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EDITOR'S NOTE;

The print version of this issue of *Perspectives in Learning* has an earlier draft of Dr. Miller's article that was sent to press in error. Below is the correct draft that will also appear in the Spring 2015 print issue.

Heads Up! Georgia Teacher Preparation Programs Threats

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Abstract

This article explores the changing landscape for the evaluation of Georgia Teacher Preparation Programs (GaTPPs). The author presents disconcerting perceptions driving changes which could threaten some of Georgia's programs and will certainly result in significant reforms. A summary is provided of the known reform proposals that will be required of the GaTPPs. The paper concludes with a recap of the threats and some defensive opportunities to neutralize them. The information contained in the article will highlight that it's not business as usual.

Heads up, Real threats are on the horizon. The critics of higher education are mounting, and the colleges of education are coming under special scrutiny. Institutions of higher education are required to defend and justify their programs against both criticisms directed at higher education in general and those specifically directed against teacher preparation programs.

Georgia colleges of education have always understood the crucial and special nature of their mission to prepare professional and caring teachers so that the necessary positive, academic impact for the children to succeed can be achieved. Others outside the teaching profession understand this as well. Thus, when Georgia teacher preparation program completers are perceived to be inadequate for this task, the critics will look first at teacher preparation programs for answers and probably to assign the blame.

Before addressing the significant changes on the horizon, the following pages summarize three perceptions that define the nature of the current evaluative landscape for Georgia Teacher Preparation Programs. Footnotes identify articles that tend to drive these perceptions. These footnoted articles are not intended to validate any specific article but to demonstrate the type of literature that drives the developing viewpoints.

Perception Drivers

Static-to-Declining Student Performance

Student performance appears to be static-to-declining depending on what time period is being measured. ¹ For example, 12th grade National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading scores declined slightly from 1975 to 2004 while math scores rose modestly over the same period. ²

Rising Per Capita Education Expenses

The taxpayer per capita expenditures adjusted for inflation are perceived to have grown rapidly and are thought to be among the highest in the world. However, performance is not commensurate with expenditures.³ Despite constant dollar per capita spending, increasing 23.5% from 1994 to 2004 and increasing by 83.8% in the 20 years between 1969 and 1989, the reading and math scores showed little change.⁴ Eric A. Hanushek, a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution, Stanford University, points out in Education Week (January 22, 2014) that the NAEP shows the U.S. student performance remaining “pretty flat” over several decades despite dramatic increases in K-12 spending.⁵

Return on Investment of Higher Education

Many college students today incur a significant amount of financial aid debt before they graduate. The United States Department of Education (USDE), who administers student financial aid under Title IV, is scrutinizing this trend and whether the students’ increased future earnings are sufficient to repay the loans. The USDE uses the regional accrediting agency Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) to qualify many institutions to participate in Title IV.⁶ Thus, SACS seems to be feeling pressure to ensure that learning outcomes are identified and actually achieved.

These three drivers combined create a potential toxic political brew and a call for reform. It is this atmosphere that will force changes in Georgia Teacher Preparation Programs and may threaten some programs with extinction. . While the changes have a worthy intent they may or may not bring improvement. Nevertheless, the teacher preparation programs must address these

changes and should consider them an opportunity to improve.

Three of the obvious changes are as follows:

Georgia was awarded \$400 million for the Race to the Top grant. This initiative identifies classroom student achievement and links it to the respective teacher preparation programs and publically reports this information. The idea is to expand the programs that appear to prepare teachers who are effective at promoting student achievement.⁷ Separately, the Federal Government through Title II requires states to report information and make it publicly available with the purpose of identifying underperforming programs.⁸ In addition, the current administration also proposed in 2011 that it should support state efforts that reward the best programs, strive to better mediocre ones and, interestingly, change or shut down the poorest performers.⁹ If this action ever materializes then, for the first time to this author’s knowledge, the federal government is advocating a system which produces *winner and losers* among teacher preparation programs.

Therefore, Georgia Teacher Preparation Programs now have the competitive threat of the publication of the best programs that could become more attractive to students. The worst programs, along with their negative publicity, may also face the possibility of extinction. The prospect of program termination has also been confirmed in Georgia by a University System of Georgia (USG) news release.¹⁰ This scenario of *winner and losers* is not business as usual for the USG Colleges of Education.

The Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) is poised to raise the bar for preparation of educators in our nation. CAEP will serve as a model accrediting agency mandating rigorous standards, demanding sound evidence, and

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establishing a platform to drive continuous improvement and innovation. These new standards include significantly higher admission requirements, actually tracking and measuring the impact that our graduates make on their students' learning and development, indicators of their professionalism, and the satisfaction of their employers.¹¹ The challenge is to make certain that students leave their teacher preparation programs with the necessary knowledge, skill sets, and dispositions.

An additional challenge for Georgia Teacher Preparation Programs (GaTPPs) is to be in a position to attract students who can meet the higher admission standards. Obviously, to do this, the GaTPPs must at least avoid the possibility of the negative publicity previously mentioned.

Reform proposals include the use of assessments by Independent Third Party Evaluators (I3PEs). These I3PEs will offer an outside opinion about Teacher Preparation Programs' performance and include:

Georgia Assessments for the Certification of Educators (GACE) is the educator certification assessment that is administered by Educational Testing Service (ETS). The purpose is to determine that the knowledge and skills of the teacher candidates are sufficient and are aligned with national and state standards including the Common Core Georgia Performance Standards (CCGPS).¹² These licensure tests are not new but they are becoming much more rigorous.

