Houston Graduate School of Theology

Student Handbook

Revised August 2014
The Student Handbook represents a condensed summary of the policies, procedures, and standards explained more fully in the HGST Catalog, which is the official student policy guide of the seminary.
Welcome to Houston Graduate School of Theology

You have sensed the calling of God upon your life to Christian ministry and have decided to prepare to fulfill that calling through graduate studies. We want to help you meet these goals. This Handbook provides information and guidelines for daily routines and professional style that will enhance your ministry and the life of the seminary. It is our hope that you will want to fit into this setting with respect, gratitude, and a professional manner that does honor to our Lord Jesus Christ and his church.

Responsibility and Style

HGST students are asked to:

- Use good judgment and taste in their dress and appearance while at the school.
- Refrain from smoking inside the facility or within ten feet of entrances.
- Avoid loud discussions in class and the hallway when other meetings are in progress.
- Treat each other (students, faculty, and staff) with utmost respect regardless of differences of opinion. Personal attacks or insults will not be tolerated.
- Attend chapel when possible.
- Complete assignments by deadlines as indicated in syllabi.
- Keep accounts with the school settled or have a satisfactory payment plan arranged with the Financial Aid Office and the Business Office.
- Be aware of academic policies and requirements and take initiative in meeting these responsibilities.

Facilities

HGST is located at 4300-C West Bellfort in Houston, on the east side of the campus of Willow Meadows Baptist Church.

Classes - Classrooms at HGST are located on 2nd floor. The Library “Seminar Room,” Room 106, is also used as a classroom from time to time.

Any special activities or student use of these rooms for meetings should be scheduled in advance in coordination with the Academic Office. Student use of the building is to be limited to the classrooms, Student Commons, and the Library unless otherwise noted.

As good stewards of our responses, join us in treating our leased facilities with the utmost respect.

Food Services - Numerous restaurants are located nearby. In addition, the Student Commons is located in the north wing. The Student Commons is equipped with vending machines,
refrigerator, and microwave oven. Care must be taken to maintain this area. Students are responsible to clean up after themselves in order to leave the area as clean as possible at all times. Care should be taken when bringing food and beverages into classroom areas.

**Office Locations** – The 1st floor of the complex houses the Reception Desk, the offices of the President, Provost and Chief Academic Officer, and Chief Financial Officer, and the Library. All resident faculty offices, the Registrar’s office, and classrooms 201-205 are located on the 2nd floor. Telephones, copy machines, and other equipment are to be used by school employees only. A copy machine in the library is available for student use. Offices for the Chief Advancement Officer, Admissions Coordinator, and Financial Aid and Student Services, are located in the north wing, adjacent to the Student Commons

**Parking** - Ample, well-lit parking is provided for students in the area directly in front of the seminary’s entrance.

**STUDENT SERVICES AND RELATED POLICIES**

*Please refer to the Academic Catalog for a complete listing of policies*

**Academic Probation** - A student will be placed on academic probation for the following reasons:
- A student’s cumulative GPA falls below the minimum for his or her degree program as published in the Academic Catalog under which he or she was admitted.
- A student receives three or more failing grades over three or fewer successive terms.

A student placed on academic probation may register for no more than 10 credit hours per regular semester (6 hours in the summer) until the student’s cumulative GPA rises above the minimum requirement. A student placed on academic probation due to a low cumulative GPA shall automatically be removed from academic probation when the student’s cumulative GPA rises above the minimum required for his or her degree program. A student whose cumulative GPA remains below the minimum requirement for two consecutive terms after being placed on academic probation will ordinarily be discontinued from the seminary.

It is important to note that academic probation differs from financial aid academic probation. The Financial Aid Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) is governed by federal regulation and is used to monitor a student’s eligibility to receive Title IV funds. The Financial Aid office is responsible for monitoring the Financial Aid SAP policy. Only students receiving Title IV funds are subject to the Financial Aid SAP policy. (See the Financial Aid Student Handbook published on the school’s website, www.hgst.edu.)

**Attendance** - Regular attendance is expected in all classes. Students are responsible for obtaining information from fellow students about missed lectures or announcements made in their absence and assume the risk of missing assignments or quizzes by unexcused absence. Whenever possible, the instructor should be notified prior to the absence. Attendance is
especially important in intensives, mini-terms, or seminar-style classes. The success of any course depends upon the regular attendance and participation of each member. Therefore, an excessive number of absences, as outlined in the syllabus, may result in a grade of “F” for the course, despite completion of other requirements.

**Campus Security Information** - The U.S. Department of Education requires all Title IV institutions to publish and make available up-to-date campus security information to their students and staff. HGST’s most recent campus security information can be found on the school’s website, www.hgst.edu.

