According to federal regulations, all schools that administer Title IV funds must monitor the academic progress of students receiving federal aid to determine whether those students are progressing in a satisfactory manner toward the completion of a degree. Due to changes in federal regulations effective July 1, 2011, that progress must be measured in both qualitative (grade point average) and quantitative components (pace and maximum timeframe). This monitoring process policy is called the Satisfactory Academic Progress Policy or more commonly referred to as SAP.

It is important to note that Financial Aid SAP differs from Academic SAP. Academic SAP policy monitors a student’s good standing within the seminary and whether a student is eligible for graduation. The Chief Academic Officer and Associate Deans are responsible for creating and monitoring the Academic SAP policy. All students matriculating at HGST are subject to the Academic SAP. The Financial Aid 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. Federal regulations require the Financial Aid SAP policy to be equal to or stricter than the school’s graduation requirement. Therefore, it is possible for a student to remain in good standing with the seminary’s Academic SAP policy yet fail to meet the standards required by the Financial Aid SAP policy.

Qualitative

All students pursuing a degree must maintain a cumulative grade point average (GPA) that is equal to or greater than the minimum graduation standard for their degree as published in the HGST Academic Catalogue at the time of admission. The current minimum GPAs for each degree are listed below.

- Doctor of Ministry: 3.0
- Master of Theological Studies: 3.0
- MA in Counseling: 3.0
- MA in Spiritual Direction: 2.5
- MA in Missional Leadership: 2.5
- Master of Divinity: 2.5

This standard is referred to as the qualitative component of the Satisfactory Academic Progress Policy (SAP). This policy applies to all federal loan recipients. Scholarships are awarded at the
discretion of the Scholarships Committee and may be withdrawn if the student does not meet this satisfactory academic progress policy.

**Quantitative**

There are two elements to the quantitative component of SAP: *PACE* and maximum timeframe. *PACE* measures the rate at which students are completing classes whether aid has been received or not. Students’ completion of registered classes is monitored as withdrawal from classes can negatively affect a student’s *PACE*. Maximum timeframe measures whether a student is progressing towards completing the degree within the maximum timeframe allowed.

**Pace**

All students must maintain a satisfactory *PACE* while pursuing a degree. *PACE* is measured by dividing total completed hours by total attempted hours. All withdrawals which are recorded on the transcript (withdrawals after the “Last day to withdraw with no record on transcript”, as listed in the academic catalog calendar) and transfer hours are calculated according to this formula. All first year graduate students and/or those who have completed less than 24 credit hours must have a completion rate or *PACE*, of 50%. Second year students and/or those with 24 through 47 credit hours must have a *PACE* of 60%. Third year + students and/or those with 48 credit hours and above must have a *PACE* of at least 70%. Students should note that withdrawal from course work can adversely affect *PACE* and, therefore, affect financial aid eligibility.

**Maximum Timeframe**

All students must complete their degree within the maximum timeframe determined for their degree program. The maximum timeframe and the minimum credit hours per academic year for each degree are listed below.

The **Doctor of Ministry** degree must be completed within 6 years with a minimum 7.0 credit hours completed within each of the first five years. All remaining credits hours required for degree completion must be successfully completed within the sixth year.

The **Master of Theological Studies** degree must be completed within 4 years with a minimum of 13 credit hours of completed enrollment during each of the first three years of enrollment. All remaining credits hours required for degree completion must be successfully completed within the fourth year.

The **Master of Arts in Counseling** degree must be completed within 5 years with a minimum 12 credit hours of completed enrollment during each of the first four years of enrollment. All
remaining credits hours required for degree completion must be successfully completed within the fifth year.

The **Master of Arts in Spiritual Direction** degree must be completed within 4 years with a minimum of 12 credit hours of completed enrollment during each of the first three years of enrollment. All remaining credits hours required for degree completion must be successfully completed within the fourth year.

The **Master of Arts in Missional Leadership** must be completed within 4 years with a minimum of 12 credit hours of completed enrollment during each of the first three years of enrollment. All remaining credits hours required for degree completion must be successfully completed within the fourth year.

The **Master of Divinity** degree must be completed within 7 years with a minimum 12 credit hours of completed enrollment during each of the first six years of enrollment. All remaining credits hours required for degree completion must be successfully completed within the seventh year.

**Monitoring Progress**

The Financial Aid Office conducts reviews of all SAP components of all applicants for financial aid after grades are submitted each semester and before aid is disbursed for the following semester. The assessment is based on the student's entire academic record. All of a student's academic coursework is considered in the review process, without regard to whether or not the student received financial aid for all the terms. Admission to HGST or maintaining good academic standing as defined by the individual graduate and doctorate programs does not necessarily constitute maintaining Satisfactory Academic Progress for financial aid purposes.

**Financial Aid Warning**

Students who are not in compliance with the SAP policy are considered to be in an unsatisfactory status. A student whose status is determined to be below the minimum cumulative GPA, PACE, or maximum timeframe for his /her degree program will be placed in a Financial Aid Warning status. A student is still eligible to receive aid while in warning status for one semester. If a student has not met minimum SAP requirements at the end of that semester, the student will be placed on Financial Aid Dismissal and will no longer be eligible to receive aid until the student achieves the minimum SAP. The student’s financial aid eligibility may be reinstated after demonstration of the ability to meet minimum SAP standards.

