Bemidji State University Student Association
Student Senate
“Trust, Vision, Voice”

SB 18-02
Authorized Excused Absence for Religious Observance

Moved By: Chair Hennek
Seconded By: Senator Shakkhar

Whereas the Bemidji State University Student Association (BSUSA) Student Senate is the official voice of the students; and

Whereas Bemidji State University (BSU) has a shared fundamental value of international and multicultural understanding; and

Whereas BSU has a mission statement that states, "we instill and promote service to others, preservation of the earth, and respect and appreciation for the diverse peoples of our region and world"; and

Whereas Bemidji State University’s Equal Opportunity and Non-Discrimination in employment and education policy states, “Bemidji State University is committed to a policy of equal opportunity and nondiscrimination in employment and education”; and

Whereas Bemidji State University has a moral obligation to accommodate all students to exercise their right to religious observance; and

Whereas the 2017 Minnesota State Statute 120A.35 states, “Reasonable efforts must be made by a school district to accommodate any pupil who wishes to be excused from a curricular activity for a religious observance.”

Whereas other Universities in the United States of America (Rutgers University-The State University of New Jersey, University of Colorado Boulder, University of Maryland, University of Massachusetts Amherst and Beloit College) have policies set up for excused absences for religious observance.

Therefore be it resolved that BSUSA Student Senate insists a policy be put in place to excuse students who are absent, without penalty, from class to exercise their right to religious observance. In addition to religious holidays, this policy will also cover Native American holidays and spiritual obligations of Native American students as appropriately recognized by the University. The policy will allow students to make up missed class work, and each absence will be at the discretion of the instructor. Examinations and other required class activities should
typically not be scheduled on days when majority of the students in the class are participating in religious observance, to avoid conflict.

**Therefore be it further resolved** that the BSU Teaching faculty should make every effort to accommodate all students who, because of religious obligations, have conflicts with scheduled exams, assignments, or other required attendance, provided the student(s) notifies the instructor well in advance of the scheduled conflict. Applying for excused absences due to religious observance does not constitute automatic waiver from the penalties of an absence in a class, absences can only be granted as excused at the instructor’s discretion.

Faculty members should always include precise instructions regarding their own policies for these special accommodations in their syllabus and they should call attention to the requirement for early, timely arrangements. If an exam is scheduled on the day of a religious observance for which the student has already been excused, the faculty member must provide a suitable option for the affected students.

Examples of suitable accommodations include: (1) creating a course policy in which all students can drop an exam or assignment score for any accepted reason, specifically including religious observance as one of those reasons, or (2) providing the opportunity for a makeup exam or an equivalent assignment, or (3) allowing extra-credit assignments to substitute for missed class work, or (4) arranging for an increased flexibility in assignment due dates, etc. Other reasonable and appropriate accommodations may be made by the course instructor. If class attendance is required, classes missed due to a religious observance should not be counted as an absence. The specific accommodations employed may vary from course to course depending upon factors such as the size of the class, nature of the course content, and mode of instruction. All faculty in all courses are expected to create a class-specific accommodation policy which strives to maintain a climate of essential fairness to all members of the class.

**Therefore be it even further resolved** that the BSUSA Student Senate Inclusivity Committee help form an ad hoc committee and work with the University’s Academic Calendar Committee to create a list of dates of important religious holidays. This list will help faculty verify the holidays when students ask for absences and encourage them to practice this diverse procedure. The BSUSA Student Senate Inclusivity Committee will help create an excused absence form in collaboration with the Faculty Association, for students to fill out and document with the Records Office (if appropriate). This form will help verify the students requested absences for religious observances, and the form will also prevent students from abusing the policy. This form will be kept private once documented and will only be accessible by the appropriate and authorized parties.

**First Reading:** 1/17/2018  
**Second Reading:** 1/24/2018  
**Result:** Passes (13-0-3)  
**Date:** 1/24/2018