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A Far-Eastern Campus for Kean

By JOHN KOBLIN

Union

GLASSES clinked, toasts were made and then leaders of this 151-year-old institution were calling it the most important moment in its history.

Kean University, a state institution with a student body made up mostly of commuters, is expected in September 2007 to become the first American university to open a newly designed campus in [China](#).

The college, which would be named Kean University-Wenzhou, would grant Kean degrees, instruct all courses in English and serve thousands of Chinese students by 2010, when construction is completed.

But with all the bluster of university officials toasting each other at an event last week and describing the deal as their apogee, an obvious question arises: why Kean?

With powerhouses like [Harvard](#) and [Princeton](#) sitting on the sidelines, smaller state colleges like Kean are eyeing a ripe opportunity in China.

"Education is about the only area the American economy hasn't entered yet," said Yawei Liu, a director at the Carter Center in Georgia. "But making money is a big part of education in China and now American schools are moving east to find new sources of revenue."

What is striking about the arrangement is not its uniqueness, but Kean's aggressive push as such a minor player. The university — with a student body of 13,000 — admits 65 percent of its applicants and has a \$5 million endowment, an emaciated figure in a world of bloated tuitions and bullish fund-raising.

And with state colleges facing a proposed cut of more than \$150 million from Gov. [Jon S. Corzine's](#) proposed budget, the president of Kean, Dawood Farahi, said the move to China was driven heavily by money.

"Education is really a commodity," Mr. Farahi said. "It's a commodity that can be sold and marketed, so why don't we take advantage of what we have and market that to China since they want it?"

Kean will not have to put down a single dollar, according to the president. It will be joining up with Wenzhou University, a bottom-tier university in the Zhejiang Province that will foot the bill, estimated at more than \$60 million. This includes construction of the proposed campus of 300 acres. Wenzhou

University will also pay for all faculty costs and the day-to-day operation of the school.

The nascent university will offer courses in education, public administration and business. It is expected to serve predominantly Chinese students, who will be held the same admissions standards as Kean students are now.

Leaders at the school are hopeful that as many as 300 of its [New Jersey](#) students can study in China and take the same courses on the far eastern satellite campus as they would in Union.

The minutia of the university life is expected to be retained too, all the way from student organizations to residence life, all in the name of bringing a Western style of education out east.

But even with a working deal, there is still more work ahead. The Ministry of Education in China still needs to approve it and Dr. Farahi said that if anything changes, no matter how small, Kean will walk away.

For instance, if Kean's Chinese students are not allowed to access the United States version of Google, which permits information freely, unlike the Chinese-only Google that restricts information on issues like the Tiananmen Square massacre, everything is off.

"That's a deal-breaker," said Dr. Farahi. "Any violation of academic freedom and any difference with how we do it here, would not be acceptable."

The wide-scale ambition of the proposed Kean campus is unique, but certainly American schools already have a presence in China. Harvard Business School and the Northwestern Kellogg School of Management have had small programs for years and [New York University](#) is looking to open a new program in Shanghai by next summer.

But Kean's plan takes it a step farther and at least one university other plans to follow its lead. The State University of New York, will sign a deal next week with Nanjing University, allowing Chinese students to earn a SUNY degree.

And Kean and SUNY are on the heels of Nottingham University in England, the first school to announce a move into China. Indeed, education experts say that this is just the beginning.

"This market is driven by the Chinese's deep value of education and their extremely high willingness to pay for it," said Xiaodong Lin, an associate professor of education at [Columbia University](#). "This is about a small, struggling American university and a small, struggling Chinese university hoping to find a niche," Dr. Lin added.

Indeed, Dr. Farahi admits as much. With an endowment and an alumni giving rate that he describes as "very poor," he said the only way to narrow the divide between Kean and bigger state schools like Rutgers University, is by moving east.

"In order to attract high-caliber students, name recognition is a major thing," he said. "People know about other universities because of their football team. We can't afford a D-1 football team. This will give us the ability to be known."

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