

FAQ for exams accommodation on the basis of religious observance:

Canada is understood to be a secular society but what does this mean? The Ontario Human Rights Commission reminds us that “Canadian courts have ... made clear that the Canadian legal understanding of secular remains “open” and “inclusive” of religion, which means accommodating, and neither favoring nor disadvantaging or excluding, religion in the public sphere, in keeping with the *Canadian Charter of Rights* and the *Ontario Human Rights Code*.

Queen’s University (like all publicly funded institutions) then has a duty under the Ontario Human Rights Code to provide accommodation for students, staff and faculty where their religious observances create a conflict with their work/ study schedule. Also, the school calendar should not be seen to favor a particular religion.

1) Q: What constitutes a religious observance?

A: Whatever Holy Days are observed by a member of a particular faith eg: Weekly Sabbath, or festivals such as Easter, Ramadan, Passover, Divali, etc. If a member of a particular faith would be expected not to work on the date of a particular observance/Sabbath, and if the observance conflicts with a work or academic requirement, that person would be entitled to request religious accommodation.

2) Q: Will an exam be re-scheduled to a date of my choosing?

A: No. The exam will be re-scheduled at the earliest possible date, following the original scheduled exam, agreeable to the University exams office in consultation with the University Chaplain's office. Rescheduled exams cannot be held earlier than the original schedule date unless the observance falls on the last day of exams. Exam rescheduling is not intended to create unnecessary hardship or inequality for students. However, given the complex arrangements involved in scheduling exams, students may find the re-schedule date less ideal than they may have hoped. The University's obligation is to provide an appropriate exam accommodation so as long as the offered date does not create an "Official exam conflict" (that is three consecutive exams in 24 hours, containing one 9 am, one 2 pm and one 7 pm start time). The new date, while appropriate, may not be the student's preferred date.

3) Q: Will I be allowed extra time for travel in order to observe the religious observance with my family?

A: Typically, no. The University has a duty to provide accommodation for only those dates of religious observance that directly conflict with a student's exams. Students who request time with family as part of a religious accommodation will be required to demonstrate that this is not merely a preference and that they are required to meet a familial obligation that is clearly essential to the religious observance.

4) Q: How is my membership in a religious community vetted?

A: To be frank, it is not. Under human rights legislation, a person need only demonstrate sincerity of belief in order to have their faith-based accommodation needs considered. Religious accommodations, then, are essentially granted on an honor system. We encourage students to ask only for accommodations that are legitimate based on their current commitment to practicing their religion. For example: if you have an exam scheduled for Saturday or Sunday, we expect that you will only request the accommodation if you are, in fact, a regular Sabbath Keeper. If you would normally study or do other work on the given day, there should be no barrier to you writing a scheduled exam on that day as well. Remember that the re-scheduling of exams, like other forms of accommodation, is intended to eliminate barriers, not to give students an advantage. Exams will not necessarily be rescheduled to a date/time that the student prefers. The University expects students to make requests for religious accommodation **in good faith**.