

**A RESOLUTION TO BE ENTITLED ACT TO:**

**Updates on the Religious Accommodations Policy Recommendations**

**Short Title:** Updates on the Religious Accommodations

**Authored by:** Justin Walhart

-----*Below for Senate Leadership*-----

**Resolution Number:** [F22-03]

**First Reading:** 10/10/2022 **Second Reading:** 10/24/2022

**Referred to:** DEI Committee

1 **WHEREAS**, Western Carolina University is comprised of a diverse student body who practice  
2 various types of religions such as Judaism, Islam, Christianity, Sikhi, and Hinduism among many  
3 others; and,  
4

5 **WHEREAS**, Western Carolina has an obligation to provide reasonable accommodation to  
6 students who observe religious holidays in accordance with the First Amendment which allows  
7 for freedom of religion, which many religions include holidays and observance; and,  
8

9 **WHEREAS**, Western Carolina is already doing so for their employees per Title VII of the Civil  
10 Rights Act of 1964, “Western Carolina will reasonably accommodate the religious beliefs,  
11 observance, or practice which conflict with an employment requirement”; and,  
12

13 **WHEREAS**, The religious calendar holiday calendar is regularly updated and includes major  
14 holidays, but should be expanded to include other holidays observed by faiths or religions that are  
15 not currently represented; and,  
16

17 **WHEREAS**, These religious holidays oftentimes require students to take time away from class.  
18 Therefore, urging religious observance, students may not be able to complete the assigned work  
19 for the day, and, thus, require accommodations; and,  
20

21 **WHEREAS**, A religious accommodations policy already exist at Western Carolina however the  
22 policy is inflexible as it only calls for accommodations to be made for students who notify their  
23 professor(s) of future absence(s) due to religious observance(s) within two weeks prior to the  
24 proposed absence(s); and,  
25

26 **WHEREAS**, the policy states, “According to North Carolina General Statute 116-11 (3a), a  
27 student may request absences for required religious observances. WCU allows two absences each  
28 academic year for religious observances required by faith. To obtain permission to be absent for  
29 religious reasons, a student must complete the Absence Due to Required Religious Observance



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30 form (available at: <http://registrar.wcu.edu> (select Forms & Resources)), obtain all necessary  
31 signatures, submit it to each instructor for review and approval, and submit it to the Assistant  
32 Vice Chancellor for Student Success for final approval at least two weeks prior to the proposed  
33 absence. Students are encouraged to discuss these absences with the faculty member prior to the  
34 end of the drop/add period in case the absence will unavoidably keep the student from completing  
35 the requirements of the course. However, if the student completes the form and submits it to the  
36 instructor prior to the two-week time frame, he/she shall be given the opportunity to make up any  
37 tests or other work missed due to an excused absence for a required religious observance.”; and,

38  
39 **WHEREAS**, the policy fails to include "Instructors will, without prejudice, provide such students  
40 with reasonable accommodation for completing missed work.”; and,

41  
42 **WHEREAS**, This ambiguity and subjective language has caused many students to forgo  
43 participation in religious holidays to ensure attendance in class as a result of not knowing about  
44 the existence of the policy as it is not easily accessible; and,

45  
46 **WHEREAS**, Expansion of Western Carolina University’s existing accommodations for  
47 religious observances is a way in which the University and the Student Government Association  
48 can uphold our commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion; and,

49  
50 **Therefore, Be It Resolved That:** Western Carolina University include the statement “Instructors  
51 will, without prejudice, provide such students with reasonable accommodation for completing  
52 missed work.” to the current Religious Observation Policy; and,

53  
54 **Further, Be it resolved:** The Student Government Association is in support of expanding the  
55 current policy that allows for religious accommodation and absence from class session(s) due to  
56 religious observance; and,

57  
58 **Further, be it resolved:** The Student Government Association shall present this resolution, upon  
59 passage, to the Dean of Students and office of the Provost as a sign of support for this initiative in  
60 accordance with the formal recommendations; and,

