, China: Efforts Underway to Address Technology Transfer Risk at U.S. Universities, but ICE Could Improve Related Data (GAO-23-106114) (Nov. 15, 2022).

⁷³ *Id.* at 15.

⁷⁴ Newsham, *supra* note 2.

⁷⁵ See Wolf & Carafano, *supra* note 32.

⁷⁶ U.S. Dep’t of State, The Chinese Communist Party on Campus: Opportunities & Risks (Sep. 2020).

⁷⁷ See Kaplan & Metz, *supra* note 44.

⁷⁸ *Id.*

⁷⁹ See Joske, *The party speaks for you*, *supra* note 8.

⁸⁰ See Kaplan & Metz, *supra* note 44.

⁸¹ *Id.*

email address.”⁸² The University of Washington allegedly refused to intervene on Zhou’s behalf, out of fear that doing so would “jeopardize a valuable agreement with the Chinese government.”⁸³ CSSAs appear to be another weapon of the CCP, designed to spread propaganda while silencing any speech critical of CCP ideology.

To date, there are approximately 150 CSSA chapters on college campuses throughout the U.S.⁸⁴ These chapters are overseen by the united front and often receive guidance from PRC diplomatic posts instructing the chapters to protest and disrupt lectures or events that are critical of CCP ideology.⁸⁵ In 2017, a Chinese student speaking at the University of Maryland’s commencement ceremony faced retaliation from the CCP after she praised the presence of “free speech” on the college’s campus.⁸⁶ In 2022, students at George Washington University put up posters criticizing the policies of the CCP.⁸⁷ In retaliation, the campus CSSA chapter sent a letter to the president demanding that the university remove the posters and take disciplinary actions against the students who had spoken out against the Party.⁸⁸ In order to justify its position that the posters should be removed, the CSSA chapter claimed that opposition to the CCP was rooted in racism.⁸⁹ There is a concerning trend in higher education where “American universities tend to treat these issues as issues of racism and diversity.”⁹⁰ In Canada, the student union at McMaster University voted to ban the CSSA operating on its campus after it intimidated and surveilled students, “including at least one Uyghur refugee, on behalf of local Chinese diplomatic staff.”⁹¹ Unfortunately, it appears that retaliation against students who have dared to speak out against China and the CCP are common.⁹²

Conclusion

The CCP’s political warfare, targeting of U.S. college campuses, theft of American intellectual property through the Thousand Talents Program, infiltration via Confucius Institutes, recruitment of STEM field graduates, and suppression of free speech on campus pose serious risks to millions of Americans. The influence of the CCP on college campuses has “dangerous implications for free speech, student safety, industrial espionage, ethical scientific practices, and national security.”⁹³ In summarizing the threat that the Chinese government poses, scholars Seth Kaplan and John Metz noted that:

⁸² *Id.*

⁸³ *Id.*

⁸⁴ See U.S. Dep’t of State, *supra* note 76.

⁸⁵ *Id.*

⁸⁶ Simon Denyer & Congcong Zhang, *A Chinese student praised the ‘fresh air of free speech’ at a U.S. college. Then came the backlash*, Washington Post (May 23, 2017).

⁸⁷ See Kaplan & Metz, *supra* note 44.

⁸⁸ *Id.*

⁸⁹ *Id.*

⁹⁰ *Id.*

⁹¹ *Id.*

⁹² Gabrielle Resnick, *Chinese Students Say Free Speech in US Chilled by China*, Voice of America (Jan. 14, 2020).

⁹³ See Kaplan & Metz, *supra* note 44.

The Chinese government has developed a vast network of overlapping institutions, including [Confucius Institutes], CSSAs, and so-called talent programs aimed at recruiting the most brilliant scholars and transferring their know-how to Chinese firms and state entities. Simply put, no foreign government has ever had both the resources and the resolve necessary to override academic firewalls against foreign malign influence in the way the CCP does today.

Seth D. Kaplan & John Metz, *Concealed Crackdown: China's Influence Across Campus*, Heterodox Academy (Oct. 4, 2022).

The Department of Education must engage with American schools and universities to change our approach to the Chinese government. This necessary shift in posture will “require both a thicker understanding of free speech and deeper constraints on [the university’s] relationship with the CCP and Chinese government.”⁹⁴ For example, universities must disclose the sources of their foreign funding and “establish clear guidelines for how they will safeguard the freedoms of students from China and other authoritarian countries.”⁹⁵ In addition to these disclosures, universities must also put “ethical guardrails in place to ensure that advanced research is not contributing to human rights abuses or to the military development of the world’s most powerful authoritarian state.”⁹⁶ Most importantly, universities must remove the CCP and its entities—Confucius Institutes and CSSAs—from their campuses and ensure that their students’ freedom of speech is protected.⁹⁷

To assist the Committee in investigating this matter, we request a briefing from the Department with Committee staff. Please contact Committee staff as soon as possible, but no later than May 13, 2024. This briefing should address the following:

- (1) How the Department strives to inspire and equip Americans to strengthen their communities, innovate, and create the technologies and phenomena that will secure a strong and prosperous future for our nation;
- (2) How Department leadership ensures from the top down that all Department employees are aware of CCP warfare and influence operations against America and are equipped to address them wherever they arise;
- (3) Department work to promote and advance STEM field research among U.S. students at American K-12 schools as well as colleges and universities;
- (4) Department efforts to ensure that taxpayer funded research and any research, trade secrets or intellectual property gained from taxpayer funded research are not transferred to foreign adversaries, including the PRC, via Thousand Talent Programs or any other methods targeting American schools and universities;

⁹⁴ *Id.*

⁹⁵ *Id.*

⁹⁶ *Id.*

⁹⁷ *Id.*

- (5) Department efforts to ensure that the Chinese Students and Scholars Associations and other similar organizations do not intimidate students and interfere with freedom of expression on American campuses. This discussion should also address any Department engagement with universities about the banning of CSSAs, and any Department consideration of the value of such a ban in protecting American students and the free exchange of ideas on campus;
- (6) Department efforts to protect professors, students, and university employees who speak out about CCP influence and infiltration on campus;
- (7) Department outreach to state and local officials about the risks associated with incorporating into their education system technology products and services, including but not limited to tutoring services, owned by Chinese corporations;
- (8) Department outreach to American universities, schools, and students about CCP influence in tutoring services;
- (9) Efforts taken by the Department to ensure that American colleges and universities are properly disclosing funding received by foreign governments and entities; and
- (10) Department outreach to Department employees, American university officials, schools, and students about the CCP's political warfare campaign against the U.S. education and research sector.

Please contact the Committee on Oversight and Accountability staff at (202) 225-5074 to schedule the staff briefing. The Committee on Oversight and Accountability is the principal oversight committee of the U.S. House of Representatives and has broad authority to investigate “any matter” at “any time” under House Rule X. Thank you for your prompt attention to this important investigation.

Sincerely,



James Comer
Chairman
Committee on Oversight and Accountability

cc: The Honorable Jamie Raskin, Ranking Member
Committee on Oversight and Accountability