

# REVOCATION OF DEGREES

## I. Purpose

This policy outlines the process to be followed when a question arises as to whether a degree previously granted to a student, should be revoked.

All degrees at the University of Pennsylvania are conferred by the President on behalf of the Trustees. Therefore, the authority to revoke a degree rests with the President of the University. The Doctor of Philosophy, Master of Arts and Master of Science degrees are recommended by the Graduate Council of the Faculties, so that body has a role in the process for determining whether those degrees should be revoked. Other degrees are recommended by the faculty of a school at the University, so the faculty of that school have a role in the process. In all cases, the dean of the school that oversees the graduate group or recommends the degree has a key role in determining whether a degree should be revoked.

## II. Statement of Policy

The University's award of a degree constitutes its certification of student achievement. In order to preserve the integrity of its academic standards and the degrees it grants, the University may exercise its right to revoke a previously conferred degree. Such action may be considered in a case where it is alleged, for example, that the degree has been obtained by fraud or other serious misconduct, such as, but not limited to, providing false information on an application for admission, cheating on an examination, tampering with student records, plagiarism, or research misconduct while enrolled in the degree program.

## III. Process for the Revocation of Doctor of Philosophy, Master of Arts and Master of Science

### A. Initiation

1. Information that places into question the validity of a previously conferred Doctor of Philosophy, Master of Arts or Master of Science degree should be referred to the dean of the school that houses the graduate group in which the degree holder was enrolled.
2. Upon discovery or receipt of credible information that a graduate may have obtained a degree by fraud or other serious misconduct, the dean should initiate an investigation.

### B. Investigation

1. The dean will appoint an investigative committee, composed of 2 or more faculty, to review the matter and recommend to the dean whether no further action should be taken, whether corrective action short of revocation is appropriate, or whether the degree should be revoked.
2. The graduate will be notified in writing of the investigation, the reason for the investigation, and the procedures to be followed during the investigation. In addition, the graduate will have an opportunity to provide information for the investigative committee to consider.
3. The investigative committee will submit a written summary of its findings and recommendations to the dean. A copy of the committee's report will be provided to the graduate and the graduate may submit a response to it.
4. After reviewing the committee's report and the graduate's response (if any), the dean will decide whether to proceed toward a revocation

of the degree, whether to obtain corrective action or whether to drop the matter. If the dean decides to pursue revocation of the degree, the matter must be referred to the Graduate Council of the Faculties for a hearing. The dean or his/her designate will also bring the matter to the attention of the Provost.

### C. Hearing

1. The graduate may have an advisor, of his or her own choosing, during this process. (Throughout this policy, the term "process advisor" is used to refer to the graduate's advisor for this process.)
2. The graduate should be provided written notice of the hearing at least one month in advance of the hearing. This notice should include information about the hearing process. Every effort should be made to schedule the hearing at a date and time when the graduate and his or her process advisor are able to attend in person or via teleconference. Upon a showing that the required notice was provided, the hearing may proceed in the absence of the graduate and/or his or her process advisor.
3. Members of the Graduate Council will receive the investigative report and supporting documentation in advance of the hearing. The graduate will be invited to submit information in advance of the hearing as well.
4. Both the graduate and the dean will be expected to identify witnesses and provide copies of any additional documents to be offered at the hearing at least one week prior to the hearing date. In the event that a witness is not able to attend the hearing, the witness may present information via teleconference or a signed written statement.
5. The dean (or designate) and the graduate will have an opportunity to present evidence and to question witnesses presented by the other party. Members of the Graduate Council may ask questions of any participant or witness. At the appropriate time, both the dean (or his/her designate) and the graduate may present opening and closing statements.
6. At the hearing, the graduate may be accompanied by a process advisor, who may be an attorney. If the graduate's process advisor is an attorney, a representative of the Office of General Counsel may be invited to attend the hearing. A member of the investigative committee and the graduate group chair may attend the hearing as well. The graduate's process advisor/attorney may provide counsel to the graduate during the hearing but (except as provided in paragraph 7 of this subsection) may not actively participate in the hearing. Likewise, the University's counsel, if present, may not actively participate in the hearing.
7. The graduate is responsible for presenting his or her own case before the Graduate Council. However, when, in the Graduate Council's discretion, the circumstances so warrant, the graduate's process advisor may be permitted to address the Graduate Council or make a statement on the graduate's behalf.
8. The rules of evidence applicable to legal proceedings do not apply to the hearing. Information, including hearsay, may be considered if it is relevant, not unduly repetitious and the sort of information on which responsible persons are accustomed to rely in the conduct of serious affairs.
9. Student members and ex officio members of the Graduate Council may be present at the hearing and the closed session. They may participate in the closed deliberations in the same way as other members of the Graduate Council; however, they may not participate in or be present for the vote.
10. At the conclusion of the hearing, the dean (or designate), the graduate and the process advisor, and all other guests will withdraw and the

