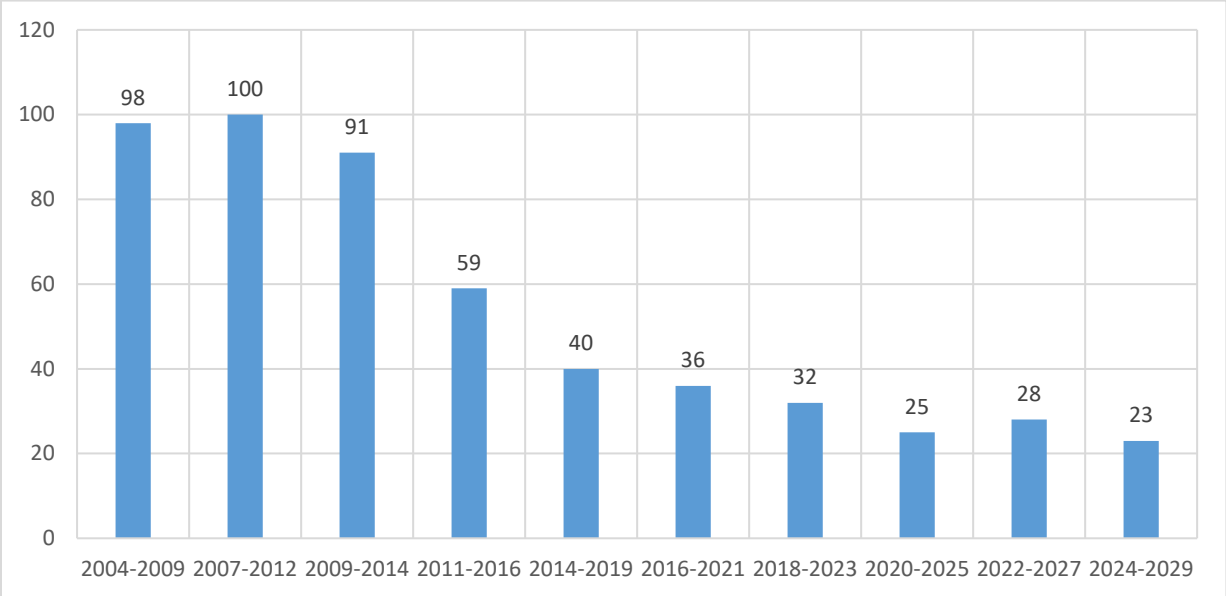
Exploring trends in academic doctoral programs through UC's *Five-Year Planning Perspectives*

Every other year, campuses submit to the Office of the President their *Five-Year Planning Perspectives* (*Perspectives*), which list the anticipated actions to establish, transfer, consolidate, disestablish, or discontinue undergraduate and graduate degree programs, schools, colleges, and other academic units. Individually, the *Perspectives* contain information that can be useful to campus long-range planning efforts; collectively, they offer an informative snapshot of UC's academic program pipeline. These biennial snapshots can be organized to identify and assess trends, and this topic brief focuses on trends in academic doctoral programs in context.

- The number of planning items for academic doctoral programs has steadily declined; across the *Perspectives* since 2004, the percent of these programs has dropped four-fold.
- Planning items for all degree/certificate types besides academic doctorates reached its lowest point in the 2011-16 cycle, with 103 items. This number has since jumped to 226 whereas planning items for academic doctoral programs dropped to 23 in the most recent *Perspectives* cycle.
- Proposals for academic doctoral programs were eclipsed by professional master proposals in the 2014-17 cycle and in the 2024-29 cycle academic doctoral programs were 9% of all planning items while professional master programs were 33% of the total.

