

Proposal Overview

Martin Luther King, Jr. Day is an American federal holiday marking the birthday of Martin Luther King, Jr. It is observed on the third Monday of January each year. Juneteenth, also known as Freedom Day, is a holiday commemorating the actual emancipation of slaves in the United States. Even though the Emancipation Proclamation was issued on 1/1/1863, it was not until 6/19/1865 when Texas took action. Juneteenth is observed on June 19th each year.

This proposal seeks to address the concerns of staff members surrounding Vanderbilt's observation of both holidays. After a review of Vanderbilt's current holiday schedule, we propose adding Martin Luther King, Jr. Day and Juneteenth to Vanderbilt University's holiday observance as paid days off.

Objective and Rationale

Many employees at Vanderbilt have questioned why Vanderbilt does not officially observe Martin Luther King, Jr. Day as a paid holiday. Vanderbilt officially [observes 12 holidays](#)¹ as paid time off for full-time exempt and non-exempt staff. The holidays include New Year's Day, Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day, the Day after Thanksgiving, and six days for Winter Break, which include Christmas and Christmas Eve.

Vanderbilt does not observe the Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday as a paid day off, but highly encourages the Vanderbilt community to participate in a series of [commemorative events](#)² facilitated by various university offices. In addition, students do not have classes on this day. As it stands, staff members must receive supervisor approval to participate in these events and, as a result, participation is not equitable across staff members, with some staff members experiencing push back from supervisors.

Vanderbilt employees are also impacted by entities in the Nashville community that observe the holiday. Staff face challenges with public transportation during the Martin Luther King, Jr. Day holiday. [We Go bus schedules](#)³ are modified, and some routes are eliminated. Additionally, the We Go Star does not run on this day. Vanderbilt staff with children in K–12 schools face childcare challenges as well because all public schools are closed, and many private schools are closed. See Table 1 for a list of private K–12 schools that are closed.

In 1998, The University Staff Advisory Council ([USAC](#)) [originally proposed](#)⁴ officially observing the Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday. The [primary reason](#)⁵ identified for not accepting the 1998 proposal was that more flexibility was needed with Vanderbilt operating a health care environment. Vanderbilt no longer operates in the health care environment, and the PTO policy

¹ <https://hr.vanderbilt.edu/policies/holiday.php>

² <https://www.vanderbilt.edu/mlk/schedule-of-events/>

³ <https://www.nashvillemta.org/nashville-mta-generalinfo.asp,%20https://www.rtarelandride.com/Middle-TN-RTA-schedules.asp>

⁴ <https://www.vanderbilt.edu/usac/archive/documents/mlkholiday.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.vanderbilt.edu/usac/archive/documents/mlkholidayreply.pdf>

no longer includes two personal paid days off for staff. Following the separation from the Vanderbilt University Medical Center, USAC once again proposed the addition of Martin Luther King, Jr. Day as part of a larger Paid Time Off Proposal in 2016. While multiple holidays enjoyed today were added, Martin Luther King, Jr. Day was not included.

When evaluating peer institutions today, 22 years after USAC's first proposal regarding the observance of Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, an overwhelming majority of peer institutions observe this holiday, as seen in Table 2. The reluctance for colleges and universities to embrace the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday has also received national attention, as seen in a [JSTOR article from 2019](#).⁶ Vanderbilt University should strive to be a leader in this area as Vanderbilt University commits to being an institution where achieving [equity, diversity, and inclusion are its highest priorities](#).⁷

This mission is where Juneteenth becomes especially important. On June 16, 2020, [Harvard University announced](#)⁸ they would close in observance of the Juneteenth holiday. [Other universities have recently done the same](#).⁹ By declaring Juneteenth to be a university holiday, Vanderbilt has an opportunity to establish itself as a leader while calls for Juneteenth to become a federal holiday start to [gain momentum](#).¹⁰

Recommendation

Having Martin Luther King, Jr. Day and Juneteenth as paid holidays would allow many employees to participate in celebratory events on and off-campus while demonstrating Vanderbilt's position of leadership in both the Nashville community and the world. With Vanderbilt's transition to a [new Chancellor, Daniel Diermeier](#)¹¹, now is the perfect time to reinforce Vanderbilt's commitment to learning from the mistakes of America's past while acknowledging there is still more work to be done. With Vanderbilt's continued prioritization of matters surrounding equity, diversity, and inclusion, we feel the addition of Martin Luther King Jr. Day and Juneteenth as University holidays would send an important and lasting message to all faculty, staff, and students on the importance of these ideals.

