



UNIVERSITY  
*of* ALASKA

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*Many Traditions One Alaska*

**Response to Findings of the  
National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ)**

January 10, 2013

## Executive Summary

*UA schools and college of Education support the goal of closely evaluating teacher preparation programs with the goal of providing feedback to facilitate program improvement. Unfortunately, we can't support NCTQ's methodology or conclusions. NCTQ employed a flawed methodology that is increasingly questioned nationwide. Additionally, because the NCTQ team did not adequately check data with institutions ahead of time, they published badly flawed information with apparently little regard for the accuracy that should be the hallmark of any serious research.*

*The degree of inaccuracy in the report is alarming. Columbia was rated highly for the selectivity of an undergraduate program that does not exist. In Alaska, UAF received low scores for the reported absence of curriculum in elementary reading education when in fact, candidates must take three courses relevant to that standard. Even more alarming, in NCTQ's published report, the highest-achieving states on the National Assessment of Educational Progress — including Massachusetts, Vermont, New Hampshire, Maine, New Jersey, and Minnesota — all got grades of C or D, while low-achieving Alabama got the top rating from NCTQ. How can we trust ratings that are based on criteria showing no relationship to successful teaching and learning?*

*NCTQ's report mis-represents UA programs. Our schools and college of Education are CAEP accredited and focus on continuous improvement. We will continue to focus on improving teacher education programs that meet the distinctive needs of our state.*

## Introduction

The National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) is a Washington, D.C.-based, privately funded organization founded in 2000 by the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation. Based on information from their website, the council was established to provide an alternative voice to existing teacher organizations and to build the case for a comprehensive reform agenda that would challenge the current structure and regulation of the profession. In late 2001, Secretary of Education Rod Paige gave NCTQ a grant of \$5 million to start a national teacher certification program called the American Board for Certification of Teacher Excellence (ABCTE). ABCTE has since become an online teacher preparation program. NCTQ is currently funded by a variety of foundations; its largest supporters are the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Carnegie Corporation of New York, Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, Laura and John Arnold Foundation, Searle Freedom Trust, Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation, Joyce Foundation, and Teaching Commission.

Drawing on information gathered from the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) and sources from each of the three UA MAUs, NCTQ has consistently rated the State of Alaska as deficient in Teacher Education. However, according to other universities and education organizations, the NCTQ ratings are seriously flawed. For example, Linda Darling-Hammond, chair of the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, stated that:

*NCTQ's methodology is a paper review of published course requirements and course syllabi against a check list that does not consider the actual quality of instruction that the programs offer, evidence of what their students learn, or whether graduates can actually teach.<sup>1</sup>*

Moreover, the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education observes that:

*This [NCTQ] review is a public relations campaign. It does not seek to improve teacher preparation, nor is it a helpful or reliable guide for parents, prospective teacher candidates and the public. NCTQ promotes to the public that its goal is to help improve teacher preparation. Yet NCTQ outright refuses to make rubrics available publicly or individually to institutions to show where programs did and did not meet standards. It does, however, make recommendations to policy makers on how they should regulate preparation programs. If NCTQ's goal was to help improve teacher preparation, rubrics should be released so that programs could utilize that information.*

All of the teacher preparation programs at UA hold specialized accreditation through CAEP (Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation, formerly known as NCATE, <http://caepnet.org/>), which is the accreditation required by DEED. CAEP-accredited institutions meet rigorous standards for *both* curriculum and student learning outcomes. CAEP is nationally regarded as the most rigorous accreditor of education programs. However, NCTQ does not consider CAEP standards to be sufficient.

The University of Alaska response to the 2013 National Council for Teacher Quality (NCTQ) reviews is divided into two sections. First we address the review of Alaska state policy and then we specifically address the review of University of Alaska teacher education programs. A summary of national comments on NCTQ and the NCTQ process was prepared by Diane Hirshberg at the Center for Alaska Education Policy Research and is included in the appendix.

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<sup>1</sup> Strauss, Valerie. 2013 "Why the NCTQ teacher prep ratings are nonsense." *The Washington Post*, June 18, 2013. Reporting the comments of Linda Darling-Hammond, chair of the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing and the Charles E. Ducommun Professor of Education at Stanford University.

## NCTQ State Policy Report: A Response from UA Educators

On January 23, 2013 The National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) released its annual State Teacher Policy Yearbook 2012, which focuses on the state laws, rules and regulations that shape teacher preparation. This particular NCTQ review looks only at state regulation of teacher preparation, and does not consider the teacher preparation carried out by colleges and universities at all. The Yearbook purported to provide Alaska with a tailored analysis identifying the teacher preparation policy areas most in need of critical attention, as well as "low-hanging fruit," policies that could be addressed in what was characterized as "relatively short order".

The state received a grade of "F" for its teacher preparation policies in 2012, while it received a "D" in 2011. Alaska is one of just three states in the nation to receive a failing grade for its teacher preparation policies in the 2012 report. However, the average grade across all 50 states and the District of Columbia was a "D+".

The policy issues raised by NCTQ and the University's response to each are provided below:

1. *Raising admission requirements to ensure that teacher preparation programs admit candidates with strong academic records.*

**UA Response:** The State of Alaska requires that teacher candidates pass the PRAXIS 1 or another of a group of similar tests of basic competency in reading, writing, and mathematics before receiving certification (<http://education.alaska.gov/TeacherCertification/praxis.html>). While, the State does not require this or any other test for *admission* to a teacher preparation programs, UA's initial teacher preparation programs require that after completing their general education requirements and before being admitted to teacher candidacy, students pass the PRAXIS 1 exam.

