

VASSAR COLLEGE
OFFICE OF THE DEAN OF THE FACULTY

August 17, 2018

Dear Colleagues,

Vassar is committed to embracing diversity in many forms, among them religious diversity. We write to remind you of the religious holidays that some faculty and some students will be observing during the coming academic year and of the college's policy on the interplay between academic commitments and religious observance.

In planning courses, instructors are encouraged to take note of religious holidays in scheduling exams, papers and projects. Instructors are also encouraged to take note of religious holidays in relation to students' academic responsibilities in athletics, the performing arts, language tables, field trips, etc. Instructors are encouraged as well to tell their students at the beginning of each term that although some classes and other academic activities inevitably will take place on religious holidays, they will allow excused absences for students whose religious practice creates a conflict with their academic obligations. In turn, students who will miss class in order to observe a holiday must notify their instructors in advance of their absence and arrange to make up any work missed. This general policy applies for all religious holidays observed by our students and is not restricted to the abbreviated listing of holidays we include each year in this letter.

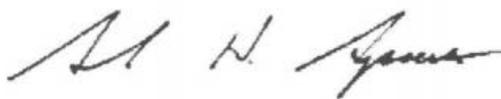
On the reverse of this sheet, we provide a chronological listing of the holidays that in past years have posed the most significant scheduling challenges for Vassar students and faculty. The attached calendar is not a comprehensive listing of religious holidays, nor a statement about the greater or lesser importance of any particular holiday to members of the college community. It is simply our best effort to help faculty anticipate the holidays we have learned are most commonly observed by members of our community. A more complete listing of religious and cultural holidays throughout the year is available on the Religious and Spiritual Life Office website: <http://religiousandspiritualife.vassar.edu>. Before dropping a student from your class list, you might look for an email from him or her advising you of the reason for the absence (as noted already, students will be encouraged to contact their professors in advance). In the 2018-19 academic year, please note that the Jewish High Holidays begin during the first full week of classes (Rosh Hashanah starts Sunday, September 9), and that Ramadan, the month of fasting in the Muslim calendar, overlaps this year with both classes and exam period (beginning on Sunday, May 5).

Instructors who elect not to teach on a holy day may plan their assignments and make up meetings with their classes as they wish. They should inform their chairs and notify their students of their plans at the beginning of the term, being mindful of potential conflicts with other scheduled classes and College events.

In a community of learning, each individual's decision to engage in or refrain from religious observance merits our respect and consideration. Supporting students in engaging this issue thoughtfully can be an important contribution to their education.



Jonathan L. Chenette
Dean of the Faculty
Professor of Music



Samuel H. Speers
Director, Religious & Spiritual Life Office
Assistant Dean for Campus Life

2018-2019 Religious Holy Days

2018			
August 21–25 (sundown Tuesday - sundown Saturday)	Eid al-Adha	Muslim	One of the two main Islamic festivals (the other is Eid al-Fitr), this festival commemorates Ibrahim's willingness to sacrifice his son, Ishmael.
September 9–11 (sundown Sunday – sundown Tuesday)	Rosh Hashanah	Jewish	This marks the beginning of the Jewish year and the beginning of the High Holy Days or the Days of Awe. Observance includes refraining from work.
September 18–19 (sundown Tuesday – sundown Wednesday)	Yom Kippur	Jewish	The Day of Atonement, at the end of the 10 Days of Awe, is devoted to prayer, repentance and fasting. The Sabbath of Sabbaths in the Jewish calendar, it is the most widely observed Jewish Holiday of the year. Observance includes refraining from work.
November 7 (Wednesday)	Diwali/Tihar	Hindu, Jain, Sikh	The festival of lights, celebrating the triumph of light over darkness, good over evil, and knowledge over ignorance.
2019			
February 5 (Tuesday)	Chinese/ Vietnamese/ Korean New Year	Buddhist/ Daoist/ Confucian (secular in origin; observed across religious and secular communities throughout East Asia cultural regions excluding Japan)	Celebrated as the most important holiday of the year in the East Asian Lunar calendar (also known as the Chinese lunar calendar). The holiday is observed primarily in mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Macau, Vietnam and Korea, and also many Southeast Asian countries with significant population from the above regions. The Year of the Pig begins.

March 6 (Wednesday)	Ash Wednesday	Christian	The beginning of Lent, the 40–day period (excluding Sundays) of prayer and repentance that precedes Easter.
April 14–21 (Sunday - Sunday)	Holy Week/ Easter	Christian	The most important Christian holidays, marking the Last Supper, Passion, crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. Holy Week begins on Palm Sunday, with a day of holy observance on Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter Sunday.
April 19–27 (sundown Friday – sundown Saturday)	Passover	Jewish	Passover commemorates the liberation of the Israelites from Egyptian bondage. “Seders,” ritual feasts at which the story of the Exodus is recounted, are conducted on the first and second nights, followed by six more days of observance during which dietary restrictions apply.
May 5–June 4 (sundown Sunday – sundown Tuesday)	Ramadan	Muslim	The (lunar) month of fasting. Adult Muslims abstain from eating from dawn until sunset.

In planning courses, instructors are asked to take note of these days so that examinations will not be held or major assignments will not fall due on them. Students should be told at the beginning of each term that although classes may be conducted on these days, absence for reasons of religious observance is not to be penalized. However, students who intend to be absent in order to observe these holy days—or other holy days not listed here—are expected to notify their instructors in advance of their absence and to arrange to make up any work missed.

Instructors who elect not to teach on any holy days should inform their chair and notify their students at the beginning of the term. They should arrange for another faculty member to cover their classes if possible or plan make-up classes with their students and announce them in advance.