Dear Colleagues,

Once again, the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) will release a report of rankings of teacher preparation programs in the United States. These ratings will be released on June 17 and will be published in the U.S. News and World Report. The expectation created by this organization is that the vast majority of University-based teacher education programs are of low quality and are failing to prepare competent teachers for the nation’s schools.

Niagara University did not participate, yet we will be still be included in the rankings. Our knowledge of NCTQ, its methodology, and the experience of other states in working with this organization suggest that the document will not present an accurate nor complete account of teacher preparation in New York State. We do know that many school districts, for example, received a freedom of information request to provide materials from universities to communicate, assess or describe their field experiences and student teaching. Simply being ranked through this type of data collection is an indicator of the inherent issues in this project.

The College of Education at Niagara University takes great pride in the quality of its academic programs and of the career success of its graduates in the U.S. and in Ontario. Our alumni, our current students, and the community we serve have witnessed the evidence of our commitment to excellence, content-knowledge, and accreditation standards – measures of accountability which are set by the New York State Education Department, the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities in Ontario, the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), and the Ontario College of Teachers, among others. Their standards set a high bar for the profession and have been developed through sound methodology and research. NCTQ is not an accrediting agency; rather they refer to themselves as “education reform advocates”.

Niagara University’s teacher and leader preparation programs are comprehensive. We embrace accountability and high standards – standards that are research-based and transparently discussed and debated by the profession. Our focus is to prepare teachers in areas such as the Common Core and data-based instruction – working in partnership with P-12 schools to ensure comprehensive clinical practice for beginning teachers and enhanced student learning. Our results speak to this distinction.

**What do our findings show?**

Our findings show that:

- 100% of students pass the ATS-S, 99% pass the LAST, 95% pass the Multi-subject Content Specialty Test (CST), 100% pass the Teaching Students with Disabilities CST, 100% pass the
Literacy CST, and 100% pass the Math CST (New York State Certification Examinations, 2012-13 pass rates).

- 100% of teacher candidates participate in a comprehensive, supervised (assessed by the University supervisor and P-12 supervising teacher) student teaching experience of 14-15 weeks, with an additional 150 hours (minimum) of field experience completed to determine eligibility for student teaching. Niagara University’s student teachers average 555 hours in the classroom, with a 196 hours of mentor/induction support (Title II, 2013).

- The median high school GPA of incoming freshmen entering the education programs is 90, and the combined SAT for the entering students is 1012 (2013, Institutional Report).

- Employers rate our graduates the highest (mean of over 4.4 on a 1-5 scale) on indicators related to willingness to continue professional growth and self-assessment, knowledge of subject matter, and willingness to use a variety of instructional strategies to increase performance (2012 Employer Survey).

- 96% of undergraduate alumni report being employed; 59% are continuing their professional learning in graduate programs (Class of 2012, Employment report).

- Data on assessment for student learning demonstrate undergraduate and graduate strengths in instructional intervention, post assessment, evaluation/reflections, and collaboration. Beginning in 2014, all initial candidates completed the education Teacher Performance Assessment (edTPA) which focuses on planning for instruction and assessment, instructing and engaging students, and the assessment student learning. Preliminary results are very strong for the performance of our students on this assessment of teaching practice – in fact, over 85% have passed this new and controversial assessment. Of all those who have passed, 37% reached the highest levels of mastery.

- Increases have been documented in ELA and Math scores on the state assessments among students in participating classrooms of the Teacher Leader Quality Partnership grant (N=5065) and in high level performance in relevant content areas and pedagogical practices of participating teachers (N=67).

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*What comparisons are made based on national benchmarks (the National Survey of Student Engagement, NSSE, 2013):*

Recent analyses of NSSE compare students in education to students at peer institutions and it is noted that:

- Education candidates rated their participation in a community-based program as part of their course and their contributions to the welfare of the community higher than the University mean, the Carnegie peers, and NSSE institutions (NSSE, 2013). Niagara University’s pre-service teacher education students contributed 23,066 hours of service in P-12 classrooms (Learn and Serve and Teaching Assistantships).

- Undergraduate students in education rated their learning experiences related to diversity (diverse perspectives in class discussions or writing assignments) higher than their peers in all comparison categories (Carnegie, NSSE, and Niagara University peers: NSSE, 2013). Freshmen in education also rate their understanding of people of other racial and ethnic backgrounds higher than the University, Carnegie and NSSE peers (100% of teacher education students complete field experiences in high needs schools).
How does the College of Education provide leadership and innovation in the profession and what are the outcomes?

