

VASSAR COLLEGE
OFFICE OF THE DEAN OF THE FACULTY

July 23, 2015

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://religiousandspirituallife.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).

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

September 13-15 (sundown Sunday to 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.
September 22-23 (sundown Tuesday to sundown Wednesday)	Yom Kippur	Jewish	The Day of Atonement, 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.
September 24 (beginning at sundown, Wednesday, September 23) <i>Beginning date can vary by a day</i>	Eid al-Adha	Muslim	The Festival of the Sacrifice remembers Abraham's devotion in offering his son as a sacrifice.
November 11	Diwali	Hindu/Jain/Sikh	The Festival of Lights, celebrating several different sacred stories, depending on the region. One of the most important Hindu festivals, Diwali is an official holiday in India and many other countries.
February 8	Lunar New Year (also known as Chinese New Year)	Secular in origin, the holiday is 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 Monkey begins.
February 10	Ash Wednesday	Christian	The beginning of Lent, the 40-day period (excluding Sundays) of prayer and repentance that precedes Easter.
March 20-27 <i>Vassar spring break is March 11-27</i>	Holy Week/Easter	Christian	The most important Christian Holidays, with a week of observances: Palm Sunday, March 20 Holy Thursday, March 24 Good Friday, March 25 Easter, March 27 Holy Week marks the Last Supper, Passion, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.
April 22-24 (sundown Friday to sundown Sunday)	1st Days of Passover	Jewish	Passover commemorates the liberation of the Israelites from Egyptian bondage. "Seders" are conducted on the first and second nights, retelling the story of the Exodus. These Seders begin an 8-day holiday in which dietary restrictions apply (April 22-30).