

# Accreditation Sets Higher Standards For Higher Education

In February, 2000, Grand Valley State University's School of Education participated in its fifth-year on-site continuing accreditation review by the National Association for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). NCATE accreditation would recognize the School of Education as an innovative leader in teacher education. Following are excerpts from an interview with David Imig, Ph.D., president and CEO of the American Association for Colleges of Teacher Accreditation (AACTE).

**Colleagues:** Explain the ongoing mission of the teacher education accreditation process:

**Imig:** "Accreditation is twofold. One is public recognition of quality through institutional accreditation by one of six regional organizations. Aside from that is specialized accreditation for special bodies such as medicine, law, teacher education or other specialized fields."

**Colleagues:** Why is this type of accreditation so important for colleges and universities, and what prevents some teacher education programs from achieving it:

**Imig:** "It is the profession's stamp of approval. It the profession's way of saying that a program meets the highest standards, and that we're willing to say to the public that it represents quality. It's analogous to manufacturing, where they have specialized (ISO 9000) certifications and accreditations that signify the highest standards in the industry. There are lots and lots of discussion about establishing a Malcolm Baldrige Award for education, like they have for manufacturing. It's about peers looking at programs and saying, based on this set of standards that the school of education meets our expectations."

**Colleagues:** What does getting a degree from an accredited School of Education mean to the future teacher, as opposed to attaining a degree from a non-accredited program:

**Imig:** Having a degree from an accredited institution has a great impact if a teacher moves from one state to another. Then, they are not required to take additional courses or meet additional test requirements. A person who has gone through an accredited program is recognized from state to state as coming from a quality education program."

**Colleagues:** How do you view the new Teacher Education Report Card that the federal government is designing:

**Imig:** "We live in a world that requires accountability to the public. I think all the various efforts to hold any public endeavor to public scrutiny or accountability are another way to recognize high quality. However, there are constraints or limitations to the report card approach, because there are only certain things candidates can show on a paper and pencil test. Whether a person will be effective in a classroom is different. We're on the brink of a new battery of tests that will make this report card more significant and more positive."

**Colleagues:** How detailed will the new Report Cards be and how will they affect the quality of teacher education programs:

**Imig:** "They're going to drive a conversation on the campus. It won't be as much about teacher education as it will be about the colleges of arts and sciences. It will provide a profile. Does a history teacher know sufficient history? Does a person have sufficient grounding in biology to teach biology? Are we all measuring up? It will tell us where we are, and what we have to do."

**Colleagues:** What is your response to criticism from Capitol Hill that education organizations have been delaying implementation of the Report Card:

**Imig:** "This is an enormously complicated matter. There are different tests in different states. What congress tried to do was create a broad-brush test. What it has essentially shown is that there are lots and lots of different vendors offering different tests and trying to stack them up against each other is very difficult. What we need is a national council and a standardized system so we're comparing apples to apples."

**Colleagues:** What should be done in a time of national teacher shortages to increase the number of quality graduates:

**Imig:** "This is always a problem both on the supply and demand side. The reality is that lots and lots of kids finish programs and then make a decision not to teach. I see that as a problem of supply and we need more teachers to fill the

demand. Working conditions and salaries have a lot to do with it. We have to look at ways of ensuring that every kid in America has a highly competent and caring teacher."

**Colleagues:** How can schools increase minority involvement in teacher education programs:

**Imig:** "There needs to be a systematic approach. We need to create opportunities for minorities in schools and increase salaries to help attract them. We need to be much more aggressive in identifying minority students in community colleges and link those community colleges with teacher education programs. We need to work with inner city schools and minority teacher cadet programs to increase the interest. There are a number of high schools with heavy minority enrollment creating specialized schools for students who are interested in becoming teachers and teaching a curriculum conducive to meeting those ends."

**Colleagues:** What are the pros and cons of circumventing teacher education programs by shortcutting the process in order to fill urban classrooms:

**Imig:** "The most devastating thing about this is people who come through those alternative programs have scores on entrance tests that are substantially below those coming through teacher education programs. Although they are filling an immediate need many of those going through the abbreviated programs are less qualified than those going through teacher education programs. An exciting aspect is that more and more mid-career people are getting into teaching and that's exciting. One third of the students enrolled in teacher education programs come from other professions where they can enhance their teaching skills with the other experiences."

**Colleagues:** What do you see as the latest and greatest trends in teacher education programs:

**Imig:** "There are several big things going on now. One is that more and more attention is being focused on the learner and what background the learner brings. The second trend is making sure our beginning teachers are skilled in technology. There is now much, much more careful attention to local and state standards in arts and science. Another trend is growing out of the character education movement to look at and address the concerns of the total child and the moral grounding of the child. The other is to improve ongoing teacher education so that it is a continuing resource for teachers as they pursue their careers."

