



2005 ATFE Biennium

**GATE KEEPING IN  
THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION**

Joan Wyatt and Jacques Hadler

# Gate Keeping in Theological Education

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After presentations by Jacques Hadler and Joan Wyatt on how their respective institutions deal with their gate keeping responsibilities, they and the participants raised a number of issues about gate keeping. These issues all concern the ‘readiness for ministry’ side of a theological education—the side usually not dealt with on a transcript of courses and grades.

The first several were issues of clarity for the sake of all three parties concerned—seminary, student, and judicatory/denomination.

- Clarity about criteria for the student’s readiness for ministry. (Categories used by the Episcopal Church USA from an agreement by their Bishops of dioceses and Deans of seminaries about fifteen years ago, and the process and criteria used at Vancouver School of Theology are appended below.)
- Clarity of expectations by the denomination/judicatory on where theological schools fit in their process and what kind of assessment they want.
- Clarity about the theological school’s educational purpose so that the faculty can assess and give appropriate readiness for ministry feedback as well as academic.
- Clarity at admissions about the covenant the student is entering regarding faculty evaluation of his/her readiness for ministry.
- Clarity about the meaning of degrees offered, especially the MDiv. Does it indicate readiness for ministry as well as academic competence? Note that one theological school gives two kinds of MDiv.s—MDiv-Ordination and MDiv-non-ordination.
- For certain theological schools, distinguish between assessment of ‘discernment of call’ issues and ‘readiness for ministry’ issues, depending on where the student is in his/her formation.

Other questions raised were the following:

- How might we incorporate feedback from peers who see a very different side of their fellow student from that presented to faculty and field education supervisors?
- Is there wisdom in offering this ‘readiness for ministry’ assessment as a service for other theological degree programs besides the MDiv? And if so, to what community would such an assessment be addressed?
- Is the labor intensive time commitment of the faculty, both individually and collectively, worth the value given to their recommendations by the judicatories and denominations? And/Or is it part of the essence of the theological education they offer?

Finally, there was raised a benefit of including a ‘readiness for ministry’ assessment by the faculty: It challenges individual faculty members to offer better advising to students than they might otherwise have offered.

## Appendix

### Episcopal Bishops' and Seminary Deans' Agreement on Criteria for Evaluation of Seminarians

To fulfill the requirements of Title III, Canon 5, Sec. 1(c) (ii):

This narrative evaluation is based on several sources. These sources include the student's academic work as well as the faculty's academic and personal relationship with the student. It also includes perceptions of the student's interpersonal relationships. Finally, the evaluation takes into consideration the Christian discipline and maturity of the student based upon his/her personal behavior, chapel worship, field education and other activities at the seminary.

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- 1) Assessment of the student's knowledge and understanding of the Christian tradition.
- 2) Faith in God as revealed in Jesus Christ, nourished and expressed by participation in the seminary's liturgical life and in an intentional pattern of personal spiritual discipline and a commitment to promote peace and justice among all people.
- 3) Potential to develop skills for the ordained ministry including capabilities such as the capacity to integrate intellectual reflection with experience, the ability to communicate the faith of the Church both orally and in writing with insight and imagination and the capacity to lead a congregation in worship, mission, and community service.
- 4) Personal readiness for ordained ministry including such characteristics as evidence personal maturity and emotional stability required to work and minister effectively, the capability to accept appropriate authority, the capacity to laugh with others and at oneself, and the ability to manage time and to meet deadlines.
- 5) Strengths of the seminarian.
- 6) Areas needing improvement.

NOTE: This extensive evaluation is usually done once during the seminarian's three years in an Episcopal Church USA seminary. At Virginia Theological Seminary, it is done during the middle year. It is also done in the middle of the second semester for a one year seminarian who is doing his/her senior year or post-graduate year at VTS after attending a non-Episcopal theological school.

