

April 14, 2008

MEMORANDUM

To: E. James Potchen, ECAC Chair

Cc: Douglas Estry, APUE
Karen Klomparens, Dean, Graduate School
John Powell, UCFA Chair
Roger Ludy, UCSA Chair
Mary Noel, UGC Chair
Payal Ravani, ASMSU
Connie Zheng, COGS
Jackie Wright, AGO

From: R. Sekhar Chivukula, UCAP Chair

RE: Revision of Students' Religious Observance Policy

UCAP respectfully submits the attached revision of the policy on students' religious observance. These efforts were prompted by ASMSU Bill No. 14-41, which requested re-examination of the current policy on religious observance. UCAP originally submitted in February 2007 a proposed revision the Policy on Religious Observance. A number of concerns were raised about the proposed revision. The proposal presented here is UCAP's response to those concerns.

UCAP notes here the following shortcomings of the existing policy in its treatment of students' religious observance:

1. The current policy does not make clear whether faculty are truly *expected* to accommodate instances of student religious observance, stating only that faculty *should be sensitive* to the observance of religious holidays.
2. The standard for accommodation of religious observance in the current policy is that arrangements should be made so that a student is not *seriously disadvantaged*, rather than making clear whether students are to be allowed an opportunity to complete the required work.

The proposed Policy on Students' Religious Observance is drafted to address these concerns, and would replace the current policy that currently appears in *Academic Programs* and in the *Faculty Handbook*. In order to aid faculty in the implementation of this policy, UCAP has also drafted a series of "guidelines and practices" which we recommend be posted alongside the policy itself.

Note that the proposed policy addresses issues only of *students'* religious observance, while the existing policy includes reference to religious observance of both students and faculty. Because of the different roles of students and faculty in the University, UCAP recommends separating the policies on religious observance for the two groups. If the policy proposed here is adopted, the issue

of faculty and instructors missing teaching and other responsibilities for reasons of religious observance will need to be addressed in separate policy.

UCAP recommends that this policy be examined by the relevant committees of academic governance, especially UCFA, UCSA, UGC, ASMSU, and COGS, and, after any necessary modifications are made, that it be submitted to Faculty and University Council for approval. UCAP stands ready to assist in this process, if requested.

Attachments:

Proposed Policy and Guidelines

Current Policy

Policy on Students' Religious Observance (Proposed)
University Committee on Academic Policy
April 10, 2008

Michigan State University respects the right of all students to observe their religious holidays and will make reasonable accommodation, upon request, for such observance. Students are responsible for providing instructors with reasonable advance notice of dates they will be absent for religious observance. Students who have provided reasonable advance notice and are absent for religious observance on days of examinations or class assignments shall be offered the opportunity to make alternative arrangements for completing required work, without academic penalty, unless it can be demonstrated that providing the alternative arrangements would constitute an unreasonable burden on the instructor or other students. Students may register complaints regarding adherence to this policy by following the hearing procedures for the *Code of Teaching Responsibility*, which entail taking complaints to the instructor or the teaching unit's chief administrator or designee.

Suggested Guidelines & Practices

To support implementing the Policy on Students' Religious Observance, we recommend that the following guidelines and suggested practices be posted on the University web site, along with the policy itself.

1. Instructors should state attendance policies, including course-specific policies related to religious observance in course syllabi. Although there is no all-University regulation requiring class attendance, attendance and participation in class activities is often an essential part of the educational process ([University Attendance Policy](#)). Instructors are responsible for defining course attendance policies at the beginning of the course and including them in the course syllabus ([University Attendance Policy](#), [Code of Teaching Responsibility](#)).
2. An instructor may specify a deadline by which students must provide notice of dates they require accommodation for religious observance. For example, an instructor might require that students provide notice at least two weeks in advance of dates they will miss class for religious observance, or that such notice be provided within in the first two weeks of the semester. Such practices are encouraged because they enhance clear communication between instructors and students and support planning for making alternative arrangements in advance for students to complete required work.
3. Some course-specific attendance policies allow for a specific number of class sessions to be missed or assignment or quiz grades to be dropped without impact on a student's grade. Such policies should clearly state whether absences for religious observance are to be included as part of the specified number of class sessions or grades.
4. It is important for instructors and students to recognize that missing class sessions or course-

related activities for any reason may negatively affect the learning opportunities of both the absent student and other students in the class. A student's contributions to a class discussion, for example, or participation in a group laboratory activity, can never be completely "made up" through alternative activities or assignments. In making accommodations for individual students' religious observance instructors should strive to minimize negative effects on the learning of all students in the course.

