

Review & Critique of the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ)
Methodology to Rate Schools of Education

Eduventures is the industry leader in research and consulting for higher education institutions. Through our membership research programs, including the Schools of Education Learning Collaborative, Eduventures facilitates the exchange of best practices among members and conducts actionable research and analysis on shared challenges. Through our research programs and consulting services, Eduventures analysts gather unequaled insight into the higher education landscape through our work with 300+ colleges and universities. Eduventures is considered an authority on higher education trends and best practices; our research and expert analysts are cited regularly in such publications as The Wall Street Journal, BusinessWeek, The New York Times, The Chronicle of Higher Education, and Inside Higher Ed. Founded in 1993 by Michael R. Sandler, Eduventures is privately held and headquartered in Boston, Massachusetts.

Goals and Rationale for this Critique
Presently, NCTQ is completing a national study in partnership with US News & World Report with the goal of ranking the quality of over 1,000 teacher preparation programs nationally against a set of standards developed by NCTQ. The goal of this study is to review the quality of teacher preparation programs across the U.S., based on NCTQ’s standards for teacher education.

Schools of education welcome program review and frequently participate in rigorous reviews to ensure they are preparing high-quality educators, and that they are aligned with state and national standards for teacher preparation. Schools of education seek to continually build strong, effective programs that meet the needs of the school districts that they serve; program review is an important process to ensure that schools of education continually revisit, revise, and update programs to meet this important goal. Schools of education continually undergo a review process at the state level and in most cases, at the national level through such highly recognized organizations as the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) or the Teacher Education Accreditation Council (TEAC). Schools of education use the findings from program reviews to revise programs to ensure that they are training and producing high quality educators. Thus, it is integral that the methodology for program reviews be rigorous, research-based, and proven to produce usable and dependable results. The methodology of program reviews should be sound in order to ensure that any reform that occurs as a result of recommendations ultimately benefits educators and P-12 students, rather than creating programs that may be relatively weaker. The goal of this critique is to provide insight to the public and press regarding the inherent weaknesses of the methodology that NCTQ typically employs to rank teacher education programs.

---

1 Descriptions of NCTQ’s standards can be found in the Appendix
2 Based on NCTQ’s recent reviews of Illinois and Texas teacher preparation programs
Methodology Overview

The goal of the NCTQ/US News study is to determine the quality of the teacher training programs located across the country. In order to accomplish this in the past, NCTQ has asked schools of education to submit syllabi from the teacher training courses that students at their respective institutions must complete in order to receive a degree. The syllabi, along with all required course materials, were then compared against a set of common standards developed by NCTQ in order to make determinations with regards to the level of quality of each of these teacher preparation programs.

The study was conducted in several phases. First, SOEs were asked to submit syllabi to NCTQ. NCTQ then produced a preliminary report of their findings that was mailed to each individual SOE. Each participating SOE addressed the findings in part I of the report and then mailed NCTQ its response. NCTQ then mailed part II of the preliminary report to each individual SOE. The SOE addressed the findings in part II and then mailed NCTQ its response. Finally, based on all of the data gathered during parts I and II of the process; including the additional information provided by SOEs in their responses; NCTQ produced a rating of each individual SOE.

Methodology Critique

While SOEs are able to respond to NCTQ’s findings, NCTQ’s program review methodology may still not accurately reflect the quality of educators produced by each teacher education program. There are several major weaknesses with the methodology that NCTQ has employed in its past studies of teacher preparation programs. They are listed and explained below:

NCTQ’s teacher preparation program ratings are based on an evaluation of institutional inputs; addressing inputs alone without taking into considerations outputs such as the resulting quality of prepared educators, or the impact of teacher education graduates on P-12 student achievement, does not provide a holistic picture of program quality. Based on criticisms of its Texas teacher preparation study, NCTQ preemptively addresses this concern on its website by stating that there is a lack of output data making such a study of SOE outputs currently impossible. Additionally NCTQ contends that an analysis of inputs provides information about “what’s on the menu” at teacher preparation programs. While both of these statements are true, they do not address the main problem with such an analysis; 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. A comprehensive program review would include both inputs and outputs of a teacher education program.