Unfortunately, PRAXIS I does not meet NCTQ criteria because it is not nationally normed to the general college-bound population. PRAXIS 1 is normed to teachers and pre-service teachers. Several national studies have found significant positive correlation between scores on the SAT and PRAXIS 1 exams. NCTQ apparently did not examine any of the UA requirements for teacher candidacy. If they had, they would have found that UA requirements do assure that candidates are academically strong.

2. *Ensuring that elementary teachers know their subject matter and have the knowledge and skills to be effective reading teachers as a condition of initial licensing.*

**UA Response:** While DEED does not require teacher education programs to have either particular courses or specific standards related to the "science of reading", the Alaska Teaching Standards strongly suggest that teachers will know their content and how to teach it. NCTQ is evaluating policy rather than practice. UA faculty work closely with DEED to ensure that all Alaska certified teachers are qualified for the classrooms in which they teach. All of UA's teacher education candidates are required to take and pass reading methodology coursework which has rigorous assessment as a part of each course. Additionally, in a year-long student teaching experience teacher candidates are supervised closely by an experienced mentor teacher in practicing what they learned in the university classroom. Finally, candidates must take and pass a PRAXIS II test of content knowledge before being recommended for licensure. Alaska's passing scores for PRAXIS II are at or above national levels.

3. *Disallowing K-8 teaching licenses that fail to distinguish between teaching elementary and middle school students and requiring that all secondary teachers pass a content test in every specific subject they are licensed to teach.*

**UA Response:** Alaska does license elementary teachers for the K-8 grades, a practice that NCTQ criticizes. As the geographically largest state in the union, Alaska has unique challenges and opportunities. A broadly based initial certification, with the opportunity to add additional content areas by passing tests of content knowledge (Praxis II), serves our rural and remote areas well.

4. *Eliminating generic K-12 special education licenses that lower the bar for special education teachers and make it virtually impossible for the state to ensure that these teachers know their subject matter and are prepared to teach grade-level content.*

**UA Response:** Alaska offers a K-12 special education certification. Contrary to NCTQ standards, Alaska does not require that special education teachers at the secondary level are highly qualified in at least two subject areas. Special education is a critical shortage area especially in rural and remote communities. The current system of broad certification for special education teachers provides flexibility for our schools and helps to ensure that our special education teachers have the critical skills necessary to be effective special educators in our context(s). The recommendation for specialization by disability or age fails to recognize that teachers have a responsibility to provide for diversity across a wide range of abilities, accommodating students in an inclusive environment. Abilities and special needs are not necessarily tied to age, disability or grade level.

5. *Requiring that teacher candidates receive a high-quality summative student teaching experience and are assigned to cooperating teachers who have demonstrated evidence of effectiveness as measured by student learning.*

**UA Response:** The State of Alaska does not have any specific requirements for student teaching or for the qualifications of the (supervising) cooperating teachers, and that is the issue that NCTQ is addressing. Again, UA works closely with DEED to establish and maintain substantial requirements for student teaching. Teacher candidates recommended by the University of Alaska for initial certification successfully complete a full year of classroom experience. This summative experience is very rigorous and includes a final portfolio documenting successful intervention with a diverse group of students in Alaska schools. Cooperating teachers are selected by UA based on recommendations of their supervising school administrator(s), and typically they are highly regarded teachers and mentors.

6. *Holding teacher preparation programs accountable for the performance of their graduates.*

**UA Response:** NCTQ standards require that (1) the state collects data that connect student achievement gains to teacher preparation programs and (2) the state collects data that assess teacher preparation program performance, such as standardized test scores of teacher candidates; test pass rates and number of retakes before passing; satisfaction ratings by school principals; evaluations of new teachers; and retention rates of teachers. Alaska does not currently collect most of this information. However, given the new Alaska Standards and the possibility of a new assessment for K-12 students as well a shared data system, it may be possible for Alaska to connect student learning to the preparation program of their teacher in the future.

UA education programs (as part of their self-assessment for accreditation) do collect information on PRAXIS I pass rates of students, which are generally high. The principals of UA graduates are surveyed after the first, third and fifth year of teaching as to their efficacy in the classroom. The annual report prepared by UA for the State Legislature, "Alaska's University for Alaska's Schools 2013" (SB 241 Report) includes information on teacher turnover rates.

7. *The report also identifies ways that Alaska could improve its weak transition to teaching alternate route program, which, according to NCTQ has low standards, minimal flexibility and limited access.*

**UA Response:** The Alaska Transition to Teaching (AKT2) program that NCTQ criticizes no longer exists. This year's State Teacher Policy Yearbook was released before NCTQ's Spring 2013 Teacher Prep Review of the higher education-based teacher preparation programs in the nation, which found that 100 percent of

undergraduate teacher preparation programs in Alaska are insufficiently selective, failing to ensure that candidates come from the top half of the college-going population. That NCTQ report is discussed in the following section.

### NCTQ Ratings on University of Alaska Teacher Education Programs: Issues and Responses

The first edition of the *NCTQ Teacher Prep Review*, an evaluation of more than 2,000 teacher education programs in colleges and universities around the country, was published on June 18, 2013

([http://www.nctq.org/dmsView/Teacher\\_Prep\\_Review\\_2013\\_Report](http://www.nctq.org/dmsView/Teacher_Prep_Review_2013_Report)). Given that UA programs are largely based on state teacher preparation policies that NCTQ already rated as deficient, it is no surprise that UA's three programs were not highly rated. Nationally most teacher preparation programs did not meet NCTQ expectations. Of the 2420 programs examined nationwide, 78% earned two or fewer stars and 14% earned no stars. Many colleges and universities have commented that NCTQ's standards are somewhat arbitrary and inflexible, not allowing for varied approaches to the same goal. Also, there are many reports that NCTQ made errors in their assessments. It is challenging to respond to NCTQ assessments in detail because in many cases the evaluation criteria that they used are not clear.

