

Suggestions for Students at Lehigh Who Are Observing or Planning to Observe the Fast in Ramadan

For most Muslims, fasting during the month of Ramadan is a religious obligation. However, its core practice is a physical act that might have consequences for one's mind and body. If you are fasting during this month or planning to fast, there are matters you need to know that could help you perform the fast while successfully navigating your studies and other activities at Lehigh.

(1) The first thing to note is that Islamic law permits (and actually encourages) anyone to refrain from fasting if fasting entails undue physical or psychological hardship. This license is based on the Qur'anic verses 2:183-185.

(2) One key aspect of fasting in Ramadan is that you should strive to maintain your usual study and work duties as close to normal as possible.

(3) In spite of what is stated above, fasting daily from all food and drink from dawn to sunset (and for 29 consecutive days) entails, for most people, certain physical and mental limitations. You might experience some of those limitations. If you do, you are strongly advised to approach your instructor, coach, or any person with whom you work at Lehigh requesting some of the accommodations listed below. You can simply copy and paste the parts that are relevant to your specific needs during Ramadan and email them to the appropriate person at Lehigh in order to request adequate support.

(4) If you are attending class during the time of sunset, you need to break the fast at that time. If the instructor allows students to eat and drink during class, you should break the fast then in class. Otherwise, inform the instructor in advance that you will need to leave the class temporarily to break the fast. Traditionally, most Muslims break the fast with a drink and a few bites and later consume a complete meal. So, you will be able to break the fast during class time and then eat a complete meal after class.

(5) Many people who are observing the fast report a certain degree of mental fatigue (a form of "brain fog"), especially close to sunset. The most common features of this mental fatigue are difficulty maintaining concentration for more than 20 minutes and lack of adequate cognitive alertness. These symptoms are primarily due to low mental energy. The fuel (energy) the human brain needs is glucose, and humans get glucose by eating carbohydrates and other foods that can be converted to glucose. Of course, during the hours of the fast, your brain might not be able to get all the energy it requires to function fully and sharply. If you encounter these difficulties, you should approach your instructor and explain your condition and its cause. Ask your instructor if it's all right for you to attend office hours (or to schedule one) to go over some of the materials discussed in class and about which you are not clear.

(6) Just as you might experience mental fatigue, you might also experience physical fatigue – again, that is due to a low level of physical energy. If you are engaged in some strenuous physical activities (such as participating in certain sports or performing arts),

it's very likely that you will not be able to perform these activities in your usual manner. Here again, you should approach the coaches or producers and explain to them how you feel (and why you are feeling this way). They might be able to assist you by suggesting alternative times for performing those activities.

In sum, almost all the people in charge are happy to help if they are approached with relevant explanations and requests. But you need to advocate for yourself and your needs. People will not know that you are fasting if you don't inform them. And even if they know that you are observing the fast, they might not know what exactly you need in order to carry out your studies and activities successfully. So, be your own advocate, and Happy Fasting!