Introduction:

This version incorporates the written suggestions given and notes taken during discussion at the Faculty meeting on February 23, 2017. We hope that faculty will review and be ready for a vote to adopt this Policy, understanding that the policy may develop further as it is put into practice.

Policy on Academic Accommodations for Reasons of Faith and Conscience

As Occidental College strives to provide a gifted and diverse group of students with a total educational experience of the highest quality, we recognize that the student body includes adherents of many faiths and students who passionately believe their ideology. As our student body becomes more diverse, it is increasingly important that we, as an inclusive community, make academic accommodations for students from a variety of religious, spiritual and cultural backgrounds and personal convictions.

Consistent with our commitment to creating an academic community that is respectful of and welcoming to persons of differing backgrounds, we believe that students should be excused from class for reasons of faith and conscience without academic consequence. While it is not feasible to schedule coursework around all days of conviction for a class as a whole, we will honor requests from individual students to reschedule coursework, to be absent from classes that conflict with the identified days, and inform students that this is an option. Similarly, this policy should be honored with regard to co-curricular college events such as athletic contests, concerts, or outside lectures on identified days.

In particular, Occidental College affirms that:

* Faculty should provide course syllabi at the beginning of each term that specify dates of exams and due dates of assignments. Every effort should be made to avoid scheduling exams on religious and cultural holidays. (A calendar of religious holidays will be maintained on the Office for Religious and Spiritual Life).
* Faculty will make sure that work missed by a student because of an excused absence associated with reasons of faith and conscience can be made up by the student, and faculty will articulate clear guidelines as to how a student can make up the missed work.
* Students are permitted two days of excused absences per academic year for reasons of faith and conscience, as part of each faculty member’s attendance policy. These two days would include, but not be limited to, organized activities conducted under the auspices of a religious denomination, religious organization, cultural heritage, identity-based rallies or political affiliation. Examples are available on the ORSL website.

* Because religious holidays and most days of conscience are scheduled in advance, instructors have the right to insist, where feasible, that students complete the course work prior to the anticipated absence in accordance with the course attendance policy.
* There will be times when holidays and days of conscience will fall early in the semester. When this occurs, students will make every effort to coordinate with their instructor and to contact ORSL or the CDO as soon as reasonably possible to request an excused absence. In some rare cases, a faculty member, at his or her discretion, may need to make accommodations following the absence.
* Given the time limits inherent in completing end of semester assignments or making up a missed final exam, this procedure cannot be used during the final exam period. Students are expected to take final examination at the scheduled times and to complete end-of-semester work by the deadlines set by the instructor.

Student Procedure

1. Students must coordinate their planned absence through either the Chief Diversity Officer, (CDO) or the Office for Religious and Spiritual Life (ORSL) as soon as possible. All requests for an authorized absence under this policy must be given to the CDO or ORSL in writing and must contain a concise explanation of how the requested absence is related to a reason of faith or conscience or be an organized activity conducted under the auspices of a religious denomination or religious organization. Requests made for an authorized absence after the event will not be allowed without compelling circumstances confirmed by the CDO or ORSL in consultation with the course instructors.
2. The CDO or ORSL will provide the student with a document verifying the date of the approved absence. The student is solely responsible for ensuring that the documentation authorizing the absence is provided to each of their instructors, whose classes or assignments will be affected by the absence, no later than 7 days after receiving the approved absence.
3. After an instructor is notified by the student of this approved absence, the instructor will determine what adjustments, if any, will need to be made to the student’s scheduled class work or assignments. The instructor shall inform the student of these adjustments within two instructional days of receiving the student’s notification.
4. If the student’s desired absence is on a day when a test is scheduled or an assignment is due, the instructor may require that the student take the test or submit the assignment before or after the regularly assigned date. In such cases the faculty member will arrange for an appropriate location for the test.

(5) Regardless of an instructor’s class expectations or grading policies, under this policy the absence itself shall not directly impact a student’s grade. Absences excused by this policy are part of any absentee policy individual faculty may use in their courses. However, students are expected to make up or complete any coursework or assignments that have been adjusted by their instructor because of this absence.

1. If a student fails to notify any of their instructors of an authorized absence, the instructor is not obligated to make any accommodations for the student’s absence or treat the absence as authorized under this policy.

In the past, some issues such as those raised in this statement have been successfully handled by informal discussions among students, faculty, and administrators, when necessary. Occidental recognizes that all political and social protests may not fall under the purview of this policy. We hope and expect that such accommodations will continue to be made in the future in cases where this policy may not apply.

**Statement to be included in Syllabi:**

“Consistent with Occidental College’s commitment to creating an academic community that is respectful of and welcoming to persons of differing backgrounds, we believe that students should be excused from class for reasons of faith and conscience without academic consequence. While it is not feasible to schedule coursework around all days of conviction for a class as a whole, faculty will honor requests from individual students to reschedule coursework, to be absent from classes that conflict with the identified days. Information about this process is available on the ORSL website: <https://www.oxy.edu/office-religious-spiritual-life>.”

Information about these holidays and the dates of their observance is available on the [**web page maintained by ORSL**](http://www.northwestern.edu/religious-life/). More detailed information is also available on this web site.

**Responsible Offices:**

Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs

Vice President for Equity and Inclusion/CDO

Office for Religious and Spiritual Life

**Dated:** March 2017