

June 2009

To: The Oregon State University Community
From: Terryl Ross
Office of Community and Diversity

Greetings:

We are fortunate to have a university community that includes students, staff and faculty from around the world as well as all areas of the United States. Each person brings unique aspects of backgrounds, lifestyles, beliefs and customs to enrich our educational experience. This richness is especially apparent during seasons of many observances, celebrations and holidays.

The Office of Community and Diversity assists our State institution in promoting cultural diversity, awareness, and sensitivity throughout the campus community. It provides leadership in promoting an environment responsive to the diversity of groups represented at OSU.

Becoming sensitive and responsive to all in our community, we move towards a climate of “inclusion.” This is up to each of us, each day. At this time of year, many of us have special opportunities to remind and educate ourselves. Even if you *assume* all people in your department or unit are of one tradition that may or may not be the case. And even if it were, there are always others coming in and having interactions and “inclusion” should be in place at all times. We can each learn not to make assumptions about each other’s practices and beliefs. Insensitive remarks and exclusions can be hurtful, and ultimately they reflect poorly on the person who makes the remark or does the exclusion.

Some observances are based on religions, and others celebrate natural phenomena such as the “rebirth” of the sun as days grow longer following the winter solstice.

As an educational institution, and Oregon’s only “Land Grant” university, it is imperative for us to support opportunities for all to learn about diversity and the multiple communities in which we function. We have the responsibility to live up to our commitment to respect and honor all individuals, and to provide a welcoming and supportive learning, teaching, living and working environment.

As you prepare for the fall quarter, know that OSU has subscribers to a rich on-line calendar that gives a great overview of many religious and seasonal holidays. Please take a few minutes to review the 2008 calendar at: <http://oregonstate.edu/diversity/DivCal/index.htm>. The 2009 calendar will be available shortly.

Additional holiday and seasonal information can be found at:

- <http://www3.kumc.edu/diversity/>

- <http://www.multcolib.org/homework/holidhc.html>

Also, if you are teaching a class, you are strongly encouraged to put a paragraph in your syllabus letting students know that you are open to observing their religious holidays. An example of this is:

Religious Holidays

Oregon State University strives to respect all religious practices. If you have religious holidays that are in conflict with any of the requirements of this class, please see me immediately so that we can make alternative arrangements.

Sensitivity and awareness in creating displays will help avoid sending inadvertent messages that one observance, belief, symbol or practice is preferred or superior over another. One way to avoid such messages is to include symbols of seasonal celebrations – all, if possible. Everyone benefits from displays that reflect the diversity of the campus community as they provide opportunities to increase knowledge, understanding, and awareness of cultural similarities and differences.

It's also a good idea if you create a college/department committee to examine how you holiday seasons during the academic year. If you are interested in beginning, changing, or adapting ways to celebrate this season, in finding answers to questions or in resolving related issues, please contact me at (541) 737-4384, TerryL.Ross@oregonstate.edu, or in 330 Snell Hall. Consultation on ideas and solutions is available. The Valley Library has an excellent collection of multicultural materials, including books, journals and videos; you can check the online catalog, or contact the Reference Librarian.

Best wishes for you this upcoming year.