**Children on the HGST Campus** - In addition to providing graduate-level studies, Houston Graduate School of Theology is a community of faith and caring, concerned with the well-being of every member of its family. However, unattended children can disrupt the teaching and learning process, may damage equipment or facilities, and may cause injury to themselves or others. HGST employees are not qualified to provide adequate childcare and cannot take responsibility for the safety and well-being of children while their parents are in class, conducting business on campus, or studying in the library. Therefore, students with children under the age of 12 should seek alternative childcare arrangements off campus.

Children 12 and older may sit quietly and read or study in the Student Commons, the Student Lounge, or the Library. In every case, parents are responsible for ensuring that their child does not become a distraction to fellow students or HGST employees. Noncompliance may lead to the revoking of the privilege of bringing children of any age to campus.

**Copying and Copyright** - HGST students are expected to purchase or otherwise obtain a copy of each required textbook. A copy of the required textbook for each HGST course is placed on reserve in the Library every semester; however, reserve books may not be removed from the Library nor may they be photocopied in their entirety. Except in cases where a book is out of copyright (published prior to 1923) or is not available at a reasonable cost, photocopying an entire book is forbidden under U.S. Copyright Law. Following is the actual text that the U.S. Copyright Office suggests posting in libraries and that is posted in the HGST library.

The copyright law of the United States (Title 17, United States Code) governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted material. Under certain conditions specified in the law, libraries and archives are authorized to furnish a photocopy or other reproduction. One of these specified conditions is that the photocopy or reproduction is not to be “used for any purpose other than private study, scholarship, or research.” If a user makes a request for, or later uses, a photocopy or reproduction for purposes in excess of “fair use,” that user may be liable for copyright infringement. This institution reserves the right to refuse to accept a copying order if, in its judgment, fulfillment of the order would involve violation of copyright law.
Course Load - A full-time load is defined as at least nine credit hours for fall and spring semesters. A full-time load for summer terms is defined as at least five credit hours. Students who wish to graduate within the time period designated for each degree program should plan to enroll full-time whenever possible. Students who are employed twenty or more hours per week are advised to take fewer than twelve credit hours per semester. Taking classes during summer sessions and special mini-terms will help reduce the period of time necessary for completion of degrees.

Educational Rights and Privacy - FERPA is an acronym for the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (20 U.S.C. 1232g, 34 CFR 99). Congress enacted FERPA, also referred to as the “Buckley Amendment,” in 1974. FERPA mandates that schools, including colleges and universities, maintain students’ records in a confidential manner. It requires that students be allowed to inspect and review their education records and request the amendment of records that are inaccurate or misleading. It also prohibits the disclosure of student information except in limited circumstances. Rights under FERPA apply to eligible students. An eligible student is an individual who is or has been in attendance at HGST. FERPA rights begin on the first day of class in the academic term for which the student is accepted. Applicants who are denied admission or who never attend are not covered under FERPA.

Education Records
Education records are records directly related to a student and maintained by HGST or by a party acting for HGST. Printed documents, handwritten notes, emails, electronic documents, and web pages can all contain education records covered by FERPA. Education records may include but are not limited to:
- Student folders in Admissions/Registrar/Financial Aid/Advisors/Placement offices
- Student classroom activity or homework maintained by HGST as part of the student’s permanent record
- Reports and records
- Class rolls, papers, and tests
- Application forms for student organizations/activities
- Memos between school employees
- Photographs
- Most student disciplinary records

The following are not included in the definition of education records:
- Employment records where employment is not connected to student status
- Alumni records that do not relate to the person as a student
- Records made by instructional, administrative, and educational personnel that are not shared with others

Directory Information
FERPA permits institutions to define some education record information as “directory information” not confidential under FERPA. This is information that is generally not considered
harmful or an invasion of privacy if disclosed. HGST considers the following directory information:

- Student’s full name
- Permanent address and telephone number
- Local address and telephone number
- Email address
- State of residence
- Date and place of birth
- Marital status
- Academic status
- Class schedule and roster
- Name of advisor
- Major field of study
- Dates of attendance and graduation
- Degrees and honors and awards received
- Photographic, video, or electronic images of students taken and maintained by the school

Although the above information is not confidential under FERPA, HGST will not disclose this information to third parties who plan to use the information for purposes of commercial solicitation. Students may opt out of the release of directory information by completing a form available in the Registrar’s office.

