

MICHIGAN STATE
UNIVERSITY

August 13, 2007

MEMORANDUM

TO: Deans, Directors, Chairpersons

FROM: Kim Wilcox, Provost 

RE: University Policy on Religious Observance

As our campus and community becomes increasingly multicultural, faculty may experience an increase in the number of requests for academic accommodations related to absence for the observance of religious holidays. It has always been the **policy of the University** to permit students and faculty/academic staff to observe those holidays set aside by their chosen religious faith. You may wish to refer to the policy in the Faculty Handbook at <http://www.hr.msu.edu/HRsite/Documents/Faculty/Handbooks/Faculty/Instruction/v-religiousobservance.htm>.



OFFICE OF THE
PROVOST

Michigan State University
Administration Building
East Lansing, Michigan
48824-1046

FAX: 517/355-9601

The faculty and staff should be sensitive to the observance of these holidays so that students who absent themselves from class 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. 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. Please consider the ways in which these planned absences can be fairly and respectfully accommodated.

Faculty are encouraged to announce early in the semester to students that they are responsible for making arrangements in advance of their absence. Faculty should also review their syllabi and semester plans to determine whether or not scheduling is likely to disadvantage students. For example, a one-evening-only review session for a major exam (although optional) scheduled during a religious observance may be impossible to accommodate. 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 semester. 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.

There are a number of religious holidays calendars on the web which may assist you in your planning, including <http://www.wellesley.edu/RelLife/calendar/> or www.interfaithcalendar.org. You may wish to note which holidays begin at sundown on the preceding day.

As an institution, we are committed to the value of inclusion, and so our practices must conform to our commitments. I am confident that working together we can continue to build an environment that supports and fosters diversity and inclusiveness.

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