



# Cherry Hill Seminary

education for leadership,  
ministry & personal growth

Faculty Handbook

2024

## **Cherry Hill Seminary Faculty Handbook 2024**

The administration of Cherry Hill Seminary extends a warm welcome to both new and returning faculty. We are deeply grateful for the expertise and passion that you all bring to the process of building this unique institution, the first graduate-level seminary to offer ministry training in a contemporary Pagan context. Cherry Hill Seminary would not exist if faculty members past and present had not given so generously of their time and energy.

We gratefully acknowledge the individuals who originally authored most of the material in this document. Wendy Griffin, Academic Dean Emerita, composed our original Faculty Handbook. Christine Hoff Kraemer wrote the Teaching Manual, a rich supplemental resource. These documents are now combined.

All curricular and assessment documents are in the curriculum handbook.

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## General Information

This faculty handbook has been designed with you in mind. It was created in the belief that faculty, both experienced teachers and those who are fairly new to the profession, would appreciate a resource that would help them better navigate their way through an innovative, online institution of higher learning. Like our honored guardian ancestor Hypatia of Alexandria, you are teaching a challenging subject in challenging times. What we are doing together with our students in this joint venture is developing new voices and practices to enter the public arena. This is an exciting time for all of us.

## Our Vision (updated August 2023)

Cherry Hill Seminary envisions a world where people of Pagan and Nature based spiritualities can receive competent and compassionate spiritual support.

## Our Mission (updated August 2023)

Cherry Hill Seminary serves Pagan and Nature-based communities by providing transformative education and empowering students to advance academically and lead spiritually.

## Our Values

To live our Mission, we:

- Honor the Sacredness of the Earth
- Embrace Diversity
- Value Scholarship
- Advocate Service to Our Communities
- Diversity of Spiritual Expression in Pagan and Nature Spiritualities

## Guardian Ancestor

Cherry Hill Seminary honors Hypatia of Alexandria, a woman of extraordinary accomplishments who was martyred in 415 CE, as we pursue our vision of providing professional Pagan ministry education. Hypatia was ritually installed in June 2004 as Guardian Ancestor using the formal name Despoina Hypatia Polumathes. *Despoina* is “Lady, Mistress”; *Polumathes* means “much learned.” Visit “About CHS” on our web site to read more about Hypatia.

## About the Seminary

The seed that became Cherry Hill Seminary was planted in the early 1990s by a group of Vermont Pagans. Classes were conducted first by mail, and then brought online in 2000. The Seminary was granted 501(c)3 tax-exempt status by the Internal Revenue Service in March of 2007. Business operations were moved to South Carolina in 2008, and the first master’s program was announced in July 2009. By January 2020 we have awarded five Master of Divinity degrees, eight Community Ministry Certificates, and numerous former certificates; hundreds have taken one or more courses.

## Unique Culture

The culture of Cherry Hill Seminary differs significantly from that of a university. Seminary training is inherently practical, with classes situated in a context of community ministry and personal spiritual growth. Although the critical thinking skills so central to university culture are also essential in a seminary environment, seminary training requires deep reflection and the willingness to bring personal experience into dialogue with the material. Students must constantly ask themselves: How might my community benefit from this material? What new light does this class shine on my spiritual practice? What big questions about human nature, religious communities in general, or contemporary Paganism, in particular, are being raised or answered? As adult learners who are often already serving as clergy in their communities, CHS students require a pragmatic curriculum that does not shy away from theory or scholarly research but harnesses these materials in the service of students' work in the world.

Cherry Hill Seminary is also a largely volunteer-run organization. Students are expected to provide their own computer equipment and to use library services local to their area. This structure allows CHS to provide graduate-level education at a very low tuition rate. However, it also requires both students and faculty to embrace a very proactive, self-responsible, and collaborative attitude toward study at CHS.

## About Our Students

The students at Cherry Hill Seminary are a wonderfully mixed group. Some are professionals seeking to learn to serve the Pagan community through counseling, chaplaincy and ministry, others seek to enhance skills they have previously developed, and still others come to enrich their own personal spiritual journeys. What they all have in common is a hunger for knowledge, training, and the dynamics of the classroom educational experience. Depending on the class you are teaching, you may find all these students in your classroom.

Cherry Hill Seminary students are often deeply involved in their local communities and have already been serving in leadership positions for several years before coming to Cherry Hill Seminary. Although some aspire to paid ministry positions, such as hospital, prison, or military chaplaincy, most are realistic about the limited availability of such jobs and have come to CHS for the development of practical leadership skills. Although some CHS students have a scholarly orientation, for many this is secondary to their community work.

We offer several ways to pursue learning through Cherry Hill Seminary:

- Our **Master's degree** classes are graduate-level study, demanding intellectual rigor and commitment on the part of the student. Applications to a master's degree program are competitive, requiring baccalaureate transcripts or the equivalent, and a rigorous admissions process.
- Our **Insights** courses are open to all, including the general public. A significant number of Insights students will be taking courses for the first time. Faculty teaching Insights courses will encounter students with a wide variety of educational

backgrounds and levels of maturity.

- The **Community Ministry Certificate** is a non-graduate-level 15-month program of self-study, guided by an assigned faculty-mentor. The CMC is designed to prepare individuals to offer leadership to their local communities.

For more information on the requirements our students must meet for admission, please see the latest Student Handbook and Course Catalog posted on our website under *For Students/Materials*.

## **Faculty Governance**

A supportive community was an integral part of the way Cherry Hill Seminary developed and continues to play an important role in the form of faculty governance. Faculty members are part of the consultative process for many kinds of decision-making. Collegial governance allows the academic community (students, staff, administrators, and faculty) to work together to find the best answers to the issues we face. Faculty members are supervised by their department chair but are likely to also find themselves interacting with the academic dean or others on the faculty or staff.

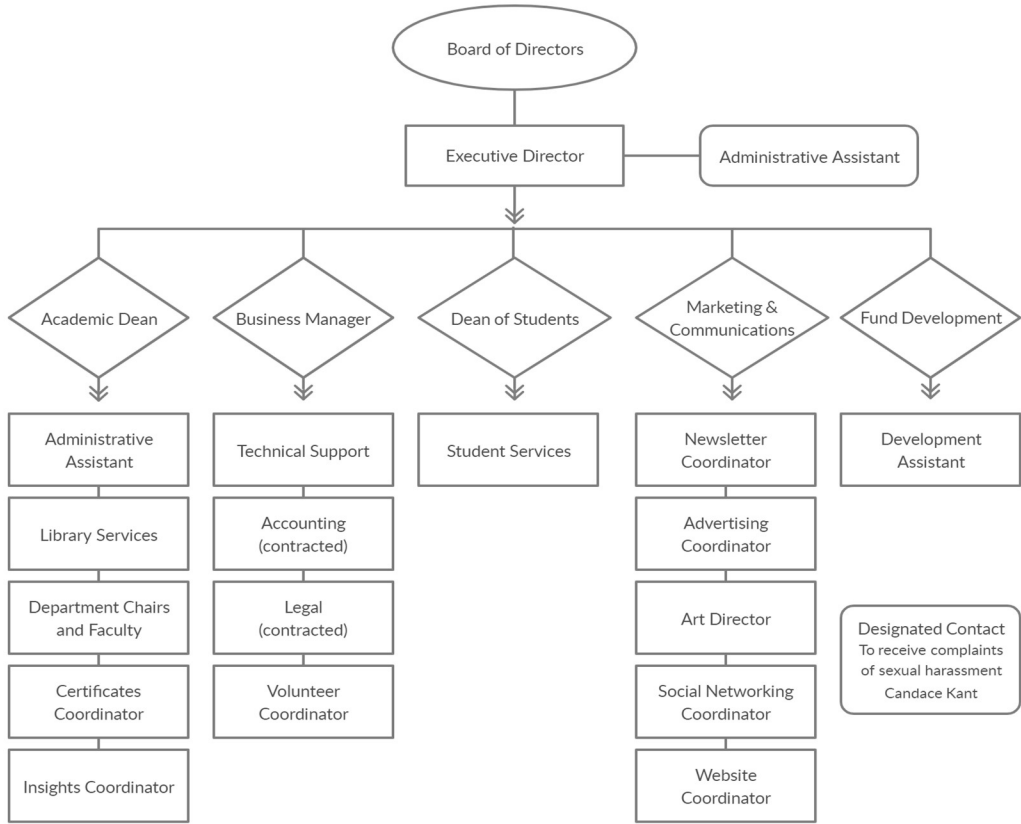
## **Committees**

Individual membership in standing committees often depends on who is available when the work needs to be done. We understand that when faculty only teach on average one or two classes a year, their time commitments and availability may be limited. However, the following standing committees should always include faculty: Accreditation, Admissions, Grade Appeals, Grievances, Hiring, Curriculum, Academic Standards, and Program Review, and Resource Selection.

