



TRENDS IN DEGREES AWARDED  
IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES:  
**1949 - 2016**

February 26, 2018

## Executive Summary

This report includes figures illustrating long-term trends in degrees conferred in political science and other social sciences in the United States. In addition to bachelor's degrees, this year's report also highlights trends in master's and doctoral degrees conferred. Data are from the National Center for Education Statistics' (NCES) annual Digest of Education Statistics. These data are primarily drawn from [\*Table 325.92. Degrees in economics, history, political science and government, and sociology conferred by postsecondary institutions, by level of degree: Selected years, 1949-50 through 2015-16\*](#). The data were last accessed on 02/22/2018.

**Figures 1, 4, and 5 highlight trends in the number and proportion of bachelor's degrees conferred.** 2015-16 represented the fifth consecutive year that the number of bachelor's degrees awarded in political science declined, and it also represented the fourth year that average social science bachelor's degrees declined overall. Political science as a proportion of all bachelor's degrees conferred in the social sciences declined for the fifth consecutive year. Bachelor's degrees conferred in political science, history, and sociology have declined over the past few years, but those awarded in economics continue to grow and are close to equaling the total number conferred in political science. In 2015-2016, 1.77% of all bachelor's degrees awarded were in political science – the lowest level ever recorded.

**Figures 2, 4, and 6 show trends in political science master's degrees conferred.** In 2010-11 and 2011-12, the number of master's degrees conferred in political science reached their highest recorded levels since records began, surpassing the former highs experienced in 1973-74. However, as with bachelor's degrees, the number of master's degrees awarded has declined over the past four academic years. The average number of social science master's degrees conferred has declined overall during this same period. As was the case last year, political science made up 18.5% of master's degrees awarded in the social sciences in 2015-16 – the lowest level recorded since 1965-66. The proportion of master's degrees conferred in all social science fields, including political science, declined from 2014-15 to 2015-16 and reached the lowest level ever recorded (since 1970-71) for both political science and sociology.

**Figures 3, 4, and 7 show trends in the number and proportion of doctoral degrees conferred.** The total number of doctoral degrees conferred in political science declined from 2014-15 to 2015-16, however the overall trend is upward since records began in 1949-50. Indeed, 2015-16 saw the fourth highest number of doctoral degrees ever conferred in political science, surpassing the highs of the early 1970s. Political science makes up 22.0% of all social science doctoral degrees conferred and has remained relatively stable for much of the last six and a half decades. As a proportion of all degrees awarded, average social science doctoral degrees have experienced decline since 1970-71 but remained relatively stable over the past few years. In 2015-16, political science accounted for 0.44% of all doctoral degrees awarded in the United States.

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Washington, DC  
February 26, 2018



Figure 1. Economics, History, Political Science, and Sociology bachelor's degrees conferred, 1949 - 2016

