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Degree Status Petitions: February 2023 – March 2023

The Graduate Stipends Increase Initiation Plan memo (https://www.lsu.edu/graduateschool/files/grad_stipends_increase_initiation_plan.pdf) circulated to graduate faculty and students in December, 2022 identifies the need to develop a process for Degree Status Petitions to occur between January and September, 2023. Under Item C of the memo, an LSU graduate degree program can petition the Graduate School to 1) reclassify itself as a Terminal Degree (TD) if it is not already one as defined in the memo, or 2) classify itself as one warranting “special status” based on its unique role in advancing LSU’s core mission. The following outline provides guidance on how programs should prepare such petitions, the timeline for review and decision-making, and the entities reviewing them. It is anticipated that successful petitions within each of these two categories will be very small in number.

Graduate degree program administrators should carefully consider which of these two petitions is most advantageous for continued program success. In particular, a successful petition for terminal degree status will require a higher expenditure than a successful special status petition. Thus, it will be equally costly to the institution as a traditional PhD or other doctorate, while at the same time not contributing to the formal evaluation of LSU as a Carnegie I Very High Research Activity Institution. Each of these reclassification petitions is regarding eligibility and does not guarantee any level of annual funding, which may influence which petition route is more advantageous for the program.

Petitions for Reclassification as a Terminal Degree Program

The Initiation Memo defines terminal degrees as “all research degrees, including PhD, DDes, DMA, and other ‘doctoral’ degrees; all Masters of Fine Arts degrees.” Based on a review of the literature on “terminal degree” definitions, combined with targeted conversations with the leadership of each of the dean-led academic units at LSU, the following definition is the basis for evaluating petitions.

The Master’s degree in the United States is recognized as the second stage of higher education and first beyond a bachelor’s degree. It is important to note that in the U.S., Master’s degrees may be taught for academic/research and professional work-field purposes. Furthermore, they may be considered a terminal degree in some fields. The criteria below frame a definition for a terminal Master’s degree, and petitions will be evaluated based on the extent to which they meet as many of the criteria listed below as possible. A Master’s degree cannot be considered terminal if students that do not pursue a doctoral degree in the same field for either personal or academic reasons, or because a doctoral degree is not available at LSU. If a program offers a PhD or other doctoral degree, Master’s students cannot be considered as terminal-degree-seeking students.

Criteria for Inclusion as a Terminal Degree:

- Academic job listings overwhelmingly identify a Master’s degree as the qualifying degree required;
- No doctoral degree is available in the field of study (not just at LSU, but in general);
 - For fields of study (broadly interpreted) that are academic/research-oriented, a master’s degree is not a terminal degree because one can earn a doctorate to pursue research and scholarship;
- Non-academic job listings overwhelmingly identify a Master’s degree as the necessary and sufficient qualifying standard; in essence, a Master’s degree indicates that the degree indicates the graduate is fully prepared to enter a given profession;
 - Coursework taken is highly practical and/or creative;
 - Final products of terminal master’s degree programs focus on actual skills needed to complete a job in a profession and possibly to put those skills to use

Students pursuing graduate degrees approved as successful petitions will be included in the group of terminal degree students receiving the minimum standard \$23,000 FTE stipend along with the other terminal degrees, beginning in Fall, 2023.

Petitions for Classification as a Special Status Non-Terminal Degree Program

There are some programs that are essential for status as a comprehensive flagship university like LSU, as well as for remaining a university that provides the cultural and social environment for LSU to remain competitive with its peers. The case that programs will need to make for a successful petition as a Special Status program is to clearly establish that LSU cannot fulfill its research, teaching, and service mission without the program, or that it is a clear outlier when compared to its peer institutions (as defined either by the Office of Academic Affairs or the Graduate School).

Unlike the petitions for Terminal Degree reclassification defined above, petitions for Special Status can propose a financial plan for any use of unrestricted funds to combine with restricted funds to achieve an institutionally revenue-neutral, or revenue-positive basis. Demonstrated and justified external research awards, Professional Service Assistantship, philanthropic awards, and other restricted funding sources can be all be used as matches to any unrestricted funds. While such funds are not required for a successful petition, they are likely to increase the chances of success.

Successful petitions will be subject to review every five years, and the minimum stipend level for that program will be determined at a level below the \$23,000 FTE standard level.

Review and Decision-Making Timeline



The goal of this process is to establish program classifications in time for the FY24 budget to be finalized at the end of June, 2023. Meeting this timeline will require that classification is decided by the end of March, 2023. Thus, petitions should be submitted by February 28th, 2023 for full consideration. The Pinkie Gordon Lane Graduate School and the Office of Academic Affairs will work as expeditiously as possible once petitions are submitted so that departments can have a clear idea of funding for non-terminal degree applicants and reclassified degree applicants as soon as possible within the Fall 2023 application cycle.

Reviewing Entities

Petitions for **Terminal Degree Status** will be reviewed and decided on by the Dean of the Pinkie Gordon Lane Graduate School, in consultation with the Graduate Stipends Implementation Committee. Recommendations will be reviewed by the Office of Academic Affairs before the final decision is made.

Petitions for **Special Status** will be reviewed and decided on a case-by-case basis by the Pinkie Gordon Lane Graduate School and the Office of Academic Affairs. Unlike the Terminal Degree Status, which is conditioned in reference to an external set of norms in higher education, the Special Status petitions are highly dependent on LSU as a unique institution, and in the context of hundreds of different academic and non-academic programs.

Notes on Preparing Petitions

Although there are many excellent graduate programs at LSU, and many deserve financial support from the unrestricted budget of the university, please keep in mind that this is a question of allocating a very scarce resource to support graduate programs that are core to the mission of a Carnegie I Very High Research Activity university. The use of verified external data and comparisons can be very useful in making this case if they are done systematically. Such comparisons would also usefully include the funding model for external comparisons, since the question is not about a program's existence, but of how much the larger university should financially support the program's degree-seeking students. Petitions should be two single-spaced pages or less, with no limit (though reasonable) on any included appendices.

Petition Submission

Please submit the pdf document to Ms. Ashley Collins, Executive Assistant of the Pinkie Gordon Lane Graduate School (acollins1@lsu.edu) by 5pm, Tuesday, February 28, 2023. Please contact the Dean of the Pinkie Gordon Lane Graduate School, James Spencer (jhs@lsu) for any clarification questions related to this memo.

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