

Considering the Future of University-Based Teacher Education



James W. Fraser
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Note: The following report seeks to place the accomplishments of the Woodrow Wilson Teaching Fellowship programs in the context of the ongoing national debate about the future of teacher education, especially the contested future of teacher education programs offered by universities. While no program or university has come close to solving the many problems facing teacher education, the universities working with the suite of Woodrow Wilson Teaching Fellowships have all used these programs to develop new initiatives and promising practices. Their efforts are worthy of further study and some of their innovations may well point the way to new developments that will make the teacher preparation of the next decade more effective than it has been in the recent past.

On October 20, 2013, New York Times columnist Bill Keller published a piece with the title, “An Industry of Mediocrity.” Keller was quick to note that he had borrowed his title from the recent report on university teacher education programs by the National Council on Teacher Quality. The Keller article and the NCTQ report are only the latest in a long chain of articles, reports, and commentaries to make the same point: In the opinion of many Americans—educators, policy leaders, and average citizens— teacher education in the United States is not just in a state of crisis; it is a disaster. Worse, it is a disaster that is responsible for many other national problems, from American students’ poor rankings on international tests to declining American competitiveness in the international economic arena.

Schools of Education Are In Trouble

Several years ago, when I was dean of the School of Education at Northeastern University, Adam Urbanski, president of the Rochester New York Teachers Association, and I were on a number of panels together. We developed a common introduction: “Good morning...We are an ed school dean and a teacher union president—and we are the two most unpopular people in education today.” It always got a good laugh. Ed schools and teacher unions are the whipping boys for much of what is considered education reform in this country. But—Urbanski and I would also confess—both institutions have often earned their bad standing and both are in need of reform if their important contribution to American education is to be enhanced.

As those of us who are historians know, the critique of education schools is not new. In 1953 Arthur Bestor published *Educational Wastelands: The Retreat from Learning in Our Public Schools*. And—surprise—he blamed education schools for becoming detached from the academy, turning into mere vocational training enterprises. At a time when many specialized teacher preparation institutions—the former normal schools—were dropping their association with teaching and becoming regional campuses of comprehensive universities, Bestor summarized curricular change at the schools of education of the 1950s thus:

Instead of a new and genuinely professional approach to education, there was a mere upgrading in the numbering of the old courses in pedagogical method. For most students

these courses were apt to be piled, layers thick, upon an undergraduate major in pedagogy, not upon a major in one of the liberal arts. In the end, so-called graduate work in education tended to become merely a prolonged and attenuated program of vocational training.

A decade later, other critics—James D. Koerner and former Harvard president James Bryant Conant among them—said essentially the same thing. And in every decade since, some version of this criticism has emerged: The curriculum of education schools has too many methods courses and too little rigorous study of the basic arts and sciences disciplines that teachers actually teach, but also too little time actually spent in the field—in school classrooms where novice teachers can observe, test their wings under careful supervision, and not only learn the tricks of the trade but also observe the actual work of excellent master teachers.

Surprisingly little has changed in the general critique of education schools from Bestor's complaint of the 1950s to those of the reformers in state legislatures and major foundations in 2013. But the complaints have become especially severe in the last decade.

- State agencies regulating teacher education are attempting to address the critique about low standards and raise the bar, often by adding increasingly rigid and specific expectations that strangle efforts at innovation. The result is a virtual “overregulation agenda,” as Marilyn Cochran-Smith has called it.
- External bodies—NCTQ being the most recent—are ranking education schools according to standards that many of us find wanting. But they have the microphone. We can say that it is unfair. I certainly fault NCTQ for sloppy research that focused mostly on an analysis of syllabi rather than on observations of classes or analysis of outcomes. But for a large segment of the public—including the public that funds and licenses our work—the critique is sticking.
- Alternative providers of teacher education are growing ever more popular. Teach for America is but the best known of a plethora of efforts based outside of universities. These programs may operate on their own or in school districts, like the Boston and Philadelphia Teacher Residency programs; in charter schools like New York's Harlem Village Academies and the efforts of the Great Oaks Foundation in Newark and New York; or in independent programs like Relay Graduate School of Education. Where such alternative programs once produced only a tiny fraction of teachers, their impact—and the competition they offer to university-based programs—is growing as they prepare ten and even twenty percent of the teachers in some regions of the country.
- Then, of course, there are new measures designed to test the ability of the graduates of schools of education. The edTPA, originally designed for use in California by researchers at Stanford University, is now being adopted by more and more states, including Washington and New York. Created to be a much more sophisticated analysis of the actual skill level of the graduates of teacher education programs, edTPA is demanding that we rethink all

