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Written Testimony
Chapter 49.2 Teacher Preparation Follow-up Hearing
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Albright College shares the widespread concern about the quality of teacher education in Pennsylvania. We welcome, for example, the increased attention to preparing teachers for the challenges of addressing special needs and English language learning.

While I come to this hearing as Albright's President, I also come as a citizen of the Commonwealth and the father of five children who received most of their elementary and secondary education in Pennsylvania public schools. I have a professional and personal stake in this issue.

Albright has a strong, respected, high-quality teacher certification program that is rooted in our broad-based liberal arts curriculum. Because of this curriculum, we receive very positive assessment from supervising teachers, school principals, and superintendents about the quality of our graduates, and we have an excellent record of placement of our graduates. Our graduates, too, appreciate the quality and breadth of their preparation. Historically, all of our students who have been certified to teach have also earned a concentration in at least one other academic field, such as history, English, psychology, or biology. A robust interdisciplinary emphasis is in fact a hallmark of the Albright curriculum overall -- about 60% of our graduates routinely complete programs of study that combine more than one discipline.

The new guidelines promulgated by PDE would require major curricular change at Albright, including the creation of two stand-alone education concentrations (or majors) that would increase dramatically the number of required education courses for our students, and also make it impossible for them to major in another academic area -- contrary to our historical liberal arts mission. The unintended consequence of these guidelines would be to narrow not only the educational preparation and experience of students at schools like ours, but also the intellectual preparedness and diversity of the teacher-candidate pool from which the Commonwealth draws to staff its classrooms.

The guidelines thus undermine our institution's core commitment to the liberal arts, which we firmly believe is the best possible preparation for students entering a rapidly changing global society and economy. Indeed recent studies by the American Association of Colleges & Universities (AAC&U) show that business and government leaders strongly affirm the value of the skills and competencies cultivated by a broad

liberal arts education. There is a growing consensus that these skills will be of the greatest *practical* value in preparing college graduates to navigate a world of exponential change. AAC&U's Project on Accreditation and Assessment, for example, reported that specialized accrediting agencies for "business, education, engineering, and nursing . . . are unanimous in declaring that a strong liberal education is essential to success in each of their professions. . . . [T]hese leaders see it as a central aspect of educational quality in their fields."¹

We at Albright, and others at schools like ours, can fully expect to be less appealing to prospective students as a result of the flattening of educational missions across the Commonwealth that is entailed in these guidelines. The "value-added" of a strong liberal arts education will no longer be a distinguishing selling point for either our teacher education programs, as we try to recruit students, or for the teacher candidates we would produce, as they seek jobs upon completing these programs.

Additionally, the large number of required credits that are mandated by the guidelines will make it virtually impossible for our students to complete the early childhood or middle level certification in four years, unless they take an overload in almost every semester. This, too, is sure to make our program much less competitive and increase the difficulty of recruiting students in an environment that is already increasingly challenging, due to well documented demographic trends.

Yet, at the same time, these guidelines would increase our cost of doing business as we expand our Education curriculum and staffing, and would do so in the midst of widespread concern about the cost of higher education, a concern that we share.

Finally, the prescribed review and certification of education faculty members that is contained in the guidelines intrudes upon our own existing rigorous faculty review and evaluation system. This, too, violates our institutional autonomy and integrity.

Historically, the independent sector of higher education has enjoyed great autonomy and diversity in developing curriculum and in hiring, evaluating, and promoting its faculty members. These schools typify what the AAC&U and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation recently pointed to as the foundational strength of American higher education and as what keeps it "the envy of the world" – our institutions are "varied, accessible, and intellectually self-directed."² The proposed guidelines strike at both this autonomy and diversity, something the Spellings Commission itself ultimately demurred from doing.

In sum, our program is rigorous and respected. We fear that these onerous and intrusive regulations threaten our independence, the quality of our curriculum, the

autonomy of our faculty, and ultimately the long-term viability of our teacher preparation programs.

We also fear that this could both lead to a shortage of qualified teachers in Pennsylvania and also discourage students from other states from choosing Pennsylvania for college study, as so many currently do. Given the decrease in high school graduates in Pennsylvania, this would seem a particularly poor time to be implementing measures that will discourage the recruitment of students from other states, a prospect that PDE has shown a distressing lack of interest in addressing.

If the Commonwealth had wanted to put the independent sector out of the teacher preparation business, it could hardly have developed a more effective means than these over-reaching and costly new mandatory guidelines. We predict that if these guidelines are not amended, many fine schools will simply cease to offer some or all of their teacher preparation programs, and the diverse and robust system of higher education and of teacher preparation in Pennsylvania will be weakened.

1 Association of American Colleges and Universities, *Taking Responsibility for the Quality of the Baccalaureate Degree* (Washington, D.C.: Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2004), 2-3.

2 Association of American Colleges and Universities and Council for Higher Education Accreditation, *New Leadership for Student Learning and Accountability* (Washington, D.C.: Association of American Colleges and Universities and Council for Higher Education Accreditation, 2008), 1.