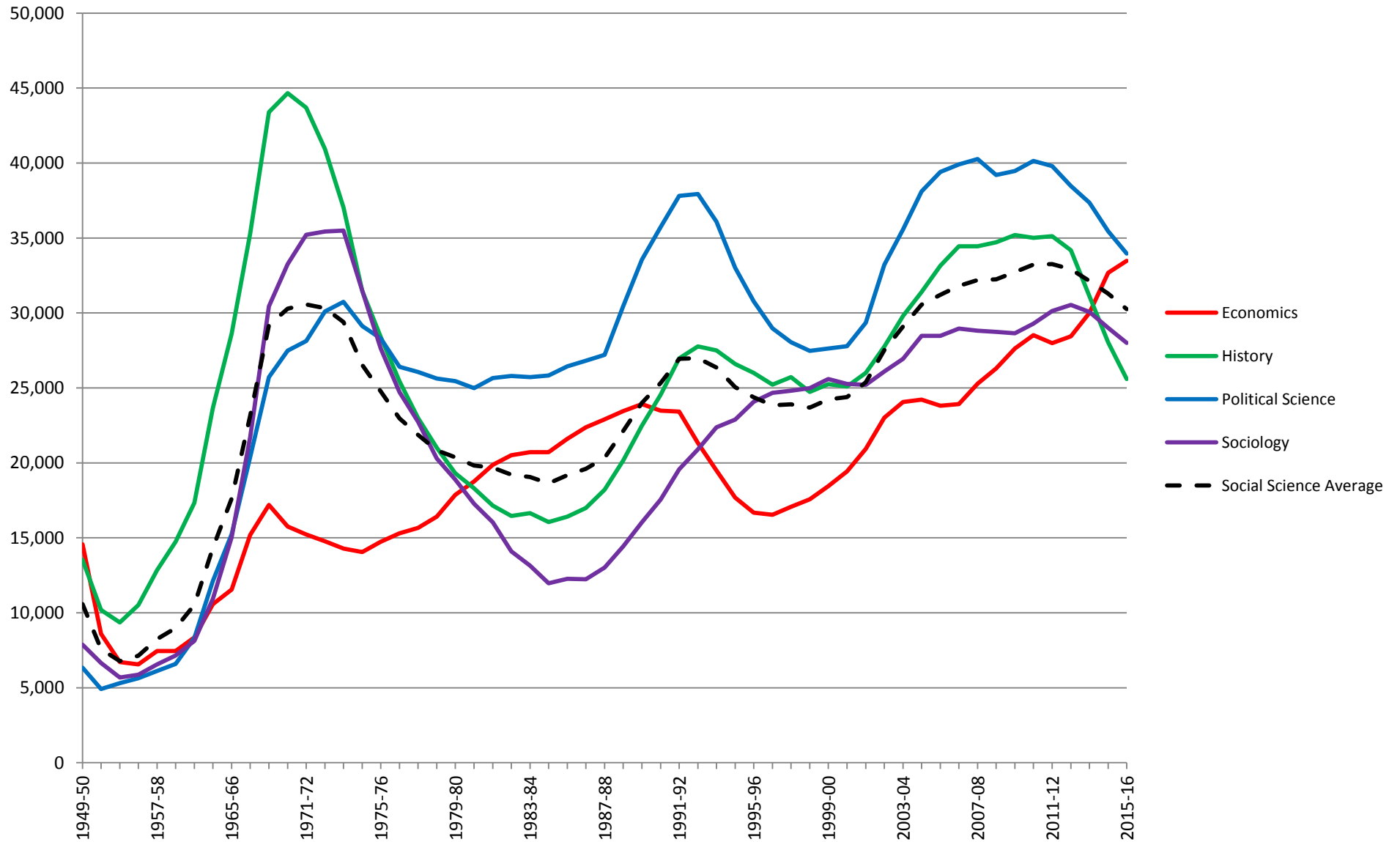
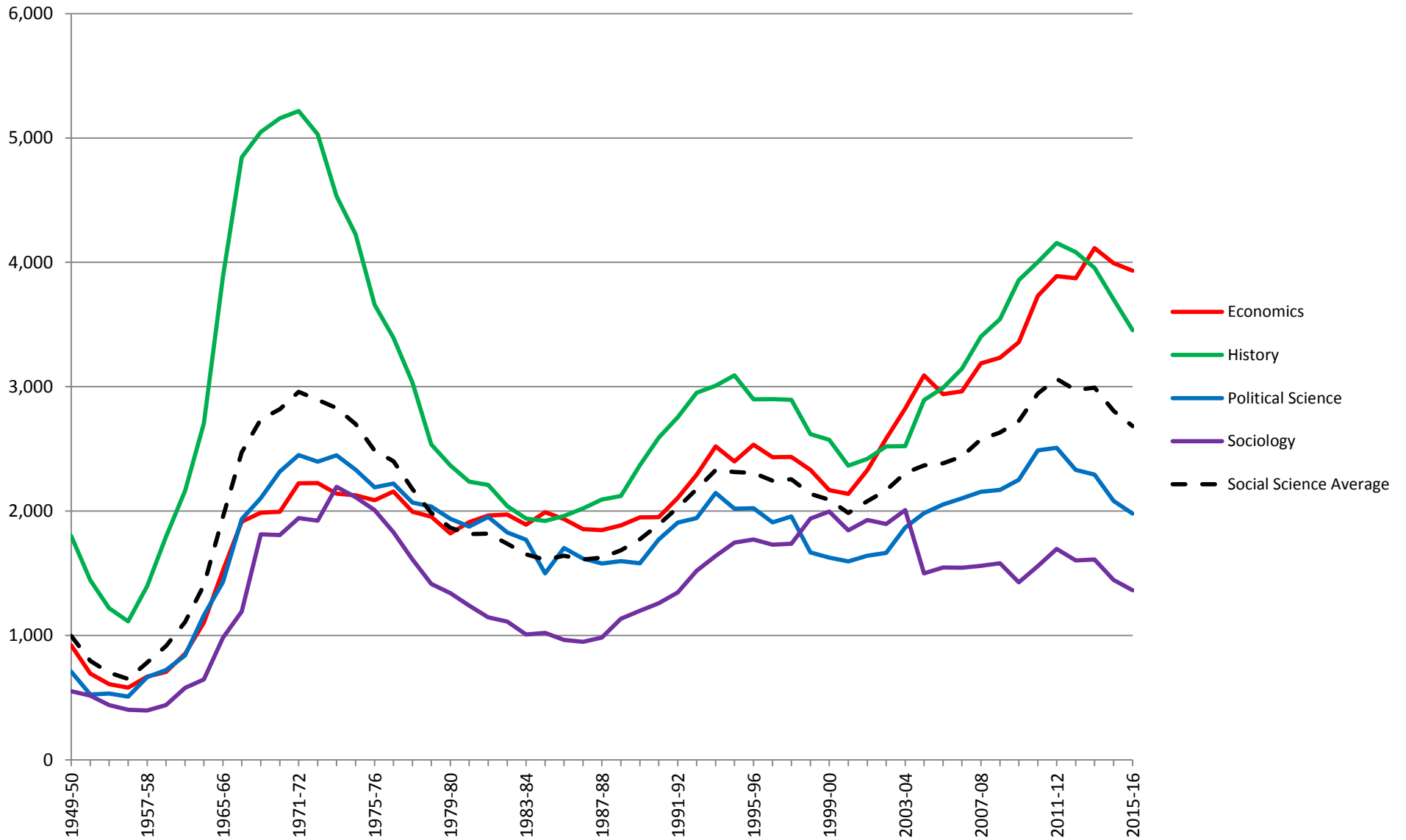
