

RELIGION, BELIEF AND STUDY: CODE OF PRACTICE TO SUPPORT STUDENTS¹

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1. INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

- 1.1 The University recognises the freedom of individuals and groups to express their religious or non-religious beliefs and, through its Equality and Diversity Policies and Codes of Practice, seeks to foster academic and creative freedom. Further information on Equality and Diversity can be found here: <https://www.westminster.ac.uk/about-us/our-university/vision-mission-and-values/corporate-social-responsibility/equality-and-diversity>.
- 1.2 This Code of Practice is designed to ensure recognition of diversity of belief in the context of the University's mission as a higher educational establishment, which is to provide a supportive context in which all students will explore new ideas and experiences and engage critically with received beliefs and understanding. In all learning opportunities the language must be inclusive, as should the types of case studies and examples relied upon.

¹ This Code and the Religious Observance Calendar applies to London Campuses only. Different arrangements may be necessary for other University of Westminster International Campuses.

2. POLICY STATEMENT

- 2.1 The University of Westminster is committed to embracing diversity and promoting equality amongst its student body and values its diverse international community of students with their religious and other beliefs or worldview. In doing so, the University recognises that ethnicity and culture are not indicative of religion or belief and that all religions have a variety and range of doctrines, which may reflect different values and customs. Fair treatment involves taking difference into account, not treating everyone the same.
- 2.2 The right to religious freedom means that no one should be forced to act against their convictions nor restrained from acting in accordance with their convictions in religious matters in private or in public or in association with others. This right to religious freedom is given recognition through this code of practice.
- 2.3 It is recognised that students and staff who celebrate a particular belief will seek to give it external expression and the University seeks to provide a respectful environment for this. In their turn they must respect the opinions and human rights of others. While giving expression to their belief individually or in association, people are expected to show sensitivity and respect for the opinions of others if they wish to spread their belief.

3. BREACHES OF THE POLICY

- 3.1 Any students who feel they have been treated in ways that breach this policy should first discuss it with their tutor with a view to finding an informal way to resolution. If this is unsuccessful, individuals can access the procedure appropriate to their situation, for example the Student Complaints Procedure or the University's Equal Opportunities Policy.
- 3.2 However, behaviour that intimidates, is hostile, degrading or humiliating towards a member of staff or fellow student on the basis of their belief or belief practice, or assumptions about the same, constitutes harassment and will be cause for disciplinary action.

4. DEFINITION OF A RELIGIOUS OR OTHER BELIEF

- 4.1 For the purposes of this code of practice, religious or other belief is defined as any religion, religious belief or philosophical belief that has a clear belief system or profound belief that affects the way of life or view of the world of the believer. There may also be collective worship, such as in churches, mosques or gurdwaras.

5. DRESS

- 5.1 The University does not operate a formal dress code and it is therefore appropriate and a welcome of our wish to express cultural diversity on campus for people to wear religious dress.
- 5.2 However, if students have to study in clinical or laboratory spaces or workshops, particular rules or dress codes may apply, and these must be complied with, as the health and safety of members of the University community is the priority consideration. If a person is required not to wear a particular aspect of their chosen dress this will be

handled with sensitivity and reasons given.

6. FACILITIES

- 6.1 The University has a policy to provide Multi-faith Quiet Rooms and Muslim Prayer rooms. See the Faith & Spirituality website (<https://www.westminster.ac.uk/current-students/university-life/faith-and-spirituality>), for details and locations.
- 6.2 In the spirit of embracing diversity, the University recognises that alone amongst faith groups the Islamic faith requires prayers at specific times and in certain conditions, including formal separation of male and female prayer areas by a curtain. Other faith groups allow prayer in any quiet space.
- 6.3 In certain circumstances faith groups may wish to request a booking of a large room for prayer. Such bookings must be requested through the normal bookings procedure. (https://www.westminster.ac.uk/sites/default/public-files/general-documents/Freedom-of-Speech-code-of-practice-external-booking-process_0.pdf).
- 6.4 Where a booking of a large room for Muslim prayer is approved, the University recognises that the group booking the room may make provision for formal segregation between men and women. Such arrangements must be made in consultation with the relevant Campus Services Manager and in accordance with Health & Safety requirements. This form of segregation on the basis of gender does not apply for teaching, scholarly or other social activities.

7. RELIGIOUS SOCIETIES

- 7.1 These societies, working within the policy and guidelines of the University and affiliated to the Students' Union (SU), are free to invite support and guest speakers for meetings from religious communities outside the University, within the framework set out in the University's Code of Practice on the Freedom of Speech (including External Events Booking Process (https://www.westminster.ac.uk/sites/default/public-files/general-documents/Freedom-of-Speech-code-of-practice-external-booking-process_0.pdf)).
- 7.2 Student initiatives with regard to faith and spirituality, other than by invitation through SU societies, are the responsibility of the Faith & Spirituality team. The Students' Union has also produced an External Speaker Guide which is available on the Students' Union website here (<https://www.uwsu.com/student-hub/external-speaker>).

8. RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCE

8.1 ACADEMIC CALENDAR

- 8.1.1 Those who set the University calendar and timetable seek to support the spirit of diversity and inclusiveness which underpins this Code. However, they are constrained firstly by the system of public holidays in this country, secondly by both our and our students' limited resources which require us to deliver programmes in as time efficient way as possible, and thirdly, particularly at assessment time, by the need to ensure security and equality of treatment for all those sitting any particular assessment.

8.2 RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCE CALENDAR

8.2.1 Annually, following the setting of the academic calendar, the Faith & Spirituality team shall produce the University's Religious Observance Calendar. This calendar shall identify principal religious festivals, and shall include a list of specific Religious Observance dates (and, where appropriate, times of day) on which certain University activities shall be avoided (see below)². The Religious Observance Calendar shall be submitted annually for approval by the Teaching Committee.

8.3 TEACHING

8.3.1 Teaching and other learning opportunities may be scheduled on days of Religious Observance as identified in the Religious Observance Calendar. The University timetable has been designed to ensure that teaching and learning requirements are delivered efficiently and effectively within the available time and space. For these reasons, the timetable cannot accommodate the diversity of religious observance requirements on campus.

8.3.2 The University understands that there may be certain occasions when a student may be absent due to religious observance. If religious observance means that you will miss a lecture or other scheduled learning opportunity, you must notify your module leader(s) in advance. Except where the Faith and Spirituality team is unable to confirm that the absence coincides with a day of religious observance, such an absence will not normally be recorded as an unauthorised absence.

8.3.3 Students may observe the requirements of their religion and pray at certain times of the day. They should, wherever possible, fulfil their obligation to pray either before or after classes.

8.3.4 Where the class is longer than an hour they should speak to the lecturer beforehand, arrange to leave to pray during the break and return before the break ends.

8.3.5 Missed learning opportunities resulting from participation in prayer and other religious obligations must be made up by the student. However, tutors should be supportive in this by ensuring that any handouts normally distributed in the class are available.

8.4 ASSESSMENTS SCHEDULED OUTSIDE THE FORMAL EXAMINATION PERIOD

8.4.1 Many courses and modules include summative assessments which are undertaken outside the formal examination period, including in-class tests, lab tests, presentations, practicals, vivas, performances etc.

8.4.2 Organisers of such assessments shall, as far as is practicable, not schedule such assessments on Religious Observance dates (or times of day) as specified in the Religious Observance calendar.

8.4.3 Where it is not possible for the assessment to be held other than on a Religious

² Religious Observance dates will be those dates (or specific times of day on those dates), determined at the absolute judgement of the Faith and Spirituality Team, on which it would be unreasonable to expect a follower of a recognised religion to engage with the University's learning and teaching opportunities or assessment requirements, due solely to the obligations of that religion.

Observance date, and/or a student is unable to attend University as a result of religious observance, the student should submit a Mitigating Circumstances form in accordance with the requirements of the mitigating circumstances policy and regulations (<https://www.westminster.ac.uk/current-students/guides-and-policies/assessment-guidelines/mitigating-circumstances-claims>). Except where the Faith and Spirituality team is unable to confirm that the assessment coincides with a day of religious observance, the student will be offered a deferral to the next available opportunity.

8.5 COURSEWORK DEADLINES

8.5.1 Deadlines for handing in assessed work will not normally be extended to allow for religious observance, and students must schedule their work accordingly.

8.6 EXAMINATIONS

8.6.1 Formal examinations, held during the formal examination period, may be scheduled on days of Religious Observance as identified in the Religious Observance Calendar. Due to the restrictions of having to schedule a large number of examinations within a time-constrained examination period, the examination timetable cannot, unfortunately, accommodate the diversity of religious observance requirements.

8.6.2 The University understands that there may be occasions when a student may be unable to attend an examination due to religious observance. If religious observance means that a student will miss a formal scheduled examination, the student should submit a Mitigating Circumstances form in accordance with the requirements of the mitigating circumstances policy and regulations. Except where the Faith and Spirituality team is unable to confirm that the examination coincides with a day of religious observance, the student will be offered a deferral to the next available opportunity.

8.6.3 During the formal examination period, students should make arrangements to pray at lunch time, and then to fulfil their afternoon prayer obligations after the end of an afternoon examination, so as not to disturb other candidates by leaving and returning to the examination room.

8.6.4 If the clothes worn by any candidate for an assessment or formal examination make the identification of that person difficult, they should bring with them to the examination room some form of identification with a signature and replicate that signature in the presence of the invigilator on request. Otherwise they will be required to reveal their features to an invigilator of the same gender in private, sufficiently to allow their identity to be checked.

9. FURTHER INFORMATION

For issues surrounding **religious aspects** of this code please contact the Faith & Spirituality Team (<https://www.westminster.ac.uk/current-students/university-life/faith-and-spirituality>).

For aspects of the code referring to **academic regulations** (<https://www.westminster.ac.uk/about-us/our-university/corporate-information/policies-and-documents-a-z>) please contact the Academic Registrar's Department.

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