

Unitarian Universalist Association Religious Education Credentialing Program

Assessment of Outcomes – February 2007

Credentialed Religious Educators and key leaders within their congregations/organizations were surveyed over the last eight months to quantify outcomes and assess the effectiveness of the credentialing program. This assessment will be ongoing. Newly credentialed religious educators will be surveyed a year after being credentialed. All credentialed religious educators will be surveyed every two to three years to provide ongoing longitudinal data. It is likely that there will be a tipping point within the UUA when the cumulative outcomes of the credentialing program will begin to have a systemic effect on the field of religious education, especially among mid-size and large churches. While we can't predetermine that point, we believe that an auspicious milestone will occur when 100 credentialed religious educators are active in the field.

The primary goal of the program is for a majority of religious educators working in positions that are half-time or greater to become credentialed. The desired outcomes and the assessment of those outcomes are as follows:

1. Increase in professionalism and sense of professionalism among credentialed Directors of Religious Education (DRE) as well as the further professionalization of the field of religious education.
 - This outcome is significant because religious educators have struggled with the issue of professionalism. If they are unable to validate this internally, they often will not experience external validation. The credentialing process is, in itself, a powerful external validation that is visible within congregations/organizations and among colleagues.
 - 96% of credentialed Religious Educator respondents reported a reinforced or increased sense of professionalism through their completion of the credentialing process.
 - 71% of congregational respondents indicated a strengthened sense of professionalism in the credentialed religious educator, while 53% indicating significant strengthening.
 - Anecdotally, credentialed religious educators have reported that the credentialing process strengthened their sense of professionalism through the process of organizing and assembling their portfolio. This required that they document all of their relevant education training, reflect on its impact on their work, and choose representative work products that flowed from both the training and the experience in their position. The compilation of the portfolio provided objective evidence to them of their competence.
2. Increase in the length of tenure by credentialed DREs in local congregations.
 - Religious education in many of our congregations is negatively impacted by turnover in the position of religious educator. While we do not have good data to quantify the tenure of religious educators, there is a considered opinion that the average tenure is five years or less. The decision to enter the credentialing process

in and of itself favors increased tenure because of the time to complete the process as well as the commitment involved on the part of the religious educator and the congregation. We expect the tenure of credentialed religious educators to be longer, which the results of our survey confirm. Over time, we expect the average tenure of credentialed religious educators to increase.

- The average length of tenure of a credentialed religious educator with a single congregation is 9.5 years.
 - 30% of credentialed religious educator respondents reported that their employment changed in some way after being credentialed, mostly in increased salary or increased hours.
 - 96% of respondents indicated that they were still working in the field of religious education after being credentialed.
3. Increase in the quality of (and then the enrollment in) RE programs in local congregations led by credentialed DREs (and growth in adult membership as churches become more vital).
- Religious education is just one component in the growth in vitality of a congregation, but it is considered to be one of the more significant components. A recent analysis conducted by one member of the UUA RE Credentialing Committee focused on the most dynamic religious education programs in large UU churches. It revealed that the number of children and youth as a percentage of the entire congregation (children and adults combined) ranged from 30% to 38% in those congregations. In some large congregations the percentage was as low as 16.4%. While this is influenced by the demographics of the community on which a congregation draws, there is no doubt that strong RE programs impact the demographics within a congregation.
 - 39% of credentialed religious educator respondents believe that the credentialing process has positively influenced the way they operate their programs. 48% have initiated new programs or activities in their congregations as a result of learnings through the credentialing process. 22% believe that the increase in size in their program or congregation is directly related to the credentialing process.
 - 77% of congregational respondents indicated that their religious education programs have increased in quality, enrollment, or effective innovations since their religious educator was credentialed.
4. Increase in annual compensation of credentialed DREs.
- Recruitment and retention on religious educators will be positively influenced by increases in compensation, including structuring positions with sufficient hours to provide effective leadership.
 - 48% of credentialed religious educator respondents reported an increase in hours, compensation, or responsibilities, and that these increases were directly related to being credentialed.
 - 83% of congregational respondents indicated an increase of salary or hours once their religious educator was credentialed, or they used UUA Compensation guidelines in establishing their religious educator's salary.

5. The position of credentialed DRE becoming a valid, viable, and rewarding career choice as evidenced by an increase in the number of years worked in the field. This includes DREs seeking credentialing at one level first and then the next higher level, as well as serving several congregations during a career.
 - The feedback from candidates going through the program indicates that it is transforming their attitude about religious education from that of a job in a specific church to that of a career with the possibility of career advancement “in place” through increased responsibilities, hours, and compensation as well as the very real possibility of advancement by taking a position at a larger congregation. While congregations may not require credentialing of prospective candidates, there is no question that a credentialed DRE seeking a new position would have a competitive advantage. The prospect of increased mobility will also encourage congregations with credentialed religious educators to take the issue of retention more seriously, which suggests that the congregation will also come to view the position as a career rather than just a job that can be easily filled with someone else.
 - 39% of credentialed religious educator respondents indicate that credentialing has influenced their career goals.
 - 44% have been credentialed at more than one level or are considering doing so.
 - 61% might apply for a position with higher compensation or better opportunities.
 - 30% have changed positions since becoming credentialed.