The NCTQ study of teacher education programs uses a four-star system to rate elementary, secondary, and special education programs. Four stars would mean that a program is exemplary, three that the program is very good with zero stars meaning that a program is placed on their "consumer alert" list.

#### University of Alaska Anchorage (2010)

- Undergraduate Elementary 
- Graduate Secondary 
- Graduate Special Education 

#### University of Alaska Fairbanks Annual (2010)

- Undergraduate Elementary 
- Graduate Secondary 

#### University of Alaska Southeast Annual (2010)

- Graduate Secondary

*Some standard scores available however, no program rating was issued.*

## Summary of NCTQ Ratings and UA Responses to NCTQ Critiques.

Note: NA=Not Applicable. NR=Not Reviewed by NCTQ.

Elementary Education			
NCTQ Key Criteria	UAA	UAF	UAS
<b>Selection Criteria:</b> The program selects teacher candidates of strong academic caliber. The standard evaluates admissions requirements for teacher candidates to determine if they help ensure that programs are drawing from the top half of the college-going population. Prospective teachers should have above average SAT or ACT scores, or at least a 3.0 grade point average (GPA).	No Stars	Two Stars	UAS had no Elementary Education report from NCTQ; there is no explanation from NCTQ for this omission.
		UAF's baccalaureate admission standard requires a 3.0 high school GPA or a 2.5 GPA and an ACT or SAT score indicating minimal college readiness. While this is not the top half of Alaska's <i>college-going</i> population, the admission standard apparently was somewhat in line with NCTQ requirements.	
<b>Early Reading:</b> The program trains teacher candidates to teach reading as prescribed by the Common Core State Standards.	No Stars	No Stars	
		<p>The program includes three relevant courses: ED344 <b>Foundations of Literacy</b>; ED411 <b>Reading, Writing, Language Arts: Methods and Curriculum Development</b>; and ED626 <b>Teaching Reading, Writing and Language Arts</b>.</p> <p>NCTQ identifies the following five components as essential for effective reading instruction: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. These five areas were identified in 2000 by the <a href="#">National Reading Panel</a> and described in in the 2001 publication, <a href="#">Put Reading First: The Research Building Blocks for Teaching Children to Read</a>.</p> <p>All UAF students who complete the Foundations of Literacy (ED344) and Teaching Reading, Writing and</p>	

		Language Arts (ED626) courses are required to download and read the <a href="#">Put Reading First</a> publication and complete writing assignments related to the five essential areas for reading instruction.	
<b>Common Core Elementary Mathematics:</b> The program prepares teacher candidates to successfully teach to the Common Core State Standards for elementary math. This standard evaluates the specialized coursework teachers should take to gain the deep conceptual understanding of elementary math topics required to teach to the Common Core Math Standards.	<b>No Stars</b>	<b>One Star</b>	
		UAF teacher candidates are required to take MATH 107x Functions for Calculus (4 credits); OR MATH 161x Algebra for Business and Economics (3 credits) as a prerequisite for a two semester sequence, MATH 205: Mathematics for Elementary School Teachers I (3 credits) and MATH 206: Mathematics for Elementary School Teachers II (3 credits). MATH 205 and MATH 206 are specifically designed to make sure that Elementary Education students develop and refine their conceptual and procedural understanding of the mathematics content of the K-8 curriculum. MATH 205 and MATH 206 are required courses in the Elementary Education major and are closely aligned with content, evaluation, and teaching principles and standards for mathematics developed by the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics.	
<b>Common Core Elementary Content:</b> The program ensures that teacher candidates have the broad content preparation necessary to successfully teach to the Common Core State Standards.	<b>One Star</b>	<b>Three Stars</b>	
		Although UAF was rated relatively highly in this area, NCTQ commented: <i>Coverage is somewhat deficient in science.</i>  UAF teacher candidates are required to take three, four-credit science courses. This is equivalent to a three-credit lecture with an accompanying lab that meets three-hour per week. Students may choose from the following course	



		<p>options: BIOL 104x Natural History of Alaska; OR BIOL 100x Human Biology and CHEM 100x Chemistry in Complex Systems; OR PHYS 115x Physical Science</p> <p>GEOS 101x The Dynamic Earth; OR GEOS 120x Glaciers, Earthquakes and Volcanoes</p> <p>The three courses that the students choose equate to 12 credit hours that span life, physical, and earth sciences. In the final internship year, teacher candidates complete a three-credit course ED 479 Science Methods &amp; Curriculum Development.</p>	
<b>Student Teaching:</b> The program ensures that teacher candidates have a strong student teaching experience. The standard examines programs' standards for selecting cooperating teachers, programs' role in the selection process and the frequency with which the programs' supervisors observe and provide written feedback to student teachers.	<b>No Stars</b>	<b>No Stars</b>	
<p>NCTQ requires <i>weekly</i> visits and is apparently, not willing to consider that UA monthly visits are of longer duration. Weekly visits are unaffordable for UA candidates who teach in communities that are not accessible by road. UA teacher education programs use a variety of strategies to enrich the experience including but not limited to, Skype observations of interns in their classrooms, weekly seminars and classes where common issues, concerns and experiences are shared and analyzed.</p> <p>All UA teacher candidates are carefully placed with mentor teachers with a minimum of 3 years experience and a track record of success. Placements are based upon university faculty recommendations and approval from site administrators. Placements are year long and interns are observed, evaluated and counseled by university faculty as well as cooperating teachers.</p>			
<b>Other Criteria</b>			
<b>English Language Learners:</b> The program prepares elementary teacher candidates to teach reading to English language learners.	<b>No Stars</b>	<b>No Stars</b>	UAS had no Elementary Education report from NCTQ; there is no explanation from NCTQ for this omission.
	UAA teacher preparation programs have explicit course work related to ELL.	NCTQ apparently was looking for a specific course in this area. UAF does not have one specific course designated just for teaching reading to ELL students, but strategies for working with ELL students are part of our required reading courses. UAF needs to make sure this is clearly evident in our syllabi.	
<b>Struggling Readers:</b> The program	<b>No Stars</b>	<b>No Stars</b>	

