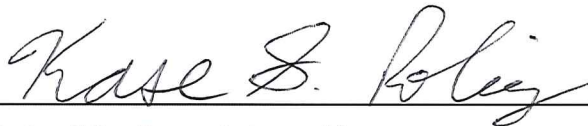2018/19 – 5R
Author(s): Satyasaran Sreeharikesan
Sponsor(s): Sohile Bakhtary, Conrad Briles, Sophie Campos, Sara Beth Hollandsworth

RESOLUTION IN SUPPORT OF ACCOMMODATING RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL ABSENCES

[1]   **WHEREAS,** students observing religious holidays are not protected under the Virginia Tech Faculty Handbook which, according to Section 9.6.2.1, states that faculty do not have "to accommodate religious practices"; and

[2]   **WHEREAS,** the Dean of Students website states that the Dean of Students staff will not provide absence verifications for "faith-based practices or celebrations"; and

[3]   **WHEREAS,** the Student Government Association of Virginia Tech is committed to the rights of all students to observe their faith without penalty; and

[4]   **WHEREAS,** the Dean of Students does not have the authority to verify the existing interfaith calendar; and

[5]   **WHEREAS,** the interfaith calendar is an internationally recognized calendar containing the holidays of world religions and interfaith organizations that is also recognized by the Virginia Tech University Registrar; and

[6]   **WHEREAS,** in the past, many students have been forced to attend class or take tests during times of religious or cultural observances including fasting, repenting, or prayer; and

[7]   **WHEREAS,** according to the journal Nutrition & Food Science, religious activities such as fasting adversely affects cognitive performance and consequentially students' academic performance; and

[8]   **WHEREAS,** this year's observance of Ramadan coincides with spring semester exams; and

[9]   **WHEREAS,** the University of Virginia recently created a policy which accommodates Muslim students by allowing them to reschedule exams during Ramadan; and

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[10]   **WHEREAS,** Yom Kippur and Maha Shivaratri are observed during a time in the school year that forces students to take midterms on days of fasting and prayer; and

[11]   **WHEREAS,** allowing faculty to penalize minorities for these absences is antithetical to the diversity of Virginia Tech and contradicts the Third Affirmation of the Virginia Tech Principles of Community which affirms "the value of human diversity because it enriches our lives and the University"; now

[12]   **THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED:** SGA recommends Virginia Tech require accommodations for religious and cultural absences be approved by faculty when observance aligns with the interfaith calendar; and

[13]   **THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**: Other related observances not listed on the interfaith calendar may be appealed to the Dean of Students for approval; and

[14]   **THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**: SGA recommends other university policy including but not limited to the Hokie Handbook and Faculty Handbook be updated to reflect this change.

_____   3-27-19
Chair of the General Assembly   Date

_____   3-27-19
President of Student Government Association   Date

Appendix A

1. https://www.provost.vt.edu/who_we_are/faculty_affairs/faculty_handbook/chapter09.html#9.6.2.1
2. https://www.dos.vt.edu/our_services.html
3. http://www.interfaith-calendar.org/2019.html
4. https://registrar.vt.edu/dates-deadlines-accordion/index/2017-2018.html
5. Yasin, Wardah M., et al. (2013). Does Religious Fasting Affect Cognitive Performance. *Nutrition and Food Science, 483* (5): 483-489
6. https://registrar.vt.edu/dates-deadlines-accordion/index/2018-2019.html
7. https://provost.virginia.edu/thought-pieces/spring-2019-ramadan-exams
8. https://registrar.vt.edu/dates-deadlines-accordion/index/2019-2020.html
9. https://www.inclusive.vt.edu/Initiatives/vtpoc0.html