

RECC 2013

Credentialed Observer's Report

Observations

I'd like to thank the RECC for offering me the wonderful experience of observing their work this week. Having previously experienced the interview process in the role of candidate, it was enjoyable and edifying to get the "behind the scenes" look at the process. During the week I observed a high level of professionalism and commitment on the part of each and every member of the committee. Having observed the committee at work, I feel I would be able to encourage a colleague to enter this program and assure them that their work would be evaluated with diligence and fairness within the clearly articulated guidelines and standards of the program. I would especially like to mention the work of Jan Devor, who will be retiring as chair of the committee this year. It was clear to me that the smooth functioning of the committee was the result of years of energetic, capable leadership.

This committee functions with a high degree of collegiality. The input of each member was welcomed with respect. Alternative points of view were expressed and were accepted as just that – alternative ways of viewing the same reality rather than fodder for dissension or debate. In its decision making the committee strove for and achieved consensus, never resorting to majority rule. One way that leadership intentionally fosters this collegiality is through bonding activities. A lovely Monday night gathering with check-in and deeper sharing established an atmosphere of caring early on, and helped to welcome newcomers to the committee, including the credentialed observer. Another way I saw collegiality fostered was by suffusing the process with a clear understanding of the religious nature of the endeavor, with worshipful openings and closings and graces. The Religious Education Credentialing Committee is not just a committee. It is a caring community.

Throughout the week I saw due diligence brought to bear on many levels, from the conscientious attention to detail in the reviewing of candidates' packets to the reviewing of standards and practices to keep all aspects of the program up to date, relevant, and consistent. Under the leadership of two Jans, the committee is clearly not content to rest on the laurels of this successful program, but continually seeks to reflect on its own practice and explore ways to improve, both by drawing on the expertise of its own members and by inviting outside consultants to offer fresh perspectives.

Another area in which I observed integrity and professionalism in action concerned the issue of candidates that are known to the RECC members. After an early discussion of possible rules for recusing, it was agreed that a formal mechanism is not needed. It is hoped that a person who feels they cannot be objective, or who may APPEAR to not be objective because of a close relationship with a candidate will remove him or herself from voting on that candidate's credential award. It is important to remember that the religious education community is relatively small, so the likelihood that candidates and RECC members will be well known to each is high and it may not work well for members to recuse themselves unless the relationship is fairly close. From my observation of the subsequent interviews and evaluative discussions, I felt that committee members were able to objectively discuss the work of

candidates with whom they had a personal relationship and used their own judgment as to whether to take part in votes involving friends and close colleagues.

Whether a given candidate was known to some or a complete stranger to all, it seemed to me that each was treated with caring and respect by the committee. In other words, the treatment of each candidate reflected our religious ideals. Candidates were challenged, but never tricked or trapped by questions, and the opportunity to compose their own first question allowed the candidate to start strong. In the evaluation process following each interview I also felt a strong sense of caring on the part of the RECC. Regardless of the quality of the interview, each evaluation began with a discussion of the strengths of the candidate. In each committee member I could discern a sincere desire to be as generous as possible without sacrificing an iota of the integrity of the program.

Recommendations

1. It would be great to have a formal "job" description for the role of credentialed observer. This would include a clear statement of purposes, such as "to provide objective input as someone not directly involved in the process," and "to provide transparency." I knew ahead of time that I would not be voting, but wasn't sure initially if I would be asking questions of the candidate or taking part in the deliberations. The job description might also pose some questions that the observer may wish to consider.
2. I liked that the reader for each candidate created a few original questions tailored to their candidate's portfolio. I wonder if these questions could be sent via e-mail a day or so in advance so they could be seen in writing and other RECC members could come ready with any suggested revisions.
3. Sharing of cell phone numbers in addition to e-mail addresses may have facilitated communication in a couple of instances.

Again, thanks so much for inviting me on this journey with you this week!

Faithfully submitted,

Dr. Sheri Phillabaum

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