OVERLAND PARK (AP) — Less than one year after it opened, the University of Kansas Confucius Institute has proven to be a big draw with Midwesterners eager to learn Chinese culture and language.

The institute, based at the university’s Edwards Campus in Overland Park, is one of 120 around the world, with just four located in the United States.

A joint project of the University of Kansas, the Chinese Ministry of Education and Huazhong Normal University, the institute has attracted 275 students since last May to its classes in Mandarin Chinese.

Many are schoolchildren, but the course is also popular with professionals and other business people for whom a working knowledge of China’s most widely spoken dialect would be an advantage.

Jack Nagle, an engineer with Overland Park-based Black & Veatch, is one such student. Although his Chinese co-workers find his mispronunciations amusing, his attempts to speak their language have sealed a bond between him and those he manages at the engineering and construction firm.

“It has really bridged a gap and has helped us work together,” said Nagle, who hopes to visit China someday. “I think they appreciate me trying to learn their language. That’s probably the best benefit.”

So high is the interest among Black & Veatch workers in learning Chinese language and culture that, at the company’s request, the institute holds classes twice a week at the firm’s offices. Nearly 50 employees have participated so far.

Black & Veatch employees communicate often via teleconference and videoconference with their counterparts in the company’s Beijing office.

“I think that people understand that Chinese is economically and politically relevant,” said Sheree Willis, associate director for institute programs.

According to the Kansas Department of Commerce, China purchased more than $300 million in Kansas goods and services in 2005, making it the third leading buyer of Kansas products.

“A lot of companies like Black & Veatch are very forward-looking in understanding that in order to be effective, international companies need to be very well-versed not only in other languages but in other cultures,” Willis said.

That is why the Confucius Institute is so attractive to area businesses, said John Watson, director of trade development for the Kansas Department of Commerce.

“I believe that the more business executives and the more students take advantage of the opportunity to learn the language, the more opportunities created for business between Kansas and China,” Watson said.

Employees from Harrah’s Casino, Sprint and many small firms have taken the classes.

Saturday morning classes have attracted whole families, some of whom plan to visit the country and others who are just curious about the language and the culture.

“The classes have been really popular at Black & Veatch,” said David Swift, who coordinates global professional training for the company. “We did one class last fall, and when we announced that we had room in it for 20 people, it was full in less than five minutes.”

Last month, chief engineers got a crash course in Mandarin to prepare for a corporate board meeting in Beijing this spring.

“Chinese is very difficult to learn,” Nagle said. “It’s not a Romance language. You could have one word pronounced many different ways, and each pronunciation means something different.”

“We plan to add more companies starting in the fall,” he said. “We have also agreed to do an orientation for the Kansas Special Olympics staff and ath-
| athletes going to the Special Olympics World Games in Shanghai in October."
| The institute also is partnering with the Kansas Department of Education to bring more Chinese teachers from China to public schools in Kansas. The institute is involved in recruiting and training the teachers. |
KANSAS CITY, Mo. (AP) — A proliferation of fake diplomas on the Internet has college officials worried about academic fraud and a dilution of their schools' image.

But even as they wage constant legal battles against Web sites that are making money off selling the phony documents, officials acknowledge they're aiming at a moving target.

"Diploma fraud is an enormous problem," said Barmak Nassirian, associate executive director of the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers in Washington. "Stuff is coming at us so fast that we can't even gain awareness, let alone do anything about it."

At Kansas State University, officials recently ordered the school's trademark-licensing agent to send a cease-and-desist letter to a Web site that offered a fake Kansas State diploma and transcript for $249.99.

Various Web sites examined by The Kansas City Star advertise the documents as "replacement" or "novelty" diplomas. Many of the sites carry disclaimers that say the diplomas should not be used as a substitute for authentic diplomas. The Star found at least 12 Web sites that claim to offer diplomas from legitimate institutions, including one site that claims "10 years in the underground of counterfeiting documents."

The site where Kansas State sent the cease-and-desist order has shut down, but former FBI agent Allen Ezell said it won't be long before a different site takes its place.

He said the fake-diploma industry is worth millions of dollars and still growing. "It's whack-a-gopher," he said. "One goes down, another one comes up."

While officials at Kansas, Kansas State and Missouri said they couldn't cite any instances in which someone was caught using a phony degree from their institutions, they believe academic fraud is a problem, nonetheless.

All three schools are clients of Collegiate Licensing Co., a trademark-licensing firm based in Georgia that represents more than 150 colleges and universities. Collegiate Licensing associate general counsel Jim Aronowitz said his firm sends cease-and-desist orders to businesses "multiple times a day."

