Cornell University

Office of the Dean of Students

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Dear Faculty Colleagues,

Every year I have many inquiries about religious accommodation for students. The university has written policies for faculty, staff, and student workers which can be found on the Human Resources website of the University. In a letter I sent last week to colleagues within the Office of the Dean of Students I mistakenly wrote that Cornell has no Religious Accommodation Policy for students. I was wrong. The Faculty Handbook mandates religious accommodation for students in response to New York State Legislation promulgated on July 1, 1992.

Cornell's policy advises students who are seeking religious accommodation to discuss this with their instructors well in advance of the religious holiday. Since this policy is only contained in the Faculty Handbook, however, students are not aware of its existence.

Many colleges and universities require their faculty to publish this accommodation each semester in each class syllabus.

It is clear that students are not exempt from any academic obligation imposed by the professor (class attendance, laboratory presentation, taking an exam). Students and professors are encouraged to negotiate another way for the obligation to be fulfilled.

It is also generally accepted that professors can neither alter a grade because of a religious accommodation nor ignore or belittle a request.

Perhaps as a result of our discussion on September 12th an ad hoc committee might be convened to address appropriate ways of fulfilling academic obligations when religious accommodation is requested.

Daniel McMullin

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