



Office of Equity and Inclusion

Oregon State University, 526 Kerr Administration Building, Corvallis, Oregon 97331-2139

T 541-737-3556 | F 541-737-0712 | <http://oregonstate.edu/oei>

Guidelines for Holiday Decorations

The Office of Equity and Inclusion offers the following recommendations to guide departments as they plan for the use of holiday decorations in their units. We understand that having a festive environment, especially during the December/January holidays is important to many of our students, employees, and stakeholders. We also believe this can and should be accomplished in ways that are inclusive and respectful of a range of cultural traditions.

Considerations

Two constitutional protections inform the university's guidelines about holiday decorations:

1. As a public agency, OSU may not advance or endorse religion, non-religion, or one religion over another.
2. The university must safeguard the rights of individuals to the free exercise of their beliefs.

As you consider whether or how to display holiday decorations, please ensure that both these constitutional obligations are met. To clarify, this means that individuals do have the right to display religious symbols privately in their work areas, but such expressions must clearly be personal, private, and not appear to be public. Religious symbols should not be displayed in areas such that they seem to be expressions of the institution rather than an individual. The distinction between private and public spaces and private and public expressions should be determined using best judgment about how decorations will appear to the reasonable observer; please contact the Office of Equity and Inclusion (541-737-3556) with specific questions.

In addition to these legal parameters, Oregon State University is committed to inclusiveness and respect for a wide range of cultural customs. The Office of Equity and Inclusion encourages individuals and departments to be thoughtful and respectful of the beliefs, traditions, and comfort level of others with regard to holiday decorations. The visibility of decorations to others and their resulting impact upon the workplace should be considered by employees who place them in the workplace.

Inclusive Strategies

The following suggestions are meant as a starting point for conversations and planning within your department. Please note that holiday decorations must conform to all fire and safety regulations.



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- Use a collaborative process for staff input into department decorating plans.
- Respect an individual's decision to not participate.
- Focus decorations on the winter season by using images that are not associated with religious traditions (e.g., snowflakes, snow sculptures, sleds). Remember that images that seem neutral to some may be experienced as religious by others with different traditions.
- Ensure that decorations reflect and are respectful of the diversity of our university community.
- Identify a specific period of time for the display of holiday decorations.
- Consider how efforts support and enhance the university's values and goals with regard to equity, inclusion, and diversity.

Thank you.