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## INVESTIGATING THE APPARATUS

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# Citation Counts and SSCI in Personnel Decisions: A Survey of Economics Departments

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[ABSTRACT, KEYWORDS, JEL CODES](#)

**THIS INVESTIGATION IS AN AUXILIARY TO OUR PAPER ABOUT** the Social Science Citation Index (SSCI), which appears in the same issue of this journal (Klein and Chiang 2004). In researching that paper, we sought evidence on the extent to which economics departments utilize SSCI citation counts in hiring and promotion decisions, and on the weight given to a journal's inclusion in SSCI in deciding whether a publication is to be deemed "peer reviewed." Because we could not find any existing empirical evidence on those matters we undertook this survey. Our method was simply to send an email message containing the survey to departmental chairs and request a response.

We stratified our sample according to a ranking of economics department. The purpose of stratifying was to see if the importance of citations and SSCI status varied with the eminence and prestige of the department. We created three groups of departments—A, B, and C—by marking off three points (1<sup>st</sup>, 61<sup>st</sup>, and 111<sup>th</sup>) in a worldwide top-200 ranking

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We are grateful to the 30 economics department chairs who responded to our survey.

of economics departments (Coupé 2003: Table 2); the ranking is constructed by averaging 11 methodologically-distinct rankings, each based on publication output. We proceeded to solicit responses from American departments in each group until 10 responses were received. Thus, we have three sets of 10 responses, or a total of 30 responses. The surveying occurred during November and December 2003. The responding universities are listed in Table 1.

**Table 1**  
**Departments that Participated in the Survey**

<b>Groups</b>	<b>Responding Universities</b>
<p><b>A10</b></p> <p><b>Formed by working down from the 1st position in the ranking.</b></p>	<p>Harvard University University of Pennsylvania Stanford University Massachusetts Institute of Technology University of California-Berkeley Northwestern University Yale University Princeton University University of California-Los Angeles New York University</p>
<p><b>B10</b></p> <p><b>Formed by working down from the 61st position in the ranking.</b></p>	<p>University of California-Irvine Boston College Iowa State University North Carolina State University Dartmouth College University of California- Santa Barbara Florida State University University of Houston Louisiana State University University of Connecticut</p>
<p><b>C10</b></p> <p><b>Formed by working down from the 111st position in the ranking.</b></p>	<p>Tulane University American University State University of New York-Buffalo University of California-Santa Cruz Rice University Emory University Wayne State University University of Missouri University of Alabama University of Miami (Florida)</p>

## RESULTS

The results are presented in Table 2. Highlights follow.

- For the 11 multiple-choice questions, the average number of responses is 29.
- 15 respondents report that citation counts are usually or always considered in promotion decisions.
- Only 2 respondents report that citation counts are part of annual evaluations.
- 14 respondents report that the trend over the past 10 years has been toward putting greater weight on citation counts, while one said the trend was toward less weight.
- 14 respondents indicate that he or she expects the trend over the next 10 years to be toward greater weight on citation counts, while one expects the trend to be toward less weight.
- 20 respondents indicate that he or she thinks citation counts are currently given about the right amount of attention and weight.
- The responses indicate that at about half of the schools a journal's inclusion in the SSCI is a factor (though usually not a decisive one) in deciding whether to deem a publication "peer reviewed."
- The sample sets are small, but the results might suggest that the top schools (the A10 group) are somewhat less concerned with citation counts (in particular, see Question 3).
- There are signs that the middle group (B10) puts more weight on citation counts (compare response rates at 1D, 3B, 4A, and 8C). This might be interpreted as an anxiousness or inducement to be like the higher ups.

Table 2: SSCI Use Survey Questions and Responses

Questions	Results by Group			
<b>1. Which sentence best describes your department's common practice <i>IN HIRING</i>? Put an x after (that is, immediately below) your selection.</b>				
	A10	B10	C10	ALL
As a matter of procedure, the department obtains the candidate's citation count, and this information is made common knowledge to voting members of the department	0	2	2	4
Obtaining and distributing a citation count is not a strict matter of procedure, but usually someone does come up with a citation count and the information is brought up and considered as a factor.	3	3	2	8
Obtaining and distributing a citation count is admissible information and does occur sometimes, but is not common.	3	5	1	9
Any discussion of the candidate's citation count is rare. Usually, there is no information or discussion of the candidate's cites.	4	0	5	9
<b>Total Responses: 30</b>				
<i>Authors' comment about the previous question: The question should have distinguished entry-level from senior-level hiring. Two of the "a" respondents specified that the response was with respect to senior hires, and two of the "d" respondents specified that it was with respect to entry level hiring. Clearly, in answering the question with respect to senior hiring, the responses would be more toward "a," and for entry-level toward "d".</i>				
<b>2. Apart from formal procedures and discussions at meetings, consider what matters in the mind of the individual voting member of your department when you are hiring. Please x after the statement that best captures your own impression.</b>				
	A10	B10	C10	ALL
One way or another the individual faculty member usually gets at least a ballpark estimate of the candidate's citation count, and that factor BY ITSELF is significant in his or her decision.	1	2	2	5
One way or another he or she gets at least a ballpark estimate, but that factor is not significant in his or her decision.	1	2	3	6
It is not common that individual voting				