prepares elementary teacher candidates to teach reading skills to students at risk of reading failure.	UAA teacher preparation programs have explicit coursework related to teaching reading within a range of contexts and with a range of students.	NCTQ identifies struggling readers as those at risk of reading failure. Throughout all three courses identified in the response of Standard 2, UAF elementary students are required to learn and implement strategies to help students gain literacy. UAF elementary students learn and implement strategies to diagnose specific reading deficiencies and implement instructional plans for children to help them gain needed fluency. In the Foundations of Literacy course (ED344), UAF elementary students complete 15 hours of fieldwork with children at elementary schools. In the Reading, Writing, Language Arts: Methods and Curriculum Development (ED411) course, UAF elementary interns work with elementary children through the elementary internship	
Classroom Management: The program trains teacher candidates to successfully manage classrooms. The standard looks at how student teachers are evaluated by their supervisors (and possibly by cooperating teachers as well) on the use of classroom management strategies.	Two Stars	No Stars	
		Feedback from cooperating teachers and supervisors relative to classroom management is required and is included in every single form that cooperating teachers and university supervisors submit (approximately 15 forms from both the mentor and the university supervisor during the internship year).	
Lesson Planning: The program trains teacher candidates how to plan lessons. Requirements for all culminating assignments, such as those pertaining to the content of lesson plans used in student teaching, are examined to ensure that elementary and secondary teacher candidates must demonstrate that they can make the necessary adjustments to accommodate diverse students and to use technology effectively.	One Star	One Star	
	Instruction related to lesson planning, construction and use is a part of methods classes instruction and student teacher supervision and mentoring.	UAF does not know what the NCTQ reviewers meant when they indicated that we "encourage candidates to use pseudo-scientific methods of instruction." The required elementary lesson plan template <i>does</i> include the items listed in the bulleted response section with the exception of having a special category for ELL students, since they are included in the requirement for Differentiation.	

		Elementary students are required to use this lesson plan template and it was submitted to NCTQ. UAF also submitted samples of the required lesson plan templates and the rubrics used to assess lesson plans for several of the methods courses. Integrating technology is a requirement that occurs in all courses.	
<b>Assessment and Data:</b> The program trains teacher candidates in how to assess learning and use student performance data to inform instruction. Coursework and assignments representing the culmination of a candidate's preparation are examined to check that elementary and secondary teacher candidates have an opportunity to practice developing their own assessments, analyzing student assessment results and applying their analysis to lesson planning. We also check to see that candidates have an opportunity to practice analyzing student data in teams, because schools are increasingly fostering a collaborative approach to teaching.	<b>NA</b> Teacher candidates complete "key assessments" in each required course of the teacher preparation programs. These submissions are reviewed and graded using college wide rubrics and standards and stored in a college wide "task stream" based system.	<b>No Stars</b> UAF submitted syllabi, assignments and rubrics that demonstrated that these criteria are met in nearly every intern year course. UAF will include far more than requested syllabi this year – UAF will attach copies of all required major assignments and the rubrics used to assess them.	
	<b>NA</b> All UA programs collaborate closely with Alaska P-12 programs which are themselves, very diverse. We take pride in serving all learners and in preparing our teacher candidates to meet the needs of their students.	<b>NR</b>	
<b>Equity:</b> The program ensures that teacher candidates experience schools that are successful in serving students who have been traditionally underserved.	<b>Two Stars</b> Data are collected, managed and analyzed using UAA proprietary software PETAL supplemented by Task Stream- a 3 <sup>rd</sup> party records storage system. Both PETAL and TaskStream are designed to be user (Professor and	<b>Two Stars</b> UAF sent out graduate and employer surveys until last year when ISER took it over. UAF submitted copies of these surveys to NCTQ.	
	<b>Outcomes:</b> The program and institution collect and monitor data on their graduates.		

