



Office of Institutional Equity

WKU Faculty Guidance: Responding to Religious Accommodation Requests

This guidance is intended to assist faculty in responding to student religious accommodation requests and should be read in conjunction with WKU's [Religious and Cultural Observations Policy, No. 1.4000/4.2700](#).

Most religious accommodation requests can be resolved through direct communication between the student and faculty member. The Office of Institutional Equity serves as a resource for consultation, facilitation, and review when questions arise, when a request cannot be resolved informally, or when a request involves broader university requirements or policies.

1. Recognize a Request

- A request does **not** need to be formal or include specific wording.
- Any communication indicating that a sincerely held religious belief or practice conflicts with a course requirement should generally be treated as a request for religious accommodations.
- Students are expected to provide reasonable advance notice when practicable. However, faculty should consider requests even when advance notice is limited and consult with OIE if questions arise.

2. Respond Promptly and Respectfully

- Acknowledge the request as soon as possible.
- Discuss the request with the student and explore whether the matter can be reasonably resolved at the course level.
- Provide the student with the [Religious Accommodation Request Form](#) when additional assistance, review, or facilitation may be needed.
- Maintain a **non-judgmental, neutral tone**.
- Avoid questioning the validity, sincerity, significance, or legitimacy of the student's stated religious observance, practice, or belief.
- Focus on the requested accommodation and the academic requirements at issue.
- Do not ask the student for proof or documentation of their religion.

3. Applicable University Policy

WKU's [Religious and Cultural Observations Policy, No. 1.4000/4.2700](#) outlines the University's commitment to accommodating religious observances and providing reasonable considerations when religious practices conflict with academic requirements. The Policy encourages students to provide reasonable advance notice of anticipated absences for religious observance and expects faculty to make reasonable efforts to accommodate such requests when feasible. Faculty should be familiar with this Policy and consult it when responding to requests involving religious observances, examinations, attendance, assignments, or other academic requirements.

Faculty may generally address routine religious observance requests involving attendance, examinations, and assignment scheduling through direct communication with the student and consistent with WKU's Religious and Cultural Observations Policy.

Requests seeking modification or exemption from a course requirement, program requirement, technical standard, university policy, housing requirement, or other institutional expectation should be referred to OIE before a final decision is made.

4. Religious Accommodation Requests Beyond the Classroom

Not all religious accommodation requests involve exams, assignments, or absences. Students may seek accommodations related to university policies, programs, activities, housing, dress, or appearance practices, or other aspects of university life. When such requests arise, faculty should consult OIE for guidance and/or direct the student to complete the Religious Accommodation Request Form.

5. Avoid Undue Burden or Course Alteration

- You are **not required** to:
 - Lower essential academic standards
 - Eliminate core course requirements
- Consider whether the request would create:
 - Significant disruption
 - Unfair advantage
 - Inability to meet learning outcomes

6. Maintain Confidentiality

Treat information regarding a student's religious accommodation request as confidential and share it only with university officials who have a legitimate educational need to know.

7. Document the Interaction

- Keep a brief record of:
 - The request
 - Your response
 - The agreed-upon accommodation
- Documentation is especially important if the request cannot be resolved informally or is referred for additional review.
- Documentation need not be extensive but should accurately reflect the request and how it was resolved.

8. Religious Discrimination or Harassment Concerns

A student may raise concerns that they have been treated differently, harassed, excluded, or otherwise subjected to discrimination because of their religion, religious beliefs, religious practices, or lack of religious affiliation.

Such concerns should not be treated solely as requests for accommodations. Faculty should promptly refer students to the OIE for information regarding available reporting and support options or submit the [Discrimination and Harassment Form](#) on their behalf. Faculty should not attempt to investigate allegations of discrimination or harassment on their own. Please refer to the [Discrimination and Harassment Policy No. 0.2040](#).

9. Know When to Refer

Contact the [Office of Institutional Equity \(OIE\)](#) if:

- You are unsure how to proceed.
- The request seems complex or involves multiple conflicts.
- The request involves a university policy or requirement outside the classroom.
- The student and faculty member cannot agree on an accommodation.
- You believe the requested accommodation may fundamentally alter an essential academic requirement.
- You believe the accommodation may create **undue hardship**.
- The student reports being harassed, discriminated against, treated differently, or singled out because of their religion, religious beliefs, or religious practices.

10. Apply Consistently

- Ensure similar requests are handled in a **consistent and equitable manner** across students. However, accommodations should be assessed individually based on the specific religious conflict, course requirements, and circumstances involved.

11. Do Not Retaliate

Faculty should ensure that students are not penalized, discouraged, treated differently, or subjected to negative treatment because they requested a religious accommodation, regardless of whether that accommodation is ultimately granted and/or implemented.

12. Include a Syllabus Statement

- Clearly inform students upfront about how to request religious accommodations and any **timelines for notice**.

Remember: WKU is committed to providing equal educational opportunity while respecting sincerely held religious beliefs and maintaining essential academic standards. When in doubt, **pause, consult, and collaborate**.