Guidelines for Managing Curricular Accommodations Related to Religious Practices

Underlying policies:

- HSCEP 77.12: Student Absences Related to Religious Holy Day (https://elpaso.ttuhsc.edu/opp/_documents/77/op7712.pdf)

Operational guidelines are as follows:

I. General principles: In accordance with Texas Tech University System Regulation 07.10 section 2.b, TTUHSC El Paso will make reasonable accommodations on the basis of sincerely held religious practices or beliefs unless the accommodation would impose an undue hardship on the institution. This principle applies to students seeking accommodations related to their participation in the academic programs in which they are enrolled. Also, policies and procedures for absences due to religious holy days shall be consistent with, and no more arduous than, the institution's policies and procedures relating to other excused absences and as required under applicable federal, state, and local laws.

II. Definition of a religious practice: A sincerely held practice or observance that relates to moral or ethical beliefs as to what is right and wrong, and as to the nature and purpose of the universe. Religion includes not only traditional, organized religions, but also religious beliefs that are new, uncommon, not part of a formal religious institution or sect, or only subscribed to by a small number of people. Social, political, or economic philosophies, as well as mere personal preferences, are not considered to be religious beliefs. See also 8 USC § 1448(a).

III. Requests involving observance of a religious holy day: HSCEP 77.12 (Student Absences Related to Religious Holy Day Observance) should be applied to any situation in which a student is requesting an excused absence related to observance of a religious holy day.

IV. Requests involving routine (daily, weekly, and/or monthly) religious practices:

A. Expectation of reasonable accommodation: Consistent with the general principle stated above, educational program directors, course directors and all educational program faculty
and staff, are expected to support reasonable student accommodations based on sincerely held religious practices.

B. **Reasonable accommodations** include, but are not limited to:

- i. Allowing a student to arrive to a session or activity late, leave early, or step-out briefly in direct relation to a religious obligation (as long as any related disruption is minimized and the student accepts their responsibility to fulfill all of the learning objectives associated with the session or activity).

- ii. Managing a student who misses a summative assessment due to an unavoidable conflict with a religious obligation the same as any other student with an excused absence.

- iii. Allowing religious attire, dress, and grooming (referring not to cultural or traditional elements, but to requirements of religious observance) that are within the health and safety expectations of the student’s learning environment (noting that students in clinical settings must comply with the expectations of those settings and any related affiliated entities).

- iv. Provisions for quiet spaces and prayer. University religious organizations will have to reserve a room (“quiet space”) to reasonably accommodate participants of a religious activity; for example, prayer.

C. **Undue hardship**: There is no obligation to provide accommodations that impose an undue hardship on the institution. An undue hardship is defined as anything more than minor (“de minimis”) cost or burden relative to those routinely anticipated. An accommodation may cause undue hardship if it is costly, compromises workplace safety, decreases workplace efficiency, infringes on the rights of other students/trainees or employees, or requires other students/trainees or employees to do more than their share of potentially hazardous or burdensome work. For the purposes of this guideline relating to students in academic programs, the term “workplace” applies to educational program settings. In this regard, while program directors should be sensitive to the needs and preferences of individuals and groups whose religious practices may differ from the majority, accommodations should not disrupt the intended structure and function of a curriculum and should not interfere with patient care.

D. **Accommodations based on recognized group identify/affiliation**: As the TTUHSC El Paso student community grows and becomes increasingly diverse, and as students organize as members of distinct and recognized religious communities, the need to specifically address the needs and preferences of those religious communities may arise. To facilitate such mutually supportive interaction, registered religion-based student organizations may opt to inform the TTUHSC El Paso Office of Academic Affairs of the events and practices that may commonly result in requests for curricular accommodations by their members. Such documentation of religious affiliation-based considerations, after review and mutual acceptance with the vice president for academic affairs, or their designee, shall be made accessible via the Office of Academic Affairs webpage, to all students and faculty, as well as any relevant academic program staff designated by the vice president for academic affairs.
V. Registration for accommodations based on religious practices:

A. Whenever reasonably possible, requests for accommodation based on religious practices should be submitted prior to any direct effects they may have on a student’s participation in their academic program.

B. All students wishing to request religious accommodations should complete a request for religious accommodations form. Completed forms should be submitted by the student to the senior officer for student affairs, or their designee, of the school in which they are enrolled.

C. Students belonging to a religion-based registered student organization for whom the Office of Academic Affairs has posted group affiliation-based considerations per section IV.D above, may refer to and include such documentation as part of their individual requests for accommodations related to religious practices.

D. In some cases, documentation or information supporting the request may be required when there exists a bona fide doubt about the basis for the accommodation request.

VI. Appeal of the outcome of a request for religious accommodation: A Student may appeal a decision denying a request for religious accommodation by submitting a written appeal to the Dean of the school in which they are enrolled, or their designee. To be considered, appeals must be submitted within five (5) business days of the student receiving the original decision. The Dean, or their designee, shall render a decision regarding an appeal within five (5) business days, and that decision shall be final.

VII. Student Complaint: If a student or religious organization believes they have been subject to discrimination or harassment on the basis of religion, they should follow the complaint process outlined in Texas Tech University System Regulation 07.10.

Review

Guidelines for Managing Curricular Accommodations Related to Religious Practices shall be reviewed by the Office of Academic Affairs annually or as relevant state or federal legislation changes. Any proposed changes to the Guidelines for Managing Curricular Accommodations Related to Religious Practices shall be forwarded to the Academic Council for review.