⁶ <https://daily.jstor.org/colleges-reluctant-embrace-of-mlk-day/>

⁷ <https://www.vanderbilt.edu/diversity/mission-statement>

⁸ <https://www.thecrimson.com/article/2020/6/17/harvard-juneteenth/>

⁹ <https://www.insidehighered.com/quicktakes/2020/06/18/harvard-antioch-will-observe-juneteenth#:~:text=Harvard%20University%2C%20Antioch%20College%20and,were%20told%20they%20were%20free,>

¹⁰ <https://www.npr.org/2020/06/19/879647898/calls-to-make-juneteenth-a-federal-holiday-gain-momentum>

¹¹ <https://news.vanderbilt.edu/2019/12/04/daniel-diermeier-ninth-chancellor/>

USAC Proposal for Holiday Observances

TABLE 1

Private K-12 Listing from Nashville Chamber of Commerce

K - 12 School	MLK Holiday	Source
Battle Ground Academy	YES	Link
Benton Hall Academy	YES	Link
Christ Presbyterian Academy	YES	Link
Currey Ingram Academy	YES	Link
Davidson Academy	YES	Link
Donelson Christian Academy	YES	Link
Ezell Harding Christian School	YES	Link
Family Christian Academy	NO	Link
Franklin Road Academy	YES	Link
Goodpasture Christian School	YES	Link
Hendersonville Christian Academy	NO	Link
Lipscomb Academy	YES	Link
Metropolitan Baptist School	NO	Link
Nashville Christian School	YES	Link
Spring Hill Christian Academy	YES	Link
University School of Nashville	YES	Link

Links

- <https://www.battlegroundacademy.org/event-detail?pk=6334905&fromId=231378>
- <https://irp-cdn.multiscreensite.com/f9b998f3/files/uploaded/2019-2020%20BHA%20Calendar.pdf>
- https://www.cpalions.org/about/calendar?cal_date=2020-01-01
- <https://www.curreygram.org/calendar?sDate=20200101&selStartDate=20200101&eDate=20200131&selEndDate=20200131&showAll=1>
- https://davidsonacademy.myschoolapp.com/ftpimages/1196/download/download_2805699.pdf
- http://www.dcawildcats.org/pro/responsive/tools/includes/events/event_view.cfm?detailid=167572&event_type=renweb&memberid=2217&eventid=1973
- <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1paadoLvOb81ku6-3dkAys6Mrvn9YV1Cm/view>
- https://www.fcahouston.org/calendar.cfm?view=cal_view&categoryid=&month=1&year=2020#a_calendar220971
- https://www.franklinroadacademy.com/uploaded/Resources/Academic_Key_Dates_Calendar_2019-20_FINAL.pdf
- <https://www.goodpasture.org/calendar?sDate=20200101&selStartDate=20200101&eDate=20200131&selEndDate=20200131&showAll=1>
- <http://www.hcacrusaders.com/filerequest/1730>
- https://drive.google.com/file/d/1OQrr_Gs6zsWNvZ5f4dku4g4O4vSAn8BU/view
- https://s3.amazonaws.com/media.cloversites.com/f7/f755ede7-a48c-44c8-8949-080475b416bb/documents/School_Calendar_2019_2020.pdf
- http://www.nashvillechristian.org/about-us/calendar.cfm?view=cal_view&categoryid=&month=1&year=2020#a_calendar154772
- <https://www.shchristian.com/calendar>
- https://usn.myschoolapp.com/ftpimages/392/download/download_3648491.pdf

USAC Proposal for Holiday Observances

TABLE 2

Peer Institutions

Relation	Peer Institution	MLK Holiday	Source
Local	American Baptist College	YES	Link
	Austin Peay State University	YES	Link
	Belmont University	YES	Link
	Cumberland University	YES	Link
	DeVry University	YES	Link
	Fisk University	YES	Link
	Fortis Institute	YES	Link
	Gupton College	NO	Link
	Lipscomb University	YES	Link
	Nossi College of Art	YES	Link
	Trevecca Nazarene University	YES	Link
	Watkins College of Art	YES	Link
	Welsh University	NO	Link
US News Top 25	Brown University	YES	Link
	California Inst. of Technology	YES	Link
	Carnegie Mellon University	YES	Link
	Columbia University	YES	Link
	Cornell University	YES	Link
	Dartmouth College	NO	Link
	Duke University	YES	Link
	Emory University	YES	Link
	Georgetown University	YES	Link
	Harvard University	YES	Link
	John Hopkins University	YES	Link
	Mass. Inst. of Technology	YES	Link
	Northwestern University	YES	Link
	Princeton University	YES	Link
	Rice University	YES	Link
	Stanford University	YES	Link
	University of California (Berkeley)	YES	Link
	University of California (Los Angeles)	YES	Link
	University of Chicago	YES	Link
	University of Notre Dame	NO	Link
University of Pennsylvania	YES	Link	
University of Southern California	YES	Link	
Washington University	YES	Link	
Yale University	YES	Link	

