



TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY HEALTH SCIENCES CENTER EL PASO

Operating Policy and Procedure

HSCEP OP: 77.12, **Observation of Religious Holy Day and Requests for Religious Accommodation**

PURPOSE: The purpose of this Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center El Paso (TTUHSC El Paso) Operating Policy and Procedure (HSCEP OP) is to ensure understanding and create a standardized approach to handling student absence for observance of a religious holy day(s).

REVIEW: This HSCEP OP will be reviewed by November 15 of every odd-numbered year (ONY) by the Assistant Vice President for Student Services and Student Engagement (AVPSSSE), the Office of General Counsel, and the Vice President for Academic Affairs (VPAA) or their designees, with recommendations for revision forwarded to the President by December 15.

POLICY/PROCEDURE:

I. Definitions

- A. **Religious Accommodation:** A reasonable adjustment to the academic environment or application processes that allows an individual covered under this policy to practice or otherwise observe a sincerely held religious belief or practice, provided that the accommodation does not impose an undue hardship on the University, fundamentally alter the nature of the academic program, compromise the essential requirements of the program, or endanger the safety of patients, the individual, or others.
- B. **Religious Holy Day:** As defined by Texas statute, a holy day observed by a religion whose places of worship are exempt from property taxation under Texas Tax Code §11.20.
- C. **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 religious beliefs.

II. Religious Holy Day

- A. A student who intends to observe a religious holy day should make that intention known in writing to the instructor of their academic program prior to the absence using their school's absence reporting tool and following the appropriate attendance policy. A student who is absent from classes for the observance of a religious holy day shall be allowed to take an examination or complete an assignment scheduled for that day within a reasonable time after the absence.
- B. If a request for absence due to observance of a religious holy day is denied at the school level, a student may submit an appeal to the Office of Student Services and Student Engagement for further review using the [Appeal Form for Denied Absence Request Related to Religious Practices](#). The AVPSSSE or their designee will review the request, and engage in an interactive process with the program in which the student is enrolled in to determine if an excused absence is reasonable and appropriate.
- C. A student who is excused under section II.A. may not be penalized for the absence; however, the instructor may respond appropriately if the student fails to complete the assignment satisfactorily.

III. Religious Accommodation

- A. A student who would like to request a religious accommodation that does not qualify as a religious holy day, may complete and submit a [Request for Reasonable Religious Accommodation form](#) to the AVPSSSE. In some cases, documentation or supporting information regarding the request may be required where bona fide questions regarding the basis for religious accommodation exist.
- B. The AVPSSSE, in reviewing the religious accommodation request, should respond in a timely manner. The AVPSSSE will engage in the interactive process with the student requesting the religious accommodation, and the department or program, to make a determination as to whether the religious accommodation will be provided. The AVPSSSE will inform the student requestor of the religious accommodation request determination.
- C. Determinations regarding religious accommodation requests shall be made on an individualized basis considering the totality of circumstances following the interactive process. As part of the interactive process, the AVPSSSE may analyze the fundamental requirements of the student's academic program and/or related technical standards, essential functions, requirements of the department or program, any impact of the accommodation, the duration of the accommodation request, and the availability of alternative accommodations.

IV. Appeal for Religious Accommodation Request

- A. A student who disagrees with the AVPSSSE's determination of their religious accommodation request may appeal in writing to the VPAA within five (5) business days of receipt of the written response. Upon receipt of the written appeal, the VPAA will review the initial request for religious accommodation and the appeal and may ask the AVPSSSE, the requesting student and other pertinent persons to provide additional information pertaining to the religious accommodation request. The decision of the VPAA is final.

V. Miscellaneous Provisions

- A. Retaliation of any kind against anyone for observing a religious holy day or requesting a religious accommodation is strictly prohibited.
- B. The University may provide interim accommodation(s) while the religious accommodation request is being processed or if an approved religious accommodation request cannot be properly implemented.
- C. This policy does not apply to any student absence for a religious holy day which interferes with patient care responsibilities.