



UMBC INTERIM POLICY ON FAITH-BASED AND RELIGIOUS ACCOMMODATIONS

UMBC Policy #III-5.10.01

I. POLICY STATEMENT

The University of Maryland, Baltimore County (“UMBC” or “the University”) is committed to providing a welcoming and inclusive living, learning, and working environment. As part of this commitment, the University will make good faith efforts to accommodate a student’s or employee’s sincerely held faith-based or religious beliefs or practices that conflict with a University policy, procedure, or other academic or employment requirement, unless such an accommodation would result in a fundamental alteration to the essential course or program objectives or create an undue or de minimis hardship.

II. PURPOSE FOR POLICY

In accordance with federal and state law, students, faculty, and staff, have the right to request an accommodation to observe faith-based or religious holidays or to participate in organized religious activities when their sincerely held faith-based or religious beliefs conflict with a University policy, procedure, or other academic or employment requirement.

This Policy sets forth the University’s commitment to provide reasonable faith-based and religious accommodations to students, faculty, and staff, the applicable procedures for these requests, and the standards that will be used to evaluate and grant such reasonable accommodations.

III. APPLICABILITY AND IMPACT STATEMENT

This policy applies to UMBC students, faculty, and staff seeking to request a reasonable accommodation for a sincerely held faith-based or religious belief or to participate in an organized religious activity.

IV. DEFINITIONS

For purposes of this Policy and the applicable Procedures, the following definitions apply:

- A. Accommodation: A reasonable change in academic, work, and/or living environment or any necessary modification to a University policy, procedure or other requirement that enables an individual to practice or otherwise observe a sincerely held faith-based or religious belief or practice provided the accommodation is not a fundamental alteration or does not create an undue or de minimis hardship. An accommodation may include but is not limited to allotting time for prayer and excused absence to attend religious events or observe a religious holiday.
- B. De Minimis hardship: An employment accommodation that would require more than a de minimis cost or burden on the University's operations or business. A de minimis burden may exist if an accommodation may cause undue hardship, if it is costly, compromises workplace safety, decreases workplace efficiency, infringes on the rights of other employees, or requires other employees to do more than their share of potentially burdensome work. Relevant factors for consideration may include the cost of the accommodation in relation to a department/office operating budget, the overall unrestricted operating budget of the University and the number of individuals who will in fact need an accommodation.
- C. Essential course and program objectives: The core learning outcomes (such as skills, knowledge, or licensure requirements) that all students must demonstrate, with or without accommodations, which are part of the interconnected curriculum requirements of the degree or academic program. Established essential objectives and requirements should clearly articulate the overall purpose of the course/program; identify required mastery of specific skills, knowledge, principles, and concepts; and convey the framework used to set the academic and program standards.
- D. Essential job function: The fundamental job duties of the employment position. The term "essential functions" does not include the marginal functions of the position.
- E. Fundamental alteration: A change that is so significant it alters the essential nature of a course, service, program, or activity. Whether an accommodation would fundamentally alter the nature of a course, service, program, or activity is determined on a case-by-case basis.
- F. Interactive process: Ongoing communication between the employee and the University, as facilitated by a supervisor or the University's Office of Equity and Civil Rights, for the express purpose of providing a reasonable accommodation.
- G. Undue hardship: Significant difficulty or expense incurred by the University. The analysis of what constitutes an undue hardship is determined on a case-by-case basis and requires consideration of financial costs, additional administrative burden, complexity of implementation, and any impact on the operations of the University.

V. ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATIONS

- A. In accordance with the [University System of Maryland Policy](#), as amended, UMBC has adopted the following policies and procedures with respect to the provision of academic accommodations for students.

All academic programs and services of the University are available to all qualified students who have been admitted to the University's programs, regardless of their sincerely held faith-based or religious beliefs. University policies and practices shall therefore not penalize students and shall provide a reasonable accommodation for students to observe faith-based or religious holidays or to participate in organized religious activities. Instructors are encouraged to avoid scheduling assignments,

examinations, and tests during times that correspond with religious holidays and observances.

Examples of accommodations include but are not limited to, providing an opportunity to make up any academic assignment, examination, test, or class work; flexibility in assignment due dates; providing access to any handouts or other material distributed in class with the opportunity to obtain or to review any duplicated lecture notes or slides presented in class; and altering the time of a student's presentation.

