February 23, 2007

Memorandum

To: E. James Potchen  
Chair, Executive Committee of Academic Council (ECAC)

From: Ralph Putnam  
Chair, University on Academic Policy (UCAP)

Subject: Proposed Revision to University Policy on Religious Observance

In response to Associated Students of Michigan State University Academic Assembly Bill No. 14-41 (A Bill to Change the Religious Observance Policy to accommodate individual religious practices), UCAP has considered at length the existing policy on religious observance and ASMU’s proposal, resulting in the following recommendation for revision to the University’s Policy on Religious Observance:

Proposed Policy on Religious Observance

It is the policy of the University to permit students and instructors to observe those holidays set aside by their chosen religious faith. Instructors must be sensitive to those who absent themselves from class in order to observe religious holidays. It is the responsibility of students who wish to be absent to make arrangements in advance with their instructors. It is also the responsibility of those instructors who wish to be absent to make arrangements in advance with their chairpersons, who shall assume the responsibility for covering their classes. In the absence of a simple and dignified way to determine the validity of individual claims, instructors generally should accept claims of religious conflict at face value. Instructors may expect a reasonable limit to the number of absences by any one student. If it is the practice of an instructor to cover reasons for student absences from required academic events such as quizzes or exams with a blanket practice, e.g., allowing the student to drop one grade or two quizzes without penalty, this practice does not apply to the university policy on religious observance. If instructors require make-up exams, they retain the right to determine content and conditions of administration, giving due consideration to equitable treatment. Hearing procedures for violations of the religious observance policy are those in place for the Code of Teaching Responsibility.
To aid consideration of the proposed policy, the current policy and proposed changes are shown here:

**Current policy (From Academic Programs)**

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, instructors generally should accept claims of a religious conflict 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 absences 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.

**Proposed policy show as changes to current**

It is has always been the policy of the University to permit students and instructors faculty to observe those holidays set aside by their chosen religious faith.

Instructors must The faculty and staff should be sensitive to those who absent themselves from class in order to observe religious holidays, 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 instructors 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, instructors generally should accept claims of a religious conflict 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 absences requests by any one student. Some instructors attempt If it is the practice of an instructor 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, this practice does not apply to the university policy on religious observance. 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.

Hearing procedures for violations of the religious observance policy are those in place for the Code of Teaching Responsibility.

Attachment

C: Julie Harrison
   Linda Stanford
MEMORANDUM

TO: Ralph Putnam, Chairperson
    University Committee on Academic Policy

FROM: Jon Sticklen, Chairperson
      Executive Committee of Academic Council

SUBJECT: AA Bill #14-41 re: Change the Religious Observance Policy to Accommodate Individual Religious Practices

As a follow up to the April 4, 2006 ECAC meeting, I am formally forwarding the above mentioned Academic Assembly Bill to UCAP for review. Please forward your report back to the Secretary for Academic Governance office at your earliest convenience for discussion at a later ECAC meeting.

Thank you.

JS/jh

Attachment
ASSOCIATED STUDENTS OF
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY
ACADEMIC ASSEMBLY

FOURTEENTH SESSION

BILL NO. 14 - 41

INTRODUCED BY: Schare SECONDED BY: Kaplan

A BILL TO: Change the Religious Observance Policy to accommodate individual religious practices

THE ASSOCIATED STUDENTS OF MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY ENACT:

WHEREAS, Diversity in the faculty, students and staff is a major source of Michigan State University’s intellectual vitality and innovative spirit; and

WHEREAS, The current Religious Observance policy state that “The faculty and staff should be sensitive to the observance of these holidays so that students who absent themselves from class on these days are not seriously disadvantaged […] 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 policy. If this is meant to extend to religious observances, the instructor should state this clearly at the beginning of the term”; and

WHEREAS, The current policy does not require faculty to accommodate students for absences due to religious observances; and

WHEREAS, All students should have a fair and equal opportunity and should not be penalized from earning full credit in a class, regardless of religious belief; and

WHEREAS, Dropping of examinations should not extend to religious holidays. All students should have the opportunity to drop their lowest grade, where applied, without discrimination and regardless of religious belief; and

WHEREAS, Faculty should be sent a list of religious holidays to be made aware of the observance and absences of students at the beginning of each semester or year; and

WHEREAS, Faculty members are expected to reasonably accommodate individual religious practices, in accordance with Federal Law; and

WHEREAS, A Modified Religious Observance Policy could include the following: “It is the policy of Michigan State University, as it is also Federal Law, that instructors will, without prejudice, provide students with accommodations who provide instructors with proper notification and wish to observe their religious holidays at times when academic requirements conflict with those observations. Students must be allowed an opportunity to make up any examination, in class extra credit, other written test, or class work, have access to any handouts or other material distributed in class and have the opportunity to obtain or to review and duplicated lecture notes or slides presented in class. A makeup examination must be at a time feasible to both instructor and students, cover only the material for which the student is originally responsible, and be given within a reasonable limit that retains currency of the material.”; therefore be it
RESOLVED, The Office of the Chair should meet with the appropriate administration and faculty to modify the current policy and should advocate for a specific Religious Observance Policy to accommodate for individual religious practices as stated above.

INTRODUCED ON March 21, 2006

SPECIAL ACTION TAKEN DATE

FINAL ACTION TAKEN X 26-0-0 March 21, 2006
PASSED FAILED VOTE DATE

CHAIRPERSON SECRETARY