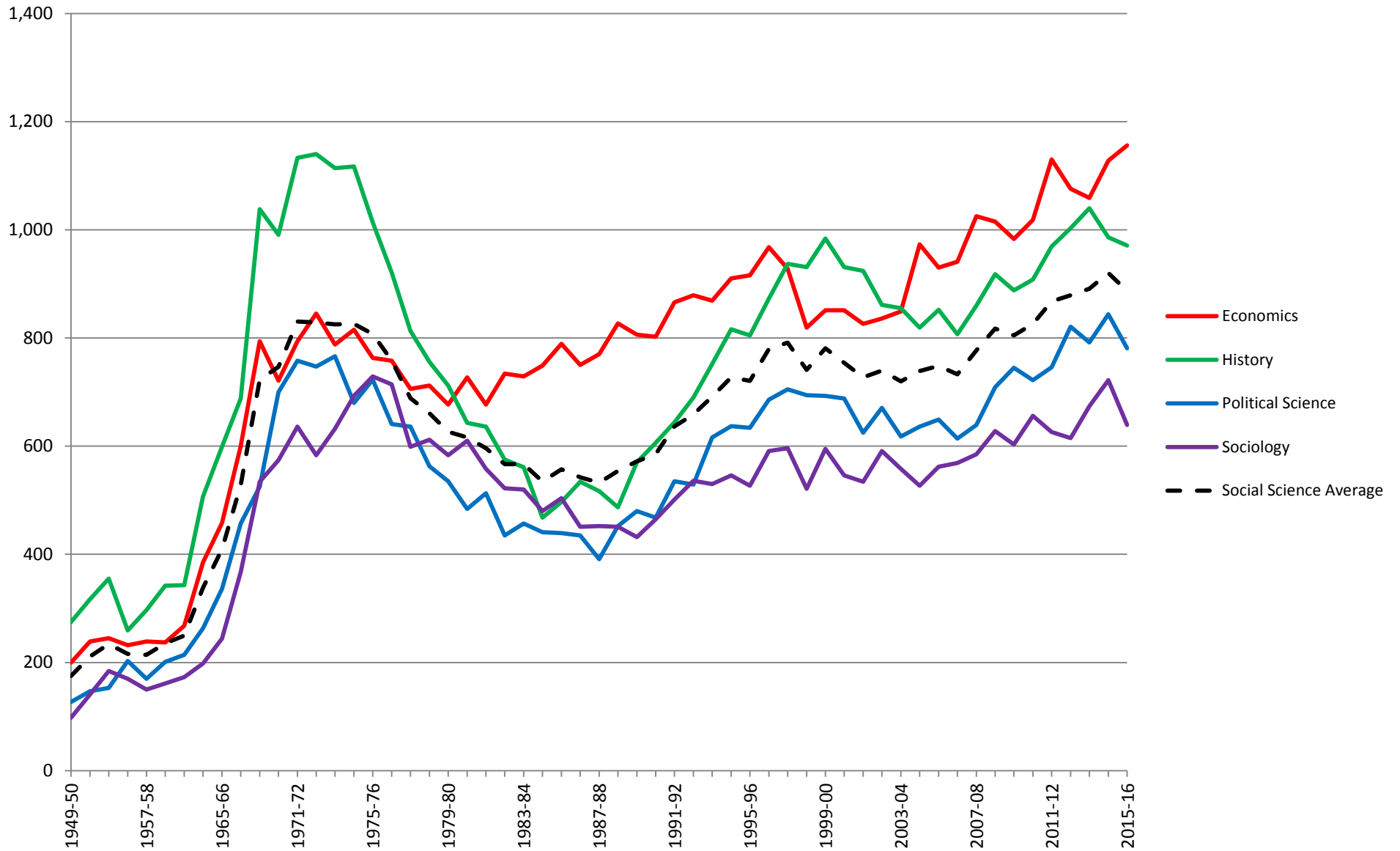


