

August 17, 2022

**PROVOST MICHAEL BROWN**  
**SENATE CHAIR ROBERT HORWITZ**

**FROM:** Elizabeth Watkins, EVC & Provost UC Riverside  
Andrea Kasko, Chair, CCGA

**RE: Report on the Review and Approval of Master's Degree Programs**

Dear Provost Brown and Chair Horwitz,

Please find below the final report of the APC Workgroup on the Review and Approval of Master's Degree Programs.

**KEY FINDINGS:**

- Master's degrees and (especially professional master's degrees) are the fastest growing category of new degrees in the UC system.
- Self-supporting graduate professional degree programs (SSGPDPs) comprise the majority of new degree proposals. SSGPDPs generate \$90+ million in surplus revenue annually to the UC system, although this surplus is not distributed evenly within and between campuses.
- Campus review of new degree proposals take three months to "several years", and there are sometimes inconsistencies between divisions in the depth of review. Divisions typically only see a handful of new degree proposals in any given year. There may be ways to improve efficiency at the divisional level, and the workgroup recommends sharing best practices amongst campuses.
- CCGA reviews 12-15 new degree proposals every year. CCGA review of a new degree proposal takes an average of 3.2 months, and review of proposals submitted to CCGA by January 31 is nearly always completed within the same academic year (with two exceptions in the past six years).
- CCGA solicits expert reviewers (both UC and non-UC) for each proposal, and conducts its own internal evaluation and discussion as well. The process results in improvements to many proposed degrees, such as strengthened curriculum, increased staff support and increased financial aid.
- 90% of new degree proposals are approved after an iterative process between CCGA and the proposers.
- It is unclear that the potential benefits of devolving final approval to the campuses (such as reduced review time) are outweighed by potential risks (such as broadening inequities between campuses, reputational risk, conflicts of interest, financial risk), so the workgroup recommends maintaining the current process for master's degree proposal review and approval.

## FULL REPORT

Graduate education is a fundamental component of the UC System. Graduate degrees in general, and master's degrees in particular, are among the most sought after and most visible aspects of the University of California's graduate education mission. High quality, accessible, and affordable graduate degrees that meet the labor-market needs of our state are necessary to fulfill our commitment to the State of California and the Master Plan for Higher Education. Master's degrees can play a key role in addressing these needs by offering innovative curricula and addressing the needs of emerging work sectors. Over the past 20 years, master's degrees (particularly professional master's degrees) have comprised the most rapidly growing type of UC graduate degree. In comparing the 2004-2009 *Five Year Planning Perspectives* report with the new 2020-2025 report, the overall number of graduate degrees expected to be proposed is similar, but the reports differ widely in the type of degree proposed. In the 2004-2009 report, campuses anticipated submitting 99 academic doctorate degree proposals, 53 academic master's degree proposals, 8 professional doctorate degree proposals and 14 professional master's degree proposals, while in the 2020-2025 report campuses anticipated 25 academic doctorate degree proposals (75% decrease), 35 academic master's degree proposals (34% decrease), 11 professional doctorate degree proposals (38% increase) and 93 professional master's degree proposals (an astounding 564% increase). In order to maintain academic excellence, diversity and accessibility of graduate degree programs with these large numbers, an efficient and rigorous review process is necessary. Per Bylaw 40.1 of the Board of Regents, the Academic Senate authorizes and supervises all courses and curricula, (except in the Hastings College of the Law, in professional schools offering work at the graduate level only, and over non-degree courses in the University Extension).

Recently, some campuses have expressed an interest in eliminating systemwide Senate and Administration review of master's degree proposals, and at the end of the 2020-2021 academic year, Provost Brown raised the possibility of reconsidering systemwide review of some master's degree program proposals. In response, the Academic Planning Council (APC, a joint Academic Senate and Administration committee) formed a workgroup to evaluate current review processes for master's degrees. The workgroup included the following members: CCGA Chair Andrea Kasko (co-chair, UCLA), EVC & Provost Elizabeth Watkins (co-chair, UCR), CCGA Vice Chair Erith Jaffe-Berg (UCR), Kwai Ng (UCSD), UCPB Chair Kathleen McGarry (UCLA), UCPB Vice Chair Don Seneer (UCI), Vice Provost for Graduate Studies & Dean of the Graduate Division Lisa García Bedolla (UCB), Vice Provost for Graduate Education & Dean of the Graduate Division Gillian Hayes (UCI), Provost & Executive Vice Chancellor Mary Croughan (UCD), Provost & Executive Vice Chancellor Gregg Camfield (UCM), Administration/APC Staff: Todd Greenspan and Chris Procello and Senate Staff Hilary Baxter and Fredye Harms. The committee met on March 7, 2022, March 24, 2022, April 13, 2022 and April 22, 2022.

