

# Catastrophic Event Policy

## Purpose

Shepherds Theological Seminary (STS) recognizes the need to prepare for unexpected catastrophic events such as natural or human-made disasters, the outbreak of pandemic illnesses, and other events that affect the continuity of operations and make it difficult to maintain normal processes including classroom instruction.

## Definitions

Catastrophic Event – any unforeseen event, outside the control of the seminary, which is so widespread that it interferes with normal activities.

## Policy

If a catastrophic event occurs that requires evacuation from the main campus or teaching site, STS will notify the student population using a mass text and email through the Populi system and follow its policies outlined in the [\*Security, Health, and Crisis Response Handbook\*](#). Site Directors at teaching sites will initiate communications to those locations using the same process and system.

As our distance education program is done entirely through livestreaming, classes and academic programs can be resumed through this medium as soon as possible. Residential students will need to move to this modality until the main campus or teaching site is able to resume normal operations.

STS leverages available educational technologies such as the Canvas Course Management System as well as Populi as our Learning Management System. These cloud-based programs should minimize the likelihood of service interruptions. These programs are protected from vulnerabilities, adequately secured, and backed up to prevent the destruction of records and/or loss of data.

STS utilizes cloud backup services to store and protect data. This includes an online managed backup service that provides the seminary with a system for the backup, storage, and recovery of computer files. Backups are performed on a daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly basis.

Seminary backup and recovery procedures are tested and verified on an annual basis to ensure protection in the event of an outage, system failure, or natural disaster.

## Academic Records

Current academic records are generated electronically via Populi, our Learning Management System. This system is password protected with specific security permissions. Hard copies of these records are stored in fireproof cabinets on the main campus. Each cabinet requires a key and is behind several doors with special access for entry. All forms from the admissions

application and scanned and stored in the digital academic file in Populi for each student. Electronic documents are stored in the cloud with a digital backup.

### **Program Discontinuances**

In the unlikely event that STS cannot deliver the instruction for which students have enrolled, the seminary commits to one or more of the following courses of action, depending on each individual student's needs:

- Providing a reasonable alternative for delivering instruction and/or services for which students have paid
- Providing a reasonable financial refund for the education students did not receive
- Providing assistance for transferring earned credits to other institutions

STS students will be notified by the seminary administration and then counseled about their options by their advisors. In accordance with institutional accreditation requirements, a teach-out plan is on file.

Responsible party

*The Vice President of Academic Affairs*

Policy Review

*This policy is to be reviewed every five years.*

Distribution

This policy is located on the STS Policies webpage:

<https://shepherds.edu/policies-disclosures/>

### **Teach-Out Policy**

If the catastrophic occurrence is of such magnitude that Shepherds Theological Seminary is not able to return to normal operations in a timely manner or must close its operations, the seminary will counsel each student regarding completing their degree either through a teach-out program or through a teach-out agreement with another institution (Full policy is in the ***Teach-Out Policy*** document). STS will work to the greatest extent possible to ensure that students will not suffer financially as a result of a catastrophic event, but the seminary cannot promise to make any guarantees as planning for every potentiality is beyond the scope of this policy.

STS has a verbal teach-out agreement with two schools who have similar degree offerings and courses and are ATS accredited institutions: Southern California Seminary and Central Baptist Theological Seminary. The details of course and degree program transfers will be developed considering student needs at the time such is necessary due to the constantly changing nature of academic programs and courses.

# Teach-Out Policy

## **Purpose**

The seminary teach-out policy aims to protect the interests of students and faculty and to satisfy the requirements established for accreditation. The decision to close a main campus, teaching site, degree program, or certificate program requires substantial planning and careful consultation with all those affected. Every effort should be made to inform affected parties as fully as possible about the conditions leading to a decision of such importance. As the immediate interests of current students and faculty are most directly affected, their present and future prospects require sensitive and timely attention and involvement.

