2017 National Honors Gala - “Discovering New Horizons”

Ten Outstanding U.S. Students Receive “People-to-People Award” at Confucius Institute U.S. Center’s 2017 National Honors Gala

WASHINGTON, D.C. (November 22, 2017) – The Confucius Institute U.S. Center’s (CIUS Center) second annual National Honors Gala was held at the National Press Club on November 18, 2017. The Gala recognized the accomplishments of ten exemplary Confucius Institute students selected from universities and school systems across the country. Over 160 guests including distinguished business leaders, educators, public officials, diplomats, media representatives, artists, and scholars joined in celebrating the importance of global education and people-to-people exchanges between China and the United States. The ten honorees hailed from ten different states, and were selected from a competitive pool of applicants based on their personal stories and active engagement with Chinese language development, cultural awareness, and global education programs.

Keynote Speakers

James Heimowitz, President of China Institute, shared how studying Chinese impacted his life and provided him with many unique opportunities throughout his distinguished career. “The successes I believe I’ve had are in place only because I’m bicultural and bilingual,” said Heimowitz in reflecting on the benefits of language learning.

Dr. C.D. Mote Jr, President of the National Academy of Engineering and founder of the first Confucius Institute in the U.S. while serving as President of the University of Maryland, spoke on the unique structure of the Confucius Institute and praised the honorees, “It's not just your knowledge of the language and the culture. It's actually the special spirit that inspires you to do this...Things are not always easy, I know even at your young age. These difficult challenges that you've overcome in order to keep this going...requires a certain quality of person.”
MG Charles F. Bolden, Former Administrator of NASA, delivered the keynote address, sharing his own experience of engaging across difference, learning from failure, and courageously pursuing one’s passion. Speaking on U.S.-China collaboration, Bolden stated, “there are incredible opportunities for us to cooperate and collaborate today with China, both personally and professionally. Because I happen to be a person who’s a pilot and a former astronaut…I believe that our future is working together in space.”

Isabelle Szczerbinski (Bao Ling) of the Confucius Institute at the College of William and Mary delivered the honoree keynote address. Isabelle spoke about her incredible journey of learning Chinese and her recent trip to China. She shared on her work lobbying her senators to support increased funding for language education. “It's hard to learn a new language in a vacuum. Learning from a computer or a teacher a few times each week is not the same as being part of a community that exists to share Chinese language and culture. Luckily, I found a Confucius Institute near my home in Virginia.”

Isabelle is a profoundly-gifted twelve-year-old homeschooler who has been studying Chinese for 6 years. She just returned from her first trip to China, visiting 4 cities over 3 weeks. An accomplished French speaker, Isabelle won 4th place in the US in Le Grand Concours, the National French Contest. Isabelle also speaks Polish and some Russian. Isabelle joined the JNCL-NCLIS (LanguagePolicy.org) in 2017 to lobby her senators and congressional representative for more funding for language learning in public schools. To read more about this year’s honorees, please visit this page: http://www.ciuscenter.org/?page_id=1027.

About the Confucius Institute U.S. Center
The Confucius Institute U.S. Center (CIUS Center) is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit educational institution based in Washington D.C. with the mission of strengthening educational and cultural exchanges and fostering ‘people-to-people’ interactions between China and the United States. The CIUS Center also supports 110 individual Confucius Institutes across the United States. To support and advance global education, Chinese language development and cross-cultural understanding programs, the CIUS Center engages and supports the directors of the 110 independent Confucius Institute network through four primary domains – education and professional development, arts and culture, academics and research, and public relations and strategic communications outreach.

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