## **Organizational Chart**

Like any other educational institution, Cherry Hill Seminary is structured to permit its various aspects to function optimally. Although hierarchies are not integral to all Pagan traditions, they can be used to facilitate communication and refine and delineate areas of responsibility. Cherry Hill Seminary's structure is hierarchical. In practice, few important decisions are made by one individual without wider consultation. Several of these positions are filled by volunteers. Vacant positions can be discerned on the CHS website on the *Faculty and Staff* page. If you are interested in volunteering for one of these positions, please contact the Seminary office.





## **Faculty Personnel Policies**

### **Faculty Application Procedure**

All persons seeking to teach at Cherry Hill Seminary must complete the online application, which can be found on the *Faculty* page of the CHS website. No application will be reviewed until all required components of the application have been received. The completed application will be reviewed by the Academic Dean and passed on to the appropriate Department Chair, who will then begin the process of evaluation to determine needs of the seminary and fit of the candidate. If the response is positive, the Chair will contact the candidate and conduct an interview with the Academic Dean.

### **Qualifications, Responsibilities, Development, and Employment**

Faculty members must have the appropriate credentials and competencies for teaching master's level courses and Insights courses. These credentials are demonstrated by the attainment of a research doctorate, other earned doctoral degrees, and/or master's degrees in theological studies and related fields. Additionally, qualified teachers without a research doctorate or a Master of Divinity may have special expertise in skills relating to administration, media, and cross-cultural studies for teaching, learning, and research.

All faculty are guided by the Mission, Vision, and Values of Cherry Hill Seminary, which are integral components for long-range planning.

Faculty must be diverse in meeting the demands of teaching, learning, and research in an online environment.

Faculty who instruct in graduate programs are responsible for the planning, design, and oversight of the program's curriculum, ensuring at all times that it is aligned with Seminary Mission, Vision and Values. These responsibilities include aligning the curriculum with the requirements of recruitment, matriculation, graduation, and service to communities as directed by the school administration.

Each faculty member has the responsibility to be aware of the policies concerning their rights and responsibilities and how they relate to their appointment, retention, and dismissal; criteria for faculty evaluation; compensation; and other conditions of employment. These policies are posted within the Faculty Handbook & Teaching Guide under Policies and Procedures.

### **Faculty Performance Evaluation**

Learning, teaching, and working at Cherry Hill Seminary should all be seen as part of a continuous improvement cycle. An essential part of that cycle is performance evaluation, which allows each member of the Seminary to reflect on their goals and integrate lessons learned into future performance. Each member of faculty must complete a course self-

evaluation at the end of each course taught. The Faculty Course Self-Evaluation form is found on our web site under For Faculty/Materials. In addition, periodic faculty evaluations will be conducted by the faculty member's Department Chair and/or Academic Dean.

### **Instructor Evaluation Requirements**

Faculty who have taught for two or more semesters must be evaluated every three years at minimum. This evaluation will include student evaluations of teaching performance, a review by the Academic Dean, the Chair of the department or the Chair's designee and evaluations by appropriate administrators. It will most often include a classroom visit.

A faculty member who has taught only one semester will be evaluated at the discretion of the Department Chair or the appropriate administrator. The faculty member may request that an evaluation be performed. A faculty member who has received an evaluation of "does not consistently meet requirements" or "does not meet requirements" may be reviewed again at the Department Chair's or Academic Dean's discretion.

### **Classroom Observation Evaluation**

Classroom visits can be a useful tool in the evaluation process and are required by the Cherry Hill Seminary as part of the evaluation process. This visitation may be done by the Academic Dean, the Chair or the Chair's faculty designee. The evaluator will complete the Faculty Classroom Observation Evaluation Form found on the Cherry Hill Seminary website under For Faculty/Materials. A copy of the report on the classroom visitation will be provided to the faculty member being evaluated, the Department Chair, and placed in the faculty member's permanent file.

### **Full Evaluation**

All faculty who are being evaluated must submit syllabi for every class they have taught or are teaching since their last evaluation. In addition, they may submit additional materials such as a current curriculum vitae, a brief list of professional or appropriate community accomplishments or contributions over the past year, and a reflective narrative.

All materials considered by the department will be made available to the Academic Dean. The dean's evaluation and any of the following materials, if submitted, must go into the faculty member's permanent file: C.V.; reflective narrative; list of professional or community accomplishments and contributions; written peer evaluation, and report of the classroom visitation.

The faculty member being evaluated will be given a copy of their evaluation and may submit a response or rebuttal within ten days of receipt of the evaluation. The response or rebuttal is then forwarded with the evaluation to the Academic Dean. A written record of the periodic evaluation will be placed in the faculty member's permanent file. At the completion of the evaluation process, the faculty member will be provided a copy of the written record of the evaluation.

## **Student Course Evaluation**

Students complete an anonymous evaluation of the course in which they are enrolled at the end of the semester. These are summarized by the office of the Academic Dean, then shared with the appropriate Department Chair and the individual instructor. Copies are placed in the faculty member's permanent file. In addition, the Department Chair and the Deans may sit in on a class at any time. In some cases, a written assessment of the class visitation will be provided to the instructor and placed in the permanent file. When done, these assessments are intended to be an aid to the faculty, pointing out what was done well and providing teaching tips, if appropriate.

## **Faculty Course Self-Evaluation**

Faculty are also required to complete a self-evaluation for each class taught at the end of the semester. These evaluations are used to strengthen our course offerings and the flow of communication between faculty and staff at the Seminary, and to provide information to be used in program assessment and Program Reviews. Upon receipt of evaluations and grades a check for the semester's teaching will be mailed.

## **Faculty Salaries**

Faculty members are paid a lump sum after grades have been turned in for the semester. The amount depends upon the number of paid students who were enrolled in the class. Currently, Cherry Hill Seminary pays the following (current as of September 1, 2020):

- Insights courses: \$45 per enrolled, paid student
- Master's degree courses - \$200, per enrolled, paid student for a 3-credit hour course (or \$66 per credit hour per student). Note: Most Master's classes are 3 units.

When a faculty member serves as the Chair of a Praxis (1 credit) or Master's (3 credits) Project/Thesis Committee, he or she will receive the equivalent salary for one student. Other faculty committee members are deeply appreciated but not financially compensated at this time.

## **Fee Waivers**

Intrigued about ancient Egypt or forest-bathing? Want to sit in on a fellow scholar's signature class? Or delve into the joys of sacred gardening? Sign up and be a student for a change. One perk of teaching for CHS is that you may take one class per semester at no charge if you have proposed a course that was offered in the previous three years (or at the discretion of the director). Questions or to register for a free course, email the office at [CHS@cherryhillseminary.org](mailto:CHS@cherryhillseminary.org).

## **Audits**

Registration fees and instructor pay are the same whether a student is auditing a course or receiving credit.

## **Grievance Procedure**

Cherry Hill Seminary recognizes that conflicts arise in any organization. People sometimes find it becomes necessary to clear up miscommunication, to speak truth to power, to recognize injustice and seek redress, to negotiate boundaries and settle disputes. As a matter of policy, the members of the Cherry Hill Seminary community, whether students, faculty, staff, or administrators, are encouraged to begin by speaking directly to the person involved. The conversation is best begun in an informal way, naming what is true for the complainant without labeling or judging the other person. Preferably, this will be done by face-to-face or voice-to-voice communication, or perhaps by email, but it should begin with a conversation limited to those directly involved.

If this first step of speaking directly is not successful in reaching resolution, or if the situation requires third-party intervention, the second step is to speak to the next person up on the organizational chart. For example, if a faculty member and a student have a problem that cannot be resolved, the next step would be to speak with the Department Chair. If a third step is needed, the Academic Dean should be contacted.