**Student Rights Under FERPA**

Under FERPA, students may:

- Inspect and review their education records (requests should be made in writing)
- Request the amendment of inaccurate or misleading records (requests must be made in writing)
- Consent to disclosure of personally identifiable information contained in their education records by completing a form available in the Registrar’s office
- File a complaint with the U.S. Department of Education concerning alleged failures by HGST to comply with this law

HGST is not required to provide a copy of education records unless failure to do so would deny access. Records cannot be destroyed if a request is pending. The school must comply with written requests to inspect and review education records within 45 days. FERPA does not grant the student access to:

- Educational records that contain information on more than one student (the student may review only the specific information about himself or herself).
- Confidential letters of recommendation, for which the student has signed a waiver and which are related to admission to HGST.
School Officials and Legitimate Educational Interests
A school official is a person employed by HGST in an administrative, supervisory, academic, research, or support staff position. This includes contractors, consultants, volunteers, and other outside parties to whom the institution has outsourced institutional services or functions, persons serving on the Board of Trustees, and students serving on official committees or assisting school officials in performing their tasks.

Only school officials with a legitimate educational interest may access education records. A school official has a legitimate educational interest if the official needs to review an education record in order to fulfill his or her professional responsibilities for the school. Upon request, HGST also discloses education records without consent to officials of another school in which a student seeks or intends to enroll.

Grade Point Average (GPA) is based on the four point system: A=4.0; A-=3.7; B+=3.3; B=3.0; B-=2.7; C+=2.3; C=2.0; C-=1.7; D+=1.3; D=1.0; D-=0.7; F=0.0.

Courses in which the student receives a failing grade (“F”) count as hours attempted and are computed in the GPA. If a grade of P, W, WA, WP, or WF is received, the course is counted toward the number of hours attempted but is not computed in the GPA. The minimum cumulative GPA required for graduation is 3.0 in the Doctor of Ministry, Master of Arts in Counseling, and Master of Theological Studies degree programs and 2.5 in the Master of Divinity, Master of Arts in Spiritual Direction, and Master of Arts in Missional Leadership degree programs. No grade below C- will be considered a passing grade for a required course.

Grade Reports are distributed via email to students at the close of each semester. Students who do not wish to receive grades via email may choose to opt out through the Registrar’s Office. In the event a grade of “I” has been given, an adjusted Grade Report will be issued when incomplete work is completed. Students whose business office accounts and library fines remain unpaid at the end of the term will not receive Grade Reports until the accounts are settled.

Grievances and Appeals - A grievance is a cause of distress affording reason for complaint. When a student has a grievance regarding treatment under school policies, including grades, every effort will be made to deal with the matter fairly according to this process:

1. An appeal by a student for redress of a grievance must be made in writing with the signature of the person making the complaint.
2. A grievance from a student must first be given to the faculty or staff member to whom the grievance pertains.
3. A further step, in the event it is necessary for a second consideration, will be to have the grievance presented to the Chief Academic Officer.
4. If necessary, a decision by Chief Academic Officer about a grievance may be appealed to the President. The decision of the President is final.
Illicit Drugs and Alcohol Abuse (Pertaining to Section 22: The Drug Free Schools and Communities Act – Amendment of 1989)

Standards of Conduct - Any student who is found under the influence of illicit drugs or alcohol while on HGST property, or who is in unlawful possession of, using, or distributing an illicit drug or alcohol on HGST property or as part of any of its activities, will be expelled immediately from the campus and must appeal, in writing, to the HGST President for reinstatement.

Report to Legal Authorities - HGST will observe all City of Houston, State of Texas, and United States federal laws and sanctions for the unlawful possession or distribution of illicit drugs and alcohol by students. If there is a violation of any applicable policy or sanction, law enforcement authorities will be called for the appropriate action or response. Charges resulting from violation of local, state, and federal laws could range from misdemeanor punishment to felony charges; this could result in fines or confinement in jail.

Health Risks Associated with the Use of Illicit Drugs and the Abuse of Alcohol - The health risks associated with the use of illicit drugs and the abuse of alcohol are identifiable in several areas. Excessive drinking causes a multiple series of psychological, physiological, and social problems. Illicit drugs such as marijuana, cocaine, barbiturates, and designer drugs are more devastating to the physiological and psychological aspects of human beings.

Library Services - The Student ID card also serves as the HGST library card. Students may check out up to six books. The borrowing period is two weeks. Books may be renewed provided another patron has not requested the item. Reference (including bound HGST theses or project reports) and Reserve Room items may not leave the Library. The fine for overdue books is 25 cents per book per day. Students cannot receive final course grades, diplomas, or transcripts until all library fines are paid in full.

Non-discrimination Policy - HGST welcomes students, regardless of age, national or ethnic origins, sex, marital status, race, socio-economic status, and disability, to all the rights, privileges, and programs generally accorded or made available to students. HGST does not discriminate on the basis of any of these factors in the administration of its policies.

