

3 FORMATION GUIDELINES

3.1 SEMINARY POLICIES

(regarding Communication Technologies)

last updated on August 10, 2026

Acceptable Use of Technology *(source: CS Seminarian Handbook, 2016-2017, p.18)*

As a seminarian in training for a life of Christian discipleship, while preparing for a potential life as a Catholic priest, one should be accountable for how he uses information technologies. In order to assist in striving to be accountable, the seminary reserves the right to monitor its internet, e-mail, networks and other information technologies. Also, the seminary abides by all state and federal laws concerning the use of the internet. Such laws protect the seminary community, and the seminary cannot shield anyone who breaks such laws, e.g. child pornography or illegal trafficking of any sort. The seminary's policy regarding information technologies is set out in the Policy for Acceptable Use of Technology Resources.

A seminarian is accountable not only to God but also to his bishop, the seminary formation staff, and also to those he will serve in the future. While Formation Advisors and Spiritual Directors will bring internet use into discussion at times, a seminarian should also be courageously willing to bring forward anything he is struggling with at any time, including inappropriate internet use. Hidden problems and weak nesses only grow greater, so it is best to bring them to light immediately and have the aid of one's Formation Advisor and Spiritual Director in striving to overcome any issue.

A seminarian's Formation Advisor and Spiritual Director assist in all areas of formation; however there are times when the more focused care of a psychologist or counselor is not only prudent, but necessary. Such circumstances may include when a seminarian is struggling with problems such as addictions, substance abuse, sexual addiction or obsession, pornography, or other problems affecting the seminarian's mental and behavioral health and well-being. The seminary formation team or the seminarian himself may request such counselling. The Rector and the designated representative of the seminarian's sponsoring diocese must be consulted prior to the beginning of any counselling. Although some may perceive the need for counselling as a weakness, it should never be misconstrued that such a need discounts someone from discerning a priestly vocation; rather counselling should be viewed as an opportunity to assist the seminarian in an important aspect of formation. Note that pre-approved professional counselling or psychotherapy costs will be confidentially covered in accord with the requisite policies of the seminarian's sponsoring dioceses. The seminary will work cooperatively with the seminarian and therapists to determine if he can remain in formation while addressing these issues.

Electronic Devices *(source: Faculty Handbook, revised Feb. 2018, p. 46)*

Electronic devices may be used for note taking in class; no other documents or digital applications are to be opened during class time. It is a distraction as well a sign of disrespect to fellow students, to the professor, and to oneself to be involved in activities other than class participation and note-taking. Phone use is prohibited in class as well.

Electronic Devices *(source: TS Seminarian Handbook, 2016-2017, p.16)*

Seminarians must develop proper habits with regard to the use of electronic means of communication, such as cellular telephones, computers, or any other handheld electronic devices.

- 1) Seminarians are permitted to have cellular telephones.
 - a. A seminarian should use his cellular telephone in such a way as to avoid disturbing others living in the residence halls.
 - b. Seminarians should not make or receive telephone calls after the curfew hour.
 - c. Cellular telephones, smart phones etc. are not to be used in the classroom.
- 2) Seminarians are expected to be responsible for the proper use of both his personal computer and computers in public spaces.
 - a. A seminarian should monitor the amount of time spent using computers. Too much time spent on the computer risks becoming isolated from the community.
 - b. A seminarian is not permitted to plug his personal computer for internet usage into a public internet or telephone jack.
 - c. The use of the internet should be very carefully controlled. Its use should be only for moral purposes.
 - d. All computer usage must be consistent with the policies of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia.

Internet Use in the Classroom *(source: Syllabus Template, SharePoint)*

While the internet is a valuable source of information that can facilitate the learning process, it can often be a distraction within the classroom setting. Therefore, unless explicitly permitted by the instructor, students in the classroom are not permitted to connect to the internet.