**Right to Appeal**

Students who have had eligibility for Title IV aid suspended due to unsatisfactory academic progress may appeal to the Financial Aid Department for an extension of time to meet the
standards detailed in this policy. A student whose academic performance was affected by
circumstances beyond his/her control including, but not limited to, personal or family accident;
illness or crisis; death of a close family member; loss of employment or employment transition;
or divorce; may request a review of his or her situation by submitting an appeal in writing to
the Financial Aid Office. The letter must describe in detail those circumstances and provide
specific information about how his/her ability to meet the satisfactory progress standards
detailed in the HGST policy was affected. The student must describe changes that will facilitate
the student’s ability to meet SAP in the future. In addition, independently verifiable supporting
documentation from a third party is required in most instances. Documentation may include a
letter from a medical practitioner, lawyer, priest or pastor who is familiar with the student's
circumstances; copies of applicable bills; or copies of reports from government or local
authorities. The documentation must contain the name and telephone number of a contact
person in the event that the Appeals Committee wishes to confirm the authenticity of the
documentation or to request additional information. All appeals will be reviewed by the
Appeals Committee which is comprised of the Chief Operating and Financial Officer and the two
Associate Deans.

**Appeal Decisions and Financial Aid Probation**

If the student’s appeal is granted, the student will be placed on **Financial Aid Probation** and
given an academic plan that, if followed, will ensure the student’s ability to meet SAP
requirements within a specified period of time. During this probationary period the student
may continue to receive financial aid. If the student does not meet the Satisfactory Academic
Progress standards after the end of the probationary period, the student is determined to be
ineligible for current and future Title IV aid until the student completes additional coursework
sufficient to return to good standing.

**Financial Aid Eligibility When Obtaining Additional Concentrations and Degrees**

In order to be eligible for federal student loans, a student must be seeking a degree. A HGST
graduate may receive federal student loans for the pursuit of a second degree, provided the
student has met SAP standards in pursuit of the first degree. A graduate who returns to HGST
seeking a second concentration for a degree previously conferred by the Seminary is not
eligible for Title IV aid.

**Student Withdrawal / Return of Title IV Funds Policy**

In accordance with federal regulations, when a Title IV aid recipient withdraws from all classes
during a term, it is Houston Graduate School of Theology’s responsibility to determine the
withdrawal date and amount of loan funds that the student has earned. If a student received
less assistance than was earned, he/she may be able to receive those funds. Alternatively, if the
student received more assistance than earned, the unearned funds must be returned by the
school and/or aid recipient to the Department of Education (ED). If, when the school returns funds to the ED, a balance is created on the student’s HGST account, it is the student’s responsibility to pay that balance to the Seminary. **Note:** The Return of Title IV funds calculation is different from the tuition refund calculation.

**Withdrawals**

A student's withdrawal date varies depending on the type of withdrawal.

**Official Withdrawal**

A student is considered officially withdrawn if the Registrar’s Office is notified in writing via:

- **Add/Drop Form Submission** - The withdrawal date is the date the student submits a completed form to the office.
- **Letter, Email or Fax Withdrawal Letter** - The withdrawal date is the date the letter is received via postal, electronic, or fax mail.

**Non-Official Withdrawal**

If a student ceases attendance without providing official notification, the withdrawal date is the date that is reported as the last date of attendance at an academically related activity by a faculty member on a class roster, grade roster/sheet, or other documented source, e.g., grade book. The faculty member will maintain the documentation of the last date of attendance.

If the student fails to officially withdraw due to circumstances beyond the student’s control, i.e., illness, accident, grievous personal loss, or other circumstances, the date related to the onset of that circumstance may be used as the withdrawal date.

**Exit Counseling after Withdrawal**

After withdrawal from HGST, a student must complete the federally required Direct Loan Exit Counseling. If counseling has not been completed, HGST reserves the right to withhold the student’s transcripts until the requirement is met. Exit counseling may be completed at [www.studentloans.gov](http://www.studentloans.gov).

**Calculation of Earned Title IV Assistance**

The amount of Title IV funds earned by the student is determined on a pro-rata basis up to the end of 60% of the term. For example, if the student completed 30% of a term, 30% of the aid originally scheduled to be received would have been earned. Once a student has completed more than 60% of a term, all awarded aid has been earned.
Return of Title IV Funds

The school will use the required federal Return of Title IV worksheets to calculate the total aid earned by a withdrawn student. The same percentage of earned aid is applied to the amount of aid the school is able to accept to pay institutional charges. For example, if, as in the example above, a student has only earned 30% of the aid, the school may only apply aid to 30% of the institutional charges. This, however, does not release the student from the responsibility to pay the remaining 70% of the institutional charges if the student withdrew after the “Last day to withdraw with partial refund” as determined in the academic catalog calendar. If all the aid has been disbursed at the time of the student’s withdrawal, the school is only responsible to return its percentage of the institutional charges. The student must pay the remainder of excess aid to the Department of Education. Any balance left on the student’s account after a Title IV return calculation must be paid before the student can re-enroll in classes, receive transcripts, or utilize any other service of the school.

Post-Withdrawal Disbursements

If the total amount of the Title IV loan funds earned as of the withdrawal date is more than the amount that was disbursed to the student, the difference between the two amounts will be treated as a post-withdrawal disbursement. In the event that there are outstanding charges on the student’s account, HGST will credit the student's account for post-withdrawal disbursement of loan funds, up to the amount of the allowable charges.

Any remaining funds will be disbursed to the student in the form of a check no later than 14 days after the funds have been credited to the student’s account, unless otherwise instructed by the student to keep a credit balance on account.