Aronowitz said most of those businesses aren't involved with phony degrees, but those that are typically remove Collegiate Licensing clients from their lists after receiving a threatening letter.

"We have to stay vigilant about protecting the brand," said University of Kansas spokesman Todd Cohen. "We don't spend our days surfing the Web looking for these sites, but as soon as we find out about them, we immediately react."
Former Vice President Mondale to speak at the Dole Institute

LAWRENCE, Kan. (AP) — Former Vice President and Democratic presidential candidate Walter Mondale will speak at the Dole Institute of Politics at the University of Kansas.

Mondale was the vice president during the Carter Administration and ran unsuccessfully against Ronald Reagan for the White House in 1984.

He also served two terms in the Senate and was ambassador to Japan during the Clinton Administration.

Mondale is now in private law practice in Minneapolis.

His speech is set for 7:30 p.m. April 12. It is free and open to the public, but tickets will be required.
The war against ersatz diplomas

Kansas State bugged by firms offering sheepskin for a fee

Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — A proliferation of fake diplomas on the Internet has college officials worried about academic fraud and a dilution of their schools' image.

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The University of Kansas honored 362 student athletes named to the Athletic Director's Honor Roll for 2006 during halftime of the KU-Colorado men's basketball game Jan. 27 at Allen Fieldhouse, including students from Burrton and Halstead.

Student athletes who achieved a semester grade-point average of at least 3.0 on a 4.0 scale during the spring or fall 2006 semester are eligible for the honor. Among those with special recognition at the game were 77 students who earned 4.0 GPAs in one or both semesters.

Flickinger, Miles Get Student Athlete Honors

FOR THE INDEPENDENT

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Brianna Flickinger, daughter of Corey and Rae Ann Flickinger was honored as was Lindsey Miles of Halstead, daughter of Kirk and Shelley Miles.

The Athletic Director's Honor Roll recognizes students in intercollegiate baseball, men's and women's basketball, cross country, football, golf, rowing, softball, soccer, swimming and diving, tennis, track and field and volleyball. Spirit Squad members are included this year for the first time. KU is a member of the Big 12 Conference.

"We're very pleased with the overall success of our student athletes," Athletics Director Lew Perkins said.
Colleges work to stifle sites offering phony diplomas

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Universities work to stomp out phony diplomas

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LAWRENCE — Six University of Kansas students, including Ruth L. Seeliger, a junior from Burden, are among more than 500 students nationally competing for 80 Morris K. Udall Scholarships.

Winners of the $5,000 scholarships will be announced online April 5 by the Morris K. Udall Scholarship and Excellence in National Environmental Policy Foundation.

Seeliger is majoring in environmental studies and in ecology and evolutionary biology. Her professional goals include working in conservation biology to preserve endangered species and habitats or to work in a university program to protect biodiversity in the ecosystem.

During the winter break in 2007, Seeliger conducted field research in Costa Rica through KU's study abroad course on neotropical bat ecology. She plans additional research on the effect of forest disturbance on populations of tropical bat species that are important in seed dispersal to regenerate forests.

This academic year, Seeliger has worked as an undergraduate teaching assistant in biology. She also volunteers with Operation Wildlife, a rehabilitation veterinary center near Lawrence. Her summer jobs have included working on the family farm.

(SEE: Award, page 5)

(Continued from page 4)

She is a daughter of Michael and Carolyn Seeliger and a Winfield High School graduate.

Nominees must be college sophomores or juniors who demonstrate outstanding potential and study the environment and related fields or must be Native American or Alaska Native college sophomores or juniors who demonstrate outstanding potential and study fields related to health care or tribal public policy.

Two-year and four-year institutions may nominate a total of six students from either or both categories. Scholars selected during their sophomore year may be renominated for the next year’s competition.

Since the first Udall scholarships were awarded in 1996, 16 have been awarded to 15 KU students (one student received the scholarship twice).

Established by Congress in 1992, the scholarship program honors Congressman Udall and his legacy of public service.
The University of Kansas Medical Center's drive for National Cancer Institute designation has been portrayed as DOA unless the medical center affiliates with Saint Luke's Hospital.

However, opinions differ on whether new affiliations with Missouri-side hospitals are needed to attract NCI designation.

Dr. Roy Jensen, director of the KU Cancer Center and leader of the local NCI campaign, said achievement of an NCI comprehensive cancer center designation would add 9,400 jobs and $1.3 billion to the regional economy. Those gains, plus the loss of 15 Kansans to cancer each day, have prompted KU Chancellor Robert Hemenway to make NCI designation by 2016 the university's No. 1 priority.

