

Accreditor of Education Schools Drops Controversial 'Social Justice' Language by Paula Wasley

(This article originally appeared on *The Chronicle of Higher Education* website.
<<http://chronicle.com/daily/2006/06/2006060602n.htm>>)

The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education won a key endorsement on Monday in its quest for continued federal approval of its accrediting power after announcing that it would drop controversial language relating to "social justice" from its accrediting standards for teacher-preparation programs.

The council, which is the nation's largest teacher-education accrediting organization, has come under fire from conservative activists for the wording of standards that require that candidates in education programs "demonstrate the content, pedagogical, and professional knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to help all students learn."

The council, known as Neate, had said that teacher candidates' "dispositions" should be "guided by beliefs and attitudes such as caring, fairness, honesty and responsibility, and social justice."

The concept of social justice, opponents contend, has political overtones and can be used by institutions to weed out would-be teachers based on their social and political beliefs. Several teacher candidates, in fact, have complained recently about education professors who seemed more interested in students' political views than in their classroom performance (*The Chronicle*, December 16, 2005).

On Monday, at a hearing of the U.S. Department of Education's National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity, Arthur E. Wise, president of Neate, called the criticisms of the standards "unwarranted" but announced that the organization would drop "social justice" from the guidelines, "lest there be any misunderstanding about our intentions."

Mr. Wise emphasized that the phrase "social justice" was merely an example of criteria institutions may adopt when assessing candidates' dispositions, and was never intended as an accreditation requirement. Each institution, he said, was free to choose its own disposition evaluation criteria.

"The allegation that Neate requires thought control is simply wrong," he said. His announcement pre-empted testimony from members of groups such as the National Association of Scholars and the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, who had gathered to voice objections to the "social justice" provision and request that the Department of Education withhold renewal of its recognition of Neate until that term was removed.

Stephen H. Balch, president of the National Association of Scholars, said he was "delighted" by Ncate's decision to strike the concept of "social justice" from its standards, calling the phrase "ideologically freighted" and "necessarily ambiguous." Similarly, Greg Lukianoff, president of the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, applauded the change as a "step in the right direction."

"Social justice" is simply too vague of a term and susceptible to interpretation," he said. But, although pleased with the modification, Anne D. Neal, the president of the American Council of Trustees and Alumni, said rewording the standards was not enough.

Higher-education institutions have "already adopted the standard and are using it in ways that lend itself to political litmus tests," she said in an interview after the hearing, noting that several colleges have incorporated the words "social justice" into mission statements or teacher-evaluation forms.

It is, she said, "short-sighted to think that eliminating the words eliminates the problem." Mr. Wise countered that Ncate had already alerted member institutions to the changes and that a draft version of the revised standards was already available for public comment on the organization's website.

The National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity passed a motion recommending that the department renew its recognition of Ncate for five more years. It also recommended expanding the council's authority to include the accreditation of programs offering distance education.

Background articles from The Chronicle:

- Washington State U. Revises Evaluation Form for Would-Be Teachers That Led to Bias Complaints <<http://chronicle.com/daily/2006/03/2006030103n.htm>> (3/1/2006)
- 'We Don't Need That Kind of Attitude' <<http://chronicle.com/weekly/v52/i17/17a00801.htm>> (12/16/2005)
- Group Asks Education Dept. to Investigate 2 Accreditors for What It Calls Politicized Standards <<http://chronicle.com/daily/2005/11/2005110206n.htm>> (11/2/2005)
- Accreditation Group Releases New Standards for Teacher-Education Programs <<http://chronicle.com/daily/2000/05/2000051606n.htm>> (5/16/2000)
- Fight Intensifies Over Accreditation of Teacher-Education Programs <<http://chronicle.com/weekly/v45/i07/07a01201.htm>> (10/9/1998)
- Debate Over Accrediting Teacher Education Continues <<http://chronicle.com/che-data/articles.dir/articles-38.dir/issue-35.dir/35a01902.htm>> (5/6/1992)



November 6, 2006

SCHOOL OF
EDUCATION

Arthur E. Wise
President
National Council for the
Accreditation of Teacher Education
2010 Massachusetts Avenue NW, Suite 500
Washington, DC 200036

Dear Art:

At a recent faculty meeting, a member of our School of Education faculty raised a question about whether NCATE had dropped its use of the term "social justice" in accreditation standards documents. If so, he wanted to know what this meant and whether our faculty should formulate some type of formal response.

