

## Standards and Expectations for Campus Groups Engaged in Religious Activity

### 1. Authority

The Dean of Marsh Chapel, as head of the Religious Life Office, speaks on behalf of Boston University in setting policy governing religious activities on campus.

### 2. Scope

The following standards and expectations apply to all groups engaged in religious activities on Boston University campuses. This includes groups with formal recognition from the Religious Life Office, conferred through the Dean of Marsh Chapel as advised by the Religious Life Council as well as those that have been denied recognition and those that have not sought such recognition. Recognized groups are then referred to the Student Activities Office (SAO). It includes groups coordinated by campus ministers and those organized on other bases. This policy may apply to groups that do not profess to be religious in nature but some of whose activities are religious or spiritual in the ordinary sense of these terms.

### 3. Religious Freedom at Boston University

Boston University supports freedom of religious belief, practice, and statement. This support is broad, but not unlimited. In fact, the University has consistently gone beyond the letter of its Charter in fostering diverse and responsible religious activities among its students, faculty members, and others in the broader University community. The University continues to accommodate a wide variety of religious practices by providing access to facilities, adjusting academic schedules,<sup>1</sup> and many other practical considerations.

Section 5 of the University's founding document, the Charter of 1869, enunciates two principles: that the University will not require faculty members to profess any particular religion "as a test of office"; and that the University will not deny admission or other privileges to students because of their "religious opinions." Section 5 of the Charter states:

No instructor in said university shall ever be required by the trustees to profess any particular religious opinions as a test of office, and no student shall be

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<sup>1</sup> As published by the Provost's Office, the Boston University policy is "The University, in scheduling classes on religious holidays, intends that students observing those holidays be given ample opportunity to make up work. Faculty members who wish to observe religious holidays will arrange for another faculty member to meet their classes or for canceled classes to be rescheduled."

refused admission to, or denied any of the privileges, honors or degrees of said university on account of the religious opinions which he may entertain; but this section shall not apply to the Theological Department of said university.

The Charter clearly does not offer an unconditional protection of all activity that might be classified as religious. The ban on requiring the profession of a particular religious opinion "as a test of office" applies only to non-Theology faculty members, and the guarantee for students against non-discrimination in admissions, honors, and degrees is silent on the question of the degree to which the University will otherwise accommodate differing religious views and practices.

#### **4. Recognition and Review**

The Religious Life Office (RLO) reserves the right to determine whether a group is religious in nature. These decisions will be made on a case-by-case basis. Among other factors the RLO will consider will be whether groups represent communities of believers who define their relationship to divine life in a way that includes systematic consideration of ethical and existential questions leading to the development of normative piety.

**In order to be recognized, groups and their leaders must be willing to abide by these Standards and Expectations. In addition, a group may not be solely an extension of a local religious organization, nor may a group substantially duplicate existing groups.**

Groups pursue recognition through a twofold process involving both the Student Activities Office (SAO) and the Religious Life Office (RLO). All religious life groups must abide by the policies and procedures for all SAO recognized student organizations at Boston University as outlined on their website (<http://www.bu.edu/sao>). In addition, groups must present their paperwork to the RLO for review, interview with the Religious Life Council, and receive final approval from the Dean of Marsh Chapel. It is strongly encouraged that students interested in forming a recognized group meet with someone in the RLO as early in the process as possible. Due to the added complexity involved in forming a religious life group, doing so will make the process as smooth as possible.

Furthermore, finding an appropriate advisor for a religious life group can be challenging. The Religious Life Office is available to help religious life groups find appropriate advisors, and in some instances an official of the RLO will serve as the advisor for newly forming groups during their first year following approval. All advisors are subject to approval by the RLO, must meet with the Religious Life Council biannually, and may be called upon to account for the activities their group undertakes.