The list of inputs NCTQ used to evaluate teacher preparation programs is incomplete.

While the use of inputs in order to make statements concerning outputs is problematic, the omission of other important inputs further weakens the study. The NCTQ study does not consider other inputs such as the quality of instruction, student support services, professional development provided, teacher induction programming, and many other factors that could potentially be related to the quality of teacher preparation programs. These factors are integral in determining the overall quality of teachers produced by any preparation program and are linked by research to training more effective teachers for schools.
The majority of NCTQ’s standards are not evidence-based, and appear to reflect the specific viewpoint of NCTQ.

The majority of NCTQ’s standards are not supported by evidence and appear to be broadly subjective. In its Guide to Ratings Methodologies, NCTQ frequently couches its rationale with nuances such as “While there is no research basis for this…,” or “While there is no research evidence…” 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. On its website, NCTQ contends that “Unfortunately, there is not a large body of research in education that connects to teacher effectiveness. The lack of standards and research supporting almost everything that comprises teacher education were made all too clear in the exhaustive review conducted in 2004 by the American Educational Research Association.” In actuality, there is a large body of empirically strong studies and research syntheses that have emerged in the past 7 years, including a notable, exhaustive research synthesis completed by Dr. Laura Goe in October of 2007 titled The Link Between Teacher Quality and Student Outcomes: A Research Synthesis (National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality). This more recent report demonstrates that much recent research has emerged that links teacher preparation program components to better teachers and increased student achievement. Furthermore, this study highlights several empirically strong studies that actually refute the importance of some of NCTQ’s standards, such as the emphasis placed on selectivity.

NCATE’s standards, in contrast, are clearly substantiated by recent empirically strong research and are proven to link to the preparation of stronger educators. When NCTQ’s standards are compared with the standards developed by NCATE, the issue of evidence becomes very clear. NCATE notes in their Professional Standards for the Accreditation of Teacher Preparation Institutions that “NCATE revises its unit accreditation standards every seven years to ensure that the standards reflect current research and state-of-the-art practice in the teaching profession.” NCATE’s highly detailed descriptions of their...
standards and explanations of their ratings system can be viewed in their 98-page document: http://www.ncate.org/documents/standards/NCATE%20Standards%202008.pdf. NCTQ, in contrast, only cites evidence and research supporting a small portion of their standards.

No explanation or evidence is provided by NCTQ to address the steps taken to ensure that the data collected and used to compare a program to the NCTQ standards actually measures that standard. Thus, the validity of the study’s findings may be compromised. Additionally, there is no discussion or presentation of the steps taken by the evaluators to increase the validity and reliability of the results. For example, to rate the overall quality of a given teacher preparation program’s coursework, NCTQ only chose to review a small sample of course syllabi, descriptions, and in limited cases, textbooks. While these materials may capture some of what occurs in a classroom or course, they are a small proxy for an entire program’s coursework and the limitations of this methodology should be recognized. It is questionable whether these materials alone provide a valid, reliable measure for the quality of the broader program’s coursework. Furthermore, NCTQ does not reveal the qualifications of the individuals who actually conduct the analysis for its studies. NCATE, in contrast, employs program review committees that draw upon individuals with many years of experience and a deep knowledge of teacher education programs and the research-based principles that are important to apply to those programs.

Conclusion
While it is important that SOEs be held accountable for preparing high quality teachers, studies that NCTQ has conducted of teacher preparation programs is significantly flawed. Furthermore, there does not appear to be evidence that NCTQ has worked to correct these flaws prior to its launch of its national study in partnership with US News & World Report. The quality of outputs and employer ratings are not taken into consideration—an integral piece to consider when judging the quality of preparation program. The federal government and state and local policymakers increasingly emphasize outcomes and results in producing highly effective teachers that increase student achievement, turning away from inputs alone as indicators of teacher quality. The lack of clarity and transparency with regards to the common standards that NCTQ is using and the processes and procedures used to analyze the collected data make the methodology of NCTQ’s studies problematic. While its studies provide a high-level look across teacher education program models, their methodology flaws ultimately limit the validity of the study’s conclusions and make the findings somewhat unreliable. Eduventures analysts recommend that policymakers, the public, and the press should keep these limitations in mind when reviewing the results of NCTQ’s existing and future studies.

