

SPECIAL REPORT
of the
ACADEMIC MATTERS COUNCIL
concerning
ACADEMIC REGULATIONS UPDATE:
IX. ABSENCES DUE TO RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCE

Presented at the
725th Regular Meeting of the Faculty Senate
March 14, 2013

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Report

At the request of the Faculty Senate, the Calendar Subcommittee of the Academic Matters Council reviewed the Class Absence Policy for Religious Observances to assure it was up to date with current practices. The new policy supersedes Sen. Doc. No. 89-050.

Current Academic Regulation

State Law (Chapter 375 [and Chapter 151C, as indicated below??], Acts of 1985), requires that the University excuse any student who is unable to attend classes or participate in any examination, study, or work requirement because of religious observance. Students have the right to make up examinations, study, or work requirements that they miss because of religious observance without any adverse or prejudicial effects. No fees may be charged to the student for the makeup exercise. The law also provides that such makeup work may not create an unreasonable burden upon the University. Therefore, students have an obligation to inform their course instructors, in advance, of the days on which they may be absent for religious reasons. Students should inform their course instructors in writing of the days they will be absent as early in the semester as possible and always prior to the day(s) on which they will be absent for religious reasons. Instructors, if they feel that it is important for course planning, have the right to require students to provide a written list of such days within one full calendar week after students' enrollment in the course, provided that the instructors list this requirement and deadline on the course outline or other handouts. In the event of a dispute between an instructor and a student in any course, either party should contact the Department Head or the Ombuds Office.

New Academic Regulation

The University of Massachusetts Amherst requires that the University excuse any student who is unable to attend classes or participate in any examination, study, or work requirement because of religious observance, as noted:

Chapter 151C of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts General Law states:

“Any student in an educational or vocational training institution, other than a religious or denominational educational or vocational training institution, who is unable, because of his religious beliefs, to attend classes or to participate in any examination, study or work requirement on a particular day shall be excused from any such examination or study or work requirement, and shall be provided with an opportunity to make up such examination, study, or work requirement which he may have missed because of such absence on any particular day; provided, however, that such makeup examination or work shall not create an unreasonable burden upon such school. No fees of any kind shall be charged by the institution for making available to the said student such opportunity. No adverse or prejudicial effects shall result to any student because of his availing himself of the provisions of this section.”

Instructors must accept a student's assertion of the need to be absent from class for religious reasons, but students are required to notify instructors in advance that they will miss class in order to observe a religious holiday. University policy and Massachusetts state law require faculty to offer make-up assignments or exams to students who are absent for religious observance.

Students and instructors can ascertain the dates of many religious holidays by consulting an interfaith calendar such as:

<http://www.interfaithcalendar.org/>

See also other online calendars posted on the Office of Religious and Spiritual Life website at http://www.umass.edu/religious_affairs/calendars/. Note, however, that none of these calendars is exhaustive.

Students planning to be absent from classes due to religious observance must notify their instructors in writing as early in the semester as possible, but no later than one week in advance of the absence with the exception of holidays falling during the first week of the academic year. In the event of a dispute between a student and a faculty member, either party should contact the department head or the Ombuds Office at (413) 545-0867.

MOVED: That the Faculty Senate approve the Academic Regulations Update: IX. Absences due to Religious
43-13 Observance, as presented in Sen. Doc. No. 13-040.