

March 12, 2007

Dr. Arthur Wise, President  
National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education  
2010 Massachusetts Avenue, NW  
Suite 500  
Washington, DC 20036

Dear Dr. Wise:

Thank you for taking the time out of your busy schedule to meet with me last Friday morning. Your continued support of me over the past years is greatly appreciated. The purpose of this letter, however, is to state my opposition, as the Head of the Professional Education Unit at Eastern Michigan University, to the removal of social justice from the NCATE nomenclature.

In my opinion, the proposed professional dispositions and "fairness" are not nearly adequate enough to support a professional education unit. If law, social work, nursing, psychology, etc can speak the words, "social justice," professional educators certainly need to have an understanding of what social justice means in the preparation of professional educators. Minorities realized great progress, especially during the latter half of the last century, but the educational advancement of ethnic and minority groups has not matched their growth in numbers in this country.

I agree, surprisingly, with the National Association of Scholars who argues that teacher candidates should not be judged based on their performance in the area of "social justice." It is rather difficult to imagine how teacher candidates and other professional educators could be fairly judged using a rubric (i.e. target, acceptable, unacceptable) to score their commitment and performance in a domain called "social justice." NCATE, however, could be most helpful to its member institutions by "defining" social justice rather than simply removing it as if it is no longer relevant or suggest that "it" is sufficiently "covered" under diversity.

Some would argue that anything found in the NCATE standards should be measurable and observable in the candidates' performance. I argue that [NCATE](#) is more than what teachers and other professional educators "know and do" in the field (Standards 1, 2 and 3) – Candidate knowledge, skills, and dispositions are *outputs*. Social justice (*input*) is a well-established social "ideal" that speaks to how an institution defines diversity, recruits and retains its faculty and students (Standard 4); how an institution considers its faculty and their relevant qualifications (Standard 5); and how the Unit allocates its funds to ensure diversity and justice (Standard 6).

Diversity is one matter--it does not ensure that "no child is left behind," only social justice can attempt to properly address myriad issues which preclude the possibility that all children have access to a quality education (the core principle of social justice). Social justice tends to equalize disparities in educational attainment, educational achievement and socio-economic status, and the impact of prejudice and discrimination on educational attainment.

For example, we just hired our first African American male faculty this week. Although the candidate is clearly qualified, it was social justice (the ideal) that provided the argument to justify his hiring, not diversity. We have many faculty from around the world, albeit eminently qualified and essential to execution of our academic programs, but do not necessarily look or sound like the students who are showing up for class in Detroit, Saginaw, Flint, and Ypsilanti.

It is social justice that sustains our Minority Achievement Recruitment and Retention Program (MARS) that serves our teacher candidates who experience all types of challenges on and off our campus and in our classrooms.

It is social justice that ensures that all students, educator candidates, and faculty are protected against discrimination, physical abuse, emotional distress, and social stigmatization regardless of their race, gender, class, or sexual orientation. This, of course, includes those persons who identify as lesbian, bisexual, gay, or transgender.

Further, we are the largest producer of special education educators in the nation. The history of special education in the country was built around issues that we define as social justice. Although the United States is trailing other industrialized nations in mathematics and sciences, we still lead the world in establishing the knowledge base and best practices for the education of children with disabilities.

It will be social justice that will infuse a sense of resilience among the relatively few black males on our campus. African American males graduate at 26% in Michigan – the lowest rate in the nation. Hispanic males and females are not far behind. If these students, who live at the margins of society, can not successfully complete high school, we will not need to worry about them entering our teacher preparation programs. In essence, social justice is the one true ideal that ensures that “no child is left behind.” It appears ironic that those same factions that would argue that no child be left behind, would also aggressively work to remove social justice from the nomenclature. Can we have it both ways?

EMU has produced 1793 teachers for Michigan schools in the last three years. Only 143 are African American and a mere 43 are Hispanic. Among the African Americans only 4 are mathematics teachers and 5 are science teachers. These are clear issues which cry out for a remedy that we have come to call in this country, “social justice.”

Let me share some background information which further frames my concerns with respect to the need for social justice as a social construct within the NCATE nomenclature.