aspects of our curriculum. While attention to edTPA may help education schools pay greater attention to the expertise of their graduates—both their skill as teachers and their ability to explain their teaching—it can all too easily become one more thing that deflects teacher educators from their own careful analysis of what needs to be done to achieve excellence. The fact that, in many states, education schools will be ranked by how well or poorly their graduates score on edTPA means that, in any case, it will be hard to ignore.

- There are the new standards from the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP), which are designed to significantly raise the standards for admission and for outcomes in teacher education programs. These standards will play an important role in marginalizing if not eliminating weak programs, but many observers and leaders find the complexity of the standards to be burdensome and overly detailed.
- And there is the plea from principals and superintendents that our graduates be able, on day one, to be experts in the Common Core, which will require curricular changes in most programs.

The list could go on. Kenneth Zeichner, one of the leading scholars studying teacher education, has described three, perhaps four, competing reform agendas that often collide but consistently critique today's university-based teacher education programs. There is what he calls the professionalism agenda, which seeks to improve the quality of teacher preparation by creating rigorous and enforceable national standards backed by tough accreditation systems like CAEP's. There is the deregulation agenda, espoused by some who are highly skeptical of any national standards and who seek to support multiple avenues into teaching, leaving those who hire teachers responsible for the quality of those placed in the classroom. There is a social justice agenda—one that is subject to intense debate even among its adherents—that seeks to transform public schools by transforming teacher education so that a new generation of teachers can help level the playing field in the United States. And finally, Zeichner notes what seems like an overregulation agenda in some states as officials seek to micromanage teacher education, even as they foster alternative routes.

No wonder some of us teacher educators feel buffeted. Some of this criticism and some of these demands on us are reasonable. Some are not. Many contradict each other. And taken together they do not give us, on the faculty, much room to maneuver, to innovate, and to engage in creative new approaches to the preparation of teachers rather than mere compliance with rules and policies set by others.

My own complaint about education schools is actually somewhat different, though no less severe. I think education schools have failed to establish themselves as true professional schools, true centers for the study of and preparation for the practice of the profession—of *teaching*.

We have tried too hard to emulate our more prestigious colleagues in the arts and sciences, have been too concerned with our individual research agendas, our standing in the university, and our modeling of our work on the research and “credit generation” of our peers, and have allowed ourselves to become too detached from the day-to-day lives of teachers and students in today’s schools. We have spent too little time focused on creating professional excellence in the future teachers who are our students.

I think Geraldine Joncich Clifford and James W. Guthrie’s 1988 book *Ed School* said it best:

Our thesis is that schools of education, particularly those located on the campuses of prestigious research universities, have become ensnared improvidently in the academic and political cultures of their institutions and have neglected their professional allegiances. They are like marginal men, aliens in their own world. They have seldom succeeded in satisfying the scholarly norms of their campus letters and science colleagues, and they are simultaneously estranged from their practicing professional peers. The more forcefully they have rowed toward the shores of scholarly research, the more distant they have become from the public schools they are duty bound to serve. Conversely, systematic efforts at addressing the applied problems of public schools have placed schools of education at risk on their own campuses.

In the years since Clifford and Guthrie wrote, more and more colleges and universities have sought elite status as prestigious research universities, a kind of mission creep that has resulted in more and more education schools being pulled into the same vortex that Clifford and Guthrie describe. Education school professors find themselves criticized simultaneously for failing to meet the scholarly standards of the institution and for distancing themselves from the nearby school systems that are finding alternative providers more and more intriguing.