## **Recommendation of Readiness for Ministry for MDiv. Students, Ordination Track at Vancouver School of Theology**

The granting of a Recommendation, i.e., the certification that in the opinion of the members of the **Faculty/Student Review Committee (FSRC)**, an M.Div. graduate of the School is suitable for the exercise of ordained ministry, is the end of a process that begins early in a student's programme of studies.

Students who are enrolled in an M.Div. programme shall submit an application for the Recommendation to the Coordinator of Academic Planning at the time of their admission to the School. The application shall include the student's written authorization for the gathering of the required information for the Recommendation.

The criteria stated below shall guide the Faculty and the Directors of Denominational Formation as they discuss a student's readiness for ministry throughout that student's entire programme. The primary criteria on which the decision to grant or to withhold the Recommendation are as follows: (A) Personal Characteristics, (B) Understanding and Practice of Ministry, and (C) Disqualifying Patterns of Behaviour. The numbered items under each heading are descriptive rather than prescriptive.

The criteria shall be shared with field educators and pastoral care supervisors to guide their assessment of students engaged in these dimensions of the School's programme. Students shall also receive a copy of the criteria as part of their orientation to the School's programme of studies.

Programmatically, the criteria shall be explicitly used in the discussion of a student's progress during the **Faculty/Student Review Committee (FSRC)** occurring at the end of each term of study. The key is the identification of patterns of behaviour rather than isolated incidents which of themselves are not necessarily indicative of a student's fundamental character and readiness for ministry. In the event that the Faculty/Student Review Committee identifies any concerns that might affect the granting of a Recommendation at the time of a student's graduation, the student shall be referred to the Dean's Advisory Council, in consultation with the student's Director of Denominational Formation, for consideration of appropriate remediation or other action.

The granting of the Recommendation itself can only be made after certain evaluations are before the Faculty and Directors of Denominational formation, e.g., the assessments of field educators, pastoral care supervisors, and the report of the team assessing the student's ministry position paper. Consequently, the granting of the Recommendation will normally be considered in January of the student's final term.

Students have the right to appeal the decision of the FSRC through the Appeal Committee of the Board of Governors. The decision of the Appeal Committee is final.

Any information obtained for the purposes of the Recommendation is confidential and is subject to the School's normal procedures regarding access to and discussion of confidential student information.

## Criteria for Recommendation Assessment

- A) Personal Characteristics
- i) **Faithfulness to Persons and Tasks:** Respects and cares for others. Values ideas and needs of others. Practices adequate self-care. Communicates honestly. Demonstrates leadership abilities.
  - ii) **Personal Integrity:** Demonstrates authenticity, sincerity and congruity in word and deed.
  - iii) **Personal Responsibility:** Maintains commitments, schedules, promises, inner convictions. Manages personal finances in a responsible way. Accepts responsibility for mistakes. Shows consistency in responses to persons and circumstances.
  - iv) **Flexibility:** Adaptive to new situations and contests. Copes well with the unexpected. Able to relate to a wide variety of people, e.g., age, gender, cultures, economic status, etc.
  - v) **Gifts of Caring:** Sensitive to needs and feelings of other people. Encourages others to share their problems and to seek appropriate help/support. Helps others evaluate options and make their own decisions. Speaks the truth in love.
  - vi) **Self Awareness:** Aware of how others perceive her or him. Able to solicit honest feedback. Able to be self-critical.
- B) Understanding and Practice of Ministry
- i) **Vocational Clarity:** Has a clear vocational identity and direction. Gives evidence of spiritual growth and development. Has a disciplined life of prayer. Able to articulate a well-grounded personal faith.
  - ii) **Mission of the Church:** Demonstrates support for the mission of the church. Committed to public ministry. Concerned about justice issues. Cares for the marginalized, the alienated and the needy.
  - iii) **Denominational Collegiality:** Feels at home in her or his denomination and is familiar with the denomination's ethos and history. Can work within denominational structures. Is respectful of other traditions within her or his denomination and of other denominational and faith traditions.
  - iv) **Coping with Stress/Conflict/Life Crises:** Understands conflict as an inevitable part of community life. Seeks fairness, openness and good communication in a conflict situation. Deals with stress in a balanced, healthy way. Is constructively supportive when others ask for help.
- C) Disqualifying Patterns of Behaviour
- i) **Pursuit of Personal Advantage:** Inappropriately manipulates institutional structures to meet personal needs. Tries to control situations to an inappropriate degree. Rejects others' needs or desires and aggressively pursues their own.
  - ii) **Inappropriate Self-Protective Behaviour:** Under stress becomes guarded and secretive or, alternatively, aggressive and bullying. Excessively self-interested. Inflexible about schedules, appointments, etc. Tends to shift blame to others or to circumstances.
  - iii) **Aggressive/Abusive Behaviour:** Attacks persons not issues. In intense situations consistently bursts with anger or withdraws in hostility.

