

Religious and Spiritual Observance Policy

Section 1 - Summary

(1) This Policy states Victoria University's (VU) commitment to respecting and accommodating the religious and spiritual beliefs and practices of members of VU's community, including provision of religious or spiritual observance space and multi-faith chaplains.

Section 2 - Accountability

Key Decision-making powers under the Policy (if applicable)

(Delegated) Power	Role
Final decision on written requests for appointment of multi-faith Chaplains.	Director, Student Services
Final decision on written requests for applications to use a VU room for religious or spiritual observance purposes.	Director, Student Services

Section 3 - HESF/ASQA/ESOS Alignment

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

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

Section 4 - Scope

(4) All students and staff.

Section 5 - Definitions

(5) Staff

(6) Student

(7) Chaplain

(8) Prayer Room

(9) Aboriginal

Section 6 - Policy Statement

(10) VU is committed to:

- a. Opportunity and success for any student from any background.
- b. Being an inclusive university for our diverse community of students.
- c. Respecting the religious and spiritual beliefs and practices of members of the University community.
- d. Academic excellence and providing high quality, engaging career-based tertiary education at all levels of vocational and higher education.

(11) VU acknowledges that religious or spiritual observances of students may conflict with their academic obligations and religious or spiritual observances of staff may conflict with their employment obligations. This could potentially lead to a disadvantage if an accommodation is not arranged.

(12) Where reasonable, accommodation could take the form of:

- a. Students and Staff: release from duties or excused from class attendance or study requirements.
- b. Students: flexibility in the provision of learning materials, assessments and access to facilities.
- c. Staff: flexible working arrangements and/or leave entitlements as appropriate.
 - i. The provision of Clause 49 of the [Victoria University Enterprise Agreement 2019](#) applies 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, the University 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 50 of the [Victoria University Enterprise Agreement 2019](#).
 - 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 42 and 43 of the [Victoria University Vocational Teacher Enterprise Agreement 2019](#) provides for Ceremonial/Cultural leave.

(13) VU is committed to taking all practical steps to support and enable all students and staff to meet their obligations or needs in relation to their religious and spiritual observance, including:

- a. Considering written requests from students and staff to use a VU room for religious or spiritual observance

purposes;

- b. Provision of spiritual support for students and staff by the appointment of chaplains. The [Council for Chaplains in Tertiary Institutions](#) describes the work of a [university chaplain](#).

(14) Please see the [Religious and Spiritual Observance Procedure](#) for further information.

Section 7 - Procedures

(15) [Religious and Spiritual Observance Procedure](#)

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	Michelle Gillespie Chief Student Officer 9919 5106
Enquiries Contact	Heather Marsh Director, Student Equity, Safety and Wellbeing Services 9919 5178

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.