

Academic Standards, Regulations and Admissions Committee

**Response to Charge S-1602 Revised
February 27, 2018**

**Charge S-1602 Modified - Policies on Excused Student Absences for Religious Observance: Consider Rutgers policies on excused student absences for religious observance, and make recommendations on how best to revise those policies in light of the increasing diversity of the Rutgers student body. Respond to Senate Executive Committee by October 2017. [Issued March 2016. Reissued March 2017]
Revised November 3, 2017: The revised charge removes Barbara Lee as the source of the proposed/requested charge.**

Background:

The Committee has investigated this charge last academic year under the esteemed leadership of then Chair Martha Cotter and again during this academic year, as the Charge was reissued and then modified. It has also been discussed with Rutgers Vice President Barbara Lee and others. We evaluated the ways in which this matter is handled by educators both here at Rutgers and elsewhere and considered a variety of options. We noted that many professors detail this consideration in their course introductory material and mention it verbally at their initial class meeting. We evaluated the potential benefits and disadvantages of that approach. We recognized that it is undesirable to have an examination date from which a number of students would be absent. We considered the idea of having a student provide the professor with a written note from a religious figure substantiating the holiday as a valid one meriting the student's absence. The following here are highlights from our discussion:

- The definition of "religion" for this purpose is unclear.
- Difficulty was noted in producing an official list of religious holidays.
- There were concerns about asking students to state, or even to prove or demonstrate, that they are members of given religions or committed to specific observances.
- There were concerns about accommodations need and required.
- Faculty difficulties in planning examinations, tests, quizzes, and even lectures can become burdensome.
- Timing of classes and examination for holidays that begin or end at sundown can be difficult.
- Accommodating some students may disadvantage others.

Special Considerations:

We also viewed this Charge in the context of protecting our students and their right to privacy and religious freedom. We noted that there are widely recognized religious observances and others less so, as there are varying degrees of conformity and depth of belief. We sought a policy that would reassure students that the University cannot and should not intrude upon or seek to make students feel uncomfortable or unwanted by declaring their religious ideation. We favored wide latitude commensurate with academic integrity and the mission of our university.

Recommendation:

After discussion, it was moved and seconded that we respond to Charge S-1602 Revised by endorsing the current Rutgers policy, Section 10.2.7B, listed below. The Motion was passed unanimously.

Cordially,

Bob

Robert A. Schwartz, Chair

RUTGERS POLICY

Section: 10.2.7

Section Title: Student Academic Regulations & Policies

Policy Name: Course Attendance

Formerly Book: 2.4.7

Approval Authority: President

Responsible Executive: Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs

Responsible Office: Office of Academic Affairs

Originally Issued: 1959

Revisions: 9/1990; 7/1/2013

10.2.7 COURSE ATTENDANCE

B. It is the policy of the University not to cancel classes on religious holidays. However, students should exercise their own judgment as to attendance in accordance with the dictates of specific school or program policies and requirements governing class attendance. Generally no public ceremonies should be scheduled for these religious holidays. In any case, any ceremonies necessary on these days should be cleared through the Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs or the appropriate campus Chancellor.

It is also the policy of the University, when consistent with specific school or program policies and requirements governing class attendance, to excuse without penalty students who are absent because of religious observances and to allow the make-up of work missed because of such absence. Except when related to clinical assignments, examinations and special required out-of-class activities shall ordinarily not be scheduled on those days when religiously observant students refrain from participating in secular activities. Absences for reasons of religious obligation shall not be counted for purposes of reporting.

2017-2018 Academic Standards, Regulations, and Admissions Committee

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