



February 14, 2011

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

Kate Walsh, President  
National Council on Teacher Quality  
1420 New York Avenue, NW, Suite 800  
Washington, DC 20005

Dear Mr. Kelly and Ms. Walsh,

We write on behalf of the Council for Academic Deans from Research Education Institutions (CADREI) regarding the recently announced comprehensive review of education schools you are jointly undertaking. Our organization is made up of more than 120 deans of education from research and land grant institutions throughout North America. Its purpose is the preparation of education personnel in all its phases and the discussion and formulation of plans, policies, and programs to make the member institutions of the Council more effective in their work. CADREI is a non-profit, apolitical organization dedicated to providing the most comprehensive research regarding education.

We applaud the effort to provide “America's students with the best possible information on the quality of institutions of higher education.” We are aware of your response to the letter from the AAU Deans, and we appreciated your hosting the webinar on February 9th to provide additional information about your approach. Because we continue to have concerns, we ask that you consider them prior to implementing the study to create a more meaningful project.

First, we appreciate your willingness to back away from labeling as “failing” those institutions who choose not to participate. However, institutions who choose not to participate should not be reviewed. Providing estimated ratings based on incomplete information is a disservice to the very audience of consumers you hope to help. We suggest simply indicating that an institution has voluntarily chosen not to participate. That is standard practice in comparative studies (see, for example, how NAEP presents states that did not participate).

Second, we have concerns regarding your standards, the methods used to make rating determinations, and the manner in which results will be reported. We applaud NCTQ’s agreement with our member institutions’ goal to increase the number of effective teachers, and we share your commitment to assessment and accountability as we already collect and report data for state mandated reviews, professional accreditation, and institutional evaluations of our programs. We adhere to well designed standards established by InTASC, the states that govern licensure, and the professional accrediting agencies (including specialized professional associations which have evolved discipline-specific standards). All of these standards have been established and vetted in ways that are common to all professions. While in your response to the AAU Deans you indicate a lack of comfort with existing

standards, it remains that you have absolutely no research evidence to indicate that meeting the NCTQ standards will result in improved teacher preparation—the espoused goal of the project.

There are other questions about NCTQ’s proposed methods which raise skepticism regarding this project. We know that you have heard the concerns about over reliance on input variables. Data gleaned from documents such as syllabi, handbooks, and catalogs may lead to extremely poor and misleading inferences, especially without clear guidelines about how analyses are being conducted and interpretations made. Consumers – the readers of the USNWR ratings—want to make informed decisions based on more than simply a critique of documents. They want information on impact, experiences of past students and graduates, quality of instructors and instruction, mentoring, job placement, etc. We fear that NCTQ’s approach does not capture such data, and in its reviews makes overly negative determinations that a fuller examination might challenge. In your AAU response and during the webinar, you proposed the idea of an open forum on the NCTQ website to discuss rating disputes, but since the ratings will be published in another venue, such an approach to transparency is not particularly useful for consumers. As you indicated in the webinar, NCTQ hopes to utilize more output variables when available. For now, at a minimum, we suggest establishing rubrics for your standards and indicators, so that institutions and the public may fully understand how determinations are being made, along with providing clear statements for consumers that this project relies predominantly on inputs in making its determinations about quality.

Finally, although NCTQ will rank only the outliers in their report, you will rate every institution in each state using some scale, and as discussed above, employ analytic methodologies that have not fully been made public. How are these determinations to be made? How will these ratings actually help prospective students make sound decisions about the institution to attend? Many states require performance assessments of all candidates prior to being recommended for licensure. How will such significant information be scaled so it is relevant across all states?

CADREI institutions will decide independently about participation in this project. But CADREI members stand ready to assist USNWR and NCTQ with developing a plan and set of methods that will truly serve the interests of prospective students. We know you agree that the best service to potential teachers is providing information that accurately depicts what they can expect in a teacher preparation program. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

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