June 21, 2013

Dear Friends of Chapman University and the College of Educational Studies,

As you probably already know, the NCTQ recently released its findings on teacher education programs across the country. California, along with most other states, did not fare so well. You may also know that the College of Educational Studies (CES) elected not to participate in this new report. We thoroughly investigated the possibility of participation in the NCTQ’s study, and came to the absolute conclusion that there would be zero benefit from participating, which would only take valuable time, energy and resources away from meeting our goal of developing the highest quality teaching professionals. A more thorough rationale is below.

The systematic evaluation and rankings of programs in teacher education have become commonplace. This is not a new phenomenon—teacher education is and has been one of the most measured, controlled and legislated professions in the United States. The state controls the curriculum our graduates must teach in schools, the length of time it takes to become a teacher and the standards to which we must adhere. National professional standards, while voluntary at this point, are a "must" for universities that focus on creating the highest quality educators based on national standards. As such, Chapman’s College of Educational Studies has earned seven state accreditations (one for each specialty area, such as special education, elementary and secondary teaching, school psychology, etc.) and holds four national accreditations and one international accreditation. This is all over-and-above Chapman's regional accreditation by WASC. The CES possesses the highest accreditation status across every one of these governmental and professional accrediting entities. We measure everything. We continually evaluate our outcomes and make adjustments as needed. These efforts result in regular, systematic and effective program improvement. Yet, a group like NCTQ wants to hold teacher education to flawed and inconsistent scrutiny.

In the spirit of seeking to improve the teaching profession, the CES voluntarily provides additional proprietary reports to groups like US News and World Report, which ranks programs regionally and nationally, and AACTE, a highly respected national professional organization that compares teacher educational programs in a way that allows us all to become better at what we do. The hours of work and resources it takes to participate in so many accreditations, rankings and national professional comparisons is exhausting. Nonetheless, we freely and openly participate to be at the "top of our game," to develop the best educators in the country and to serve the profession.

Even with this relentless routine of required and voluntary participation in the most prominent accreditation and ranking groups in the country, some special interest groups are asking us for even more data, looking to evaluate us and rank us on their proprietary and ideologically-based criteria. In fact, there are at least twenty groups who have claimed they know what it takes to be great at developing educators. Some have even insisted we "comply" with their requests for data—not in lieu of the dozen programs we currently participate in, but in addition to! One in particular, NCTQ, has demanded participation. Using Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests, they have all but forced the Cal State University and University of California systems to
comply (even after an emphatic letter from both Chancellors refusing to participate). The methods used by the group are questionable to say the least, and we want no involvement with them. Among other methodologically "light" strategies, the group suggests they can assess goodness heavily based on the syllabi from a given program. No interviews of employers or students, no checking to see if the syllabi were custom designed just for their review. In fact, no human actually comes to your institution at all.

After careful collaboration with our faculty, staff and university leadership, and after a thorough review of the NCTQ report and confirming the methodological and factual errors in the report, we reaffirm our stance not to participate. After all, 12 accreditations across six accrediting bodies, each sending teams of professionals to interview schools, our students and faculty and thoroughly review our records —in-person— should be enough feedback for any program, wouldn’t you say?

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Donald N. Cardinal, Ph.D.
Dean and Professor