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## **NCTQ Report Finds That Teacher Prep Coursework Is Easier Than That Of Other Majors on College Campuses**

*“Easy A’s and What’s Behind Them” Highlights Lack of Rigor in Teacher Preparation; Report Finds That 44% of Teacher Candidates Graduate With Honors While Only 30% of All Undergraduate Students Do So*

Washington, DC — A new report from the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) documents that education majors are significantly more likely to receive high grades and graduate with honors than students in other majors on the same campuses.

The report, *Easy A’s and What’s Behind Them*, argues that the persistent lack of rigor in teacher education coursework is a disservice to future teachers and their students. By failing to signal the challenge and complexity of real teaching, these courses send too many graduates into the classroom woefully unprepared, thus diminishing the value of their investment in preparation.

NCTQ looked at graduation data for students from more than 500 institutions—where nearly half of all new teachers are prepared—and found that education majors are almost half again as likely as all graduating students to graduate with academic honors.

“Teaching is one of the most difficult and demanding jobs there is,” said Kate Walsh, president of NCTQ. “Yet for reasons that are hard to fathom, it appears to be one of the easiest majors both to get into and then to complete. Our findings are provocative and disturbing, helping to explain why most new teachers are overwhelmed when they walk into the classroom. The situation is not fair to the kids who get assigned to new teachers, nor is it right to shortchange the teachers themselves—who through no fault of their own are not sufficiently prepared.”

*Easy A’s* is the latest installment in a series of reports by NCTQ, each focusing on a different aspect of teacher preparation. These reports supplement NCTQ’s much broader *Teacher Prep Review*, which rates the quality of teacher preparation programs and is published by *U.S. News & World Report*.

*Easy A’s* findings:

- Based on spring commencement brochures from 509 institutions, a teacher candidate is half again as likely to graduate with honors: on average, 44 percent of teacher candidates versus only 30 percent of all students in graduating classes earn academic honors.
- This 14 percentage point *average* differential between graduating teacher candidates and other graduating students (44%-30%) masks the much larger difference found at many of the institutions in the study. At about a quarter of the colleges and universities, the gap stands at a disturbing 20 percentage points, climbing as high as 40 percentage points in 14 (3 percent) of the institutions.

- At a minority but significant number of institutions (42 percent), teacher candidates are not much more likely than their campus peers to earn honors. At these institutions, there are few, no or even reverse differentials—proof that it is possible for grading standards in teacher preparation to align to campus norms.

(Individual findings for the 509 institutions can be retrieved from the NCTQ website, <http://www.nctq.org/teacherPrep/review2014.do>, and are found in Appendix A of the report.)

NCTQ's analysis did not stop with an examination of grades, but also investigated *why* teacher candidates at so many colleges and universities might receive such high grades in professional coursework, even as many surveys report that new teachers frequently struggle to be effective despite their high grades. Ruling out a number of explanations, the analysis ultimately focused on the kinds of assignments that the candidates must complete.

NCTQ analyzed the types of course assignments for 1,161 courses, both education and non-education (including business, psychology, history, nursing, economics and biology) across 33 institutions, finding two basic types of assignments.

NCTQ termed these two types of assignments “criterion-deficient” and “criterion-referenced.” The prevalence of one type of assignment over another proves to be a powerful predictor of whether a course is more or less likely to lead to high grades. (This relationship was determined using a subsample of 499 courses for which the average grade is publicly available.)

Courses where it is relatively easy to earn an "A" rely primarily on criterion-deficient assignments. Such assignments tend to be generally quite broad in nature, do not require demonstration or mastery of particular knowledge or skills, and are often subjective, asking only that students express an opinion.

Courses where it is harder to earn an "A" tend to base grades more on “criterion-referenced” assignments, honing in more narrowly on specific knowledge and skills. These assignments are more objective in nature, with an understanding that some strategies are more effective than others in the classroom. (Examples of the two types of assignments can be found at the conclusion of the press release, with many examples taken from teacher preparation coursework in Sections 2 and 4, and Appendix D of the report.)

“Criterion-deficient” assignments are overwhelmingly more common in education coursework than in the courses in other majors. In the average teacher preparation course, criterion-deficient assignments account on average for 71 percent of the grade, but in non-education coursework such assignments account for only 34 percent of the course grade.

Based on this research, NCTQ makes a number of recommendations. Among them, teacher preparation programs need to examine teacher candidates' grades on their own campuses to align their grades with other majors, set common standards for what it takes

to earn top marks, shift the balance of assignments from criterion-deficient to criterion-referenced, and award honors to only a limited percentile of top-performing candidates.

### About the National Council on Teacher Quality

The National Council on Teacher Quality is a nonprofit, nonpartisan research and policy organization located in Washington, DC. Founded in 2000, the National Council on Teacher Quality is committed to restructuring the teaching profession, led by our vision that every child deserves effective teachers. NCTQ is committed to lending transparency to and increasing public awareness of the four institutions having the greatest impact on teacher quality: states, teacher preparation programs, school districts and teachers unions.

Funding for NCTQ's *Teacher Prep Review* and related reports is provided by over 50 foundations, located in 22 states.

### What Others are Saying About *Easy A's* and What's Behind Them

Dina Rock, a 5<sup>th</sup> grade language arts and social studies teacher from Ohio who was an advisor to the project, said, "Too often new teachers don't know what they didn't learn until they're on their own, facing classrooms of children. *Easy A's* explains what's behind the painfully frustrating experience of too many new teachers."

Celine Coggins, Executive Director of Teach Plus, whose focus is ensuring that urban children are taught by effective, experienced teachers, said, "Every year thousands of bright college students go into education, committed to working specifically with children in poverty. Then we drive them away from the profession because we didn't train them well. Kids who desperately need these new teachers' energy and passion are the losers. If we want to be successful at educating at-risk children, we have to teach their teachers well."

### Examples of Criterion-Referenced and Criterion-Deficient Assignments

The distinction between these two types of assignments is not unique to teacher preparation coursework, but we focus on examples that could have been taken from teacher preparation because of the focus of NCTQ's work. In order to show that it is not difficult to add criteria to an assignment that is criterion-deficient to ensure that both teacher candidates and their instructors can focus more on critical content and skills, the two criterion-referenced are modifications of the criterion-deficient examples. An explanation of how the assignment has been improved to provide a better foundation for strong training is provided.

<b>Criterion-Deficient Assignment</b>	<b>Criterion-Referenced Assignment</b>
Indicate on the checklist that will be provided to you the techniques that the teacher whom you are observing in your field placement class uses to engage all students in discussion.	Indicate on the checklist that will be provided to you in class the techniques that the teacher whom you are observing in <del>your field placement class</del> <b>the video we will view in class</b> uses to engage all students in discussion.
	<i>How is this improved?: By selection of a video the instructor can ensure that candidates view</i>

	<i>particularly significant techniques and demonstrate the skill to discern the techniques.</i>
After teaching a lesson in your field placement, analyze the results of pre- and a post-teaching quizzes and interpret how the results would inform your instructional planning if you were teaching the next day.	<del>After teaching a lesson in your field placement,</del> Analyze the results of <del>a</del> <b>the</b> pre- and post-teaching quizzes <b>that I have provided</b> and interpret how the results would inform your instructional planning if you were teaching the next day.
	<i>How is this improved?: By analyzing results from quizzes that the instructor has developed, the instructor both ensures that candidates are examining results that contain important content about student misconceptions and common errors or difficulties, and that the candidates have the skill to discern both what has not been learned and what can or should be taught next.</i>