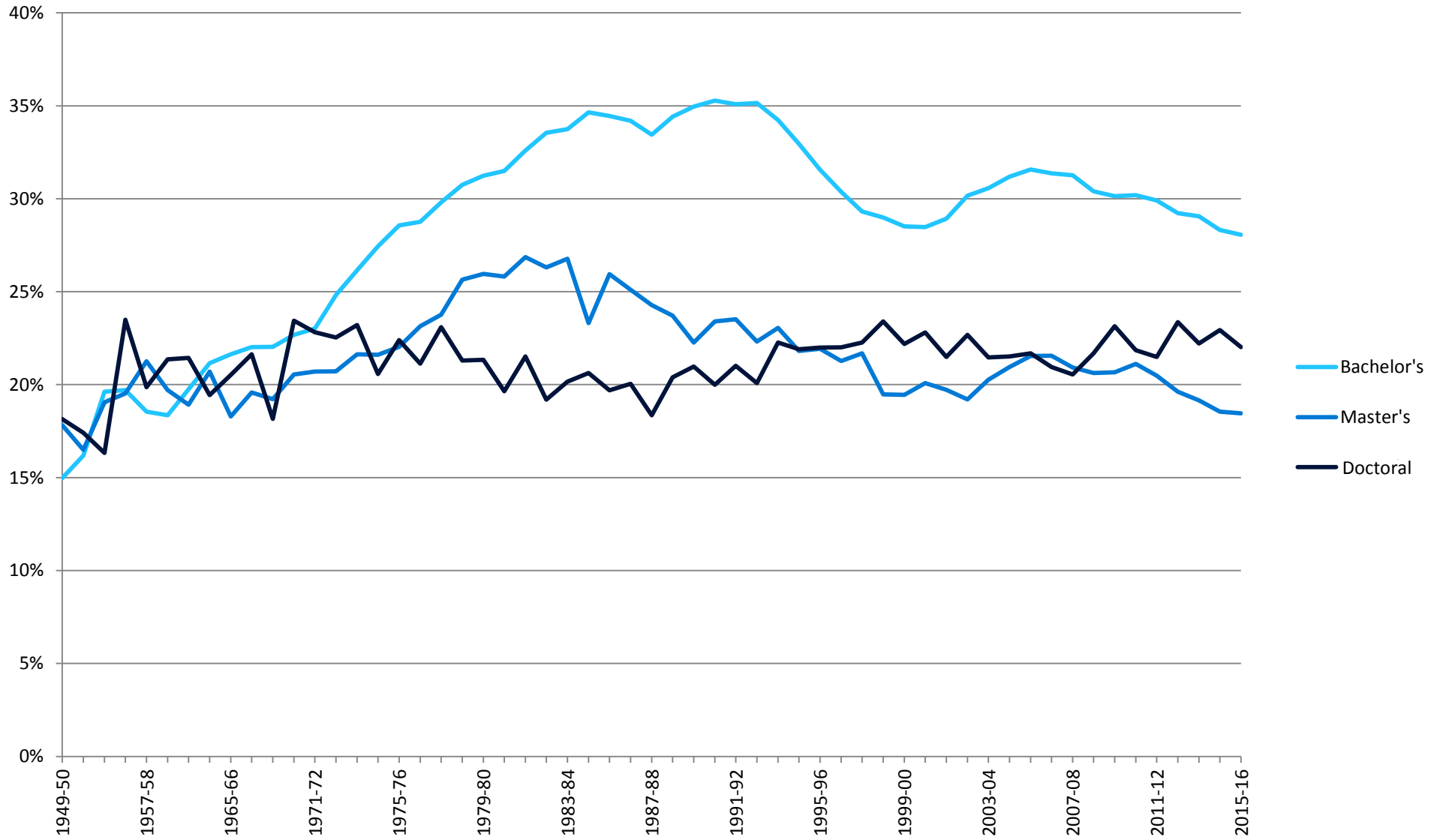
Figure 2. Economics, History, Political Science, and Sociology master's degrees conferred, 1949 - 2016