For more than 150 years, Eastern Michigan University has played a major state and national role in the preparation of teachers, other school personnel and related professionals. EMU has a historic and valued place as the first “normal school” west of the Alleghenies. Eastern was among the first institutions involved with the preparation of physical educators and special education teachers. The Professional Education Unit, (consisting of programs housed in the College of Education (COE), the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS), the College of Health and Human Services (CHHS), and the College of Technology (COT) is one of the nation’s largest preparers of professional education personnel, offering programs at the bachelor, masters, specialists and doctoral degree levels. The University’s programs have received a number of national recognitions, are fully accredited by the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), and are approved by the Michigan Department of Education. In almost every instance where a program-specific national recognition exists, the Professional Education Unit at EMU holds this recognition at the highest level. Through its Office of Collaborative Education, the College of Education has created numerous partnerships with local school districts that are interested in enhancing a variety of school improvement activities.

EMU graduates are highly prized and are aggressively recruited at the national level. Our alumni hold many distinctions, including the Pulitzer Prize, National Student Teacher of the Year and National Teacher of the Year, and serve as presidents or executives of major national professional organizations. In addition, 26 EMU graduates have received the Prestigious Milken Family Foundation Award for teaching excellence in the classroom—the largest number accredited to any teacher preparation institution in the nation.

The College of Education is an essential component of the Professional Education Unit and is the home for the Head of the Professional Education Unit, the Certification Officer, and the Accreditation Coordinator. There are more than 8,500 students enrolled in myriad educational programs housed in the College of Education, the College of Arts and Sciences, the College of Business, and the College of Technology.

The Professional Education Unit at EMU, annually, certifies more than 1200 teachers representing elementary, secondary, and special education (See Table 1 below):

**Table 1.**

**Teacher Preparation Program Completers by Level of Certification**

<b>Completions</b>	<b>Elementary Ed.</b>	<b>Secondary Ed.</b>	<b>Special and Physical Ed</b>	<b>Grand Total</b>
2003-04	553	460	190	1203
2004-05	497	450	197	1144
2005-06	555	503	235	1293

If schools matter, access to the “highest” qualified teachers matters most. As the largest preparer of certified teachers for the State, the College of Education at EMU is attentive to the following data generated from the placements of certified teachers in Michigan between 2003 –2005. This data provides powerful insights into the needs for highly qualified teachers to meet the social justice challenges presented by the dearth of highest qualified teachers in schools with the greatest needs. Please note the numbers and placements of mathematics, science, special education and African American teachers. Schools and colleges of education have a role to play in addressing these disparities—we call it social justice.

Given our size and scope, EMU serves as a good benchmark for forecasting trends in teacher preparation in Michigan and perhaps the nation. The data that follows provides real assertions about teacher certification and social justice:

1. There are obvious critical needs in the areas of secondary mathematics and the sciences, especially given the new high school graduation requirements.
2. EMU placed nearly 50% of its graduates in schools around the State. This is particularly impressive given the fact that Michigan is an export state, meaning we produce more teachers that can be hired within the state.
3. African American teachers are most likely teaching in predominately African American populated school districts. The good news is that increasing the number of highly qualified African American teachers will ensure that more African American students are served by African American teachers.
4. Proportionately, Hispanics have the largest number of mathematics teachers. Hispanics are, however, less likely to teach in districts where large numbers of Hispanic students are enrolled.
5. There continues to be critical shortages of special education teachers in all categories by all races.

*The data set consists of  $n = 1792$  cases.*

- Out of the 1792 teachers that accepted Michigan jobs during the past three academic years:
  - 1597 (89.1%) are White
  - 143 (8.0%) are African American
  - 29 (1.6%) are Hispanic
  - 10 (0.6%) are Asian
  - 5 (0.4%) are American Indian

