

MICHIGAN STATE
UNIVERSITY

February 23, 2007

Memorandum

To: E. James Potchen
Chair, Executive Committee of Academic Council (ECAC)

From: Ralph Putnam
Chair, University on Academic Policy (UCAP)

Subject: Proposed Revision to University Policy on Religious Observance

In response to Associated Students of Michigan State University Academic Assembly Bill No. 14-41(A Bill to Change the Religious Observance Policy to accommodate individual religious practices), UCAP has considered at length the existing policy on religious observance and ASMU's proposal, resulting in the following recommendation for revision to the University's Policy on Religious Observance:

Proposed Policy on Religious Observance

It is the policy of the University to permit students and instructors to observe those holidays set aside by their chosen religious faith.

Instructors must be sensitive to those who absent themselves from class in order to observe religious holidays. It is the responsibility of students who wish to be absent to make arrangements in advance with their instructors. It is also the responsibility of those instructors who wish to be absent to make arrangements in advance with their chairpersons, who shall assume the responsibility for covering their classes. In the absence of a simple and dignified way to determine the validity of individual claims, instructors generally should accept claims of religious conflict at face value. Instructors may expect a reasonable limit to the number of absences by any one student. If it is the practice of an instructor to cover reasons for student absences from required academic events such as quizzes or exams with a blanket practice, e.g., allowing the student to drop one grade or two quizzes without penalty, this practice does not apply to the university policy on religious observance. If instructors require make-up exams, they retain the right to determine content and conditions of administration, giving due consideration to equitable treatment.

Hearing procedures for violations of the religious observance policy are those in place for the Code of Teaching Responsibility.



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To aid consideration of the proposed policy, the current policy and proposed changes are shown here:

Current policy (From *Academic Programs*)

It has always been the policy of the University to permit students and faculty to observe those holidays set aside by their chosen religious faith.

The faculty and staff should be sensitive to the observance of these holidays so that students who absent themselves from classes on these days are not seriously disadvantaged. It is the responsibility of those students who wish to be absent to make arrangements in advance with their instructors. It is also the responsibility of those faculty who wish to be absent to make arrangements in advance with their chairpersons, who shall assume the responsibility for covering their classes.

As Michigan State University has become increasingly multicultural, the incidence of conflicts between mandatory academic requirements and religious observances has increased. In the absence of a simple and dignified way to determine the validity of individual claims, the claim of a religious conflict should be accepted at face value. Be aware that some degrees of observance may have a more extensive period of observance. Instructors may expect a reasonable limit to the number of requests by any one student. Some instructors attempt to cover all reasons for student absences from required academic events such as quizzes or exams with a blanket policy, e.g., allowing the student to drop one grade or two quizzes without penalty. If this is meant to extend to religious observances, the instructor should state this clearly at the beginning of the term. If instructors require make-up exams, they retain the right to determine the content of the exams and the conditions of administration, giving due consideration to equitable treatment.

Proposed policy show as changes to current

~~It is has always been~~ the policy of the University to permit students and ~~instructors faculty~~ to observe those holidays set aside by their chosen religious faith.

Instructors must ~~The faculty and staff should~~ be sensitive to **those who absent themselves from class in order to observe religious holidays.** ~~the observance of these holidays so that students who absent themselves from classes on these days are not seriously disadvantaged.~~ It is the responsibility of those students who wish to be absent to make arrangements in advance with their instructors. It is also the responsibility of those ~~instructors faculty~~ who wish to be absent to make arrangements in advance with their chairpersons, who shall assume the responsibility for covering their classes. ~~As Michigan State University has become increasingly multicultural, the incidence of conflicts between mandatory academic requirements and religious observances has increased.~~ In the absence of a simple and dignified way to determine the validity of individual claims, **instructors generally should accept claims** ~~the claim of a religious conflict should be accepted~~ at face value. ~~Be aware that some degrees of observance may have a more extensive period of observance.~~ Instructors may expect a reasonable limit to the number of **absences requests** by any one student. ~~Some instructors attempt~~ **If it is the practice of an instructor** to cover all reasons for student absences from required academic events such as quizzes or exams with a blanket **practice policy**, e.g., allowing the student to drop one grade or two quizzes without penalty, **this practice does not apply to the university policy on religious observance.** ~~If this is meant to extend to religious observances, the instructor should state this clearly at the beginning of the term.~~ If instructors require make-up exams, they retain the right to determine ~~the content of the exams and the~~ conditions of administration, giving due consideration to equitable treatment.

Hearing procedures for violations of the religious observance policy are those in place for the Code of Teaching Responsibility.

Attachment

C: Julie Harrison
Linda Stanford