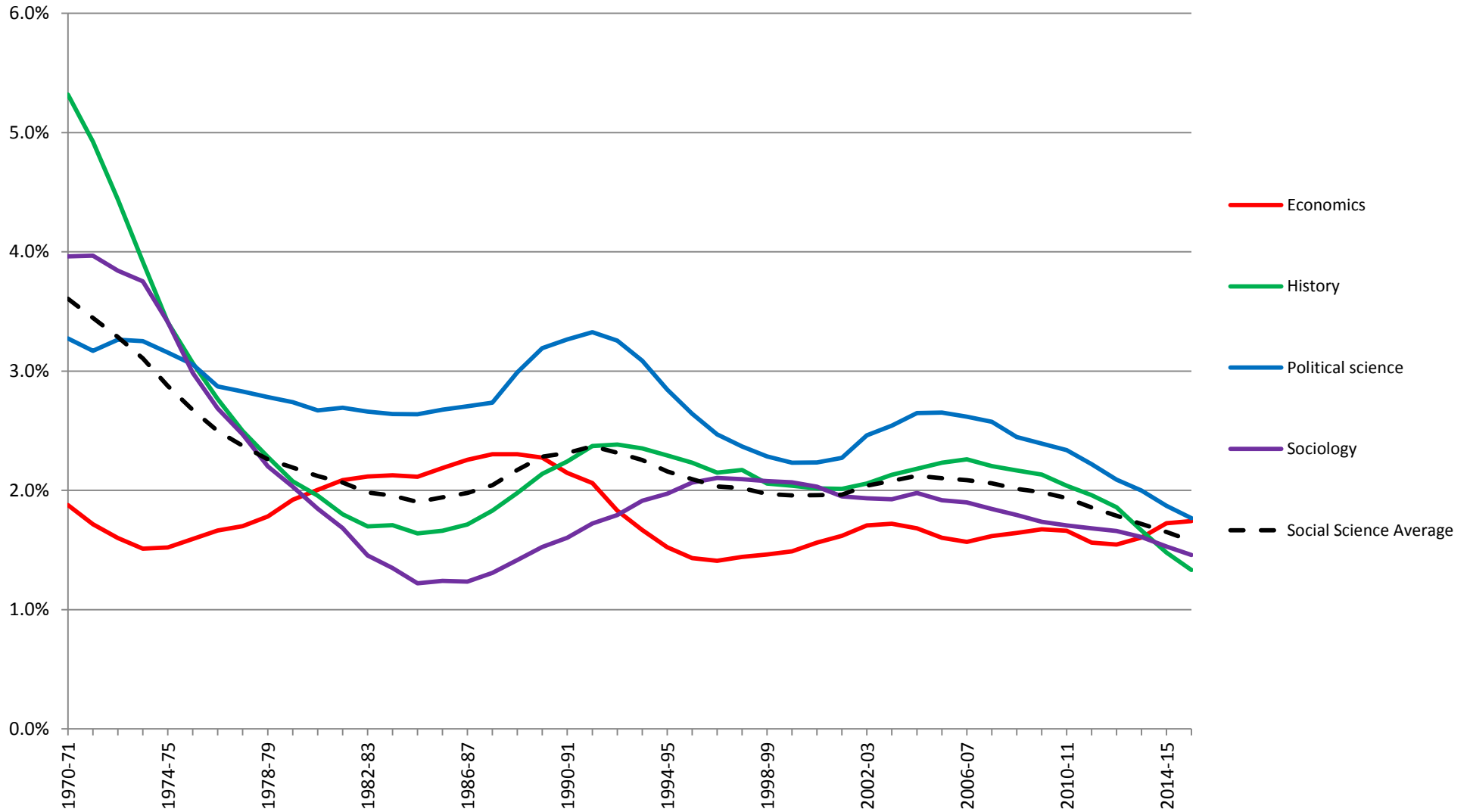
**Figure 3. Economics, History, Political Science, and Sociology doctoral degrees conferred, 1949 - 2016**