Campus religious groups shall appear before the Religious Life Council (RLC) for review under the following circumstances:

When seeking recognition as a campus religious group

When the Religious Life Office deems necessary, due to the activities or behavior of the group or its leadership

When the name, mission, or organizational affiliation of a recognized religious group undergoes a significant change

For periodic review of recognized religious groups

The RLC will make recommendations with regard to the particular circumstances of a given group to the Dean of Marsh Chapel whose decision is the final expression of the Religious Life Office. In cases of extreme urgency, the RLO may arrive at determinations prior to consultation with the RLC but will always report such determinations to the RLC and hear response from the RLC as soon as is practicable.

One of the main differences between religious life group and other student organizations is that religious life groups are eligible to call upon leadership from outside Boston University. This is especially important for groups that are part of traditions requiring clergy to perform certain rituals. The Religious Life Office must recognize such leaders before they may engage in leadership among their respective groups.

The two classes of religious leader that are recognized are Campus Ministers and University Chaplains. Campus Ministers are authorized to work only with the religious life group by whom they are called and with which they are affiliated. (Their status may be reviewed on a yearly basis.) To be approved as a campus minister an applicant must submit a completed Campus Minister Application (including a CV is strongly advised) along with a letter from the religious life group in question. After receiving this material, the Religious Life Office will interview the applicant and discuss these Standards and Expectations. Once approved, Campus Ministers are expected to provide spiritual guidance and counsel to the group they help to lead and to encourage and equip the student leadership of that group. Student groups at Boston University are student led, and it is important that a campus minister assume the roles of encouragement and accompaniment. This means that activities should be student planned, marketed and implemented. Furthermore, students are welcome to engage in outreach activities on campus in line with these standards and expectations, but campus ministers must refrain from engaging in such activities apart from the student membership of the religious life group.

The second class of religious leaders is University Chaplains. The Dean of Marsh Chapel may choose to invite a Campus Minister to express religious leadership more broadly on behalf of the whole University in addition to their work with a particular religious life group. The University Chaplains are called on to support the campus in times of crisis and participate in forming religious life policy through the work of the

Religious Life Council, and so there is an expectation that they be qualified to minister to and work with anyone, regardless of religious affiliation. It is usual that University Chaplains be involved in ministry on a full-time basis here at Boston University. This is important because University Chaplains should be deeply enough engaged in the life of the University as a whole to be able to offer wise counsel on the particularities of religious life out of first-hand knowledge. Furthermore, because it is expected that University Chaplains be engaged with the whole University community, they are encouraged to engage in outreach activities that keep a student centered approach attentive to the personal and spiritual needs of the individual and not solely the growth of the religious life group among which they are primarily in leadership.

## **5. Regulation**

Religious groups at Boston University are subject to two kinds of regulation. First, they must comply with all University rules and regulations that apply to non-religious groups. Special exceptions, as allowed by Massachusetts law, may be granted on a case by case basis. Thus, for example, religious groups whose ritual requires burning candles can apply for exemption from Fire Code rules that generally prohibit open flames in University facilities. Second, religious groups at Boston University must comply with these Standards and Expectations.

The purpose of the Standards and Expectations is to promote a constructive role for religious groups at Boston University. The University is a private, independent body, subject to state and federal law, but free to act with wide discretion concerning what activities, religious or otherwise, it wishes to encourage or to discourage on its campuses.

While the University recognizes that religion usually plays a constructive role in the lives and education of students, it also recognizes that religious activities can sometimes harm participants, threaten injury to others, and impede education.

Boston University does seek to limit the access to students by groups that have engaged or appear likely to engage in religious activities that the University judges to be strongly counter to its educational mission or to the welfare of its students.

The University does not seek to regulate religious activities on campus with the goal of eliminating any and every threat of harm, injury, or educational setback. The primary responsibility to avoid such harms belongs to individual students. The University encourages students to exercise prudence and discretion in religious activities.