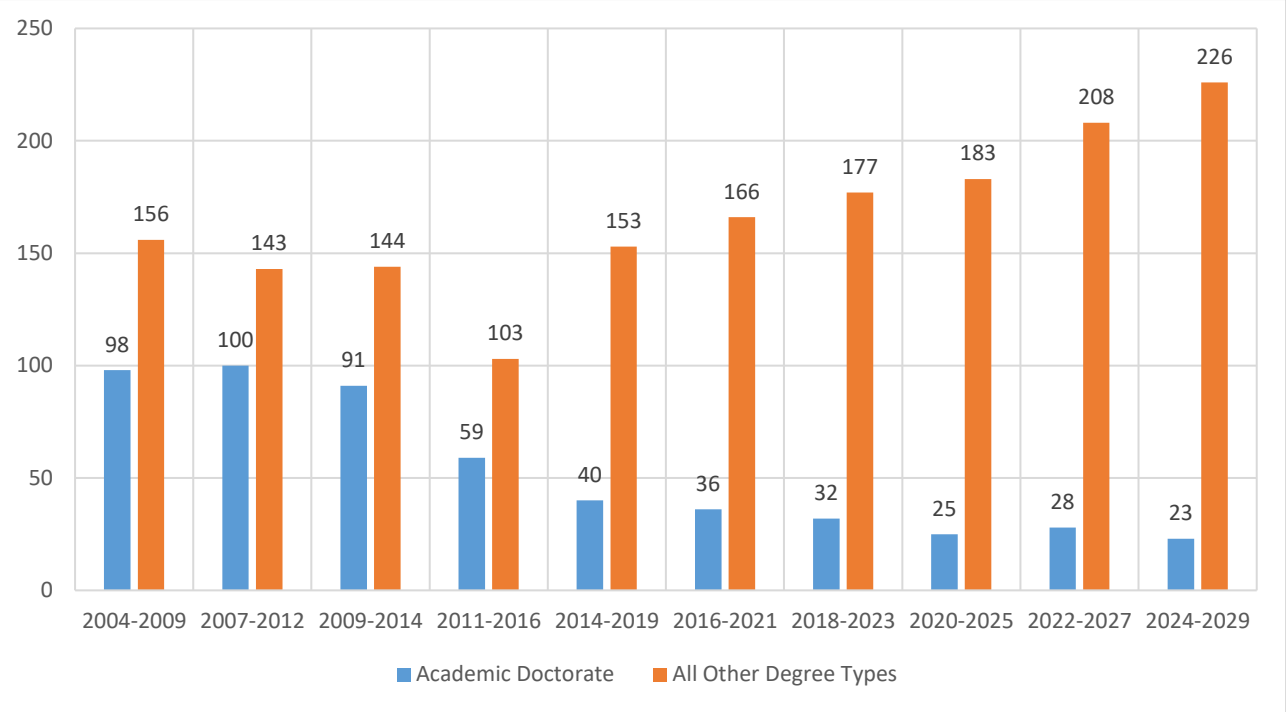
Within the *Perspectives*, the number of planning items for academic doctoral programs has steadily dropped since the 2007-12 cycle. In that cycle, there were 100 planning items for academic doctoral programs and in the following two planning cycles that number dipped to 91 then to 59. Since the 2011-16 cycle, academic doctorate planning items have not exceeded 50 items. Proposals to establish academic doctoral programs fell to 25 items in 2020-25 cycle, slightly rebounded in the 2022-27 cycle, then dropped to their lowest point across the *Perspectives* in the 2024-29 cycle—23 items.

Figure 1. Proposals for academic doctoral program establishments Universitywide, 2004-09 to 2024-29 *Perspectives*



While the number of academic doctorate planning items has decreased since the 2007-12 *Perspectives* cycle, the number of planning items for all other academic program types has increased.[1] Planning items for all other academic program types reached its lowest point in the 2011-16 cycle, with 103 items. This number jumped to 153 in the 2014-19 cycle and then to 208 in the 2022-27 cycle. In the most recent cycle, there were 226 planning items for all other academic program types compared to 23 for academic doctoral programs.