	UAA staff) accessible.		
Evidence of Effectiveness: The program's graduates have a positive impact on student learning. The standard examines state reports, where available, on the effectiveness of graduates of individual teacher preparation programs.	NA	NA	
	Alaska does not issue a report on the effectiveness of graduates of individual teacher preparation programs. Hence, UA currently has no way to meet this standard. Alaska does have a new teacher evaluation plan to be implemented in 2015. When data are reported, this plan may help to address the concern.		
Graduate Secondary Education			
Key Criteria	UAA	UAF	UAS
Selection Criteria: The program selects teacher candidates of strong academic caliber. The standard evaluates admissions requirements for teacher candidates to determine if they help ensure that programs are drawing from the top half of the college-going population. Prospective teachers should have above average SAT or ACT scores, or at least a 3.0 grade point average (GPA).	No Stars	No Stars	Two Stars
	All teacher candidates must maintain a 3.0 GPA.  Students must take and pass the PRAXIS I exam before being considered teacher candidates. As referenced earlier – PRAXIS I scores correlate with SAT scores.	UAF's program is at the graduate level and appears to meet NCTQ's selection standards, despite not garnering any stars. Applicants must enter the program with a 3.0 or better grade point average; must submit scores that meet the State of Alaska's set score for Praxis I reading, writing, and mathematics and Praxis II content test for each teaching content area; must have a bachelor's degree in a teaching content area or meet specific course requirements for each teaching area; additionally each candidate must meet NCATE/CAEP specialty association (SPA) requirements; each candidate is interviewed by three faculty members before admission to the program; admission packets include letters of recommendation, all transcripts, extemporaneous writing sample, and admission essay. Average grade point admission average over the previous three years is 3.3.	All teacher candidates in the Secondary Ed program must have and maintain a 3.0 GPA, must submit scores that meet the State of Alaska's set score for Praxis I reading, writing, and mathematics and Praxis II content test for each teaching content area; must have a bachelor's degree in a teaching content area or meet specific course requirements for each teaching area; additionally each candidate must meet NCATE/CAEP specialty association (SPA) requirements; each candidate undergraduate transcript is analyzed for content requirements before admission to the program; admission packets include letters of recommendation, all transcripts, extemporaneous writing sample, and admission essay.
Common Core Middle School: The program ensures that teacher candidates have the content preparation necessary to successfully teach to the Common Core State Standards.	NA	NA	NA
	All UAA secondary candidates have a degree in their content area and are required to take and pass the PRAXIS II test for content knowledge.	All UAF secondary candidates must have a bachelor's degree in a teaching content area or meet specific course requirements for each teaching area.	All UAS secondary candidates have a degree in their content area and are required to take and pass the PRAXIS II test for content knowledge.

<b>Common Core High School:</b> The program ensures that teacher candidates have the content preparation necessary to successfully teach to the Common Core State Standards.	<b>One Star</b> All UAA Secondary candidates have a degree in their content area and are required to take and pass the PRAXIS II test of content knowledge.	<b>No Stars</b> All UAF secondary candidates are prepared in a variety of classes, especially General Methods and Content Methods classes, to successfully design and teach lessons based on Alaska's Common Core Standards.	<b>No Stars</b> All UAS secondary candidates have a degree in their content area, undergo a transcript analysis to ensure that they meet national standards for content, and are required to take and pass the PRAXIS II test of content knowledge.
<b>Student Teaching:</b> The program ensures that teacher candidates have a strong student teaching experience. The standard examines programs' standards for selecting cooperating teachers, programs' role in the selection process and the frequency with which the programs' supervisors observe and provide written feedback to student teachers.	<b>No Stars</b> In 2010, teacher candidates were in the classroom for a full year and assigned to their mentor teachers based on their content area expertise. The UA supervisor conducts regular supervisory visits. It is unclear why NCTQ finds this unacceptable.	<b>No Stars</b> NCTQ apparently requires <i>weekly</i> visits and is not willing to consider that UA monthly visits are of longer duration. Weekly visits are unaffordable for UA candidates who teach in communities that are not accessible by road.  All UA candidates are carefully placed with mentor teachers with a minimum of 3 years experience and a track record of success. Placements are based upon university faculty recommendations and approval from site administrators. Placements are year-long (a minimum of 1000 hours) and interns are observed a minimum of 9 times by university faculty as well as cooperating teachers. Candidates are required to complete a digital portfolio.	<b>No Stars</b> When assigning ratings for this standard, NCTQ used a <i>weekly</i> visit as their standard. Because weekly visits are not practical for most of our candidates where visits are made through significant travel, UAS schedules less frequent but longer and more intense visits for our candidates. An NCATE review team reviewed our student teaching plans in 2011 and found them to be both rigorous and relevant for an Alaska context.  Teacher candidates are in the classroom for a full year and their cooperating teachers are carefully chosen for their content and teaching expertise. The UA supervisor conducts a supervisory visit once a month at minimum.
<b>Other Criteria</b>			
<b>Classroom Management:</b> The program trains teacher candidates to successfully manage classrooms. The standard looks at how student teachers are evaluated by their supervisors (and possibly by cooperating teachers as well) on the use of classroom management strategies.	<b>Two Stars</b>	<b>No Stars</b> All secondary candidates are required to complete Classroom Management (EDSC 458/658). Each observation (9 each from university supervisor and cooperating teacher) assesses classroom management strategies via form J, the classroom observation form, reproduced below:  Domain B: Creating an Environment for	<b>Two Stars</b> Classroom management strategies are embedded in the teacher education curriculum. Additionally, both the university supervisor and the cooperating teacher guiding the student teacher and formally evaluating his or her progress in this area.

