



TO: Committee on Academic Policy and Programs

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DATE: May 16, 2005 for May 11, 2005

AGENDA ITEM: 3

ITEM IDENTIFICATION:

Policy on Scheduling of Classes and Examinations and Other Accommodations for Religious Observances

JURISDICTIONAL INFORMATION:

The terms of reference of the Committee on Academic Policy and Programs provide that the Committee is responsible for the consideration of University-wide policy on academic matters including the establishment of policy with respect to examinations.

PREVIOUS ACTION TAKEN:

The religious observances of the major Christian denominations are recognized through ordinary University scheduling and statutory holidays. An existing Governing Council resolution, approved by the Academic Affairs Committee on February 4, 1974, provides the following:

- (1) THAT the first day of classes in the fall term in all teaching divisions should not be scheduled on the first and second days of Rosh Hashanah or on Yom Kippur.
- (2) THAT examinations in all teaching divisions should not be scheduled on the first and second days of Rosh Hashanah or on Yom Kippur or on the first two days and the last two days of Passover, which normally fall in April.

The first resolution is interpreted to apply to the first day of classes in any given course and not only to the first day of the autumn term.

In recent years, other holy days have been accommodated pursuant to a memorandum issued annually by the Vice-President & Provost. However, there is no provision for the accommodation of holy days, other than those noted above, in University policy.

HIGHLIGHTS:

The proposed policy articulates the University's commitment and expectations with respect to reasonable accommodation of the needs of students who observe religious holy days other than those already accommodated by ordinary scheduling and statutory holidays.

As provided in the proposed policy, the Office of the Vice-President & Provost shall, on an annual basis, publish information concerning the anticipated dates of a number of holy days over the subsequent two academic years. This list is currently based upon the dates published in the *Multifaith Calendar* by the Ontario Multifaith Council on Spiritual and Religious Care. This calendar can be ordered at the Council's web site at <<http://www.omc.ca>>.

The policy provides that while every reasonable effort should be made to provide accommodation, the publishing of these dates should not necessarily be interpreted to mean that no important academic activities can be scheduled on these dates. The published dates will be provided in the interest of assisting instructors and those planning academic activities in anticipating when students might choose to seek accommodations for religious observances. It is also important to note that there are many holy days associated with many faiths and that the absence of such dates on the published list should not be interpreted to mean that there should be no accommodation for students who observe those holy days. Finally, some observances are based on an interpretation of the lunar calendar, and thus may vary by one or two days depending upon the interpretation relevant to a student's faith tradition.

FINANCIAL AND/OR PLANNING IMPLICATIONS:

There are no implications for the University's operating budget.

RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that the Committee on Academic Policy & Programs recommend to the Governing Council:

THAT the Policy on Scheduling of Classes and Examinations and Other Accommodations for Religious Observances be approved, effective immediately.

Policy on Scheduling of Classes and Examinations and Other Accommodations for Religious Observances

Preamble

The University of Toronto welcomes and includes students, staff and faculty from a broadly diverse range of communities and backgrounds. The University community comprises one of the most diverse campus populations anywhere. Students, staff and faculty have a wide range of backgrounds, cultural traditions and spiritual beliefs.

With reference to the University's commitment to human rights as articulated in the *Statement on Human Rights* and in accordance with the accommodation principles of the *Ontario Human Rights Code*, this policy is concerned with accommodations for students with respect to observances of religious holy days.

Policy

It is the policy of the University of Toronto to arrange reasonable accommodation of the needs of students who observe religious holy days other than those already accommodated by ordinary scheduling and statutory holidays.

Students have a responsibility to alert members of the teaching staff in a timely fashion to upcoming religious observances and anticipated absences. Instructors will make every reasonable effort to avoid scheduling tests, examinations or other compulsory activities at these times. If compulsory activities are unavoidable, every reasonable opportunity should be given to these students to make up work that they miss, particularly in courses involving laboratory work. When the scheduling of tests or examinations cannot be avoided, students should be informed of the procedure to be followed to arrange to write at an alternate time.

It is most important that no student be seriously disadvantaged because of her or his religious observances. However, in the scheduling of academic and other activities, it is also important to ensure that the accommodation of one group does not seriously disadvantage other groups within the University community.

On an annual basis, the Office of the Vice-President & Provost shall publish information concerning the anticipated dates of a number of holy days over the subsequent two academic years. While every reasonable effort should be made to provide accommodation, the publishing of these dates should not necessarily be interpreted to mean that no important academic activities can be scheduled on these dates.

This policy shall be applied in a manner which is consistent with normally applicable academic requirements and standards.

Responsibility

Administrative responsibility for this policy is assigned to the Vice-President & Provost.

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