



TANG INSTITUTE AT ANDOVER

World Interfaith Harmony Week
Panel of Judges

March 7, 2016

Tang Institute
Phillips Academy
180 Main Street
Andover, Massachusetts 01810
United States of America

Dear Esteemed Panel of Judges,

It is with great pleasure that I offer this testimonial on behalf of Dr. Mary Kantor and her exceptional work in leading the United Nations Interfaith Harmony Week at Phillips Academy. Throughout the course of the event, Dr. Kantor spearheaded an effort that involved activities both on- and off-campus and engaged participants in various dimensions of the interfaith experience, including discussion and debate, visual and performing art, and mindfulness meditation and community service, among several other activities. By the conclusion of the program, students and adults had cooperated to implement an inventive and far-reaching event which powerfully “spread the message of interfaith harmony and goodwill” and served as a “summons to solidarity” for members of our campus community and beyond.

Phillips Academy, in Andover, Massachusetts, is the oldest incorporated boarding school in the United States. Founded in 1778, the school fulfills the tenets laid out in its constitution to “educate youth from every quarter” and abides by its mottos of *Finis Origine Pendet* (the end depends upon the beginning) and *Non Sibi* (not for self). Today, 1,131 students from 45 states and 45 countries attend Phillips Academy and participate in the life of an intentionally diverse community. Building upon its deep tradition of educating students across a spectrum of disciplines, the school has committed itself to educational innovation in various forms. One of those endeavors, the Tang Institute, launched in 2014 as an on-campus “ideas lab” dedicated to cultivating and sharing innovative ideas centered on preparing students for an increasingly complex and interconnected world. Our Institute works in collaboration with faculty colleagues and partners with schools and organizations worldwide to support initiatives aimed at strengthening teaching and learning. In that spirit of readying our young people for global challenges and opportunities, Dr. Kantor shared with our team in late 2014 her idea to build out the interfaith program at Phillips Academy. By all accounts, I stand in admiration of the effort she led over the ensuing months.

The 2016 U.N. Interfaith Harmony Week at Phillips Academy represented the first initiative of its kind to be integrated into our campus life and it was evident that students and adult participants deeply appreciated and embraced the opportunity to participate in the program. The diverse set of activities, made available to the Phillips Academy community as well as nearby, Merrimack Valley / Greater Boston residents, served as a call to the campus and broader audience to delve into the depths of faith traditions

and explore the interrelatedness of religious experiences. Participants were afforded the opportunity to listen, to probe, to ask questions of one another - even to “hack” campus traditions in order to support faith conversations more prominently - in an unprecedented venue. Students who previously had held discussions about their faith on the sidelines of their academic experience spoke of the critical and central platform offered to them through the events of the week.

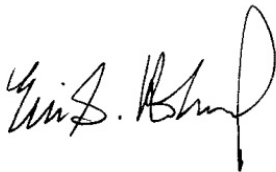
Dr. Kantor’s thoughtful and selfless leadership focused on guiding and empowering students to design, build, and implement these interfaith efforts. With her guidance, young people of faith and atheist students together created and shaped the events of the program. Encouraging students to offer their insight and to play formative roles in the proceedings reflects Dr. Kantor’s sincere belief in the potential of young people as global citizens and veritable agents of change. That notion of agency was evident throughout the program, as students assumed responsibility for advancing the deliberations of the U.N. Interfaith Harmony Week as well as crafting a series of recommendations to strengthen the campus experience for religious and nonreligious alike. From my vantage, our student participants emerged from the event even more empowered to take up the mantle of interfaith leadership, both near and far.

Throughout the planning process, Dr. Kantor engaged various adults and departments on our campus to bring the interfaith discussion “beyond the chapel”. This approach reflects her own invitational tone and manner, honed through more than three decades of interfaith and ecumenical experience in secondary school and university settings, churches, conferences, and other convenings and organizations. Dr. Kantor cast a wide net in gathering the community for this endeavor and deftly brought together representatives of academic departments and campus centers and institutes while also partnering with nearby Merrimack College. Clearly, she brought change to our campus - a place rooted in traditions dating back to the establishment of Phillips Academy over two centuries ago - and did so by building the foundation for ongoing dialogue and action around issues of faith.

My own enthusiasm for the program extends from witnessing the interactions between and among students as they wrestled with understanding better the faith traditions of their neighbors while also revisiting their own religious experiences in a new light. Dr. Kantor’s work in engineering this outstanding event serves as a platform of hope for our campus - and for all others with whom our young people will continue to engage as they carry the lessons of these proceedings into the world at large.

Truly, Dr. Kantor has done outstanding work in making the U.N. Interfaith Harmony Week a reality for Phillips Academy, both for 2016 and years to come. I offer my highest recommendation on her behalf.

Very sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Eric Roland". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized "R" at the end.

Eric Roland
Precourt Director of Partnerships, Tang Institute
Phillips Academy