

STUDENT HANDBOOK



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WESTERN REFORMED SEMINARY

STUDENT HANDBOOK

Mission of WRS

“The mission of Western Reformed Seminary is to produce spiritually grounded, knowledgeable, capable servants to pastor and counsel the flock of Christ.”

This institution is grounded in the rich heritage of the Bible Presbyterian Church and embodies its rich distinctives

- Bible-saturated
- Hands-on pastoral care
- Guided by the Confession

Theological Perspective

Western Reformed Seminary adheres to the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms, as adopted and amended by the Bible Presbyterian Church in 1938. These Standards are the fullest expression of the Seminary’s doctrinal position. The basic beliefs of WRS are summarized in the fundamental statement of faith:

1. The plenary divine inspiration of the Scriptures in the original languages, their consequent inerrancy and infallibility, and, as the Word of God, the supreme and final authority in faith and life;
2. The Triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit;
3. The essential, absolute, eternal deity, and the real and proper, but sinless, humanity of our Lord Jesus Christ;
4. His birth of the Virgin Mary;
5. His substitutionary, expiatory death, in that He gave His life “a ransom for many;”
6. His resurrection from among the dead in the same body in which He was crucified, and the second coming of this same Jesus in power and great glory;
7. The total depravity of man through the Fall;
8. Salvation, the effect of regeneration by the Spirit and the Word, not by works, but by grace through faith;
9. The everlasting bliss of the saved and the everlasting suffering of the lost;
10. The real spiritual unity in Christ of all redeemed by His precious blood;
11. The necessity of maintaining, according to the Word of God, the purity of the Church in doctrine and life.

The seminary holds to the doctrine of biblical ecclesiastical separation—that is, Christians are to be associated with churches that are loyal to the Bible and the historic Christian faith. The eschatological perspective of WRS is premillennial within a covenantal framework. The seminary curriculum itself is designed around the Reformed theology espoused by Western Reformed Seminary. The five-semester systematic theology course presents this theology in detail. Required reading for this course includes Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, the three-volume Systematic Theology of Charles Hodge, and *The Confession of Faith* by A. A. Hodge. An additional course on the Westminster Standards is required for all MDiv/BDiv students. One assignment in that course is memorizing the Westminster Shorter Catechism. All the other seminary courses are taught from the perspective of Reformed theology.

Orientation

New students are encouraged to familiarize themselves with the following helpful guidelines to become acquainted with the seminary's operation. Questions about seminary life may be directed to the Dean of Students.

While seminary staff and faculty are always willing to aid students with concerns and interests, students are asked to keep office interruptions to a minimum. Appointments may be made for longer sessions.

Intercommunications

Student mailboxes should be checked regularly for communications, notices, and returned assignments.

Student ID Card

A Student ID Card will be issued for all local students and distance students who request one. The ID card is useful for student discounts and identification for out-of-state students. They will also be used to facilitate library book checkout.

Copying and Printing

For your personal copying needs, you may use the Seminary copier at 10 cents per side. A digital scanner is available through the copier, and an OCR-compatible scanner is available in the library.

Food Arrangements

A refrigerator, microwave, and coffee bar are provided for your convenience. Thank you for helping to keep these appliances clean and tidy. Please restrict your on-campus dining to the student lounge and wipe up any spilled beverages on the carpet. Beverages consumed outside the lounge should be consumed from covered containers. Snacks may be allowed in the classroom and study areas, but not in the library; students are expected to police their areas.

Library Loan

WRS students may check out books, periodicals, and audio materials for three weeks at a time with a one-week renewal. Encyclopedia references, digital materials, and microfiche slides are intended for in-house use only. Faculty books may not be checked out without faculty permission.

Course reading assignments from the library may generally be found on the Reserve Shelf. Reserve items designated by faculty are for in-house use or short-term checkout only. Items may be taken overnight or over a weekend and should be returned at the beginning of the next business day. To help ensure that materials are returned promptly for use by other class members, late fines for reserve items are significantly higher than for normal items in circulation: a late fine of \$1.00 will be assessed per item for each day overdue.

Academic Guidelines

Class Length

Each credit hour requires 50 minutes of class time. There is at least a 10-minute break between courses. Short intermissions are factored into longer class sessions.

Homework

For every hour of class time, an average of two hours of homework is assigned.

Attendance Policy

Attendance and Participation

Because theological education is centered upon the faithful study of Scripture, meaningful interaction with faculty and fellow students, and preparation for Christian ministry, regular attendance and active participation in every class meeting are expected of all students. Students are responsible for all material presented in class, including lectures, discussions, assignments, quizzes, and examinations, regardless of the reason for any absence.