## **6. Governing Principles**

The Religious Life Office reserves the right to consider the religious activities of each campus group individually. No group has a presumptive right to either recognition by the RLO or an unlimited right to pursue its activities on Boston University property.

The Religious Life Office approaches religious activities in a spirit of toleration, but

also a spirit of concern that religious activities play a constructive role in the lives of students. These objectives — promoting toleration and exercising a concerned vigilance on behalf of students — are not reducible to a specific list of injunctions and prohibitions. Rather, they are best pursued by careful discussion among knowledgeable people who are informed about particular situations. This is the purpose of the Religious Life Council.

## **7. Guidelines**

The Religious Life Office offers guidelines to groups engaged in religious activities on campus. These may be grouped under six headings: Honesty, Consonance, Accountability, Leadership, Lawfulness, and Harm.

### **A. Honesty**

Religious activities should be openly acknowledged as religious in intent. In cases where a religious group sponsors a non-religious activity, it should be clear about its sponsorship. Advertisements for group meetings or other activities should always make clear the identity of every sponsor, and if the religious nature of the group is not clear from its name, it should be unambiguously communicated by additional text. The religious or denominational identity of the group and its sponsors should also be explicit in the text.

False and deceptive advertising are forbidden, as are misleading personal contacts. Furthermore, all groups must strictly adhere to Boston University marketing standards that govern all groups, offices and departments.

Students wishing to engage others in discussions leading to an invitation to attend a religious activity should be forthright about their purposes.

Religious activities that take the form of enticing participants with one goal and then substituting another once the participant has made an initial commitment are unlikely to be viewed with favor by the Religious Life Office.

### **B. Consonance**

Religious activities should be broadly consonant with the educational mission and ethical mandates of the University. While most religious activities are indeed consonant with the University's educational mission and ethical mandates, there are some exceptions.

#### **1. Hostility to disciplined intellectual inquiry.**

The Religious Life Office recognizes that many religions address matters that depend on faith, and that paradox and mystery are essential parts of many forms of religious experience. These dimensions of religion can be and usually are fully consonant with the University's educational mission. However, when a group's emphasis on the limitations of human reason or impenetrable mystery reaches the point of undermining students' orientation towards or commitment to disciplined intellectual inquiry, then the orientation of the group is not consonant with the University's educational mission.

## **2. Self-destructive behavior**

The Religious Life Office recognizes that many religions teach the value of ascetic practices and self-sacrifice. These too are dimensions of religion that can be and usually are fully consonant with the University's educational mission. However, when a group encourages or fosters an atmosphere conducive to suicide, life-threatening injury or physical impairment, use of hallucinogenic drugs, or other acts of self-destruction, the orientation of the group is not consonant with the University's ethical mandates.

## **3. Irresponsibility**

The Religious Life Office recognizes that many religions teach that the individual is responsible for his or her acts before God and that compliance with merely human laws and rules is a lesser duty. The RLO also recognizes that many religions teach the importance of refusing to comply with human laws and rules that are unjust. These are dimensions of religion that also can be and usually are fully consonant with the University's educational mission and ethical mandates.

However, when a group teaches that its members are exempt from the ordinary rule of law and may therefore lie, steal, plagiarize, or deceive with impunity; when a group teaches that its members are bound by no civil or religious authority other than that of the group itself or its members' separate wills; or when a group teaches that there are no acceptable human frameworks within which its members can be held accountable for their actions, the orientation of the group is not consonant with the University's educational mission or ethical mandates.

## **C. Accountability**

Groups and individuals promoting religious activities must be accountable to their leaders and the Religious Life Office for their actions. The RLO expects that a group will have responsible leadership that can explain why the group has undertaken a particular action and, in the event that the group has committed an infraction, to ensure that it desists.

Leaders are expected to know what their members are doing when they act on behalf of the group and they are expected to be able to give a reasonable account of their members' activities in the event of violations of University rules, accidents, injuries, and/or damages.

