



Opinion of General Counsel

Opinion # 2012-03

Holiday and Religious Displays

This opinion outlines and clarifies the University of Kentucky's policies regarding holiday and religious displays on campus. The University strives to create an environment of awareness, support, and respect for a wide range of beliefs and rituals.

The University of Kentucky is a community whose members hold a variety of religious and philosophical views. As a public institution, we must respect the First Amendment's Establishment Clause, Free Exercise Clause, and Free Speech Clause. Institutionally-sponsored religious symbols that convey the University's endorsement of religion are not appropriate. Departments should be respectful of our diversity of beliefs and refrain from displaying within public areas in the workplace any religious symbols that may be seen as endorsing a particular religious viewpoint. Nevertheless, our concern about the appearance of institutional endorsement for a particular religious viewpoint must be balanced against our constitutional obligation to respect the Free Speech and Free Exercise rights of individuals.

Based on University regulations, the following statements outline guiding principles regarding holiday decorations.

1. Non-religious holiday decorations are acceptable. Examples of non-religious decorations: wreaths, snowflakes, trees decorated with non-religious decorations, bows, garland, strings of lights, Santa Claus figures, holly, reindeer, poinsettia plants, and candy canes. Please use good judgment in the use of such decorations so as not to disrupt University activities or create safety hazards.
2. Religious holiday decorations may not be displayed in public areas. Examples of religious decorations: Nativity scene, menorah, crosses, and Star of David.
3. Religious symbols may be displayed by any member of the campus community in their personal workspace. Personal workspaces are areas occupied by a single University employee and where the public generally does not enter. However, if members of the University community (students, faculty, or staff) regularly enter a private office to conduct University business, the occupant of that office

should consider whether religious symbols might be viewed as implying University endorsement for that religion.

4. Care should be given to remain sensitive to other's levels of comfort regarding items on display and recognize that some may not feel they have freedom to express concern about items (i.e., students expressing concern to faculty, etc.).

These guidelines are intended to allow each person to express his or her own views and beliefs and that by following them, we can respect many points of view. For questions, please contact the Office of Legal Counsel at (859) 257-2936.

References:

[Governing Regulation, Part I](#), Section H, Use of University Facilities