For more information regarding Eduventures, the Schools of Education Learning Collaborative, or to speak with the team of analysts that evaluated NCTQ’s methodology, please contact Mindy L. Anastasia, Senior Analyst, at manastasia@eduventures.com.
Appendix

Background on NCTQ

The National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) is a non-profit organization founded in 2005 and based in Washington, DC. NCTQ advocates for reforms on a broad range of teacher policies at the federal, state, and local levels. According to its website, the organization’s mission is “to provide an alternative national voice to existing teacher organizations, and build the case for a comprehensive reform agenda [to] challenge the current structure and regulation of the profession.” NCTQ aims to build the case for comprehensive reform within what it recognizes as the four sets of institutions that have the greatest impact on teacher quality: states, teacher preparation programs, school districts and teachers' unions.

Standards used by NCTQ in the forthcoming National Study

Grounded Clinical Practice

Standard 1: Classroom Management.
The program ensures that teacher candidates learn and practice specific techniques for managing the classroom. Standard applies to: Elementary and secondary programs.

Standard 2: Practice Planning Instruction.
The program requires teacher candidates to design and adjust instruction to enhance the academic performance of all students. Standard applies to: Elementary and secondary programs.

Standard 3: Measurement.
The program requires that teacher candidates gain a thorough overview of student assessment that includes practice analyzing student performance data to drive instruction. Standard applies to: Elementary and secondary programs.

Standard 4: All Children Can Learn.
The program ensures that teacher candidates experience high-performing schools that successfully serve students living in poverty. Standard applies to: Elementary, secondary and special education programs.

Standard 5: Student Teaching.
The program ensures that the student teaching experience includes the essential components for success: a full-time placement of sufficient length that is aligned with the school calendar, adequately supervised, and attendant to the qualifications of the cooperating teacher. Standard applies to: Elementary, secondary and special education programs.

Preparation of Elementary School Teachers

Standard 6: Early Reading.
The program consistently prepares candidates in the essential components of effective reading instruction. (Standard also applies to special education programs.)

Standard 7: Elementary Mathematics.
The institution provides adequate preparation and practice in the specific mathematics content and methods needed by teachers. (Standard also applies to special education programs.)

Standard 8: Elementary Content.
The institution prepares teacher candidates to teach the core curriculum as well as have expertise in a single subject. *(Standard also applies to special education programs.)*

**Standard 9: English Language Learners.**
The program prepares elementary teacher candidates to teach reading to English language learners.

**Standard 10: Struggling Readers.**
The program prepares elementary teacher candidates to teach reading skills to students at risk of reading failure.

**Preparation of Secondary School Teachers**

**Standard 11: Middle School Content.**
The program ensures that middle school teacher candidates know their subjects.

**Standard 12: High School Content.**
The program ensures that high school teacher candidates know their subject.

**Standard 13. Secondary Methods.**
The program requires that high school teacher candidates practice teaching the content of their intended subject areas.

**Preparation of Special Education Teachers**

**Standard 14: Grade-level Subject Preparation.**
The program requires special education teacher candidates to know the subjects they are likely to teach.

**Standard 15: Instructional Design.**
The program ensures that special education teacher candidates practice the development of “specially designed” instruction that customizes instruction to address a range of students needs.

**Entry into Program and Profession**
*(Applies to elementary, secondary and special education programs.)*

**Standard 16: Selectivity.**
The program selects candidates of high academic caliber using a screen that enables comparison of their academic achievement to that of college-attending peers.

**Standard 17: Outcomes.**
The institution collects data related to its graduates’ performance in the classroom.