

As we are rich in diversity at UMass Dartmouth, the Division of Student Affairs wants to remind the university community about the need to be inclusive during this time of year. What follows is our holiday letter on inclusiveness.

Holidays, rituals and traditions are significant to all cultures, particularly at this time of year when many important and special observances are held with religious, historical and cultural meaning. Families, friends and communities gather together to celebrate holidays, commemorate historical events, recall acts of heroism and courage, join in prayer, fast attend to the less fortunate, and raise voices in song. These occasions also provide a sense of comfort in the certain times faced by many this holiday season.

On our campus, as is the case for most of western society, during December (and November!), symbols of Christmas are often pervasive and dominant. This can lead to a lack of regard for others who cannot or do not celebrate Christmas. For example, since the Residence Hall are considered "home" for many students while they are on campus, the public display of a Christmas tree without reference to others holidays may provide joy for some but a feeling of alienation for others.

With this in mind, our goal would be to find a way of celebrating that is inclusive and not exclusive.

During this holiday season, symbols and displays of special observances are likely to be placed in the workplace. We can invite colleagues and co-workers to share this holidays, traditions and celebrations with us as we share our observances with them. In doing so, we can avoid sending inadvertent messages that one observance; belief, symbol, or practice is preferred or superior over another. With planning and forethought, we can engage each other in creating displays and activities that promote an environment of welcome and inclusion. We can respect the decision of those who choose not to participate in rituals and traditions that may be considered the norm for this time of year. We should not expect that every assumed member of a particular ethnic, racial, religious or other cultural group would celebrate special days in the same way. Most importantly, we can appreciate and respect the many ways people acknowledge their significant days and honored traditions.

What follows are details of some of the holidays and cultural celebrations members of our communities might be observing and celebrating.

- The **birthday of Baha'u'llah**, the prophet-founder of the Baha'i faith, is celebrated on November 12. His message focused on the coming of unification of all humanity and a world civilization.
- On **Bodhi's Day**, (Dec. 8), the enlightenment of Buddha is celebrated by Mahāyāna Buddhists. The day honors Buddha's comprehension of the truth of existence, freeing him from all human suffering, and finding perfect happiness.
- **Christmas** (Dec. 25), celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ, is one of many observances in our multicultural and international community at this time of year. Many people celebrate this day as a Christian holiday while others who may celebrate it in the tradition of St. Nicholas, by giving gifts to loved ones.

- **Diwali** (Oct 26), another festival of lights, is one of the most important celebrations of the Hindu year. It marks the beginning of the Hindu New Year.
- **Feast of the Theophany or Epiphany** (January 6) is the term for the culmination of the Greek Orthodox celebration of Christmas, which begins on Dec. 25th and ends on January 6. It is also a name for the Armenian Christmas or Christmas Day in Spain.
- **Hanukkah** (Dec. 21 – Dec. 28), often misunderstood as “Jewish Christmas” because its days of observance occur in December, commemorates both the victory of the Jewish people over oppressors and the miracle that became the Festival of Lights.
- In their home country, Hmong traditionally celebrate the New Year after harvesting their crops. In the U.S., **Hmong New Year** is more likely to be planned around Thanksgiving and Christmas holiday schedules.
- **Kwanzaa** (Dec. 26 ) is an African American spiritual and cultural tradition patterned after East African harvest festivals. It calls for the reaffirmation of the fundamental principles of unity, self-determination, collective work and responsibility, cooperative economics, purpose, creativity and faith.
- Special days, people and events honored by members of the UMD community include **Ramadan**, the holiest month of the Muslim year. It is a time of worship, fasting, reading the Qur’an, participating in charitable acts, and purifying one’s behavior. **Eid Al-Fitr**, the Feast of Breaking the Fast, marks the end of Ramadan.
- **Three Kings Day/Dia De Los Tres Reyes Magos** (January 6) is the holiday held in Spanish speaking countries’ which celebrates the visit paid to the baby Jesus by the three Magi Kings. The holiday is celebrated with the exchange of gifts.

A convenient source for learning more about the many observances and holidays this season and throughout the year can be found at <http://www.beliefnet.com/calender/index.html>.

Observances that highlight other aspects of our lives include World AIDS Day (Dec. 1), sponsored by the United Nations and the World Health Organization to increase awareness and education of AIDS throughout the world. The International Day of Disabled Persons (Dec. 3) was created by the U.N. to promote continuing integration of people with disabilities into general society. Human Rights Day (Dec. 10) was also established by the U.N. to promote the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which “sets forth the basic civil, economic, political, and social rights that should be guaranteed to every person.” The U.S. Bill of Rights Day (Dec. 15) marks the anniversary of the 1791 ratification of the first ten Constitutional Amendments. These “days” are of such importance to the human condition locally, nationally and globally that it may be to our advantage to give them yearlong attention.