Further, the use of sexist, religious, or racial epithets or any other derogatory statement or conduct based upon a person’s race, national origin, religion, age, gender, disability, or veteran status will not be tolerated. All faculty members, staff, and students are entitled to equal treatment, respect, and dignity.

Plagiarism is presenting the work of another person as one’s own without giving proper credit for the use of the information. Students must not quote or paraphrase books, articles, essays, or Internet sites without giving proper credit to the author(s). Students should guard against plagiarism by crediting the original author through use of proper citations. Internet plagiarism is a particularly easy and tempting form of intellectual theft. Cutting and pasting sentences and paragraphs from the Internet without citations is plagiarism. Failure to cite Internet sources is
plagiarism. Any student found guilty of plagiarism is subject to a range of consequences as outlined below:

1. If a faculty member suspects plagiarism, the instructor will investigate. If suspicions are confirmed, the faculty member will present the evidence to the appropriate Associate Dean as a record of the offense. If the Associate Dean concurs with the allegations, the following procedures should be implemented as applicable:
   a. The faculty member may discuss the offense with the student following consultation with the Associate Dean, but the student will meet with the Associate Dean.
   b. For a first offense, the faculty member, in consultation with the Associate Dean, may give opportunity for a rewrite of the assignment or may assign a grade of zero for the plagiarized assignment.
   c. For a particularly egregious case of plagiarism on a major assignment, the consequences could result in automatic failure of the course.

2. The student may appeal the above-mentioned decisions of the faculty member in writing to the Chief Academic Officer.

3. The second confirmed offense will result in expulsion from school. The student will be notified by a letter from the Chief Academic Officer. His or her only opportunity for appeal will be to the President in writing. The President’s decision will be final.

Sexual Abuse and Harassment

General Policy - Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex, including sexual harassment, in any educational programs and activities of educational institutions that receive federal funding. Students and employees are covered by Title IX.

As Christians, we affirm that God’s will for both religious institutions and society as a whole is the full and equal participation of all persons without distinction as to gender, race, religion, or physical disability (Gal. 3:26-28). Human relationships in the church should be marked by respect and Christ-like love (Gal. 5:16-18). Leadership should be marked by the Christ-like servant character that distinguished the Lord we serve while he was on this earth (Luke 22:24-27).

When sexual harassment or abuse occurs, the Christian community bears a responsibility to offer healing to the victims of such abuse and to correct it. The existence of human sin, however, means that this desirable solidarity and equality in the human community has been and perhaps will continue to be broken by violence and sexual abuse. HGST also has a responsibility to insure that policies are in place both to prevent such abuse insofar as it is possible and to discipline offenders when it occurs.

Student Relationships

Relationships, between students and their teachers, advisors, and others holding positions of authority over them, should be conducted in a manner that avoids potential conflicts of interest, exploitation, or personal bias. Given the inherent power differential, the possibility of
intentional or unintentional abuse of that power should always be borne in mind. For example, a conflict of interest arises when an individual evaluates the work or performance of a person with whom he or she is engaged in a romantic or sexual relationship.

Romantic or sexual relationships between students and persons in positions of authority compromise the relationship between students and the seminary. No faculty or staff member should be romantically or sexually involved with a current HGST student.

In the case of a student complaint of sexual harassment or inappropriate relational contact with an employee, the follow steps will be taken:

1. The Chief Academic Officer, President, or designated representative will investigate the incident, including meeting with the student and other involved party or parties. If the incident can be resolved to the satisfaction of all involved, the incident will be considered concluded.

2. If the incident is not resolved, a sexual harassment grievance committee will be convened to investigate and recommend a satisfactory solution. The committee, appointed by the President, should include at least one member from the following groups:
   - Board of Trustees
   - Administration
   - Faculty
   - Student Body

3. The committee will gather all necessary evidence and make one of the following recommendations.
   - Dismissal of charge because of insufficient evidence.
   - Recommendation of disciplinary action against the accused, which may include dismissal, a period of probation, or official reprimand, following the general guidelines for disciplinary actions in this manual.
   - In an extreme situation, the committee may recommend legal action by the complainant.

4. Either party may appeal the decision of the committee to the Board of Trustees. The Board of Trustees may choose the course of action that they deem appropriate. The decision of the Board of Trustees will be final.

**Student Activities**

*Student Participation in School Decision Making* - Meeting the needs of the students, as they pertain to graduate education, is a priority. It is important, therefore, for the school to know how students perceive the operations and programs of the school and how their educational needs are being met. For these reasons, the participation of students is needed in institutional planning, evaluation, and decision-making at several levels. By invitation from administrators, students may be asked from time to time to serve on various committees. In addition, students regularly evaluate each course and participate in periodic evaluation of the school and its programs through opinion questionnaires.