**Credentialed Observer Report to the RE Credentialing Committee**

**April 23, 2016**

It has been an honor and a privilege to serve as the Credentialed Observer with the Religious Education Credentialing Committee (RECC) this past week. Through interviewing 11 candidates and additional meetings directed to process issues, policy updates and other RECC business, I was impressed by the RECC’s collegiality, integrity, and consistent kindness and fairness, while upholding high standards for both its own work and religious educator credentialing. My overall impression is a well-led, high-functioning committee doing excellent work.

In my own credentialing interview last year, one thing that struck me was the respect the RECC conveyed for both the process and me as a candidate. This year, as an observer, I realized how intentional this is. A few examples: (a) the accommodation of different processing styles by providing written questions to those who found it useful, by allowing individuals who process verbally the time to do so when answering questions, and by providing some questions ahead of time to 2014 plan candidates, (b) consistent attention to details that might convey messages of respect or lack thereof, such as maintaining silence before candidates enter the room, (c) phrasing questions to directly ask for the information sought, and (d) giving careful thought to language used to convey disappointing decisions to candidates, as well as providing clear guidance for future work where needed.

This year brought some changes to the RECC: there were two new members, it was the first year with a significant number of 2014 plan candidates, and the RECC made changes to the question formulation process. These changes presented challenges for the RECC, which were handled gracefully and capably; I’d like to note just a couple of aspects:

**1. Reading / question formulation:** In this year’s process, questions were formulated by pairs of readers ahead of time, rather than as a committee during the interview week. This was clearly necessary due to time constraints, but when I learned about this change I wondered about the effect of losing the additional viewpoints at this stage, with different candidates receiving questions formulated by different readers. I was pleased to see that this was not an issue. Not only were six questions identical for all candidates, but other questions were carefully chosen to explore all of the competencies and to learn more about aspects of the candidate’s materials that clearly warranted additional attention. The topics covered and level of difficulty were remarkably consistent.

For most of the candidates, the RECC’s preparation time was sufficient. In a couple of cases, however, the preparation seemed a little rushed; more prior review of reader summaries or another 10 minutes might have allowed time to notice some overlap between questions and the occasional gap in subject matter. There was also difficulty at one point finding time to discuss a general issue of plan interpretation; scheduling a little more committee time between candidates might be helpful. I see these issues as minor, however, with no effect on the outcomes.

One other issue with the new process relates to transparency around pre-meeting conversations between the two assigned readers of the same candidate's materials. (Additional committee members are likely to have looked at a candidate’s materials, but two are given responsibility for thoroughly reviewing and reporting on them prior to the candidate’s interview.) The RECC states in their policy that such conversations may take place when necessary for meeting preparation, and I can see that such conversations might be very helpful. However, it is not clear to me what the substance of these conversations should be, and whether the readers should reconcile their views ahead of time. Some readers held such preliminary conversations; others did not. This could introduce at least the appearance of disparity. I suggest clarifying the policy to more clearly indicate whether and when such conversations will take place, as well as their purpose, and to create a record of pre-RECC conversations that documents both the participants and the topics discussed.

**2. Lenses**: Another question I came in with had to do with the AO/AR/MC and technology lenses that were introduced in the 2014 plan – both of which seem like a good idea, but I wondered how they would work in practice. My impression is that the AO/AR/MC lens works well – this issue is so fundamental to our work and to Unitarian Universalism, that I think candidates and RECC members largely share an understanding of how to apply this lens (although the extent of the desired focus on anti-racism was not uniformly understood). The expectations around the technology lens, on the other hand, seems less clear. I was pleased to see the RECC identify this issue part way through the week and make plans to address it. This is an indication of this committee’s comfort and facility with self-evaluation, and their continued commitment to improving the process.

**3. Candidate support:** One issue that I found myself considering this week has to do with support of RE credentialing candidates, so that all arrive at their interviews with at least the essential core understandings and abilities. The RECC is an evaluative body, and does this work very well, but I sense that some candidates would benefit from greater formative support along the way. The credentialing program has changed over time in feel and scope, which may point to changing mentoring needs.

Finally, as this is Jan Gartner’s last year as the UUA’s RE credentialing staff person, I would like to express my appreciation for her work in this area. I personally benefitted from her professionalism, organization and kindness during my own credentialing work; more broadly, her contributions to credentialing have built a strong foundation for her successor, and laid a clear path for future candidates. Thank you, Jan!

Once again, I want to stress the RECC’s very high level of professionalism, caring, and respect for each other, the process and the candidates. I’m also leaving this week very encouraged about the future of religious education, as overall this week’s candidates were very impressive in their knowledge, ability, commitment and achievements, with great potential for so many more contributions to religious education, Unitarian Universalism and the world. I’m very grateful for this Committee, these people, and the opportunity to be here this week.

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