## **\* Recommendation for Readiness for Ministry Policy Statement adopted by Board of Governors May 2003**

### **Faculty/Student Review Committee (FSRC)**

The progress of students in each of the various degree programmes is normally reviewed at the end of each term by the Faculty/Student Review Committee (FSRC), which is chaired by the Dean and consists of all members of the faculty and the Coordinator of Academic Planning. Time is allotted to consider each student, to celebrate gifts and to identify areas where support and challenge may be needed. Following each session of the Faculty/Student Review Committee, students receive the record of the previous term's evaluation. The Review Committee keeps all members of faculty informed about the progress of students and gives an overview of the needs of the student body.

*The Faculty/Student Review Committee will use the Guidelines for Readiness for Ministry when discussing M.Div students. If the FSRC identifies any concerns that might affect the granting of the Recommendation of Readiness for Ministry at the time of graduation, the student shall be referred to the Dean's Advisory Council (DAC), and the student will be informed, in writing, of the concerns of the FSRC and any remediation or other action deemed necessary.*

### **Purpose of FSRC:**

- To flag and corporately track progress for students in all degree programmes;
- To offer feedback to directors of denominational formation regarding M.Div students to assist them with their denominational reporting function and Readiness for Ministry statement.

### **FSRC Guidelines:**

- Discussions regarding suitability for ministry shall be undertaken; faculty shall offer feedback on students' progress and development; specific illustrations of concerns or affirmations should be provided where possible;
- To ensure accountability for effective and accurate representations of group perspective, the directors of denominational formation are obliged to share with the Dean, the student's Faculty Mentor and/or a faculty member from the same denomination a copy of any written report that is intended to represent the views of the FSRC;
- Students see a draft of denominational reports for discussion before they are sent;
- Direct communication is encouraged – where possible, faculty should raise concerns regarding academic issues directly with students about whom they are concerned prior to FSRC;
- Students who require further follow-up out of FSRC shall be referred to the Dean's Advisory Council (DAC) for academic issues and to their director of denominational formation for other issues;
- Follow-up out of FSRC shall be done by the Coordinator of Academic Planning and or the Dean in matters of programme details;
- Cumulative record issues shall be dealt with by the Academic Planning office;
- Minutes will be taken of the meeting and maintained by the office of the Dean

**Application for the Recommendation of Readiness for Ministry**  
Vancouver School of Theology

**Applicant's Name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_  
(First) (Last)

**Denomination:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Anticipated year of Graduation:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Recommendation Description and Guidelines:**

The granting of a Recommendation, i.e., the certification that in the opinion of the members of the Faculty Council an M.Div. graduate of the School is suitable for the exercise of ordained ministry, is the end of a process that begins early in a student's programme of studies. Students who are enrolled in a Master of Divinity degree programme shall submit this application to the Coordinator of Academic Planning at the time of their admission to an M.Div programme. The application shall include the student's written authorization for the gathering of the required information for the Recommendation.

Programmatically, the criteria shall be explicitly used in the discussion of a student's progress during the **Faculty/Student Review Committee (FSRC)** occurring at the end of each term of study. The key is the identification of patterns of behaviour rather than isolated incidents which of themselves are not necessarily indicative of a student's fundamental character and readiness for ministry. In the event that the Faculty/Student Review Committee identifies any concerns that might affect the granting of a Recommendation at the time of a student's graduation, the student shall be referred to the Dean's Advisory Council, in consultation with the student's Director of Denominational Formation, for consideration of appropriate remediation or other action.