General Attendance Requirements

Recognizing that illness, family emergencies, military obligations, or other unforeseen circumstances may occasionally prevent attendance, each student is permitted one (1) class-hour absence for each semester credit hour of the course without academic penalty. For example:

- 1-credit course: up to 1 class-hour absence
- 2-credit course: up to 2 class-hour absences
- 3-credit course: up to 3 class-hour absences

Absences beyond this allowance may result in a reduction of the final course grade at the discretion of the instructor. Students are expected to notify the instructor as soon as reasonably possible when an unavoidable absence occurs.

Students remain responsible for completing all assignments and making arrangements with the instructor regarding any missed coursework. Faculty members are not required to repeat lectures, provide alternative instruction, or permit make-up work except as required by institutional policy or applicable law.

Excessive Absences

Students whose absences substantially hinder their ability to achieve a course's learning objectives may receive additional grade penalties, be required to withdraw from the course, or receive a failing grade, regardless of their academic performance on completed assignments.

Repeated tardiness or leaving class early may be counted as partial absences at the instructor's discretion.

In-Person Attendance

Courses designated as residential, or in-person, require physical attendance at the scheduled class meetings. Unless specifically approved as part of the course design, remote participation, livestream viewing, or recorded lectures do not constitute attendance.

Attendance is determined by the student's physical presence and participation in scheduled instructional activities.

Attendance Requirements for Students Receiving VA Education Benefits

Students receiving educational benefits administered by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) are expected to maintain regular attendance and satisfactory academic progress in accordance with institutional policies and all applicable federal regulations.

The Seminary is required to maintain accurate records of class attendance, enrollment status, course withdrawals, and changes affecting certification of VA educational benefits. Students receiving VA benefits should understand that:

Failure to begin attending a certified course may result in the Seminary reporting the student as a "no-show."

Withdrawal, unofficial withdrawal, excessive absences resulting in administrative action, or termination of attendance may require the Seminary to report changes in enrollment to the VA.

Such changes may affect eligibility for current or future VA educational benefits and may result in adjustments or repayment obligations determined by the VA.

Students receiving VA educational benefits are encouraged to promptly communicate with both their instructor and the School Certifying Official whenever their attendance may be affected by illness, military obligations, or other significant circumstances.

Attendance Requirements for F-1 International Students

International students on F-1 visas are required by United States immigration regulations to maintain full-time enrollment and satisfy all attendance and academic engagement requirements established by the Seminary.

Failure to maintain regular attendance may constitute a failure to maintain status if it results in:

- administrative withdrawal from a course,
- enrollment below the required full-time course load without prior authorization,
- failure to begin attendance in a registered course, or
- other violations of institutional or federal requirements.

The Seminary is required to maintain accurate enrollment records through the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS). Students are responsible for promptly communicating any attendance concerns, medical issues, or exceptional circumstances to both the instructor and the Designated School Official (DSO). Failure to do so may jeopardize the student's F-1 immigration status.

Excused Absences

The Seminary recognizes that legitimate circumstances may occasionally prevent attendance. These may include: personal illness, serious illness or death in the immediate family, military service or reserve obligations, jury duty, approved Seminary activities, or other circumstances approved by the Registrar.

Whenever possible, students should notify the instructor before the absence occurs. Excused absences do not automatically relieve the student of the responsibility to complete missed assignments or satisfy course requirements.

Auditors

Students auditing a course are expected to attend regularly and participate appropriately. To receive transcript notation indicating successful completion of an audit, auditors must meet the minimum attendance required for credit students in that course. Excessive absences may result in the audit designation not being recorded on the transcript.

Faculty Responsibilities

Faculty members shall maintain accurate attendance records for each class meeting throughout the academic term. Attendance records constitute part of the Seminary's official academic record and may be required for institutional accreditation, financial aid compliance, veterans' educational benefits, immigration reporting, or other legal and regulatory purposes.

Auditing Classes

Full-time students may audit most courses with no additional charge; Basic Greek and Basic Hebrew may not be audited if they are required in a student's program. Part-time auditors are permitted in most seminary courses after filing an audit registration. Regular auditors should have completed high school. Auditors shall have all student privileges inside and outside the classroom, including participation in classroom discussions. Auditors will not submit exams or assignments nor make class presentations. No grades will be supplied to auditors; an academic record will be kept showing "satisfactory" or "unsatisfactory" participation.

Occasionally, guests may be granted a "listener status." Prospective students are welcome to sample seminary classes; special friends of the seminary may be invited to attend a whole course. In most courses, spouses of students taking a course for credit have the privilege of attending as listeners. "Listeners" generally do not participate in classroom discussions, but they may be offered other privileges, such as access to course materials. No academic record is kept for "listeners."

Course Evaluations

At the end of each semester, the seminary provides students with evaluation forms for each course they are taking. All students are required to complete the end-of-course evaluation form for each course they are enrolled in every semester.

