

Mary Brabeck Gale and Ira Drukier Dean

**MEMORANDUM**

DATE: February 3, 2011

TO: Brian Kelly, Editor, *U.S. News and World Report*

CC: Robert Morse, *U.S. News and World Report*  
Kate Walsh, President, National Council on Teacher Quality

FROM: Education Deans, Presidents, Directors from AAU Universities

RE: NCTQ Standards: Identifying the Methodology

We are writing on behalf of a group chief academic officers from education schools in the Association of American Universities (AAU), listed at the end of this memorandum. On January 25, 2011, deans of schools of education across the United States received a request to fill out two surveys (one for deans and one for central administration) and, by February 4, 2011, to complete an on-line survey. The letter notes that the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) will partner with *U.S. News* on assessing the quality of institutions of higher education.

We applaud NCTQ's goal "to ensure that every child has an effective teacher," and *U.S. News'* goal "to distinguish the quality of programs... and provide the field with the feedback it needs to improve." We agree with Secretary Duncan that the quality of teacher education programs in the United States is uneven and improvements are needed. We ask for an appointment to meet with you and any colleagues of your choice at *U.S. News* to discuss how best to achieve those goals.

We would also like to discuss with you the methodology that *U.S. News* will employ in evaluating university and college based teacher education programs. We are looking for reliable and valid measures of teacher education programs so that we can assess how well we are doing, and where we need to improve our programs. NCTQ states the "method" for its evaluation by listing ten standards that in some cases are based on research. However, there is no information (e.g., kinds of data collected, scoring methods, rater characteristics) that we could locate regarding how NCTQ determines if schools meet their standards. Experiences some of us have had with NCTQ's evaluation process, and reports on programs at their website, <http://www.nctq.org/p/publications/reports.jsp>, raise concerns about the reliability and accuracy of the data collected by NCTQ and the

validity of inferences they draw from the data. (See for example a critique of NCTQ methods available from *Eduventures at* <http://www.eduventures.com/services/learning-collaboratives/schools-of-education/illinois-teacher-preparation-programs>).

Furthermore, according to the FAQ document available on the NCTQ website, “NCTQ and *U.S. News and World Report* will publish ratings of how well the vast majority of teacher preparation programs meet the standards of the review, regardless of these programs’ degree of cooperation. For all programs, some of the information needed for the review is publicly available, and will be used as the basis of NCTQ’s judgment. If an institution that chooses not to cooperate is a public university, NCTQ plans to make open records requests to gather the documentation the review requires. And in cases where we cannot get documents needed to make ratings, NCTQ will declare that the institution *failed* to meet the standards in question.” This seems to be contrary to *U.S. News* practices with every other professional evaluation that it has conducted. We are concerned that such a practice is also inconsistent with professional journalistic practices. We worry that this implied coercion will cast doubt on the results of the entire evaluation, and ask for your clarification of the practice *U.S. News* will follow if institutions choose to opt out of the rankings.

We also want to discuss with you a growing consensus on what teacher preparation programs ought to include. Two reports published in recent months describe the clinical preparation of teachers and school-university partnerships for improved student learning (<http://www.ncate.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=zzeiB1OoqPk%3d&tabid=715>) and what is known from cognitive and developmental sciences about what an effective teacher needs to know and be able to do (<http://www.ncate.org/Public/Publications/TheRoadLessTraveled/tabid/707/Default.aspx>) These and other advances in education science indicate that there is an emerging consensus about what constitutes an effective teacher education program, and how to evaluate students who graduate from these programs.

Perhaps the most comprehensive attempt to establish standards for teacher education has been the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (InTASC, <http://www.ccsso.org>), developed by the Council of Chief State Schools Officers and the National Governors Association. Their work, originally published in 1992 and updated in 2010, sought and received help from nineteen education organizations such as the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE), Teach for America (TFA), and the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE), among other professional education organizations.

The stated purpose of the publication of InTASC standards is “to serve as a resource for states, districts, professional organizations, teacher education programs, and others as they develop policies and programs to prepare, license, support, evaluate, and reward today’s teachers.” The document was developed to be compatible with the Common Core State Standards for students in mathematics and English language arts, the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) accomplished teaching core principles, the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) accreditation standards, the National Staff Development Council (NSDC) professional

development standards, and the Interstate School Leader Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) 2008 educational leadership policy standards. It represents as close to consensus about standards for teacher education programs that the field has ever had.

The InTASC standards are based on evidence from cognitive science, studies of the impact of different teaching approaches, research on high quality intellectual tasks and student learning, studies of supports students need for learning, evidence for the impact of assessment on learning, and evidence about how to enhance learning among diverse learners.

For each standard, InTASC specifies the necessary “performances” or what a teacher must be able to demonstrate; “essential knowledge” or what knowledge a teacher must be able to demonstrate; and “dispositions” or what attitudes, expectations, habits of mind a teacher ought to have acquired. The authors of the InTASC standards made their methodology for developing the standards transparent, called for public comment, and revised their standards as a result of feedback.

In contrast, the methodology for conducting a NCTQ review is not transparent. A review of documents from NCTQ reveals that judgments made about education schools and critical comments made by NCTQ lack supporting evidence or information on the methodology used to arrive at the ratings (A-F).

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the NCTQ evaluation did not assess what teachers know and can do, or whether what they do impacts student learning. Rather, judgments appear to be based on what content is included in syllabi gathered. It is not clear how the syllabi were reviewed, coded, or rated. Furthermore, there is little evidence given that the content NCTQ sought on syllabi affects teacher effectiveness.

We offer to work with *U.S. News* and Secretary Duncan to develop a methodologically rich outcome-focused study of all teacher preparation programs. Performance assessments that have been developed over the last decade (See Tom Kane’s MET project funded by the Gates Foundation, <http://www.metproject.org/>) and new statistical methods like Value Added Modeling (See Rand Corporation analysis, [http://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_briefs/RB9050/index1.html](http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/RB9050/index1.html)) can lead to robust program assessment. Race to the Top states are implementing multiple measures of effective teaching, and other states and teacher education programs are voluntarily doing the same. All of these efforts indicate that robust, valid, and useful assessments of the outcomes, in terms of what aspiring teachers know and can do, and the impact these candidates have on student achievement, is possible.

Again, our concern is not with the standards NCTQ lists (they can be subsumed under the InTASC and many other efforts to define teacher professional standards), but with the method for evaluating how schools meet the standards. We respectfully suggest that *U.S. News* can achieve its goal “to distinguish the quality of programs...and provide the field with the feedback it needs to improve” in a way that better represents the evidence for effective teacher education, as the many efforts noted above demonstrate. We would like

to work with you to achieve that goal and respectfully request a meeting. We would be pleased if President Walsh from NCTQ also would join us. Please contact Mary Brabeck at [mmb7@nyu.edu](mailto:mmb7@nyu.edu) or 212 998 5330. She will arrange a meeting with you and a small group of other deans. Thank you for your consideration.

This letter is respectfully submitted by the following Education Deans, Presidents, and Directors from AAU Universities:

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