



TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY HEALTH SCIENCES CENTER

Operating Policy and Procedure

HSC OP: 77.12, **Student Religious Observances and Practices**

PURPOSE: The purpose of this Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center Operating Policy/Procedure (HSC OP) is to ensure understanding and to create a standardized approach to approving student absences related to the observance of religious holy day(s) and daily religious practices.

REVIEW: This HSC OP will be reviewed on November 15 of every odd-numbered year (ONLY) by the Student Affairs Committee, Associate General Counsel, Academic Affairs and Curriculum Committee, and Academics Council.

POLICY/PROCEDURE:

1. **Religious Holy Day:** A holy day observed by a religion whose places of worship are exempt from property taxation under Section 11.20 of the Texas Tax Code. This policy complies with Section 51.911 of the Texas Education Code and 19 Texas Administrative Code Section 4.4, which provide that a student who is excused under this section may not be penalized for the absence, but the instructor may appropriately respond if the student fails to satisfactorily complete the assignment or examination.
2. **Daily Religious Practice:** Daily religious practice refers to regular, faith-based observances performed at specific times each day as part of an individual's sincerely held religious beliefs. These practices may include prayer, worship, or other devotional activities that are customary within a religious tradition.
3. **Religious Practice:** Moral or ethical beliefs, whether theistic or non-theistic in nature, as to what is right and wrong which are sincerely held with the strength of traditional religious views. Social, political, or economic philosophies and mere personal preferences are not considered a Religious Practice.
4. **Religious Adjustment:** A reasonable adjustment to the academic environment or the application processes that will allow an individual covered under this procedure to practice or otherwise observe a sincerely held religious practice without undue hardship on the University.
5. **Absence Request Process**
 - a. Students seeking adjustments for religious observance, whether for Religious Holy Days, daily religious practices, or other religious provision requests must submit a written request.
 - i. Students should follow their school's procedures and timelines for completing and submitting absence requests.
 - ii. Once submitted, the request will be distributed to the relevant parties for review and approval, which may include:
 1. the instructor of record,
 2. the Assistant or Associate Dean of Student Affairs or designee for the school, and
 3. the research supervisor (if applicable).
 - iii. These individuals will coordinate to evaluate the request and determine if and how the adjustment can be reasonably provided.
 - b. Requests should specify the nature of the religious practice, dates and/or times of absence or breaks needed, and any potential conflicts with academic, clinical, or research responsibilities.

- c. The school will engage in an interactive process with the student and relevant faculty or supervisors to determine appropriate adjustments and any necessary makeup arrangements.
 - d. Documentation or additional supporting information may be requested if bona fide questions exist about the adjustment request.
 - e. Requests should be submitted as early as possible. Students are encouraged to review academic calendars, clinical schedules, and syllabi early in the term to anticipate any potential conflicts.
 - i. Clinical Rotations: Requests for religious adjustments during clinical rotations must be submitted not less than 30 calendar days before the start of the rotation to allow sufficient time for clinical scheduling adjustments and program coordination with preceptors or rotation sites.
 - 1. If the adjustment involves an absence that impacts clinical duties, the student may be required to make up missed time—often on weekends—to ensure continuity of patient care and fulfillment of course objectives. Adjustments will be made without compromising essential clinical requirements. Make-up arrangements must follow the program’s duty-hour policies, if applicable.
 - f. Students enrolled in asynchronous distance education courses may not be required to complete the form, as these courses are inherently designed to provide flexibility in attendance and the completion of course requirements. Students should consult their course syllabus or instructor for specific guidelines.
 - g. Students will be informed promptly about adjustment decisions and have access to appeal processes as outlined in Section 11 below.
6. Religious Holy Day Observance.
- a. A student will be excused from attending class(es), examinations, or other required activities for the observance of a Religious Holy Day. A student whose absence is excused under this section will be allowed to take an examination or complete an assignment within a reasonable time after the absence, to be determined in concert with the instructor of record and/or Associate Dean of Student Affairs for the school or designee before or after the absence.
 - b. Preparation or travel cannot exceed one day before and after the recognized religious holy day.
 - c. A student who is excused under Section 6 may not be penalized for the absence; however, the instructor may take appropriate action if the student fails to satisfactorily and timely complete the missed assignment or examination.
7. Daily Religious Practice Adjustments
- a. Students who engage in daily religious or spiritual practices, such as prayer, may request short breaks during clinical rotations, research, or academic classes to observe these practices.
 - b. Reasonable adjustments may include brief absences of up to 10–20 minutes per day, provided these do not interfere with patient care, essential clinical responsibilities, research activities, or the core requirements of a course.

- c. Any time missed may need to be made up in accordance with program or course expectations.
 - d. Faculty, research supervisors, and clinical instructors will work collaboratively with students to support these adjustments in a manner that upholds both academic and professional standards.
8. Other Religious Adjustment/Practice Requests
- a. Requests for religious adjustments that fall outside of Religious Holy Days or Daily Religious Practices (such as special dietary needs, religious dress, or other practices) should be submitted using the school's standard absence request procedures and timelines.
 - b. A student may request to be excused from participating in specific health care procedures, research activities, or educational experiences that present a conflict with their sincerely held religious beliefs. Requests should follow the standard adjustment process outlined in this policy and will be reviewed on an individual basis.
 - i. Students may not opt out of participating in essential clinical or health care duties during a disaster, mass casualty event or other similar large scale community emergency. Such events are considered core experiential training, and students must still be evaluated on related competencies. If exempted from performing a particular procedure during an emergency, alternate evaluation methods (e.g., simulation, case review) will be used to assess competency.
 - ii. While reasonable adjustments may be granted to excuse participation, students are still responsible for acquiring the knowledge, competencies, and educational objectives associated with the procedure or experience through alternative means as determined by the instructor, clinical director, or research supervisor.
 - iii. Faculty and supervisors will work with the student to identify appropriate alternatives that uphold academic, professional, and accreditation standards.
 - iv. The school will review such requests individually and engage in an interactive process considering academic program requirements, technical standards, and possible alternative adjustments.
9. Retaliation of any kind against anyone for observing a Religious Holy Day or requesting a Religious Adjustment is strictly prohibited.
10. The University may provide interim adjustment(s) while the Religious Adjustment request is being processed or if an approved Religious Adjustment cannot be properly implemented.
11. Appeal: Texas Administrative Code, Title 19, Part 1, Chapter 4, Subchapter A, Rule §4.4 (c) states that if a student and an instructor disagree about the nature of the absence being for the observance of a religious holy day, as defined therein or if there is similar disagreement about whether the student has been given a reasonable time to complete any missed assignments or examinations, either the student or the instructor may request a ruling from the President, or designee. The following steps should be taken:
- a. A student who disagrees with the decisionmaker's determination of their Religious Adjustment request may appeal in writing to the Associate Provost for Student Affairs within five (5) business days of receipt of the written response. Upon receipt of the written appeal the Associate Provost for Student Affairs will review the initial request for Religious Adjustment(s) and the appeal and may ask the initial reviewer of the Religious Adjustment request, the requesting student and other pertinent persons to provide additional information pertaining to the Religious Adjustment request to make a determination.

- b. If a student disagrees with the Associate Provost for Student Affairs decision, the student may request a final ruling from the President, or designee. At TTUHSC, the Provost serves as the President's designee for final decisions on such matters and further appeal is not permitted.