

# SOUTHWESTERN LAW SCHOOL

## L O S A N G E L E S

### Religious and Cultural Observances Policy

**Administrative policy approved May 18, 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.

**Related policies:** Student attendance policy (in Student Handbook). Southwestern will issue a Religious Accommodation Policy for Job Applicants and Employees in June 2022; Southwestern will also issue a Floating Holidays Policy in June 2022 (that will apply to full-time staff).

**Scheduled Review Date:** July 15, 2025 (Administrative Services Office and Office of Diversity Affairs, with input from the Dean’s Task Force on Equity, Inclusion & Belonging and General Counsel’s Office).

#### 1. 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 the employee holiday calendar.

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.

It is the policy of Southwestern to accommodate faculty, staff, and students who observe work-restricted religious or cultural holidays unless the accommodation would cause undue hardship or compromise or fundamentally alter a program of study. A work-restricted religious or cultural holiday is one observed by persons or groups who are required, through a set or system of religious or cultural beliefs, laws, doctrines, tenets, canons, or theology, to restrict or limit work or physical or mental activity to produce or accomplish something, toil, or labor. Observances and practices vary from culture to culture, and within and across denominations, but the definition of a work-restricted religious or cultural holiday may include academic endeavors (e.g., examinations, classroom activities, research, and out-of-classroom learning experiences). 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.

## **2. 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.

Until Southwestern develops its own calendar of religious and cultural holidays, Southwestern recommends that members of the community consult the [University of Missouri's guide to holidays and dates celebrated](#). This guide explains whether a particular holiday is work-restricted. We acknowledge that not all religious and cultural holidays are included in this guide. Instead, the guide is meant to assist with event- and program-planning and is not an exhaustive list of dates on which an individual may base a request for accommodation.

## **3. Faculty Work and Classes on Work-Restricted Religious or Cultural Holidays**

Faculty will not be required to work on their own work-restricted religious or cultural holidays. 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.

#### **4. Course Syllabi**

Faculty, as they develop their syllabi, are encouraged to consult the [University of Missouri guide](#) when scheduling assignments and setting other significant deadlines.

So that students can readily identify potential dates on which they may need to seek an accommodation for a religious or cultural holiday and have sufficient time to seek that 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.

#### **5. Student Requests for Accommodations for Religious and Cultural Observances**

The Dean of Students Office handles student requests for accommodations for religious and cultural observances, including holidays. Students seeking an accommodation should contact the Dean of Students Office as early in the semester as possible. Students should 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.

##### **a. Examinations and in-class assignments**

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

Where accommodations are sought for in-class assignments and presentations, students must contact their particular faculty member, who will then coordinate with the Dean of Students Office.

##### **b. Class absences**

Absences for religious or cultural holidays are not considered excused absences and are subject to Southwestern's general attendance policy. However, absences resulting from a student's religious or cultural observances will be given great weight in cases where a student petitions an administrative withdrawal that results from exceeding the absence limit, especially when the student contacted the Dean of Students Office in advance.