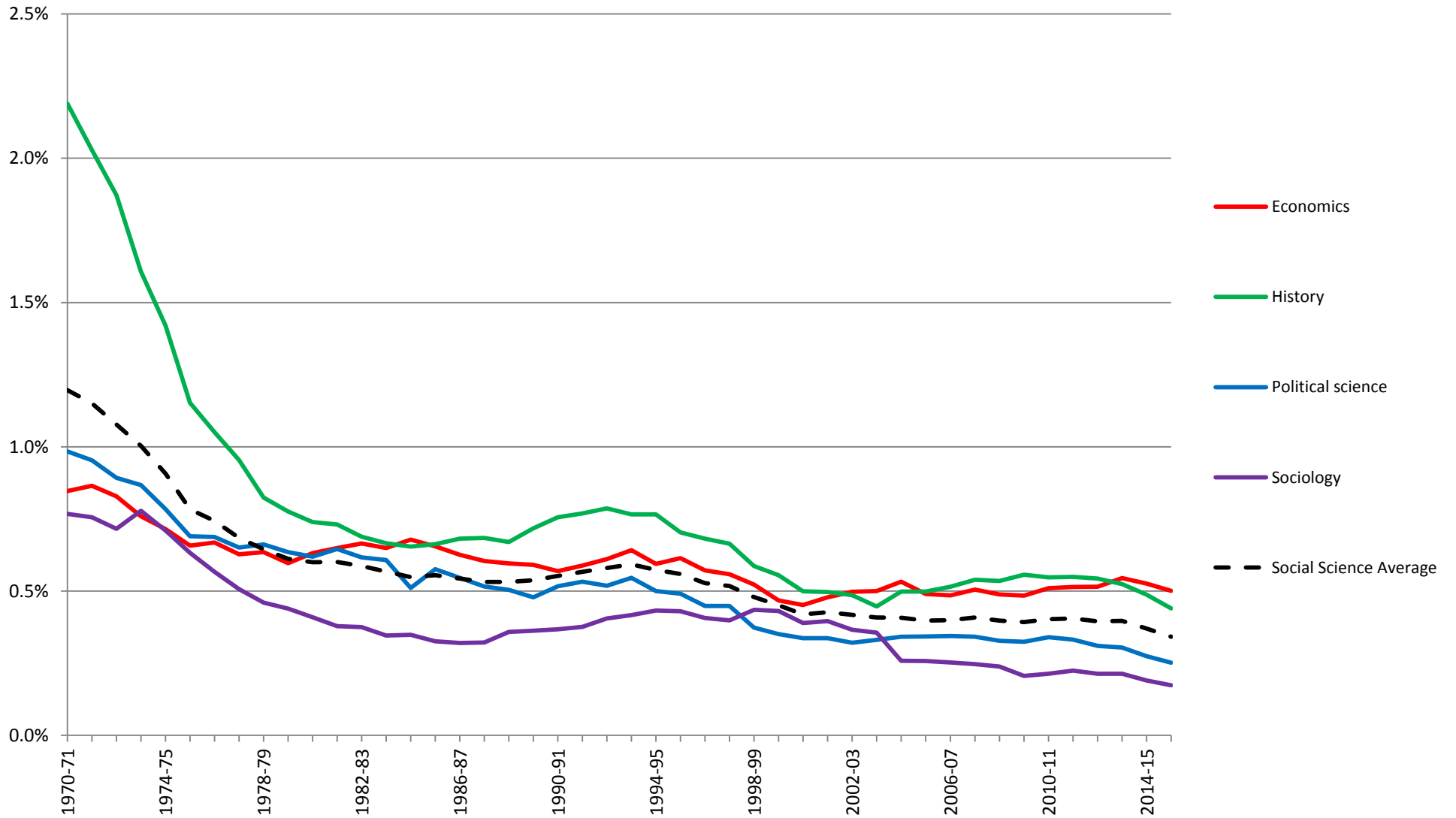
**Figure 4. Political Science as a proportion of all Social Science degrees conferred, 1949 - 2016**



**Figure 5. Economics, History, Political Science, and Sociology bachelor's degrees as proportions of all bachelor's degrees conferred, 1970 - 2016**



**Figure 6. Economics, History, Political Science, and Sociology master's degrees as proportions of all master's degrees conferred, 1970 - 2016**



**Figure 7. Economics, History, Political Science, and Sociology doctoral degrees as proportions of all doctor's degrees conferred, 1970 - 2016**

