

## Information Sheet for Requesting a Letter of Certification

The Graduate School is the qualified, official institutional entity authorized to provide verification/certification that all degree requirements have been met for graduate students prior to degree conferral (subsequent to degree conferral, the University Registrar is the appropriate, authorized entity). Letters signed by a representative of the Registrar's Office, faculty or college deans attesting that degree requirements have been met for graduate students are not official or appropriate for verification purposes.

Candidates for graduation during a particular semester may request an official letter that verifies their status with respect to meeting degree requirements and their expected graduation date. Potential employers, licensure boards, embassies and other agencies may require this type of verification, including petitions for H-1B visas.

Below are three types of letters of certification that the Graduate School can provide in cases where the degree has not yet been conferred:

### 1. Completion of all Degree Requirements Letter (Master and Doctoral Students)

Degree completion letters provide official verification from The Pennsylvania State University that all degree requirements have been met, and specify the date that a student's degree will be conferred. At a student's request, a completion letter may be provided to potential employers, immigration, or other agencies. A completion letter includes the student's name, degree, major, projected degree conferral date, the University's official seal, and the signature of the senior associate dean of the Graduate School.

A degree requirements completion letter is the appropriate letter to request when petitioning the USCIS for an H-1B visa. Requests for such certification letters from the Graduate School will be fulfilled in approximately 1-2 weeks. However, a degree requirements completion letter can only be issued if ALL degree requirements have been officially met, and will be dated commensurate with the date of completion of the final requirement.

For example, if a thesis or dissertation is a requirement of the degree program and is the final requirement completed by the student, the Letter of Certification will note that all degree requirements were met on the date that the thesis/dissertation was approved and reported by the Thesis Office, and not the date of the final oral examination nor the date the committee members approved and signed the final document.

Also, if a required course is in progress, a certification letter cannot be issued to certify that all degree requirements have been met until final grades have been officially reported and noted on the student's transcript.

A degree completion letter cannot be provided if:

- 1). the degree requirements include a thesis/dissertation and the final, signed thesis/dissertation has not been submitted to and approved by the Graduate School Thesis Office;
- 2). completion of the culminating experience (for degree programs that do not require a thesis or dissertation) has not yet been reported to the Graduate School by the graduate program;
- 3). there are missing or deferred grades;
- 4). a hold has been placed on the student record.

For H-1B visa purposes, all required credit and course requirements need to be officially met (i.e., noted on the student's transcript) no later than the end of the fall semester preceding any request for a letter of certification that all degree requirements have been met in the subsequent spring semester.

After degrees have been conferred, completion letters are no longer issued by the Graduate School because an official transcript can be requested from the University Registrar that provides evidence of degree completion.

## **2. Final Oral Examination Passed Verification Letter (Doctoral Students Only)**

Final oral examination letters are official verification from The Pennsylvania State University that a doctoral student has successfully passed the final oral examination in the degree program in which the student is currently enrolled. At a student's request, a final oral examination letter may be provided to potential employers, immigration, or other agencies. Final oral examination letters are certified statements that include the student's name, degree, major, date of examination and the signature of the Graduate School director of Graduate Enrollment Services.

## **3. Comprehensive Examination Passed Verification Letter (Doctoral Students Only)**

Comprehensive examination letters are official verification from The Pennsylvania State University that a doctoral student has successfully passed the comprehensive examination in the degree program which the student is currently enrolled. At a student's request, a comprehensive examination letter may be provided to potential employers, immigration or other agencies. Comprehensive examination letters are certified statements that include the student's name, degree, major, date of examination and the signature of the Graduate School director of Graduate Enrollment Services.