"But it's absolutely not going to happen if we don't have a successful conclusion to these (affiliation) discussions," Jensen said.

In the shorter term, Jensen said, extending research and academic affiliations to Saint Luke's will help the medical center win millions of dollars in research support from Kansas City foundations and corporations.

But broadening the medical center's network of affiliates is about more than raising money, Jensen said.

Dr. John Niederhuber, the new director of the NCI, is expected to push new cancer center guidelines requiring all applicants "to really leverage community resources," Jensen said.

Mark Wietecha, a consultant who has been advising KU Hospital on the NCI issue, said that will be accomplished by the Midwest Cancer Alliance, which Jensen is developing as part of the NCI campaign. The alliance is a network of oncologists and hospitals that will share best practices, extend cancer prevention and screening, and participate in clinical trials.

"The NCI does care that there is a proven, working cancer network," said Wietecha, chairman of Kurt Salmon Associates in Atlanta. "But the NCI does not really give a rip whether Saint Luke's or any of the community hospitals are academic affiliates of KU Medical Center or not."

Officials at KU Hospital, the primary teaching hospital for KU Medical Center, have voiced several concerns about the proposed affiliations. But during a March 13 meeting of the governing board, KU Hospital CEO Irene Cumming acknowledged that the community wants the affiliations and should get them soon.

Dr. Barbara Atkinson, executive vice chancellor of KU Medical Center, agreed, saying she was pleased with the progress made during more than three weeks of marathon negotiations with Cumming and others.

The affiliations also have been the topic of debate in Topeka, where Cumming recently testified that Kansas City life sciences leaders had imposed a March 31 deadline for completing negotiations.

Cumming said those leaders had indicated that failure to reach an affiliation agreement by the deadline would prompt Saint Luke's and the Stowers Institute for Medical Research to seek association with the Siteman Cancer Center in St. Louis. Siteman is an NCI-designated...
joint venture between Washington University and Barnes-Jewish Hospital.

Joni Westerhouse, a spokeswoman for Washington University, said Stowers and Saint Luke's officials discussed potential affiliation with Siteman "months and months ago."

"But to my knowledge, there aren't any talks going on right now," Westerhouse said.

Saint Luke's and Stowers officials have declined to discuss any new affiliations until they are finalized. Local doctors, meanwhile, are starting to become vocal.

In a recent letter to Kansas lawmakers, officers of the KU Hospital medical staff expressed concerns — one of them NCI-related — about the Saint Luke's affiliations.

"Ninety-nine percent of medical staff surveyed believed that it was very important for KU Hospital to be the 'flagship hospital' in the National Cancer Institute designation," the letter said. "However (that) has not been formalized in the agreement."

KU Hospital spokesman Dennis McCulloch said one sticking point in the talks was the question of how much cancer care branding Saint Luke's should receive.

Officials at KU Hospital, which has invested more than $75 million in cancer care during the past seven years, have suggested that Saint Luke's call itself "a research affiliate of the KU Cancer Center," McCulloch said.

Proponents of the affiliations have been pushing "KU Cancer Center at Saint Luke's," he said.

Consultant Wietecha said Saint Luke's probably plans to expand its outpatient cancer operations under the KU branding to win back market share lost during the recent cancer care shift from hospitals to outpatient centers.

KU Hospital is hoping to do the same thing by expanding its outpatient oncology services at its new Westwood campus.

"I think that's why KU Hospital is opposing this," Wietecha said. "They're thinking, 'We're the only Kansas City Chiefs franchise,' if you will. And now there's going to be two of them."
Measurements show groundwater levels continued to drop in 2006

LAWRENCE, Kan. (AP) — Farmers continue pumping more water from the state’s aquifers than can be replenished through rain and snow, the Kansas Geological Survey said Wednesday.

The Geological Survey, based at the University of Kansas, measured more than 1,100 wells in central and western Kansas as part of its annual review.

The measurements are taken in January after the irrigation season has ended and water levels have stabilized, but winter storms left geologists unable to reach about 305 wells this year.

“The weather delay and missed wells may have some influence on the water level comparisons between 2005 and 2006, so we’re going out again in early April to try to fill in the holes within our coverage area,” said Brownie Wilson, water data manager at the agency.

While water levels continued a trend of decline in western Kansas, the water levels in central Kansas saw renewed decline after holding steady just the year before.

From January 2006 to January 2007, preliminary data shows the water level declined 0.94 feet in western Kansas, 2.17 feet in the Equus Beds area north of Wichita, 1.29 feet in the Big Bend region of central Kansas, about 0.21 feet in northwestern Kansas, 0.42 feet in west-central Kansas, and 2.18 feet in southwestern Kansas.