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Accreditor of Education Schools Drops Controversial 'Social Justice' Standard for Teacher Candidates

By [PAULA WASLEY](#)

The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education won a key endorsement on Monday in its quest for continued federal approval of its accrediting power after announcing that it would drop controversial language relating to "social justice" from its accrediting standards for teacher-preparation programs.

The council, which is the nation's largest teacher-education accrediting organization, has come under fire from conservative activists for the wording of standards that require that candidates in education programs "demonstrate the content, pedagogical, and professional knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to help all students learn."

The council, known as Ncate, had said that teacher candidates' "dispositions" should be "guided by beliefs and attitudes such as caring, fairness, honesty and responsibility, and social justice."

The concept of social justice, opponents contend, has political overtones and can be used by institutions to weed out would-be teachers based on their social and political beliefs. Several teacher candidates, in fact, have complained recently about education professors who seemed more interested in students' political views than in their classroom performance ([The Chronicle](#), December 16, 2005).

On Monday, at a hearing of the U.S. Department of Education's National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity, Arthur E. Wise, president of Ncate, called the criticisms of the standards "unwarranted" but announced that the organization would drop "social justice" from the guidelines, "lest there be any misunderstanding about our intentions."

Mr. Wise emphasized that the phrase "social justice" was merely an example of criteria institutions may adopt when assessing candidates' dispositions, and was never intended as an accreditation requirement. Each institution, he said, was free to choose its own disposition evaluation criteria.

"The allegation that Ncate requires thought control is simply wrong," he said.

His announcement pre-empted testimony from members of groups such as the National Association of Scholars and the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, who had gathered to voice objections to the "social justice" provision and request that the Department of Education withhold renewal of its recognition of Ncate until that term was removed.

Stephen H. Balch, president of the National Association of Scholars, said he was "delighted" by Ncate's decision to strike the concept of "social justice" from its

standards, calling the phrase "ideologically freighted" and "necessarily ambiguous."

Similarly, Greg Lukianoff, president of the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, applauded the change as a "step in the right direction."

"'Social justice' is simply too vague of a term and susceptible to interpretation," he said.

But, although pleased with the modification, Anne D. Neal, the president of the American Council of Trustees and Alumni, said rewording the standards was not enough.

Higher-education institutions have "already adopted the standard and are using it in ways that lend itself to political litmus tests," she said in an interview after the hearing, noting that several colleges have incorporated the words "social justice" into mission statements or teacher-evaluation forms.

It is, she said, "short-sighted to think that eliminating the words eliminates the problem."

Mr. Wise countered that Ncate had already alerted member institutions to the changes and that a draft version of the revised standards was already available for public comment on the organization's [Web site](#).

In response to the modifications, the National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity passed a motion recommending that the department renew its recognition of Ncate for five more years. It also recommended expanding the council's authority to include the accreditation of programs offering distance education.