No Cell Phone in Class *(source: Memorandum from College Dean of Students, Jan. 2018)*

Starting Monday, January 22, 2018 we will be starting a new formation policy in the college seminary for our seminarians. This new policy is very important to their formation as future priests. Cell phones will no longer be allowed in our college classes. The men have been informed of this policy. So, the seminarians have been asked to leave their cell phones in their dorm rooms or when they come to class to shut off their cell phones and place them in a basket that we will have in each classroom. If you see a seminarian bring out his cell phone during class please tell him to place it in the basket and at the end of the class bring it to my office. They have been informed of the consequence for not following this new policy. If there are no consequences then, they will not follow the policy. We really need your support in enforcing this formation policy.

POLICY ON THE USE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE *(source: Policy Number III.A.20)*

The purpose of this policy is to offer limits and guidance regarding use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools within the program of intellectual formation of the seminary, ensuring alignment with Catholic moral teaching and the principles of academic integrity.

Guiding Principles for the Use of AI

Within the academic program of the seminary, all use of AI tools should reflect:

1. **Human Dignity:** deeply held respect for human authorship and the intellectual formation of students. Students and educators must remain at the center of education, and all formation must serve "the pressing duty to remain profoundly human" (Pope Leo **XIV**, *Magnifica humanitas*, no. 15). The purpose of intellectual formation at Saint Charles Borromeo Seminary is the intellectual formation of the seminarian or other theology student himself or herself and the ability to "think with the Church," and not merely his or her ability to use tools effectively to produce work that is excellent in itself. (See also MH, nos. 50-53 and 233.)
2. **Truthfulness:** firm commitment to academic honesty and careful avoidance of plagiarism. Any submission of an artificially generated text in an assignment for which the student is responsible, in whole or in part, and including the use of citations of works not actually consulted by the student, is to be considered a form of plagiarism. "School is the place where new generations can learn to seek and love the truth, to reflect on the meaning of life, and to recognize the dignity of every person" (MH, no.143).
3. **Discernment:** prudence in the use of technology. AI tools should only be employed **in** those limited circumstances where it is clear that they will enhance the educational experience. "Schools are not called to follow the pace of the digital world, but to offer that which the digital sphere by itself cannot provide, namely a shared time for learning and developing trustworthy relationships" (MH, no. 147).
4. **Integral Formation:** encouraging deep intellectual engagement, rather than replacing the exercise of one's intellectual faculties with automation. The use of AI should never replace the original thought, effort, or authorship of a student or faculty member. Any use of AI must always serve, not hinder, the student's growth in all dimensions of formation.
5. **Personalist Principle:** opportunities for human interaction are always to be preferred over engagement with AI.
6. **Inner Growth:** all formation must promote interior growth through human experiences. "So-called artificial intelligences do not undergo experiences, do not possess a body, do not feel joy or pain, do not mature through relationships, and do not know from within what love, work, friendship, or responsibility mean. Nor do they have a moral conscience, since they do not judge good and evil, grasp the ultimate meaning of situations, or bear responsibility for consequences. They do not understand what they produce, for they lack the affective, relational, and spiritual perspective through which human beings grow in wisdom. Even when these tools are described as capable of 'learning,' their way of doing so is different from that of a human person. It is not the experience of those who allow themselves to be shaped by life and grow over time through choices, mistakes, forgiveness, and fidelity.

Rather, it is a form of statistical adaptation based on data and feedback, which can be very effective, but does not imply inner growth" (MH, no. 99).

Different approaches to the allowance of AI tools in academic contexts can be categorized as follows:

- **Restrictive approach:** AI tools are entirely prohibited.
- **Prescriptive approach-:** AI tools are permitted only for specific purposes and require prior permission unless such use is explicitly prescribed in the assignment as given.
- **Permissive approach:** AI tools are encouraged in the completion of assignments.

Seminary professors may adopt either a restrictive or a prescriptive approach in their courses. Adopting a permissive approach, which is not anticipated in any seminary courses, would require explicit approval from the Vice President for Academic Affairs (VPAA).

