

Ethical Framework for Religious and Spiritual Life at University of Chicago

INTRODUCTION

The ethical framework provides the basis for the conduct of religious business in relation to students at the University of Chicago, with the goal that such business be conducted ethically and with transparency of purpose.

Religious advisors, their staff, and student leaders of recognized student organizations with a religious or spiritual purpose (including student organizations which have an ethnic or cultural focus linked to a religious tradition) are expected to abide by the ethical framework, and to consult with Spiritual Life in the event of questions or concerns.

ETHICAL FRAMEWORK FOR RELIGIOUS ADVISORS, THEIR STAFF, AND STUDENT LEADERS OF RELIGIOUS AND SPIRITUAL STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS

1. We engage in our activities in a manner in keeping with the essential mission of the University of Chicago—enriching the world through the power of ideas. It is characteristic of the University that all that is done here is grounded in rigorous inquiry and fearless scholarship. We invite scrutiny of all ideas and beliefs, and welcome questions of every kind from those who choose to engage with us—including questions, which may challenge particular religious tenets or behaviors. There are no questions that are considered ‘out of bounds.’
2. We affirm that all students are welcome at all events, while recognizing that certain religious requirements may apply with regard to qualifications for religious leadership and for participation in certain rituals.
3. We recognize that students freely choose to join or leave a group, without pressure or coercion of any kind. When they (or other members of the University community) request no further contact, we respect their choice and remove them from mailing lists, electronic and otherwise. We do not expect students to engage in any activity or behavior which compromises their academic standing, removes them from campus without their full consent, places undue financial pressure upon them, or exploits any possible vulnerability (for example, providing services to international students with no previous experience of living in the US who are not already affiliated with the tradition providing the services).
4. We respect the University’s regulations with regard to publicity and posting. We identify our religious affiliation or purpose clearly and with integrity on all written and electronic publicity. We honor the fact that residence halls and dining areas are students’ private space. We do not canvass or randomly approach students, in person or with literature, in residence halls and dining areas. We understand that any religious activities or rituals, which may take place in such areas, are done only in space booked for private use for that purpose.
5. We acknowledge that certain student concerns are more appropriately addressed by professionals at the Student Health and Counseling Services (SHCS) than by religious leaders without formal qualifications or training in psychological counseling. We commit ourselves to referring students to SHCS for consultation in matters where religious strictures or norms may conflict with psychological standards of care as defined by the American Psychological Association (for example, with regard to sexual or gender identity).

6. We ensure that Spiritual Life has a current list of all representatives of our traditions who come into regular contact with students at our invitation or under our supervision. We understand that this applies to all representatives who are not currently employed at or enrolled in a degree program at the University of Chicago, but that it does not involve those who visit the campus on a one-off basis for an event or conference.

7. We are not authorized to speak to media on behalf of the University. If we receive media inquiries, we will consult with the Spiritual Life office.

RELIGIOUS ADVISORS AND THEIR STAFF

Religious representatives who work on campus with students of particular religious or spiritual traditions at the University of Chicago are required to be recognized by Spiritual Life as religious advisors or religious advisors' staff. Religious advisors and their staff commit to abiding by the ethical framework (above) and also to following University policy on all matters related to their work with students.

Religious advisors generally fall into three categories:

- Professional clergy or lay representatives of faith traditions or non-profit religious organizations, who work at least part-time with University of Chicago students on behalf of their tradition.
- Faculty advisors who work with religious or spiritual groups where no professional advisor exists.
- Community advisors or senior graduate students who may work with professional or faculty advisors, or in the absence of the same.

The University expects that religious advisors will have appropriate training for professional religious or spiritual work in their tradition (a Master's degree or equivalent), and prior experience of professional religious or spiritual work.

The University requires a background check for all who are recognized as religious advisors and their staff (other than those who are already University employees). This costs \$75, which is borne by the sponsoring agency, and it is undertaken through the University's Human Resources Office. Note: The cost may be greater for those with international backgrounds or work histories.

The University is a spiritually diverse environment, and those working directly with students must affirm their willingness to work collaboratively with religious advisors of other traditions and faiths. At all times, religious advisors are expected to model for the students the highest values of the University, including respect for civil discourse, for the diversity of religious practices, and especially for the essential dignity of those who differ and disagree. This principle obtains whether adherents are within or outside of the advisor's own religious or spiritual tradition.

Religious advisors commit 10 hours per quarter to UChicago Spiritual Life office by attending the required monthly meetings/trainings and through interfaith collaborative programming with the Spiritual Life team and or religious advisors.

Non-compliance with the ethical framework, lack of reasonable attendance at required religious advisor meetings/trainings, and non-cooperation with UChicago's Spiritual Life office and team, may result in revoked UChicago Affiliate status. This holds for religious advisors and their staff.

The University's liability for the actions of religious advisors and their staff whom it does not employ is strictly limited.