5. In the absence of a simple and dignified way to determine the validity of individual claims of conflict for religious observance, such claims should be accepted at face value. Students are not required to supply evidence of their attendance at religious services or events in order to qualify for any accommodation granted to them.

PROTECTION OF UNIVERSITY FUNCTIONS AND SERVICES GENERAL STUDENT REGULATIONS, 5.00

Functions, services, and processes of the University must be protected if the institution is to be effective in discharging its responsibilities; therefore, no student shall:

- 5.01 provide false information for the purpose of gaining benefit for oneself or others to any office, agency, or individual acting on behalf of the University.
- 5.02 interfere with the functions and services of the University (for example, including, but not limited to, classes, social, cultural, and athletic events, computing services, registration, housing and food services, governance meetings and judicial hearings) such that the function or service is obstructed or disrupted.
- 5.03 alter or forge any University document and/or record, including identification materials, issued or used by the University.
- 5.04 allow any University document and/or record, including identification materials, issued by the University for one's own use to be used by another.
- 5.05 use any University document and/or record for other than its authorized purpose, including identification materials issued to another.
- 5.06 act as an agent of the University unless authorized to do so.
- 5.07 fail to present correct identification issued by the University for the student's use when requested to do so by an authorized University agent acting in the performance of designated job responsibilities or who has reason to believe that the student may be involved in the violation of a regulation.
- 5.08 without proper authorization, sell or make contracts for purchase or delivery of any commercial merchandise or services for personal profit or gain, or solicit voluntary contributions for organizations.

COUNTERFEITING, ALTERING AND COPYING MSU ORDINANCES, 14.00

14.01 False copy

14.02 Possession of false copy

14.03 Unauthorized keys

.01 No person with intent to injure or defraud shall falsely make, forge, manufacture, print, reproduce, copy, tamper with, or alter, any writing, record, document or identification used or maintained by Michigan State University.

.02 No person shall knowingly possess, display or cause or permit to be displayed any writing, record, document, or identification form used or maintained by Michigan State University knowing the same to be fictitious, altered, forged, counterfeited or made without proper authority.

.03 No person without proper authority shall knowingly possess, make, or cause to be made, any key, card, or unlocking device, to operate any lock or locking mechanism used or maintained by Michigan State University.

POLICY ON RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCE

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.

LIBRARY LENDING POLICIES

Borrowers are responsible for understanding the policies related to any library material they check out.

Items on open shelves are available for use by anyone in the library. In order to check out material, or use Reserves, Reference, or other restricted material, a library card and a picture ID must be presented. Library material must be checked out before leaving the building.

Material may not be checked out for others. A borrower is financially responsible for all material checked out using his/her card. Therefore, theft/loss of an MSU ID or library card must be reported immediately by calling Circulation at (517) 355-2333.

Borrower Responsibilities and Lending Policies

1. Due Dates and Care of Material

Borrowers are responsible for knowing the dates books are due and returning (or renewing) them promptly.

Material must be returned in the same condition that it was in when it was checked out. Borrowers are financially responsible for damage that occurs while material is checked out to them. To protect themselves, borrowers who notice damage before checking out a book should bring it to the attention of Circulation staff, who will note it. Borrowers are also financially responsible for material stolen while checked out to them, so checked out items should never be left unattended.

Checked-out material will be recalled if requested by another user and may be given a new (earlier) due date. These must be promptly returned to avoid recall fines. To prevent recall fines while out of town (breaks between semesters, vacation, sabbatical, university business, etc.), a borrower should return library material before leaving — or make arrangements with someone to watch for recalls, have access to one's checked out material, and return recalled items.

2. Returning Material

Please return laptops, videos, and items from Reserve, Reference, Art, Maps, Music, and Software to the desk where they were checked out. Place other material in any book return, at the Main Library (24 hour drops at both entrances) or a branch — or mail it to: Book Returns, Circulation, MSU, 100 Library, East Lansing, MI 48824-1048; postal insurance of \$50 per volume is suggested. (If overdue fines are involved, the postmark will be considered the date of return.)

For written confirmation of the return of library material, take it to the Main Circulation (instead of placing it in a book return) and ask the Desk Supervisor for a receipt.

3. Renewals

Library material must be renewed to extend the due date; renewals are not automatic. Borrowers may renew online via "Your Account" at: www.magic.msu.edu — phone renewals are not possible. All material may be renewed except recalled items and reserves, software, CDs, records, videodiscs, special permission checkouts, and laptops, and some 3-day and 7-day material.

4. Recall of Checked Out Material

The library usually has only one copy of each title to support the information needs of the entire MSU community. Therefore, we will recall any material that is checked-out if