The full charge given to the committee is attached as Appendix 1, but briefly, the workgroup was tasked with reviewing the efficiency and effectiveness of review processes at the divisional and systemwide levels, considering the risks and benefits of devolving final approval of master's degrees to the individual campuses, and assessing whether updated disestablishment processes

ought to be considered. The workgroup was given access to a variety of data pertaining to past reviews. These data included a summary of campus review processes, campus review timelines, CCGA review timelines, the recent report of the CCGA/UCPB workgroup on self-supporting graduate professional degree programs (SSGPDPs), documentation related to rejected degree proposals, and documentation of improvements made to proposals through the CCGA review process.

Review process history and current practices. Proposals for new degree programs undergo several levels of review during the establishment process. They are first reviewed by the proposing campuses and subsequently at Systemwide (Coordinating Committee on Graduate Affairs (CCGA), Academic Assembly if needed, and then administrative review). The review process for new graduate degrees can take anywhere from several months to a year or more. Campuses report review timelines of as little as three months to upwards of “several years”, with a rough average of 7-8 months. Between 2017-2019, review at CCGA took 5-6 months. In 2019-2020, CCGA began providing modest compensation to external reviewers who completed their reviews in a timely manner (within two weeks). Proposal reviews now average 3.2 months at CCGA. Subsequent steps at systemwide take 1-2 months, depending on whether the proposal must be approved by the Academic Assembly. Campus review typically takes as much as or significantly more time than systemwide review.

In reviewing a proposal, CCGA conducts an in-depth academic evaluation. First, the CCGA assigns a lead reviewer responsible for analyzing the proposal and soliciting outside letters from experts (typically two UC and two non-UC). Next, the lead reviewer communicates with the program proposer to address any issues raised by the expert reviewers and any concerns that arise during CCGA discussions of the proposal. This is an iterative process that often results in refinements and improvements to the proposal, while addressing any resource or budgetary issues with the proposal. A critical component of this process is an analysis of the program’s vision for diversity including the diversity goals and plans of the proposal, as well as strategies for evaluating the success of such plans. Self-supporting degree program (SSGPDP) proposals are also simultaneously reviewed by UCPB. This review is critical to ensure the SSGPDP proposal is financially sound and to ensure that the proposed program has no negative impact on state-supported degrees. Once CCGA approves a proposal, it is forwarded to the Provost via the Academic Senate for final Presidential approval. The CCGA review process specifically addresses the a) quality and academic rigor of the program; b) adequacy of the size and expertise of faculty who will administer the program; c) adequacy of facilities and budgets; and d) applicant pool and placement prospects for the graduates. The purpose of the review processes (both divisional and systemwide) is to ensure that graduate programs are fully aligned with the UC’s mission of academic excellence, diversity, and accessibility.

The workgroup noted significant variability in both efficiency and, in some cases, comprehensiveness, of review at the divisional level. Divisional Senates review far fewer proposals than CCGA, and thus have less experience and expertise in identifying areas of potential concern or areas in which a proposal does not meet systemwide regulations. Furthermore, there is significant variability among the ten campuses in the availability of

resources for developing new proposals. For example, at UC Berkeley the Graduate Division works with proposers to develop their proposals prior to sending them to their Graduate Council. UCLA has a specific advisory committee to review proposals for SSGPDPs, as these are more complicated than proposals for state-supported degree programs. Other campuses have no additional support for proposal development prior to sending to their Graduate Councils. Most campuses do not solicit independent external reviews prior to campus approval, although some do include letters of support.

