

## University Religious Council Statement of Understanding

Colleges and universities are microcosms of the religious diversity that is shaping American life. As students of countless faiths and worldviews converge on campus, higher education environments are playing an increasingly vital role in engaging this diversity by creating encounters and experiences that lead to cooperation, not conflict.

Our goal is to equip tomorrow's leaders to navigate and strengthen our diverse democracy. That's why it's so important to make interfaith engagement an essential part of these students' campus experience today (<https://www.ifyc.org/campusstaff>)

I. Through its Division of Student Affairs, the University of California, Davis, works cooperatively with diverse spiritual leaders with in the local community to support the developmental growth, interfaith engagement and welfare of the University's students. It is essential that an effective and mutually beneficial working affiliation be maintained to support the holistic development of our students.

Toward that end, this definitional statement of understanding has been developed.

We have agreed to meet regularly and to work together in fulfilling the following specific outcomes:

- Create and develop encounters and experiences that lead to cooperation, not conflict around interfaith exploration.
- To provide updated information about each group's respective service for UC Davis students, relevant trend information and services offered.
- To provide support for student organizations (in keeping with the roles and expectations described by the Center for Student Involvement: <http://csi.ucdavis.edu>)

II. The University has identified several key liaisons to work with the URC. First, the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs, and specifically the Associate Vice Chancellor for Student Life, Campus Community and Retention Services, serves as the institutional liaison with the URC. In addition, specific staff in the Center for Student Involvement, the Office of Student Housing, the Cross Cultural Center and Middle Eastern/Southeast Asian Director, the Student Health and Counseling Services Center have been identified as operational liaisons for the URC (see contact information at the bottom).

A. While carrying out their work in distinct ways, both groups have traditionally played important roles in the areas of:

- Student development
- Leadership development
- Values clarification and ethical reasoning
- Campus climate and community relations
- Intergroup and intragroup relationships and cross-cultural communication
- Crisis intervention and response within the community
- Support for individual students and families in crisis

### III. Composition of the University Religious Council (URC)

Many religious organizations exist in the local regional environs of the UC Davis campus. Of these, several have a continuing collaborative relationship with the campus community and share the following common characteristics:

- Their principal “ministry” or organizational focus concerns the spiritual needs of UC Davis students and this is a discussion and focus point at quarterly meeting.
- They each have an external governing body or affiliation and have a spiritual/professional staff.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Exceptions can be requested through the office of the Associate Vice Chancellor for Student Life, Campus Community and Retention Services.

Because of the nature of their work and their collaborative relationship with the campus, religious groups sharing these characteristics may be considered for membership in the URC. The Division of Student Affairs shall decide eligibility questions as they arise. URC members may receive limited privileges from the campus, described in Section III of this document.

Other spiritual/religious organizations and leaders in the region also have cooperative relationships with the campus, but interaction is occasional and situational. Because such groups tend not to meet the aforementioned characteristics, principally by not having an on-campus “ministry,” or an on-going relationship with a registered student organization, they may consult with the Division of Student Affairs on as needed basis. However, such groups may be called upon for infrequent referrals and/or crisis intervention (e.g., in connection with response to a regional or national crisis or tragedy, or assisting in a student death where the student’s family is of a certain faith). Religious groups in the community may choose to come together to form inter-faith associations. It is understood that any criteria for membership and inclusion may be determined by the University and URC. Organizations that are not members of the URC are not eligible to receive privileges from the campus. Organizations interested in joining the University Religious Council should contact Student Affairs Associate Vice Chancellor for Student Life, Campus Community and Retention Services Sheri Atkinson ([slatkinson@ucdavis.edu](mailto:slatkinson@ucdavis.edu)), 530-752-8787.

