



To: Brian Kelly, USNWR

From: Tennessee Association of Colleges for Teacher Education Deans

Re: U.S. News and World Report and National Council on Teacher Quality Survey

Date: February 8, 2011

The Tennessee Association of Colleges for Teacher Education is comprised of 41 institutions of higher education that prepare teachers to work in classrooms in Tennessee and beyond. We work together with the Tennessee Department of Education, the Tennessee State Board of Education, and the Tennessee Higher Education Commission to establish and maintain quality teacher preparation programs. Our programs are built around the Interstate Teacher Assessment Support Consortium (InTASC) standards, which provide well-researched benchmark standards for the field. Drawing on the best research and insights from practice, we continually strive to improve our programs, and so too the quality of the teachers we prepare for our nation's classrooms. As a recent example, in the past year, many Tennessee institutions of higher education have increased their emphasis on clinical experience coupled with problem-based approaches to instruction.

We welcome opportunities to participate in a rigorous study of Tennessee teacher preparation programs that could result in a healthy competition and improvement for all. We are particularly interested in the development of measures that provide rich data on candidates' abilities to support students in reaching high standards of achievement, such as those represented in the Common Core Standards. Over the past year and one-half, selected Tennessee institutions of higher education have been engaged in developing and piloting a Teacher Performance Assessment system modeled after the Performance Assessment for California Teachers (PACT). These efforts are coordinated by the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education (AACTE), the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), and Stanford University.

Unfortunately the current effort sponsored by U.S. News and World Report and the National Council for Teaching Quality (NCTQ) to study teacher education programs across the nation is not likely to produce meaningful results and possibly could do great harm as it is conceived. Most of our Tennessee colleges and universities are rated by US News and World Report or the Princeton Review and we proudly display such rankings on our home pages for parents and prospective students to see. We are deeply enmeshed in numerous forms of external review of our teacher education programs. For example, in Tennessee we also have an annual Teacher Education Program Effectiveness Report as mandated by our legislature. The Tennessee Department of Education and the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education

Great Teachers, Great Schools



(NCATE) also review our institutions' programs. We all must publish our Praxis II pass rates for every licensure candidate in our programs; data on these pass rates are available for public review as required by the U.S. Department of Education. We cooperate fully and willingly with all such efforts – indeed, we welcome them.

We are not alone in our assessment that the current study is problematic and that past performance has provided ample evidence of the inability of NCTQ to deliver results that will prove useful to the students and parents hoping to find a high quality teacher education program based on NCTQ rankings. Sharon P. Robinson, president of the AACTE has articulated the concern held by many that, "NCTQ has produced several reports over the years focused on measuring program inputs through public document reviews rather than measuring the actual outputs of programs through sound research methods." AACTE's critique of NCTQ's input-driven methods is echoed in a 2010 Eduventures report: "The main problem with such an analysis [is] formulating conclusions about the quality of the end product of a teacher preparation program—prepared teachers—solely by analyzing the quality of the course materials."

The Eduventures report also cites critical inputs that NCTQ omits from in its studies, inputs that have been proven to have a profound effect on teacher quality. These include, but are not limited to, quality of faculty instruction, student support structures (e.g., supervision and mentoring), duration and quality of field experiences, and teacher induction programming.

With regard to NCTQ's questionable standards, Eduventures notes, "Rather than providing evidence, the rationale NCTQ provides for many standards appears to be opinion-based, and, in some cases, the rationale includes broad generalizations that many experts would recognize as untrue." Eduventures' analysts conclude that the flawed methodology ultimately limits the validity and reliability of NCTQ's conclusions.

Studies of the sort proposed by NCTQ should be conducted in accordance with the same high standards to which we, and other accrediting bodies, hold ourselves. Threats of failure to those who choose not to participate are unethical and contrary to standards long employed by US News and World Report. *Transparency in methodology* is another critical standard. What forms of data will researchers seek to access? Will analysis be qualitative? If so, what are the credentials of those determining the extent to which syllabi for a particular course can be considered indicators of quality? If the approach is quantitative, what is the statistical model to be used?

Tennessee teacher educators observed with dismay the studies in Illinois and Texas in which the determination of teacher education program effectiveness was based solely on course syllabi. Accreditation studies in almost all fields conventionally include information from employers and alumni as an indicator of the quality of program graduates. Based on the limited

Great Teachers, Great Schools



information available, such will not be included in this study. Most of us have accreditation websites that are replete with data collected on our candidates at various stages in the program from admission to teacher education to candidate performance in coursework and fieldwork. We interview our graduates and survey the employers of our graduates. We constantly revise and improve our programs based on the feedback data that we receive. Will these data be used?

We are eager to have the opportunity participate in a thorough study of teacher education that reflects what is known about effective teaching and effective teacher preparation. We are eager to expose our work to the scrutiny of critics and friends alike who offer an unbiased, transparent methodology that will produce reliable, valid and meaningful results, not merely dramatic headlines.

Thank you in advance for considering our concerns. We hope to hear back from you at your earliest convenience.

Great Teachers, Great Schools



TACTE Member Institutions

Aquinas College
Austin Peay State University
Belmont University
Bethel University
Bryan College
Carson-Newman College
Christian Brothers University
Cumberland University
East Tennessee State University
Free Will Baptist Bible College
Freed Hardeman College
Johnson Bible College
King College
Lambuth University
Lee University
Lincoln Memorial University
Lipscomb University
Martin Methodist College
Maryville College
Middle Tennessee State University
Milligan College
Motlow State Community College
Peabody College of Vanderbilt
Rhodes College
South College
Southern Adventist University
Tennessee State University
Tennessee Tech University
Tennessee Wesleyan College
Trevecca Nazarene University
Union University
University of Memphis
University of the South, Sewanee
University of Tennessee, Chattanooga

Great Teachers, Great Schools



University of Tennessee, Knoxville
University of Tennessee, Martin

Great Teachers, Great Schools