61  
62 **Further, be it resolved:** An University Official, the Director of Diversity and Inclusive  
63 Excellence, and the Student Government Association will work to expand the policy to benefit  
64 students, ensure consistent language in all references of this policy, and provide easier access in  
65 terms of advertisement and conversation around this policy; and,

66  
67 **Further, be it resolved:** The University Official, shall take the recommendation for the updates  
68 to the religious accommodations polices, and develop a new policy statement with the proposed  
69 recommendations in mind; and,

70  
71 **Further, be it resolved:** The University Official, shall take the recommendation of expanding  
72 accommodations from two days of allowed absences an academic year to two religious



73 observations a semester increasing the days allowed for religious observance, and thus maintain  
74 our commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion; and,

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76 **Further, be it resolved:** The University Official, shall take the recommendation of the policy  
77 expansion and develop a system to combat policy abuse; and,

78  
79 **Further, be it resolved:** While some students may have religious observances that can be a time  
80 period that may exceed one day, allowing them to pick a day within that time period to observe  
81 their respective religion keeps WCU's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, while also  
82 ensuring the student does not fall behind in class, maintaining the commitment to academic  
83 success; and,

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85 **Further, be it resolved:** The Diversity and Inclusion Committee has created a series of formal  
86 recommendations for the policy expansion as provided in Appendix A and Appendix B.

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88 **Appendix A: Diversity and Inclusion Committee Policy Recommendations**

89 1. The policy page should include resources such as the bias and discrimination report  
90 form in the case the professor(s) do not provide adequate, reasonable, and fair accommodations,  
91 adding new language to the policy as stated above.

92  
93 2. Suggested syllabus language should be sent to professors to ensure all students are able  
94 to access the policy through their respective syllabi. Additionally, all professors should be held  
95 accountable for providing such accommodations noted in their syllabi and the suggestions sent by  
96 the Office of the Provost.

97  
98 4. This policy should be accompanied by a template flyer, informational brochure, social  
99 media posts, and other marketing materials. These should be given to students at orientation in  
100 addition to being found across Western Carolina University social media platforms and in such  
101 public areas with digital advertising.

102  
103 5. The Student Government Association will also be expected to promote and advertise  
104 this information to the student body and faculty

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106 **Appendix B: Information that may be Included on Flyers, Posts, and Syllabi for the**  
107 **Promotion of this Policy Expansion:**

108 Criteria that must be formulated into brochures/ pamphlets, Instagram/ media posts, physical and  
109 online flyers at the discretion of Western Carolina University and Center for Student Diversity  
110 and Inclusion

111 1. Western Carolina University's Religious Accommodation Policy for Excused Absences as  
112 follows:

113 A. WCU excuses class absences for religious observances. You must give written notification to  
114 your instructors within the two weeks of class of the religious event that prohibits class  
115 attendance and the date that will be missed



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- 116 2. You must email your professor within the two weeks prior and notify them of an absence  
117 3. Professors are required to provide reasonable and fair accommodation and excused students  
118 absences due to religious observations.  
119 4. This must be distributed at the Student Center, across campus, at each semester/ group  
120 orientation, and on the media accounts (Instagram, Facebook, etc.)  
121  
122

Senate Vote: Aye: \_\_\_\_\_ Nay: \_\_\_\_\_ Abstain: \_\_\_\_\_

*CJ Mitchell* \_\_\_\_\_ 10/26/22 \_\_\_\_\_ Passed:  Failed:   
CJ Mitchell \_\_\_\_\_  
Office of the Student Body Vice President \_\_\_\_\_  
Date \_\_\_\_\_

*Estefany Gordillo-Rivas* \_\_\_\_\_ 10/26/22 \_\_\_\_\_ Passed:  Veto:   
Estefany Gordillo-Rivas \_\_\_\_\_  
Office of the Student Body President \_\_\_\_\_  
Date \_\_\_\_\_