A resolution to a grievance must be initiated during the semester in which it occurs. Those individuals involved are expected to keep accurate and timely notes of all relevant conversations. These notes are to be shared with CHS Senior Administrators and/or staff as appropriate if resolution is not achieved at the first step. Advocates can be appointed to assist and represent the parties to a dispute if needed. The Dean and Executive Director will act in concert and may impose a settlement if resolution cannot be worked out among the parties most immediately involved. Any appeal of such an administrative decision will require a review by a committee composed of faculty and board members, as appropriate. This committee will be created by the Executive Director.

## **Dismissal of Faculty**

Cherry Hill Seminary acknowledges that there may be rare circumstances under which a faculty member is dismissed. These include, but are not limited to the following:

1. Use of personal information obtained during tenure at CHS for solicitations, fund-raising, advertising, promotion, or any type of commercial activity without written permission from the Seminary.
2. Misrepresenting oneself, one's education, one's experience, or one's connection with Cherry Hill Seminary
3. Misrepresenting the quality or quantity of one's studies
4. Plagiarism or academic dishonesty
5. Conviction of illegal activity that is contrary to the mission of Cherry Hill Seminary
6. Unable to consistently provide the educational experience required for the course. This includes not providing feedback to students or grades and consistently missing communications and meetings, and lack of professional behavior.

An additional consideration might be faculty conduct during Seminary teaching or activities which are damaging to students, colleagues or the institution. If you have a question about whether there might be just cause for Cherry Hill Seminary to terminate its relationship with you as faculty, we suggest that you first review our Values found in the first section of this handbook. Next, consider the recommendations of the American Association of University Professors, found at their web site ([aaup.org](http://aaup.org))

## **Faculty Assignments and Responsibilities**

### **Academic Freedom**

Academic freedom is central to the heart of any institution of higher learning. The community of faculty, students, administrators, staff, and board members at Cherry Hill Seminary are expected to be committed to and supported in the pursuit of knowledge and the expression of ideas. This includes the freedom to examine all pertinent data, to question assumptions, to be guided by the evidence of scholarly research and to teach and study the substance of a given field as crucial to the integrity of an educational institution.

Academic freedom does not mean that faculty have the right to teach a class that does not meet the catalog description or the department's objectives for the class, to insist that students agree with all the faculty member's ideas, or to require assignments that put students into danger or that cannot be completed by disabled students. Cherry Hill Seminary endorses the *Academic Freedom of Professors and Institutions* statement created by the American Association of University Professors.<sup>1</sup>

### **Scheduling of Work Assignments**

The instructional assignments of individual faculty members will be decided by the appropriate administrator after consultation with the Department Chair and will be consistent with Department and student needs. Departments vary in the way in which they build schedules and determine individual teaching assignments, but all give faculty members some opportunity to express a preference for particular courses or times, although these preferences cannot always be accommodated. The Academic Calendar (on the Seminary web site under *For Students*) gives dates by which course proposals for each semester must be submitted, and a link to the online form for doing so.

### **Outside Employment**

At this point in our history, CHS is unable to provide faculty with full-time work. We are very aware that means that most of our faculty will need to have employment outside of CHS. Employment outside of CHS should not conflict with satisfactory and timely performance of all duties on the part of Seminary faculty.

### **Cancelling a Class**

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<sup>1</sup> Found at [aaup.org](http://aaup.org)

Sometimes the enrollment in a class is so low that it is unlikely to generate enough income for meaningful compensation to the instructor. A cohort which is too small can also result in a poorer learning experience for students. In this case, the Executive Director of the Seminary will make a decision regarding whether or not to cancel the class. The Executive Director is the only individual with authority to cancel a class.

### **Student Identity**

In a distance education program, assuring the identity of participating students is required in order to comply with the United States Federal Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA) of 2008. Each student will be given an individual secure login and password to the online classroom, which should not be shared. Students are required to post at least one assignment (this may include forum discussion posts) in the first seven days of the course, and instructors are required to verify that the assignment is completed. Finally, student identity is confirmed by participation in online video class meetings, where every student participates in discussions and presentations.

### **Cherry Hill Seminary Curriculum Guide**

The curriculum guide expands upon the courses and requirements needed for each program. It is essential that this guide is reviewed regularly to ensure that course descriptions and student outcomes are embedded into the syllabus and class. In addition, the curriculum guide aligns each course with the programmatic outcomes; these provide a guide for the instructor so that students are able to meet those programmatic outcomes.

## **Student Handbook and Course Catalog**

You will need to be familiar with this all-important document which includes all policies, requirements, recommendations, and procedures for all Cherry Hill Seminary students. The course catalog information help you see where your course or courses fit in our programs, and what student expectations will be. We ask all faculty to thoroughly familiarize themselves with the document, which can be downloaded from the Student section of the CHS website.

## **Populi Learning Management System**

Cherry Hill Seminary uses Populi to manage students, faculty, admissions, and courses. Faculty are expected to sign-in regularly and learn how to use the system according to their role(s). There are several Populi tutorials available to help navigate your time on the LMS. In addition, administration will host regular training sessions to assist new instructors with the system. All work will be stored on the Populi system including course materials, syllabi, and teaching agreements. We encourage everyone to fully use the system possible so that we may document all our processes.

## **Teaching: Administrative Procedures**

### **Course Development**

At Cherry Hill Seminary, we rely on our faculty to create exciting and valuable courses. Although administrators may identify areas where we need new offerings, our faculty members are at the heart of curriculum development. If there is a topic you would like to teach, check first with the Chair of your Department to see if it is currently being covered or how it might fit in with our existing programs. With their agreement, fill out the proposal form linked to the *Faculty* page of the Seminary website. The Academic Calendar (on the Seminary web site under *For Students*) gives dates by which course proposals for each semester must be submitted, and a link to the online form for doing so.

When proposing a new course or requesting to teach one currently in our catalog, the Seminary gives you the authority to decide both the minimum number of paying students and the maximum number of students (including audits and non-paying) you are willing to work with in the class. We permit occasional audits; however, it is your decision as to whether or not to accept them in your class. Students who are auditing pay regular fees. As explained at the end of this document, CHS faculty and staff may take classes for free. You may limit how many of these non-paying students are in your class, but not exclude them entirely.

Three-credit Master's courses should provide students with about 135 hours of work per semester (8-12 hours of work per week for 14 weeks). This time commitment includes all readings, assignments, class meetings, synchronous and asynchronous classroom participation, and other course activities.



Although instructors are encouraged to assign the best textbooks available for their courses, students may be reluctant to take courses where the books are very expensive. Ensure that the book is necessary for the course before making it a requirement. Some classes will also have recommended or required books, as determined by the resource selection committee.

All syllabi, including those for Insights classes, need to be written for a pan-Pagan student body and avoid making assumptions about the practices or beliefs of individual students' traditions when framing assignments.

### **Developing Course Objectives and Evaluation Criteria**

All courses that are listed in the course selection guide have outcomes developed by the curriculum committee and serve as the guide for your course development. Instructors may add outcomes and objectives, but those listed must be adhered to. Evaluations of those outcomes need to be rigorous and appropriate for the level of work required.

### **Your online Classroom**

Populi is the Learning Management System used to house all the online course material. Zoom is used for synchronous meetings with students, usually on a weekly basis and for meeting and advising times.

It is important that the classroom is set up in an organized and timely fashion so that students may look ahead to what is scheduled and appropriately schedule their workload. If you wish to keep material closed until an appropriate time, there is also a setting for that so that the materials are revealed to students when it is needed.

Very important: please proof everything that you put into your classroom. Cherry Hill Seminary is an institution of higher education and should always reflect excellence.

### **Course Syllabus**

The best way to communicate your expectations to students is through the course syllabus. It provides them with essential information, explains the types of assignments and the basis for evaluating student performance, and gives other relevant information. Not only is a strong syllabus critical for you and your students, but it is a critical piece by which the institution may be evaluated by outside authorities. As adults, our students tend to have full lives and multiple responsibilities outside of the Seminary. They need to know in advance what kind of commitment they are making when they enroll in a class and exactly what will be expected of them. Think of the syllabus as a contract between you and the students authorized by the educational institution, and only make very minor and necessary changes during the semester.

