

Religious Academic Accommodation Guidelines

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Purpose of this Guide

This guide is for all Carleton University students and instructors. The guide is designed to provide clear information on the accommodation process, including how to request accommodation based on the protected grounds in the human rights code. The guide also explains how professors and instructors can assist with the process. For simplicity, professors, instructors, and other teaching professionals will be referred to as “instructors” hereinafter.

What is Accommodation on Human Rights Grounds?

Accommodation on human rights grounds is related to protected attributes such as disability, family status, sex, and creed/religion. The purpose of accommodation is to enable students to meet the essential requirements of their course or program and to ensure equitable access to education by making appropriate adjustments to course and program related deliverables. At no time should academic accommodation undermine or compromise the learning objectives that are established by the academic authorities of the University. Under the Code, accommodation is assessed and provided on an individual basis, to the point of undue hardship.

Beyond meeting policy and human rights legislation requirements, Carleton University is committed to being an inclusive and equitable institution, hence, supporting accommodation requests with respect, compassion, and in a timely manner, contributes to creating a healthy and flourishing environment. It also prevents discrimination and human rights violations. Below is step-by-step information on the kind of accommodation that students can request and how they can make such requests, along with information on how instructors can engage in and support the accommodation process.

What is Religious Accommodation?

Accommodations under Carleton University's Human Rights Policy are provided when an individual (e.g., employee or student) identifies limitations and/or restrictions based on a Code Protected Ground in relation to services, employment or housing provided by the University. In such cases, the University is required to provide reasonable accommodation up to the point of undue hardship

For consistency, this resource will use the term "religious accommodation" throughout the document when discussing the duty to accommodate sincerely held beliefs based on creed. Sometimes a person's religious or spiritual obligation may conflict with tasks and expectations in the workplace or the academic environment. Accommodation requests on religious grounds require the University, its students, and its employees to work together to arrive at a reasonable accommodation. Instead of providing special privileges or advantages, accommodation removes barriers and provides equitable and inclusive access to individuals.

Students' Role and Responsibilities

When you may need religious accommodation

Religious academic accommodation can be requested when a religious or spiritual obligation directly interferes with an academic requirement (e.g., specific class or tutorial time, assignments and presentations, date and time of a midterm exam or final exam, etc.).

How do I ask for accommodation?

If you require religious academic accommodation, you should direct your request for accommodation to your course instructor, ideally, early in the term or as soon as the need for accommodation is known. As soon as you receive your syllabus or course outline, you are encouraged to identify any potential conflicts between religious obligations and course requirements. You can refer to [the most commonly-cited religious obligations](#). If a date for a religious obligation cannot be confirmed until closer to the date (e.g., follows the lunar calendar, etc.) please contact your instructor in advance regardless to notify them and plan accordingly.

In your request for academic accommodation, you should include the following:

- State that you are seeking religious academic accommodation.
- Identify the specific course requirements for which you are seeking accommodation (e.g. midterm, assignment, final exam, etc.).
- Provide information on the religious or spiritual obligation, and how it conflicts with the course, program deliverables, or requirements.
- Provide suggestions for means of satisfying the academic requirement such as alternative dates to write a midterm or a final exam, extension on assignments, making up missed tutorial sessions, etc.

If you require academic accommodation for more than one course for the same religious or spiritual obligation, ensure that you connect with each instructor directly to explore possible accommodations. Accommodation for each course may look different depending on the instructor and the structure and requirements of each course.

After I ask for accommodation, what should happen next?

Once you have made your request for accommodation, your instructor will take the necessary steps to explore the accommodation request. At this time, your instructor may ask for additional information to aid in the process.

Asking for accommodation is often just the first step in the accommodation process, and depending on the circumstances, can take time to work out. Thus, it is important to request

accommodation as soon as the need for accommodation arises, such as early in the semester or when the final examination schedule is released.

Your proposed or preferred accommodation may not always be what you will get as other reasonable accommodation options may be considered. As the person requesting the academic accommodation, you have a responsibility to co-operate in the accommodation process by participating in good faith and being open and ready to seriously consider different ideas and suggestions.

What if there is a disagreement about my accommodation request?

The goal of processing an accommodation request is to explore what is a reasonable and appropriate. An appropriate accommodation will vary with the circumstances of each case. It is important to keep in mind that your request for accommodation is often just the first step in a collaborative effort to come up with an appropriate solution. This means that you need to be prepared to work with your instructor and respond to questions or concerns that may arise as the accommodation process takes place.

If you have questions, concerns, or need more information on the accommodation process and Carleton's Human Rights Policy, you can schedule a time to meet with an Equity Advisor at Equity and Inclusive Communities by emailing equity@carleton.ca or by calling (613) 520-5622

Tips to consider in the process

- When requesting a religious or spiritual accommodation, be mindful in your request to not ask for a "deferral" as this can suggest you are looking to write the exam within the deferral period which usually happens outside of the exam season. Deferrals are generally not considered an appropriate form of religious accommodation, except in circumstances where an alternative time to write an exam is not possible.
- Be prepared to provide additional information in support of the requested accommodation.

Instructor's Role and Responsibilities

What to do when you receive a religious accommodation request

Upon receipt of a request for religious accommodation, as an instructor, you are advised to:

1. Determine appropriate accommodation in consultation with the student in a way that avoids academic disadvantage to the student. For in-class and mid-term accommodation, discuss directly with the student. For final exam accommodations related to religious/spiritual requests, discuss directly with the student. Once you have reached an agreement regarding the most appropriate form of accommodation, you can contact the Scheduling and Examination Services (SES) Office for assistance coordinating final exam logistics (e.g., booking a space for the student to take the final exam, proctoring, etc.).
2. You may assess the eligibility of the event prior to determining accommodation. If you are not familiar with the particular religious observance, ask the student to clarify the actual obligation of the religious event. You can also refer to the [commonly cited religious/spiritual observance](#) and/or consult with an Equity Advisor at Equity and Inclusive Communities (EIC).

If you or the student have further questions or need clarification or guidance regarding accommodations and the university's human rights policy, please contact Equity and Inclusive Communities (EIC) at equity@carleton.ca or by calling (613) 520-5622 to speak to an Equity Advisor.

Tips to consider in the process

- Treat accommodation requests as sincere. Accept the students' request in good faith, unless there is clear evidence to believe otherwise. Documentation from faith leaders is not required.
- Work with the student to explore the request and to provide reasonable accommodation. Every effort should be made to avoid accommodation that disadvantages a student.
- When working with SES, ensure you are doing so as soon as possible as they require advance notice to assist with final exam accommodation logistics.

Further reading and resources

- [Understanding the Duty to Accommodate by the Human Rights Legal Support Centre](#)
- [Ontario Human Rights Commission's policy on preventing discrimination based on creed](#)
- [Commonly cited religious/spiritual observance](#)