March 30, 2011

Dear UMKC Partners in Education:

Recently, as you may have heard, the National Council for Teacher Quality (NCTQ) announced its intent to partner with *U.S. News and World Report* to publish a national ranking of the top teacher preparation programs. According to their January 20, 2011 press release, NCTQ will rate the quality of more than 1,000 school of education teacher preparation programs across the nation. The State of Missouri and the University of Missouri-Kansas City have a long history of developing high standards for teacher preparation and for holding our programs and ourselves accountable for meeting those high standards. Accordingly, we support and welcome rigorous, standards-based research using sound proven research methodology to help us improve our programs. Unfortunately, the study that the NCTQ and *U.S. News and World Report* are launching does not reflect the application of standards-based research, sound and proven research methodology, or rigor.

In fact, it reflects just the opposite and has prompted Dr. Sharon Robinson, President and Executive Director, American Association for Colleges of Teacher Education (AACTE), to state the following in referring to participation in this project by schools and colleges of education:

“This project does not recommend itself as one worthy of your involvement. The issues concerning methodology are significant. Another factor that gives us pause is the experience of our members in past NCTQ projects. After members had devoted considerable time to drafting responses and gathering additional material for NCTQ’s evaluation of their programs, NCTQ often rejected the new information as irrelevant. Thus, NCTQ is advancing an analysis of program quality that is not based on all the evidence.”

In addition to serious concerns regarding the research methodology associated with the proposed NCTQ study, as Kansas City’s research university, we also vehemently reject the coercion strategies that the NCTQ has used in the past and, according to their website, is planning to again use in this study to secure the participation of schools and colleges of education. As Dr. Robinson stated, “We know that NCTQ will produce a report regardless of whether institutions participate or not. NCTQ has indicated that failure to participate in this project could result in a program failing on multiple or all of its standards. Any study that begins with such a tone of intimidation is destined to be problematic.”

The University of Missouri-Kansas City believes that all educator preparation programs should be held to the highest nationally recognized standards so that all children are afforded an equitable, high-quality education regardless of their life circumstances and we are committed to preparing all professional educators to meet this calling. The certification programs offered at
UMKC adhere to the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education’s legislative rules and standards. The NCTQ is not a recognized accrediting body; thus we are not accountable to their self-defined non-research-based “standards.”

We do, however, hold ourselves accountable to the standards of recognized professional non-profit associations, such as the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), which the U.S. Department of Education recognizes as a professional accrediting body for colleges and universities that prepare teachers and other professional personnel for work in elementary and secondary schools. NCATE is a non-profit, non-governmental organization, and more than 30 national associations representing the education profession at large make up the council. The associations that comprise NCATE appoint representatives to NCATE’s policy boards, which develop NCATE standards, policies, and procedures. Membership on policy boards includes representatives from organizations of teacher educators, teachers, state and local policymakers, and professional specialists in P-12 schools. In 2006, the UMKC School of Education received official full continuing accreditation from NCATE and the School’s next site visit will be in early 2012.

The University of Missouri-Kansas City does and will always support aspiring teachers and the pursuit of academic excellence. We are open to sound, credible standards and want to be challenged by such standards that will help us to better prepare our graduates for tomorrow’s diverse classrooms, aid school districts in knowing where they should target hiring efforts, and assist education leaders and policymakers in determining best practices. However, we will not look to the NCTQ as the source of this information, but will continue to work with AACTE, NCATE, and others on significant education reform efforts aimed at improving our professional practice. In fact, the UMKC School of Education recently began piloting a Comprehensive Unit Assessment System including the development and implementation of performance-based assessment measures for all of its programs (not just teachers) in the School. The School will gather feedback from its program completers and their employers on a regular basis.

We are confident in the quality of our teacher and professional educator preparation programs. Using questionable methodologies to guide our programs will only yield questionable results. Therefore, we will not participate in the NCTQ and U.S. News and World Report study. Instead, we will continue to use the most reliable and high-quality assessment measures for our teacher candidates in order to live the UMKC School of Education’s mission “To recruit, prepare, and support outstanding teachers, mental health professionals, and administrators who will create lifelong opportunities through education for America’s diverse urban communities.”

Sincerely,

Leo E. Morton  Gail Hackett  Wanda J. Blanchett
Chancellor  Provost  Dean, School of Education