Electronic recordings

There may be times (e.g., planned absence) when a student may wish to record class sessions. Electronic recordings of class lectures and chapel messages may be made only with the instructor's permission and with the understanding that the recordings are for no purpose other than personal use.

Academic Freedom

While the seminary strongly holds a Reformed and separatist position, it practices academic freedom for its students. Students from other churches or traditions are neither discriminated against nor required to adopt the theological distinctives of Western Reformed Seminary. However, students are expected to be familiar with the seminary's position on doctrinal and related matters and to clearly articulate the reasons for that position. Instructors will consider opposing views fairly and charitably. Academic freedom exercised fairly by students and faculty will lead students to a clearer grasp of God's truth. The seminary seeks to maintain a proper atmosphere of academic freedom within the sphere of Christian love to be a blessing to all the churches in our region.

Plagiarism

Through assigned written projects, students have the opportunity to develop their skills in research, critical analysis, and literary communication. All research writers should be very careful to credit the ideas and words that they borrow from other writers. Failure to do so constitutes literary plagiarism. The MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations has a standard definition of literary plagiarism; “Derived from the Latin word *plagiarius* (“kidnapper” and also “plagiarist” in the modern sense), plagiarism is defined by Alexander Lindley as “the false assumption of authorship: the wrongful act of taking the product of another person’s mind, and presenting it as one’s own” (Plagiarism and Originality [New York: Harper, 1952], p. 2). Plagiarism may take the form of repeating another’s sentences as your own, adopting a particularly apt phrase as your own, paraphrasing someone else’s argument as your own, or even presenting someone else’s line of thinking in the development of a thesis as though it were your own. This includes the use of new technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI) generated responses. In short, to plagiarize is to give the impression that you have written something that you have borrowed from another. Although a writer may use another person’s “words and thoughts, they must be acknowledged as such” (1st ed., p. 4). For further illustration, Kate Turabian’s *Student’s Guide for Writing College Papers* (3rd ed., Revised and Expanded, sections 4.60ff.) gives examples of plagiarism and proper citation.

WRS students are required to know how to give proper credit to the academic works they reference in their written projects. Failure to properly credit other works will make the student subject to WRS’s plagiarism penalty; the assignment will be recorded as a zero (0) and must be resubmitted with changes to properly credit the sources. Other disciplinary action may also be taken.

Students are expected to complete all assignments using their own knowledge and skills. Professors may allow students to use AI tools for brainstorming, outlining, grammar suggestions, or idea generation. AI may not generate substantive portions of submitted work. Any AI assistance must be acknowledged in a statement accompanying the assignment describing the tool used and how it contributed (i.e., cite the program, prompt(s), and how you used the information provided). Unauthorized AI use constitutes academic misconduct.

Academic Records

Students whose tuition accounts are current will receive an updated, unofficial transcript within 30 days after the end of the term. Progress sheets are also supplied semi-annually to degree students. Students may request an official transcript; the first copy is free, and subsequent copies are \$10.00 each. Students may have supervised access only to those parts of their academic files that are not confidential (such as letters of recommendation). Original student files remain the property of the seminary.

Academic Probation and Dismissal

Students must maintain a cumulative grade average of at least a C (2.0 GPA). Those with averages below this minimum will be automatically placed on academic probation until their cumulative grade average rises above the probationary level. The faculty will exercise special oversight of probationary students. Any student on academic probation whose semester average falls below a C (2.0 GPA) will be suspended from the seminary for a minimum period of one full semester. Thereafter, he may seek re-entry by submitting a written appeal to the Academic Office. A student dismissed a second time shall not be readmitted.

These basic standards take for granted that students will conduct themselves maturely and professionally and will demonstrate Christian conduct. The seminary reserves the right, through the faculty, to dismiss any student whose behavior is not in harmony with the biblical standards accepted by the seminary.

Student Conduct and Conditions for Dismissal

Student Conduct

Western Reformed Seminary is committed to providing a Christ-centered academic community that promotes spiritual growth, academic excellence, and personal integrity. Students are expected to conduct themselves in a manner consistent with biblical principles, the Seminary's Statement of Faith, and all institutional policies. Enrollment at the Seminary is a privilege that entails the responsibility to uphold standards of Christian character, honesty, respect, and accountability.

Students are expected to:

1. Demonstrate integrity in academic work and personal conduct.
2. Treat fellow students, faculty, staff, and visitors with dignity, respect, and Christian charity.
3. Comply with all Seminary policies, procedures, and applicable laws.
4. Maintain conduct that reflects the values and mission of the Seminary.
5. Refrain from behavior that disrupts the educational process or damages the reputation or ministry of the Seminary.

