

Complete Policy Title:

**Policy on Academic Accommodation for  
Religious, Indigenous and Spiritual  
Observances**

Approved by:

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**[Equity and Inclusion Office](#)**

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**[Policy \(University Secretariat\)](#)**

**DISCLAIMER:** *If there is a Discrepancy between this electronic policy and the written copy held by the policy owner, the written copy prevails*

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## PREAMBLE

McMaster University (the University) strives to be welcoming and inclusive of all its members and respectful of their differences. Students, staff, and instructors come from a range of backgrounds, traditions and beliefs. The University recognizes that, on occasion, the timing of a student's religious, Indigenous, or spiritual observances and that of their academic obligations may conflict. In such cases, the University will provide reasonable academic accommodation for students that is consistent with the Ontario *Human Rights Code*, through respectful, accessible, and fair processes.

Further information on McMaster University's commitment to an inclusive community and its legal obligations can be found on the website of the Office of Human Rights & Equity Services (HRES) at: [www.hres.mcmaster.ca](http://www.hres.mcmaster.ca).

## SCOPE

This Policy applies to all students enrolled in a course or program of study as approved by the University Senate and who are seeking accommodation as a result of academic obligations that conflict with their religious, Indigenous or spiritual observances (RISO).

This Policy does not apply to the following: general course or program requirements; co-op, clinical and other experiential placements; residence; athletics; dietary restrictions; access to space; use of space; ablution; and employment matters, including teaching assistantships.

Guidance on how to pursue requests not covered under this Policy may be obtained from Faculty Offices, HRES, and/or Human Resources, or their respective websites.

## GLOSSARY

For the purposes of this Policy:

<b>Academic Obligations</b>	Evaluative Exercises, including, but not limited to, examinations, tests, labs, assignments, participation, and seminars.
<b>Accommodation</b>	The provision of Alternative Arrangements to meet Academic Obligations that uphold Essential Requirements.
<b>Alternative Arrangements</b>	The manner in which the Academic Obligations of the Student will be met.
<b>Associate/Assistant Dean</b>	One of: the Associate Dean, Assistant Dean or Program Manager of the Faculty or program in which the student is registered; one of the Associate Deans of Graduate Studies, depending on the program in which the Student is registered; the Director or Program Administrator of Arts and Science; or the Assistant Director of the Centre for Continuing Education.
<b>Essential Requirements</b>	The knowledge and skills that must be acquired and/or demonstrated in order for a Student to successfully meet the learning objectives of the course or program.

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<b>Examinations</b>	Registrar-invigilated final examinations.
<b>Faculty</b>	Depending on the program in which the Student is registered, one of:  the Faculty of Business (DeGroote School of Business), Engineering, Health Sciences <sup>1</sup> , Humanities, Science, or Social Sciences;  the School of Graduate Studies;  the Arts & Science Program; or  the Centre for Continuing Education.
<b>Observance</b>	A commemoration, tradition, or event of religious, Indigenous or spiritual significance. Please consult the Multi-faith calendar on the HRES website.
<b>Registrar</b>	Scheduling and Examinations office (Gilmour Hall, Room 114).
<b>Student</b>	An individual enrolled in a course or program of study as approved by the University Senate.

## PURPOSE

This Policy provides guidance and consistency for members of the University community in the requesting and provision of Academic Accommodation for Observances including:

- a) principles that govern decision-making;
- b) processes by which Students may request and receive Accommodation;
- c) rights and obligations of Students, administrators and instructors;
- d) dispute-resolution mechanisms available to Students.

## PRINCIPLES

The University respects and accepts the self-declaration of beliefs made by Students; however, it reserves the right to request documentation in cases where documentation may assist in the Accommodation process or where there are reasonable grounds to suggest the request is unfounded.

The University respects and accepts that the sincerely held beliefs of Students who identify with the same religion or tradition may involve different Observances.

Availing themselves of an Accommodation under this Policy does not prevent a Student from seeking other Accommodations, such as those related to a disability.

An Observance shall be interpreted to include reasonable travel and preparation time for an Observance, in-class Observance requirements, or other similar requests.

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<sup>1</sup> In the Faculty of Health Sciences, the Faculty refers to the Student's Program Office.

Students shall inform the University of their Accommodation needs, and administrators and instructors shall inform Students of their Accommodation-related decisions, in a timely way, as per this Policy.

It is the Student's responsibility to arrange a means of obtaining lecture notes and other pertinent information provided during classes missed as a result of Accommodation.

The University encourages Students to participate in discussions regarding the most appropriate Alternative Arrangements.

No unreasonable academic disadvantage shall occur as a result of exercising rights under this Policy.

## **PROCESS**

### **A) Registrar-Invigilated Examinations (For all other requests, see Section B)**

#### **Responsibilities of Students:**

Students shall complete and submit the RISO-Examination form<sup>2</sup>, in person, to the Registrar's Office as soon as possible after receiving their Examination schedule, and where possible, no later than ten working days prior to the commencement of the Examination period.

Where the Student fails to meet the stated deadline, it may not be possible for the Registrar to reschedule the Examination within the current Examination period. In such cases, the Student shall contact the Faculty if they wish to request Alternative Arrangements.

A Student who has a concern about a rescheduled Examination shall contact the Registrar in a timely way.

#### **Responsibilities of the Registrar:**

Where the RISO-Examination form is submitted at least ten working days prior to the commencement of the Examination period, the Registrar shall normally inform the Student of their rescheduled Examination(s) five working days or more prior to the beginning of the Examination period.

