

Ramadhan Support Guide

For Academic and
Professional Employees



Creating Inclusive and Supportive Environments for Fasting Staff & Students

Ramadhan (also known as Ramadan and Ramzan) is one of the most significant months in the Islamic calendar, observed by Muslims worldwide through fasting, additional prayer and spiritual reflection, as well as family and community engagement.

As educators and university employees, we play an important role in fostering an inclusive academic environment where all students and employees –regardless of their background– can thrive.

This guide provides general information about Ramadhan, outlines challenges students and employees may face during the month, and offers practical strategies to support them compassionately and effectively.

During this time, some Muslim students and employees may experience:

- **Fatigue and reduced concentration** due to early wake-up times, reduced food and water intake and less sleep due to late-night prayers.
- **Dehydration**, especially in warmer weather.
- **Difficulty attending or being focused during evening** classes, group work, or social events that clash with Iftar (breaking of fast) and the evening prayer (Maghrib).
- **Stress** due to balancing requirements of Ramadhan with academic and/or work pressures. Adjusting to a different time schedule can also lead to stress.
- **Isolation or discomfort** if their needs finding halal food to break their fast, getting enough time to pray, having an accessible prayer space, etc, aren't adequately acknowledged or supported.

Additional challenges may be present if a person is:

- **At the beginning of the academic year** when students are adjusting to new environment, classes, schedules, and university life. For employees, it would be due to the additional workload brought about by the start of a new year and semester.
- **Pregnant, suffers from a disability impacted by fasting, or has a chronic illness** and chooses to fast with the support of their doctors.
- **Needs to adjust schedules** to accommodate the changes to their normal eating, worship and sleeping schedule, which could potentially cause additional pressures.
- **Fasting in this climate for the first time**, e.g. new migrants or international students in their first semester.

What is Ramadhan, and why do some colleagues and students fast?

Ramadhan is the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar, and one of the five founding pillars of the faith. It is a required practice and is observed by Muslims as a period of deep spiritual reflection, fasting, increased prayer, religious and spiritual practice. It is also the month where the revelation of the holy Qur'an began.

Ramadhan is marked with abstaining from food and drink (including water), habits that are deemed to be negative such as smoking, increased charity, religious and spiritual practices, all with the aim of gaining self-discipline and self-awareness..

Any person observing the month of Ramadhan is expected to continue with their daily routine to the best of their ability. Any changes in routine are normally to facilitate prayer, additional worship and breaking one's fast. While this might be the case, there are some who may struggle with the heat, not eating or drinking for an extended period, etc.

Do all Muslims fast?

Fasting becomes obligatory once a person reaches puberty. Some may be exempt due to age, health, pregnancy and breastfeeding, menstruation, travel, or personal reasons. Avoid assuming or asking directly as this may cause discomfort. Create a safe space where people can share their needs voluntarily.

How long does Ramadhan run for?

Ramadhan runs for 29 to 30 days, the start and end dependant on the sighting of the new moon. Fasting occurs from dawn to dusk, with calendars available to show specific times for the pre-dawn meal, breaking fast, as well as the five daily prayers.

Do all cultural communities observe Ramadhan the same way?

Whilst the founding principles are the same (abstaining from food/water, increased worship and prayer, etc), there are some cultural practices that may be observed differently in each community. Some communities might have simple meals to break their fast, whilst others might have a bigger spread.

There might also be differences in how Eid – ul – Fitr is observed, with some communities having a simple celebration, and others celebrating for three days. And whilst this might be the case, this should not impact on a student's attendance or participation in their coursework for more than a day, as extended celebrations are secondary and not mandatory.

Some key practices during the month

Suhoor

Waking up for the pre-dawn meal, prior to the first prayer of the day. Whilst this is the general term in Arabic, some communities might refer to it using a different name – Daku in Swahili, Sehri in Urdu and Fotha Bala in Sylhet.

Iftar

Meal to break the fast at dusk.

Salah

Five mandatory prayers that are meant to be performed at particular times of the day. Salah is also one of the founding pillars of Islam. Each prayer takes approximately 5 – 10 minutes.

There are optional prayers that can also be included. Whilst these aren't mandatory, they are recommended and can add to the amount of time one takes to pray.

It is preferred that Salah be performed in a clean and quiet space. For prayer times during the upcoming Ramadhan, please refer to the Ramadhan calendar attached.

Wudhu

Ablution performed prior to prayer. It involves cleansing certain parts of the body, in a particular order and three times each – hands, mouth, nose, face, arm from elbow to wrist, hair, ears, feet.

Tarawih

Extended night prayers that only occur during Ramadhan. While optional, most will choose to attend the prayers at a mosque or prayer hall, or choose to perform it at home.

Sadaqa/Zakat

Charity that is given to those in need. Sadaqa is voluntary and can be any amount or item. Zakat is mandatory, set at a certain amount each year, or a percentage of a person's total wealth.

Last 10 days of the month

Prayer and supplication are increased, as well as extended night prayers. This is considered as a more auspicious time of the month.

Eid ul-Fitr

The festival that marks the end of Ramadhan, celebrated with prayer, family, and food. The festival is celebrated across 1 – 3 days, depending on the community or country.

Inclusive Practices

Can I ask a student or Employee member if they are fasting?

Only if relevant to providing support. Ask privately and respectfully. Some students and employees may prefer not to discuss their faith practices.

How can non-Muslim colleagues and students show support?

Simple gestures like acknowledging Ramadhan, avoiding offering food or drink in meetings, avoiding eating or drinking in shared workspaces if possible, or saying “Ramadhan Mubarak” / “Happy Ramadhan” are appreciated.