Two years after *Ed School* was published, John Goodlad and his colleagues wrote in a similar vein:

The university schools of education “have consciously distanced themselves from training and serving classroom instructors” and the “university research agenda produces little useful knowledge for the practitioner or scholarship respected by members of traditional academic disciplines.”...The shift from a teaching and service emphasis to a research emphasis continues....That which was honored no longer is, leading to a sense of betrayal and resentment.

But while Goodlad, Clifford, and Guthrie are respected voices in university education schools, few members of the faculty have paid much heed to their warnings.

The result is that education schools continue to be marginalized within universities and are often seen as “lightweights” by academic peers. At the same time, they receive little respect for their efforts to prepare highly effective teachers from those outside of the university in the world of government, teacher organizations, schools, or foundations.

The Suite of Woodrow Wilson Teaching Fellowships

- The Leonore Annenberg Teaching Fellowship
- The Woodrow Wilson-Rockefeller Brothers Fund Fellowship for Aspiring Teachers of Color
- The Woodrow Wilson Indiana Teaching Fellowships
- The W.K. Kellogg Foundation's Woodrow Wilson Michigan Teaching Fellowships
- The Woodrow Wilson Ohio Teaching Fellowships
- The Woodrow Wilson New Jersey Teaching Fellowships
- The Woodrow Wilson Georgia Teaching Fellowships

If you follow the money—from the federal government, state legislatures, and some of the nation's most prestigious foundations—the track is to the alternative routes into teaching, be they TFA, residency programs, or new providers such as the rapidly growing Relay School of Education. This is why the suite of Woodrow Wilson Teaching Fellowships was created in the first place: to support innovative university-based teacher preparation programs, and to attract good candidates to them. It is also one reason why these Woodrow Wilson initiatives have been welcomed by the leaders of the universities which have elected to participate in the program: Teacher education programs are unaccustomed to the availability of funding for innovation in the way they prepare teachers.

I have no quarrel to pick with any of the alternative routes into teaching; indeed, I have been known to say positive things about Teach for America, the various residency programs, and new efforts like Relay Graduate School. Still, I worry about a world in which university-based education schools do not continue to play a central role both in preparing teachers and in providing research about the structure of teaching and learning. Doesn't the research that is taking place within universities—research about how the brain actually works when a student learns something or research about the social impact of schooling on communities—have a place in the preparation of teachers? Don't the arguments about the fundamental goals and purposes of education that can take place among a top flight education faculty help an aspiring teacher develop his or her own informed professional judgment? Do we want teachers who may have learned the tricks of the trade but have not participated in the intense academic arguments about what constitutes effective teaching—and, indeed, the purposes of learning—to be the education leaders of tomorrow? And doesn't the day-to-day work of helping a novice learn how to be a professional educator help university researchers hone their own work? For me, the answers to these questions are obvious. Finally, of course, there is the practical issue raised even by critics like Bill Keller: "There are 3.3 million public school teachers in America, and they probably can't all be trained by start-ups. Raising up the standards of our university programs should be an urgent priority."

Before beginning to answer such questions, we must turn to another problem faced by schools of education. They are schools within universities. And universities are also in trouble today — lots of trouble.

The Troubled University of the Twenty-First Century

As we look around the stately campuses of some of the nation's leading research universities or consider the geographic breadth and programmatic diversity of American institutions of higher education, it is hard to believe that they are institutions in trouble, but they are, and it is serious

trouble.

Innovations in Teaching Teachers: STEP—A University-Based Residency

Stanford's STEP (Stanford Teacher Education Program) is a national model of a first-class university-based residency program. All STEP graduate students work with middle school students while taking their first university courses during the initial summer of the program. Then, as fall approaches, they are connected with one teacher and classroom and remain connected from the day school starts in August until it ends in June. Students in the home classroom see the experienced teacher and the STEP student as a team all year; the STEP teacher candidates become fully engaged in the school community—teaching classes on their own but also meeting with faculty and students on a regular and ongoing basis. As good as their Stanford classes are, and all Fellows said they were very good, it is clear that this intensive internship is the key to the program. According to a recent STEP survey, more than 79 percent of STEP graduates were still teaching after five years, 42 percent of them in high-need schools.