The criteria stated below shall guide the Faculty and the Directors of Denominational Formation as they discuss a student's readiness for ministry throughout that student's entire programme. The primary criteria on which the decision to grant or to withhold the Recommendation are as follows: (A) Personal Characteristics, (B) Understanding and Practice of Ministry, and (C) Disqualifying Patterns of Behaviour. The numbered items under each heading are descriptive rather than prescriptive.

The granting of the Recommendation itself can only be made after certain evaluations are before the Faculty and Directors of Denominational formation, e.g., the assessments of field educators, pastoral care supervisors, and the report of the team assessing the student's ministry position paper. Consequently, the granting of the Recommendation will normally be considered in the January of the student's final term.

Students have the right to appeal the decision of the FSRC through the Appeal Committee of the Board of Governors. The decision of the Appeal Committee is final.

Any information obtained for the purposes of the Recommendation is confidential and is subject to the School's normal procedures regarding access to and discussion of confidential student information.

#### Criteria for Recommendation Assessment

##### A) **Personal Characteristics**

- i) **Faithfulness to Persons and Tasks:** Respects and cares for others. Values ideas and needs of others. Practices adequate self-care. Communicates honestly. Demonstrates leadership abilities.
- ii) **Personal Integrity:** Demonstrates authenticity, sincerity and congruity in word and deed.
- iii) **Personal Responsibility:** Maintains commitments, schedules, promises, inner convictions. Manages personal finances in a responsible way. Accepts responsibility for mistakes. Shows consistency in responses to persons and circumstances.
- iv) **Flexibility:** Adaptive to new situations and contexts. Copes well with the unexpected. Able to relate to a wide variety of people, e.g., age, gender, cultures, economic status, etc.
- v) **Gifts of Caring:** Sensitive to needs and feelings of other people. Encourages others to share their problems and to seek appropriate help/support. Helps others evaluate options and make their own decisions. Speaks the truth in love.
- vi) **Self Awareness:** Aware of how others perceive her or him. Able to solicit honest feedback. Able to be self-critical.

##### B) **Understanding and Practice of Ministry**

- i) **Vocational Clarity:** Has a clear vocational identity and direction. Gives evidence of spiritual growth and development. Has a disciplined life of prayer. Able to articulate a well-grounded personal faith.
- ii) **Mission of the Church:** Demonstrates support for the mission of the church. Committed to public ministry. Concerned about justice issues. Cares for the marginalized, the alienated and the needy.
- iii) **Denominational Collegiality:** Feels at home in her or his denomination and is familiar with the denomination's ethos and history. Can work within denominational structures. Is respectful of other traditions within her or his denomination and of other denominational and faith traditions.
- iv) **Coping with Stress/Conflict/Life Crises:** Understands conflict as an inevitable part of community life. Seeks fairness, openness and good communication in a conflict situation. Deals with stress in a balanced, healthy way. Is constructively supportive when others ask for help.

##### C) **Disqualifying Patterns of Behaviour**

- i) **Pursuit of Personal Advantage:** Inappropriately manipulates institutional structures to meet personal needs. Tries to control situations to an inappropriate degree. Rejects others' needs or desires and aggressively pursues their own.
- ii) **Inappropriate Self-Protective Behaviour:** Under stress becomes guarded and secretive or, alternatively, aggressive and bullying. Excessively self-interested.

Inflexible about schedules, appointments, etc. Tends to shift blame to others or to circumstances.

iii) **Aggressive/Abusive Behaviour:** Attacks persons not issues. In intense situations consistently bursts with anger or withdraws in hostility.

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (print name) have read and fully understand the Guidelines for The Recommendation assessment, and give my full permission for the gathering of the required information for the Recommendation.

Applicant's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Coordinator of Academic Planning: \_\_\_\_\_