Recent history and projected future workload. In the past five years, CCGA has received 70 proposals for graduate degrees, including 18 PhDs, 48 master's, one 4+1 program and three Professional Doctorates. Of these proposals, 34 were for state-supported programs and 36 were for SSGPDPs. In the 2020-25 *Perspectives* report, campuses indicated they expected to submit proposals to establish 164 new graduate degree proposals, including 25 academic doctorate degree proposals, 35 academic master's degree proposals, 11 professional doctorate degree proposals and 93 professional master's degree proposals. While the *Perspectives* report is likely an overestimate of the number of proposals that will arise, it nonetheless indicates that the workload on divisional graduate councils and CCGA, which is already significant, will continue to grow.

Unique nature of self-supporting professional master's degrees. SSGPDPs are programs in which all program costs (direct and indirect), are covered by revenues generated by the program itself. They are created serve additional students beyond those supported by state resources and to fulfill demonstrated higher education and workforce needs. Neither undergraduate degrees nor PhD degrees are permitted to be self-supporting. The first SSGPDP was established in 1972, and 16 SSGPDPs were established over the next 30 years (1972-2002). Since that time, the establishment of SSGPDPs has accelerated, with the next 15 years (2003-2018) bringing the establishment of 77 additional SSGPDPs. This increase was also apparent on a national level. Notably, in the early 2000s, the federal government removed borrowing limits on Graduate PLUS loans, creating a large pool of funding available to graduate students. Currently (2021-2022), program fees for SSGPDPs resulting in master's degrees in the UC system range from \$17,300 to \$196,000, with an average cost of \$65,275 and a median cost of \$56,633. Fourteen master's degrees have program fees over \$100,000. For comparison, the average annual tuition and fees for state-funded master's degrees in 2021-2022 is \$17,700 for residents and \$32,800 for non-residents. The average SSGPDPs master's degree requires approximately four quarters of full-time study to complete, which for a state-funded degree program translates to a total of \$23,500 in-state tuition and fees or \$43,600 non-resident tuition and fees. That is, the average self-supporting master's degree costs nearly three times as much as an equivalent state-supported degree (resident).

A major benefit of establishing and operating SSGPDPs is the ability to revenue for departments, schools and divisions. In 2019-2020, 64 SSGPDPs in the system generated revenue, with profits ranging from \$1300 to \$19.5 million. Eighteen programs were in deficit (22%), with a range of \$1550 to \$667K. In 2020-2021, 73 of 97 programs generated new revenue, with profits ranging from \$834 to \$21.7 million. 24 programs operated in deficit (25%), with a deficit range of \$22.9K

to \$1.4 million. It is important to note that generated revenue is primarily held by the school, division or department offering the program. While there is typically an overall net gain in revenue (\$90,000,000 or more net gain across the system annually), this gain is felt unevenly within and between campuses, and some units and campuses feel losses more acutely.

*Effectiveness of the review process.* 63 of the 70 proposals submitted over the past five years were approved by CCGA, including 18 PhD programs, 48 master's degrees, one 4+1 BS/MS degree program and three professional doctorates; 36 proposals were for SSGDPs. It is important to note that of the 63 proposals approved, many were revised during the review process. That is, proposers are given the chance to respond to CCGA and external reviewer feedback to address any areas of concern that are identified during review. This review process has greatly improved the academic rigor of proposals, for example, by asking proposers to modify curricula to include critical topics identified by expert reviewers, or to modify (or include) capstone or project requirements to better prepare students for employment. Other examples of how systemwide review has improved proposals include a) ensuring proposals are compliant with Academic Senate policies regarding issues such as faculty compensation and the impact on state-supported programs; b) ensuring that formal agreements/MOUs exist between units prior to program approval; c) increasing staff support for students; d) increasing return to aid in SSGDPs to ensure accessibility; e) increasing diversity and inclusion goals in degree programs; and f) adding an industrial advisory board to a program.

Of the 7 (10%) proposals that CCGA reviewed and eventually rejected, 5 were SSGDPs and two were state-supported programs. These rejections were distributed across campuses: UCSD and UCR each had two proposals rejected, while UCD, UCLA and UCI each had one proposal rejected. Reasons for rejecting the proposals included a) insufficient curriculum; b) failure of proposers to respond in a timely manner; c) substantial changes to a program that impacted academic quality (specifically reducing required units from 72 to 36 and simultaneously changing mode of delivery to online); d) pedagogical concerns over adding large numbers of self-supporting master's students to existing PhD courses; e) lack of breadth in curriculum; f) extensive curricular overlap in a dual degree program that may not have been in compliance with standards from accrediting bodies; and g) serious concerns about program deficiencies from external reviewers. It is important to note that proposers are always given the chance to revise a proposal to address concerns (although may choose not to do so) unless the necessary changes are so significant that the proposal requires re-review at the campus level.

