

MSA proposal for new policy and procedures regarding religious observance (updated)

This is a slightly modified version of the proposed new guidelines for accommodations for religious observance together with the proposed forms for request for (student) and approval/denial of (instructor) accommodations.

Items in red reflect suggestions from FC members as well as the University Registrar's Office. These are:

- 1) Removal of the requirement that absence accommodations for reason of religious observance *automatically* be exempt from (or be considered separately from) any other course absence policies (e.g., an individual faculty member who allows three absences without grade penalty).
- 2) A clarification of the deadlines for requesting accommodations (this came from the University Registrar's Office).
- 3) An embedded link to MU's interfaith calendar of recognized holidays.

UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI
FACULTY GUIDELINES FOR STUDENT RELIGIOUS ACCOMODATIONS

Working Policy

It is a long-standing policy of the University of Missouri to respect the diversity of our students. Various religious faiths are represented in the University of Missouri student body. The University of Missouri does not restrict student free exercise of religion, unless 1) the restriction is in the form of a rule of general applicability, and does not discriminate against religion, or among religions; and 2) it can be demonstrated that the application of the restriction is essential to furthering a compelling university interest, and is not unduly restrictive considering the relevant circumstance. The policy of the University attempts to strike a reasonable balance between accommodating the religious practice of students and meeting academic needs and standards.

Guidelines

In accordance with the Universities stance on religious freedoms, the University makes every reasonable effort to accommodate the sincerely held religious practices of students. Any student who is absent from class, or is unable to complete an assignment because of a religious practice based upon a sincerely held religious belief shall be given the opportunity to submit any relevant work, without penalty, unless it can be demonstrated that doing so would impose undue hardship upon the quality of the course, or upon the University.

If the grade of the course is dependent upon attendance, the student shall not be penalized for any absences resulting from excused religious practice. ~~Additionally, course attendance policies that allow for a specific number of dates to be missed without impact on a student's grade should not count absences resulting from excused religious practice within that number.~~ A student who is to be excused from class for a religious practice based upon a sincerely held religious belief is not required to provide a second party certification for the reason of absence, or to be required to prove attendance at religious services insofar as the request is submitted before the **designated** add/drop deadline for the course (See MU University Registrar page for deadlines for full-semester and full-term classes; see class section information on myZou for deadlines for part-of-term, eight-week, and self-paced courses.) The University of Missouri does not recognize a minimum or maximum number of excused absences to be allocated for sincerely held religious practice; all excused absences are contingent upon the relevant circumstances of the course, and may be restricted in cases where undue hardship can be demonstrated.

The University of Missouri also makes every reasonable effort to permit students to engage in religious expression, unless it can be demonstrated that doing so is in direct conflict with a compelling university interest or is contrary to established university policy.

Definitions

Exercise of religion: an act or refusal to act that is substantially motivated by religious belief, whether or not the religious exercise is compulsory or central to a larger system of religious belief.

Demonstrate: the burden of going forward with the evidence and of persuasion.

Reasonable accommodation: any change in an academic course or program of study with respect to the way tasks or responsibilities are customarily done that enables a student to observe a sincerely held religious practice or belief without creating undue hardship.

Sincerely held: held with the strength of traditional religious views.

Undue hardship: Occurs when granting a requested accommodation would require significant expense or difficulty for the University, or would result in the inability of the student to perform an essential function of the student's course or program of study. The determination of undue hardship is dependent upon the facts of each individual situation.