New to Georgia, the Education Teacher Performance Assessment (edTPA) is a Stanford University performance-based assessment that measures the classroom readiness of teacher candidates. The assessment includes a component that videos our prospective teachers in their student teaching environment. Students are

scored by outside evaluators using fifteen rubrics.¹³

Successful completion of a three-year induction process, that includes the Teacher Keys Assessment, is required before teacher preparation program graduates receive their Clear Renewable Teaching Certificate. The primary scorers appear to be a team of school district personnel. Consequently, the landscape for the evaluation of Georgia's Teacher Preparation Programs is changing. Current assessment practices have many components which, traditionally, have been mostly controlled by the colleges themselves. Now, Georgia's colleges of education obviously find themselves not in total control of some of their traditional assessment functions. The colleges are being forced to reevaluate their teaching practices, curriculum development, and assessment to conform to the evaluations of the I3PEs. If students who complete the teacher preparation program fail to perform well on the I3PEs evaluations, it will call into question many aspects of Georgia's teacher preparation program operations, maybe even the grading system. Clearly, aligning program and course learning outcomes with I3PE assessments is critical. The I3PEs, CAEP, and Race to the Top will in essence be used to validate (or not validate) Georgia's Teacher Preparation Programs. It's not business as usual.

Conclusion

In order to ensure that Georgia's Educator Preparation Programs do not fall prey to damaging headlines or any disciplinary action, program learning outcomes must be well defined and defensible. This includes an increased effort in making sure that course and program goals and objectives are relevant in today's environment. The publicity of the rankings and the punitive consequences of being

ranked as a low-performing institution must be taken seriously. Although these threats can be generalized to most institutions of higher education, a primary focus for teacher preparation programs should be on the assessment scheme as a tool to defend its programs. Faculty need to be kept fully informed and engaged and make certain that they can define, produce, and validate their program learning outcomes.

Where are the opportunities in this changing landscape for evaluating teacher preparation programs? Initially, the opportunities are two-fold and both depend on successfully meeting the I3PE requirements.

In meeting new requirements, there is no reason to limit the improvement efforts to just these. A creative university faculty may use this environment to include additional program changes of their own.

A good report card with favorable publicity will provide the opportunity for teacher educator preparation programs to attract additional talented students. It is reasonable to expect that border institutions, with a “good” report card will attract more able students from neighboring states.

In conclusion, if there are going to be *winner and losers* within the Georgia University System, each Georgia Teacher Preparation Program must compete for survival which includes attracting an adequate number of students to maintain program viability. Hopefully, all Georgia Teacher Preparation Programs can work together and all meet and surmount the new challenges; thus, resulting in better prepared completers that will serve Georgia P-12 students.

Footnotes

¹ Coulson, Andrew, The CATO Institute, “New NAEP Scores Extend Dismal Trend in U.S. Education Productivity”. Sample document: Rising Perceptions. Retrieved

December 23, 2013, from <http://www.cato.org/blog/new-naep-scores-extend-dismal-trend-us-education-productivity>

² The Heritage Foundation, “12th Grade NAEP Math and Reading Scores by Race”. Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. See page 20, Chart B3.B2179. Retrieved April 23, 2014, from

<http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2008/09/does-spending-more-on-education-improve-academic-achievement>

³ University of Southern California, “Education Spending and Performance vs. The World, USC Rossier School of Education”. Sample document: Rising Perceptions. Retrieved December 26, 2013, from <http://rossieronline.usc.edu/u-s-education-versus-the-world-infographic/>

⁴ The Heritage Foundation, “Historical Per-Pupil Expenditures on K-12 Public Education, by State”. Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. See page 9, Chart A1-1.B2179. Retrieved April 23, 2014, from <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2008/09/does-spending-more-on-education-improve-academic-achievement>

⁵ Education Week, “Analysis Points to Growth in Per-Pupil Spending—and Disparities”. Retrieved April 23, 2014, from <http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2014/01/22/18wop-states.h33.html>

⁶ Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, Commission on Colleges, 2012 ed. See especially page 91, “Resource Manual for the Principles of Accreditation.” See document for more detail. Retrieved December 30, 2-13, from <http://sacscoc.org/pdf/Resource%20Manual.pdf>

⁷ Georgia Department of Education, “Georgia’s Race to the Top (RT3) Plan”. See document for more detail. Retrieved

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<http://www.gadoe.org/Race-to-the-Top/Pages/default.aspx>

⁸ National Academy of Education (2013), Evaluation of Teacher Preparation Programs, p. 3. Washington, D.C.

⁹ National Academy of Education (2013), Evaluation of Teacher Preparation Programs p. 40. Washington, D.C.

¹⁰ University System of Georgia, “Georgia Teacher Preparation Effort Will Stress High Teacher Quality.” Retrieved January 10, 2014, www.usg.edu/news/release/georgia_teacher_preparation_effort_will_stress_high_teacher_quality

¹¹ CAEP Board of Directors, “CAEP Accreditation Standards and Evidence”. See document for more detail. Retrieved December 20, 2013 from <http://caepnet.files.wordpress.com/2013/02/commrpt.pdf7>

¹² About the GACE Assessments. Retrieved January 14, 2014, <http://gace.ets.org/about>

¹³ edTPA. Retrieved January 14, 2014, <http://edtpa.aacte.org/>

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