*Potential benefits, risks and liabilities of devolving master's degree approval to divisions.* Individual campuses are most familiar with the needs of their own institution, including how units on campus interact, divisional bylaws and regulations, and the availability of resources for launching new programs. In contrast, systemwide committees are familiar with systemwide needs, the context of new degree programs within the UC system, and systemwide bylaws and regulations. Divisional and systemwide committees thus provide complementary oversight in the process of establishing new degree programs. The current process preserves divisional independence to initiate programs that best serve their campus while providing a high-level perspective from systemwide that strengthens the curriculum and degree program, and can

simultaneously identify emerging trends in UC graduate education, areas of overlap and potential cannibalization across programs, and the potential risk of competition for students between campuses. There are clear benefits to keeping both divisional and systemwide review of master's degree programs in ensuring that new master's degree programs provide innovative and needed educational opportunities to address rapidly-changing market needs. Devolving approval of master's degrees to the divisions presents several risks while the potential benefits are unclear.

*Potential benefits of devolving final approval to divisions.* The primary benefit for delegating master's degree approval to the divisions is the perception that it would lead to decreased review time. However, systemwide review has proven to be shorter than proposal development and divisional review; it is therefore unclear that eliminating systemwide review would significantly impact the speed with which a new degree program is launched. After approval, new degree programs usually require publicization prior to accepting applications. Furthermore, graduate admission applications are typically accepted in fall for admission in the following academic year (although some programs have rolling admissions). All told, from conception to matriculation of its first class, new master's degree programs take several years to execute, with only a small portion of that time being spent in systemwide review. If divisions submit their proposals to CCGA in a timely manner (for example, by mid-Winter), systemwide review is typically completed in time to advertise the program for fall admissions, thus having no impact on the timing of the first matriculating class. When divisions submit proposals later in the academic year, CCGA still makes every effort to complete review by the end of the academic year to allow for fall admissions. Those proposing a degree and divisions themselves can thus mitigate the time spent in systemwide review by timely submissions while retaining all the benefits of systemwide expertise. The workgroup does not have any data indicating that systemwide review has significantly impeded program launch for approved degree programs. Indeed, between 2015-2016 AY and 2020-2021 AY, only two master's degree proposals submitted to CCGA by January 31 (as recommended in the compendium) were not approved by the following July, and those two proposals were approved in August (this excludes the five proposals not approved by CCGA). The suggestion that eliminating systemwide review will significantly impact the speed with which a new degree program can be launched is therefore unlikely to hold true.

*Potential risk of exacerbating inequalities between campuses.* Individual campuses within the UC system do not have equal resources available for developing new master's degree proposals. Several members of the committee are particularly concerned about the possibility of generating inequities between campuses if approval of master's degree programs is devolved to the divisions. The potential exists for the highly resourced campuses to amplify their resources through new SSGPDPs while squeezing the less-resourced campuses out of the professional master's degree space.

*Reputational risk.* While CCGA rejection of proposals is relatively rare, these rejections do indicate that divisional review alone is sometimes insufficient to ensure that new master's degree programs are aligned with the UC's mission of academic excellence, diversity, and accessibility. Programs that do not meet these standards risk damaging the reputation of the UCs as the premier state university system in the world. It is important to remember that even those

proposals that are approved by CCGA are often improved substantially during the review process, reinforcing the value of systemwide review. In recent months, professional master's degree programs elsewhere throughout the country have received intense scrutiny in the media due to their high cost and, in some cases, lack of post-graduation employment prospects.<sup>1</sup> The risk to the reputation of the University of California is difficult to quantify but is no doubt large. A single, poorly-constructed program that lacks academic rigor and carries the UC brand has the potential to negatively impact not only the specific campus that offered the program, but all campuses systemwide. If the program cost is also high, such that the program is viewed as predatory, the damage could affect the reputation of all UC graduate education with California residents, the Regents, our legislators and the rest of the world for many years. A sullied reputation has both academic and financial costs in terms of both the quality and quantity of applications, and in terms of public support of our mission. Unlike private institutions, the UC relies on a productive and cooperative relationship with the California legislature and residents to fulfill our commitment to the State of California and the Master Plan for Higher Education. Graduate education is already in a precarious and underfunded position at the UCs and to risk further investment in graduate education by offering programs that do not provide their promised value to the students would be devastating.

