

Guidance for Instructors – Putting the University’s Religious Observances Policy into Practice

As instructors prepare for each semester, they are encouraged to review the following guidance regarding the university’s religious observances policy, recognizing that the policy is meant to be sensitive to the needs of individual students.

The Policy

State law mandates that any student with a conflict between an academic requirement and any religious observance (which may include travel time) must be given an alternative for meeting the academic requirement. There are a variety of valid claims, and there is no practical, dignified or legal means to assess individual claims; students’ requests for relief due to a religious observance should be accepted at face value.

[Read the full religious observance policy.](#)

Putting the Policy Into Practice

The following guidance aims to provide further explanation, resources and examples on how to put the university’s religious observances policy requirements into practice.

Proactively plan ahead to avoid scheduling conflicts, when possible

- Avoid scheduling conflicts between examinations or major course activities and religious observances.
- Use [this calendar](#) (scroll to the end of the message on the page) to assist in your planning. The list is not exhaustive; all requests from students should be accepted at face value, whether or not the observance in question appears on the calendar. You can also [add religious observances to your Outlook calendar](#).

Communicate with your students to raise awareness and define expectations

- Reference the policy in your course syllabus and announce it to your students at the start of the semester.
- Highlight that students are responsible for notifying instructors **within the first two weeks of classes** of the date(s) on which they request relief due to a religious observance.
- Share that when conflicts arise, you and any co-instructors or teaching assistants will follow the policy, and outline how you plan to offer alternative pathways to fulfilling course requirements (see below for further guidance on offering alternatives).

Accept students’ requests at face value

- There are a variety of valid claims, and there is no practical, dignified or legal means to assess individual claims.

Be prepared to offer alternative pathways to fulfill course requirements

- It may not always be possible to avoid overlap between examinations or major course assignments and religious observances – plan in advance for how to offer alternative pathways to complete course requirements. Make-ups may be scheduled before or after the regularly scheduled requirements.
- In some courses, instructors allow students to drop a lowest examination, quiz or other assignment grade in the calculation of final grades. We encourage instructors **not** to use this option for students who need to miss said course requirement due to a religious observance. We view one’s religious observance as being part of one’s identity. We would find it untenable to have a policy that says one identity group gets fewer excused absences than another identity group. Given this, we urge instructors to provide students an alternative way to complete the course requirement.
- Similarly, in some courses, instructors permit students to miss a specific number of class sessions without a grade penalty. We encourage instructors **not** to use this option for students who need to miss class due to a religious observance for the reason given above. When a student needs to miss class due to a religious observance, we recommend that the absence should not be counted towards the number of absences otherwise allowed to all students in the course.
- Within these general parameters, the precise nature of alternative assignments provided for students will differ from course to course.