

**Supporting Muslim Fieldwork Students:
Understanding Religion Rituals in Various Practice Settings
FAQ Sheet**

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Objectives

- Identify the daily religious rituals that Muslim students perform during traditional work hours.
- Identify different ways Muslim rituals are incorporated into different fieldwork practice settings.

Terminology

Ablution (*wudu*)- ritual washing in order to be considered “clean” before praying. Blood, urine, feces all make a Muslim “unclean” for prayer, therefore a specific washing protocol which includes a quick pat with damp hands/light rinse of the face, hair, ears, arms to elbows and feet is performed. This may take up to 5 minutes, and yes, you may walk in on your Muslim colleague with a foot in the sink...this is more awkward for you than them.

Fasting (*Sawm*)- A Muslim may fast (abstain from eating, drinking, smoking, and exhibit extra behavioral self control) for a variety of reasons related to their faith. The fast lasts from sunrise to sunset, and yes, no drinking means not even water. Ramadan is the holy month in which a Muslim fasts every day for a month (no, not nights too, just during the daytime). While this may make you uncomfortable and worry about them, they know their bodies and its’ limits. It’s ok to eat and drink in front of a Muslim while they fast, yet understanding that they may choose to sit somewhere else for lunch break than at the lunch table is understandable too. A sick person is excused from obligatory fasting, as is a woman during her cycle to prevent undue physical stress.

Headscarf (*hijab*)- covering Muslim women wear over their hair and chest area, also includes sleeves to wrists and pants to ankles, typically longer shirts at hips for modesty. A Muslim woman may or may not cover, may or may not also cover her face with an additional covering called *niqab*. This is her personal preference that may also signify geographical or cultural norms. The headscarf is typically attached with a pin

clasp, safety pin or straight pin, there may be more than one pin. Scarves are rarely a choke hazard for the wearer and typically survive a ride on a roller coaster. If you are working in a specific setting where pins are forbidden (i.e. mental health) feel free to ask your student to secure their scarf without pins (this can be done, just a tuck method) or to wear a sports scarf, the “amira” style is what this typically means. Asking a student to not cover is a violation of their rights, asking them to wear a scarf safe for their practice setting is allowed. Have patience as this may involve some trial and error.

Holiday (*Eid*)- There are two Islamic holidays a year, one at the end of the holy month of Ramadan, in which Muslims fast. Another is a few months after that. The holiday is technically three days, but most Muslims typically celebrate on the actual day of the community prayer. It can be difficult for Muslims and non-Muslims alike to anticipate the exact day of the holiday until just beforehand as it is based on a lunar calendar that shifts every year and the holiday itself cannot be announced without physical sighting of the new moon. So, while many Western calendars and even Islamic websites may state the holiday, in fact it can be determined up until the night before. This can lead to a lot of anxiety for students in fieldwork trying to give their FW educator advanced warning and expectations around calling out. It is common to say “Eid Mubarak” (eye-eed moo bar ak) to wish someone a happy holiday.

Holy Day (*Jumah*)- Friday is the day of worship for Muslims. Noon prayer is communal and includes a sermon, most Muslims feel duty bound to attend this 45-90 minute commitment on Fridays depending on access, and make it fit into their work schedules accordingly.

Prayer (*salat*)- meaning one of the five segments of daily prayer to be performed, this is a physical act that requires room to move up and down and bend at the waist (preferable not to have an audience behind you, especially for women). Do not interrupt/speak to a person in mid-prayer, step or walk directly in front of them. If a fire alarm were to go off, a Muslim would interrupt their prayer, this would be one of the only exceptions. Workplace prayer usually lasts about 7-10 minutes in addition to the 5-20 minutes needed for ablution. It is more respectful to refrain from loud distractants, i.e. music or loud conversations directly in area of person in prayer. Some students may choose to go to their car at lunch to perform prayers in a more private setting.

There are 5 prayers a day, the midday (*duhr*) and afternoon (*asr*) prayers are most likely the ones impacted by fieldwork environment. A Muslim is duty bound to pray in the 1-3 hour window of that prayer. The more timely the better. Local prayer times can be found

at www.islamicfinder.org. Lastly a Muslim prays in the direction of Mecca, which is roughly northeast or east for most of the continental US.

This is by no means a complete list and each Muslim may have a slight variety to their daily practice, it is meant as a general guide to open dialogue with a student you support, not as any kind of scholarly religious discourse.