		<p>Student Learning:</p> <p>Classroom Climate:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Creating a climate that promotes fairness.</li> <li>2. Establishing and maintaining rapport with students.</li> <li>3. Communicating challenging learning expectations to each student.</li> <li>4. Establishing and maintaining consistent standards of classroom behavior.</li> <li>5. Making the physical environment as safe and conducive to learning as possible.</li> </ol>	
<p><b>Lesson Planning:</b> The program trains teacher candidates on how to plan lessons. Requirements for all culminating assignments, such as those pertaining to the content of lesson plans used in student teaching, are examined to ensure that elementary and secondary teacher candidates must demonstrate that they can make the necessary adjustments to accommodate diverse students and to use technology effectively.</p>	<p><b>No Stars</b></p> <p>As with all of the UAA teacher preparation programs, candidates in the secondary education program are required to submit and pass key assessments in each of the required courses in the teacher preparation curriculum. These key assessments address a range of key methods, skill and practice sets, including such aspects as the effective and appropriate use of technology.</p>	<p><b>No Stars</b></p> <p>All secondary candidates must meet strict requirements for lesson planning. Lesson planning is assessed on each observation (form J) as well as in three "work sample" units required of each candidate. Lessons also must include strategies for differentiation and inclusion of current technologies in their teaching. All secondary candidates are required to take EDSC 442/642 and EDSC 443/643 Technology Tools in Education and successfully complete a required assignment showcasing their use of technology in their teaching internship.</p>	<p><b>No Stars</b></p> <p>Secondary candidates must take and pass a curriculum class with a B or better. Additionally, candidates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete a Teacher Work Sample, a nationally recognized and validated process for lesson development, which includes a plan for the use of technology.</li> <li>• Take and pass a course on the use of technology in the classroom with a B or better.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Assessment and Data:</b> The program trains teacher candidates in how to assess learning and use student performance data to inform instruction. Coursework and assignments representing the culmination of a candidate's preparation are examined to check that elementary and secondary teacher candidates have an opportunity to practice developing their own</p>	<p><b>NR</b></p>	<p><b>Two Stars</b></p> <p>All candidates are required to show learner gains in each of the three required "work sample" units they create and teach, one for their General Methods (EDSC 402) class and two for their secondary internship seminar (EDSC 472). University faculty evaluate all assessments for these units as well as samples of student work with the</p>	<p><b>NR</b></p> <p>Secondary teacher candidates complete a Teacher Work Sample which validates their ability to use data to design curriculum, develop assessments, and modify lessons when needed. These are nationally recognized as valid assessments of using data for lesson design and modification.</p>

assessments, analyzing student assessment results and applying their analysis to lesson planning. We also check to see that candidates have an opportunity to practice analyzing student data in teams, because schools are increasingly fostering a collaborative approach to teaching.		candidate's individual remarks and responses to his/her students. Finally, candidates must provide reflections based on the efficacy of the lessons.	
<b>Equity:</b> The program ensures that teacher candidates experience schools that are successful in serving students who have been traditionally underserved.	<b>NR</b>	<b>NR</b>	<b>NR</b>
	Alaska's schools are very diverse. Care is taken to ensure that Secondary teacher candidates have an opportunity to work with diverse and traditionally underserved students.		
<b>Secondary Methods:</b> The program requires teacher candidates to practice instructional techniques specific to their content area.	<b>Two Stars</b>	<b>Four Stars</b>	<b>Two Stars</b>
	Teacher candidates are in the classroom for a full year under the guidance of a content area teacher and their UA supervisor. During this time they design, teach and assess lessons that are specific to the content area.	All competencies were met in this category. All candidates complete EDSC 402 Methods of Teaching in a Secondary School as well as a content methodology course in their teaching content area (EDSC 432/632, 433/633, 434/634, 435/635, 436/636, 437/637).	Teacher candidates are in the classroom for a full year under the guidance of a content area teacher and their UA supervisor. During this time they design, teach and assess lessons that are specific to the content area.
<b>Outcomes:</b> The program and institution collect and monitor data on their graduates.	<b>Two Stars</b>	<b>Two Stars</b>	<b>No Stars</b>
	UAA conducts annual surveys of its graduates and of the district employers of UAA graduates. This information is shared and used to monitor and improve our programs.	All candidates are surveyed midway through the program and at the end. Additionally, cooperating teachers and site administrators are surveyed for the efficacy of the candidates, the program, and university supervision. Data are collected and examined by university faculty for program revision as needed.	UAS has always surveyed their graduates and their employers. As of the 2012 academic year, UAF and UAS worked with CAEPR, the educational arm of ISER to independently conduct a yearly survey.
<b>Evidence of Effectiveness:</b> The program's graduates have a positive impact on student learning. The standard examines state reports, where available, on the effectiveness of graduates of individual teacher preparation programs.	<b>NR</b>	<b>NA</b>	<b>NA</b>
	Alaska does not issue a report on the effectiveness of graduates of individual teacher preparation programs. Hence, this standard is not applicable to Alaska programs. Alaska does have a new teacher evaluation plan to be implemented in 2015. When data is reported, this plan may help to address the concern.		
<b>Graduate Special Education</b>			
<b>Key Criteria</b>	<b>UAA</b>	<b>UAF</b>	<b>UAS</b>
<b>Selection Criteria:</b> The program selects	<b>No Stars</b>	A Special Education Report from NCTQ	A Special Education Report from NCTQ

teacher candidates of strong academic caliber. The standard evaluates admissions requirements for teacher candidates to determine if they help ensure that programs are drawing from the top half of the college-going population. Prospective teachers should have above average SAT or ACT scores, or at least a 3.0 grade point average (GPA).		was not issued for UAF. No explanation was provided by NCTQ for this omission.	was not issued for UAS. No explanation was provided by NCTQ for this omission.
<b>Early Reading:</b> The program trains teacher candidates to teach reading as prescribed by the Common Core State Standards.	No Stars		
<b>Common Core Elementary Mathematics:</b> The program prepares teacher candidates to successfully teach to the Common Core State Standards for elementary math. This standard evaluates the specialized coursework teachers should take to gain the deep conceptual understanding of elementary math topics required to teach to the Common Core Math Standards.	No Stars		
<b>Common Core Special Ed Content:</b> The program ensures that teacher candidates' content preparation aligns with the Common Core State Standards in the grades they are certified to teach.	No Stars		
<b>Student Teaching:</b> The program ensures that teacher candidates have a strong student teaching experience. The standard examines programs' standards for selecting cooperating teachers, programs' role in the selection process and the frequency with which the programs' supervisors observe and provide written feedback to student teachers.	No Stars		
<b>Instructional Design for Special Ed:</b>	Two Stars		