Where a Student fails to submit the form at least ten days prior to the commencement of the Examination period, rescheduling within the Examination period may not be possible. In such cases, the Registrar shall attempt to reschedule the Examination(s) and, if successful, shall inform the Student of their rescheduled Examination(s) in a timely way. Where rescheduling is not possible, the Registrar shall inform the Student in a timely way and refer them to their Faculty for possible Alternative Arrangements (see section B).

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<sup>2</sup> The completed RISO-Examination form shall include:

- The names and dates of all Observances in the term that, to the best of the Student's knowledge at the time of submission, may conflict with Examinations.
- The name of the instructor, course, and course code for all courses for which an accommodation is requested.

The RISO-Examination form does not ask for documentation.

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**B) For Academic Obligations (Excluding Registrar-Invigilated Examinations with the possible exception of late notice requests)**

**Responsibilities of Students:**

The Student shall submit the RISO form<sup>3</sup> to their Faculty, electronically or in person, normally within ten working days from the beginning of each term in which they are anticipating a need for Accommodation. There may be occasions where the date of an Observance is not yet confirmed or where an Observance is unanticipated. In such cases the Student is advised to contact the Faculty as soon as they become aware of the conflict to request Accommodation.

After submitting the RISO form, the Student shall receive confirmation from the Faculty office, normally within five working days. The Student may be required to develop an Accommodation plan in consultation with the Faculty office, in which case they will be contacted by the Faculty Office in a timely way.

After receiving confirmation of receipt of the RISO form from the Faculty, the Student shall contact the instructor(s) regarding the Alternative Arrangements as soon as possible and no later than five working days prior to the date on which the scheduling conflict will occur.

The Student is encouraged to discuss the Alternative Arrangements with the instructor in a timely way.

A Student who is registered with Student Accessibility Services (SAS) may self-identify on the RISO form if they would like a copy of the RISO form sent to SAS in order to assist in the co-ordination of their Alternative Arrangements.

In situations where the Observance requires the Student to leave the class temporarily, the Student shall discuss their needs with the instructor and develop a mutually-acceptable arrangement where possible.

**Responsibilities of the Faculty:**

Normally within five working days of receiving a completed RISO form, the Faculty shall send the days and/or times during which a Student anticipates a scheduling conflict between Academic Obligations and Observances to the relevant instructors, with a copy sent to the Student. If appropriate, a copy may also be sent to the Student's department, and, if the request involves a course outside the Student's Faculty, to that Faculty.

If requested by the Student, the Faculty Office may provide Alternative Arrangements in cases where, due to late notice, the Registrar has been unable to reschedule an Examination during the Examination period.

The Associate/Assistant Dean may deny an Accommodation where there are reasonable grounds to believe the request is unfounded.

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<sup>3</sup> The completed RISO form shall include:

- The names and dates of all Observances in the term that, to the best of the Student's knowledge at the time of submission, may conflict with Academic Obligations.
- The name of the instructor, course, and course code for all courses for which an accommodation is requested.

The RISO form does not ask for documentation.

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### **Responsibilities of Instructors:**

At the Student's request, the instructor shall discuss with the Student the Alternative Arrangements prior to making a determination. As soon as possible and no later than ten working days after being contacted by the Student, the instructor shall inform the Student of the Alternative Arrangements.

### **ALTERNATIVE ARRANGEMENTS**

Instructors have a responsibility to provide Alternative Arrangements in a way that is consistent with the principles in this Policy, and, where practical, to consult with a Student who chooses to discuss the most appropriate Alternative Arrangements.

Alternative Arrangements may include:

- a) rescheduling an Academic Obligation;
- b) providing an alternative Academic Obligation;
- c) re-weighting, providing that no one component of the course becomes worth 75% of the final grade or greater;
- d) extending a deadline.

Alternative Arrangements that are discouraged and should be considered only in consultation with the Student and, if appropriate, the Chair of the department, are as follows:

- e) requiring the Student to submit an Academic Obligation prior to the deadline;
- f) requiring the Student to have someone else submit their Academic Obligation on their behalf;
- g) re-weighting where one component of the grade becomes worth 75% of the final grade or greater.

### **RECORD-KEEPING**

The Faculty shall forward the completed RISO form to the Registrar and may keep a copy.

Information pertaining to a Student's Observance shall be held in strict confidence and shall not be shared outside the Registrar or Faculty office without consent. If requested by the Student, the information pertaining to an Observance shall be removed from a Student's file when they have completed their degree requirements and are cleared to graduate.

### **DISPUTE RESOLUTION**

At any point during the process, a Student or instructor may seek informal advice or assistance from HRES.

In addition to HRES, any member of the University community may consult the University Secretariat Office and/or the Ombuds Office for advice or guidance with regards to the application of this Policy.

When a Student is not satisfied with the Alternative Arrangements determined by the instructor, the Student shall contact the instructor to discuss the matter.

If the Student is still not satisfied, the Student may request the intervention of their Associate/Assistant Dean.

The Associate/Assistant Dean may attempt to settle the matter, and, if unsuccessful, shall render a decision.

With the exception of process matters, decisions of the Associate Dean to deny Accommodation may not be appealed under the Student Appeal Procedures.

A Student seeking to challenge a decision or action that may be a violation of their Human Rights may do so under the University's *Policy on Discrimination, Harassment & Sexual Harassment: Prevention and Response*. Anyone with questions or concerns regarding Human Rights is advised to contact HRES.