December 17, 2019

TO: Deans, Directors, Faculty, and Instructional Academic Staff

CC: Facilities and Administrative Unit Directors, Teaching Assistants

FROM: Karl Scholz, Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs

Lori Reesor, Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs  
Jane M. Richard, Interim Secretary of the Faculty

RE: Religious Observances

Do not schedule exams and other mandatory academic requirements on days when religious observances may cause substantial numbers of students to be absent. Despite a long standing faculty policy to avoid such conflicts and to make reasonable accommodations for individual cases, students are increasingly reporting conflicts in our courses that have not been addressed. Please refer to the policy or this memo in your syllabus, or use the standard syllabus template (where the language is already included). Advise your teaching assistants to adhere to this policy.

**Please note the extra pressure this year on Muslim students who observe Ramadan and will fast from dawn to sunset during the most stressful time of the academic year, including finals week Spring 2020.**

State law mandates that any student with a conflict between an academic requirement and any religious observance must be given an alternative for meeting the academic requirement. The law also stipulates that students be given a mechanism by which they can conveniently and confidentially notify an instructor of the conflict. A student’s claim of a religious conflict, which may include travel time, should be accepted at face value. A great variety of valid claims exist for religious groups, and there is no practical, dignified, and legal means to assess the validity of individual claims.

The following three guidelines that have been developed to provide clarity for both students and instructors: (1) Announce early in the semester that your students must notify you within the first two weeks of class of the specific days or dates on which they request relief. Including this information on your course syllabus is encouraged, to make sure your students are informed of the policy. (2) Make‑ups may be scheduled before or after the regularly scheduled requirements. (3) It is understood that instructors may set reasonable limits on the total number of days claimed by any one student. Occasionally, students may not fully understand the necessity for prior notice, and under these circumstances we urge you to be as flexible as possible. Our policy seeks to be sensitive to the needs of individual students

Some religions mark observances over multiple days, which may begin at sunset on the day preceding the posted date(s) of the holiday. See [**interfaith-calendar.org**](http://interfaith-calendar.org/)for a listing, though not exhaustive, of religious holidays. Please refer to the calendar below or at [**secfac.wisc.edu/academic-calendar/**](https://secfac.wisc.edu/academic-calendar/) to compare with the UW-Madison academic calendar.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us:

Jane M. Richard, Interim Secretary of the Faculty, 608-262-3958, sof@secfac.wisc.edu

Steven M. Cramer, Vice Provost for Teaching and Learning, 608-262-5246, steven.cramer@wisc.edu

Christina Olstad, Dean of Students, dean@studentlife.wisc.edu

**CALENDAR FOR SPRING SEMESTER 2020**

Martin Luther King Jr Day 20 January (Mon)  
Last day to cancel enrollment without transcript record 20 January (Mon)

Instruction begins 21 January (Tue)

Last day to drop courses or withdraw without notation on transcript 29 January (Wed)

Last day to add courses or enroll without department/dean permission 31 January (Fri)

Last day for 100% tuition adjustment on dropped classes 31 January (Fri)

Last day for 50% tuition adjustment on dropped classes 14 February (Fri)

Last day to apply for pass/fail or convert from credit to audit (undergrad) 14 February (Fri)

Spring recess 14-22 March

Classes resume 23 March (Mon)

Last day to drop courses 27 March (Fri)

Last day to apply for pass/fail or convert from credit to audit (grad) 27 March (Fri)

**Good Friday\* 10 April (Fri)**

**Passover (Pesach)\* 9-15 April \*\***

Last day to withdraw without academic penalty (undergrad, prof., special) 17 April (Fri)

Last day to withdraw without academic penalty (grad) 1 May (Fri)

Last class day 1 May (Fri)

Study day 2 May (Sat)

Exam (summary) period 3-8 May

**Ramadan\* 23 April-May 23\*\*\***

Commencement ceremony: doctoral and MFA candidates 8 May (Fri)\*\*\*\*

Commencement ceremony: undergraduate and master’s degree candidates 9 May (Sat)\*\*\*\*  
Last day grades in 14 May (Thu)  
Faculty contract year ends 17 May (Sun)

**Spring 2020 Key Deadlines:**  
[**registrar.wisc.edu/dates/**](https://registrar.wisc.edu/dates/)

Please contact the Office of the Registrar for the Apply to Graduate deadline.

Note that Ramadan falls on April 23-May 23 this year, which includes finals week Spring 2020. More information on making accommodations for religious fasting:

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2019/05/14/colleges-try-accommodate-muslim-students-fasting-ramadan>

\* In accordance with regent and faculty policy, faculty are asked not to schedule mandatory exercises on days when religious observances may cause substantial numbers of students to be absent from the university.

\*\* Observances of Jewish holidays begin at sunset on the day preceding that which is listed as the holiday.

\*\*\* Islamic holidays are based on the lunar cycle and dates may vary by one day from those listed.

\*\*\*\* The official date of degree conferral on the diploma will be 10 May 2020.