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The Journal of Socio-Economics 34 (2005) 269–280

The Journal of
Socio-
Economics

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Is there a trade-off between domestic and international publications?

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Abstract

This paper examines how a reputation-seeking academic economist allocates his time between research and nonresearch activities to publish papers in domestic and international journals. In equilibrium there is a trade-off between domestic and international publications. One implication is that the observed differences in academic productivity between American and European economists reflected by rankings can be misleading. The model allows for the existence of productive and efficient scholars even when their names do not appear in the rankings. The reason is that some scholars are publishing in domestic rather than in international journals, in accordance with the incentives in their home countries.

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JEL classification: A19; D29; J22

Keywords: Economics of Science; Network Externalities; Rent-seeking

1. Introduction

There is a long tradition in economics in measuring the output of scholars and departments.¹ These measures are usually based on publications in peer-reviewed international journals and/or in citations.² The available empirical evidence provides a positive

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¹ Among the pioneer works are Fusfeld (1956), and Yotopoulos (1961).

² Recent references include Bairam (1994), Medoff (1996), Dusansky and Vernon (1998) and Kalaitzidakis et al. (1999).

relationship between resources for research and ranking position (e.g., Koshal et al., 1996; Fox and Milbourne, 1999; Thursby, 2000), so it is no surprise that these rankings are used to attract grants.

However, rankings based on publications and citations show that North American (especially from the US) academic economists perform much better than others. Frey and Pommerehne (1988), for example, using the number of citations in the Social Science Citation Index over the period 1972–1983, show that the US and Canada provide 72% of all eminent living economists, and only 25% are Europeans.³

According to Frey and Eichenberger (1992, 1993) the significant differences in academic productivity are due to differences in the academic markets in the US and Europe. They argue that the US market is bigger and more competitive and homogeneous than the European market. Moreover, job mobility is almost absent in European markets.

This paper explores another possible explanation – not necessarily separated from the labor markets hypothesis outlined above – for the observed differences. It is argued that economists outside the US have incentives to publish in domestic journals to maximize their value in their respective home countries. The domestic production is seldom captured by rankings, since the rankings take into account international journals, and most of these international journals are Americans or have as editors American economists (see Hodgson and Rothman, 1999). Therefore, there are productive economists outside the US – in that they publish their academic output in peer-reviewed journals – but their effort is not reflected in the rankings because they are publishing in domestic, rather than international journals.⁴

The main hypothesis of this paper is that productive scholars are reputation-seekers in their respective countries. Given that, other things being equal, a better reputation allows the academic economist to profit from his expertise by attracting more sources of income. The point of interest here is to analyze how this reputation-seeking behavior affects the choice of the scholar in publishing internally or externally. The scholar has to establish himself as a high profile academic to gain some respect among peers and to build up his reputation in academia. The quickest way to gain reputation in academia is by publishing in top journals of the area which, in the present context, are represented by international journals. Another way is by obtaining a Ph.D. degree in a first rank international university. After achieving some respectability in academia, the scholar starts to build his reputation outside academia [where additional sources of income lie]. He directs his focus to domestic journals to promote himself in the home country. Thus the scholar has incentives to publish in domestic and international journals.⁵

³ For other indicators, see Portes (1987).

⁴ In this paper all top journals are regarded as international journals. In this sense, despite the American Economic Review being an American journal it is considered to be an international journal even for American economists since it is widely read and respected as a top journal everywhere. The same holds true for the Economic Journal concerning British economists.

⁵ A related line of reasoning argues that as competition for publication in top journals increase [and in this paper top journals are considered international journals], it provokes an increase in the rejection rates as well as increase in the time delay from submission to publication in a top journal (Mason et al., 1992). Therefore, authors tend to diversify their publications across different journals (Chung et al., 1993), among them there are domestic journals. The race towards publication in international journals leads to a trade-off between the number of publications and their quality (Faria, 2003).

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