June 27, 2012

To whom it may concern:

This letter is in response to the Chapman University’s College of Educational Studies (CES) decision to not participate in the NCTQ request for ranking teacher education programs. As someone who works in teacher education, I applaud NCTQ’s effort to find ways to improving teacher quality, and identifying programs that are having success at accomplishing such goals. At a time when educational experiences and opportunity are vital for all students, high quality teaching is arguably the single most important factor that a school can offer its students. However, I believe that the approach taken by NCTQ is not the most suitable approach to improve teacher quality. My initial understanding of the approach being taken by the proposed USN&WR and NCTQ review raises important question about both transparency and the underlying science. A ranking system raises concerns on several levels, and truly calls for a more collaborative effort to determine a reliable set of criteria that could be welcomed and encouraged. It is my belief that Chapman’s CES shares this stance. An effort that would be designed to solicit input from programs across the country on essential qualities of teacher quality would be an important step in the right direction, a synthesis of the relevant research on teacher preparation could also aid in that process.

Finally, it is important to capture the effectiveness of prospective teachers in the classroom. Therefore, any effort that attempts to evaluate teacher education programs should focus as much on what students learn, as what they are taught. The classroom is one of the most important locations where teacher learning takes place. Basing what is taught on a mere review of texts used and topics covered in course syllabi strikes me as an inadequate and superficial accounting of the teaching experience. As someone who recently conducted a review of CES and their teacher preparation program, I believe that they are truly committed to preparing teachers to effectively work in today’s diverse schools. Their stance of non-participation in NCTQ does not take away from their commitment to educational excellence and equity, and I encourage their participation in helping the entire teacher education community work towards developing a comprehensive approach of developing competent and caring classroom teachers.

Sincerely,

Tyrone Howard
Professor
University of California, Los Angeles
Graduate School of Education & Information Studies