

Focus on China - and Chinese Studies

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fsimon@tulane.edu

As all eyes turn to Beijing for the Olympics, many students are thinking of making Chinese studies their major. Tulane University is responding to the ever-increasing interest in China and the Chinese language by developing a new major in Chinese studies.



Carl Bankston, director of Asian studies at Tulane, says the upcoming major in Chinese area studies is an “outstanding opportunity” for students, given the importance of China in today's world. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

“There's a lot of demand for Chinese language from students and it's steadily increasing, so we're addressing a need,” says Carl Bankston, co-director the [Asian studies program](#) at Tulane.

Bankston, professor and chair of sociology in the Tulane School of Liberal Arts, worked in the Peace Corps in Thailand and an Indochinese refugee camp in the Philippines before his career in academia. Bankston's area of expertise is migration from Southeast Asia to the U.S.

“Students perceive job opportunities in Asia, now that China and Japan are big world players,” Bankston says. “Today's students no longer see these countries as exotic and far away. Now they view them as a realistic part of their future careers.”

Tulane has offered two years of Chinese, Japanese and Vietnamese language courses for many years. This past year the university offered a third year of Chinese and Japanese in response to students' requests.

“Like the French major, we plan to offer enough courses in the language as well as courses in English in Chinese area studies, so that we will be able to offer the major,” says Rich Watts, executive director of the Tulane Center for Global Education, who is an associate professor of French. Watts has been working with Bankston and Shanshan Du, associate professor of anthropology and co-director of Asian studies, to plan the major in Chinese area studies.

The team hopes that students can look forward to majoring in Chinese studies beginning with the 2009-2010 academic year.

“It's a good idea for incoming freshmen to start thinking about this major, and begin taking Chinese language courses as well as courses such as Chinese history and the politics of China,” Bankston says.

Funding from the U.S. Department of Education is helping Tulane to plan the new major. An assistant professor of Chinese will be hired for two years with assistance from a Title VIa Undergraduate International Studies and Foreign Languages Grant.

Currently the university employs one full-time professor of practice in Chinese and two adjunct faculty members. This fall, work will get under way to design the curriculum, which will be reviewed by the university's curriculum committee.

Bankston says the new Chinese area studies major fits well with Tulane's goals that include global education and dovetails with other programs and institutions at Tulane including the [Payson Center for International Development](#).