Instructors submit their syllabi to the Academic Dean and for new courses, the Department Chair for feedback no later than six weeks before the course is to begin.

Check the Academic Calendar for relevant dates. All syllabi must include the following elements in the following order:

1. Official course name and number
2. Semester offered, dates, times of meetings
3. Official Course Description
4. Department the course is housed
5. Instructor contact information
6. Official Course Learning Outcomes (listed in curriculum guide)
7. Class expectations
  - Reading –between 40-60 pages a week.
  - Workload – between 8-12 hours a week per class
  - Writing – approximately 6000-9000 words. This may be accomplished with a term paper, two shorter papers, journaling, reports, etc. or any combination of these. There must be a substantial writing component
  - Class Behavior – online guidelines, discussions, Populi check-ins and number of postings, etc.
8. Grading and Assignments
  - There must be a minimum of 4 assessments of student performance, which may include papers, discussions, exams, oral presentations, fieldwork, etc. The percentage of the final grade must be indicated for each assessment. The final exam, project or other form of assessment must not be worth more than 1/3 of the semester's grade.
9. Required Readings
  - Suggested optional readings (if any) These could be placed in weekly topics instead
10. Week by week topics and assignments
11. Statement referring the student to the catalogue or Seminary web for issues of policy, such as plagiarism, make-ups, etc.
12. Official CHS policies relating to discrimination, disability, or advising (listed in curriculum guide)

Insights courses should also provide a syllabus which gives the above information. No grading is required, however, and no minimum assessments of student performance. You will find more discussion of Insights courses in the Resources section of this handbook. That discussion will help you better understand the distinct character of an Insights course.

### **Accessibility**

Cherry Hill Seminary intends our classes to be accessible to students and instructors with various abilities and disabilities. As assistive technology is in a rapidly changing environment, we make no claim to have a “perfectly accessible” website at any time, although we continually work to improve and enhance our system. We ask our students, faculty, and staff to please make us aware of any accessibility problem, challenge, or issue in any of our web pages or classrooms. We gratefully accept suggestions for ways to make our classes more easily accessible to all. We also ask that faculty be aware of and follow our DEI

statement in regard to accessibility.

### **Grading and Communication Policies**

When a course is in session, instructors are expected to respond to student and administrator communications within 48 hours during the regular work week or 72 hours over the weekend, except when an absence has been planned and announced. Feedback on short assignments should be given within a week; long assignments should be responded to within two weeks. NOTE: Students have a right to be informed promptly of their scores and to review each of their demonstrations of competence with their instructors. This means assignments must be returned in a timely manner.

It is important that students have an ongoing understanding of their performance in class. Therefore, by the time approximately 1/3 of the course has been completed (5 weeks), students should have performed a minimum of one demonstration of competence and have had that graded and returned to them. This may be an examination, a paper, a report, or any other assigned activity that is evaluated. Instructors are expected to keep a record of students' scores on each of the demonstrations of competence on which the final grade is based.

Grades at Cherry Hill Seminary are standardized letter grades. For detailed information on this, please look under *Grading and Evaluation* in the current Student Handbook & Course Catalog, posted on our website under *For Students/Materials*.

Grades for individual demonstrations of competence should be posted on Populi, but in addition may also be emailed to the individual student. If sending these individual grades, *however – in no case may a grade be posted on a forum or sent in a group email so that anyone but the individual student who earned the grade may see it.* The only exception to this rule would be for Senior Administrators, as appropriate.

Final grades must be based on a minimum of four demonstrations of competence by the student. In no case shall the grade on the final examination of competence (exam, paper, project, etc.) count for more than one-third of the course grade.

### **Incompletes**

In some unusual cases, a student may request an “Incomplete” instead of a grade, because the intention is to finish the work left undone. The decision to grant the request is up to the individual instructor. However, this should not be considered unless the student has completed at least 60% of the course successfully. In this case, the instructor must fill out an Incomplete on Populi. This form must be submitted at the same time as the final grades. There is a place on the form to write the grade the student will receive if the incomplete is not made up. The final grade in such cases is up to the instructor.

For Example: If a student has completed 60% of the semester's coursework and received a combination of A and A- on everything done, that would still be 60% of the final grade (the equivalent of a Not Acceptable). However, if the student has done 90% of the semester's

work and received a combination of A and A- on everything, the final grade based on work completed would probably be in the B range, although the instructor might consider an A-. For questions regarding the value of specific grades, please refer to the current [Student Handbook & Course Catalog](#), under grading.

An Incomplete must be made up with one semester of being granted. In an extraordinary case, such as military deployment, death of a spouse or child, or illness, the instructor may grant an extension of one additional semester. If an Incomplete is not made-up within the time allotted, the grade will automatically become the grade listed on the incomplete form by the instructor.

## Submitting Final Grades

All final grades can be posted and finalized on Populi. In addition, Send a list of your final letter grades to the Seminary office at CHS @cherryhillseminary.org. These are official and final grades and are used to generate official student transcripts, and for student advisement.

If you have made a mistake in calculating or recording the student's grade before submitting it, this may be corrected. In this case, you must send an email to the office (address above) explaining the error and providing the correct grade for the student. The email correction must be submitted before the grade is officially changed. Any correction must be made within one semester of the original filing.

Grade changes may not be based on additional work completed after the original grade was filed except when the original grade was "Incomplete."

## Semester Timeline

Once you have been given an assignment the following items need to be completed before your semester begins:

1. Approve the date/time of your course meeting and course title/description, and your title for the advertisement of the course.
2. Submit required text list by requested date on your Teaching agreement letter.
3. Submit the Teaching Agreement form (this is required for each semester you teach).
4. Submit a draft syllabus of your class to the Academic Dean at the requested date.
5. Attend the pre-semester meeting for updates, announcements, and questions.
6. Begin to set up your Populi classroom several weeks before the semester begins. Consider setting up just the first 3 weeks until you see that the class has enough students to run.
7. Teach your class.
8. Give your students feedback on an assignment by no later than 1/3 of the way through the semester.
9. Notify your students of all remaining grades no later than one week after the close of the semester.

10. Submit your grades and any incomplete forms by email to the Seminary office (address above) within one week of the end of the semester.
11. Complete your online self-evaluation and submit it as soon as you send your grades.
12. There will also be a mid-semester check-in meeting that will be scheduled with the academic dean.

## **Teaching: The Classroom**

### **Prohibited Discrimination**

Cherry Hill Seminary prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, creed, sex, age, marital status, national origin, mental or physical disability, political belief or affiliation, veteran status, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression or any other class of individuals protected from discrimination under state or federal law in any aspect of the access to, admission to, or treatment of students in its programs and activities, or in employment and application for employment. Furthermore, Seminary policy includes prohibitions of harassment of students, faculty, and employees, i.e., racial harassment, sexual harassment, and retaliation for filing complaints of discrimination. As faculty, you have an ethical and legal responsibility to interact with students in a manner free from all forms of unlawful discrimination.

If you have concerns or issues involving sexual harassment, please report them to Candace Kant, who currently serves as our Harassment Officer, and may be contacted at [ckant@cherryhillseminary.org](mailto:ckant@cherryhillseminary.org). For any other form of discrimination, contact the Dean of Students.

### **Classroom Meetings and Attendance**

All synchronous Zoom classes must be held during the time listed in the announced course listings, in your Populi classroom, and on the course syllabus. If you need to cancel a class meeting, notify the Academic Dean and the students. Plan an alternate activity for your students so they do not lose out on valuable class time. Our ability to legally award credits towards a degree relies on your maintaining the standards set out in your course syllabus.

Students are expected to attend class regularly, and only miss for valid reasons, such as illness, accident, etc. The Seminary does not require you to keep records of class attendance. However, if your syllabus says any portion of the course grade will be based on attendance, you must keep written records to use as a basis of the grade assigned.

Because the Seminary teaches all classes virtually, we are required to confirm that the student who shows up in your classroom is a real person who is actually the person doing the work and receiving a grade. This is easily confirmed by video participation. If for any reason you feel that an individual is misrepresenting themselves as a matriculated CHS student, please notify the office immediately.

