

## WHY ISN'T UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN BOYCOTTING THE NCTQ-U.S. NEWS & WORLD REPORT JOINT SURVEY OF TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMS?

Recently the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) (<http://www.nctq.org/p/>), an independent organization devoted to ensuring that children have quality teachers, announced that it will conduct a survey of higher education-based teacher education programs and that the ratings produced by this survey will be published in U.S. News & World Report (USNWR) (see <http://www.nctq.org/p/edschools/>). Although NCTQ says that it will produce ratings of schools of education, the survey will actually focus on teacher education programs. This has generated widespread concern and criticism among education deans and many faculty. Despite that, we are not boycotting the survey and we declined to sign on to a letter from the education schools at the AAU institutions.

The concerns expressed are several:

1. The methods that NCTQ has used in previous surveys of teacher education programs (they review syllabi and examine programmatic requirements only);
2. The perception that NCTQ is biased against colleges of education and against teacher education;
3. The NCTQ ratings will not be based on what teacher candidates learn in their programs;
4. The survey does not meet standards of high-quality research;
5. Reports (which are varied) about prior NCTQ surveys of teacher education (preparation for teaching reading, mathematics; programs in Illinois, Texas);
6. The NCTQ does not rely on other professional consensus documents (such as InTASC or the recent NCATE report on clinical training) for the standards it is using.

How do I think about these concerns?

This survey is not research, and discussions of its "methods" do not seem appropriate to me. Even if they say it is research, it is a survey. Many recent reports have similar problems. But as the recent report showed, research in teacher education is in need of substantial improvement. The National Council of Teacher Quality survey will produce ratings based on a set of criteria they have developed and that has been vetted by a diverse technical advisory group (<http://www.nctq.org/edschoolreports/about/advisoryPanel.jsp>). The project staff will examine program documents to learn the extent to which our programs offer opportunities to learn that match the standards they have set.

This is not a study of the effects of teacher education on teachers' actual learning, their practice, or their student' learning. But it doesn't claim to be. Do we need such studies? Absolutely, but this kind of research requires strong research designs, tools for measuring both opportunity to learn, effectiveness with students in a real environments and with specific subject matter and curriculum. That is not what the NCTQ study is, nor what it pretends to be. The annual U.S. News and World Report rankings are also not the product of research on graduate schools of education and their impact.

Critical of the "methods" (not methodology) of the project? Looking at syllabi and requirements is certainly a method to learn what we offer and require. Asking whether programs offer content related to specific skills and aspects of teaching is reasonable. Asking how much is offered of what content, and how much students are engaged with practice in schools, is also reasonable.

Question the credibility of NCTQ? No one is credible in the current environment as the war ramps up. Colleges of education are certainly not seen as unbiased.

The results will be published in a popular American magazine, not a professional or scholarly journal. Expecting standards of research makes little sense. The media takes up issues that the public cares about. It is good news that the public seems to care more about education and teachers than it has. If we want the standards and information to be better, it is our responsibility, and to do that, we have work to do.

Americans seem to be better at starting and fighting wars over our children's education than in building it. As a classroom teacher, teacher educator, and researcher, I lived through the reading wars and then, the math wars. Sides were formed, and positions articulated that were so extreme as to have little to say to practice. Now we are embroiled in a new education war, this one focused on teacher education and teacher quality. The good news is that we agree on something very important this time: Teaching matters. It matters in the poorest of communities and for the middle class. It matters for students of color and for white students. Skillful teaching can make the difference for students between being at the top of the class or the bottom, overriding differences in family income or skin color. The recognition of the importance of teaching is good news. After decades of policy which seemed to assume that teachers and professional education were little more than a parenthesis in the effort to make schools better, teachers and teacher education are the headline.

The disappointing news is that we are not using this agreement to figure out ways to get lots of skillful teaching in classrooms. Instead we are battling over who should train teachers and where and for how long. Defending the right of colleges of education to train teachers is an argument that began at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and was never resolved. It is also a losing argument. Colleges of education have held the bulk of the enterprise for over 75 years and there is no evidence that teachers prepared in higher education-based programs are more skillful or more effective.

*Much more important is that there is little evidence base to support any current approach to preservice teacher education. What needs defense is the need for professional training at all. Not who provides it. Not where it takes place or for how long.*

Many people out there doubt the need for professional training. Although they are persuaded that most other kinds of work—from plumbing to surgery—require specific training, they think that teaching children is something you can learn best on the job. They believe it is much more a matter of selecting the right people and of ousting those who do not figure it out from experience. I'd be willing to believe this if classroom experience produced widespread skillful teaching in the U.S. or if the "right people" were reliably effective. And although I appreciate that better pay and working conditions are important, these things don't produce good teaching. They merely support it.

What we need is to radically improve the professional training of teachers, using what we know about the practice of teaching and its substantial demands, and clear thinking about what is reasonable for novice teachers to do, and how to build infrastructure to support beginning teachers' continued development. Then maybe we will be able to show that solid professional training gives an edge over being smart and trying hard. It is those efforts we need to study, and then to use what we learn to improve training.

Spending our time fighting about a survey of our syllabi and requirements is a distraction. Claiming over and over that we know what we are doing and that we should control training looks foolish to our critics and, in the face of weak or non-existent evidence, only discredits our claim to expertise.

At the University of Michigan, we have been redesigning our program, and are busy implementing and improving it. We are sure we have a lot to learn still, and hope that by studying our efforts, we will be able to keep developing and improving our approaches. We also assume that we will not do well on all

the NCTQ criteria; we understand that. In some cases, we simply don't yet do certain things as well as their standards specify. In other cases, we do not seek to do things in quite the way they identify.

Our efforts need to be centered on the broad national need to improve teachers' professional training. It is time for a new campaign, not a new war. The campaign's elements include common standards for students, and common professional systems to support high-quality teaching and schools. Doing this one classroom, school, district, one program, or even one state at a time is not a strategy for collective improvement. Instead of waving battle flags, let's turn to the tough job of building the tools and resources for success, and the realistic incentives and structures for their effective use. At the University of Michigan, we want to do our part, and are developing strategies for helping to organize more collective work. We hope that the broad energy that was spent protesting the NCTQ survey can be mobilized instead toward improving the professional training of teachers, the training of those who prepare them, the research that is done on teacher training, and the public understanding of both teaching practice and the training needed to do it responsibly.

Contact: Jenny DeMonte, Public Affairs/Media Relations, 734.615.4359 or [edemonte@umich.edu](mailto:edemonte@umich.edu)