RELIGIOUS ADVISORS AND MANDATED REPORTING

Adopted November 18, 2018

Revised May 29, 2019

Religious advisors work with students and others on campus under an agreement with Spiritual Life and are afforded perquisites—not paralleled in any other University context—which offer the explicit and intentional appearance of affiliation with the University. With this agreement come duties and responsibilities.

Under almost all circumstances, religious advisors are considered responsible employees as defined by the University's Title IX coordinator.

The only circumstance in which a communication between a member of the University and a religious advisor has absolute privilege of confidentiality is that which takes place between an individual and a member of the clergy of his or her respective religious tradition, where that tradition mandates and encodes such privilege. An obvious example is that of sacramental confession or its equivalent, where the professionally trained member of the clergy is entrusted with hearing an individual congregant's admittance of wrongdoing and then with determining what to do in response (typically, to determine appropriate penance).

The University honors practices encoded in religious traditions, but expects—as is now widely customary—that where penance or its equivalent is prescribed, it will include the member of the clergy accompanying the penitent to a meeting with the appropriate civil authorities, where the penitent reports what he or she has done. It is understood across religious traditions, if not fully encoded, that the failure to prescribe such action (with appropriate pastoral support) may have all manner of consequences, including recurrence of the same harm and/or future harm to others. A spiritual penance, by itself, does not necessarily result in the prevention of such harm.

Likewise, where an individual communicates to a member of the clergy in the context of such privileged communication that they are considering harming another person or themselves, the member of the clergy is expected to respond by accompanying the individual to appropriate sources of reporting or counseling.

In all other circumstances, religious advisors should consider themselves mandatory reporters and/or responsible employees as normally defined, and not set apart by virtue of their religious advisor status. A religious advisor who is not ordained—or not otherwise functioning within an

encoded practice that provides the formal context for privileged communication in their specific tradition—is never exempt from mandatory reporting and/or responsible employee duties. The only other exception would occur in the case of a religious advisor who was also licensed as a clinician (a psychologist, psychiatrist, etc.) and who was explicitly functioning within their clinical—and not advising—office and professional capacity.

The staff at Spiritual Life expresses its gratitude, and that of the University at large, for the compassionate counsel offered by religious advisors to so many members of the University community in so many different contexts. Mandated reporting and/or responsible employee obligations should be understood as part of that caring response, including the opportunity that it offers to prevent possible further incidence of harm and to provide the right clinical professional help to one who has been harmed.

GUIDELINES FOR THE USE OF ALCOHOL IN RELIGIOUS SERVICES OR CEREMONIES

Adopted March 27, 2023

Religious services or ceremonies held on-campus may incorporate the use of alcohol in ritual practices under the supervision of an authorized religious leader or religious adviser. In most cases where religions use alcohol in their ritual practices, the distribution and quantity of alcohol is customarily and carefully regulated by the religious leader.

University policy forbids the distribution of alcohol to minors on campus grounds or at campus sponsored events. There are, however, longstanding exceptions to this policy based on religious customs or religious laws where distribution of alcohol to minors has not been forbidden. University policy states “For events where individuals under 21 may be present, University staff or faculty members or a licensed bartender must check identification and serve the alcohol. While it is not customary for religious leaders to disrupt their rites by checking identification, *religious advisors, by virtue of their affiliate status, will be held to the same responsibility as designated faculty and staff* to ensure the safety of underage participants by a) carefully monitoring the amount of alcohol that is consumed by minors and b) providing a low alcohol or alcohol substitute where permissible by the laws and customs of the religious body administering the rites.

Any religious exception is only in effect during the course of the performance of a religious ritual. Receptions prior to and following religious rites should be subject to the same conditions as any other university event.

In cases where the lines between a feast and a religious rite are blurred, failure to monitor the consumption of alcohol by minors in attendance may result in a revocation of 'affiliate' status of the religious advisor(s), the privilege of hosting such events on campus property, or both. The religious leader is encouraged to make it clear that impairment is not in keeping with the spirit of the ritual.

As with any other event where alcohol is served to students, advertisements should not contain *explicit*

references to the availability of alcohol. For example, advertisements that read "Holy Eucharist will be celebrated" or "Join us for Passover" are acceptable; centering the presence of wine is not.

BY ENTERING MY NAME (SIGNATURE) BELOW:

- I understand that religious advisor status confers upon me the privilege of working with students at the University of Chicago, of having my name listed on the website of the University of Chicago as a representative of my tradition, and of obtaining a University of Chicago email address for use related to the aims and purposes of the University. I understand that such status may be revoked at will and at any time by the University.
- I have received a copy of the Ethical Framework for Religious and Spiritual Life at the University of Chicago, and am willing to abide by it in my work with students.
- I recognize that a call to work as a religious advisor in higher education is a call to work in a multi-religious environment, and I expect to work collaboratively with members of religious traditions other than my own.
- I am aware that the University expects religious advisors to attend monthly meetings.