

AC836: Academic Accommodation for Religious, Indigenous and Spiritual Observances

Policy Title:	Academic Accommodations for Religious, Indigenous and Spiritual Observances
Policy Number:	AC836
Owner:	Student Affairs
Approved by:	College Executive Team
Effective Date:	September 2021
Reference:	Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (2005), Ontario Human Rights Code (1990), Ontario Human Rights Commission’s Guidelines on Accessible Education, (2004)

Links to Other Policy:

St. Lawrence College is committed to making our resources usable by all people, whatever their abilities or disabilities. This document will be made available in alternative format upon request.

BACKGROUND

Definitions:

Religion or Creed	Defined as a professed system and confession of faith that governs one’s conduct and practices, including both beliefs and observances or worship. A belief in a God or gods, or a single supreme being or deity is not a requisite
Accommodation	An adaptation or adjustment made to enable a person to fulfill religious obligations unless to do so would create an undue hardship for the College.
Observance	A commemoration, tradition or event of religious, Indigenous or spiritual significance.

Purpose:

At St. Lawrence College we believe honesty, inclusivity and accountability are the pathways to success. As our communities evolve, we look to create a sense of Belonging for our students, team, and partners. We celebrate diversity, respect our differences, value contributions, and foster an environment where everyone feels they can participate without discrimination in our College community.

This policy provides guidance and consistency for members of the St. Lawrence College community in the requesting and provision of Academic Accommodation for Religious, Indigenous and Spiritual Observances.

Scope:

This Policy applies to all students enrolled in a course or program of study at St. Lawrence College and are seeking accommodation as a result of a conflict between their academic obligations and their religious, Indigenous or spiritual observances.

This Policy does not apply to clinical and other experiential placements; the relevant accommodation policy of the hosting agency / institution shall apply.

POLICY STATEMENTS

1. St. Lawrence College supports an inclusive teaching and learning environment that respects and values the diversity of our students. In addition, St. Lawrence College, in agreement with and in support of the Ontario Human Rights Code, is committed to respecting the religious, Indigenous and spiritual observances of all members of the College Community and to making accommodations for observances of special significance to adherents.
2. The College respects and accepts in good faith 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.
3. The College respects and accepts that the sincerely held beliefs of students who identify with the same religion or tradition may involve different Observances.
4. Students must seek accommodation for religious, Indigenous and spiritual observances by submitting to Faculty an Accommodation for Observance request form, and per the procedural requirements associated with this Policy, within the first two weeks of the semester and prior to the date of assessment that falls on the date(s) of the observance. It is the responsibility of Faculty to clearly state the students' obligation in this regard in course outlines / learning plans.
5. Accommodation exceptions based on extenuating circumstances or matters impacting health and safety must be vetted through Student Wellness and Accessibility and approved by the Program Associate Dean / Dean.
6. Any student who is unable to attend classes or participate in any examination, study or work requirement on some particular day or days as a result of an accommodation under this Policy must be given the opportunity to make up the work that was missed or to do alternative work that is intrinsically equitable and no more difficult than the original exam or assignment; the principle of academic integrity will be upheld in any accommodation.

7. 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 any Accommodation provided under this Policy.
8. No unreasonable academic disadvantage shall occur for a student as a result of exercising their rights under this Policy.
9. In any case where a mutually agreed upon accommodation cannot be reached between a student and Faculty member, students have the right to have Faculty decisions reviewed by their Associate Dean / Dean. If after consultation with their Associate Dean / Dean, a mutually agreeable accommodation is not reached, students may launch an appeal through the College’s complaint [process](#).
10. To assist members of the College community in meeting our obligations and providing reasonable accommodation under this policy, the College shall provide access to an interfaith calendar found [here](#). The list of observance days listed on the calendar is not meant to be exhaustive and other requests for accommodations should be duly considered under this policy.

MONITORING

All areas of the College are accountable for ensuring that the principles of accessibility and equity outlined in this policy are upheld. However, it is the responsibility of the Vice-President of Student Affairs to ensure that this policy is reviewed every three years, and more often if required, to ensure adherence to developing law.

