

Examinations and Religious Obligations

- 1.1. Imperial College is aware that examinations are very stressful and would always strive to ameliorate, if possible, any situations where one individual or group of students might be unreasonably disadvantaged by factors which are not relevant to the assessment.
- 1.2. The Imperial College student population includes people from many different religious groups and also many with no religious affiliation at all.
- 1.3. Imperial College has a very large student population and each year has to set a vast number of examinations at various times throughout the academic year. Moreover there is severe pressure on examination space on most campuses especially at peak examination times. These factors present major logistical issues in devising a satisfactory examination timetable and unfortunately severely inhibit flexibility for individual departments.
- 1.4. Religious festivals and the fasting that is associated with some of these can, for many, be an important and positive experience and celebration of and commitment to their faith. Many of the major religious festivals fall within the College's vacation period when no examinations are normally set. At other times the College will strive to take account of the dates of key festivals in setting examinations as far as it can but the logistical issues described above make this very difficult.
- 1.5. Students with a religious obligation that clashes with an examination date should bring this to the attention of the Senior or Postgraduate Tutor as early as possible in the academic session. In some cases the department may be able to change the examination date but this will not always be possible. Where it is not possible to resolve a clash between an examination and a religious obligation a student is advised to discuss their options both with the Senior or Postgraduate Tutor and with a religious advisor at the College chaplaincy.
- 1.6. In some years, either the main examination period or the re-sit examination period will overlap (at least partially) with Ramadan or one of the other periods of religious fasting. The College will not be able to alter dates of the major examination periods as these are all carefully timed to accommodate the various elements of the individual degree programmes and the limited availability of examination rooms. If students have a religious fasting obligation during an examination period they are advised to seek advice from the College chaplaincy.
- 1.7. Some general comments and advice on religious fasting and examinations can however be offered and the following options are open to students:
 - Some students may decide not to take any particular steps and to continue with their fast as usual.

- Some students, in consultation with their religious advisor, may consider that their examinations are sufficient justification to permit them not to fast, either just on examination days or in some cases for the whole examination period. It might be possible to undertake the period of fasting at a later time or explore if some alternative arrangement could be considered.
- 1.8. The College's Muslim Faith Advisor, offers the following practical guidance to Muslim students with examinations in Ramadan:
- Prepare the night before by mentally rehearsing the day ahead and note areas which may present difficulties.
 - Work out how to overcome those difficulties but try to imagine it as an ordinary day.
 - Ensure you are well rested - this may mean not attending 'tarawih' (night prayers in congregation).
 - Ensure you have 'suhur' (a pre-dawn meal) that has slow-release energy food.
 - If the exam is in the afternoon, take a short rest of 15-20 minutes around midday.
 - If you feel lethargic or irritated, refresh your 'wudu' (ritual ablution). And peace on those who follow the right guidance.
- 1.9. While departments may give consideration to timetabling some examinations during the fasting period in the morning this is completely impractical for all examinations because of the logistical issues described above. The College is aware of arguments that students who are fasting for religious reasons could be disadvantaged, compared to other students, if their examination occurs in the afternoons during the period of the fast, because the student was not permitted to eat at lunchtime. Mornings would not be affected as fasting students would have the opportunity to breakfast before dawn, so would be little different to other days. Persons who have a fasting obligation are generally aware of the need to keep hydrated and to eat well in the evenings and mornings.
- 1.10. The disadvantage arises from the changes in blood sugar, resulting from the fast, producing hypoglycaemia (low blood sugar) and an inadequate supply of glucose to the brain, which can, in turn, affect a person's brain function (neuroglycopenia) including direct effects on concentration, memory, attention and other cognitive processes plus potential indirect effects on overall mood, anxiety and fatigue levels which can affect studying, revision and the examinations themselves. Those people who have a diagnosed medical condition, such as diabetes, and in certain other circumstances, are usually excused from the religious requirement to fast.

- 1.11. Individuals will inevitably differ in the extent to which they do, or do not, experience such changes, depending on their individual metabolisms. The cognitive difficulties will naturally tend to be greater later on in the day.
- 1.12. The Department of Health provides a guide on healthy living and Ramadan which may be found at:
http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130107105354/http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_078409

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