

February 4, 2011

Brian Kelly, Editor, *U.S. News and World Report*  
1050 Thomas Jefferson Street NW  
Washington, DC 20007

Dear Mr. Kelly,

We are writing regarding the U.S. News & World Report and the National Council on Teacher Quality rating of teacher education programs. We start with the assumption that we all want to ensure that our nation's teachers get the best preparation possible. We also believe that transparency and accountability in providing information about preparation programs is essential to protect both prospective teachers who enroll in our programs and the public who depend on the teachers who complete preparation. Transparency and accountability are explicitly embraced by NCTQ (as evidenced by the FAQ section of the current study's website).

To meet these goals and to assure that the information provided by the new rating is truly meaningful, the process of developing them must be credible. The data collection process must itself be transparent and clear, the assessments must be reliable, and the presentation of findings must be honest and fair. Without these characteristics, the rating will be meaningless. Based on the communications we have received from USNWR and NCTQ thus far, on the studies NCTQ conducted in Texas and Illinois, and on publicly available information about the project, there are a number of potential issues with the rating as currently planned. We write to express our concerns about these issues, to engage in a process that would address these concerns and improve the rating, and also to make clear that we intend to be a public voice for complete transparency and accountability throughout the NCTQ/USNWR process.

The very goal of the new rating is to provide transparency and clarity about a complex issue. In order to do so, your data collection process must also be transparent and clear to the institutions that you are assessing. While rubrics are provided for each standard, the definitions of the criteria used in these rubrics are not. Further, there is no mechanism outlined that would allow for a valid assessment of these criteria. For example, the rationale for the first standard (Classroom Management) states that "Teacher candidates will be better able to establish a classroom environment that makes learning possible if they are taught and practice a coherent management approach that focuses on maximizing the potential for learning and the means to handle minimally disruptive behavior." We agree that learning classroom management is an important aspect of teacher preparation

and ongoing professional development. However, absent a clear statement about how NCTQ defines “coherent management approach,” there is no way of knowing how the data collected will be assessed for purposes of developing a comparative rating.

Elementary mathematics is another example where the NCTQ process needs clarification. The standard says that “the institution provides adequate preparation and practice in the specific mathematics content and methods needed by teachers.” Again, what is missing is a clear statement that the assessment of adequate preparation and practice in the specific mathematics content and methods needed by teachers will be grounded in accepted scholarship on mathematical knowledge for teaching.

Another hallmark of a credible process is reliability. Ratings – particularly those that are subjective in nature, as many of the standards in the new NCTQ/USNWR rating are – must be reliable and valid. Raters need to be appropriately qualified to assess the range of content specified in the standards: they must have the depth and breadth of subject matter and pedagogical knowledge to understand whether a given syllabus meets NCTQ’s standards. Whether rating sessions are open to observers or a system of third-party confirmation is in place, there must be a mechanism that ensures both the quality and the reliability of the assessments in order for them to add value in the marketplace and the policy arena.

Further, the eventual presentation of findings must be honest and fair. While one can quibble with prior rankings produced by US News, you have never to our knowledge engaged in the practice outlined in the process for the new rating, which states that “in cases where we cannot get documents needed to make ratings, NCTQ will declare that the institution failed to meet the standards in question.” Instead, frequent and prominent notifications about how missing data were treated should appear throughout the rating, as they would in any meaningful assessment. Equating missing data with instrumental failure is simply dishonest, and doing so would surely result in a devaluing of the overall rating.

Finally, the materials for the new rating refer often to outcomes: the language for each of the standards suggests a concern with what knowledge and abilities students leave their programs with (for example, that “teacher candidates gain a thorough overview of student assessments” – Standard 3, or that candidates are “consistently prepare[d]...in the essential components of effective reading instruction” – Standard 6). However, the methodology described does not in any way allow for such judgments about outcomes to be made. Instead, the rating will take into account only what programs intend to do. In the press release for the new rating, you say that, “We want to know what teachers are being taught.” We would suggest a far more important goal: we want to know what teachers have *learned*.

Unfortunately, as you acknowledge, the current design does not provide such insight, and we should all be clear about that.

Everyone, including USNWR, intends for this rating to be high stakes – as, indeed, such a review should be. We are fully in favor of any attempt to encourage improvement in teacher preparation. However, we will insist that any process we participate in exhibits sound practices: that it is transparent, reliable, and fair.

We would welcome the opportunity to talk further with you about how the NCTQ/USNWR ranking might be improved and how we, as heads of institutions that offer respected teacher education programs, might assist.

Sincerely,

Carole Ames  
Dean, College of Education  
Michigan State University

Deborah Loewenberg Ball  
Dean, School of Education and William H. Payne Collegiate Professor  
University of Michigan

Mary M. Brabeck  
Gale and Ira Drukier Dean, Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human  
Development  
New York University

Aimée Dorr  
Dean, Graduate School of Education and Information Studies  
University of California, Los Angeles

Michael J. Feuer  
Dean and Professor of Education, Graduate School of Education and Human Development  
The George Washington University

Susan H. Fuhrman  
President  
Teachers College, Columbia University

Thomas James  
Provost & Dean of the College  
Teachers College, Columbia University

Judith Warren Little  
Dean and Carol Liu Professor of Education Policy  
University of California, Berkeley

Kathleen McCartney  
Dean of the Faculty of Education and Gerald S. Lesser Professor  
Harvard University

Penelope Peterson  
Dean, School of Education, and Social Policy and Eleanor R. Baldwin Professor  
Northwestern University

Andrew Porter  
Dean, Graduate School of Education, and George and Diane Weiss Professor of Education  
University of Pennsylvania

Lorrie Shepard  
Dean, School of Education  
University of Colorado, Boulder

Deborah Stipek  
I. James Quillen Endowed Dean of the Stanford University School of Education  
Stanford University

Julie Underwood  
Dean, School of Education  
University of Wisconsin – Madison

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