Graduate Council will deliberate in closed session and then vote on the question of revoking the degree. A two-thirds vote of those voting members present is required for revocation. The determination to revoke a degree must be supported by clear and convincing evidence.

11. The Graduate Council will issue a written decision. If the vote of the Graduate Council does not support revocation of the degree, the Graduate Council will so advise the dean and the matter will be dropped. If the vote supports revocation of the degree, the Graduate Council's decision will be transmitted to the dean and the President, along with copies of all documents reviewed by the Graduate Council.
12. The Graduate Council will arrange for a verbatim recording of the hearing (but not the deliberation and voting phases). The recording and any transcription of it will become part of the record of the proceeding and will remain the property of the University.

## **IV. Process for the Revocation of Degrees Recommended by the Faculties of the Schools**

### **A. Initiation**

1. Information that places into question the validity of a degree should be referred to the dean of the school that houses the program in which the degree holder was enrolled.
2. Upon discovery or receipt of credible information that a graduate may have obtained a degree by fraud or other serious misconduct, the dean should initiate an investigation.
3. In cases, where there are two or more degrees housed in different schools and the validity of one or more the degrees is in question, the deans of the schools involved should confer and act in concert. In such cases, the word "dean" in the following sections shall mean the deans acting together.

### **B. Investigation**

1. The dean will appoint an investigative committee, composed of 2 or more faculty, to review the matter and recommend to the dean whether no further action should be taken, whether corrective action short of revocation is appropriate, or whether the degree should be revoked.
2. The graduate will be notified in writing of the investigation, the reason for the investigation, and the procedures to be followed during the investigation. In addition, the graduate will have an opportunity to provide information for the investigative committee to consider.
3. The investigative committee will submit a written summary of its findings and recommendations to the dean. A copy of the committee's report will be provided to the graduate and the graduate may submit a response to it.
4. After reviewing the committee's report and the graduate's response (if any), the dean will decide whether to proceed toward a revocation of the degree, whether to obtain corrective action or whether to drop the matter. If the dean decides to pursue revocation of the degree, the matter must be referred to the appropriate committee in the school, which shall convene a hearing. If no such committee exists or in cases of two or more degrees being investigated, the dean or deans should appoint a hearing committee consisting of a chair and at least three other members of the faculty of the school or schools. The dean (or designate) will also bring the matter to the attention of the Provost.

