

# UConn

<b>Title</b>	Religious Accommodations Policy
<b>Policy Owner</b>	Office of Institutional Equity (OIE)
<b>Applies to</b>	Faculty, Staff, Graduate Assistants, Students
<b>Campus Applicability</b>	All Campuses
<b>Effective Date</b>	08/01/2018
<b>For More Information Contact</b>	Office of Institutional Equity
<b>Contact Information</b>	Storrs/Regionals: Office of Institutional Equity (OIE) (860) 486-2943 or <a href="mailto:equity@uconn.edu">equity@uconn.edu</a>  UConn Health: Office of Institutional Equity (OIE) (860) 679-3563 or <a href="mailto:equity@uconn.edu">equity@uconn.edu</a>
<b>Official Website</b>	<a href="http://www.equity.uconn.edu">http://www.equity.uconn.edu</a>

## Reason for Policy

The purpose of this policy is to set forth the University's processes for responding to requests from students and employees for religious accommodations. This policy is in accordance with relevant laws and regulations regarding religious beliefs.

## Applies to

All faculty, staff and students on all Campuses.

## Definitions

*Essential Function:* A fundamental job duty of an employment position for staff and faculty, or a fundamental academic element of a course or program of study for a student.

*Religious Accommodation:* A reasonable change in the work or academic environment that enables a student or employee to practice or otherwise observe a sincerely held religious practice or belief without undue hardship on the University. A religious accommodation may include, but is not limited to: time for prayer during a work day; the ability to attend religious events or observe a religious holiday; or any necessary modification to University policy, procedure or other requirement for a student's or employee's (or prospective employee's) religious beliefs, observance or practice; provided such accommodation is reasonable and does not cause undue hardship.

*Religious Practice or Belief:* A sincerely held practice or observance that includes moral or ethical beliefs as to what is right and wrong, most commonly in the context of the cause, nature and purpose of the universe. Religion includes not only traditional, organized religions, but also religious beliefs that are new, uncommon, not part of a formal religious institution or sect, or only subscribed to by a small number of people. Social, political, or economic philosophies, as well as mere personal preferences, are not considered to be religious beliefs.

*Undue Hardship:* More than a minimal burden on the operation of the University. For example, an accommodation may be considered an undue hardship if it would interfere with the safe or efficient operation of the workplace or learning environment and/or would result in the inability of the employee or student to perform an essential function of the position or course of study. The University will not be

required to violate a seniority system; cause a lack of necessary staffing; jeopardize security or health; or expend more than a minimal amount. The determination of undue hardship is dependent on the facts of each individual situation, and will be made on a case-by-case basis.

### **Policy Statement**

The University of Connecticut is committed to providing welcoming and inclusive learning and workplace environments. As part of this commitment, the University will make good faith efforts to provide reasonable religious accommodations to faculty, staff and students whose sincerely held religious practices or beliefs conflict with a University policy, procedure, or other academic or employment requirement, unless such an accommodation would create an undue hardship.

Consistent with state law, any student who is unable to attend classes on a particular day or days or at a particular time of day because of the tenets of a sincerely held religious practice or belief may be excused from any academic activities on such particular day or days or at such particular time of day.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, it shall be the responsibility of course instructors to make available to each student who is absent from academic activities because of a sincerely held religious practice or belief an equivalent opportunity to make up any examination, study or work requirements which has been missed because of such absence.

In keeping with the University's commitment to building and maintaining a welcoming and inclusive work environment, the University will consider religious accommodations requests by employees, including faculty and staff, based on the totality of the circumstances.

The University of Connecticut prohibits discrimination, harassment, and retaliation on the basis of religion. For more information, refer to the [University Policy Against Discrimination, Harassment and Related Interpersonal Violence](#).

### **Enforcement**

Violations of this policy may result in appropriate disciplinary measures in accordance with University By-Laws, General Rules of Conduct for All University Employees, applicable collective bargaining agreements, and the University of Connecticut Student Code.

