



McGill

Memorandum

TO: Senate

FROM: Senate Committee on Student Affairs, Linda Jacobs Starkey, Interim Dean of Students and Chair, ex officio

SUBJECT: Motion to amend the Policy for the Accommodation of Religious Holy Days: Handbook of Student Rights and Responsibilities (Chapter 7).

DATE: November 21, 2006

DOCUMENT #: D06-25

FOR: DECISION APPROVAL DISCUSSION

ISSUE: Amendment to the Policy for the Accommodation of Religious Holy Days.

BACKGROUND: The Policy provides possible solutions to a missed academic obligation due to a religious observance; the proposed revision gives more latitude to the possible solution of re-distribution of grades within a course.

In addition, the Policy requires clarification and strengthening of the role of the Associate Dean.

MOTION OR RESOLUTION Be it resolved that Section 2 under Procedures of the Policy for the Accommodation of Religious Holy Days be amended to read:

FOR APPROVAL: "c) shifting the weight normally assigned to the evaluation to the weight assigned to ~~the remaining~~ other components of the evaluation.

When the instructor and student are unable to agree on suitable accommodation, the matter will be referred to the Associate Dean. The Associate Dean who may request official documentation confirming the requirements of the student's religious affiliation observance. The Associate Dean will decide whether reasonable accommodation without undue hardship is possible, and what accommodation is to be made in this instance, and will convey the decision to the instructor and student."

The revised text would therefore read as follows:

“c) shifting the weight normally assigned to the evaluation to the weight assigned to other components of the evaluation.

When the instructor and student are unable to agree on suitable accommodation, the matter will be referred to the Associate Dean. The Associate Dean may request official documentation confirming the requirements of the religious observance. The Associate Dean will decide whether reasonable accommodation without undue hardship is possible, and what accommodation is to be made in this instance, and will convey the decision to the instructor and student.”

RATIONALE:

The Policy for the Accommodation of Religious Holy Days was initially approved by Senate on March 20, 1996. The amendment is necessary because the policy is intended to address observance, not affiliation, and to clarify the authority of the Associate Dean in this matter, especially with regard to the redistribution of the grading weight of course elements.

**PRIOR
CONSULTATION:**

Working group struck by the Senate Committee on Student Affairs (January 9, 2006); Committee on Student Affairs (January 25, 2006, March 15, 2006 and 1 November 2006).

NEXT STEPS:

Senate is the final authority on student academic policy.

APPENDICES:

Current Policy for the Accommodation of Religious Holy Days (1 page)

Policy for the Accommodation of Religious Holy Days

Approved by Senate - March 20, 1996 - Minute 92

Preamble

McGill University recognizes and respects the diversity of its members, including diversity of religious faiths and observances. The aim of this policy is to ensure that the University provides an environment in which its students can fulfil both their university and their religious commitments.

Policy

1 Students are not to be penalized if they cannot write examinations or be otherwise evaluated on their religious holy days where such activities conflict with their religious observances.

2 While sessional dates, classroom and faculty activities, and examination dates take into account academic constraints and statutory holidays, where there is flexibility, efforts are to be made to select dates which do not conflict with religious holy days or to find other appropriate accommodations.

Procedures

1. In advance of the first day of class, the Registrar shall distribute to all units a multifaith calendar for the academic year, along with a copy of this policy.

2. Students who because of religious commitment cannot meet academic obligations, other than final examinations, on certain holy days are responsible for informing their instructor, with two weeks' notice of each conflict. Possible solutions include:

- a) rescheduling the evaluation, or
- b) preparing an alternative evaluation for that particular student, or
- c) shifting the weight normally assigned to the evaluation to the weight assigned to the remaining evaluation.

When the instructor and student are unable to agree on suitable accommodation, the matter will be referred to the Associate Dean who may request official documentation confirming the student's religious affiliation. The Associate Dean will convey the decision to the instructor and student.

3. When the requested accommodation concerns a final examination, students are responsible for advising their faculty office as soon as possible and not later than the deadline for reporting conflicts. Additional documentation confirming their religious affiliation may be requested. Possible solutions include (in order of preference):

- a) treating the request as a conflict, and accommodating it within the examination period, or
- b) providing a special deferred examination as soon as possible, or
- c) granting permission to write a regular deferred examination.

The choice will depend on the particular circumstances.

4. This policy is to be made available to all members of the University community.