- About one-quarter (443) of these teachers taught under the assignment description of “*General EL K-5 all K-8 self-contained.*”
- 5.9% (106) of teachers were in the area of Mathematics.
  - Of the 106 Math teachers, 94 were White, 5 were African-American and 5 were Hispanic.
  - White Math teachers, as a percentage of their teaching population, are 5.8%.
  - African-American Math teachers, as a percentage of their population, are 3.5%.
  - Hispanic Math teachers, as a percentage of their population, are 17.2%
- 4.7% (85) of teachers were in the area of Science.
  - Of the 85 Science teachers, 78 were White and 4 were African-American.
  - White Science teachers, as a percentage of their teaching population, are 4.9%;
  - African-American Science teachers, as a percentage of their teaching population, are 2.8%.
- 12.8% (230) of teachers were in the area of Special Education.
  - Of the 230 Special Education teachers, 211 were White, 18 were African-American, 1 was Asian.
  - White Special Education teachers, as a percentage of their teaching population, are 13.2%.
  - African-American Science teachers as a percentage of their teaching population, were 12.6%.
- African-American teachers (143) by location (Top 5).
  - 22 (15.3%) who chose to work in Michigan are in Detroit.
  - 9 (6.3%) who chose to work in Michigan are in Ypsilanti.
  - 7 (4.9%) who chose to work in Michigan are with Wayne RESA.
  - 6 (4.2%) who chose to work in Michigan are in Monroe.
  - 6 (4.2%) who chose to work in Michigan are in Ann Arbor.
- Hispanic teachers (29) by location (Top 5).
  - 6 (20.7%) who chose to work in Michigan are in Madison (Adrian).
  - 4 (13.8%) who chose to work in Michigan are in Howell.
  - 3 (10.3%) who chose to work in Michigan are in Detroit.
  - 3 (10.3%) who chose to work in Michigan are with Wayne RESA.
  - 2 (6.9%) who chose to work in Michigan are in both Pontiac and Plymouth-Canton.

Social justice has traditionally been the impetus for removing barriers that keep us mindful of the continued achievement and economics gaps between White and non-Hispanic and other racial/ethnic groups in the nation. For example, child poverty is a growing problem in Michigan. Since 2000, child poverty rates have increased from 14 to 17 percent, and there are approximately 26,000 more poor children in the state. More than a third of Michigan’s children live in low-income families. In Detroit, nearly *three in four* children are low income.

1. There are approximately 2.5 million children living in Michigan. 37%—926,000—live in low-income families.

- 17%—419,000—live in poor families.
2. There are approximately 262,000 children living in Detroit.
- 72%—188,000—live in low-income families.
- 39%—101,000—live in poor families.

Attitudes, aspirations, and motivation are also of importance and explain a large portion of the social imbalances that remain after the removal of more tangible factors. Therefore attention must be paid to the social environment students come from and assess their opportunity for academic achievement in their formative years. Consider the high school completion rates by race and gender (see Table 2 below).

**Table 2: High school completion in MI by race and gender**

<b>Graduation Rate by Student Group</b>	<b>Michigan (%)</b>	<b>Nation (%)</b>
<b>All Students</b>	<b>66.4</b>	<b>69.6</b>
<b>By Gender</b>		
Male	62.7	65.2
Female	69.2	72.7
<b>By Race and Ethnicity</b>		
American Indian/Alaska Native	23.1	47.4
Asian/Pacific Islander	67.3	77.0
Hispanic	35.0	55.6
Black (not Hispanic)	31.6	51.6
White (not Hispanic)	74.7	76.2
<b>By Gender and Race and Ethnicity</b>		
<b>Male</b>		
American Indian/Alaska Native	**	42.7
Asian/Pacific Islander	60.7	73.1
Hispanic	29.0	50.1
Black (not Hispanic)	26.0	44.3
White (not Hispanic)	71.2	72.4
<b>Female</b>		
American Indian/Alaska Native	23.6	47.5
Asian/Pacific Islander	69.9	79.6
Hispanic	35.8	59.9
Black (not Hispanic)	35.4	57.8
White (not Hispanic)	76.3	77.9

**Recommendations**

- 1. Reinstate “social justice” within the “Glossary of NCATE Terms” and nomenclature;**
- 2. Establish a subcommittee of the Standards Committee to properly “define” social justice for professional education units;**
- 3. Charge the NCATE Standards Committee with defining “principles” of social justice aligned with ensuring that “no child is left behind.”**

- 4. Charge each member institution with the accountability for implementing the principles of social justice and providing evidence of its implementation.**
- 5. Never judge individual candidates based upon their innate values and adherence to a social justice rubric, but establish a process which will allow professional education units to define and self-assess their commitment to social justice.**

I appreciate your attention to this matter. I remain available to assist with any of the aforementioned recommendations. If I can provide additional information or examples, please contact me at 734-487-1414. Further, if time permits, my faculty would welcome a response to their letter disapproving the removal of social justice issue from the NCATE glossary.

Sincerely,

Vernon C. Polite,  
Professor and Dean

VCP/caz

cc: Dr. Ana Maria Schuhmann  
Dr. Antoinette Mitchell  
Dr. Boyce Williams  
Dr. Donna M. Gollnick  
Dr. Sharon Porter Robinson  
Dr. M. Christopher Brown