Can an institution like the university, which has played such an essential role for so long, really be in trouble? Universities date back to the 1100s in Paris and Bologna and the 1300s in Mali and across the Muslim world and the 1600s in Massachusetts and Virginia. Can any of today's problems be anything but a bump in the road for an institution nearly a thousand years old?

While the university will probably survive in some form for the next thousand years (providing the human race manages to do so), the university as we know it—the modern research university—is less than a century old and is very much the product of the industrial age.

The university we know is not the Harvard or William and Mary that John Adams and Thomas Jefferson attended when they studied the Greek and Roman classics and were expected to demonstrate their expertise through mastering the art of rhetoric.

The university we know is certainly not the medieval or renaissance university of the trivium (grammar, logic, and rhetoric) or the quadrivium (arithmetic, geometry, music and astronomy), those essential studies a college student pursued before getting to the higher fields of philosophy and theology.

The research university that we know today emerged from the German research universities of the 1880s and 1890s; it really took shape in the United States after World War II.

- Vannevar Bush and his colleagues in the World War II universities and government created both the expectations and the funding stream that made the modern research university possible. Both the funding and the expectations are under fire today.
- The GI Bill, the Truman Commission and Clark Kerr's California Master Plan created new funding streams and the expectation that the majority of high school graduates would attend the university. Notably, the anticipated arrival on campuses of the large population of returning veterans who would need a more robust faculty to teach them led to the creation of the Woodrow Wilson Foundation, whose initial mission was to recruit and help prepare the next generation of college professors. These developments also changed universities from elite places for the education of a leadership class to mass-based and increasingly vocation-based preparation programs for the world of the emerging middle class.

Many people are writing about the problems facing universities—rising tuition, rising student debt, and rising numbers of competitors who are offering quick and dirty, if not cheap, courses at great profit but on a schedule tailored to students' individual needs and in places of much greater ease for them. At the same time, there is a declining

interest in basic research funding from the federal government, as well as from many industries that have historically provided the backbone of university budgets. No less a prestigious educator than William Bowen, retired as president of both Princeton University and the Mellon Foundation, is now asking "How much research do we as a society need? And how much can we afford?"

The nation has a long history of state and federal investment in higher education, including the 1862 Morrill Act, establishing land-grant institutions to support "agriculture and the mechanic arts"; the post-Civil War efforts of the federal Freedman's Bureau and private missionary societies to create colleges for newly freed Americans; the actions of state legislatures in

Innovations in Teaching Teachers: Community Experience at MSU

Through its program in the W.K. Kellogg Foundation's Woodrow Wilson Michigan Teaching Fellowship, Michigan State University created an extensive immersion experience for teacher candidates, giving them multiple opportunities during their clinical experience to get a sense of the communities in which K-12 students live and the various neighborhood organizations that support the development of students. Education faculty worked closely with arts and science faculty to design and implement courses that addressed gaps and overlaps in the curriculum and streamlined coursework for all math and science teacher candidates. While MSU had prided itself on strong clinical programs for many years, faculty confided that the Fellowship program provided the impetus and incentive to create an extended, rich, community-based clinical experience for new teachers.

Michigan, Wisconsin, California, and eventually all of the states to create state universities and

Innovations in Teaching Teachers: Ohio Programs Stay Connected

Two Woodrow Wilson partner institutions in Ohio are successfully using technology—some new, some more established—to support Woodrow Wilson Teaching Fellows during their clinical experiences. The University of Cincinnati has created electronic modules in classroom management and assessment that Fellows can access when they are in their teaching placements, including setting up the classroom, organizing instruction to move students from working alone to working successfully in groups, and understanding value-added assessments. The University of Dayton has established a Discipline Hotline for Fellows in all Ohio WW programs in Ohio, with a seasoned professional teacher available to discuss a discipline or classroom management concern by phone or email from 4:00 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. each day. This initiative offers a way for Fellows to connect with a practicing teacher and have immediate dialogue regarding classroom-based problems.

then university systems; the GI Bill; and the massive scholarship programs such as the modern Pell grants. All of these are in a state of decline. A generation of tax-cutting political leaders at both the state and federal levels looked at protesting students, perceived misuse of research dollars and what seemed like light faculty workloads, and concluded that governments—that is, the public—could no longer afford the investments that had characterized American support for higher education from the Civil War to the years immediately following World War II. Helping larger and larger segments of the nation's young people achieve a college degree, once seen as a public good, is now considered a private benefit, to be enjoyed only by those who can afford it.

