



How to Foster an Inclusive Campus Environment during the December “Holiday Season”

Consider...

- Our community is diverse in multiple ways, including across social identities like “race”, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic background, ability, and faith, for instance.
- Engagement with diverse peoples and cultural perspectives, being aware of and open to different world perspectives, can foster greater intercultural competence and more harmonious relationships.
- Given our diversity, throughout the year, there is a very high likelihood that many in our community celebrate diverse faith and cultural holidays.
- During December, the visibility and recognition of the Christmas holiday in the context of a void or lack of acknowledgement of additional holidays taking place in December (or other times throughout the year) can unintentionally contribute to a sense of exclusion among some members of our community.
- Recognizing the variety of celebrations and holidays of multiple cultures and faiths, in December and throughout the year, can contribute to members of our community feeling valued and an increased sense of inclusion and belonging – this also signals our acceptance of, respect for and engagement with diversity in our community in a meaningful way.
- Examples of diverse faith and cultural occasions that take place in December include: Winter Solstice, Kwanzaa (African American); Pancha Ganapati (Hindu); Hanukkah (Jewish); Ramadan and Eid-al-Fitr (Muslim) (depending on the calendar year); as well as Christmas (Christian).

Frequently Asked Questions

What is Dalhousie’s policy on holiday celebrations?

- Dalhousie does not have a policy on whether and how our community should engage in holiday events, rituals, symbols, and games.
 - Our year round focus is on fostering an atmosphere that encourages engagement, learning and dialogue, rather than ignorance, disinterest and avoidance, around cultural events and practices.
 - **Ask yourself:** Does someone consult Dalhousie’s Mosaic calendar¹, which facilitates awareness of religious occasions and cultural dates important to our diverse community?

¹ Mosaic calendar <https://www.dal.ca/dept/dalrespect/about/calendar.html>

Can I wish people a Merry or Happy Christmas?

- Of course.
 - Generally, however, you will hear happy holidays as more inclusive term, recognizing that not all in our community celebrate Christmas but will have a holiday break and perhaps different holiday occasions at this time.
 - **Ask yourself:** Do you wish people a Happy Hanukkah, Ramadan Kareem when you know they are celebrating or observing?

Can I put up a Christmas tree or decorations in my office?

- Take the approach of supporting the rights of all individuals in our community to engage in cultural practices and rituals (e.g., putting up Christmas trees, decorations, lights), while doing so in a manner that is thoughtful and inclusive of the diverse identities and experiences of members of our community.
 - Department Heads and Directors can help create an inclusive and equitable environment by being mindful that there is room for celebration of rituals and visibility of symbols that are part of diverse cultures and religions, in consultation with members of the Indigenous, cultural or religious group.
 - **Ask yourself:** “How can we recognize diverse cultural and religious events in appropriate and authentic ways to juxtapose with more mainstream highly profiled events.

Can our department or group organize a Christmas events or games?

- Individuals or groups who want to plan a holiday event or game (e.g., secret Santa, holiday party) should consult with their Department Head to ensure that these activities are inclusive (e.g., financially affordable if gifts are involved, recognize different holidays happening at the same time, ensuring individuals can opt in or out of participation, raising awareness about customs and norms).
 - Respect those who choose not to participate, without asking for a reason.
 - **Ask yourself:** Am I making an assumption that everyone in the community is aware of the mainstream (dominant) cultural norms? How can we ensure members of the community can become aware of practices associated with dominant cultural holiday events, games, and rituals so they can fully participate if they choose?

What is our obligation to provide faith-based and culture-based accommodations?

- We have an obligation to provide reasonable² accommodations in the workplace and in academics so that members of our community are free from discrimination.
 - We should strive to be proactive in allowing flexibility in the workplace and with academic expectations so people can observe faith-based occasions and cultural holidays without being penalized or discriminated against.
 - **Ask yourself:** Are leaders and individuals within groups aware of our accommodation policies for employees³ and students⁴, which outline our rights and obligations to accommodations and a workplace and academic environment that is free from discrimination?

² The university is obliged to make every reasonable effort short of undue hardship to take substantial and meaningful measures to eliminate or reduce the discriminatory effects of its workplace environment, including facilities, policies, procedures, and practices.

³ Accommodations Policy for Employees https://www.dal.ca/content/dam/dalhousie/pdf/university_secretariat/policy-repository/AccommodationPolicy.pdf

⁴ Student Accommodation Policy https://www.dal.ca/content/dam/dalhousie/pdf/university_secretariat/policy-repository/StudentAccomPolicy_Nov252014.pdf