NEXT POLICY REVISION DATE

September, 2024

SPECIFIC LINKS

Accommodation for Observance Student Request Form – [here](#)

APPENDIX A AND ATTACHMENTS

Appendix to Policy - Academic Accommodation for Religious, Indigenous and Spiritual Observances Procedure

St. Lawrence College will accept all requests for accommodation of religious, Indigenous and spiritual observances (“Observances”) as bona-fide, unless there is specific evidence to indicate an abuse of the policy. The College’s duty to accommodate will be determined on a case-by-case basis.

Personal information concerning a student's creed cannot be released without the prior written consent of the individual. Where the accommodation process requires the release of confidential information to a third party, the third party and any person delegated by that third party, will be required to ensure that confidentiality is protected, that the information obtained is kept in a secure location, and is used solely for the purpose for which it was provided.

All members of the College community are responsible for providing support and commitment to this policy and its objectives and principles and ensuring both Policy compliance and compliance with the statutory requirements of the Ontario Human Rights Code.

1. Faculty will accept Accommodations for Observances in good faith, unless there is specific evidence to indicate an abuse of the policy. Faculty will make every reasonable effort to provide the Accommodation as requested unless to do so would create an undue hardship under the OHRC. Faculty must respond to requests within two weeks of the request and at least one week prior to the date of the Observance.
2. Only those Observance Accommodations having exceptional or extenuating circumstances, and/or those creating potential to create a health and safety risk, will be vetted through Student Wellness & Accessibility. In those instances, Faculty will direct the student to Student Wellness & Accessibility to support the Accommodation. All others will be coordinated directly between student and Faculty.
3. If, after reviewing the Course Outline details for a course, a student determines that there is a conflict between an academic activity and their Observance, they will complete the "Accommodation for Observance" form and submit it to Faculty. A separate form must be submitted for each course within the first two weeks of the term if possible or at a minimum within two weeks of the conflict.

If there is a required absence occurring within the first two weeks of classes or the dates are not known well in advance as they are linked to other conditions, this form should be submitted with as much lead time as is possible in advance of the required absence. Students should describe, in as much detail as possible, the requirements of their observance and a description of the requested accommodation.

4. Student and Faculty will confer to reach an agreement on a reasonable means to address the Accommodation. Both parties must sign and date the completed agreement, and both parties will retain a copy of the form for a minimum of one semester after the term within which it was filed. The institution is responsible to be able to show that an Accommodation request has been considered meaningfully, and that multiple options were explored in determining the most appropriate accommodation to be granted.

5. If Faculty has any questions regarding the Observance indicated by the student, they are asked to reference the inter-faith calendar found [here](#) for relevant dates associated with the Observance identified. The calendar is not exhaustive of all possible Observances.
6. When making the alternative arrangements (e.g., rescheduling an examination), Faculty must ensure that the academic obligation can be met as soon as possible before the end of the semester, and that it is conducted equitably and in a suitable environment.
7. If a student does not feel their Accommodation has been dealt with appropriately, they may take the matter forward to the Dean or Associate Dean of the School, within five (5) days of receipt of the Student Request Form (attached) from the Faculty. If after consultation with their Associate Dean / Dean, a mutually agreeable accommodation is not reached, students may launch an appeal through the College's complaint [process](#).
8. If a student has not received a response from the Faculty within the first three (3) weeks of classes, they may also refer this to the Dean or Associate Dean of the School.
9. The student's signature on the Accommodation for Observance form attests to the fact that the student is submitting a bona fide claim. Any misrepresentation under this Policy may be subject to the Student Code of Conduct Policy.

Examples of Accommodation Requests

- Absence from class or placement
- Deferral of an assessment or assignment
- Absence from scheduled exams with a deferral
- Following a specific dress code
- Temporary absence from class or placement for daily prayers, fasting or breaking a fast or religious observance
- Absence and/or deferral of other required activities outlined in a course syllabus