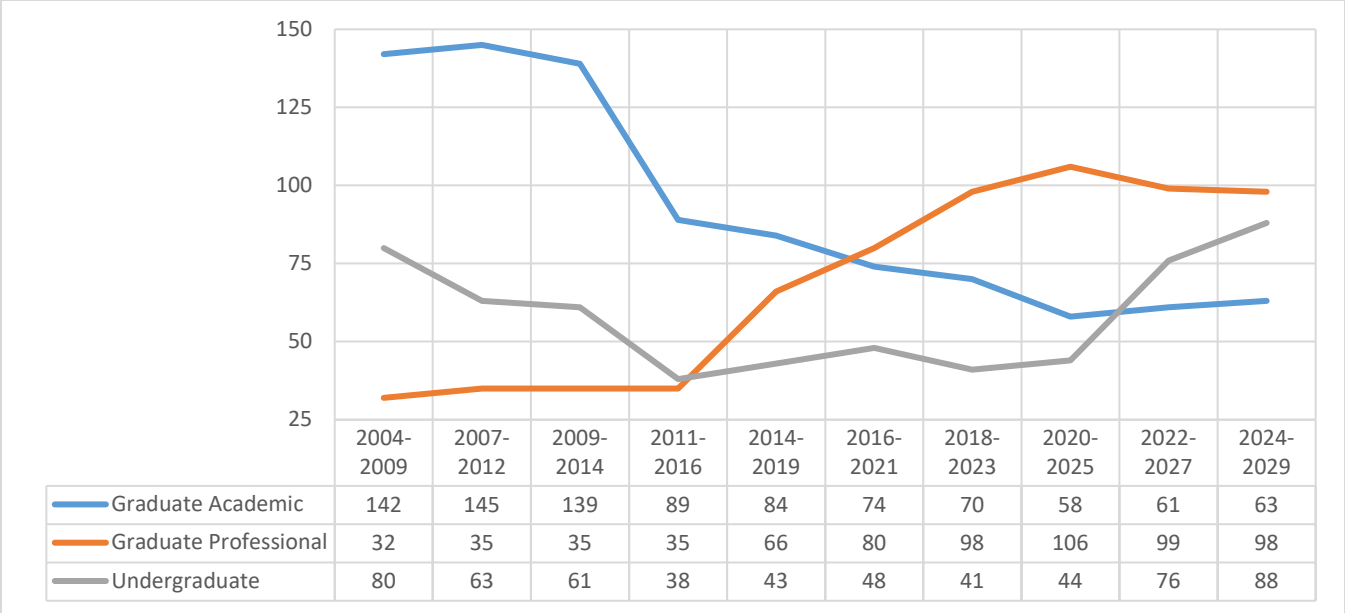
Figure 2. Proposals to establish academic doctoral programs versus other degree program types Universitywide, 2004-09 to 2024-29 *Perspectives*



The following figures disaggregate these academic program planning items while providing context. In the 2024-29 *Perspectives*, there were 249 degree program proposals, 98 (39%) for graduate professional programs, 63 (25%) for graduate academic programs, and 88 (35%) for undergraduate programs. The number of graduate professional proposals first surpassed the number of graduate academic proposals in the 2016-21 cycle and graduate professional proposals rose in the next two cycles, moving past the 100 mark for the first time in the 2020-25 cycle. Since then, the number of graduate professional programs has hovered around the 100 mark. Graduate academic proposals remained relatively unchanged in the 2024-29 cycle, with 63 proposals compared to 61 in the 2022-27 cycle and 58 in the 2020-25 cycle. In contrast to the downward trend for graduate academic proposals, proposals for undergraduate programs continue to rise. Their number has doubled since the 2020-25 cycle; there was 44 undergraduate programs in the 2020-25 cycle and 88 in the current cycle. At 35% of the total, undergraduate program proposals reached their highest proportion in the 2024-29 cycle across the *Perspectives*.