Groups are expected to have sufficient structure and internal procedures so that they can explain their policies and their actions. The Religious Life Office recognizes that some religious groups avoid hierarchical arrangements; some are strongly democratic; and some prize personal association above formal organization. The freedom of religious groups on campus to organize as they wish, however, must be tempered by the university community's need for accountability among such groups.

Religious activities must also be consistent with the principles of each individual's accountability and autonomy. Groups do not have the authority to exempt members or participants from ordinary rules of individual accountability. The University recognizes and values religious traditions of private confession; but it does not welcome religious activities that foster neglect of the rights of others or an attitude of attenuated accountability to the broader community.

## **D. Leadership**

All religious groups on campus are required to designate recognized leaders. These leaders must be accountable to the University through the Religious Life Office, and, if applicable, to their religious or denominational authorities. Abuses of authority by leaders of religious groups will not be tolerated. Key leaders (including campus ministers, student presidents, faculty/staff advisors, and others as required) will meet with the Dean of Marsh Chapel and

designees from the Religious Life Council at the onset of their tenure, and will indicate in writing their agreement to abide by these Standards and Expectations.

The Religious Life Office is available to provide certain kinds of assistance to student religious groups. Student leaders are encouraged to seek help on matters such as arranging access to University facilities, establishing dialogue with other faith traditions, and establishing contacts in the broader New England community. The RLO also will advise student leaders on what is and is not acceptable behavior for campus religious groups, but do not offer to guide groups in the interpretation of their own faith traditions. The RLO may direct students to appropriate resources for religious guidance, by request.

#### **E. Lawfulness**

Religious activities are expected to be lawful. Boston University supports religious groups that recognize their obligation to uphold the law, that act on this obligation, and that encourage their members to act lawfully as well.

The Religious Life Office recognizes the important tradition of civil disobedience that allows individuals under certain conditions to defy unjust laws. The tradition of civil disobedience is grounded on the willingness of individuals to identify clearly the laws they object to, to state their objections, and willingly to accept the consequences of refusing to abide by that particular law. The tradition of civil disobedience is not a tradition of lawlessness, but a tradition of appeal to a higher law. In contemplating acts of civil disobedience by their members, groups should keep in mind that violence and/or misrepresentation in religious activities are never appropriate.

Any group uncertain about the lawfulness of a particular activity is strongly advised to seek clarification from the Religious Life Office and from appropriate legal authorities.

#### **F. Harm**

Religious commitments may entail some sorts of personal or academic sacrifice within limits that the University respects. Nevertheless, religious activities should not harm participants or bystanders. The Religious Life Office upholds a standard that religious activities should not pose unwarranted or excessive hazards. For instance, students should not be subject to situations that threaten physical harm; excessive financial demands; nor should they find themselves the object of proselytizing and other intrusive demands on their time, attention, or privacy.

The Religious Life Office cannot foresee every type of abuse that a religious group may employ. Some can be foreseen: threats or acts of retribution against ex-members, former participants, or non-members; inducement to use drugs; and psychological pressure tactics, for example, are clear abuses. In general, the RLO aims to encourage good practices and to correct mistakes by bringing them to the attention of the responsible parties. When groups or their activities harm students or others, however, the RLO may exercise its authority on behalf of the University to impose sanctions.

## 8. Sanctions

Although the Religious Life Office prefers advising and counsel to other measures, its options include:

Withdrawal of a group's Religious Life Office recognition;

Recommendation to SAO for elimination of group funding;

Recommendation to SAO for withdrawal of SAO recognition;

Recommendation to the Dean of Students (SAO, the Office of Residence Life, and/or the Office of Judicial Affairs) or other appropriate University officials for disciplinary action against individuals or groups;

Referral to the Boston University Police or to other legal authorities for civil or criminal investigation;

Prohibition from use of University facilities;

Public notice;

Exclusion of group and all of its activities from the BU campuses.