

A MESSAGE FROM THE  
CHANCELLOR'S OFFICE

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**RELIGIOUS  
ACCOMMODATION  
- ROSH  
HASHANAH 2021**

Friday, June 4, 2021

**Letter to President Thompson and the  
UW System Board of Regents**

Dear President 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 embracing 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.

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. 6 and ends the evening of Wednesday, Sept. 8. 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. 10. Our provost will share her usual fall prep 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.



Joe Gow, Professor  
University of Wisconsin-La Crosse

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