

Religious Accommodations for Students

Policy Statement: It is the policy of Appalachian School of Law to reasonably accommodate students, so that their academic requirements do not conflict with their sincerely held religious beliefs, practices, and observances.

What is a reasonable accommodation for religious purposes? A reasonable accommodation is an adjustment or change to an academic course/program that enables a student to observe a sincerely held religious belief, practice, or observance. A reasonable accommodation is not a modification or reduction in academic standards or requirements, or a modification or adjustment that results in undue hardship to ASL, its faculty and staff, or its administration.

What are examples of reasonable accommodations under this policy?

Example 1: One of the graded assignments in a course is a group presentation to the class, requiring a student to be present in class on a scheduled date. The date falls on a religious holiday observed by the student. One reasonable accommodation may be to allow the student's group to make their presentation on a different date. Another reasonable accommodation may be to allow the student's group to record their presentation and the remaining students in the group could show the video in lieu of a live presentation. The instructor's learning objectives must be taken into consideration when deciding what is a reasonable accommodation. For example, if one of the goals of the assignment is to practice making presentations in front of a live audience, the video presentation may not be a reasonable accommodation. Reasonable accommodations would not require excusing the student or the student's group from completing the group presentation requirement.

Example 2: The course attendance policy provides that class absences in excess of a certain number result in a failing grade for the course. A student incurs an absence beyond the permitted number. At least one of the absences was due to a religious observance. The instructor may not count the absence for religious observance as part of the overall number of absences.

What should a student do to request a religious accommodation? If a student believes there is a course assignment/activity or other requirement that conflicts with the student's sincerely held religious belief, practice, or observance, he or she should raise the issue with the instructor to request a reasonable accommodation. This request should be in writing (hard copy or email) and should outline the reason for the requested accommodation, the specific modification or accommodation being requested, and a statement of how the activity conflicts with the student's sincerely held religious belief, practice, or observance.

For events or assignments (including regularly-scheduled classes) that are set forth at the beginning of a semester, the student should make this request within two weeks of the first class session. For events or assignments that are scheduled later in the semester, the student should make the request as soon as possible after the conflict becomes apparent, but no less than one week prior to the event/assignment. For requesting a rescheduling of an exam/test, the student should make the request to the Office of the Registrar, with a copy to the course instructor. The Registrar and instructor will work with the student to reach a reasonable accommodation for the timing of the exam/test.

What should an instructor do upon receipt of a request for a religious accommodation by a student? The instructor should make every effort to grant a reasonable accommodation in the event of a conflict with a sincerely held religious belief, practice, or observance of a student. Generally speaking, the instructor should offer the student an alternate method of completing the course requirement or otherwise making up any work that may be missed. Instructors are not required to waive any course requirements or to reduce the rigor of a course requirement. Instructors are not required to grant any excused absences or make-up work if the student did not make the request in accordance with this policy.

Appendix F

What happens if the instructor and/or Registrar and the student do not agree on what constitutes a reasonable accommodation or on the need for an accommodation? The issue should be submitted to the Chief Academic Officer. The Chief Academic Officer of ASL shall have the final authority on decisions regarding accommodations for sincerely held religious beliefs, practices, and observances. This shall include the existence of the sincerely held religious belief, practice, or observance as well as the accommodation granted.