#### IV. Responsibilities and Mutual Provision of Services

- A. In keeping with the shared goals and purposes outlined previously, and with these roles and functions in mind, UC Davis and the URC agree to meet throughout the academic year to exchange information and promote dialogue. Members (or an organization delegate) are required to attend 80% of the meetings throughout the academic year. In addition, the University agrees to provide the following privileges to active URC members:

- a. Annual “URC Courtesy Parking Permit” provided by the Associate Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs Office for on campus parking.
- b. University library privileges, consistent with past practices
  - i. Access to University facilities on an extraordinary basis and as provided for in campus policy (e.g., student memorial services, multi-faith services)
- c. Cooperative programming with campus departments or a student-based group, at the discretion of the campus or student entity, and in keeping with policies regarding use of University facilities by student groups.
- d. In addition, URC members have the use of campus facilities generally available to the public (e.g., tabling and distributing literature).
  - i. UC Davis and the URC have agreed, in good faith, to work collaboratively toward the implementation of the following additional privileges:
    - 1. Distribution of a directory developed by URC members including spiritual/religious organization information (electronic) to students
    - 2. Digital presence on the Student Affairs website
    - 3. Tabling/distribution of literature in UC Davis residence hall dining facilities (commons areas) as long as such activity is primarily conducted by a registered student organization (RSO), and in keeping with student organization policies<sup>2</sup>
      - a. URC presence/participation in Student Housing resource fairs will have access for two tables representing all URC member organizations

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<sup>2</sup> Members of the URC and their organizations are independent entities external to the University. While campus policy does permit rental and occasional usage of some University facilities by such external entities, preference is generally given to University units and student organizations. Given the scarcity of resources and facilities, and the legal obligation of the University to treat all external entities equitably (whether religious, political, social or nonprofit), use/reservation of campus space/facilities and presentation of on-campus programming is predicated upon collaboration with a Registered Student Organization or campus unit.

- b. URC presence/participation in the annual open house of the Cross-Cultural Center and Student Community Center
  - c. Additional promotion of URC member organizations through Center for Student Involvement (CSI), by the RSO providing a link to the off-campus religious organization's website on its CSI AggieLife Page.
- e. In accordance with their unique role and experience, the members of the URC will, to the best of their ability and upon the request of the administration of UC Davis, provide the following services to the members of the campus community:
  - i. Intervention and/or support for campus climate, or in relation to community issues or national/regional crises
  - ii. Intervention and/or support for students, staff, or faculty in connection with personal crisis, suicide, death, missing persons, etc.
  - iii. Cooperative programming in support of the educational mission of the University on topics such as values clarification, leadership and ethical development, moral leadership, and awareness of cult or hate-based groups
- f. In addition, individual members of the URC may choose to work with the University in addressing issues arising in the community and city of Davis, such as housing, human relationships and community climate, substance abuse, etc.

#### IV. Freedom of Choice of Beliefs, Coercive Groups, and University Neutrality

A. The URC and the University understand and support the religious, speech, and associational freedoms established by federal and state law. In accord with these laws, the University cannot advocate, favor, or support any particular faith or creed, nor discriminate on illegal grounds.

B. The URC and the University acknowledge that the clarification of values and/or spiritual growth can be important components of wellness and student development. For those students who seek out spiritual/religious experiences, it is important to provide a supportive environment for individual choice and growth.

C. To provide such a supportive environment, and to prevent the use of coercive tactics (isolation, emotional abuse, financial exploitation, fraud) the University and the URC are committed to educational programs that highlight the right of choice and the destructiveness of coercive tactics.

#### V. Changes to this Statement

A. This is a working document developed after extensive consultation and discussion. It may be modified as necessary to meet changing needs and issues that may arise. Any future modifications will be implemented by University representatives in consultation with URC representatives.

### **UC Davis Liaisons to University Religious Council**

#### **Institutional Liaison:**

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Associate Vice Chancellor Sheri Atkinson, Ed.D.

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#### **Operational Liaisons:**

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# Addendum

## Definition of Terms:

*Spirituality*: A longing for ways of speaking on the human experience of depth, meaning, mystery, moral purpose, transcendence, wholeness, intuition, vulnerability, tenderness, courage, the capacity to love, and the apprehension of spirit as the animating essence at the core of life (Sharon Daloz Parks, 2000)

*Interfaith*: The relationships between an individual and what we commonly understand between as religious or philosophical tradition (such as Christianity, Hinduism, or humanism). The term “interfaith,” therefore, has two profound implications: how do our relationships with those who are different affect our relationships with our religious or philosophical traditions, and how do relationships with our traditions affect how we interact with people who are different from us. (Eboo Patel, 2016)

*Religion*: The institutionalized system of beliefs, attitudes, and practices. (Webster Dictionary, 2016)

*Holistic Development*: The focus on the whole student encompasses the development and education of the physical, social, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual aspects of their being (American Council on Education, 1949).

## References

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