The program trains teacher candidates to design instruction for teaching students with special needs.			
<b>Other Criteria</b>			
<b>Outcomes:</b> The program and institution collect and monitor data on their graduates.	<b>Two Stars</b>		

## NCTQ Strategies for Improvement: UA Responses

NCTQ also suggests a set of strategies that they believe would improve the quality of teacher education programs in the state. These are listed below in **bold type**, followed by the relevant UA standards and practices in *italic type*.

- **Make it tougher to get into a teacher preparation program.** *The admission standards for UA baccalaureate level teacher education programs are the same as the admission standards for general baccalaureate admission. At UAF, the requirement is a high school GPA of 3.0 or a high school GPA of 2.5 in combination with an ACT or SAT score indicating minimal college readiness; this is apparently somewhat close to the NCTQ standard, resulting in two stars. UAA and UAS are less selective for baccalaureate admissions, proudly accepting students at all points on the learning continuum and then working with them to ensure that they have the requisite skills and knowledge to be successful in a P-12 classroom. However, for all three universities, students must pass the PRAXIS I examination of basic competencies and have a 3.0 GPA in teacher preparation coursework to become a 'teacher candidate', eligible for student teaching. All three universities have selective graduate admissions, and we are unsure why NCTQ did not find the graduate admission standard (which includes a 3.0 GPA) sufficient. Alaska hires nearly half of its teachers from the lower 48, so making it tougher for Alaska students to enter and graduate from teacher preparation programs in Alaska would result in even fewer of Alaska's teachers being educated here.*
- **Make it tougher to be recommended for licensure.** *We are not sure what is meant by "making it tougher to be recommended for licensure," nor do we understand what appears to be a rather simplistic, overly vague and confounding recommendation. In order to be recommended for licensure teacher candidates complete a rigorous course of study, maintain a GPA of 3.0 or better, spend a year in P-12 classroom under the supervision of a qualified teacher, take and pass both the PRAXIS I and PRAXIS II exams and complete a professional portfolio. Making it tougher to be recommended would only exacerbate Alaska's critical shortage of teachers.*
- **Hold programs accountable for the effectiveness of their graduates by using data on novice teacher effectiveness.** *All University of Alaska teacher preparation programs survey graduates and employers to gain insight into the effectiveness of their programs and their graduates. Recently, UAF and UAS worked with CAEPR, the educational arm of ISER, to independently conduct a yearly survey. However, NCTQ does not accept this evidence of effectiveness. Their standard includes a state-administered system connecting student performance on standardized tests to the teacher preparation programs of the students' teachers and standardized, state-administered surveys of principals.*
- **Make program approval — and re-approval — contingent on passing rigorous on-site inspections.** *University of Alaska teacher education programs do go through on-site inspections at the time of their reaccreditation visits. These are jointly conducted by an EED representative as well as 5 to 7 accreditation officials from the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), which was recently reorganized to include the Teacher Education Accreditation Council (TEAC) and renamed the Council for Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP). However, these inspections do not meet NCTQ standards, which include inspectors who are 1) professionally trained and managed by an independent agency, and 2) drawn primarily from the ranks of PK-12 principals. NCTQ specifies that inspectors should conduct visits with little notice and assess program features that are relevant to the needs of public schools in the state. They should also make their findings available—and understandable—to the public.*
- **Require institutions to place their student teachers only with classroom teachers deemed to be effective.** *UA student teachers are never knowingly placed in classrooms with teachers who are less than effective. The student teaching placement process is collaborative. The University of Alaska Schools and College of Education enjoy close working relationships with Alaska's 54 school districts. We trust our*

*colleagues in the K-12 schools and are confident that they recommend only the best teachers. The NCTQ standard includes selecting mentor teachers based on their student's performance on standardized tests; UA does not have access to this information.*

- **Base state funding on the quality of teacher preparation provided by institutions.** *Alaska's elected officials serve the citizens of Alaska. They represent the diverse sections and interests of the state, are well informed regarding Alaska's unique geographic, cultural and population issues and are empowered by the state constitution to fund education to meet the needs of all of the students in our state. They fulfill this duty by making decisions that they determine to be in the best interest of the state and their constituents within the confines of the constitution.*

*While "basing funding on the quality of teacher preparation" makes for an attention grabbing headline, the logistical and statistical challenges and complexity of the proposal makes this a recommendation fraught with both obvious and subtle opportunities for unintended misapplication resulting in disservice to the very constituents the legislators are charged with serving and whom they attempt to serve well through informed processing of data and consideration of needs. That said, there is currently no source of comprehensive, objective information that would allow legislators to discern quality differences among the three universities. By one national standard (NCATE/CAEP accreditation) all three universities offer quality programs.*

