

**REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE AD HOC COMMITTEE
ON THE ACADEMIC CALENDAR AND RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCES
ADOPTED BY THE FACULTY SENATE 7 FEBRUARY 1983**

Philosophy

The recommendations of the committee do not imply any affirmation by the university of the sacredness or importance of religious observances. Rather, the effort has been to enhance the orderly functioning of the educational process and meet the individual needs of students by reducing conflicts between educational requirements and the private free exercise of religion. Moreover, a calendar which completely ignores all religious observances did not seem feasible. That being the case, it seemed essential to the committee to recommend a system which treats all students and all religions as fairly and equitably as possible.

Religious Needs and Appropriate Relief: In General

Two sorts of relief for religious needs are possible: (a) systematic relief, such as scheduling holidays to coincide with religious observances (calendar relief), or holding classes but not scheduling mandatory academic exercises; and, (b) personal relief, that is, allowing make-ups for mandatory exercises missed because of religious observances. The existing calendar seems to grant systematic relief to major Christian holidays and no orderly relief on a personal basis. We identified two principal areas of unmet needs:

- (a) Because of the substantial numbers of students involved, a need for systematic relief for certain major Jewish holidays. "Major" is defined in terms of seriousness of the felt obligation to travel home or otherwise skip mandatory exercises.¹
- (b) A need for an orderly system for claiming personal relief for all other religious/academic conflicts.

RECOMMENDATION I. NO MANDATORY REQUIREMENTS ON MAJOR OBSERVANCES³

If a religious observance is important enough to cause substantial numbers of students to be absent from scheduled functions, or to attend at a significant personal sacrifice, mandatory requirements should not be scheduled on those days. The faculty should be encouraged not to schedule mandatory academic exercises, or require class attendance, on the first day of Passover and Passover Eve, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Good Friday, Christmas, Christmas Eve, and Easter.

RECOMMENDATION II. CONFLICTS BETWEEN ACADEMIC REQUIREMENTS
AND RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCES

Regardless of any university policy on the spring break and other holidays, there are bound to be many conflicts between mandatory academic exercises and religious obligations. Examinations, labs, and field trips are obvious examples. A student with a conflict between an academic requirement and a religious observance must be given an alternative means of meeting the academic requirement subject to the following:

- (a) in order to be granted an alternative means of meeting an academic requirement, students must notify their instructors, within the first two weeks of class, of the specific days or dates on which they will request relief from an academic requirement.
- (b) Instructors are not obligated to schedule make-ups before the regularly scheduled requirements.
- (c) It is understood that instructors may set reasonable limits on the total number of days claimed by any one student.

The claim of a religious conflict should be accepted at face value. It is obvious that a great variety of valid claims exist, and there seems to practical, dignified, and legal means to assess the validity of individual claims.

We believe that administrative confusion and abuse of the make-up privilege can be avoided by the three specific guidelines cited in the latter part of the motion.

RECOMMENDATION III. EFFECTIVE NOTIFICATION OF FACULTY AND STUDENTS

It was clear to the committee that administrative confusion can easily nullify any system of entitlements such as provided for by Recommendations I and II and vastly elevate the costs of implementation. Students and professors must share an understanding of the applicable rules. Both must act early enough in the semester to prevent lapse of the deferrals and costly schedule changes. To the committee, existing methods of notification seemed ineffectual.

At least the following administrative steps should be taken:

- (a) Faculty members should be reminded of the policies in Recommendations I and II above during registration week each semester. Notification should include at least the observances listed in I.
- (b) Students should be notified in such campus publications as the University Timetable and Wheat and Chaff. The notification to students should emphasize the need to claim relief from academic requirements during the first two weeks of class.
- (c) Someone should verify that the official university calendar correctly places and spells at least the major religious observances listed in recommendation I.

RECOMMENDATION IV. SPRING BREAK⁴

Under existing practice, the ninth week of the second semester is preferred for spring break, but a nearby week is sometimes chosen in order to accommodate Easter. Passover is never included in the spring break. Passover is the major observance for which Jewish students feel obligated to travel home; and it conflicts with more classes than the Easter Sunday weekend. Also, Christmas, the major Christian holiday for which students travel home, is always accommodated by the calendar. In the time period examined by the committee, the only way to include Passover in spring break is to schedule the break earlier or later in the semester. It so happens that all Passovers which occur reasonably near the middle of the semester occur in a week that also contains Good Friday.