USAC Proposal for Holiday Observances

Relation	Peer Institution	MLK Holiday	Source
SEC	Auburn University	YES	Link
	Louisiana State University	YES	Link
	Mississippi State University	YES	Link
	Texas A&M	YES	Link
	University of Alabama	YES	Link
	University of Arkansas	YES	Link
	University of Florida	YES	Link
	University of Georgia	YES	Link
	University of Kentucky	YES	Link
	University of Mississippi (Ole Miss)	YES	Link
	University of Missouri	YES	Link
	University of South Carolina	YES	Link
	University of Tennessee, Knoxville	YES	Link
*	Vanderbilt University	NO	

Links

US News Top 25: <https://www.usnews.com/best-colleges/rankings/national-universities>
<https://abcnash.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/student-letter-and-calendar-1.pdf>
<https://www.apsu.edu/human-resources/holidays.php>
http://www.belmont.edu/admissions/pdfs/University_Holidays.pdf
<https://inside.ucumberlands.edu/humanresources/holidays.php>
<https://www.devry.edu/students/academic-calendar.html>
<https://www.fisk.edu/academics/academic-calendar/>
https://www.fortis.edu/content/dam/fortis/compliance/catalogs/Fortis_Richmond_Catalog.pdf
<https://guptoncollege.edu/academics/academic-calendar/>
<https://www.lipscomb.edu/about/offices-and-services/human-resources>
<https://nossi.edu/events/2020-01/>
<https://www.trevecca.edu/academics/academic-calendar>
https://ek5sq2wycnu3zzow73xtzx69-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Academic-Calendar-2019-20_spring.pdf
<https://welch.edu/about/calendar/>
<https://www.brown.edu/about/administration/registrar/academic-calendar>
<https://hr.caltech.edu/resources/holiday-observances>
<https://www.cmu.edu/hub/calendar/docs/1920-academic-calendar-previous.pdf>
https://registrar.columbia.edu/calendar?acfy=46&acterm=7&acschool=All&keys=&field_event_type1_tid%5B%5D=21&field_event_type1_tid%5B%5D=22&field_event_type1_tid%5B%5D=23
<https://registrar.cornell.edu/academic-calendar/2020-2021>
<https://www.dartmouth.edu/reg/calendar/academic/19-20.html>
<https://registrar.duke.edu/2019-2020-academic-calendar>
http://registrar.emory.edu/_includes/documents/sections/academic-calendar/Academic_Calendar_2019-2020.pdf
<https://registrar.georgetown.edu/academic-calendar/maincampus/>
<https://hr.harvard.edu/holiday-calendar>
https://studentaffairs.jhu.edu/registrar/wp-content/uploads/sites/23/2017/03/FINAL.academic-calendar-2019-2020.REVISED_04.06.2020.pdf
<https://registrar.mit.edu/calendar>
<https://www.registrar.northwestern.edu/calendars/academic-calendars/>
<https://citp.princeton.edu/about/working-citp/important-dates-2019-2020/>
<https://registrar.rice.edu/calendars/spring20>
<https://cardinalatwork.stanford.edu/benefits-rewards/time-away/holiday-schedule>
<http://guide.berkeley.edu/academic-calendar/>
<https://www.ucop.edu/local-human-resources/op-life/holiday-calendar.html>
<https://humanresources.uchicago.edu/benefits/timeoff/vacationholidays/universityholidays.shtml>
<https://hr.nd.edu/nd-faculty-staff/forms-policies/holidays/>
<https://almanac.upenn.edu/penn-academic-calendar>

USAC Proposal for Holiday Observances

<https://employees.usc.edu/university-holidays/>
<https://cpb-us-w2.wpmucdn.com/sites.wustl.edu/dist/9/213/files/2020/05/Academic-Calendar-2019-20-revised.pdf>
<https://yalecollege.yale.edu/academics/academic-calendar/2019-2020-academic-calendar>
http://www.auburn.edu/administration/human_resources/holidays.html
<https://www.lsu.edu/administration/policies/pmfiles/pm-05.pdf>
<https://www.hrm.msstate.edu/benefits/holidays/>
<https://employees.tamu.edu/benefits/leave/holidays/>
<https://hr.ua.edu/payroll/payroll-schedules>
<https://vcfa.uark.edu/fayetteville-policies-procedures/vcfa/4092.php>
<https://benefits.hr.ufl.edu/time-away/holidays/>
<https://www.uga.edu/holiday-schedule.php>
<https://www.uky.edu/hr/hr-home/official-staff-holiday-schedule>
<https://hr.olemiss.edu/payroll/holiday-schedule/>
<https://hrs.missouri.edu/benefits-pay/holidays-time-off>
https://www.sc.edu/about/offices_and_divisions/human_resources/benefits/time_away/holidays/index.php
<https://hr.tennessee.edu/benefits/paid-leave/>