But behind all of these questions and problems, I think, is a larger problem. As my colleague Arthur Levine, a longtime scholar of higher education and president of the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation, argues, the university as we know it is a product of the industrial age.

Today, however, we no longer live in an industrial age; we live in an information age with an industrial age university. The mismatch is not viable. Just as universities moved from the trivium or the classics, they—and we who live our professional lives within them—need to move again, and far more radically than many faculty or university leaders think.

Levine describes the problem in a 2010 article, “Digital Students, Industrial-Era Universities”:

Universities focus on teaching, the process of education, exposing students to instruction for specific periods of time; digital natives are more concerned with the outcomes of education—learning and the mastery of content, achieved in the manner of games.... Today's digital natives are oriented more toward group learning and social networking, characterized by collaboration and sharing of content. This approach is causing an ethical challenge for universities, which under certain circumstances view collaboration as cheating and content sharing as plagiarism.

But the problems, and the mismatch, goes far beyond the outbreak of cheating scandals and arguments about what constitutes plagiarism or even good teaching. Think of the ways that universities reflect the industrial era. As Levine and others have argued, we operate in a fixed place and—though we don't like the analogy—we move our students along at a fixed rate that has much more in common with an assembly line than with the ways formal and informal, and often quite instantaneous, that knowledge is shared today. We do not talk about the skills and competencies learned by our students; at whatever pace might actually work best, as much as we talk about the curriculum and the measures of good teaching. We talk about faculty workload—measured in hours taught and pages of research published—and faculty “productivity.” We do not talk of outcomes—what students actually learned from our teaching or the impact of our research on practice. We also sometimes find ourselves in conflict with digital natives who work at all hours, produce at unexpected moments, and expect instant responses, a way of being that challenges traditional faculty relationships and workloads.

Most important, most of us have lived most of our lives with an industrial-era input model even as we know we are moving into a world that is focusing more and more on outputs and accomplishments. Who cares how long or how little time it takes to attain mastery or produce something new, as long as it is done. Who wants a surgeon—or a teacher—who has received a C in surgery or student teaching as opposed to one who stuck with it long enough to master the craft?

During George W. Bush's administration, Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings launched the Spellings commission to look into the actual outcomes of a university education. Many

Innovations in Teaching Teachers: UIndy Upends the Traditional Curriculum

Woodrow Wilson's partners at the University of Indianapolis have made a far-reaching curricular shift: UIndy broke its coursework out of the traditional schedule and wrapped it around key moments in the classroom experience.

For example, coursework on math and science literacy, previously part of the fall teacher preparation curriculum, is now offered in the summer before Fellows start their yearlong residency, so that they can emphasize STEM literacy practices from day one. Conversely, coursework on equity and diversity that had been offered during the first summer now spirals through both semesters of the academic year, allowing Fellows' awareness of equity and diversity to evolve along with their ability to address diverse students' needs in the classroom.

This approach, alongside a commitment to project-based learning and an internal evaluation model that uses Charlotte Danielson's well-known framework for professional practice, has made UIndy's Woodrow Wilson Fellows particularly appealing to recruiters. It has also helped ensure strong retention, with 80 percent of UIndy's Fellows still teaching after finishing all four years of their Fellowship experience.

breathed a sigh of relief when Spellings left office, but I predict that we are going to see a new Spellings Commission before long.

My NYU colleague Richard Arum's book, *Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses*, paints a pretty dismal picture of the amount of real learning—the limited inputs and even more limited outputs of today's college education. How long will parents, legislators, the general public permit this to continue?

