



Office of the President

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June 1, 2021

VIA EMAIL

Chancellor Rebecca Blank, UW-Madison
Chancellor Debbie Ford, UW-Parkside
Chancellor Katherine Frank, UW-Stout
Chancellor Joe Gow, UW-La Crosse
Chancellor Andrew Leavitt, UW Oshkosh
Chancellor Renee Wachter, UW-Superior

Chancellors,

You are in receipt of a May 27, 2021 letter from representatives of various campus, state, and international faith-based organizations concerning the conflict created by the scheduling of the fall semester start date during Rosh Hashanah.

We appreciate the actions you have taken to ensure the religious accommodation of observant students, faculty, and staff this fall, and the longer-term efforts being made to review and revise your existing policies and procedures in developing the academic calendar to avoid future conflicts.

In the interest of increasing awareness of these activities at each of your universities, we ask that by **June 15, 2021** you provide us with the details of your plans, both on fall-focused communications and actions, and on longer-term mitigating steps that will avoid future conflicts and promote an equitable learning and work environment for students and staff of all religious communities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'AS Petersen'.

Andrew S. Petersen
President, UW System Board of Regents

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tommy Thompson'.

Tommy Thompson
President, UW System

Cc: Board of Regents
Michael Blumenfeld, Wisconsin Jewish Conference



June 15, 2021

Edmund Manydeeds III
President, UW System Board of Regents

Tommy Thompson
President, UW System

Dear Regent President Manydeeds and System President Thompson,

I appreciate the opportunity to share with you and members of the Board of Regents and concerned community members the steps UW-Madison has taken to address the conflict created by the scheduling of the first day of the semester on the second day of Rosh Hashanah. I deeply regret this conflict exists.

We looked first at simply adjusting our calendar. Unfortunately, due to the complexity and inflexibilities in our underlying administrative systems, it is not possible to change start-dates at this point in time. The start date gets set far in advance and it affects all sorts of behind-the-scenes aspects of our work, including student financial aid packages, such as loan promissory note and repayment obligations, and separate federal and state reporting requirements. Fulfilling our regulatory and service obligations requires meticulous, extensive programming to underlying information systems built around the start and end dates of each academic term, as well as programming of downstream systems that depend on this date for management of their processes. It is these highly technical, and integrated systems (and the necessary tables that underlie them) that makes changes in start dates so complex.

With regard to the conflicts this fall, we have moved as many activities as possible. Our fall semester is scheduled to start on Wednesday, September 8. Tuesday, September 7 was going to be a date for Convocation and for departmental events. When these conflicts were raised with us we moved Convocation and departmental outreach and events for incoming students to Friday, September 3, so the first day of Rosh Hashanah has no calendar conflicts. This means we also moved up move-in to the residence halls by two days and added extra programming for freshman who will now be in town longer before school starts.

This spring, Provost Karl Scholz created a Working Group on the Academic Calendar and Accommodations to help ensure that a conflict like the one that we face this fall semester does not happen again. The group includes representatives of the Office of the Provost, the Office of Undergraduate Advising, the University Registrar, the University Committee (the executive body of the Faculty Senate), the Academic Staff Executive Committee, the Division of Diversity, Equity and Educational Achievement, the Division of Student Affairs, and the Office of Academic Planning and Institutional Research. Led by Vice Provost for Teaching and Learning (and Professor) John Zumbrunnen, the working group is pursuing a variety of efforts, including:

Chancellor Rebecca M. Blank
Morgridge Friends Distinguished Chair of Leadership
Bascom Hall University of Wisconsin-Madison 500 Lincoln Drive Madison, WI 53706
608-262-9946 Fax: 608-262-8333 TTY 608-263-2473

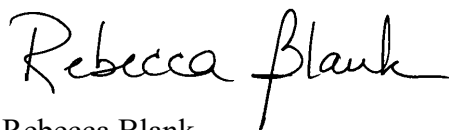
- Reviewing the academic calendar for the next five academic years to gain a full understanding of potential conflicts in order to avoid them in the future, if possible. The committee will consult with experts on campus to ensure reference to an inclusive calendar of religious observances. This committee will also explore best practices for accommodations.
- Enhancing our communication with instructors about the need for accommodations for students who will be observing Rosh Hashanah.
 - Under current practice, our Secretary of the Faculty, in coordination with the Office of the Provost, sends a reminder to all instructors regarding the UW Madison Religious Observances and Accommodations Policy (<https://kb.wisc.edu/lr/page.php?id=21698>).
 - To expand and enhance this practice, the working group has already shaped a message sent on June 1 to all faculty and academic staff drawing attention to the conflict with the fall start date and highlighting ways that instructors can plan ahead to accommodate students.
 - The working group is planning for two additional messages to be sent to instructors in August, as preparations for the fall semester intensify. These messages will encourage faculty to proactively reach out to the students in their courses to inform them of our campus religious observances policy, and to let students know their plans to offer flexibility.
- Enhancing the University's communication with students about the availability of and process for seeking accommodations for religious observances. The working group is coordinating with the Center for the First Year Experience (which administers our Student Orientation, Advising and Registration (SOAR) program for incoming students); Student Affairs communications, and UW-Madison Communications to draw on a variety of channels (including all-student e-mails, our student facing publication *The Weekly*, and University social media accounts) to inform students about the process for seeking accommodations, including steps to take if they find their accommodation needs are not being met.
- Exploring the creation of digital materials aimed at educating the campus community about religious observances, our policy, and the need for accommodating students.

