

**From: Prof. Sarah Pessin, Interfaith Chair, Center for Judaic Studies (sarah.pessin@du.edu)**

### **7 Starting Best Practices for Religious Inclusivity**

**[A companion to the Step-by-Step Guide to Transforming your Online Calendar into an Interfaith Calendar; download the full guide (and take the DU Interfaith Challenge) at [www.du.edu/ahss/cjs/interfaith](http://www.du.edu/ahss/cjs/interfaith)]**

#### ***1. Develop a mindful & fail-proof strategy for Checking the Interfaith Calendar before finalizing event or meeting dates.***

Having your new interfaith calendar is only a first step. **To see any real change, you need to update your and your office's best practices so that you and your team don't forget to consult the interfaith calendar before setting event and program dates.**

Please do not rely on your memory or good intentions to make this happen; rather:

Please schedule a meeting asap with relevant member/s of your team to brainstorm and finalize a step-by-step concrete and fail-proof plan for how your office will use interfaith calendar information when planning future events and meetings.

[One way to help ensure accountability is to create an event scheduling checklist for each event, and to have the office member in charge of scheduling be required to sign and date the form once she or he has completed the 'interfaith calendar check' step for the event in question. Related: If your office already has event checklists, please commit to adding 'Check Interfaith Calendar' to each and every event checklist]

#### ***2. Take special care on fasting days.***

Depending on the holiday in question, fasting days might or might not be consistent with your event. Here are three starting considerations to bear in mind:

**(1) Is the fasting day in question part of a holiday with work restrictions for members of a given tradition?** If so, then observant members of that religion might not be able to attend your event, regardless of the nature of the event.

**(2) Is the nature of your event consistent with a fasting day?** While it might be consistent for a person fasting to come to hear a lecture, it might be inconsistent for a person fasting to attend a music concert or a comedy showcase. It might certainly be inconsistent if your event is a meal or a cookie party.

**(3) Are DU exams taking place during religious fasting days, and if so, how should we best accommodate student and faculty needs?** For example, in Spring 2017, final exams fell during Ramadan; the Muslim Student Association hosted important campus-wide conversations about a DU Ramadan Policy in addition to DU's current Religious Accommodation policies. These are ongoing conversations; get involved and help ensure that DU is increasingly mindful and increasingly inclusive around religious inclusivity.

#### ***3. When it is and isn't OK to schedule on a religious holiday/festival.***

If no one in your office's reading group celebrates a certain religious holiday, it is likely fine to schedule your meeting on that holiday. However (1) even in smaller groups, please don't assume you know the cultural/religious practices of everyone in your group - consult with them; and (2) if you are planning departmental or university-wide events, please take great care to avoid scheduling on religious holidays.

That said, also keep in mind that not all religious holidays would prevent someone from that religion from attending an event; for example, many Jews (both observant and non-observant) would likely not be able to attend a meeting or event during the 2 days of 'Rosh Hashanah' or even on the day before the holiday (given that holiday's unique implications), while many Jews (both observant and non-observant) would likely be able to attend during any or all of the 8 days of 'Hanukkah' (given that holiday's unique implications).

To help determine whether a holiday is likely to prevent people from being able to attend your event:

**(1)** Ask colleagues and neighbors and check information online (including the “Holiday Fact Sheets” on Canvas; see OTL’s “Inclusive Teaching Practices Portal”);

**(2)** Consult DU Religious & Spiritual Life @ [www.du.edu/studentlife/religiouslife/events-activities/calendar.html](http://www.du.edu/studentlife/religiouslife/events-activities/calendar.html) to see whether a particular holiday is associated with a special worship or restriction that might prevent attendance;

**(3)** Remember to always consider a given holiday’s lifecycle/cultural implications (including travel, time with family, food preparations, etc.), separate from any “observance/worship” details...

***4. Don’t focus on whether your colleague or student is “observant”; focus on the cultural/lifecycle implications of a holiday/festival for their day/week.***

Separate from questions of observance/worship, be sure to consider whether the holiday/festival days in question are the kind of days where people from a given tradition are likely to be spending lifecycle time with family and friends; e.g. if the celebration is associated with travel, meal preparations, family visits, etc., then likely people from that tradition (whether or not they are “observant”) will not be free to participate in your event/meeting.

***5. Be thoughtful about the days before and after holidays/festivals.***

Because of factors like travel, family visits, and meal preparations, often it is just as non-inclusive to schedule an event or meeting on the day before or after a holiday as on the day of the holiday (e.g. if you are Christian, imagine how you’d feel if someone scheduled an important meeting on Dec. 24 on the reasoning that “well, it’s a day \*before\* Christmas, so it should be fine”; that would likely be quite disruptive to your holiday plans, and likely you would not be able to attend the meeting/event).

***6. Schedule a date in January for updating external interfaith calendar files (& join the CJS listserv for a reminder).***

After updating one’s calendar with the CJS-ODI-OTL “Check the Interfaith Calendar Guide,” one finds that there are three external holiday files that need to be updated each calendar year. Please mark your calendar now, while you’re thinking of it, so that you set aside the few minutes you will need each January to help keep your interfaith dates up-to-date.

If you’d like an annual reminder, email [cjs@du.edu](mailto:cjs@du.edu) to be added to the ‘DU Checks the Interfaith Calendar’ listserv; 4 emails will go out (monthly in November-February) to help remind you when (and how) to make that annual update.

***7. If your office schedules an event on a religious holiday: Acknowledge & Apologize.***

What if in spite of all best efforts your office finds itself scheduling a meeting or event on a religious holiday? There is no ideal way to address situations like this, but acknowledgment + apology is better than hoping no one notices. In such cases, consider including the following sort of language on your website and on your event materials:

“We apologize to those who might be unable to attend our event due to [name of holiday]; scheduling and other factors led us to select this date, and we hope to avoid similar outcomes in the future. Inclusivity - including religious inclusivity - is a value we work hard to uphold.”

Adding language along these lines to your marketing and website in cases of holiday conflicts helps show that your office is **(1)** in the habit of consulting an interfaith calendar, **(2)** aware that the event date likely excludes people from attending, and **(3)** apologetic for the outcome (and committed to trying in earnest to do better in the future).

*Questions? Ideas for more or modified Best Practices?  
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