Of course our universities are adjusting to the new era. We have SMART Boards and use sophisticated PowerPoints and video clips in our classes. We meet our students online through Blackboard and even use the now old-fashioned email. More and more universities are playing with online courses in which one teacher serves thousands of students, the so-called MOOCs. And this is merely the tip of the iceberg—yet none of it addresses some truly fundamental changes in education, our support for it, and our expectations of it.

On my table at home I keep a kerosene lamp (I don't use it any more). It is not a regular kerosene lamp but was, in its day, the latest most advanced technological lamp. Instead of a straight wick, it has a round wick that burns many times brighter and gives a more consistent and less flickering light. And it came on the market just before another invention—the electric light bulb—that put all kerosene lamps into antique shops like the place where I bought mine.

I tend to think of the current technology task forces in our universities as a bit like the kerosene lamps with the round wicks. Something far more radical is likely to emerge—and emerge sooner than we expect.

In light of these realities—the current crisis in schools of education and the emerging crisis in universities—we must ask, what are some practices that may point to a more productive future? While there are many answers, and many debates that need to take place before any consensus emerges, we believe that the experience of the Woodrow Wilson Foundation with its teaching fellowships provides some early and quite tentative responses, not only to the future of university-based teacher preparation, important as that is, but indeed to the future of the university itself. We do not want to claim too much. All of what we have learned constitutes only the barest beginnings of promising practices of the future. Nevertheless, as the examples cited in sidebars throughout this report indicate, a number of the campuses participating in the various Woodrow Wilson Teaching Fellowships have developed programs that illustrate some emerging new elements of university-based teacher preparation.

Conclusion

The examples cited in this commentary are drawn from just a few of the programs at more than 30 universities partnering with the Woodrow Wilson Teaching Fellowships in various ways. There are, happily, many more examples at institutions around the nation, even if they still constitute a minority among the nation's teacher education programs. They are nonetheless a

minority voice which, if heeded and supported, can transform the future of teacher education in this century. Their efforts deserve careful attention from anyone interested in the redesign of teacher preparation in American universities.

Arthur Levine and others have argued that one of the key questions for schools of education today, indeed all of our social institutions, is which of our 20th-century systems can be retooled to meet current needs, and which ones simply need to be done away with in favor of a fresh start—or, as Levine puts it, which ones can we repair, and which ones must we replace. Many teacher quality activists and philanthropists have opted for approaches that would replace university-based teacher education.

That approach, in our estimation, is not only unrealistic, but undesirable. Universities are intellectual communities where teacher candidates can learn much more than the mere basics of classroom management. They still prepare more than 80 percent of the nation's teachers, and many of them, as we have seen, are finding new ways to do this job that acknowledge the changing requirements of today's classrooms and students.

We as a nation could invest massive capital, both literal and social, in trying to do away with these institutions—an investment that, frankly, we as a nation cannot afford, and one that would cost us more socially than it would yield practically. Or we can—and should—follow the lead of some of these forward-looking teacher preparation programs around the country, while at the same time refusing to accept the excuses of those who are not willing to change the way they operate. We should ensure that we provide the change agents—the reformers—with the resources to continue to innovate, and likewise invest in spreading their innovations nationwide, while taking a hard line on funding and accreditation for those who are not willing to embrace the reforms our teachers and students need.

Many of our university partners have told us, in their work with us, that they can see where they need to go, and lack only the support and political wherewithal, both within and beyond their campuses, to go there. Instead of piling up critiques and choking off resources, it is time that we truly commit to reshaping the way that universities prepare great teachers for our schools. We still have a lot to learn. There are many questions to which we do not yet have answers. But we will not get to where we need to be if we do not adopt a model of constant experimentation and evaluation. Schools of education that begin to adopt some of the models outlined here and/or develop their own new approaches will be the leaders in the preparation of tomorrow's teachers. They deserve the resources and the public support to continue their efforts.

James W. Fraser is Professor of History and Education at the Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development, New York University. From 2008 to 2012 he was Senior Vice President of the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation and remains a Senior Advisor to the Foundation.