As we become more international in scope, some of our classes do not have regularly

scheduled meeting times. This is almost always because the time differences are too great or the internet connection is not completely reliable for the instructor. In this case, it is absolutely imperative that students receive lectures, assignment feedback, and other information on a regular and timely basis by email or within Populi to accommodate the requirement of hours per class. The Department Chair and Academic Dean should be consulted before a class is assigned no live meeting times.

### **Classroom Environment**

Our students bring to their education widely differing backgrounds, skills, and learning styles. It is advantageous to try a variety of teaching strategies that will give you the best chance to reach every student in your class. See the *Resources* section of this handbook for suggestions.

We recognize and respect that students and faculty sometimes use magickal names or nicknames. We ask that in classrooms and in correspondence with faculty and administration, all participants identify themselves by their legal given names, with any nicknames or magickal names appended with a hyphen or in parentheses. This may seem pedantic, but there have been problems with registration and grades recording because of this issue.

### **Technical Competency and Preparedness**

Cherry Hill Seminary is a distance education facility. At a minimum, all members of the Seminary community must meet the technical requirements below, which are subject to change upon recommendation of our technical support staff and the agreement of management.

1. Review of the classroom training tutorial upon receiving access to the online classroom system (Populi and Zoom)
2. Proficiency in and access to an up-to-date computer with a sound card, working computer sound card and a headset/microphone which plugs into your computer
3. Reliable high-speed internet access
4. Access to and responsibility for standard office software, including a word processing program which will create .doc files, read pdf files and an internet browser (Chrome, Firefox, Safari (for Macs), or Edge)
5. Access to and responsibility for protection from viruses, etc.
6. Ability to attend and participate in online video class sessions through Zoom (Instructors do not need their own paid account. CHS provides the classroom Zoom account).
7. Ability and willingness to follow the instructions given by office staff when first introduced to Populi and Zoom.
8. Ability to attend and participate in online chat or conference call class sessions, as well as the willingness to adjust to these differing modes of communication.

## **Online Etiquette**

Electronic communication has both advantages and drawbacks since everything is written down and can be saved forever. Written text can easily be misunderstood when there are no subtle facial expressions, voice tone or any kind of immediate visual feedback. Humor and sarcasm are frequently misinterpreted. The use of emoticons may help avoid these misunderstandings. If there are misunderstandings in your classroom's forum discussion, you may need to ask a student to clarify their remarks. If you note a lack of respect, or any other behavior you would not tolerate in a physical classroom, contact the student immediately by personal email, that is, not on the forum, and initiate a discussion about the behavior. If you have questions or need support, contact your Department Chair or Academic Dean.

## **Cheating and Plagiarism**

As with faculty, plagiarism and academic dishonesty will not be tolerated in students. Cherry Hill Seminary's zero-tolerance policy includes sanctions for violation of the policy that include rehabilitative, reparative and/or punitive aspects depending on the nature and severity of the violation, the nature and severity of the harm caused, and the interest in encouraging and promoting quality and reliable scholarship. Specific sanctions may include expulsion from Cherry Hill Seminary, probationary regulation of conditionally continued enrollment and/or reporting to appropriate law enforcement authorities. If you have questions or need support, contact your Department Chair or Academic Dean.

## **Student Rights**

Academic freedom gives students rights as well as faculty. Students, particularly in the United States, tend to be very familiar with and assertive about these rights. It is important to follow the guidelines for assignments and grading to avoid problems in this regard. In general, it is helpful to remember that students have the right to examine all sides of an issue, to question assumptions, and to come to conclusions based on the evidence, even if those conclusions are different from the faculty member's conclusions.

## **Students with Disabilities**

Occasionally there are students who request a modification of class rules or procedures because of individual circumstances. Federal law and Cherry Hill Seminary commitment to accessibility require reasonable accommodation of the needs of students with disabilities. It is the student's responsibility to inform you of this need as soon as possible. It is useful to remind students of this responsibility in your syllabus or your opening discussion with the class.

Students with disabilities have the right to such accommodations as are necessary for them to receive benefit from the course equal to that for students who are not disabled. Modifications must be considered on a case-by-case basis. Modifications that substantially alter the *essential nature* of class are not required. There are some, but very few, situations

where no reasonable accommodation is possible. If you have questions or need support, contact your Department Chair or Academic Dean.

### **Issues with Students**

Hopefully, you will not have problems with students that cannot be resolved quickly, easily and in a manner in which all parties feel respected and heard. Occasionally, however, this is not the case. Should that occur, contact the Chair of your Department immediately. Not only can a third, uninvolved party often suggest something helpful, but your Chair is probably more familiar with CHS policy and history that might apply.

### **Teaching: Resources**

#### **More About Teaching at Cherry Hill Seminary**

The culture of Cherry Hill Seminary differs significantly from that of a university. Seminary training is inherently practical: all classes are situated in a context of community ministry and personal spiritual growth. Although the critical thinking skills so central to university culture are also essential in a seminary environment, seminary training requires deep reflection and the willingness to bring personal experience into dialogue with the material. Students must constantly ask themselves: How might my community benefit from this material? What new light does this class shine on my spiritual practice? What big questions about human nature, religious communities in general, or contemporary Paganism in particular are being raised or answered? As adult learners who are often already serving as clergy in their communities, CHS students require a pragmatic curriculum that does not shy away from theory or scholarly research, but harnesses these materials in the service of students' work in the world.

Cherry Hill Seminary is also a largely volunteer-run organization. Students are expected to provide their own computer equipment and to use library services local to their area. This structure allows CHS to provide graduate-level education at a very low rate per credit hour. However, it also requires both students and faculty to embrace a very proactive, self-responsible, and collaborative attitude toward study at CHS.

We encourage students and faculty to supplement our standard Populi and Zoom-based classrooms with other electronic resources as needed, as well as to think creatively to get the most out of the resources provided. Many apparent problems with classroom software are actually due to unfamiliarity with it, so students and teachers are encouraged to thoroughly familiarize themselves with appropriate sections in the Populi Knowledge Base or to get help from the Seminary office or an experienced student or faculty member before the semester begins.

### **Expectations for Students and Instructors**

#### **Student Preparation**



Cherry Hill Seminary students are often deeply involved in their local communities and have already been serving in leadership positions for several years before coming to Cherry Hill Seminary. Although some have aspirations to paid ministry positions, such as hospital, prison, or military chaplaincy, most are realistic about the limited availability of such jobs and have come to CHS for the development of practical leadership skills. While some CHS students have a scholarly orientation, for most this is secondary to their community work.

CHS Master's students vary somewhat in their preparedness for graduate-level work. In the admissions process, we look for good communication skills, clarity of vision around their work in the Pagan community, emotional maturity, and evidence of undergraduate work relevant to the student's proposed major. Applicants to the Master's programs are expected to have a Bachelor's-level education at minimum, but such degrees may have been earned decades earlier. Some students may hold graduate degrees in other fields, such as technology, the arts or science. Such students may require remediation in skills such as academic writing and discipline-specific methodologies. Faculty are encouraged to be as specific as possible about what basic skills are needed in their syllabi and to suggest supplemental resources for students who are doing graduate-level work in a field that is new to them.

Insights courses are entirely open to the public and do not require a formal admissions process. Most Insights students will be non-matriculating though occasionally a Master's student takes a course out of personal interest (but does not earn credit towards a degree with that course). A significant percentage of Insights students may be taking a CHS class for the first time. Faculty teaching these courses will encounter students with a wide variety of educational backgrounds and levels of maturity. Because every group is different, faculty may want to design flexible syllabi that can be adjusted based on the needs of an individual class. Some Insights courses may attract an entire group of students who are already on a graduate level; other groups may resemble community college freshmen, while some classes will be mixed.

### **Collaborative Learning**

Current research into teaching and learning clearly demonstrates that students learn material more thoroughly, retain it better, and experience greater shifts in their beliefs and practices as a result when they feel in charge of their education. Cherry Hill Seminary embraces a collaborative learning model as one that respects the considerable knowledge and experience of our students, as well as helping to improve student performance because it supports a philosophy of social constructionist pedagogy. This pedagogy suggests that students learn not just from course activities, but from other students and their environment; that they learn the most when constructing learning activities for others; that a sense of integration into a classroom culture accelerates learning; and that students' ability to move between objective, factual approaches and subjective ones is valuable and desirable.

