

JOINT DEGREE PROGRAMS

DEFINITION AND POLICY:

Within the fields of medicine and law, dual training in certain fields of graduate study (or vice versa) may provide complementary “value added” that affords unique career opportunities for students. Where such value is significant, and the potential demand for such complementary training can be demonstrated, the creation of a formal “Joint” degree program in which students pursue work simultaneously towards an existing, specific graduate degree and a professional degree (JD or MD) offered at Penn State may be warranted. Such Joint degree programs enhance the educational and research opportunities within the graduate and professional programs; provide an institutional mechanism for interaction between the academic unit of the graduate program and the Dickinson School of Law or the College of Medicine; provide students with valuable complementary training for a variety of career opportunities; and afford some efficiencies with regard to courses that may be double-counted without compromising the core disciplinary requirements in either program. Such efficiencies should enable the successful completion of both degrees with some savings of time, financial resources and effort on the part of the student.

All Joint degree programs must first be defined in a formal proposal and approved through the regular curricular approval process for graduate degree offerings. Importantly, careful thought needs to be given to criteria for eligibility for admission to the Joint program given the considerable demands for completing either degree alone. Such admissions criteria should ensure that only highly motivated and capable students who are likely to succeed will be encouraged to apply and be admitted. Joint degree programs can be a valuable recruitment tool for both the graduate and professional degree programs, but with the primary consideration that a student’s success in either program is not compromised. The Joint offerings should provide flexibility to allow the student and his/her advisor to craft an individual course of study, without compromising core program requirements that are relevant to the student’s research focus and career objectives. Flexibility in the sequence of courses is also essential to allow the student to take advantage of courses in both programs that may not be frequently offered.

It is expected that there will be some reciprocity on the part of both programs involved in the Joint offering, with a goal in a Joint degree program that some interdisciplinary training is occurring. However, graduate programs need to ensure that the core academic content and quality of the graduate degree in the joint offering is equivalent to that received by students solely in the graduate degree program.

GUIDELINES FOR JOINT GRADUATE DEGREE PROGRAMS:

- A. All proposals for Penn State Joint graduate degree programs (i.e., a Penn State JD or MD and an existing graduate degree) must be submitted on a graduate program proposal form as a “program change.”

- B. Any graduate degree in a joint program must meet the minimum (core) degree requirements established for the graduate degree designation, i.e., Master of Arts, Master of Science, Master of Education, etc. In rare instances where an exception is requested such that core course requirements for the graduate degree are proposed to be substituted by courses from the professional program as part of the courses to be double-counted, the proposal must demonstrate equivalency of the course work to be substituted, in order to preserve the spirit of core requirements for all students earning the graduate degree.
- C. The proposal must include a justification for the joint offering, e.g., specific value-added, enhanced job opportunities, unique interdisciplinary specializations, etc., afforded by the joint training, and documentation to support a predicted market for the program.
- D. No less than 20%, and no more than 40% of the total credits required for the graduate program can be met by substitution of courses from the professional (MD or JD) program (i.e., double-counted). For example, if the graduate program is a 30-credit masters degree, no more than 12 credits from a JD or MD program can be double-counted towards the masters degree. It is expected that there also will be a designated amount of reciprocity with regard to double-counting of graduate course credits towards the professional (MD or JD) degree.
- E. A clear, side-by-side comparison of the stand-alone graduate degree program and changes to reflect the joint degree requirements being proposed (substituted/double-counted courses) must be included in the proposal;
- F. Proposals for joint degree programs should include relevant sections of the graduate program's student handbook with language included that will provide guidance for prospective students for the joint program including:
 - 1) Admission to the joint program should be detailed, i.e., must the student be admitted to the professional degree program first, the graduate degree program first, etc.
 - 2) Joint admission process and criteria, i.e., students must apply to and meet admission requirements of both the graduate program in which they intend to receive their graduate degree and the professional degree program;
 - 3) Statement of the student's option of receiving the graduate degree if for some reason he/she cannot complete the professional degree program.

Approved by the Graduate Council, January 17, 2007