We are also reminding staff, faculty, and other campus community members of our campus policy about religious accommodations, making sure that workplace flexibility is extended to staff and faculty and others who celebrate Rosh Hashanah.

I want to assure you that are very committed to both mitigating the impact of the conflict this fall with the first day of class and the second day of Rosh Hashanah for students, faculty and staff, as well as putting into place a series of steps that will do everything possible to avoid such a conflict in the future.

Please be in touch if you have further questions.

Sincerely,



Rebecca Blank
Chancellor

Cc: John Karl Scholz, Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs
Charles Hoslet, Vice Chancellor for University Relations
John Zumbrunnen, Vice Provost for Teaching and Learning

June 15, 2021

To: Tommy Thompson, President, UW System
Ed Manydeeds, President, UW Board of Regents

From: Debbie Ford, Chancellor, UW-Parkside *Debbie Ford*

Dear President Thompson and Regent Manydeeds,

This letter is to provide you with the information regarding our efforts at UW-Parkside to address concerns raised by representatives of various campus, state, and international faith-based organizations concerning the conflict created by the scheduling of the 2021 fall semester start date during Rosh Hashanah.

We are taking the following steps, both in the short-term for the fall session and in the long term:

- We will send a communication to the campus community, including all new students, apologizing for the oversight, and stating our commitment to accommodate students, faculty, and staff for their religious observances as well as taking steps to ensure we won't have the same conflict in the future.
- We will be sending a memo to faculty and teaching staff for distribution in late June noting the conflict for September 2021, reminding them of our current policy regarding religious observances, and asking that they communicate with students regarding steps to be taken if students will miss the first day of class.
- We are also asking our faculty and instructors who have classes that may create those conflicts to make course materials available in an online format or provide other material, ideally in advance, so that a student is not disadvantaged by missing any class.
- We will conduct our housing check-in Sunday, September 5th -Tuesday, September 7th so individuals will have the opportunity to move into their residence halls prior to the start of Rosh Hashanah.
- Evening dining hours will be available to accommodate the fasting schedule.
- Ranger Welcome events on Tuesday, September 7th for new students will be encouraged but not mandatory.
- We will review our religious observances policy and consider revisions to remove some of the burden from students; specifically, the requirement that students notify faculty about missed classes at least two weeks before the start of the term.
- Finally, the provost's office will coordinate a discussion with the registrar to review academic calendars through 2024-2025 and consider changes to prevent conflicts with major religious holidays.

Please feel free to contact me at any time if you have additional questions about these steps. Thank you.



Date: June 8, 2021
To: President Thompson
From: Renée Wachter
Subject: Rosh Hashanah Plans

As previously noted, UW-Superior's first day of fall classes will be September 8, 2021, which is also the last day of Rosh Hashanah. Campus leadership and I recognize the difficult choice that our students and instructors of Jewish faith may experience as a result of this scheduling issue. We are working actively to address the situation, avoid future conflicts, and promote an equitable learning and work environment for students and staff of all religious communities.

Below are our plans for fall-focused communications and actions, as well as longer-term steps.

- This past spring, our Dean of Academic Affairs and Graduate Studies sent a communication to all academic department members (including all instructors and department chairs) and campus leadership acknowledging that our first day of fall semester will begin during Rosh Hashanah and the challenges this may present for students and instructors. The dean requested that everyone review the Campus Policy for Accommodating Religious Beliefs and that instructors should plan to provide first-day materials in an online or alternative format so students will not be at a disadvantage by not attending class that day. This message will be resent to all academic department members as we approach fall semester.
- The Campus Policy for Accommodating Religious Beliefs will be shared with incoming on-campus students during our Weekend of Welcome events at the beginning of fall semester. A link to the policy will also be included on our Weekend of Welcome webpage and registration confirmation emails. This will continue to be done for Weekend of Welcome events going forward.
- The Dean of Students will share the Campus Policy for Accommodating Religious Beliefs with all current students (undergraduate, graduate, on-campus and online). This communication will be sent at the beginning of each academic semester.
- Human Resources will send a message to all faculty and staff with information on UW-Superior's religious accommodation policy for employees. Going forward, Human Resources will send this message to faculty and staff at the beginning of each semester.
- The Office of the Provost will review and update the Academic Calendar Committee charge to ensure that religious holidays and observances are factored into the development of future calendars.

