

Michael J. Petersen proposes the following substitute bill:

**Higher Education Student Belief Accommodation**

2026 GENERAL SESSION

STATE OF UTAH

**Chief Sponsor: Michael J. Petersen**

Senate Sponsor: Brady Brammer

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**LONG TITLE**

**General Description:**

This bill broadens a protection for a student's sincerely held religious and conscience beliefs.

**Highlighted Provisions:**

This bill:

- defines terms;
- broadens the scope of a requirement for a reasonable accommodation regarding a student's sincerely held religious and conscience beliefs;
- requires certain notifications and a review process;
- broadens the scope of policies that an institution of higher education establishes;
- requires the Utah Board of Higher Education to adopt certain policies;
- coordinates with S.B. 207, Protection from Unfair Treatment Based on Religion or Other Irrelevant Characteristics, to supersede religious provisions in S.B. 207; and
- makes technical and conforming changes.

**Money Appropriated in this Bill:**

None

**Other Special Clauses:**

This bill provides a coordination clause.

**Utah Code Sections Affected:**

AMENDS:

**53H-7-903**, as renumbered and amended by Laws of Utah 2025, First Special Session,  
Chapter 8

**Utah Code Sections affected by Coordination Clause:**

**53H-7-903**, as as renumbered and amended by Laws of Utah 2025, First Special Session,  
Chapter 8

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*Be it enacted by the Legislature of the state of Utah:*

Section 1. Section **53H-7-903** is amended to read:

**53H-7-903 . Student religious and conscience accommodations.**

(1) As used in this section:

(a) "Conscience" means the same as that term is defined in Section 67-27-106.

(b) "Fundamental alteration" means a change so significant in an examination, assignment, or activity that the change:

(i) alters the essential nature, objectives, or standards of a class, program, or degree;  
and

(ii) negatively impacts the student's ability, as a neutral arbiter, whom the institution designates under Subsection (5)(f) determines, to:

(A) master essential learning outcomes of the course, program, or degree; or

(B) acquire the knowledge, skills, or competencies necessary to pass the course, program, or degree.

(c) "Matter of public concern" means speech that relates to a political, social, religious, moral, or community matter.

(d) "Reasonably accommodate" means taking reasonable steps to modify expectations for a student's participation in an examination or other academic requirement by:

(i) excusing participation;

(ii) offering an alternative deadline or schedule; or

(iii) offering an alternative examination, assignment, or activity.

~~[(1)]~~ (2) ~~[A]~~ In accordance with Subsection (3), an institution shall:

(a) for any course:

~~[(a)]~~ (i) reasonably accommodate a student's absence from an examination or other academic requirement under the circumstances described in Subsection ~~[(2)]~~ (3) for reasons of:

~~[(i)]~~ (A) the student's ~~[faith]~~ religious or conscience belief; or

~~[(ii)]~~ (B) the student's participation in an organized activity conducted under the auspices of the student's religious tradition or religious organization; and

~~[(b)]~~ (ii) ensure that an accommodation described in Subsection ~~[(1)(a)]~~ (2)(a)(i) does not adversely impact the student's academic opportunities~~[-]~~ ; and

(b) for a course that the institution mandates for graduation or for an academic major, reasonably accommodate a student's objection to a required assignment or activity for reasons of the student's sincerely held religious or conscience belief if the requested

accommodation does not create a fundamental alteration.

~~[(2)]~~ (3) An institution shall make an accommodation described in Subsection ~~[(+)]~~ (2) if:

- (a) for an accommodation described in Subsection (2)(a), the time at which an examination or academic requirement is scheduled to occur ~~[creates an undue hardship for a student due to]~~ conflicts with the student's sincerely held religious or conscience belief; and
- (b) for any accommodation described in Subsection (2), the student provides ~~[a written]~~ prior notice to the instructor of the course for which the student seeks the accommodation regarding ~~[the date of the examination or academic requirement for which the student seeks]~~ the request for the accommodation.

~~(4)(a)~~ An instructor shall:

- (i) respond to a request for an accommodation as soon as practicable and in accordance with institutional policies described in Subsection (5); and
- (ii) if the instructor denies the request, notify the student and the institution of the denial, including the reason for the denial, as soon as practicable and in accordance with the institutional policies described in Subsection (5).
- (b) An instructor may not compel a student to publicly take or communicate a specified position on a matter of public concern as the student's own, including by requiring a student to write a letter to a lawmaker, write a letter to an editor, write an article for publication, publish an opinion online or on social media, or create or publish a podcast.