I have seen your June 16th "Statement from NCATE on Professional Dispositions" posted on your Website, but I am not aware of any recent actions that may have occurred regarding this controversy. Thus I am writing to ask you what changes, if any, NCATE has made relative to the use of the term "social justice" and what may have led to those changes. I'd like to report back to the faculty and rather than seek third-hand information I thought I should ask you directly.

This issue will be on the agenda for our next Policy Council meeting in early December and I'd appreciate any information or background materials you can provide me before then. Thank you for your attention to this request.

Cordially,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gerardo M. Gonzalez".

Gerardo M. Gonzalez
University Dean

Cc: Dr. Bradley Levinson, Chair, Policy Council Agenda Committee

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FW your question on professional dispositions

From: Gonzalez, Gerardo M.
Sent: Monday, November 13, 2006 3:16 PM
To: Levinson, Bradley Adam Unger; Blackwell, Jacqueline; Torres, Vasti
Cc: Kaho, Jane; Brown, Catherine Ann; Edwards, Clara Marie; Gonzalez, Gerardo M.; Houser, Linda Lou; Kinman, David; Kloosterman, Peter W.; Lambdin, Diana V; Leland, Christine H.; McMullen, Mary B.; Murtadha, Khaula H.; Shedd, Jill D; Williamson, Genevieve Manset
Subject: FW: your question on professional dispositions

Per our discussion at the last Agenda Committee meeting, the NCATE response to the letter I sent Art Wise inquiring about the "social justice" controversy is attached below. I'm copying the school of Education associate deans so they're aware of the response as well.

Gerardo

-----Original Message-----

From: Jane@ncate.org [mailto:Jane@ncate.org]
Sent: Monday, November 13, 2006 2:51 PM
To: Gonzalez, Gerardo M.
Cc: Art@ncate.org
Subject: your question on professional dispositions

Dear Dr. Gonzalez:

Art received your letter in the mail as he was preparing to leave for BOE training around noon today. He wanted me to get back to you so that you would have an answer sooner rather than later! The following is Art's response:

NCATE's 2001 Standards-- with their emphasis on candidate outcomes rather than curriculum--represented a dramatic departure. When it came time for a periodic review of the Standards, we promised that the only changes would be to clarify expectations, to remove ambiguity, and to promote consistency.

Quite a few individuals and organizations responded to our invitation to review and comment on the standards. The Standards Committee of the Unit Accreditation Board carefully analyzed each comment and made a number of changes to clarify the Standards. These changes were then reviewed by the Unit Accreditation Board.

A number of comments concerned the important ideal of "social justice." NCATE Standards, particularly its Diversity Standard, contain elements of "social justice." The Diversity Standard requires that institutions prepare teacher candidates who can teach so that all children learn. NCATE Standards also require that teacher candidates teach consistently with the ideals of fairness and the belief that all children can learn. NCATE's performance -based approach means that its expectations be measurable in the context of candidates' clinical experiences such as student teaching. The committee and the Board reaffirmed these long-standing expectations, making a small number of wording changes to clarify how the Diversity Standard and "professional dispositions" are to be measured.

Dr. Gonzalez, the proposed wording changes that pertain to NCATE's regular revision cycle for the standards can be viewed at:
http://www.ncate.org/public/0511_stdRevision.asp?ch=148
The change in wording was actually in the definition of 'dispositions' and that definition is in the glossary. You will want to review the diversity standard as well.

You have Art's statement on dispositions already at
http://www.ncate.org/public/0616_MessageAwise.asp?ch=150

FW your question on professional dispositions
BTW, we still use your excellent editorial as an example that others may
follow: see this link:
<http://www.indiana.edu/%7Esoenews/news/news983377388.html>

Let us know if you need further information.

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