

Oregon Association of Colleges for Teacher Education
A position paper in response to the National Council on Teacher Quality

Introduction

We begin this document by stating a proposition on which we believe there is virtually complete consensus in the education profession as well as the general public: the quality of our teachers matters. As institutions engaged in the preparation of teachers, we understand the enormous responsibility we have in educating our candidates to enter the field with nothing less than the ability to change lives - to inspire, to cultivate new knowledge and skills, to prepare our youth to meet the mighty challenges that we face today on a global scale.

So the question of how we ensure that teacher preparation programs fulfill their responsibility to educate teachers who are effective in the classroom is a crucial one. Supportive induction programs, meaningful professional development opportunities, and a wide range of structures and practices that promote effective instruction in schools are obviously essential as well, but here we focus on preservice teacher preparation.

The occasion for this position paper is the emergence of a national effort to evaluate and rank the quality of teacher preparation programs by an organization called the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) in consort with the US News and World Report. As members of the Oregon Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, we are deeply concerned that this effort has produced a coercive climate for participation, utilizes a methodology that is inadequate for its purpose, and has the potential to produce results that will be highly misleading to the public. We offer this position paper to engage with these issues openly and in a way that we hope will move the conversation forward. We begin with a brief overview of the current systems in place to ensure that teacher preparation programs in Oregon meet rigorous standards in their preparation of candidates; we then describe a number of deeply troubling concerns regarding the approach taken to this issue by NCTQ.

Teacher preparation programs in Oregon have a well-established tradition of meeting rigorous standards for their approval.

Currently, nineteen public and private institutions are approved by the Oregon Teacher Standards and Practices Commission (TPSC) to offer programs that lead to the Oregon Initial Teaching License. Although the requirements for earning a teacher's license in Oregon have changed over the years, the standards for becoming a teacher have always been set at a rigorous level. TSPC bases its program standards on emerging research and the work of national accreditation and standards bodies (e.g. the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education and the Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium). TSPC now oversees a program approval process that requires teacher education programs to meet a comprehensive set of standards that range from the knowledge and skills that candidates must demonstrate to the institutional structures and processes that must be in place to collect, analyze, and share data on P-12 student performance. A major component of these licensure standards focuses on performance and outcomes-based measures, requiring evidence that shows what P-12 students can do in actual classrooms. TSPC further requires candidates in teacher preparation programs to show evidence of successfully completing the

following components: basic skills, content knowledge, and civil rights exams; two “teacher work samples” verifying the ability to plan instruction customized to meet the unique learning needs of all students in the classroom and to assess students’ learning gains; and the validation through professional judgment by P-12 mentors and university supervisors that the candidates have met the Oregon standards for earning a license.

All Oregon teacher preparation institutions are also members of the Oregon Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (OACTE), a state affiliate of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE). Over the years, OACTE members have worked collaboratively with various state licensing and education governing bodies to carry out the following objectives:

- To exchange ideas for the purpose of improving the preparation of teachers and the performance of professional educators in the field.
- To collaborate with P-12 professionals in improving preservice and inservice programs for teachers.
- To stimulate experimentation and research in the broad field of teacher education.
- To collaborate with the Oregon Department of Education (ODE), the legislature, and TSPC, by proposing recommendations, regulations, and legislation.
- To exchange reports, experiences, and scholarship with professional educators as a means of strengthening programs in teacher education and to further national and international understanding.
- To uphold quality teacher education standards in institutions engaged in the preparation of school personnel.

During the past twenty years, Oregon teacher education institutions have consistently collaborated in research studies to examine their professional practice and improve their programs. These research studies include efforts to improve teacher work sample assessment methodology, to conduct follow up studies on beginning teachers, to examine the complex reasons why so many early career teachers leave the profession, to develop a portfolio process for the continuing teaching license, and to examine research on teaching content, like math and science content. Further, institutions regularly sponsor workshops and forums for the purpose of improving teaching. This collaborative work deepens the partnerships between P-20 professionals and our commitment to the principle that well prepared teachers are the most important ingredient in helping P-12 students emerge as civically engaged citizens.

National accrediting organizations require participating Oregon teacher preparation programs to meet rigorous, research-based standards

Over the last twenty years, we have seen a growing consensus on teacher standards. The creation of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, the research undergirding their efforts, and their remarkable success in assessing teachers using multiple forms of data, has had a profound impact on our ability to clearly articulate the elements of effective instruction. The work of the Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (InTASC) brought greater coherence and unity to teacher standards throughout the nation.

Consistent with this work on standards related to teacher licensure, national accreditation efforts have also grown in complexity and increased their focus on performance and outcomes-based assessment. The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education’s (NCATE)

performance-based standards and its emphasis on data-driven decision making are profoundly changing professional educator preparation, even among those institutions that have chosen not to be nationally accredited. NCATE's partnerships with specialized professional associations and its partnerships with nearly every state strengthen professional unity and the integrity of teacher preparation programs.

NCATE's standards and processes are approved by the U.S. Department of Education and by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation. NCATE has been widely praised for leading efforts to increase the use of performance standards and many states, including Oregon, have used their work as a framework for their own program approval processes. The Oregon Teacher Standards and Practices Commission is currently reviewing a proposal that would move even closer to NCATE and InTASC standards as a basis for teacher preparation and licensure. A final decision on this plan is expected in August. The effort builds on the current agreement between TSPC and NCATE to conduct joint accreditation visits in those cases where an institution wishes to pursue state and national accreditation.