Faculty should encourage students to see each other as resources. Each student brings unique life experience to the classroom that will cause them to engage differently with the

course. Instructors should use their judgment and creativity to formulate provocative questions about the material based on the particular interests and needs of the students. Student contributions should be treated seriously and with respect, with the understanding that students constantly teach each other and their instructors. As facilitators, instructors should set a tone for classroom discussion that is respectful, but does not shy away from difficult or controversial topics.

### **Multiple Role Relationships**

Like the pan-Pagan community in general, Cherry Hill Seminary is a small community, and participants tend to play many different roles. You may find administrators or board members in your classroom as students, or you may take advantage of your faculty tuition benefit to take a colleague's class for free. We encourage faculty to ask for clarification about which of the many CHS "hats" an individual is wearing at any given time. If there is any concern that the boundaries between roles are becoming blurred in a way that damages the classroom environment or relationships between CHS participants, faculty are encouraged to contact the department chair or Academic Dean.

### **Setting Classroom Expectations**

Regardless of whether the students are enrolled in a degree or some other kind of program, faculty will experience more success in their classes if expectations for both students and instructor are made clear at the beginning of the semester. CHS endorses the view of pedagogy researcher Ken Bain (*What the Best College Teachers Do*) that the process of introducing the syllabus should be handled more as an invitation to a feast than as a presentation of a list of demands.<sup>2</sup> CHS students are adults, often with jobs and families, who are pursuing an education at CHS out of a sense of personal calling, most often in addition to a full- or part-time job. Their participation is an informed choice. The role of the instructor is to facilitate student learning by raising provocative questions and providing structures for student thought and performance. Students of all levels are held to high standards, and instructors support student learning by consistently expressing faith in students' ability to meet those standards. That said, the syllabus is regarded by oversight authorities as a sort of contract between the school and the student, so it is vital that you construct a clear and detailed syllabus in accordance with the *Course Syllabus* section of this *Handbook*.

Because CHS classes are offered in a variety of disciplines, and assignments use many different methodologies, faculty should be as specific as possible about their expectations for individual assignments. Assignments at CHS can include academic writing in multiple disciplines, journalistic or popular expository writing, creative or reflective writing, visual art, sociological or anthropological fieldwork, curriculum development, oral presentations or speeches, and hybrids of these. When giving academic writing assignments, faculty should be particularly clear about to what degree the student may introduce personal experience and reflections. Faculty who wish to train students in traditional academic writing using the

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<sup>2</sup> Bain, Ken. *What the Best College Teachers Do*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2004.

objective voice may ask students to produce personal reflections on the research process as a separate assignment. Whenever possible, assignments should be connected to real-world tasks in which graduates might engage.

### **Technological Literacy**

Instructors and students are expected to be computer literate and to be able to use e-mail, Populi, and Zoom competently. New instructors are urged to master setting up group Zoom meetings before the semester begins. Important details on technological requirements are given in the *Student Handbook & Course Catalog*.

Because our administration and technical support are volunteer-staffed, instructors are asked to look for the answers to questions using the Populi Knowledge Base, before submitting a Populi support ticket or contacting the Seminary office about non-emergency technical issues. We particularly encourage new instructors to begin experimenting with their classroom design well before the beginning of the semester to allow plenty of time for tinkering and problem-solving. For technology issues that are interfering with the successful running of a course, however, please contact your department chair or the CHS office ([CHS@cherryhillseminary.org](mailto:CHS@cherryhillseminary.org)).

### **Models for Master's Courses**

Master's courses at Cherry Hill Seminary tend to enroll between 3 and 8 students per semester, with 5 being an average enrollment. Instructors will want to design their classes in a way that makes their time spent in the classroom most efficient while maximizing the benefit to students. Instructors should expect to spend approximately 10-15 hours on classroom design and set-up. This only needs to be done once per class; once a class has been offered, the classroom is saved and can be imported for future use.

### **Discussion-based Classes**

In discussion-based classes, instructors post readings and/or lectures to the Populi classroom. Students are asked to post to the Populi forums two or more times a week (usually one long post, and then responses to other students). The class also meets to discuss the materials via Zoom, usually once a week. Most student assignments are shared with the class in the forums, and final projects are often presented to the group as a whole with a Powerpoint slideshow, video, audio, or other mechanism.

This style of classroom runs most effectively with 5-8 students, though it can be successful with 3-4 students who are extremely participatory. It is a naturally collaborative model that allows bonding between the students. Participants are given plenty of space to connect the material with their personal experience and to learn from the experiences of others. The instructor operates primarily as a facilitator and allows the class to choose what aspects of the readings are most salient to them. Intelligent and insightful engagement with the material is emphasized over learning a body of facts. Exams are not usually given. In this style of class, the heart of the classroom is the classroom forum.

Instructors using this style should expect to spend 2-3 hours per week facilitating chat and forum discussions. Instructors may spend 1-2 hours per week giving feedback on short assignments and or 4-8 hours giving feedback on longer assignments. Many 5000-level introductory classes and some 6000-level classes are offered in this style.

### **Lecture-based Classes**

In lecture-based classes, interaction between individual students and the instructor is emphasized more than student-to-student interaction. Instructors post weekly lectures that may guide students through synthesizing the readings, or may provide the primary material for study. Students should still have opportunities for discussion in the classroom forums. Form discussions may be optional rather than required in this model. Weekly assignments focus on demonstrating a grasp of the material, and student knowledge may be periodically assessed with exams. Personal engagement with the material may be invited via journaling or other assignments, but may be shared only with the instructor rather than with the entire class. The instructor may also schedule one or two one-on-one conference calls with each student during the course of the semester.

This style of classroom works well with smaller and quieter groups of students. Even more than in the discussion-based classroom, it is essential that the instructor give prompt and substantial feedback on assignments. Here, student responses to lectures and the instructor's feedback on those responses form the heart of the classroom. Instructors are encouraged to record lectures as podcasts or even Powerpoint-based videos to maximize the sense of instructor presence in the classroom, as well as to appeal to students with different learning styles.

In addition to the time spent preparing lectures, instructors using this style should expect to spend 2-3 hours per week giving feedback on short assignments and answering questions, or 4-8 hours giving feedback on longer assignments. 5-10 hours per semester may also be spent speaking with students one-on-one. 5000- or 6000-level classes may be offered in this style.

### **Independent Studies**

(new policy as of September 2023) The scheduling of Independent Study of regular courses (not including courses outside of the regularly offered curricula) can be offered on a limited basis and must meet the following criteria. The definition of this type of independent study is: one-to-one instruction using course material, course contact hours, and course evaluations that align with the learning outcomes for that course. Substitutions can be made for some of the content and assessments due to the nature of the one-to-one contact.

1. Student is in good standing with Cherry Hill Seminary.
2. Student is nearing the end of their program and require a class that will not be offered before scheduled graduation (within a year).
3. A professor is willing and able to provide the independent study course.
4. Students may have a maximum of 12 credit hours in independent study courses for graduation, including courses that are not listed in the student catalog.
5. Approval from department chair and academic dean.

## **Insights Courses**

Insights 4-week courses are open to students with a wide range of preparation and ability. Although instructors should expect Master's students to be capable of independent work, Insights students often desire more guidance from the instructor and may be overwhelmed by long reading assignments. While there are no hard-and-fast guidelines for Insights classes at this time, instructors may want to think of these classes as lower-division undergraduate courses. Rather than formal academic papers, Insights classes often require reflective or creative writing. Insights courses may be graded on a pass-fail basis for non-matriculated students.

Because they are short and require less of a time commitment, prospective students often enroll in Insights courses in order to find out more about Cherry Hill Seminary. Insights classes often have a large percentage of first-time students, and students often enroll only a few days or a week before the class begins. Instructors are advised to have online readings and other resources available in the classroom, as last-minute students may be delayed in receiving their textbooks (which they often order through the mail). More than Master's students, Insights students may also need coaching and reminding about what constitutes respectful classroom behavior.

In order to stimulate discussion in an Insights classroom, instructors are encouraged to frame discussion questions in an explicitly personal context. Rather than asking Insights students to summarize and respond to the argument in a text, the instructor might restate a key point from the reading and ask students open-ended but structured questions such as, "How does your community handle this issue? What experience have you had with this issue in the past?" The most productive questions cannot be answered with a simple "yes" or "no" and will provide students more of a springboard for thought than overly loose questions such as, "What do you think about...?"