Procedure

1. Students should provide the relevant instructor(s) with advanced notice of the dates on which they will be unable to attend class or complete an assignment due to sincerely held religious practice via the "Student Request for Religious Accommodation Form" which can be found on the website of the Office of MU Equity (equity.missouri.edu). In order to receive full consideration, notice should be hand delivered to the relevant instructor(s) by the add/drop deadline of the given term. An instructor may deny a student's request for an excused absence on the grounds that the request was not made before the add/drop deadline of the course.
2. The student and the relevant instructor(s) should then determine the conditions under which work will be submitted in a timely and reasonable manner. The process shall be expedited as much as reasonably possible in order to ensure that a student pursuing a religious practice excusal is not unduly disadvantaged by the passage of time. Instructors reserve the right to insist that course work to be missed should be completed prior to the anticipated absence, and in no way shall this policy be construed to relieve students from responsibility for any part of the course work required during the period of absence. Additionally, instructors are not required to consider extended accommodations for the purpose of allowing students to travel away from Columbia, MO for religious practice.
3. The student and relevant instructor(s), should complete and sign the "Student Request for Religious Accommodation Form". The instructor should return the completed form to the student, submit a copy to the program department office, and keep a personal copy of the form on file - per the instructions outlined on the form.
4. Should disagreement arise over any aspect of this policy, parties should consult first the Department Chair, then the Dean of the School, and finally, if necessary, the office of the Provost for final resolution.
5. On occasions when accommodation of religious practice is denied, students may wish to appeal the decision in reference to the University Discrimination Grievance Procedure for Students outlined in the Collected Rules and Regulations of the Provost 390.010. Such appeal should be submitted to the Office of MU Equity.

Faculty are encouraged to consult the MU Guide to Religions **and calendar of generally recognized holidays** available through the MizzouDiversity website before making decisions pertaining to religious accommodation (<http://diversity.missouri.edu/get-involved/religion/holidays.php>).

Compliance

Failure to comply with these Guidelines may be a violation of University of Missouri policy.

390.010 Discrimination Grievance Procedure for Students:

"It is the policy of the University of Missouri to provide equal opportunity for all enrolled students and applicants for admission to the University on the basis of merit without discrimination on the basis of their race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, national origin, age or disability, or Vietnam era veteran status."

UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI STUDENT REQUEST FOR ACCOMMODATION OF RELIGIOUS PRACTICE

It is a long-standing policy of the University of Missouri to respect the diversity of our students. Various religious faiths are represented in the University of Missouri student body. The University of Missouri does not restrict student free exercise of religion, unless 1) the restriction is in the form of a rule of general applicability, and does not discriminate against religion, or among religions; and 2) it can be demonstrated that the application of the restriction is essential to furthering a compelling university interest, and is not unduly restrictive considering the relevant circumstance. The policy of the University attempts to strike a reasonable balance between accommodating the religious practice of students and meeting academic needs and standards.

This form can only be used to notify an instructor of an absence associated with religious practice. Students are expected to notify their instructor(s) by completing and submitting this form in a manner that is consistent with the procedure outlined in the University's policy on student religious accommodation. Providing false information regarding sincerely held religious practice is a violation of the University's Standard of Conduct and will not be tolerated.

<u>Student Information</u>	
Name of Student: _____	Date of Submission: _____
Student ID #: _____	University Email: _____
Instructor Name: _____	
Department: _____	Course Number & Section: _____

<u>Request for Accommodation</u>	
A reasonable accommodation is any change in an academic course or program of study with respect to the way tasks or responsibilities are customarily done that enables a student to observe a sincerely held religious practice or belief without creating undue hardship. Please provide the following information:	
What specific class accommodation(s) do you request (e.g., excused absence, rescheduling of an exam or other class requirement)?	

Please identify your religious practice or belief and state how the requested accommodation enables you to participate in your religious practice or belief.	

Please state the date(s) & frequency of requested accommodation within the academic semester.	

**UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI STUDENT REQUEST FOR ACCOMMODATION OF
RELIGIOUS PRACTICE**

FOR INSTRUCTOR USE ONLY

Name of student: _____ Date of submission: _____

OPTION 1: Accommodation Approval

What specific accommodation will be provided?

State date(s) or duration for the accommodation:

Instructor signature: _____ Date: _____

OPTION 2: Accommodation Denial

Ultimate outcome and reason for denial, e.g., requested accommodation required significant expense or difficulty, including a significant interference with the essential functions of the course and/or program of study (specify):

Should disagreement arise over any aspect of this policy, parties should consult first the Department Chair, then the Dean of the School, and finally, if necessary, the office of the Provost for final resolution.

Instructor signature: _____ Date: _____

Select one of the following options:

**RETURN THE COMPLETED FORM TO THE STUDENT
SUBMIT A COPY TO THE DEPARTMENT OFFICE
KEEP A COPY OF THIS FORM IN YOUR FILES**