

SOUTHWESTERN

LAW SCHOOL Los Angeles, CA

Religious and Cultural Observances Policy

Administrative policy approved May 11, 2022. Effective as of June 1, 2022.

Revision history: This policy supersedes the Student Religious Observance Policy in the 2021–22 Student Handbook; this policy applies to students and employees; technical updates were made in September 2024; revised in September 2026 to clarify religious and cultural accommodation provisions and improve coordination with related policies.

Related policies: Attendance Policy; Religious Accommodation Policy for Employees and Job Applicants; Floating Holidays Policy

Scheduled Review Date: July 2028 (Administrative Services Office and President & Dean)

A. Statement of Principles

Southwestern Law School values and respects diversity, including diversity of religious and cultural expression. Southwestern's community includes individuals from myriad religions and cultures. For many individuals, religious practice is an important element of personal identity, intellectual development, and psychological well-being; in many situations, religious practice is inseparable from cultural identity. The Southwestern community also includes individuals who do not adhere to any religion. To be inclusive and give all individuals equal footing, Southwestern will no longer designate no-class days for religious holidays. In addition, Southwestern will include only designated holidays recognized by the federal or California state government on academic calendars and employee holiday calendars.

Southwestern recognizes that on religious and cultural holidays, certain members of the Southwestern community will observe practices that preclude them from attending to their regular duties as faculty, staff, or students. Southwestern also recognizes that federal and state laws prohibit discrimination on the basis of religious belief, observation, or practice.

Southwestern provides reasonable accommodations for religious beliefs, observances, and practices in accordance with applicable law and Southwestern policy. Southwestern also seeks to accommodate significant cultural observances when reasonably practicable and consistent with academic and operational requirements. For planning purposes under this policy, a work-restricted religious or cultural holiday is an observance during which religious or cultural beliefs or practices may restrict or preclude work, academic activities, or other regular responsibilities. Observances and practices vary among religions and cultures and among individuals within the same religion or culture. Requests for religious and cultural accommodations may extend beyond holidays and pertain to observances and practices.

It is also the policy of Southwestern to be sensitive to non-work-restricted religious and cultural holidays.

B. Scheduling Campus-Wide and Major Events

Southwestern's offices, departments, and student organizations are encouraged to avoid scheduling campus-wide or major events on work-restricted religious or cultural holidays and should be sensitive to the diverse religious and cultural commitments of the community.

For planning purposes, Southwestern recommends that members of the community consult the [University of Missouri's guide to religious holidays and dates](#). This guide identifies holidays with significant work restrictions and provides information that may assist with event and program planning. The guide is not exhaustive, and the inclusion or omission of a particular observance does not determine whether an individual may seek an accommodation under this policy.

C. Faculty Work and Classes on Work-Restricted Religious or Cultural Holidays

Faculty seeking an accommodation for a religious observance should follow the Religious Accommodation Policy for Employees and Job Applicants. Faculty seeking an adjustment related to a cultural observance should follow the cultural observance process described in that policy. In addressing the impact of an approved accommodation or adjustment on a class, faculty should consider whether they could provide asynchronous online content for the class session, trade teaching days and times with another professor in the same section, arrange for a guest speaker, or have teaching assistants run exam or review tutorials.

If a full-time faculty member is considering rescheduling the class, arrangements for the make-up class must be worked out with the Vice Dean's Office, given that rescheduling requires checking available days and times for the class meeting. Adjunct faculty members must consult with a Vice Dean before canceling or rescheduling any class.

If a class is rescheduled, the professor will record the class session and should consider whether holding the class via Zoom or other synchronous online method would be more convenient for students.

D. Course Syllabi

Faculty, as they develop their syllabi, are encouraged to consult the [University of Missouri's guide to religious holidays and dates](#) when scheduling assignments and other significant deadlines to identify potential conflicts with significant religious observances.

So that students can readily identify potential dates on which they may need to seek an accommodation for a religious or cultural observance and have sufficient time to seek an accommodation, Southwestern encourages faculty to include all assessment, examination, and other significant due dates and deadlines in the syllabus released before the start of the new semester or period, and to update the syllabus promptly with any changes.

E. Student Requests for Accommodations for Religious and Cultural Observances

The Student Services Office handles student requests for accommodations for religious and cultural observances, including holidays. Students seeking an accommodation should contact the Student Services Office as early in the semester as possible. Students should also carefully review their course syllabi early in the semester and note potential conflicts. Any accommodation for a religious or cultural observance cannot compromise or fundamentally alter the essential components, substance, or requirements of a particular course or program of study.

1. Examinations and in-class assignments

Student requests for accommodations in the examination process must be directed to the Student Services Office and made as early in the semester as possible.

For accommodations involving in-class assignments or presentations, students must contact their faculty member as early as possible. The

faculty member will then coordinate with the Student Services Office as appropriate in addressing the request.

2. Class absences

Absences for religious or cultural holidays are subject to Southwestern's Attendance Policy and count toward the maximum number of permitted absences. However, absences resulting from a student's religious or cultural observances will be given great weight in cases where a student petitions for an administrative withdrawal that results from exceeding the absence limit, especially when the student contacted the Student Services Office in advance.

F. Policy Revisions

Southwestern expressly reserves the right to change or modify any aspect of this policy at any time, with or without prior notice.