*Inherent conflict of interest.* The systemwide Senate evaluation is conducted by representatives from across the University of California system; representatives from the campus from which the proposed degree program originates are excluded from voting, thus avoiding the practice or appearance of a conflict of interest. If degree approval is delegated to individual campuses, there is a strong possibility for conflicts of interest to emerge that could influence degree approval. Indeed, many campuses rely on the systemwide review process to provide system-level perspective and oversight, and to act as a check against campus excesses and strong-arming. This is especially concerning for SSGPDPs (which comprise a majority of proposed new degree programs in the 2020 *Perspectives report*) because of their perceived importance in generating significant revenue for the proposing units.

*Reducing bottlenecks in the review process.* While no specific bottlenecks were identified in the new degree proposal review process, proposals generally spend more time at the divisional level than at systemwide. Each division submits a limited number of proposals each year and turnover on divisional graduate councils is high, which can limit divisional expertise in proposal review. In order to strengthen the review process at all campuses, CCGA and UCPB are collecting best practices from each campus and sharing these best practices amongst the ten campuses.<sup>2</sup> As part of this outreach, CCGA and UCPB now hold an annual orientation of Graduate Council Chairs and

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.wsj.com/articles/financially-hobbled-for-life-the-elite-masters-degrees-that-dont-pay-off-11625752773?reflink=desktopwebshare\\_permalink](https://www.wsj.com/articles/financially-hobbled-for-life-the-elite-masters-degrees-that-dont-pay-off-11625752773?reflink=desktopwebshare_permalink)  
<https://slate.com/business/2021/07/masters-degrees-debt-loans-worth-it.html>  
<https://annehelen.substack.com/p/the-masters-trap>  
<https://annehelen.substack.com/p/the-masters-trap-part-two-069>  
<https://www.huffpost.com/highline/article/capitalist-takeover-college/>  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/13/upshot/harvard-too-obamas-final-push-to-catch-predatory-colleges-is-revealing.html>

<sup>2</sup> Joint CCGA UCPB workgroup report 2021.

Planning and Budget Chairs to discuss best practices and common issues in new degree proposals.

The workgroup also extensively discussed whether solicitation of external reviews of proposals earlier in the process might be more beneficial to proposers. The workgroup imagined a process similar to tenure review, in which a candidate's department solicits external letters but in which CAP retains the right to solicit their own letters, particularly in controversial or difficult cases. In this analogy, campuses would solicit external letters prior to approval of a program, with CCGA retaining authority to solicit additional external reviews if needed. While there was general agreement that this policy might be beneficial, the workgroup could not reach a consensus on the implementation or process for this. Some members of the workgroup imagined graduate divisions could solicit external reviews, whereas others thought external reviews should be handled exclusively by the graduate councils/academic senates. It was generally recognized that increasing the depth of the review process at the divisional level would require more Senate staff time and would increase the workload of graduate councils, or, alternatively, require more staff time at the graduate divisions. Most campuses are already significantly understaffed, a situation that is unlikely to improve given the challenging hiring environment. Senate service is voluntary, and many faculty do not serve on divisional or systemwide Senate committees. Indeed, many campuses have difficulty in filling the roster of high-workload committees such as Graduate Council. Finally, not all campuses may be able to equally provide additional resources (whether via the Senate or via graduate divisions) required to handle external review of new degree proposals, taxing further those campuses that are already facing difficulties. Several members of the committee are particularly concerned about the possibility of generating inequities between campuses if external reviews are done at the divisional level.