~~[(3)]~~ (5) An institution shall establish policies and procedures, with guidance from the board, related to the accommodation described in Subsection ~~[(+)]~~ (2) that:

- (a) require the institution to provide the accommodation with respect to ~~[when the student participates]~~ the student's participation in examinations and other academic requirements;
- (b) allow an instructor who receives a notice described in Subsection ~~[(2)(b)]~~ (3)(b) to:
  - (i) schedule an alternative examination time before or after the regularly scheduled examination; or
  - (ii) make accommodations for other academic requirements related to the accommodation;~~[and]~~
- (c) require an instructor who receives a notice described in Subsection ~~[(2)(b)]~~ (3)(b) to keep confidential a student's request for the accommodation~~[;]~~ ;
- (d) address a reasonable timeframe within which:

- 97           (i) a student must submit a request described in Subsection (3)(b) to an instructor; and  
98           (ii) an instructor must respond to a student's request described in Subsection (3)(b);  
99       (e) outline a process by which an instructor shall, if the instructor denies the student's  
100       request for an accommodation described in Subsection (2):  
101           (i) notify the institution of the instructor's denial of the student's request; and  
102           (ii) provide to the institution a written explanation of why the instructor denied the  
103           request; and  
104       (f) designate one or more neutral arbiters with the academic and subject matter expertise  
105       necessary to review a denial described under Subsection (5)(e) and determine  
106       whether the requested accommodation constitutes a fundamental alteration.

107   [(4)] (6)(a) The commissioner shall annually:

108       (i)(A) create a list of the dates of religious holidays for the following two years;

109       and

110       [(ii)] (B) distribute the list described in this Subsection [(4)(a)] (6)(a)(i) to an

111       institution[-] ; and

112       (ii) upon the request of the Education Interim Committee, ensure the inclusion of  
113       information institutions report under Subsection (7)(c) in an annual report to the  
114       Legislature described in Section 53H-1-403.

115       (b) The creation and distribution of the list described in Subsection [(4)(a)] (6)(a)(i) does  
116       not prohibit a student from seeking, or an institution from granting, an  
117       accommodation for a date of a religious holiday that is not included on that list.

118   [(5)] (7) An institution shall:

119       (a) designate a point of contact for information about an accommodation described in  
120       Subsection [(1)] (2), who may also serve as the neutral arbiter described in Subsection  
121       (5)(f);

122       ~~[(b) establish a process by which a student may submit a grievance with regards to~~  
123       ~~implementation of this section; and]~~

124       [(e)] (b) publish the following information on the institution's website and update the  
125       information annually:

126           (i) the institution's religious and conscience belief accommodation policies described  
127           in Subsection [(3)] (5);

128           (ii) the point of contact described in Subsection [(5)(a)] (7)(a);

129           (iii) the list described in Subsection [(4)] (6)(a);

130           (iv) a description of the general procedure to request an accommodation described in

- 131 Subsection [(1)] (2); and
- 132 (v) the grievance process described in Subsection [(5)(b).] (5)(f);
- 133 (c) submit an annual report to the board, no later than December 1 of each year,
- 134 detailing, for the previous academic year, any neutral arbiter decisions under
- 135 Subsection (5); and
- 136 (d) no later than December 1, 2026, report to the board the institutional policies the
- 137 institution creates in accordance with Subsection (5).
- 138 (8) The board shall:
- 139 (a) establish policies to ensure the protection of students' sincerely held religious and
- 140 conscience beliefs; and
- 141 (b) provide guidelines for the institution policies described in Subsection (5), including
- 142 parameters for the accommodations described in this section and guidance for
- 143 protecting a student's sincerely held religious and conscience beliefs.
- 144 (9) Nothing in this section interferes with federal law.
- 145 Section 2. **Effective Date.**
- 146 This bill takes effect on May 6, 2026.
- 147 Section 3. **Coordinating H.B. 204 with S.B. 207.**
- 148 If H.B. 204, Higher Education Student Belief Accommodation, and S.B. 207, Protection
- 149 from Unfair Treatment Based on Religion or Other Irrelevant Characteristics, both pass and
- 150 become law, the Legislature intends that, on May 6, 2026, the amendments to Section
- 151 53H-7-903 in H.B. 204 supersede the amendments to Section 53H-7-903 in S.B. 207.