

Why

▼ BY RAY OSTRANDER

Accreditation?

"How many of you remember a teacher that you feel had a significant positive impact on your life?" As I looked around the room at the 200 plus conference participants, I could see every individual at every table with her/his hand raised. This was no small tribute from a group of successful doctors, dentists, lawyers, chief executive officers, and college professors. But then, I have always maintained teachers substantively touch the lives of more individuals than any other profession.

So what does this anecdote have to do with accreditation? First, for the sake of argument, let's say that the Andrews' Teacher Preparation Program graduates 20 students in anyone year. Of those 20 students, let's say a minimum of ten teach for 25 years, a cumulative total of 250 years. Conservatively, let's say that each of these teachers teaches only ten students a year. This means one teacher from

Andrews will teach a minimum of 250 students over 25 years. Multiply those 250 students times the 250 cumulative years the ten teachers will teach, and we have the lives of 62,500 young people influenced for a minimum of six hours a day, 180 days per year. Therefore, using these conservative figures, over a five-year period of time, graduates from the Andrews' Teacher Preparation Program will, at a minimum, have influence over and on the lives of 312,500 youth. The question this information begs, then, is how can the Andrews University Teacher Preparation Program ensure that the teachers they train will contribute positively to the mental, social, physical, and spiritual needs of young people. Part of this answer is through external accreditation. Not only is the Teacher Preparation Program accredited through the North American Division of Education, it is also

accredited through the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). The essential function of NCATE accreditation is to standardize the profession nationally and to provide professional judgement concerning the quality of the educational program primarily responsible for the preparation of teachers and other professional school personnel as well as encourage its continuous improvement. As such, accountability and improvement in teacher preparation are central to the mission of NCATE. This accountability and improvement occur because of rigorous standards for excellence required by the profession as developed by four constituent groups: (1) teacher education, (2) teachers, (3) state and local policy makers, and (4) professional specialty areas, i.e., English, math, social studies, etc.

The standards established by NCATE demand that every child should be taught by teachers who are well-prepared and competent. The vision of teacher education mandated by NCATE is as follows:

Accredited educational programs should:

- .ensure that new teachers meet accepted standards of practice and attain the necessary knowledge, skills, and dispositions to teach independently;
- .commit to preparing teachers for a diverse community of students;
- .encourage collegiality, reflective practice, continuous improvement, and collaboration among educators and learners; and
- .view teacher preparation and development as a continuum, moving from preservice preparation to supervised beginning practice to continuing professional development.

First the professional education unit must undergo analyses of existing programs with specialty area standards. Once these analyses are completed, they are mailed to NCATE who forwards them to a group of curriculum specialists. They will mail their critiques back to NCATE who forwards them to the institution. The institution then examines the critiques and responds to noted weaknesses with rejoinders. Six months later, a peer review board of examiners (BOE) visits the campus to examine the entire teacher prep program and related areas to confirm the educational unit's compliance to a set of 20 standards developed by the above-mentioned four constituent groups. Therefore, the educational unit must make certain that it collects and presents evidences for all 20 standards in a way that is clear and concise. After four days of interviews, observations, and materials examination, the BOE presents its findings and makes a recommendation to NCATE as to the accreditation of the institution. This is a continuous process which occurs for each accredited institution in five-year cycles.

Through such an intensive accreditation process, the Andrews University Teacher Preparation Program aims to place teachers that can and will make a difference in classrooms, so that students of AU graduates will someday raise their hands and say, "I had a teacher that made a significant, positive difference in my life!"

Andrews University Teacher Preparation Program is up for continuing NCATE accreditation review November 17-20, 1996.

2 The new professional teacher who graduates from an accredited teacher education program should be able to:

- .explain instructional choices based on research-derived knowledge and best practice;
- .apply effective methods of teaching students who are at different developmental stages and have different learning styles, or come from culturally diverse backgrounds;
- .reflect on practice and receive and act on feedback; and

.create meaningful learning experiences for P-12 students.

3 This teacher has gained those abilities through:

- .a broad liberal arts education;
- .in-depth study of the teaching field;
- .a foundation of professional knowledge upon which to base instructional decisions;
- .diverse, well-planned, and sequenced field experiences in P-12 schools; and
- .an assessment of competence, through an array of performance measures, to practice.

In order to receive accreditation, a teacher preparation program must adopt and implement this vision.

The way NCATE ensures these standards is rigorous.

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