## **Definitions**

*Teaching Site.* ATS defines a teaching site as an institutional location that provides at least some resident teaching at the location.

*Degree Program.* A degree program is an organized curriculum leading to a degree in an area of study recognized as an academic discipline by the higher education community, as demonstrated by assignment of a Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) code by the National Center for Educational Statistics or as demonstrated by the existence of similar degree programs at other institutions.

*Educational Program.* A degree program.

*Date of program termination.* The date on which the educational program is closed permanently to admissions.

*Date of program closure.* The date on which the last student in a teach-out plan has completed the educational program.

*Teach-Out Plan.* The written plan and subsequent process by which the seminary provides instructional and academic support services to students enrolled at a site that has been closed and/or in an educational program that has been discontinued. The teach-out process often extends well beyond the termination date (the date on which the site or program is closed permanently to admissions) to allow time for enrolled students to complete their programs in a reasonable amount of time. The plan must provide for the equitable treatment of students if an institution, or an institutional location that provides fifty percent or more of at least one program, ceases to operate before all students have completed their program of study. The plan may include a teach-out agreement between institutions.

*Teach-Out Agreement.* A written agreement between accredited institutions that provides for the equitable treatment of students if one of those institutions stops offering an educational program before all enrolled students complete the program.

## Policy

In accordance with federal regulations, the seminary is required to submit a teach-out plan to its accreditors and NC-SARA for approval if any of the following occurs:

- The institution notifies ATS that it intends to cease operations entirely or close a location that provides at least 50% of at least one educational program.
- ATS terminates accreditation or the candidacy of an institution.
- The USDOE notifies ATS that it has initiated an emergency action against an institution or an action to limit, suspend, or terminate an institution participating in any Title IV, Higher Education Act program.
- A state licensing or authorizing agency notifies ATS that an institution's license or legal authorization to provide an educational program has been or will be revoked.

More specifically, if the seminary decides to close an educational program, approved teaching site, main campus, or the entire institution, ATS requires that the seminary choose one of the following two options:

- Execute a teach-out plan. The teach-out option occurs when the institution "teaches out" currently enrolled students; no longer permanently admits students to programs; and terminates the educational program, the operations of an approved teaching site or a main campus, or the operations of an institution.
- Develop and implement a teach-out agreement. The teach-out agreement option occurs when the institution enters into a contract with another institution or organization which will teach out the educational programs or program to their completion.

Teach-out plans and teach-out agreements must be approved by ATS in advance of implementation. To be approved, plans and agreements must include the following information:

- Dates of termination and closure
- An explanation of how affected parties (students, faculty, staff) will be informed of the impending closure
- An explanation of how students will be helped to complete their programs of study with minimal disruption or additional expense
- Signed copies of teach-out agreements with other institutions
- How faculty and staff will be redeployed or helped to find new employment; and

- If closing an institution, arrangement for the storing of student records, disposition of final financial resources and other assets

The teach-out plan should make appropriate distinctions between prospective and currently enrolled students. The teach-out period and teach-out plan may vary by main campus, teaching site, or degree program and must be determined and approved in advance at all required levels.

As soon as the decision to close is made, the institution should provide to ATS:

- (1) notification of the intended closing of a program, site, main campus, or institution and
- (2) a teach-out plan for approval (including any teach-out agreements with other institutions).

ATS may request additional information for the teach-out plan before approving the teach-out plan.

### **Affected Groups**

*Prospective graduate students* with active applications awaiting admission decisions to an affected main campus, teaching site, or degree program should be immediately advised to seek alternative degrees by the appropriate unit, generally the academic department or program. Prospective students should be given as much time as practicable to seek alternative degrees. The academic department or program also should immediately suspend admission of new students.

*Currently enrolled graduate students who have fewer than 50% of required units completed* in a terminated degree through a main campus, teaching site, or degree program, after consideration of their circumstances and potential impacts of seminary actions on such students, should be immediately suspended from continuance in the affected program. Departmental faculty or staff should advise such students regarding appropriate degree change options.