- **Set a fixed limit on the number of licenses in each teaching area that will be issued each year.** *Approximately half of all teachers hired in Alaska each year are hired from the lower 48. We have a critical shortage of teachers. Limiting enrollment or the number of licenses issued would only exacerbate an already difficult situation. Further, and very importantly, we note that surveys and analysis of state teacher retention records show that teachers from outside of Alaska have a much lower retention rate than do teachers trained in the state. Our K-12 students deserve quality teachers who understand our unique situation and stay long enough to make a difference in students' lives. The University of Alaska is proud of the many fine teachers we have prepared for Alaska's classrooms.*
- **Lower tuition for high-need areas such as special education and STEM preparation programs.** *Higher education in Alaska is generously subsidized. Our upper division undergraduate tuition is one of the lowest in the nation, and graduate tuition is moderate, compared with other public institutions. Lower tuition may not be the answer to Alaska's teacher shortages. Our issues are complex and recommendations such as this show inadequate understanding of conditions in Alaska.*

The University of Alaska Schools and College of Education appreciate NCTQ's attempt to provide feedback that is presumably meant to improve our programs, a praiseworthy goal. However, the NCTQ report on Alaska programs is seriously flawed. In many cases, we are left wondering where the data for their analysis was acquired. For example, UAS was asked for and provided extensive data on their Elementary teacher preparation program. No analysis of the Elementary program was provided by NCTQ. NCTQ never asked for, nor did UAS provide information on, the Secondary teacher education program, yet it did receive a review. If the data for the Elementary program were used to make judgments regarding the Secondary teacher preparation program, that is clearly problematic.

The methodology employed by NCTQ raises concerns as well. They report on their website that in order to determine whether there were any flaws in programming their database, in their evidence gathering approach or in their analysis of evidence, NCTQ invited 47 of the 1,100 (4%) deans of education to participate in a due diligence process in October 2012. Eighteen deans, less than 2% of those rated, participated. NCTQ's methodology would not be acceptable in UA's most basic research classes, and it is not acceptable for a national group that presumes to pass judgment on our state and our university programs.

## Appendix

### Critiques of NCTQ from outside of Alaska

In the past year a number of critiques of NCTQ have been published by faculty members and administrators from major universities across the nation. The following is a summary of three of these critiques, written by faculty and administrators from Penn State, Michigan State and Stanford University, published in sources ranging from a blog in a major newspaper to an "open letter" in *Education Week* to a peer reviewed journal.

Fuller (2014), Darling-Hammond (2013) and Heller, Segall and Drake (2013) all criticize NCTQ's use of a paper review of course syllabi and program documents as the basis of their program ratings. They contend that in doing their review this way NCTQ fails to assess the actual quality of course instruction, the qualifications of the faculty, what teacher candidates learn, how they perform in class and most important, whether program graduates actually can teach. Fuller adds that NCTQ focuses on inputs rather than on outcomes such as teacher placement, retention and performance in the classroom.

Fuller, Darling-Hammond and Heller et. al. also point out that there were many errors in the data presented with the first round of ratings which were released in 2013. Fuller adds that NCTQ also failed to collect complete data for all programs, gathering data for less than 50% of their standards for about half of the programs ranked. He notes that NCTQ also fails to demonstrate any relationship between their ranking system and available data on program outcomes, such as value-added measures being implemented in some states, or rates of teacher candidates passing licensure/certification exams on the first try.

Heller et. al. (2013), in an "open letter" to NCTQ talked about why Michigan State refused to participate in the most recent NCTQ review of their program. They contend that "the NCTQ report is based on selected, incomplete, and, often, inaccurate data and does not meet credible evaluation standards." They, along with Fuller (2014) argue that there is not a research base for much of the data used by NCTQ. Fuller adds that the research that is cited by NCTQ researchers is not linked directly to the standards, is often misapplied, and key research that could guide the evaluation of teacher preparation programs is not included, in particular around diversity issues. He states that NCTQ "...completely misuses the research by contending that every program must use a certain strategy. That is simply not what research says or what researchers would advocate in terms of how the data should be used" (p. 68).

Darling-Hammond (2013) notes that in NCTQ's ratings of states' teacher education policies states with the highest scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) were awarded Cs and Ds, while those with low NAEP scores got high ratings, calling into question the validity of their methods. In terms of the teacher education program ratings, Darling-Hammond contends that the indicators NCTQ uses often fail to identify either critical aspects of practice for successfully preparing educators or actual program outcomes.

Fuller (2014) also points out that NCTQ has not evaluated any alternative certification programs (ACPs), despite the large numbers of teachers graduating from those programs in several states (Alaska's numbers are quite small comparatively), as well as some strong indicators that in states like Texas, private ACPs are graduating many underprepared and unqualified educators.

Fuller (2014) contends that the poor methods used should raise concern about the motives behind the ratings. In his conclusion he states: "Given the very shaky foundation upon which the NCTQ review was built and the shaky motives of NCTQ in conducting the review, the entire review should be discounted by educators, policymakers, and the public. If NCTQ was truly interested in improving all teacher preparation programs, there are certainly different pathways that could have been chosen.

Fuller, E. (2014). Shaky Methods, Shaky Motives: A Critique of the National Council of Teacher Quality's Review of Teacher Preparation Programs. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 65 (1), 63-77.

Donald Heller, D., Segall, A., and Drake, C. (2013). "An Open Letter to NCTQ on Teacher Prep." *Education Week* 33, (4), 28-29. Downloaded from educationweek.com.

Darling-Hammond, L. (2013). Why the NCTQ teacher prep ratings are nonsense. The Answer Sheet blog, *WashingtonPost.com* <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/answer-sheet/wp/2013/06/18/why-the-nctq-teacher-prep-ratings-are-nonsense/>