June 8, 2021

via email

Tommy Thompson, President
Edmund Manydeeds, Regent President

Dear Regent President Manydeeds and President Thompson:

In response to the memo from June 1st, this is to provide you details on UW-Stout's actions taken to date, and our planned actions to promote equitable learning and working environments for faculty, staff, and students of all religious communities.

Attached is a copy of the memo that was sent to all faculty and staff on May 20, 2021. The memo provided the relevant accommodation resources (including already established policies and procedures), and affirmed our commitment to supporting our faculty, staff, and students of all religious beliefs and faiths.

In that communication we also stated that the Faculty Senate committee responsible for developing the academic calendar will be provided the UW System-developed, comprehensive list of all religious holidays when it is distributed to campuses. The committee will use this list to review the already established calendars and identify opportunities for revision. The committee will also use the list to inform the development of future calendars, with the goal of minimizing calendar conflicts with religious holidays. While it may not be possible to accommodate every religious holiday, we will continue to promote the accommodation process established in UW-Stout policy and affirm our commitment to supporting our faculty, staff, and students of all faiths and religions.

We have a long-standing history of recognizing religious accommodation requests and are committed to continuing to enhance awareness, review our processes, and work towards creating a more equitable and inclusive environment at UW-Stout. Relevant policies and procedures will continue to be communicated annually to faculty, staff, and students.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions.

Best regards,



Katherine P. Frank
Chancellor

Attachment

From: [Chancellor](#)
To: [All Faculty & Staff](#)
Subject: Religious Holiday Observations
Date: Thursday, May 20, 2021 12:00:39 PM



May 20, 2021

Religious Holiday Observations

Dear UW-Stout Faculty and Staff,

UW-Stout is committed to supporting our faculty, staff, and students of all faiths and religions and recognizes that there will be times that members of the Stout community will be absent from work or learning activities for religious holiday observations. This fall, the start of classes coincides with Rosh Hashanah, and this memo is to remind all faculty and staff of our policies that support accommodations for religious purposes.

Student Accommodations Resources

- [UWS 22 Accommodation of Religious Beliefs](#)
- [UW-Stout Religious Observances Policy](#)
- For questions about student religious accommodations, please contact the Dean of Students Office at dean_of_students@uwstout.edu or (715) 232-1181, or the Provost's Office at provost@uwstout.edu or (715) 232-2421.

Employee Accommodations Resources

- [UW-Stout Equal Employment Opportunity/Affirmative Action Policy](#)
- For questions about employee religious accommodations, please contact the Human Resources office at askhr@uwstout.edu or (715) 232-2149.

In an effort to promote awareness and support planning efforts, a comprehensive list of all secular and religious holidays will be provided by UW System prior to the start of fall semester. In addition, this list will assist the Educational Activities Committee in their planning of future academic calendars. While it may not be possible to accommodate every religious holiday in academic calendar planning, the list will be used to help inform the discussions, and our accommodation policies will continue to be promoted and used to support all members of

the Stout community.

Thank you for your commitment to fostering an inclusive environment that actively encourages and supports the diversity of faiths and beliefs of our faculty, staff, and students.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K. Frank', written in a cursive style.

Katherine P. Frank
Chancellor

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-STOUT

Office of the Chancellor

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June 7, 2021

VIA EMAIL

UW System Board of Regents President Edmund Manydeeds
UW System President Tommy Thompson

Dear Presidents Manydeeds and Thompson:

We are grateful for the recent interest in our academic calendar and appreciate this opportunity to share more about our scheduling processes and considerations.

At UWL, we look to the excellent leadership provided through our Faculty Senate for establishing the academic calendar. These elected faculty representatives work each spring to propose and ultimately approve the academic calendar two years in advance.

UWL has a 14-week semester with an additional finals week in both Fall and Spring. The academic calendar accounts for federal holidays, and our start date in the fall is based on the WI state mandate to start after September 1. Given those two guideposts, we have a long history of setting our fall start date the Tuesday after the federal holiday of Labor Day. The spring start date is set based on allowing for a 3-week J-term which begins the first full week after the federal holiday of New Year's Day.