As with Master's courses, Insights courses can involve readings, Zoom meetings, lectures, forum discussions and more. Instructors are particularly encouraged to use videos, podcasts, and other multimedia resources, as these help to engage less academically-experienced students. Insights students can be expected to spend 3-5 hours a week on class activities. Instructors are expected to spend a minimum of 2-3 hours a week on Insights courses.

## **Grading**

A grading rubric indicating the quality of work required to achieve various letter grades is given in the Student Handbook & Course Catalog. Note that an A+ for a course can only be given in a 6000-level class or above, not in an introductory 5000-level class. A+ work requires original research, which is generally beyond the scope of introductory courses.

Giving feedback on student work is one of the most important roles of the instructor, and faculty are asked to allot ample time for this task over the course of the semester. The book *How Learning Works*<sup>3</sup> is recommended as a resource on giving effective feedback; the principles outlined below are taken from it.

### **Effective Feedback:**

- is specific and goal-oriented
- refers to criteria understood by the student
- acknowledges strengths and weaknesses in a student's work
- targets no more than 2-3 major areas for improvement in a given assignment
- is timely (returned 1-2 weeks after the assignment is submitted)
- may refer to models or examples of high-quality performance

Instructors are encouraged to be as explicit as possible about the goals for the class and for individual assignments. Grading rubrics or checklists that are shared with the class in advance are recommended. Narrative feedback that provides specific strategies for improvement should be given whenever possible. Since student performance improves most noticeably when feedback is targeted, instructors may want to focus on how to improve a few aspects of an assignment instead of giving multi-page feedback that points out every flaw. Don't forget that students must receive feedback on at least one assignment before the semester is one-third underway (5 weeks). This is a requirement of higher education oversight bodies.

Although assignments may be used as evaluations of student ability, they should be approached primarily as learning tools; students should not be expected to perform perfectly on the first assignment of a given course. Faculty are encouraged to create assignments that build on each other so that students can practice their skills and apply what they have learned to later assignments. For example, if the final project for a class is a paper written using a particular academic methodology, students will produce better work if, earlier in the semester, they write and receive feedback on a short paper using the same methodology. Instructors may also wish to consider multi-part assignments that allow students to get feedback on their work before a final grade is assigned to the whole project. This strategy allows sensitive or anxious students to improve their work without the discouragement of a very low grade early in the semester.

Although not every assignment needs a numerical or a letter grade—faculty may give narrative feedback only, especially on drafts or assignments that are parts of a larger assignment—students should receive graded feedback at the latest by the end of the first third of the semester. This allows ample time for a student who is performing poorly in the class to ask for help in improving her or his performance.

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<sup>3</sup> Susan A. Ambrose et al, *How Learning Works: Seven Research-based Principles for Smart Teaching* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 40-42.

It is up to the individual instructor as to how he or she wishes to translate narrative or qualitative feedback into letter grades. The use of a rubric, such as the one provided in the Curriculum Guide, is recommended. Participation grades in particular are inherently subjective and require a rubric.

Instructors may wish to set a quantitative baseline for participation, such as “Students attending 8 or more of the 15 weekly meetings will receive an 85 or above on their participation grade.” The more stringently the instructor grades participation, the more specific she or he should be when explaining grading criteria in the course syllabus.

## Using Web-Based Meeting Platforms

An effective distance education format necessitates some form of technology to enable periodic direct interaction between student and instructor. Cherry Hill Seminary currently uses Zoom™ for online video conferences. Zoom has an excellent selection of short video tutorials posted at their website.

Use of Zoom is free to the student but requires compliance with some simple matters in order to best serve both the individual and the group. Students and instructors are required to use a camera and microphone and a backdrop setting that is conducive to learning.

When you are scheduled to teach a course, the CHS office will send you the login for the official Zoom account and will also create the course meeting link for you and your students. You must log in to the account, go to Meetings, find your class meeting in the list and click “Begin” in order to start each week’s class. While all classes are recorded, CHS does not retain the recordings for longer than one week. If an instructor wishes to keep a recording and send to students, the instructor must pull the recording from the CHS Zoom and either copy to their own computer or to a secure cloud environment. No class recording should be available to the general public at any time. This is for the privacy and safety of all our students, faculty, and staff.

## Organizing the Classroom

A well-organized classroom creates an effective learning environment. In an ideal online classroom, the way material is organized is itself part of what is being taught. As a specialist in her or his discipline, the instructor provides not just the material itself, but also structures for thinking about and remembering the material. An appropriate organizational structure leads students toward understanding a body of material in the way that an expert would, while an inappropriate organizational structure may hinder students’ learning.

The book *How Learning Works*<sup>4</sup> gives an example of an art history professor who teaches a survey class. The instructor is frustrated with her students’ poor performance on exams when they are asked to identify individual pieces of art. She is unable to understand why her

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

students do not pick up on the clusters of characteristics shared by art produced in particular periods. The class material, however, is not organized in terms of clusters of period-related characteristics; instead, it is organized chronologically. When students approach the pieces of art chronologically, as non-experts in art, the comparisons and relationships between pieces that seem obvious to the instructor do not come naturally. Instead, they end up attempting to memorize titles, artist names, and dates as isolated facts, without any contextualizing informational structure that allows them to arrange facts into groups and make meaningful connections. Pedagogy research suggests that the art history professor would help her students considerably if she organized the material in terms of the way she understands it—as clusters of works related by artistic philosophy and technique.

Instructors can use the Populi classroom to demonstrate connections between concepts and to highlight broad questions in relation to the material. Instructors might use colors or graphics to label groups of topics; add topic titles and pair them with thought questions that link back to previous topics (either conceptually, or with literal HTML links); provide visual concept maps of the course's main ideas; and more. A thoughtfully laid out classroom gives the students a sense of having a road map with which to approach the material. This technique lessens the possibility of students feeling overwhelmed or lost, as they may when a classroom is extremely sparse.

### **General Classroom Management Strategies**

Some in-person teaching strategies translate well to online education, while others are unique to the online environment. Students are most likely to thrive, however, when they understand the value of the material; when they feel supported by the instructor, their fellow students, and the classroom structure; and when they feel able to learn and then perform well at the required tasks. The instructor's ability to convey a sense of her or his engagement with the students is one important component of a supportive classroom.

### **Achieving a Sense of Instructor Presence**

Students benefit both emotionally and intellectually from an instructor who seems engaged, present with the class, and supportive of students' work. Because the online teaching format does not allow instructors and students to be physically present with each other, instructors may need to think deliberately about how to convey a sense of their presence in the classroom.

Instructors may find it helpful to think of the various online environments (the Populi classroom, the Zoom meetings, etc.) not as media through which participants exchange messages and other information, but rather as virtual spaces that they visit. Particularly during real-time interaction, although students may be sitting at computers thousands of miles apart, their attention and awareness is focused on their classmates and instructor. The classroom participants are projecting their consciousnesses into a non-physical space that can take on greater reality with the use of physical metaphors.



In *Life on the Screen*<sup>5</sup> and other works, sociology of science researcher Sherry Turkle describes how people in virtual communities address the shortcomings of a long-distance, text-only format by introducing descriptions of body language and emoticons into their communications. Because it is often easy to misread the tone of written messages, emoticons or emotive phrases can help instructors and students to communicate clearly, especially where humor is involved (for example, one could label an ironic comment with the faux-HTML tag “<irony>,” the emotive phrase “\*tongue firmly in cheek\*,” or a smirking wink: ;> ). For many students, the use of emoticons conveys friendliness, openness, and a touch of informality, all of which are often desirable in a collaborative learning environment. Written body language – such as “\*nod\*” – can also be used to quickly acknowledge and reward student contributions during live text chats.

Nothing is more important for a sense of instructor presence, however, than the instructor’s frequent interactions with the classroom. Appropriate frequency will depend partially on the style of classroom – for directed studies, students may need no more than weekly feedback from the instructor at times; for discussion-based classes, the instructor may participate in Forum discussions a few times a week. All instructors should be prepared to respond to direct student e-mails within 48 hours.

Zoom meetings do a great deal to let students and instructors get to know one another. Even hearing a recording of the instructor’s voice, however, can increase the sense of the instructor’s presence in the classroom.

