June 27, 2013

Dear Friends:

The College of Education, Health and Human Development is proud of our record as Montana’s leading producer of certified K-12 teachers. We believe education and teacher preparation at Montana State University should be informed by regularly assessing our teaching, training, and mentoring processes, as well as our content and pedagogical strategies. We follow many arduous program evaluation processes, the most rigorous of which is accreditation at both the state and national levels. We recognize and value the importance of high quality, ethical research processes to inform how we train our teachers.

With that said, we are deeply concerned with the release of a report published in June of 2013 titled: “National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) Teacher Prep Review.” This report was paid for by the National Council for Teacher Quality (NCTQ). We believe that the data presented by NCTQ are incomplete, which has skewed the results of the report.

To read recent stories on the NCTQ report see:

[“NCTQ Review of Nation’s Education Schools Deceives, Misinforms Public,”](http://aacte.org/news-room/press-releases/nctq-review-of-nations-education-schools-deceives-misinforms-public.html) from the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education. (See: <http://aacte.org/resources/nctq-usnwr-review/>)

[“Review of Teacher Preparation Programs Needs Improvement,”](http://www.aft.org/newspubs/news/2013/061813nctq.cfm) by the American Federation of Teachers. (See: <http://www.aft.org/newspubs/news/2013/061813nctq.cfm>)

“Statement of James G. Cibulka, President of the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP), on NCTQ Teacher Prep Review” (See**:** <http://caepnet.org/news/nctq/>)

In response to this report, we would like to provide additional details as to why we feel this report does not represent quality science and should be viewed with extreme caution. We welcome dialogue about this issue and we are continually evaluating the ways in which we can improve the quality of our teacher education program at Montana State University.

1. First and foremost, we are not convinced that the 16 data points used to rank teacher preparation programs are the most appropriate measures for judging teacher quality. For example, using candidate selection criteria and content and pedagogical knowledge to judge teacher quality makes sense. However, using syllabi to judge the quality of a program is less desirable because syllabi do not always indicate everything that goes on in a classroom. Judging teacher preparation quality by using syllabi is a bit like judging a restaurant by reading the menu and not by sampling the food, ambiance, and service. We believe researchers should continue to work to develop better measures of teacher quality as well as identifying facilitators and barriers to effective teacher preparation.
2. Secondly, we believe that the data the authors used are incomplete. The authors only collected 98% of the data on 5 of 16 data points (i.e., candidate selection criteria, content in elementary, middle school, high school, and special education). For the majority of the data points (11 of 16), 58% or less of the data were obtained. Legal battles ensued to collect some of the data. The lack of complete data as a limitation of the study was acknowledged by the authors who admitted that they were “unable to apply relevant standards to all programs as [they] were derailed by non-cooperation by institutions; but it should not make [their] findings any less meaningful or representative” (p. 13). We strongly disagree with NCTQ’s statement that the data were representative. In many cases, incomplete data were used to rate schools and this is not acceptable scientific practice.
3. Third, while we work as hard as possible to ensure that our teachers are fully prepared to enter the field of teaching, most will continue to improve their teaching practices with experience and mentoring. Preparing new teachers is ideally a partnership between the university teacher education program, and the districts in which our students intern and are eventually employed.

In conclusion, we stand by our record of training quality teachers in Montana and we are committed to innovation, improvement, and transformation of teacher education as is evidenced by our growing and dynamic partnerships with school districts in the Gallatin Valley and across Montana. Below is a summary of the highlights of our teacher preparation program at Montana State University:

* Teaching is one of the fastest growing fields in the country. The unemployment rate in teaching is much lower than in other fields, especially in the STEM disciplines. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, elementary school teaching positions are projected to have a large number of job openings: 244,200 jobs from 2008 to 2018. A 2012 Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce report entitled "Hard Times," reported that education grads have an unemployment rate of just 4.8 percent, compared to the nation’s June 2013 unemployment rate of 7.6.
* We employ rigorous teacher preparation admission standards and our students’ average GPA at admission to the teacher education program is 3.28.
* We graduate an average of 153 teachers per year and our students pass the PRAXIS II content area examinations at a rate higher than the national average. MSU students outscored their peers on 14 out of 15 tests. <http://www.montana.edu/news/11432/msu-education-students-outscore-peers-on-national-exam>
* We offer professional development opportunities for all levels of teachers at MSU. For example, in August of 2013, we are offering a “New Teachers Academy” designed by Dr. Pat Ingraham to offer guidance and support for those newly hired teachers transitioning from college to their first teaching position. The sessions during the Academy will run by master teachers from all over the Gallatin Valley. Topics will include: organizing a classroom, working with parents and colleagues, integrating technology into the curriculum, learning to juggle it all and class management techniques. In addition, the participants will have an opportunity to build a network for support that will be available to them through the years.
* We offer extensive internship and teaching practicum experiences throughout the curricula; our elementary majors complete 800 hours of hands-on experience working with children and their families and our K-12 and secondary majors complete 600 hours in the field.
* We are developing a laboratory classroom with Hyalite Elementary School in the Bozeman School District such that our faculty will partner with teachers to offer practicum experiences to our students.
* We maintain a partnership with the United Way and the Bozeman school district to offer after school instruction and practicum experience for our students. <http://www.montana.edu/news/11931/after-school-programs-help-msu-students-prepare-for-teaching-careers>

Sincerely,



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