The just-released NCTQ report on teacher education gives an F to the nation’s colleges of education. It was published in association with U.S. News & World Report.

But the report itself deserves an F.

To begin with, there are professional associations that rate the nation’s education schools, based on site visits and clear criteria.

NCTQ is not a professional association. It did not make site visits. It made its harsh judgments by reviewing course syllabi and catalogs. The criteria that it rated as most important was the institution’s fidelity to the Common Core standards.

As Rutgers’ Bruce Baker pointed out in his response, NCTQ boasts of its regard for teachers but its review of the nation’s teacher-training institutions says nothing about faculty. They don’t matter. They are irrelevant. All that matters is what is in the course catalog.

There are many reasons not to trust the NCTQ report on teacher education. Most important is that it lacks credibility. Not only is it not a professional association. It lacks independence. It has an agenda.

NCTQ was founded by the conservative Thomas B. Fordham Foundation in 2000 with the explicit purpose of harassing institutions of teacher education and urging alternative arrangements. I was on the board of TBF at the time. Initially, the new organization floundered but was saved by a $5 million grant from U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige. Just lucky.

So, knowing NCTQ’s history, and reading Mercedes Schneider’s posts about the organization, I conclude that NCTQ cannot be considered a fair, credible, independent judge of the quality of teacher training institutions.

I certainly agree that some such institutions are weak and inadequate, though I don’t think NCTQ’s superficial methodology identifies them.

I also agree with the report’s recommendation that teacher education institutions should have higher standards for admission.

But I don’t agree that the mark of a great education school is how many courses it offers on the Common Core standards or how attentive it is to raising test scores.

The great Robert Hutchins once wrote that the purpose of a professional school is to teach students to criticize the profession. Knowing the strengths and weaknesses of the profession would prepare them to make it stronger. The NCTQ report—looking at education schools from a mountain top—would have them conform to the status quo, to the conventional wisdom. This is not a prescription for the future, nor for the creation of a profession of strong teachers. It is a prescription for docility and conformity. Robert Hutchins would not approve.