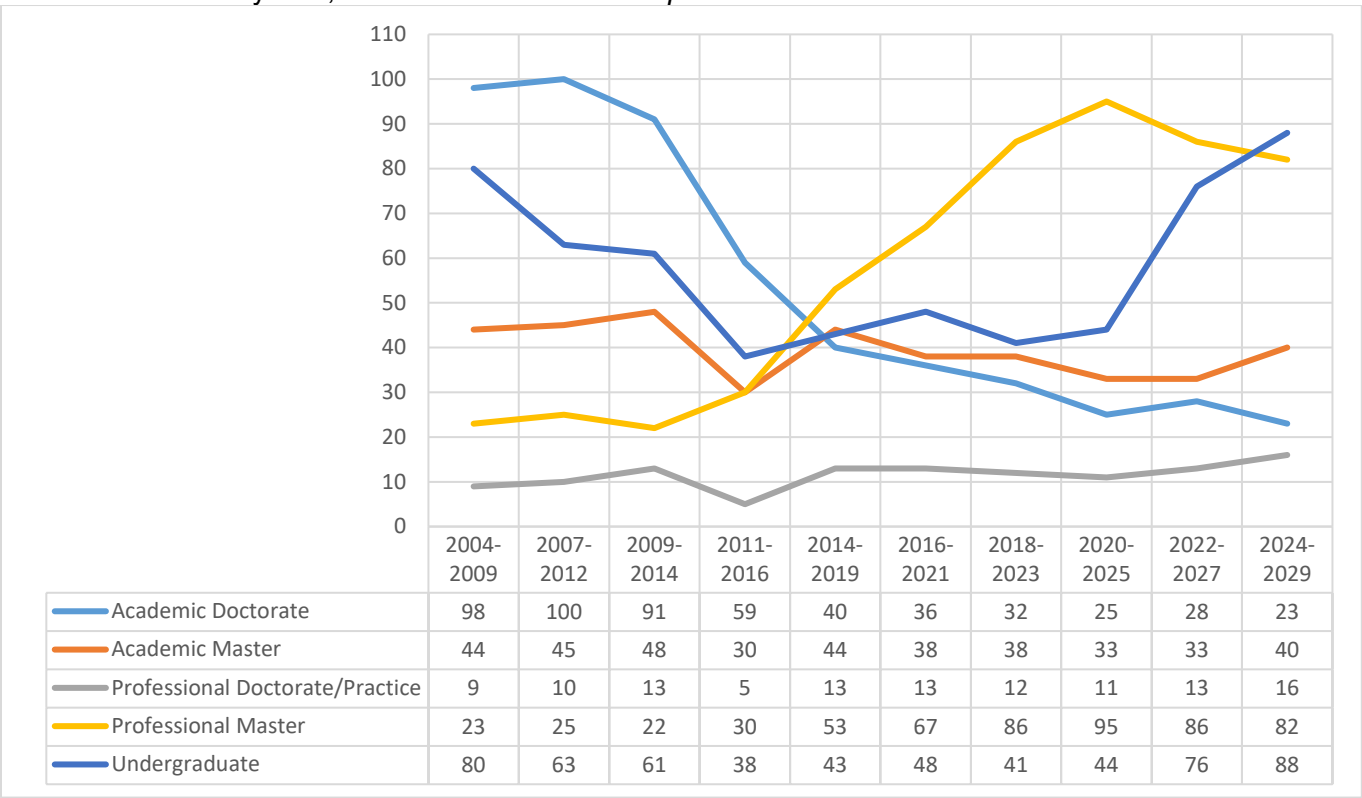
[1] Besides academic doctoral programs, there are a total of five academic degree program types in the *Perspectives*: Academic Master programs; Professional Doctorate programs; Professional Master programs; Professional Practice programs; and Undergraduate major programs. “Degree programs” here do not include certificate/credential programs or undergraduate minors.