6. An increase in continuing education by credentialed DREs as they seek to further develop their knowledge base and skills.
 - As the attitude of credentialed religious educators shifts from job to career, continuing education will become more relevant because these religious educators will be in the field of religious education, if not a specific position, for the long term. This means that there will be a greater return on their investment in continuing education.
 - 61% of credentialed religious educator respondents reported that the credentialing process had an impact in their involvement in continuing education.

7. Congregations increasingly requiring credentialing whether by limiting the search process to credentialed DREs or by requiring eventual credentialing as a condition of employment. This should also lead to acceleration in career advancement either within a congregation through increases in the hours for the position and compensation, and/or subsequent settlement in larger congregations.
 - Currently, the credentialing program is largely elective, which means that the motivation for participation in the program rests primarily with individual DREs. One consequence of achieving a tipping point will be a shift in which credentialing becomes either strongly encouraged or required.
 - 9% of credentialed religious educator respondents reported that their congregations have made a requirement of their position.
 - 24% of congregational respondents would either prefer to hire a credentialed religious educator as their next DRE, or would require that a new hire enter the

program and become credentialed. An additional 15% would support a religious educator who wanted to pursue credentialing, but would not require it.

8. An increase in the development of quality RE resources and curricula as credentialed DREs create these materials for their own programs and then make them available to other DREs.
 - Excellence in religious education depends, in part, on the quality of the resources and curricula that are available. It seems clear that the UUA cannot meet the growing demand for resources and curricula. More and more program innovation and resource development is occurring by religious educators in the field. This will only increase, especially as the number of masters level credentialed religious educators grow. Further, credentialed religious educators will have the skills to better utilize existing resources and curricula. The combination of these suggests that the experience in RE programs and RE classrooms will be significantly enhanced. The professionalization of the religious educators is not the end; it is a means for transforming religious education and congregations.
 - 78% of credentialed religious educator respondents have developed new programs, resources, and curricula since becoming credentialed.
 - 44% of credentialed religious educator respondents reported that as a result of credentialing they have initiated or strengthened programs in Safe Congregations and anti-oppression/anti-racism.
 - 76% of congregational respondents indicated that their credentialed religious educator either implemented a Safe Congregation program, strengthened policies or procedures in an existing program, or communicated the need for such a program. 67% indicated that their credentialed religious educator provided leadership in anti-oppression/anti-racism efforts where previously there had not been extensive programming or communication efforts.

9. Acknowledgement by ministers and congregations of the benefits that accrue to both as a result of the credentialing of DREs.
 - The ability of credentialed religious educators to enrich and transform religious education in congregations has the potential to both synergistically enhance the life of the congregation and systemically influence the pursuit of excellence in other areas of congregational life. Additionally, vital religious education programs are routinely engines of growth within congregations, helping congregations to become “younger and larger, instead of older and smaller.”
 - The lack of growth in many congregations is a result of congregations being stuck on a size plateau. The inability to move off of the plateau is often a result of the status quo. To the extent that a transformed religious education program can be an engine of growth, it can help in shifting the overall congregational dynamics.
 - 57% of credentialed religious educator respondents report a more positive relationship with their ministers and congregations since becoming credentialed. 100% of respondents have encouraged other colleagues to seek credentialing.
 - 44% of congregational respondents indicated that having a credentialed religious educator has provided added value to their program. An additional 44% indicated

that their religious educator already was providing added value before credentialing.

10. Increased support for the development of credentialing programs for other key positions within Unitarian Universalist congregations (e.g., administrators).

- The vitality of congregations is highly dependent on the effectiveness of staff, which is a combination of aptitude, skills, and motivation, but also the breadth, depth, and effectiveness of staff development. A credentialing process must define the essential knowledge and skill-based competencies that are required for effective and inspired leadership in a staff position. One of the less recognized, but profound benefits of the credentialing process for religious educators has been the development and articulation of these competencies. As these benefits become obvious to congregations, there will be a growing demand for the development and articulation of competencies for other key staff positions, and for credentialing programs to support the development and assessment of these competencies.
- 14% of congregational respondents either have a staff member involved in another UU certification process or are seriously considering it. 50% indicated that they would support credentialing of other staff, but would not make it a requirement. 29% indicated that they would provide professional expenses for continuing education so that other staff could become credentialed.