Regardless of any academic accommodation that may be granted, students are responsible for satisfying all academic or other programmatic objectives, requirements and prerequisites as determined by the University. Excused absences do not alter the academic requirements for the course. Students are responsible for information and material missed on the day of absence. Students are responsible for making provisions to determine what course materials they have missed and for completing required assignments in a timely manner.

All assignments, examinations, tests, or classwork must be made up within a reasonable time. A make-up examination or test must be at a time and place feasible for both the instructor and student, cover only the material for which the student was originally responsible, and be given within a timeframe that retains currency of the material.

In some classes (for example, laboratories with special material), the instructor may determine that the work is to be made up by an alternative comparable assignment rather than the original work of the class.

B. Request Procedures

It is the responsibility of the student to inform the instructor of each instance when an accommodation for faith-based or religious belief or practice is needed. The request must be submitted using the ECR Request for Faith-Based or Religious Accommodation Form or otherwise submitted in writing. Requests must be made directly to the instructor for the course and include a description of the requested accommodation, how the faith-based or religious observance or activity affects their ability to complete an assignment by the deadline, attend class, and/or take a specific test or examination, and how the requested accommodation will allow for their participation in the faith-based or religious observance or activity.

Requests should be made as early as possible at the start of a term, but no later than fourteen (14) calendar days prior to the need for the accommodation. This advance notice is required to provide adequate notice and the opportunity for the instructor to work with the student to determine whether and how the request can be granted, or what alternative arrangements can be made. Requests will not be granted retroactively. Requests submitted with less than fourteen (14) calendar days' notice are not guaranteed and will be provided if there is sufficient time for the instructor to fully assess and implement the student's request prior to the need. .

The instructor, in consultation as needed with the Office of Equity and Civil Rights, will determine, and communicate to the student, in writing, whether and how the request may be granted, or what alternative accommodation can be provided. For requests that are submitted after the start of a term, instructors will seek to provide the written notice to the student within five (5) calendar days of receipt of the request.

C. Factors to Consider

The instructor shall not ask a student for proof that their faith-based or religious practices or beliefs are sincerely held when determining whether an academic accommodation can be provided.

A requested academic accommodation will not be provided if it results in a fundamental alteration to the essential course or program objectives or creates an undue hardship. The instructor must ensure a fair deliberation with qualified campus professionals when determining if a requested accommodation would alter the essential course or program objectives such that it would create a fundamental alteration. To determine the essential objectives for a course or program, the following questions should be considered:

1. What fundamental course objective does this accommodation alter?
2. What practical function does this fundamental objective serve in the academic program?
3. Can the instructor provide documentation of the fundamental course objective (e.g., syllabus, professional association certification requirement, technical standard, etc.)?
4. How does the requested accommodation alter this fundamental course objective?
5. Has this accommodation been approved to students for any other situation or reason in your class in the current semester or in the past? If so, Why?
6. Is there any alternate way the student could demonstrate competence without undermining the essential course objectives? For example, an alternate accommodation that would not alter the essential objective of the course/program.
7. Has the program or instructor ever made modifications to the standard, learning outcome, or expectations in other student situations? If yes, how is the current situation different?
8. What skills or competencies will be needed within the field after graduation?
9. What are the requirements for licensing or professional accreditation?

If it is determined that a requested academic accommodation would result in a fundamental alteration, the University must then consider whether there are alternative academic accommodations that could accommodate a student without fundamentally altering the course or program.

D. Grievance Procedures

A student who disagrees with an instructor's decision as it relates to the provision of an accommodation should first contact the academic unit administrator (Department Chair/School Director/Dean) and submit a written appeal, with a copy to the Dean of the respective College.

A student wishing to appeal the decision of the Chair should file a written appeal with the College Dean. Such appeals are to be reviewed in accordance with duly established campus academic complaint procedures which protect the rights of all parties. Students who file such appeals may do so without being penalized in any way.

VI. NON-ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATIONS

Non-academic faith-based or religious accommodation requests from students (e.g., regarding dining, housing, observance space, etc.) should be directed to the Dean of Students.

The written request should include the specific faith-based or religious belief or practice that is the basis of the request, as well as the requested accommodation or modification to policy, procedure, or other requirement. The Dean, or their designee, will then gather the necessary information to consider the request. In some cases, the Dean, or their designee, may need to obtain additional information and/or documentation about the student's religious practices, beliefs, or accommodations which may include obtaining information from a student's spiritual leader (if applicable) or religious or philosophy scholars to address the accommodation request. The Dean, or their designee, will discuss the request with relevant individuals and will decide, in consultation with the Office of Equity and Civil Rights as needed.