### **Policy History**

Adopted 08/01/2018

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<sup>1</sup> Connecticut General Statutes, section 10a-50 provides in relevant part:

**Absence of students due to religious beliefs.** Any student in an institution of higher education who is unable [due to religious beliefs] to attend classes on a particular day or days or at a particular time of day shall be excused from any examination or any study or work assignments on such particular day or days or at such particular time of day. It shall be the responsibility of the faculty and of the administrative officials of each institution of higher education to make available to each student who is absent from school because of such reason an equivalent opportunity to make up any examination, study or work requirements which he has missed because of such absence on any particular day or days or at any particular time of day. No special fees of any kind shall be charged to the student for making available to such student such equivalent opportunity. No adverse or prejudicial effects shall result to any student because of his availing himself of the provisions of this section.

## **University of Connecticut Religious Accommodations Policy Procedures**

### **Procedures for Students**

The University grants students excused absences from class or other organized academic activities for observance of a sincerely held religious practice or belief as a religious accommodation, unless the accommodation would create an undue hardship.

Students whose religious holidays are not recognized by the University's calendar should provide the instructor or academic activity organizer with the dates they will be absent in advance of the absence.

Students requesting a religious accommodation should make the request directly to their instructor with as much notice as possible. Students anticipating an absence or missed coursework due to a sincerely held religious practice or belief should use best efforts to inform their instructor in writing no later than the third week of class, or one week before the absence if a conflict occurs during the first three weeks of class. Being absent from class or other educational responsibilities does not excuse students from keeping up with any information shared or expectations set during the missed class(es). Students are responsible for obtaining the materials and information provided during any class(es) missed. The student can work with the instructor to determine a schedule for making up missed work.

### **Procedures for Faculty / Course Instructors in Responding to Student Requests**

Course instructors are strongly encouraged to make reasonable accommodations in response to student requests to complete work missed by absence resulting from observation of religious holidays. Such accommodations should be made in ways that do not dilute or preclude the requirements or learning outcomes for the course.

Course instructors should bear in mind that religion is a deeply personal and private matter and should make every attempt to respect the privacy of the student when making accommodations (for example, it is not appropriate to announce to the class that a student is doing a presentation or making up an exam at a later date because of their religious observance). Course instructors should not ask a student for proof that their religious practices or beliefs are sincerely held or for determining a religious accommodation.

Examples of religious accommodations include: rescheduling of an exam or giving a make-up exam for the student in question; altering the time of a student's presentation; allowing extra-credit assignments to substitute for missed class work or arranging for an increased flexibility in assignment due dates; and releasing a graduate assistant from teaching or research responsibilities on a given day.

The student should be given the opportunity to complete appropriate make-up work that is equivalent and intrinsically no more difficult than the original exam or assignment. Students who receive an exemption on religious grounds cannot be penalized for failing to attend class on the days exempted. The instructor may, however, appropriately respond if the student fails to satisfactorily complete any alternative assignment or examination.

If there are concerns about the requested accommodation, the instructor should consult their department head (or dean in non-departmentalized schools) for assistance and determination of whether a reasonable accommodation can be provided. If an agreement cannot be reached after consulting with the department head (or dean in non-departmentalized schools), the department head

will advise the dean and refer the matter to the provost or designee, who will make the final determination following consultation with the Office of the General Counsel.

**Procedures for Faculty and Staff Requesting Religious Accommodation**

Employees requesting a religious accommodation should make the request directly to their supervisor with as much notice as possible. Employees may be required to use accrued time (vacation or personal) as part of the religious accommodation. If the supervisor determines that the request may pose an undue hardship for the department and/or interfere with the employee's essential job functions, or if the supervisor otherwise has questions or concerns about the accommodation request, the supervisor should contact the Office of Employee Relations within the Department of Human Resources at 860-486-8807.

**Contacts:**

Students, Faculty and Staff who have questions or concerns regarding the University of Connecticut Religious Accommodations Policy may contact the Office of Institutional Equity (OIE):

Storrs and Regionals: [equity@uconn.edu](mailto:equity@uconn.edu) or (860) 486-2943

UConn Health: [equity@uconn.edu](mailto:equity@uconn.edu) or (860) 679-3563

**Related Policies and Guidance:**

Frequently Asked Questions Regarding Religious Accommodations

[Policy Against Discrimination, Harassment, and Related Interpersonal Violence](#)

[Religious Holidays: Faculty and Staff Resource Guide](#)