

Policies and Procedures

Religion and Belief Policy

Policy Number: 1.6.2.39

Responsible Officer: DVC (LTSS)

Policy Editor/Contact: GROUP MANAGER CAMPUS LIFE / USP CHAPLAIN

Approving Authority: THE SENATE

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1 Purpose

The University of The South Pacific is a diverse community of people many of whom have religious and other beliefs. As part of its commitment to equality and diversity and to creating a tolerant and inclusive community, the University recognises it is important that all are treated with equal dignity and respect, which includes respect for religious or other beliefs.

2 Objective

The University is concerned with permitting and facilitating the free practice of religion by its staff and students on its numerous Campuses and Centres. This policy details the ways in which the University demonstrates respect for religious and other faith based beliefs. This policy also covers non-belief. The University recognises the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. The University does not seek to control or restrict religious activity but rather to provide a means, as described below, for its expression.

However, people while giving expression to their belief individually or in association should be sensitive in seeking to spread their religious belief and avoid any action, which suggests coercion, dishonest or unworthy persuasion. Employees and students are not to engage in proselytising while on University property. The right to manifest beliefs is qualified by the need to protect the rights and freedoms of others.

3 Policy

- 3.1 The right to religious freedom means that staff and students should not be forced to act against their convictions nor restrained from acting in accordance with their convictions in religious matters in private or in public or in association with others. This right to religious freedom is given recognition through this policy.

It is recognised that staff and students who celebrate a particular faith will seek to give external expression to their faith. The University does not seek to control or restrict religious activity but rather to provide a means, as described below, for its expression.

However, people while giving expression to their belief individually or in association should be sensitive in seeking to spread their religious belief and avoid any action, which suggests coercion, dishonest or unworthy persuasion. Such a manner of acting must be considered an infringement of the freedom provided and an infringement of the rights of others. Employees and students are not to engage in proselytising while on University property.

It is expected that everyone within the University community will adhere to this policy and behave in ways that are sensitive to and respectful of others religious or other faith-based belief and the ways in which faith is demonstrated or practised. This includes approved visitors to any of the University campuses, centres and halls of residence.

All members of the University community have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. However, if beliefs are promoted in a way that impinges on the rights and freedoms of others, this may result in disciplinary action.

This Policy aims to ensure equal and fair treatment for everyone, of any religion or none. It is based on the principle that people have the right to their own belief system but not to engage in activities or acts which result in the destruction of the rights of others.

3.2 Access to University Facilities

The University will take every reasonable effort to accommodate requests for facilities by approved religious groups by the University Chaplain, such as quiet rooms, subject to space and other constraints. Where it is not possible to accommodate requests, reasons will be given and every effort will be made to seek alternatives, which may include access to local community facilities. The University is home to a Chaplaincy at Laucala Campus that promotes friendly relations between different religions and faith traditions. The University does not allow open proselytising.

3.3 Space Booking

All religious faith- based organizations which are wishing to have access to and use USP facilities and hold religious activities on any campus of USP must be registered and approved annually. Approved Religious Groups will be granted access to closed USP Rooms (where possible) to meet with their members during each semester.

Access to and the use of USP facilities cannot be used by religious organizations with the expressed intent to ‘convert’ non-members to their religion, wander campus and have religious conversations with non-members or have open religious activities at food courts and study bures or be part of orientation and course advising week activities at the beginning of a semester.

In booking rooms for religious purposes, a group may only book for a maximum of two (2) hours on the day only. Submissions may be made to the Chaplain for very special and one-off, cases, where it may be necessary to book the room for the little longer and where this will not conflict with any normal use of the room by the University. The Chaplain may also need to limit the number of days requested within the week, should the requests cause difficulty with rooms and university schedules. University facilities may only be booked within the periods of the official academic teaching weeks of the semesters (Weeks 1- 14).

With the approval of Campus Life Manager or Campus Directors open spaces on University Campuses and Centres maybe used for combined services and interfaith religious activities such as the observance of a religious holiday.

3.4 Time off

All staff, regardless of their religious belief or non-belief are required to work in accordance with the contract. Staff members may request to take annual paid leave from their leave entitlement or other leave to participate in their religious celebrations, festivals or ceremonies. To assist in planning and maximising the opportunity for time off to be granted, people should, where possible, make leave requests reasonably in advance of requiring such time off.

Time off can normally be accommodated using annual leave, time off in lieu or exceptionally unpaid leave, especially where the leave is requested for a pilgrimage or to attend ceremonies related to births, weddings or deaths where relatives live at some distance.

Students that take time off to participate in their religious festivals will be expected to make up any missed learning opportunities.

3.3 Duties

The University engages in many activities and research projects which in some circumstances an individual may morally object to on the grounds of their religious or other belief. The University accepts that such situations may arise in such a diverse and international community. Where such a situation arises and an individual is required as part of their duties where they are a member of staff, or in their studies for students, to undertake activities that they object to on the grounds of religious or other belief, they should inform their manager or tutor of this.

3.4 Complaints

Students who wish to make a complaint under this Policy should refer to and follow the USP Student Grievance Policy. Staff wishing to make a complaint should refer to and follow the USP Staff Grievance Policy (Currently under Development).

4 Application of policy

This policy applies to all Campuses and Centres of The University of The South Pacific.

5 Definitions

Word/Term	Definition
Approved Religious Groups	Religious Groups approved yearly by the University Chaplain
Proselytising	to convert or attempt to convert as a proselyte; recruit
USP Campuses/ Centres	All USP Campuses and Centres across the Pacific; These are considered as “ Gated Communities” and Not Public Space
USP Chaplain	The term Chaplain does not necessarily refer to any particular faith

6 Statutory Rights

The Constitution of the Republic of Fiji (Chapter 2: 22 Sections 1, 2 and 3 a) ensures all Fijians have the following rights:

- (a) *Every person has the right, either individually or in community with others, in private or in public, to manifest and practise their religion or belief in worship, observance, practice or teaching; and*
- (b) *Every person has the right not to be compelled to act in any manner that is contrary to the person's religion or belief;*

7 Roles and Responsibilities

Role/Office	Responsibility
USP Chaplain # The term Chaplain does not necessarily refer to any particular faith	To approve and register religious groups
Group Manager Campus Life	To ensure compliance of approved religious Groups on Laucala Campus
Campus Directors	To ensure compliance of approved religious Groups on their Campus
Deputy Vice Chancellor LTSS	To ensure overall compliance with this Policy and to make decisions on the banning of individuals or religious groups that contravenes this policy

8 Related Documents

University policies, procedures and schedules

- [University Discipline Ordinance and Regulations for Students Handbook.](#)
- [Leave Overview Policy](#)
- [Space Management Policy](#)
- Student Grievance Policy
- [University Discipline Ordinance and Regulations for Students Handbook.](#)
- USP Registration of Religious Groups and regulations for access to and the Use of USP Facilities for Religious Purposes

Other Documents - Reference documents:

- Cook Islands Constitution
- [Constitution of the Republic of Fiji](#)
- Constitution of Kiribati
- Constitution of the Republic of the Marshall Islands
- Constitution of Nauru
- The Constitution of the Independent State of Samoa
- The Constitution of Tokelau
- Constitution of Tonga
- Constitution of Tuvalu
- Constitution of the Republic of Vanuatu
- University of Glasgow Policy on Religion or Belief
- University of York Policy on Religion, Belief and Non Belief for Students
- The University of Southampton Policy Religion and belief policy

Version Control

#	Effective Date	Authored by	Amendment description
1	16 November 2016	Group Manager Campus Life	NA