Information about halal, kosher, vegan, and vegetarian dining options may be found on the [UMBC Dining Services](#) website.

VII. EMPLOYMENT ACCOMMODATIONS

Employees requesting a religious accommodation, adjustment or modification to rules, policies, or practices due to a conflict between their sincerely held religious beliefs and their work should make the request directly to their supervisor. The request may be made verbally, submitted using the ECR Request for Faith-Based or Religious Accommodation Form, or otherwise submitted in writing. The request at a minimum must include sufficient information to make the University aware that there exists a conflict between the employee's religious practice, observance or sincerely held belief and a policy, procedure, practice or other job-related requirement. The University may require an employee to provide supporting documentation that may be reasonably needed to evaluate the employee's accommodation request.

Requests should be made in advance and as early as possible to provide adequate notice and the opportunity for the supervisor to engage in an interactive process with the employee and the Office of Equity and Civil Rights to determine whether and how the request can be granted, or what alternative arrangements can be made. Requests will not be granted retroactively.

The supervisor, in consultation with the Office of Equity and Civil Rights, will determine and communicate to the employee, in writing, whether and how the request may be granted, or what alternative accommodation can be provided.

A requested employment accommodation will not be provided if it results in a fundamental alteration to the essential job functions or creates a de minimis hardship. Examples of employment accommodation that can be provided for an employee's sincerely-held religious belief or practice include but are not limited to work schedule changes/adjustments, exceptions to any dress or grooming codes, allowing the use of leave (paid or unpaid), or allowing breaks for prayer or religious practices.

An employee who disagrees with a supervisor's decision as it relates to the provision of an accommodation may file a complaint with the Office of Equity and Civil Rights.

VIII. FAITH-BASED AND RELIGIOUS CAMPUS RESOURCES

- A. The Gathering Space for Spiritual Well-Being (The Gathering Space) comprises one main reservable space, office space for spiritual advising, two foot-washing rooms, a kitchenette, and a lounge area. It is connected to other conference rooms in the Center for Well-Being. Students, staff, faculty, and Religious Council members from all religious and spiritual backgrounds use the space to meet, worship, discuss, and celebrate their individual and/or collective faiths and philosophical worldviews.
- B. The University has several designated reflection, prayer, and meditation spaces on campus to accommodate faith-based or religious practices, prayer, meditation, and reflection. These spaces may be reserved and used for faith-based or religious practices in accordance with applicable University policies related to the use of facilities.
- C. The University has a host of religious and belief student organizations.
- D. The UMBC Religious Council is comprised of local religious and spiritual leaders (both ordained and lay, some volunteer and others supported by outside organizations) who help provide support, organization, and a forum to better serve students and the campus community at large. Representing various backgrounds and experiences, Religious Council members often provide secondary support to religion and belief student organizations, pastoral care and counseling, and spiritual guidance and model the value of relationships in promoting pluralism and cooperation. Collectively, the Religious Council strives to create and support a safe and inviting environment, where spiritual exploration is encouraged and spaces for dialogue and relationships are fostered.

IX. RELIGIOUS DISCRIMINATION AND HARASSMENT

Failure to provide a reasonable accommodation in accordance with this Policy may constitute discrimination under the UMBC Discrimination and Equal Opportunity Policy.

Any student, faculty, or staff who believes their sincerely-held faith-based or religious beliefs or practices are not being accommodated or who has experienced discrimination or harassment on the basis of religion may report a violation of this Policy to the University's Office of Equity and Civil Rights by filing an online report, calling 410-455-1717, or by emailing ecr@umbc.edu.

X. CONTACTS

Any general questions about this University Policy should be directed to the Office of Equity and Civil Rights at 410-455-1717; ecr@umbc.edu.

XI. APPROVAL AND PROCEDURES

XII. DOCUMENTATION: ECR Request for Faith-Based or Religious Accommodation Form

IX. RESTRICTIONS AND EXCLUSIONS: None

X. RELATED ADMINISTRATIVE POLICIES AND PROCEDURES:

[USM Policy III-5.10 Policy Concerning the Scheduling of Academic Assignments on Dates of Religious Observance; Campus Space for Faith-Based or Religious Practices](#)

[UMBC Discrimination and Equal Opportunity Policy](#)

Administrator Use Only

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