Unsatisfactory Conduct

Conduct that may be considered unsatisfactory includes, but is not limited to:

1. Academic dishonesty, including plagiarism, cheating, falsification of records, or unauthorized use of another person's work.
2. Knowingly providing false or misleading information to the Seminary.
3. Disruptive, abusive, threatening, harassing, or discriminatory behavior.
4. Theft, vandalism, destruction, or misuse of Seminary property or the property of others.
5. Failure to comply with Seminary policies, directives, or disciplinary actions.
6. Criminal conduct or other behavior that materially affects the student's ability to fulfill the Seminary's standards of Christian conduct.

7. Any conduct that is inconsistent with the Seminary's doctrinal commitments, mission, or expectations for Christian character.

Disciplinary Action

When concerns regarding student conduct arise, the Seminary seeks to address them in a manner that is biblical, fair, and, whenever possible, restorative. Depending upon the nature and severity of the conduct, disciplinary action may include:

1. Verbal or written warning.
2. Required counseling or corrective action.
3. Disciplinary probation.
4. Suspension for a specified period.
5. Dismissal from the Seminary.

The Seminary reserves the right to impose immediate suspension or dismissal when student conduct presents a serious threat to the safety, welfare, mission, or orderly operation of the institution or involves serious violations of Seminary policy.

Conditions for Dismissal

A student may be dismissed from the Seminary for reasons including, but not limited to:

1. Repeated or serious violations of the Student Conduct Policy.
2. Academic dishonesty or fraud.
3. Failure to comply with disciplinary sanctions.
4. Conduct that demonstrates an unwillingness to abide by the Seminary's standards of Christian behavior.
5. Criminal conduct or actions that materially interfere with the Seminary's educational mission.
6. Any behavior that, in the judgment of the Seminary administration, is incompatible with continued enrollment.

Due Process

Before dismissal, the student will ordinarily be notified of the concerns and given an opportunity to respond. The Seminary may conduct an appropriate review of the circumstances before rendering a decision. Decisions regarding suspension or dismissal are made by the appropriate Seminary administrator or committee and may be appealed according to the Seminary's established grievance or appeals procedures.

Nothing in this policy limits the Seminary's authority to take immediate action when necessary to protect students, employees, institutional property, or the integrity of the Seminary's educational mission.

Graduation Requirements

Candidates for graduation must be approved by the seminary board of directors. All tuition, fees, and bookstore charges must be paid in full for a candidate to be considered for graduation. Unless given an excuse by the Dean of Students for an

extraordinary reason, graduate candidates are required to attend their graduation ceremony to receive their degree.

Spiritual Life

Chapel Attendance: Weekly chapels are required for all local degree students enrolled in 8 or more hours per term, unless other arrangements are made in advance.

Prayer requests may be submitted in writing to the Dean of Students. Prayer is offered for the needs of the seminary family at the beginning of class sessions, in weekly chapels, and on spontaneous occasions, both with and for students.

Grievance and Appeals Policy

Academic appeals

If a student believes he has been unfairly graded on an assignment, a test, or an entire course, he should first make an appointment to discuss the matter with the faculty member involved. Normally, this step is all that is required to resolve the difficulty. If the student wishes to appeal the faculty member's decision, he is to write his appeal and submit it to the office for presentation to the faculty at their next meeting. The faculty will decide on the issue, and the student will be notified. The faculty may, at its discretion, wish to confer with the student before rendering its decision. In the case of a course grade, the faculty's decision may be appealed in writing to the executive committee of the board of directors, whose decision is final. During the appeal process, the concerned faculty member will abstain from voting.

Disciplinary appeals

Normally, disciplinary matters are handled first by the Dean of Students. In some cases, the Dean of Students may invite the president of the seminary to meet together with him and the affected student. Through counsel, discussion, and prayer, most cases will be settled satisfactorily and in a biblically sound manner. The Dean of Students may also assign a specific faculty member to provide ongoing counsel and oversight to the student. The student's cooperation is essential for spiritual growth and success in theological study. The seminary reserves the right, through the faculty, to dismiss any student whose behavior is not in harmony with the biblical standards accepted by the seminary. The faculty may also impose lesser penalties for this type of infraction, including suspension or disciplinary probation. In cases of disciplinary probation, the faculty will set the conditions and requirements of the probation. The faculty will also decide if and when a student is restored to good standing. The affected student may appeal in writing any decision of the faculty to the executive committee of the board of directors, which will render its decision. Members of the faculty who voted at the faculty meeting on the case and are members of the executive committee will abstain from voting on the appeal. Decisions of the executive committee are subject to review by the full board of directors. Decisions of the board are final.

Grievances and suggestions

If a student has a grievance or a suggestion involving any aspect of the seminary, the first step is to go directly to the person most directly involved and seek a solution. Normally, this step is all that will be required. If there is no satisfactory solution, then the student may consult with the dean of students or the president of the seminary. Students have the right to appeal in writing any decision of the seminary administration to the seminary board's executive committee. Decisions of the executive committee are subject to review by the full board of directors. Decisions of the board are final.