***Conclusion.*** After evaluating and discussing the efficiency and effectiveness of the review process and weighing its potential benefits against the risks and liabilities of devolving approval to the divisions, **the workgroup concluded that there is value in systemwide review of master's degree programs, and that the current process of degree proposal review should remain in place, as there was no consensus on either radical revision of the approval process (i.e., devolving approval authority to the divisions) or more incremental reform (e.g., allowing divisions to conduct external reviews).** The systemwide review process reinforces academic quality, equity across campuses, and in the case of SSGPDPs, financial soundness.



## Appendix 1. Workgroup membership and charge

### **APC Workgroup on Review and Approval of Master's Degree Programs**

UC's Academic Planning Council is a joint Academic Senate and Administration committee that addresses planning issues, considers policies, and deliberates on a range of matters related to the University's academic mission. Academic program review is one area of interest to both Senate and Administration members of APC. In response to interest from some Executive Vice Chancellors in eliminating systemwide Senate and Administration review of master's degree proposals, APC is forming this workgroup to evaluate current review processes.

#### **Membership and Staff**

- Co-Chairs:
  - CCGA Chair Andrea Kasko (UCLA)
  - EVC & Provost Elizabeth Watkins (UCR)
- Senate representatives
  - Erith Jaffe-Berg, CCGA Vice Chair (UCR)
  - Kwai Ng, former CCGA Chair (UCSD)
  - Kathleen McGarry, UCPB Chair (UCLA)
  - Don Senear, UCPB Vice Chair (UCI)
- Administration representatives
  - Vice Provost for Graduate Studies & Dean of the Graduate Division Lisa García Bedolla (UCB)
  - Vice Provost for Graduate Education & Dean of the Graduate Division Gillian Hayes (UCI)
  - Provost & Executive Vice Chancellor Mary Croughan (UCD)
  - Provost & Executive Vice Chancellor Gregg Camfield (UCM)
- Staff
  - Administration/APC: Todd Greenspan and Chris Procello
  - Senate: Hilary Baxter and Fredye Harms

The committee may want to consult additional UC Senate leadership and campus administrators (e.g., Division Chairs, Graduate Council Chairs, the Vice Chancellors for Planning and Budget) during its deliberations.

**Charge:** APC's Workgroup on Review and Approval of Master's Degree Programs will evaluate review processes for these degree proposals. In doing so, it will consider the following:

- What are the goals and objectives of existing conventions for review and approval of all graduate degree programs?
- What are the steps—both campus and system level—involved in the current process?

- Is the process *effective* in meeting the broad aims of proposal review including ensuring academic rigor and quality of degree programs offered by UC? If so, why and what evidence supports this conclusion? If not, why not and what changes could reinforce review safeguards? Is there evidence indicating changes contemplated will be effective?
- Is the current process *efficient* in moving proposals from the initial submission to final approval and implementation? If so, what are the benchmarks of “efficiency” and what are the examples to date? If not, why not? Are there “bottlenecks” in the process and what changes in practice could create greater efficiency without jeopardizing quality control?
- Given these considerations, what is the rationale supporting creating different protocols for all master’s degree programs or for professional/self-supporting master’s only? What advantages could be realized? Are there institutional risks unique to these latter programs? Could they be adequately addressed and, if so, how?
- With regard to the specific suggestion to eliminate systemwide Senate and Administration review of master’s degree proposals, what are the expected benefits of devolving approval authority to the campus level and how do these outweigh the perceived benefits of the existing approval process? What are the potential liabilities or risks of eliminating systemwide Senate review?
  - How could campuses handle inherent conflicts of interest? Would these processes be effective?
  - What appeal mechanism or recourse would divisional Senates/Graduate Councils have if faculty colleagues, department chairs, deans and/or senior campus administrators apply pressure to approve proposed programs deemed to be of insufficient quality?
  - Would there be an oversight role for the systemwide Senate to ensure appropriate management of conflicts of interest?
- The [Compendium](#) specifies the existing process for disestablishing programs. Should/could a stronger, faster, and more robust disestablishment process be instituted for master’s degree programs? If so, would it occur at the division or systemwide level? How would programs come to be considered for disestablishment? What safeguards would be needed to protect the academic mission as well as affected faculty, students and staff?

**Report:** The Workgroup will provide a report on the questions above and related issues as well as recommendations, if any, to the Academic Planning Council by April 1, 2022. Provost Michael Brown and Senate Chair Robert Horwitz will receive the report on behalf of APC for transmission to APC members.