Refrain from commenting on how hard fasting must be or making comment on how you would struggle. It is ok to ask about the practice in a respectful way, so as to learn more and understand. However, respect a person’s choice to not engage if they do not wish to participate in a discussion.

Are there additional wellbeing considerations in summer?

Yes. Long daylight hours mean fasting for longer. This leads to less hours for rest and the risk of dehydration. The increased heat can also cause fatigue, especially for students who have never fasted in these environmental conditions. Encourage taking breaks in shaded areas or indoors, adjusting workloads, and providing water access for non-fasting periods.

How might Eid – Ul – Fitr impact on student and Employee attendance and performance?

Eid – ul – Fitr falls on the first day of the next Islamic month and may be a day of absence for students and Employee.

Where possible, allow flexibility or accommodations around this time. Support employees and students should they choose to take the day off to celebrate with their family and friends. The significance of the day is akin to Christmas for Christians, or Diwali for Hindus.

What other information would be good to know?

There are two major groups when it comes to the Islamic faith – Sunni’s and Shia’s. The founding principles are the same, they only differ when it comes to how each group practices and interprets religious text.

Remember that no two people are the same. Though the principals are the same, they might be interpreted and applied slightly differently by each person.

Feel free to ask questions if need be. Just do so with respect and curiosity, rather than judgement and stereotypes.

What if Ramadhan coincides with exam marking or onboarding?

Factor in flexible deadlines or alternative working patterns for fasting Employees where feasible. Speak to the Employee and find out what will work for them.

Inclusive Practices

How can I adjust teaching and assessment schedules to be more inclusive?

Where possible, avoid scheduling intense activities, physically demanding tasks and long exams or assessments late in the day, or around key dates during the month – provide early morning or early afternoon options if feasible.

Consult the students early if Ramadhan overlaps with assessment weeks. Offer flexibility in timing. You can consider extensions. Please refer to question nine (9) for considerations when granting extensions.

Discuss time and organisation management skills that can be utilised during this time as the course commences. Offer resources available within the university on how this can be achieved, e.g. the Study Success Toolkit that offers resources to help with planning and studying successfully.

Set clear expectations about course timelines, assignment due dates and practical start dates if applicable.

Should I grant extensions for students observing Ramadhan?

Fasting should not limit a person's ability to plan or perform as they usually do. At the beginning of the course, acknowledge that you are aware that some students are fasting and the change to routines that come about during the fasting month. By doing so, you are showing understanding and awareness, as well as creating an inclusive environment.

Treat requests with the same empathy as other wellbeing-related adjustments. Please refer to The Assessment Support Procedure.

If the student requesting the extension also has a disability, please refer to the Student Disability Policy for more information about reasonable adjustment for students with a disability.

How can group work be managed fairly during Ramadhan?

Encourage students to take fasting hours into consideration when planning meetings. Offer asynchronous options for collaboration. Create a supportive classroom culture by encouraging understanding and cooperativeness.

How will fasting affect students who have practicals or part of their course that is physically demanding?

Whilst fasting can have an impact on physical energy levels and cognitive capabilities, it should not stop a person from doing what they would normally do. The premise is for the person to continue with their normal daily routines without adjustments.

That being said, there will be situations where students can potentially be impacted, for example, they have never fasted in this climate, and the heat is proving to be too much for them to cope with, or in the case of someone who has just reverted to Islam, it could be their first time fasting. This can increase chances of physiological and psychological impacts due to not knowing how to cope or what to do to manage the discomfort brought about by fasting.

Working with the student to support them during their practicals will be key. If they can get to know their shift times in advance, this will help them plan around them. If dawn or dusk should fall during their shift, giving them the opportunity to eat, hydrate and pray will go a long way in ensuring they are able to cope. If there are opportunities for their practicals to be scheduled during the day, it would be advantageous, as they would be able to eat their pre-fasting meal, as well as break their fast outside of their work. This goes for employees, too.

Examples of Good Practice

A student asks to reschedule a group meeting set for 7:15pm as they will be breaking their fast and praying between 6.30pm and 7pm.

Encourage the group to find an alternative time, helping them understand why and how it will show support and inclusivity to their fellow group member.

A student looks tired during a morning lab, and you are aware that they are fasting.

Be patient and, if needed, check in privately. Offer breaks where students can go for a walk if need be or just rest for a while so they can gain some energy.

A student is seeking an extension due to not having their assignment ready. They state that due to fasting, they have not been able to finish the assignment on time.

Whilst fasting can impact on cognitive capabilities as well as physical energy levels, those who are fasting are expected to manage their time as well as utilise organisational skills to ensure that fasting and the extra demands during Ramadhan do not impact on their studies or work. The standard guidelines pertaining to extensions should be followed, unless there are extenuating circumstances other than fasting. Please refer to question nine (9) in the FAQ for further information about assessments and extensions.

A catered department meeting is planned during Ramadhan.

Offer takeaway options to any colleagues or attendees that may be fasting. Please ensure that the options are halal and meet dietary requirements.

You notice a student quietly leaving and you believe that they are leaving to pray.

Respect their need to do so. Seek more information about prayer times and durations. Having the knowledge will assist with conversations that you may have around the subject. You could also address the matter at the beginning of the session, advising the students that if anyone needs to go pray they may take short prayer breaks and return to class after.

A student informs you that Eid-ul-Fitr is approaching. Due to this, they will be away from class for an extended period of time to celebrate with family and friends.

Eid-ul-Fitr is generally celebrated on one day. Some communities might extend it to three days, however, this is very rare in Australia as extending the celebrations past a day is optional. It is reasonable for a student to be away for a day. Anything longer than that would require some supporting evidence, provided by a religious leader confirming that the celebrations will take the requested time, and that their attendance is mandatory.