



THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK GUIDANCE MEMORANDUM

GUIDANCE SPONSOR: OFFICE OF ACADEMIC AFFAIRS, STUDENT AFFAIRS

EFFECTIVE: October 1, 2025

Purpose

The City University of New York (the “University” or “CUNY”) respects the rights of those that are baptized observers of Khalsa Sikhism and those who observe the Sikh religion to wear a Kirpan as a part of their religious beliefs. The purpose of this guidance is to provide a protocol and guidelines for accommodating the Kirpan on the University’s campuses.

Scope

This policy applies to all CUNY students, employees, delivery partners, affiliates, volunteers, contractors, and visitors.

Definitions

Kirpan: is generally described as a small ceremonial sword “typically” 15 to 22 centimeters (six (6) to (9) inches) in length and, in Sikh religion is a symbol of courage, self-sacrifice, defense of the weak and righteousness. Wearing the Kirpan is a requirement of being a Khalsa Sikh. The ceremonial knife symbolizes each individual's duty towards other human beings, particularly the poor and oppressed, and is worn on the person. The Kirpan is not a weapon, and strict rules prohibit its use as such. It is never to be removed from its sheath. For safety reasons, two (2) or three (3) clasps hold the Kirpan securely in the sheath, with a fabric belt (called a Gatra). The Gatra is worn across the torso, keeping the Kirpan next to the body. Only Khalsa Sikhism requires that a baptized Khalsa Sikh is required to wear a Kirpan.

Guidance

- 1) Kirpans may be worn on a CUNY campus only by individuals identified in the **Scope** stated herein, who are observers of Sikhism and are able to demonstrate that

they must wear a Kirpan as part of their religious beliefs. However, wearing a Kirpan shall be permitted subject to the following conditions:

- The wearer must be a Sikh or must satisfy the CUNY campus that the wearer sincerely believes that they must wear a Kirpan as a part of their religious beliefs.
 - Individuals may be requested to provide a letter from their Gurdwara (a place of worship) confirming that they are a Sikh. In cases where this is not appropriate or possible, a signed declaration by the student will be sufficient to meet the needs of the University.
 - The Kirpan (hilt, blade, and sheath) is not to exceed 11.4 centimeters (4.5 inches) in length, with a blade not to exceed 5.08 centimeters (two (2) inches) in length, however smaller Kirpans are preferable.
 - The Kirpan is not to be worn visibly and should be worn close to the body in a secure sheath at all times.
 - The Kirpan must be sufficiently secured to render removal difficult, however not impossible.
 - Modifications to a student's program may be necessary, depending on the nature of the program, where wearing of a Kirpan may inadvertently cause physical harm to the wearer or another individual while participating in program activities or during off campus authorized activities.
 - That the right to wear a Kirpan on University premises may be suspended by the University should there be misuse by the wearer.
- 2) The University reserves the right to, occasionally, in a private and sensitive manner, seek to verify that the limitations listed above are being respected and continue to be met.
- 3) A student/employee's right to wear the Kirpan may be suspended by a University school or college for failure to comply with the conditions noted above.