



March 18, 2013

Department of English and Humanities

Dear Members of the Scholarship Committee:

I write in support of Patricia Crider's scholarship application. I have had the pleasure of having Pattie as a student in a number of my religious studies courses, including World Religions, New Religious Movements and, currently, Religion, Society, and Culture. Pattie is an enthusiastic and engaged student. Of Pattie's many wonderful qualities, I most appreciate her dedication to learning. This dedication makes her well-deserving of a scholarship.

Courses in religious studies ask students to think carefully about diverse religious practices, beliefs, and ideas. In the classes Pattie has taken with me, she has read a number of challenging primary texts from a variety of religious traditions as well as reading theoretical and philosophical texts written by contemporary scholars. Pattie works not only to comprehend these difficult texts and ideas, but to delve deeper in order to interrogate their significance for religious traditions and for human experiences more broadly.

Over the years that I have had Pattie in my classes, I have been increasingly impressed by her ability to grapple with difficult course material and to engage that material thoughtfully and creatively in written and oral assignments. As a Professional Writing major, Pattie sees herself as a writer, one who clearly understands and engages with writing as a *process*—a process to which she is extremely dedicated. Pattie's project in New Religious Movements showed great creativity and knowledge of New Religious Movements, as she created and analyzed a fictional NRM that engaged popular culture, apocalypticism, and visual rhetoric. In so doing, Pattie demonstrated well what scholar Arthur Versluis has called "sympathetic empiricism," helping her (and her classmates) to think more seriously about why New Religious Movements might develop and attract believers and practitioners—and why mainstream American culture might critique and sometimes attack such movements. Interestingly, Pattie experienced an "attack" on her (fictional) NRM firsthand when she posted the paper to her blog after the course was over. This allowed her to continue to think seriously about the issues even after the course was over; she presented the project and some of these post-course perspectives on a panel at the English and Humanities Scholar's Day in Spring 2012.

I recommend Patricia Crider to you most highly. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you should need further information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Christa Shusko', written over a horizontal line.

Christa Shusko

Assistant Professor of Religious Studies

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