### **Strategies for Effective Forum Discussions**

Forum discussions often flow better with structured prompting. When you add a discussion to the classroom, Populi allows you to enter a title and description for that specific discussion. This box is an excellent place to put broad discussion questions for the week. It is much easier to understand the flow of Forum conversations if you are reading them from the classroom with threading set to “nested.” Nested conversations use indentations to show the order of posts and replies.

Splitting off a thread allows the instructor to retitle a thread with a relevant subject line. In order to keep discussions organized, instructors should encourage students to title their posts succinctly and appropriately. In Forums where students are posting their homework for general discussion, instructors may wish students to include their names and the week’s topic in the subject lines to allow the instructor to easily identify the posts as assignment responses.

Instructors may also sometimes wish to manually start a new thread on a topic. For instance, suppose the instructor wants to respond to a particular student’s post with a question for the whole class. If s/he replies directly to the post, the particular student may answer, but the rest of the class may not. In order to make it clear that the question is for

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<sup>5</sup> Turkle, Sherry. *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995.

the entire class, the instructor can start a new thread with a post something like this:

“In her post on the ‘terms’ thread, Christine said that she thought that soteriology (salvation theology) didn’t have a place in contemporary Pagan theology. Ann gave a counterexample from feminist Wicca and suggested that the hope of returning to a matriarchal utopia was a kind of salvation theology. Is ‘salvation’ a Christian idea, or is it more widely applicable?”

The instructor’s role in a discussion can be largely as a facilitator – drawing out important points from students’ posts, defusing potentially heated but unproductive lines of conversation, and making connections with the readings or other materials. Keeping the conversation visually organized with appropriate subject headers helps students make distinctions between topics and provides them with knowledge structures that support information retention.

Students benefit in many ways from seeing each other’s work. Instructors may want to ask students to post all or part of their weekly homework to the Forum to serve as a basis for discussion. In discussion-based classes, students are often asked for an initial post of 200-500 words a week and to make one or two thoughtful replies to other students’ posts. This practice gives the classroom a feeling of being active and occupied.

Both master’s and Insights students sometimes struggle to connect their reactions to the readings or lectures in meaningful ways. The syllabi found in the curriculum guide contain summary/response exercises that can be used to help students demonstrate good reading comprehension before they react personally or analytically.

## **Graded Discussions**

Discussion posts can be graded numerically or using a pre-set scale. Populi comes with a default non-numerical scale that allows the instructor to rate the degree of integration that a student’s post demonstrates.

Graded Discussions give students concrete feedback on their participation, while non-numerical scales help to avoid the arbitrariness of giving numerical ratings to what are often relatively informal or semi-formal pieces of writing.

## **Assignment Feedback**

Students won’t see feedback that you give on Assignments unless they click on the “Assignments” link on the Activities menu, and then on the specific assignment. Populi will send them notifications about your feedback, however, if you click the “Send notification e-mail” box when recording the feedback.

## **Monitoring Student Participation**

Populi provides tracking applications to monitor student participation. Instructors are encouraged to review these functions to determine if they would be helpful for their classroom. Populi also has a chat function that allows for real-time chats that can also be a

good record keeper for instructors.

## **Electronic Resources**

The Internet abounds with resources for the study of religion. A short and partial list of resources for online research is given in the Library in Moodle. Cherry Hill's Librarian is a great resource for preparing your classes.

## **PDFs and Electronic Documents**

Cherry Hill Seminary encourages instructors to provide links to PDFs and other electronic documents rather than upload large documents to the Populi site. This will prevent difficulties in downloading information in addition to adhering to copyright laws. This, of course, does not apply to instructor-developed documents.

Although Microsoft Word has become a near-universal word-processing format, avoid giving students documents in .docx format (Word 2007 and later). Students are not required to use Word 2007, and Microsoft's plug-in converter for earlier editions of Word is not entirely reliable. PDFs are recommended, as they can be read with many different free readers. This is especially important for accessibility. If you want to ensure that every student will be able to open a word processing document, .rtf (rich text format) is a non-proprietary standard format that can be read and edited by every word processor on the market.

Blogs, podcasts, and websites have become central distribution centers for information about contemporary Paganism, and portals like Patheos.com are now hosting blogs for key journalists and writers in the Pagan movement. Instructors are encouraged to include blogs, podcasts, and websites as resources in their classrooms and/or to assign the creation of blogs and other collaborative media as class assignments. When assigning blogs as course reading, care should be taken to explain the difference between primary and secondary sources; most blogs should be taken as objects of study, not as authorities on their subject matter.

Populi provides for the structured, student-paced presentation of material through the Lessons activity, an interactive alternative to lectures and readings. Zoom provides a "share screen" function which is very helpful during live class meetings if you wish to show materials, images, or media presentations.

## **Audio Lectures**

Audio lectures can be easily recorded using free audio recording software. Recordings in a non-proprietary format like .mp3 or .mp4 (video) can be listened to on a student's choice of device. Students who are primarily auditory learners benefit greatly from material presented in this format, and even those who learn best while reading may find recorded lectures to be a refreshing change of pace. In lieu of formal lectures, instructors may also use audio recordings to conversationally comment on student homework or to synthesize ideas brought up in discussions.

For a low-tech way to add visuals to an audio lecture, create a slide deck and upload it to the classroom. Simply indicate verbally to the students when they should click to the next slide. If you do not have access to Microsoft Powerpoint, Google provides a presentation application.

Powerpoint can record audio to accompany a slideshow, and the combination can be converted to a video that students can access online. There are companies online that advertise this service for free up to a certain size limit, but we cannot comment on their reliability or privacy policies. Software is also available that will convert Powerpoint presentations with audio to upload-able video. Please let CHS know about any free or low-cost programs that you find helpful for creating video lectures.

## **Visuals and Video**

YouTube is a surprisingly rich resource for video footage on a wide variety of topics. YouTube also can convert your Powerpoint presentation to a video posted on the YouTube site. Instructors are encouraged to search the Internet for images and videos that will enhance students' experience of course material. Instructors are required to be mindful of educational fair use policies. Please consult the CHS librarian for additional information.

## **Designing Assignments**

Seminary study is meant not just to help students develop practical skills and absorb relevant knowledge, but also to foster spiritual development. Cherry Hill Seminary expects that most assignments given in seminary courses will be qualitative rather than quantitative. The seminary does acknowledge, however, that quantitative assignments are appropriate for assessing whether students have learned specific facts or techniques. Faculty are encouraged to use exams, quizzes, and other quantitative methods when their use fulfills specific learning outcomes.

## **Qualitative Assignments**

In addition to academic essays using a variety of disciplinary methodologies, Cherry Hill Seminary students are often given the opportunity to produce creative projects that demonstrate their engagement with the material and are appropriate to the focus of their ministry.

For example, a student interested in the religious education of children might create educational curricula, write a children's book, or design games as a final project; a student with a background in the visual arts might create an art project and accompanying presentation for her community or for the public; a counseling or ministry student might create marketing and educational materials or protocols for a community center or private counseling practice; a student interested in public communication and advocacy might produce a blog or a website. Although academic research and writing are important skills for CHS students to have, instructors are encouraged when possible to assign projects that clearly connect to the work that students do (e.g., as clergy, chaplains or group leaders) in

their communities. Fieldwork in which students gather data to identify community needs and then design effective ministry programs based on the results tend to be particularly valuable for student learning.

Online technologies also offer unique structures for qualitative assignments. For example:

- Populi provides built-in blogs that students can use to record and share reflective writing (note that student blogs are visible to all users in the classroom).
- Powerpoint slideshows, Prezi.com, and many websites, and collaborative blogs independent, original Youtube videos of the Populi classroom all provide exciting opportunities for students to create materials that will be usable in their community ministries.

### **Quantitative Assignments**

Populi provides a Test function that can be added directly to the classroom. The Test function provides instructors with many options for test questions, which can make for a somewhat overwhelming test creation experience when using the software for the first time.

### **A Last Word**

Cherry Hill celebrates the faculty who are making the first contemporary Pagan graduate-level seminary a reality. As always, we invite your feedback and welcome your ideas for growing and deepening our programs. Finally, we hope that you will find your teaching at Cherry Hill Seminary to be a richly meaningful and rewarding experience.