Unacceptable Uses of AI

The following uses of AI tools are strictly prohibited, since they go beyond merely supplementary support and risk being fundamentally and objectively deceptive:

1. Ghostwriting: presenting or submitting AI-generated content as one's own original work. This includes using AI tools to compose homilies, reflections, papers, and other forms of written assignments, as well as using AI in the drafting process or to generate an outline.
2. Cheating or Academic Dishonesty: using **AI** tools to complete assignments, papers, quizzes, exams, etc. intended to assess personal understanding. Such use is strictly prohibited.
3. Misrepresentation of personal research in citations: using AI tools to generate citations that do not exist, that the student has not consulted personally, or that misrepresent sources. All sources must be directly and personally obtained and consulted.
4. Use as a Source: AI, itself, is never to be treated as a source.
5. Exposure of Confidential Data: since user inputs and uploaded documents serve to train AI tools, confidential information must never be entered into publicly available AI interfaces, even anonymously or for the sake of example.
6. Departmental Collaboration: departments may work collaboratively to determine a restrictive approach that would prohibit the use of AI tools entirely within a department.

Other Uses: no use of AI tools is allowed in relation to coursework without the express permission of the professor.

Possibly Acceptable Uses of AI (whenever such is in accordance with the present policy)

Any use of AI is generally discouraged. There are some specific uses that may not always be considered academic misconduct, some possible examples of which include:

1. Research assistance, such as searching for sources relevant to a given topic, gaining or enhancing background knowledge on a topic, or exploring varied viewpoints.
2. Grammar, syntax, and spelling refinement that is built into software for identifying and correcting lexical and syntactical errors. Caution should also be exercised regarding overly subservient use of automated checking for spelling, capitalization and usage, since ecclesiastical and theological usage and vocabulary may sometimes differ from general usage in these respects. Theological and philosophical precision may also sometimes require more use of subordinate clauses and longer sentences than may be favored by tools for the automated checking of grammar and syntax.
3. Language translation, principally for assistance in reading sources in modern languages, not for assignments in language classes or classes focusing principally upon English-language usage, style and rhetorical skills. If the student is not a native speaker of the English language, any use of AI tools for translation must be discussed with the professor for his or her approval and reported at the end of the assignment, as mentioned in n.5 below.
4. Clarification, such as assistance in gaining initial definitions of terms or concepts.
5. Whenever any AI tools are used in completing a written assignment legitimately in accordance with the provisions this policy, a statement is to be made in an appendix (which may be short) at the end of the written assignment describing the precise use that the student has made of them.

In all cases, acceptable uses of AI tools must have the explicit approval of the professor. Similarly, in all cases, students must retain full responsibility for the content, accuracy, and originality of their work.

Guidelines for Faculty Members

1. Faculty members are encouraged to explore ways of developing and fostering in others intellectual virtues (e.g., studiousness, humility, and honesty) so that they come to understand, appreciate, and evaluate AI as a limited tool, not as a substitute for the formation of the human mind and heart.
2. Faculty members should communicate clear expectations regarding AI use in syllabi and assignments. Every course syllabus is expected to include a statement regarding AI usage. Depending on the nature of each particular course, either a restrictive or a prescriptive approach (defined above) may be adopted.
3. Faculty members may require students to submit, along with a completed assignment, any of the following:
 - earlier drafts (including any native-language drafts if the student is not a native speaker of English) ;
 - content as it was produced by students prior to the influence of AI;

- and/or a record of AI interactions.
4. The use of AI in lesson planning, instruction, and assessment creation is discouraged. Any AI-generated materials must be acknowledged as such, and they should be reviewed and tailored before classroom use.
 5. It is impermissible for faculty members to use AI tools for assigning grades or providing feedback in an unsupervised manner.

Guidelines for Students

1. Students are encouraged to develop intellectual virtues (e.g., studiousness, humility, and honesty) so that they come to understand, appreciate, and evaluate AI as a limited tool, not as a substitute for the formation of the human mind and heart.
2. In classes adopting a prescriptive approach, students must strictly limit their engagement with AI tools to those uses expressly permitted by the professor in accordance with this policy.
3. It is always impermissible for students to use AI tools in any way that circumvents the processes of active learning, contemplation, or prayerful engagement.

Review and Oversight

1. Violations of this policy will be treated as academic misconduct. Any report of inappropriate use of AI tools shall be investigated and reviewed by the VPAA.
2. Violations may result in grade penalties, academic probation, disciplinary, and/or formal review by the Academic Affairs Committee.