As a public university, we do not make institutional policy based on any religion, regardless of the religion. However, the culture at UWL is such that we value the importance of religious observances for every individual of all faiths. Because of our commitment to embrace the diversity of traditions among our students and colleagues, and because we acknowledge that we cannot realistically adapt the academic calendar to every religious holiday, we have had a long-standing policy for religious accommodation. This policy reads as follows:

"Any student with a conflict between an academic requirement and any religious observance must be given an alternative means of meeting the academic requirement. The student must notify the instructor within the first three weeks of class (within the first week of summer session and short courses) of specific days/dates for which the student will request an accommodation. Instructors may schedule a make-up examination or other academic requirement before or after the regularly scheduled examination or other academic requirement."

We feel strongly that this approach is effective for our institution, due to the wide variety, and often changing representation of faiths on a college campus. This policy is a part of our course catalog, it is communicated to every student as a part of our syllabus template, it is on our public webpage "UWL Syllabus Policy Information & Statements", and it is communicated to every faculty member via an email from the Provost each August.

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We are aware that the first day of Fall Semester 2021 classes at UW-La Crosse coincides with the Rosh Hashanah holiday. Our plan, as we prepare for the start of the 2021-2022 academic year, is to inform our campus community that Rosh Hashanah begins on Monday, Sept. 6th and ends the evening of Wednesday, Sept. 8th. And because students may not be able to request an accommodation in advance of the first week of the semester (as articulated in our religious accommodation statement), we will extend the period for accommodation requests through Friday, Sept. 10th. Our provost will share her usual fall preparation communication in August with all of the Fall instructors; this year she will emphasize their need to provide students with the flexibility early in the semester.

Our commitment to supporting equitable learning outcomes for students of all faiths is unwavering. We are grateful for the dedicated service provided by our esteemed faculty and staff to meet the needs of UWL students.

Please do not hesitate to let me know if you need any additional information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Joe Gow", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Joe Gow
Chancellor

To: Tommy Thompson, President, UW System
From: Andrew Leavitt, Chancellor
Date: June 14, 2021
Re: Response to June 1, 2021 Scheduling Conflicts Memo

Dear President Thompson,

Per your recent request, I am providing you with University of Wisconsin Oshkosh communication timelines, actions and mitigating steps to avoid future concerns related to our institution's academic calendar conflicts with major religious holidays.

I am particularly grateful to UWO Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs John Koker. He and his team are working with a sharper focus on faculty and instructional staff, making certain our employees know that we provide students and families the space they deserve to observe religious holidays without worry and feelings of undue pressure or disadvantage related to class schedules and school work.

As you will see, we have efforts already underway and a thorough communication timeline scheduled to help keep the university community informed as students, families, faculty and staff members and other stakeholders progress toward the fall 2021 semester.

Communications

A specific review of the Jewish holidays and the posted Academic Calendar reveal that a conflict of this significance will not happen for many years to come. However, there are other religious holidays which will fall on days during the academic year.

Our focus is to advise effectively while educating and demonstrating that our inclusive values cover all members of this academic community, and all will have the freedom to practice their religious beliefs without any ill effects or negative consequences.

Our plans to communicate religious accommodation is multilayered and designed for several audiences and on target dates that we believe are optimal for attention:

- For incoming freshmen, the guidance on religious accommodation will be provided 9/1, 11/1, 2/1 and 5/1. Current UWO students receive reminders about access to accommodations through similarly timed emails. We intend to reinforce and expand our

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messaging regarding religious accommodations to consider clear statements in the UWO Student handbook, flyers and additional UWO web presences.

- Faculty and staff members will receive this year's Religious Observance & Accommodation Notice (attached) in the beginning of August. Since the conflict with Rosh Hashanah occurs on the first day of classes in the fall semester of 2021, the information about obtaining accommodations will be appropriately available before then.
- UWO's Chief Diversity Officer, Dr. Damira Grady, will collaborate with Director of Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Affirmative Action, Sean Fey, and the Dean of Students Office to revise respective websites to ensure easy access to religious accommodations requests.

Existing Policy

Our anti-discrimination policy, reflective of the state Administrative Code, the Board of Regents rules and UW System guidelines, locally assures all members of the community are protected from discrimination and retaliation:

- <https://uwosh.edu/registrar/academic-policies/>
- <https://www.uwosh.edu/provost/Main%20Highlight/handbooks/online-faculty-staff-handbook/general-personnel-materials-faculty-and-academic-staff/gen-4-instructional-policies/part-b-classroom-teaching-policies/gen-4-b-16-religious-accommodation>
- <https://www.wisconsin.edu/regents/policies/discrimination-harassment-and-retaliation/>
- https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/code/admin_code/uws/22

UWO leadership is making a commitment to continuous improvement in our religious accommodation messaging and scheduling as we examine calendars, printed, websites and other resources. We thank UW System Administration for its guidance and support as we assure students, families, faculty and staff members, alumni and other stakeholders that inclusivity means action at UWO. We will continue to demonstrate support and model flexibility for the university community out of our deep respect for students' and colleagues' diverse religious traditions, observances and practices.

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