The proposed evaluation and ranking of teacher preparation programs in Oregon by the National Council on Teacher Quality is coercive, utilizes a methodology that is inadequate for its stated purpose, and will mislead the public.

A coercive climate for participation

As we make clear above, being carefully evaluated in relation to rigorous standards for professional practice is nothing new for teacher preparation programs in Oregon. Nor are the high stakes related to these evaluations: programs require state approval to operate, and national accreditation may be withdrawn if institutions fail to meet the current standards in the field.

NCTQ is not an accrediting organization and has no official status in the professional field. It is a self-appointed group with very specific ideas about how state policy should govern teacher preparation programs. As individual institutions, and as a professional organization, we are actively engaged in the dialogue and debate around these issues with those who agree and those who disagree with what any one of us may think. Such exchanges, undertaken openly and in the spirit of constructive dialogue, are the basis for program improvement and the advancement of the profession. NCTQ has not entered the debate on these terms, however. The organization has created a grading and ranking system the results of which will be promoted publicly as a fair, informed, and accurate evaluation of teacher preparation institutions – *whether institutions agree to provide the data necessary to make these judgments or not*. Indeed, NCTQ has promised to fail institutions who do not cooperate: “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” (http://www.nctq.org/edschoolreports/national/faq.jsp#1_2, emphasis in original). This form of coercion is made effective by the collective apprehension of institutions that this element of NCTQ's process is unlikely to be communicated in an effective way to the public when the rankings are published. This is not authentic accountability; this is a form of external pressure applied by a self-appointed interest group to motivate policy changes that they support. Whether one agrees or disagrees with NCTQ's agenda, to pursue it in this way is unethical and unacceptable to us as professionals in the field.

Inadequate methodology

There has been considerable discussion among professional education organizations nationally regarding the inadequacy of the evaluation methodology used by NCTQ. Again we note the role of Oregon's Teacher Standards and Practices Commission, along with the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, in current evaluations of Oregon's teacher preparation institutions. These accrediting bodies require detailed qualitative and quantitative data on the performance of candidates in our programs and the presentation of systematic evidence regarding our assessment of their competence.

In contrast to this complex and data-informed process, which requires significant collaboration with accrediting organizations around the evaluation of evidence provided to substantiate program claims, NCTQ has indicated that their evaluations will be based primarily on descriptive material related to required courses and the answers to yes/no questions about the presence or absence of specific policies or documents. The review process includes course descriptions from catalogs, program handbooks, syllabi, and answers to questions such as, "Does your school have a contract that is used with the supervisors of student teachers?" (USNWR/NCTQ National Education School Review Survey).

In 2010, a report written by the consulting firm, Eduventures, analyzing NCTQ's work in Illinois, points out a variety of significant methodological problems with the evaluation done in that state. The authors of the report offer four conclusions that effectively represent our own concerns about the organization's planned work in Oregon and across the nation: (1) "NCTQ has evaluated inputs in order to draw conclusions regarding the quality of teacher preparation program outputs;" (2) "The list of inputs NCTQ used to evaluate teacher preparation programs was incomplete;" (3) "The majority of NCTQ's standards are not evidence-based, and appear to reflect the specific viewpoint of NCTQ;" and (4) "It is unclear how well the evidence that NCTQ uses to measure a program's adherence with each standard actually measures each standard"

(www.eduventures.com/.../Eduventures_NCTQ-Illinois_Methodology_Critique_9.30.10.pdf).

These fundamental problems in the design and conduct of NCTQ's study of teacher preparation programs, render these programs highly problematic. As noted below, we are especially concerned that this process results in each institution's performance being reduced to a single overall assessment that will then be used to rank it relation to others.

Finally, we note with regret the lack of input in this process, as well as the opportunity to clarify standards and the rubrics used to assess individual items, as well as how these items are aggregated to determine final evaluations and rankings. With the amount of energy being poured into these questions at all of our institutions, and for the amount of national attention being given to performance and outcome measures of all kinds, we find NCTQ's approach inadequate for its intended purpose and unnecessarily arbitrary in its isolation from the institutions it seeks to evaluate.

Misleading the public

Based on the concerns expressed above – that institutions will be evaluated and ranked regardless of whether data is available to justify this judgment, and that the methodology for the evaluation is inadequate to draw the conclusions sought – we find great potential for harm in the project that NCTQ has undertaken. Rather than providing a basis for improving teacher preparation, it will publish information on teacher education programs that in our view is inaccurate and misleading to

the public. We are puzzled in this regard by NCTQ's pre-emptive response to the critique that its use of "input" data dramatically limits the information available for evaluation and thus the organization's ability to evaluate the efficacy of entire programs, including the outcomes that might be expected of graduates: "NCTQ is absolutely clear about the parameters of the analysis. We are *only* assessing the fundamentals of a program, those features of a program that are necessary – but not sufficient – to produce well prepared teachers" (<http://www.nctq.org/edschoolreports/national/faq.jsp>, emphasis in original). Yet, programs will be given what amounts to a "final grade" as to their ability to prepare high quality teachers and they will then be ranked in relation to other programs in the state on the basis of this data.

Conclusion

We wish to conclude where we began, with a clear statement of our commitment to preparing teachers who will transform the lives of their future students. We find support for our efforts in the rigorous standards of state and national accrediting bodies that evaluate our work and we remain committed to the ongoing improvement of our programs. We firmly wish that we could see NCTQ as a partner in this effort, but based on our experience thus far and what we know of the organization's work in states like Illinois and Texas, we see good reason to believe that this process will do harm to teacher preparation programs, and thus to the candidates who attend them.