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IN-DEPTH

Behind the quiet termination, 'predatory' recruitment practices of former UW Chinese Christian group

A University of Wisconsin-Madison investigation reported non-student leadership and out of state trips. Those non-students refute the allegations

By [John Ernst](#)

November 2, 2025 | 11:50am CST

The University of Wisconsin-Madison terminated the Chinese Christian Fellowship student organization in January 2025 after multiple former students reported "predatory" recruitment practices from non-students and a subsequent investigation determined the organization was majority non-students.

Students alleged the group, which first registered in 2022, used their standing as a student organization to pressure and recruit Chinese students. One student said the non-students pressured them to be baptized on a group trip out of state, and others described signing a lease with the non-student leaders, according to records obtained by The Daily Cardinal. Former non-student members of the CCF, however, refute these accusations and say the university terminated their group without cause.

On Jan. 13, the Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards received a report that the CCF was not a RSO in practice, instead a group of "non-students who entice actual students to join the organization and participate in different activities including out-of-state travel." The reporter also alleged that the non-students used the actual student's campus IDs to register as a student organization and send mass emails on behalf of the organization.

In a Jan. 22 Zoom interview with Aaron Vieth, former investigating officer at the OSCCS, a student member of the group said they were approached by two individuals who claimed to be students and invited the student to join CCF. After attending a few bible study sessions with the group, the student was invited on a trip with CCF, on which they reported they "felt pressured to be 'baptized' during the visit."

The student also confirmed the leaders of the group were non-students and were traveling from Chicago to Madison three times a week to convince students to join CCF, using those students to register CCF as an RSO.

In his report, Vieth concluded the student said they "felt forced to join this group by non-students."

One of the non-student "independent supporters" of CCF, Courtney Wang, told the Cardinal Vieth's investigation was incomplete and refuted the allegations from students who accused the group of "predatory" practices. Wang said she never observed forced baptisms or conference trips, typically held in Cleveland.

"Students decide by themselves whether to go or not," she said in an email to the Cardinal. "No one could force them to go."

Wang added they had pictures and videos of the baptisms "as a memorial for them to keep, and everyone could see how joyful they were, as evidence against the pressured feeling."

In a second interview conducted by Vieth on Jan. 22, multiple students "confirmed that the organization is not a student organization but uses students to create the impression that it is a student organization to attract new members."

The group also mentioned a rented house in Madison that non-student members would use during visits, splitting the rent among the group and the non-students.

"The students said they were unprepared to handle the full additional cost of utilities and maintaining the property, and there was the perpetual risk that the non-students would stop contributing their portion of the rent if the students stopped allowing them access to the space," Vieth's report said.

According to Wang and Ting Ma, another non-student supporter who confirmed Wang's interpretation of the allegations, the non-students never asked the students in CCF to rent a place for them to stay, calling the allegation "totally false." The two started renting a place for meetings in July 2023 before two students indicated interest in moving in.

Wang said the group originally agreed on a four bedroom house, with Wang and Ma paying half the rent for half the rooms, before another student moved in and the two covered a fourth of the rent. She said the group terminated the lease in August 2024, as one student graduated and another took a gap year.

Vieth emailed representatives from CCF on Jan. 28, alleging the organization violated the [Registered Student Organization Code of Conduct](#) after interviewees confirmed CCF was not composed of at least 75% students and did not have at least four student members.

OSCCS also raised concerns about the group's management and leadership in their investigation. No students, other than the ones interviewed who corroborated Vieth's concerns on the group's predatory nature of recruitment, were listed on the Wisconsin Involvement Network. The only other contacts for the group were non-[wisc.edu](#) emails.

"The investigating officer has concerns about the apparently predatory nature of the non-student involvement in recruiting students to CCF," Vieth wrote in his report recommending CCF's termination, obtained by the Cardinal.

Vieth concluded his report with the recommendation that CCF be terminated because of the failure to qualify as an RSO, as well as considerations that if CCF were to seek reinstatement in the future, there would be extra oversight.

'I was astonished'

After the release of Vieth's report, CCF members received word of the termination, and an email was sent to dissuade UW-Madison students from participating in or attending any CCF meetings.

"I was astonished when I first heard the news about the termination of CCF," a former student member of CCF told the Cardinal, who asked to remain anonymous due to the sensitive nature of the allegations. "The internal conversations were filled with confusion and speculation about this sudden decision. Many members were trying to reflect on possible reasons or any potential misconduct that might have led to the report."

As part of the RSO Code of Conduct, all RSOs have the right to a formal hearing about the violations they have been accused of. However, no hearing took place. According to Ryan Podolak, the Associate Director of OSCCS, not all investigations result in a hearing, with some cases being resolved through an Alternative Case Resolution. Podolak did not indicate if an Alternative Case Resolution was used with the CCF.

The former student member told the Cardinal that CCF requested further details, but their request was declined, partly because the main student officer did not attend the meeting and avoided further communication or efforts to resolve the issue.

"As far as I know, the CCF was not given an opportunity for a formal hearing, possibly due to the lack of response or cooperation from the main student officer," they said.

Ultimately, the student said the group's structure did not align with the university's organizational requirements. The involvement of non-students may have further amplified concerns about the CCF's recruiting process, they said.

"Based on my observation and experience, their behavior and conduct as Christians never crossed any inappropriate boundaries," the student said. "The university, on the other hand, was more focused on organizational management and ensuring the protection of younger students."

In order to be reinstated as an RSO, the CCF would need to petition the OSCCS to be reviewed by a Reinstatement Review Committee.

Vieth's report recommended any student wishing to reinstate the student group go through the Registered Student Organization Reinstatement Process for "extra oversight to confirm that a future CCF actually is eligible for registration."

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