The College of Education at Niagara University seeks to lead sustainable transformation in education. Examples of the outcomes include the following:

- **Early College/Smart Scholars Program.** Through a partnership with Niagara Falls City School District, this program provides first generation college participants and students who are under-served an opportunity to earn up to 30 college credits prior to high school graduation. The five year program will work with 125 students who will benefit from on-campus visits throughout the academic year, attend summer camps focused on college and career readiness activities, and receive tutoring assistance from Niagara University’s College of Education students. This past year, 18 first generation college goers (eleventh grade students) completed their first college course and received A’s and B’s. Retention within the four year program averages 90% for first and second year cohorts. First year cohorts will graduate with 24 college credits in June 2015.

- **Family Literacy Center.** The Family Literacy Center (first in Niagara County) provides diagnostic reading services to children in grades Pre-k to 12 in a clinical setting. Graduate students in the Literacy Program provide weekly services to students from across Western New York. The services are coordinated with classroom teachers to strengthen identified reading difficulties. Data show that 100% of participants increased or remained the same in reading levels and 20% of participating children no longer need remedial reading services.

- **STEM Initiatives.** In a cutting-edge partnership with Niagara Falls City School District and National Grid, Niagara University has been involved in providing graduate study for 45 teachers over a three year period who work in the University’s College of Education summer STEM Camps. 100% of teachers teaching STEM Camps reported learning new strategies that are inquiry-based and research driven. 92% of 101 camp participants are now thinking about STEM careers. Also in the area of STEM, the College of Education partners with the Western New York Regional Education Council. In this initiative, 100% of 101 participants enjoyed hands-on applications through inquiry-based learning and as a result all participants reported learning about more than 40 careers in energy and advanced manufacturing.

- **Independent Sector Professional Development Statewide Initiative.** Niagara University’s College of Education has taken a leadership role at the state level (member of the Expert Advisory Panel) and the regional level (facilitator) of the statewide professional development initiative of the Commission of Independent Colleges and Universities (clcu). The College serves as the regional facilitator for the Western New York/Rochester/Finger Lakes region – leading 14 private, independent colleges and universities in the implementation of reforms teacher and leader preparation.

- **National Innovation Project (i3).** Niagara University and 12 partners, including the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, Stanford University and the Niagara Falls City School District, have been awarded an Investing in Innovation (or “i3”) grant of $3 million from the U.S. Department of Education. The federally funded program is designed to advance student
achievement in high-needs schools in grades 3-6 mathematics and science through improved teacher preparation and early-career teaching support. The project will help embed National Board standards and exemplars of accomplished teaching in pre-service and induction in participating institutions of higher education and LEAs.

- **Niagara County Quality Improvement Project (QIP).** The QIP serves 30 child care centers in Niagara Falls and Lockport in its focus to improve the quality of care and kindergarten readiness of 3 and 4 year old children in child care centers. Over 800 children have benefitted from this initiative. Findings of pre-and post-assessments show a significant difference in the kindergarten readiness skills of the children in participating early child care classrooms.

- **Teacher Leader Quality Partnership Grant (TLQP).** The TLQP initiative, funded through the New York State Education Department, has as its focus the preparation of teachers to meet the educational needs of English Language Learners. Through a partnership between International School 45 in the Buffalo City School District and Niagara University’s College of Education, 60 teachers from School 45 receive additional preparation, experience and qualifications in Teaching English to Students of Other Languages (TESOL) through a school-embedded partnership model of teacher preparation. Participating teachers have reported a 100% increase in diverse cultural background of immigrant parent and a 95% increase in best practice and strategies for instructional support. The International School serves 780 students representing 37 languages from over 50 countries.

- **Help Me Grow.** The College of Education facilitates the Help Me Grow initiative funded through the Health Foundation of Western and Central New York. The program is based on a national model to link young children (birth to age 5) to needed services through the coordination of existing agencies and services (partnerships with Pediatric offices, United Ways of Niagara and Erie Counties, Erie and Niagara County Early Intervention Programs, Early Childhood Direction Centers and others). This project will increase early diagnostic screenings for infants and toddlers (5,000 for 2014-2015) and increase number of children who are Pre-K and Kindergarten ready.

As these rankings of teacher preparation are released and press around national and state findings of NCTQ are promoted, please call me directly with any questions you may have. On behalf of our University and our faculty, I thank you for the partnerships we mutually embrace and our shared commitment to outcomes and enhanced student learning through the comprehensive preparation of educators for our schools and community.

Sincerely,

Debra A. Colley, Ph.D.
Dean, College of Education