Religious and Spiritual Observance Procedure

Section 1 - Summary

(1) This Procedure describes the process for enabling all students and staff to meet their obligations or needs in relation to religious and spiritual observance where practicable, including provision of religious or spiritual observance space and multi-faith chaplains.

Section 2 - Scope

(2) All students and staff.

Section 3 - Policy

(3) See Religious and Spiritual Observance Policy.

Section 4 - Procedures

Part A - Summary of Roles and Responsibilities

Roles	Responsibilities
Director, Student Equity, Safety and Wellbeing Services	Receives, considers and determines requests to use a VU room for religious or spiritual observance purposes.

Part B - Procedures

Release for Religious or Spiritual Observance

(4) Where a student or staff member is required to undertake religious or spiritual observance activities during VU's operating hours, they may request to be released from their duties or excused from class attendance or study requirements in consultation with their manager or Course Chair.

a. In the case of students, and where it is reasonable, VU accommodates these religious needs through measures such as flexibility in the provision of learning materials, assessments and access to facilities. Students should follow the Alternate Examination process should they require flexibility in exam dates or times.
b. In the case of staff, there is access to flexible working arrangements and/or leave entitlements as appropriate.
    i. The provision of Clause 49 of the Victoria University Enterprise Agreement 2025 apply to academic and general staff who are required to take specified days of leave for religious and cultural observance.
        - A staff member may nominate, on an annual basis, specific days which that staff member wishes to take as religious and/or cultural leave, provided that:

- Subject to normal operating requirements, VU will not unreasonably refuse the grant of that leave as unpaid leave;
- A staff member may be required to provide reasonable evidence, such as a statutory declaration, in support of their request for religious and/or cultural leave.

- Applications from staff members who are members of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in respect of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture or religion will be dealt with under Clause 62 of of the Victoria University Enterprise Agreement 2025.
  - Staff members who identify and are accepted as members of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander communities will be entitled to paid leave up to a maximum of five working days, and leave without pay up to a maximum of ten working days, per calendar year for the purpose of fulfilling ceremonial obligations. Such obligations may be 'traditional' or 'urban' in nature and may include initiation, birthing and naming, funerals, smoking or cleansing and sacred site or land ceremonies.
  - Special paid leave may be approved by VU, up to a maximum of five days per calendar year, for staff members who are members of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander communities to prepare for or attend community organisation business, National Aboriginal and Islander Day Observation Committee (NAIDOC) Week functions, or other relevant cultural events.
  - A staff member may elect to use annual leave in lieu of any unpaid leave granted in accordance with this clause.

ii. Clauses 44 of the Victoria University Vocational Teacher Enterprise Agreement 2025 provides for Ceremonial/Cultural leave.

Use of University Facilities

(5) While all Prayer Rooms operate on a drop-in basis, VU will also consider requests from students and staff to use a VU room for religious or spiritual observance purposes. This may include a dedicated prayer room or other facility that can be used by the group in question. In considering such requests the following factors will be taken into account:

a. Number of students and staff who would use the room.
b. The need for a discrete facility that cannot be shared with others.
c. The amount of time that such a facility would be used during University operating hours.
d. The accessibility of other appropriate facilities in the community.
e. Whether shared use arrangements are possible.
f. Whether special provisions are required which would involve significant cost to the University.

(6) Whenever possible, chaplains will be provided a confidential space when providing support to students.

(7) Room bookings can be made via the Facilities website.

Appointment of Chaplains

(8) VU will consider applications from religious and spiritual groups operating within VU for the appointment of chaplains to assist in religious and spiritual observance.

(9) The appointment of such chaplains will be considered by the Director, Student Equity, Safety and Wellbeing Services who will make recommendations to the Chief Student Officer who will confirm appointments.

(10) Where approval is given for a chaplain to operate within VU, they will operate within VU's policies and procedures. The appointment will be subject to regular review.

This policy document may be varied, withdrawn or replaced at any time. Printed copies, or part thereof, are regarded as uncontrolled and should not be relied upon as the current version. It is the responsibility of the individual reading this document to always refer to Victoria University's Policy Library for the latest version.

(11) Requests for the appointment of chaplains must be made in writing to the Director, Student Equity, Safety and Wellbeing Services and should include materials and vetting as per the Director, Student Equity, Safety and Wellbeing Services' request.

(12) Chaplains operate on a volunteer basis and are to be vetted/endorsed by the Council for Chaplains in Tertiary Institutions.

(13) The Chief Student Officer will make the final decision on appointments.

Spiritual Ceremonies on Campus

(14) When requesting an external space on campus for spiritual ceremonies, i.e. Indigenous smoking ceremonies, the Chief Infrastructure Officer or nominee is to be approached formally in writing by the Executive Director, Moondani Balluk or nominee for authorisation.

Section 5 - HESF/ASQA/ESOS Alignment

(15) HESF: Standard 2.2 Diversity and Equity; Standard 2.3 Wellbeing and Safety

(16) Outcome Standards for NVR Registered Training Organisations 2025: Standard 2.5 Diversity and Inclusion.

(17) ESOS National Code of Practice 2018: Standard 6 Overseas Student Support Services

Section 6 - Definitions

(18) Staff

(19) Student

(20) Chaplain

(21) Prayer Room

(22) Aboriginal

Status and Details

Status	Current
Effective Date	15th December 2021
Review Date	15th December 2024
Approval Authority	Vice-Chancellor
Approval Date	15th December 2021
Expiry Date	Not Applicable
Accountable Officer	Lisa Line Deputy Vice-Chancellor Enterprise and Digital Lisa.Line@vu.edu.au
Responsible Officer	Darrel Caufield Chief Student Officer darrel.caulfield@vu.edu.au
Enquiries Contact	Tessa Benson Director, Student Equity, Safety and Wellbeing Services +61 3 9919 7817

Glossary Terms and Definitions

"Student" - - a person enrolled at the University in a course leading to a degree, diploma, certificate, licence or other award; or - a person whose study performance is being or is to be assessed by the University, notwithstanding that such a person is not enrolled at the University in a course leading to a degree, diploma, certificate, licence or other award. (The above definition of student is from section 3 of the Victoria University Act 2010 and Council Resolution C2010 - 070).

"Staff" - Staff means: - all employees of the University, on all domestic and offshore locations, including student residences, and while engaged in all work-related activities such as conferences and work-sponsored social occasions; - all contractors and consultants performing work on University sites or on behalf of the University; - visiting academics, honorary, adjunct and exchange staff; - the Council and its committees; and - any volunteer in the workplace and study environment.

"Chaplain" - A Chaplain is a recognised representative of a religious or spiritual group, which may include an Indigenous Australian Elder, who provides religious or spiritual support to students and staff of the University.

"Prayer Room" - A room set aside for prayer or reflection.

"Aboriginal" - The use of the word Aboriginal throughout VU Policy and Procedure refers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people connected to and/or residing in South East Australia.

This policy document may be varied, withdrawn or replaced at any time. Printed copies, or part thereof, are regarded as uncontrolled and should not be relied upon as the current version. It is the responsibility of the individual reading this document to always refer to Victoria University's Policy Library for the latest version.