*Currently enrolled students in a degree program who have 50% or more of the required credit hours applicable* to their program of study should be given a high priority in the seminary's efforts to enable them to complete their degree programs. An academic plan should be developed for each student that enables him/her to complete the curricular program requirements within the teach-out period. Students should expect to take a sufficient number of courses each semester, including summers, to enable them to complete all requirements within the teach-out period. The teach-out period, typically, will continue for no more than two academic years following the date on which the notice of termination is given to students. Programs, on a case-by-case basis, will determine the necessary length of a teach-out program. Students who do not make adequate progress on their academic plan for teach-out will be advised into another degree program or institution. If a course required for the degree is not offered in the teach-out period, students may decide, with the department's consent, to take the course at another institution as a transient student and transfer the credit, or to arrange with the department to complete the requirements in some other academically appropriate fashion. Students are

required to have ongoing contact with their academic advisors during the teach-out period to ensure that their academic plans are current and consistent with the projected course offerings.

*Faculty* should be involved in and informed of plans to terminate a main campus, teaching site, or degree program at the earliest possible stage of consideration. Faculty shall be informed of any potential layoff considerations covered by the seminary administration at the earliest possible stage of consideration and be kept apprised of recommendations forwarded to the seminary Board of Trustees regarding plans to terminate a main campus, teaching site, or degree program.

## **Responsibilities**

*The Provost/Dean* and Chief Academic Officer (*CAO*) whose scope of authority involves an educational program, teaching site, or main campus being considered for termination shall inform and involve affected faculty and students at the earliest possible stage of consideration. Once the decision to pursue closure of an educational program, teaching site, or main campus has been made, the *Provost/Dean* shall devise a proposal for adequate closure of the affected site or operation. The proposal should be developed with the involvement of faculty and students and should outline the following items:

- Nature of the program
- Reasons for termination
- Number of students currently enrolled
- Progression statistics of students in the program
- Resources used to offer the program
- Financial savings, if any, realized from the termination
- Explanation of how students enrolled in the program will be helped to complete their program
- Assessment of whether faculty will be adversely affected by termination
- Explanation of how affected individuals will be informed of the planned termination

The *Provost/Dean* should be available to brief all stakeholders. The *CAO* will work with the *Provost/Dean* to develop and coordinate presentations on the proposal to the President and Board of Trustees. Once both bodies have approved requests for approval of termination of the program, teaching site, or main campus, the *Provost/Dean* shall insure all accrediting bodies are notified.

The *Provost/Dean* and *CAO* shall work with the ATS Accreditation Liaison to develop a teach-out plan and implement the notification elements of the plan for students and faculty. The *CAO* is responsible for on-going monitoring and reporting on implementation of the teach-out plans. A monitoring report should be used to provide periodic reports to the administration and accreditation liaisons of the status of the teach-out plan.

*The Provost/Dean* will ensure the proposal for termination is brought forward for discussion to

the President and Board of Trustees. The *Provost/Dean* will develop and coordinate presentations on the proposal to the Board of Trustees and work with the *CAO* to ensure all affected parties are notified of the pending decision. The affected parties must include the faculty, students, the *Registrar*, the Office of Admissions, and the Office of Financial Aid. Once the President and the Board of Trustees have approved termination of the educational program, teaching site, or main campus, the *Provost/Dean* will update the *CAO* and ATS Accreditation Liaison on the notification and approval process.

*The ATS Accreditation Liaison* will be informed by the *Provost/Dean* of pending decisions to consider termination of an educational program, site, or main campus. Once the President and the Board of Trustees have approved a proposal for termination at a date conditional upon ATS notification and approval, the ATS Accreditation Liaison will work with the *CAO* to ensure the materials needed for notification and approval by ATS are developed. The ATS Accreditation Liaison will notify ATS promptly of the proposal to terminate an educational program, teaching site, or main campus upon receipt of requisite approval.