June 17, 2013

Dear Teacher Candidate,

The purpose of this email note is to keep you informed about what is happening across the nation with regard to teacher preparation and how it relates to the UMass Amherst School of Education’s programs. The National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ), in partnership with US News and World Report, has been gathering information from institutions of higher education that prepare teachers throughout the United States. Their plan is to rate the teacher preparation programs based upon the information they have gathered. The report is scheduled to be released on June 18, 2013. Therefore, we want to provide you with some information about the UMass Amherst School of Education’s participation in the review.

The School of Education at UMass Amherst declined to participate in the NCTQ Teacher Preparation Review for a number of reasons.

- We, and other major organizations and associations, such as the AACTE (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education), CADREI (Council of Academic Deans of Research Institutions), and Education Deans of AAU (Association of American Universities), questioned the quality of the review design and the methodology being employed. For example, much of the report relies on input data, such as the review of course syllabi and student teaching handbooks, to make inferences about the quality of professionals produced by teacher preparation programs. We use numerous data sources, including teaching performance assessments, alumni placement, and supervisor evaluations of first year teachers, to continually assess and improve all of our educator preparation programs.
- We were also concerned about NCTQ’s plan to “grade” programs. Many national education experts do not agree that the criteria used by NCTQ to identify high quality programs are actually characteristics of high quality programs.
- We had even more questions about how the NCTQ criteria will be applied to individual programs. Detailed scoring rubrics or information about the qualifications of the evaluators were not provided when we were asked to participate.
- Overall, NCTQ’s lack of transparency throughout the process was a major concern to us.

We did, however, respond to three different open records (Freedom of Information Act) requests from NCTQ sending them estimates for the labor and printing costs we would incur as allowed under state law. We also gave them information regarding which requested documents are considered intellectual property and are therefore not public information. Our estimates of the labor and copying expenses
required to fulfill the open records request were reviewed and approved by the State Attorney General’s Office. The first two requests from NCTQ were extensive, requesting a wide variety of materials including numerous course syllabi. NCTQ never responded to our first two estimates and we did not send them the material requested. NCTQ made the third request for a much more limited set of information, focused primarily on student teaching sites and experiences, in May 2013 — a short time before the “study” was to be released. Again, we sent an estimate of associated expenses. Although NCTQ indicated they wished to reimburse us for these expenses, as of today, we have not received the reimbursement. Thus, to date, we have not provided NCTQ with any information about our teacher preparation programs. Yet, we understand that our programs will be rated in the NCTQ report, raising questions about the source, appropriateness, comprehensiveness, and accuracy of the information they may be using to rate our programs.

The educator preparation programs offered by the UMass Amherst School of Education are accredited by the National Council Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) and nationally recognized by Special Profession Associations (e.g., the National Council of Teachers of English, the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, Association for Childhood Education International, National Science Teachers Association, Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, National Council for the Social Studies). In fact, in a recent report produced by NCTQ, the School of Education’s Teach 180 Days in Springfield, a secondary teacher preparation program that is part of a decades long collaborative partnership with the Springfield Public Schools, was singled out as producing the teacher candidates with whom principals were most satisfied. Our Science Education Online program, offered in collaboration with the UMass Amherst College of Natural Sciences, was recently recognized by US News and World Report as one of the top in the nation.

We are committed to assessment and accountability in education and embrace the opportunity to participate in program reviews by national accrediting bodies and by the Commonwealth as we strive for continuous improvement of our programs. We hope you have a successful and rewarding academic year in the School of Education.

Regards,

Christine B. McCormick, Dean

Linda L. Griffin, Associate Dean for Academic Affairs