

2016-2017 Ad-hoc Committee to Develop Academic Calendar Religious Observance Policy Report

Craig Burnett (Chair)
Neil Donahue
Eugene Maccarrone
Gina Sorrentino
Marc Silver

Summary of Findings for the 2016-2017 Academic Year

All things considered, the calendar change from the previous format to the new academic calendar's structure was smooth overall. While the committee recognizes that some individuals will continue to require additional accommodations under the new calendar (e.g., religious observations and childcare concerns), the view of the committee is that overwhelming majority of faculty, staff, and students have adjusted to the new calendar without much difficulty. Going forward, some students, staff, and faculty will need to make accommodations for religious observances — including both religious holidays that Hofstra observed previously and holidays that Hofstra did not previously observe. Importantly, however, there were zero reports of cases in which those accommodations were denied to the relevant parties. While some faculty preferred the old calendar, it is worth noting that some responses appreciated the new calendar, citing pedagogical improvements. Overall, the committee views the new calendar as a success, with no real need for intervention at this time. As time passes, the committee anticipates that the new calendar will become the new normal.

Specific Activities and Observations

- The committee workshopped and approved language to e-mail/post online regarding the religious observance policy. It was unclear to the committee if the entire Senate needed/wanted to approve it. The official committee-approved language is appended to the end of this report.

- The committee solicited and collected from faculty any and all concerns with the new academic calendar. There were few responses (less than twenty overall), but most responses cited issues with matching the local school calendar to their own needs and some students missing classes during holidays. Others expressed their belief that the calendar was working well. The committee was not able to gather specific information about attendance issues (no one who indicated drops in attendance, when asked, were able to provide specific records). There were no reported instances where students or faculty members did not receive the appropriate accommodation(s). On the whole, responses were fairly balanced. The committee concluded that, for the overwhelming majority of instances, the new calendar worked without much difficulty. Further, noting that the calendar was already set for the next few years, the committee concluded that most faculty, staff, and students would adapt easily to the new calendar. One issue relating to clinical observations was referred to the provost's office directly.

- At the request of one chair, the committee considered compiling a list of holidays. Ultimately, deciding what holidays would make the list proved to be a quagmire. The committee concluded

that trying to compile a list of holidays that could, by accident, give the sense that the list somehow constituted an “approved” list of holidays. Having such a list, the committee concludes, would lead to more confusion. Instead, it is imperative that faculty, staff, and students who need accommodations for religious observance will take the appropriate steps to notify relevant individuals of their need.

PROPOSAL APPROVED BY AD HOC COMMITTEE AND SEC ON 3/5/18

Guidelines Related to Absences for Religious Observances

Hofstra University recognizes that students and/or faculty may miss class due to religious observances. Students who anticipate missing class for this reason should notify faculty members in advance. Likewise, faculty members who anticipate missing class for religious observance should notify students in their classes in advance. As per Faculty Policy Series 12 (B): “No student shall be expelled or refused admission to Hofstra University because he or she is unable to participate in any examination, study or work requirement because of his or her religious obligations and practices. However, all students are expected to complete all assignments and examinations. It is understood that no adverse or prejudicial effects shall result to any student who avails him or herself of religious observances. The University, faculty, and student shall work together to achieve a reasonable accommodation concerning any conflicts between educational and religious obligations.”

Additionally, in accordance with New York State Law, students who are absent from school because of their religious beliefs will be given an equivalent opportunity to register for classes or make up any examination, study, or work requirements that they may have missed because of that absence on any particular day or days.