Figure 3: Proposals for degree program establishments, by broad degree type
Universitywide, 2004-09 to 2024-29 *Perspectives*



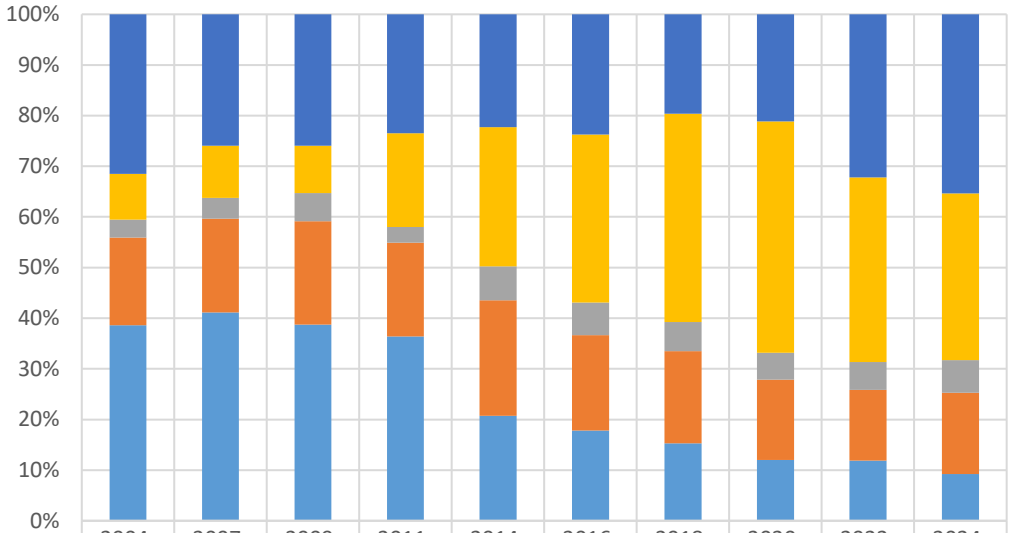
	2004-2009	2007-2012	2009-2014	2011-2016	2014-2019	2016-2021	2018-2023	2020-2025	2022-2027	2024-2029
Graduate Academic	142	145	139	89	84	74	70	58	61	63
Graduate Professional	32	35	35	35	66	80	98	106	99	98
Undergraduate	80	63	61	38	43	48	41	44	76	88

Figure 4: Proposals for degree program establishments, by degree type
Universitywide, 2004-09 to 2024-29 *Perspectives*



	2004-2009	2007-2012	2009-2014	2011-2016	2014-2019	2016-2021	2018-2023	2020-2025	2022-2027	2024-2029
Academic Doctorate	98	100	91	59	40	36	32	25	28	23
Academic Master	44	45	48	30	44	38	38	33	33	40
Professional Doctorate/Practice	9	10	13	5	13	13	12	11	13	16
Professional Master	23	25	22	30	53	67	86	95	86	82
Undergraduate	80	63	61	38	43	48	41	44	76	88

Figure 5: Distribution of proposals for degree program establishments, by degree type Universitywide, 2004-09 to 2024-29 *Perspectives*



	2004-2009	2007-2012	2009-2014	2011-2016	2014-2019	2016-2021	2018-2023	2020-2025	2022-2027	2024-2029
Undergraduate	31%	26%	26%	23%	22%	24%	20%	21%	32%	35%
Professional Master	9%	10%	9%	19%	27%	33%	41%	46%	36%	33%
Professional Doctorate/Practice	4%	4%	6%	3%	7%	6%	6%	5%	6%	6%
Academic Master	17%	19%	20%	19%	23%	19%	18%	16%	14%	16%
Academic Doctorate	39%	41%	39%	36%	21%	18%	15%	12%	12%	9%

One striking observation within the *Perspectives* is the rise of professional master proposals. In the 2009-14 cycle, there were 22 professional master proposals (9% of the total) and in the 2020-25 cycle there were 95 of these programs, 46% of the total. This percent declined in the 2024-29 cycle to a third of the total, slightly more than the percent of professional doctoral/practice, academic master, and academic doctorate programs combined. The sharpest contrast to the increase of professional master programs remains academic doctorates: there were 100 academic doctorate proposals in the 2007-12 cycle—41% of the total—and 23 in the most recent cycle, only 9% of the total. Related to academic doctoral trends, the percent of professional doctorate proposals, such as those for Doctor of Nursing Practice, Education, and Public Health programs, has remained low.