Therefore, the judgment of our committee was that the religious needs of Jews and Christians alike could be accommodated, without undue cost to competing considerations, by the following set of rules for the timing of spring break.

The following rules are referred to the University Committee for study as to feasibility in light of other calendar needs:

- (a) If the first day of Passover and Good Friday occur in the same week, and that is the 8th to 11th week of the second semester, that week should be spring break.
- (b) If either the first day of Passover or Good Friday occurs during the 8th to 11th week, that week would be the spring break.
- (c) If both the first day of Passover and Good Friday occur in the 8th to 11th week, but they do not occur in the same week, the week of Passover should be the spring break.
- (d) If none of the above, the break should be the 9th week.

Regarding (c) above, in the theoretically possible solution in which there is a choice between Holy Week and Passover week, Passover should be preferred. This situation does not seem to occur in this century.

RECOMMENDATION V. THE SPRING HOLIDAY⁵

A single holiday should be scheduled in such a way as to accommodate religious needs unmet by the spring break.

The following rules are referred to the University Committee for study as to feasibility in light of other calendar needs:

- (a) When spring break includes the first day of Passover and Good Friday, Easter Monday is a holiday.
- (b) When spring break includes the first day of Passover but not Good Friday, Good Friday is a holiday.
- (c) When spring break includes Good Friday, but not the first day of Passover, then Easter Monday is not a holiday; instead the holiday should be a day as close to the first day of Passover as possible.

The important change from present practice made by these rules is (c) above. When Good Friday is accommodated by spring break, it seems equitable to schedule the extra spring holiday to accommodate Passover rather than to provide an additional holiday after Easter, as is the present practice.

TECHNICAL NOTES DEFINING JEWISH OBSERVANCES

The dates of Jewish observances referred to in this report are the traditional dates. However, for administrative convenience, and to resolve possible ambiguities, the following more precise definitions should be understood:

The Jewish observance of Passover begins at sunset (that is, in the evening). "Passover Eve," as used in the report, means the entire calendar day (midnight to midnight) which includes the first evening of Passover.

"The first day of Passover," as used in this report, means the entire calendar day (midnight to midnight), following "Passover Eve," as used in this report.

The Jewish observance of Yom Kippur is a single day beginning and ending at sunset. "Yom Kippur," as used in this report, means 4:30 p.m. on the day Yom Kippur begins to 9:30 p.m. on the day Yom Kippur ends. (The extra time at each end is to allow for eating before and after fasting.)

The Jewish observance of Rosh Hashanah is two days, but most observers celebrate only the first. It begins at sunset and ends about 48 hours later. "Rosh Hashanah," as used in this report, means the 26-hour period beginning 5:30 p.m. on the day Rosh Hashanah begins. A student with a conflict between an academic requirement and observance of Rosh Hashanah after this period may, of course, seek personal relief under Recommendation II. (Recommendation II is also available for a conflict during the period if, for some reason, a mandatory exercise must be held.)

Notes

1. One logical basis for the distinction between systematic and individual relief is the number of students affected. When the number of necessary personal adjustments reaches a certain level, it is more efficient to change practice across the board. In that regard, the committee was satisfied that, whereas relatively large numbers of Christian and Jewish students attend the university, no other group has a major numerical representation. A second logical basis is the importance of the particular religious days to the student. In that regard, it is important to note that many less major Christian and Jewish holy days are not accorded systematic relief but are eligible for individual adjustments.
2. Calendar vs. noncalendar is a different distinction than systematic vs. personal. Calendar refers to the scheduling of holidays and breaks. Systematic includes Recommendation I (no mandatory requirements on certain major observances). Thus, all calendar recommendations are systematic, but one type of systematic relief is not calendar relief. In our view, calendar recommendations require a different procedure (referral to a calendar committee), while systematic relief requires a different justification (see note 1 above).
3. Rather than try to phrase the motion in terms of days which are presently afforded some relief vs. those that are not, the committee thought it simpler to list all days. Observances which always occur on the weekend are included here because of the possibility of scheduling exercises like field trips on those days.
4. As used in this report, "spring break" means a single week beginning Monday and ending Sunday and excluding the spring holiday.
5. The committee developed precise rules for scheduling the spring holiday relative to the first day of Passover, taking into account the apparent policy of having the holiday fall on a M-W-F. These rules are of unclear value and are too technical for a referral motion. The committee can make the rules available to a calendar committee, if such a committee is interested.

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