

Awarding of Posthumous Degrees Guidelines Updated: 09/05/2025

Background

In the sad event of a student dying while enrolled at the University of Pittsburgh, the Office of the Provost has had an internal procedure for awarding posthumous degrees, which was most recently updated in 2016. In the interest of transparency, the procedure is now being modified and made publicly available. The procedure below is in alignment with peer institutions. It has been reviewed by the Provost's Advisory Committee on Undergraduate Programs, the University Council on Graduate Studies, the Senate Educational Policies Committee, and the Academic Leadership Team.

Procedure

A dean or regional campus president should send a request for a posthumous degree or certificate of achievement to the Office of the Provost (via provost@pitt.edu), which must approve the request. The Office of the Provost will coordinate with Student Affairs. The dean/president must affirm the approval of the department chair or program director of the student's major. The student generally should have been in "active" status at the time of death and a copy of the student's academic record should be included in the recommendation.

Posthumous Degrees

Undergraduate students. An undergraduate student should have made substantial progress toward the degree, usually defined as completing 75% of degree requirements though subject to specific accreditation guidelines and be in good academic standing. Honors may be awarded if all requirements are met.

Graduate students. A graduate or professional student should have made substantial progress toward the degree, usually defined as completing 75% of degree requirements though subject to specific accreditation guidelines and be in good academic standing. A student cannot be granted a research doctoral degree without the submission of a dissertation, which will be kept in the University Library System's repository. This is accomplished in some cases by a member of the program putting the dissertation in final form (the names of the persons doing so and their contributions should be discussed in the introduction). The doctoral committee must approve the dissertation. The requirement of a defense of the dissertation is waived.

Office of the University Registrar. The Office of the Provost will send an approved request for a posthumous degree to the Office of the University Registrar, which records the award of the degree and orders the diploma. The final transcript and diploma are given to the dean or president for presentation to the family. There is no indication that the degree is posthumous

on the diploma itself. The only notation is on the transcript which states "Degree Awarded Posthumously."

Certificate of Achievement.

If a student does not qualify for a posthumous degree (per the criteria above), then the dean or president may recommend that the Provost issue a certificate of achievement. The student should be in good academic standing and should not be found on the University's Persona Non Grata List.

In situations in which a student dies when they are not in active status, the Office of the Provost may issue a certificate of achievement if the individual's engagement, leadership, or service notably reflects the mission or values of the institution.

Office of the University Registrar. The Office of the Provost will send an approved request for a certificate of achievement to the Office of the University Registrar, which will order the certificate. The certificate of achievement is given to the dean or president for presentation to the family.