Finally, below is a list of all the academic doctorate planning items from the 2024-29 *Perspectives*, providing a detailed picture of these items from the most recent cycle. Note that these planning items were not distributed evenly; in the 2024-29 cycle, Merced listed ten academic doctorate planning items whereas each of the other campuses listed four or less.

Figure 6. Proposals for academic doctoral program establishments[2]
Universitywide, 2024-29 *Perspectives*

Campus	Name of Academic Unit	Degree	Department	Status	Online?	CIP field
Irvine	Electrochemistry and Electrochemical Engineering	M.S./Ph.D.	Electrical Engineering and Computer Science / Henry Samueli School of Engineering	2	Yes (25%)	Engineering
Irvine	Health, Society, and Behavior	Ph.D.	Health, Society, and Behavior / Program in Public Health	3	Yes (20%)	Health Professions and Related Programs
Irvine	Neuroscience	Ph.D.	School of Biological Sciences and School of Medicine	1	No	Biological and Biomedical Sciences
Irvine	Speech and Language Pathology	Ph.D.	Language Science / School of Social Sciences	1	Yes (20%)	Social Sciences
Los Angeles	Asian American Studies	Ph.D.	Asian American Studies	1	TBD	Area, Ethnic, Cultural, Gender, and Group Studies
Los Angeles	Political Science Ph.D./ Statistics M.S. Articulated Degree (Political Methodology)	M.S./Ph.D.	Interdepartmental: Physical Sciences & Social Sciences	2	TBD	Social Sciences
Merced	Anthropology and Heritage Studies	M.A./Ph.D.	School of Social Sciences, Humanities and Arts	3	No	Social Sciences
Merced	Applied Philosophy	M.A./Ph.D.	School of Social Sciences, Humanities and Arts	3	No	Philosophy and Religious Studies
Merced	Computational Data Science	Ph.D.	School of Natural Sciences	1	TBD	Computational and Data Science
Merced	Ecology and Evolutionary Biology	Ph.D.	Life and Environmental Sciences (School of Natural Sciences)	1	TBD	Biological and Biomedical Sciences
Merced	Electrical Engineering	Ph.D.	School of Engineering	1	TBD	Engineering
Merced	Engineering Science, SJSU/UC Merced Joint Ph.D.	Ph.D.	School of Engineering	2	TBD	Engineering
Merced	Engineering Systems, CSU Fresno/UC Merced Joint Ph.D.	Ph.D.	School of Engineering	1	TBD	Engineering
Merced	Life and Environmental Sciences	Ph.D.	Life and Environmental Sciences (School of Natural Sciences)	1	TBD	Natural Resources and Conservation
Merced	Molecular and Cell Biology	Ph.D.	Molecular and Cell Biology (School of Natural Sciences)	1	TBD	Biological and Biomedical Sciences
Merced	Science Education	Ph.D.	School of Natural Sciences	1	TBD	Education
Riverside	Computer Engineering	Ph.D.	Dept. of CSE and ECE	1	No	Engineering

[2] Status codes: “1” = Suggested for Perspectives; “2” = Under department/school/college review; “3” = Under campus review; “4” = Under CCGA review.

Riverside	Public Policy	Ph.D.	School of Public Policy	1	No	Public Administration and Social Service Professions
San Diego	Cognitive Science	Ph.D.	Department in Social Sciences, TBD	2	No	Multi/Interdisciplinary Studies
San Diego	Public Health with a concentration in Health Services Research and Implementation Science	Ph.D.	Herbert Wertheim School of Public Health and Human Longevity Science	4	No	Health Professions and Related Programs
San Diego	Urban Studies and Planning	Ph.D.	Department of Urban Studies and Planning	3	No	Architecture and Related Services
San Francisco	Computational Precision Health	Ph.D.	UCSF Graduate Division/UC Berkeley	4	No	Health-Related Knowledge and Skills
Santa Cruz	Future Stages	Ph.D.	Arts Division	2	No	Visual and Performing Arts