### **C. Hearing**

1. The graduate may have an advisor, of his or her own choosing, during this process. (Throughout this policy, the term "process advisor" is used to refer to the graduate's advisor for this process.)
2. The graduate should be provided written notice of the hearing at least one month in advance of the hearing. This notice should include information about the hearing process. Every effort should be made to schedule the hearing at a date and time when the graduate and his or her process advisor are able to attend in person or via teleconference. Upon a showing that the required notice was provided, the hearing may proceed in the absence of the graduate and/or his or her process advisor.
3. Members of the hearing committee will receive the investigative report and supporting documentation in advance of the hearing. The graduate will be invited to submit information in advance of the hearing as well.
4. Both the graduate and the dean will be expected to identify witnesses and provide copies of any additional documents to be offered at the hearing at least one week prior to the hearing date. In the event that a witness is not able to attend the hearing, the witness may present information via teleconference or a signed written statement.
5. The dean (or designate) and the graduate will have an opportunity to present evidence and to question witnesses presented by the other party. Members of the hearing committee may ask questions of any participant or witness. At the appropriate time, both the dean (or designate) and the graduate may present opening and closing statements.
6. At the hearing, the graduate may be accompanied by a process advisor, who may be an attorney. If the graduate's process advisor is an attorney, a representative of the Office of General Counsel may be invited to attend the hearing. A member of the investigative committee and the vice or associate dean who oversees the graduate's program may attend the hearing as well. The graduate's process advisor/attorney may provide counsel to the graduate during the hearing but (except as provided in paragraph 7 of this subsection) may not actively participate in the hearing. Likewise, the University's counsel, if present, may not actively participate in the hearing.
7. The graduate is responsible for presenting his or her own case before the hearing committee. However, when, in the hearing committee's discretion, the circumstances so warrant, the graduate's process advisor may be permitted to address the hearing committee or make a statement on the graduate's behalf.
8. The rules of evidence applicable to legal proceedings do not apply to the hearing. Information, including hearsay, may be considered if it is relevant, not unduly repetitious and the sort of information on which responsible persons are accustomed to rely in the conduct of serious affairs.
9. If the hearing committee includes student members and ex officio members, they may be present at the hearing and the closed session and participate in the closed deliberations in the same way as other members of the hearing committee; however, they may not participate in or be present for the vote.
10. At the conclusion of the hearing, the dean (or designate), the graduate and the process advisor, and all other guests will withdraw and the hearing committee will deliberate in closed session and then vote on the question of revoking the degree. A two-thirds vote of those voting members present is required for revocation. The determination to revoke a degree must be supported by clear and convincing evidence.
11. The hearing committee will issue a written decision. If the vote of the hearing committee does not support revocation of the degree, the

committee will so advise the dean and the matter will be dropped. If the vote supports revocation of the degree, the hearing committee's decision will be transmitted to the dean and the President, along with copies of all documents reviewed by the hearing committee.

12. The hearing committee will arrange for a verbatim recording of the hearing (but not the deliberation and voting phases). The recording and any transcription of it will become part of the record of the proceeding and will remain the property of the University.

## V. Appeal

1. If there is a vote in favor of revoking the degree, the graduate may appeal to the Provost within ten (10) days after notification of the hearing committee's decision. The appeal must be written and state the specific grounds upon which it is based.
2. The grounds for an appeal are limited to the following points: a) that there was material and prejudicial procedural error in the conduct of the hearing; and b) that the result of the hearing was arbitrary or capricious.
3. Appellate review will be based solely on the record of the hearing (including written submissions and responses provided by the parties). When an appeal is received, the Provost will be provided with the full record.
4. After consideration of the appeal, the Provost will issue a written decision and provide copies of it to the graduate, the dean, and other appropriate parties. If the Provost finds sufficient basis, he or she may reverse the decision to revoke or remand the matter for further investigation and/or a new hearing.

## VI. Revocation of the Degree

1. If the Provost denies the graduate's appeal, or if an appeal is not submitted within the prescribed period, the decision to revoke will be referred to the President for final action. The President will formally revoke the degree or degrees and notify the Secretary of the University to write to the graduate informing him or her that the grant of the degree has been revoked and requesting that the diploma or diplomas be returned. The Secretary may also request that the graduate return any other University documents rendered inaccurate as a result of this process.
2. As necessary, the graduate's official transcript and other relevant University documents will be corrected to reflect this action. In addition, the dissertation (or master's/senior thesis) will be removed from the University Library and other scholarly repositories.
3. The President may publicize the matter to the extent that he or she, in his or her sole judgment, believes advisable. Further, the University reserves the right to notify relevant publications.

## VII. Resolution Through Mutual Agreement

Nothing in this policy is intended to preclude the dean from informally resolving a matter with a graduate short of a hearing on mutually agreeable terms, including voluntary relinquishment of a degree.