members have even a ballpark estimate of the candidate's citation count.	8	5	5	18
Total Responses: 29				
<i>Again, like Q. 1, the previous question is seriously flawed because it does not separate entry-level from senior-level hiring.</i>				
<b>3. Which sentence best describes common practice IN PROMOTION?</b>				
	A10	B10	C10	ALL
As a matter of procedure, the department obtains the candidate's citation count, and this information is made common knowledge to voting members of the department.	1	1	2	4
Obtaining and distributing a citation count is not a strict matter of procedure, but usually someone does come up with a citation count and the information is brought up and considered as a factor.	2	6	3	11
Obtaining and distributing a citation count is admissible information and does occur sometimes, but is not common.	3	2	4	9
Any discussion of the candidate's citation count is rare. Usually there is no information or discussion of the candidate's cites.	4	1	1	6
Total responses: 30				
<b>A SIMILAR QUESTION, BUT FOR ROUTINE ANNUAL EVALUATION:</b>				
<b>4. Which sentence best describes common practice FOR ANNUAL EVALUATION?</b>				
	A10	B10	C10	ALL
As a matter of procedure, the department obtains the candidate's citation count, and this information is part of the routine annual activity reporting and evaluation.	0	2	0	2
A citation count is not a formal part of annual activity reporting and evaluation.	8	8	10	26
Total Responses: 28				
<b>A QUESTION ABOUT THE UTILIZATION OF CITATIONS BEYOND YOUR DEPARTMENT BUT WITHIN YOUR UNIVERSITY:</b>				

<b>5. Looking beyond the department, for hiring and promotion, do the Dean, the university rank and tenure committee, the administration, and so on, utilize citation counts (check one):</b>				
	A10	B10	C10	ALL
Yes, very typically, if not absolutely strictly.	0	1	3	4
Generally yes, but it is hit or miss.	3	1	3	7
Not typically.	1	5	1	7
Rarely.	5	2	3	10
Total responses: 28				
<b>6. Which statement best expresses your impression about the trend at academic institutions such as yours over the past ten years?</b>				
The utilization and weight given to citation counts has been increasing.	2	6	6	14
The utilization and weight given to citation counts has stayed about the same.	6	4	4	14
The utilization and weight given to citation counts has declined.	1	0	0	1
Total responses: 29				
<b>A QUESTION ABOUT THE FUTURE:</b>				
<b>7. Which statement best expresses your guess about academic institutions such as yours over the next ten years?</b>				
The utilization and weight given to citation counts will increase.	1	7	6	14
The utilization and weight given to citation counts will stay about the same.	8	3	4	15
The utilization and weight given to citation counts will decline.	1	0	0	1
Total responses: 30				
<b>AN OPINION QUESTION (Your response will be kept unidentified per your preference given in Q12 below):</b>				
<b>8. Which statement best expresses your opinion about the utilization and weight that academic institutions such as yours give to citation counts?</b>				
Cites are currently given too much attention and weight.	1	1	0	2
Cites are currently given about the right amount of attention and weight.	7	4	9	20

Cites are currently given too little attention and weight.	2	4	0	6
I don't have a well formed opinion on the matter.	0	0	1	1
Total responses: 29				
<b>TWO QUESTIONS ABOUT WHETHER A JOURNAL'S INCLUSION IN SSCI IS AN IMPORTANT FACTOR IN ITS BEING A "GOOD" JOURNAL.</b>				
<b>THE SSCI INDEXES ABOUT 1750 JOURNALS. AN SSCI JOURNAL IS ONE FOR WHICH THE SSCI COUNTS AND INDEXES THE CITATIONS THERE GENERATED.</b>				
<b>[WE RECOGNIZE THAT OPTIONS FOR Q9 AND Q10 OVERLAP AND YOUR ANSWERS MIGHT BE REPETITIVE.]</b>				
<b>9. IS SSCI A NECESSARY CONDITION FOR "PEER REVIEWED"?</b>				
Please evaluate the following statement: At your institution (within or beyond the department), for a journal to be regarded as peer-reviewed and publications there as peer reviewed publications, the journal must be included (indexed) in SSCI. In other words, at your institutions SSCI inclusion is NECESSARY to make a faculty members' work in that journal count as a peer reviewed publication.				
	A10	B10	C10	ALL
That is correct.	1	1	0	2
That is not strictly the case, but by and large a journal would not be counted as peer reviewed if it is not included in SSCI.	4	2	1	7
My institution readily recognizes journals as peer reviewed even though SSCI inclusion is lacking, but SSCI inclusion does help in leading us to count it as peer reviewed.	0	3	3	6
SSCI inclusion is not a factor in recognizing a journal as peer reviewed.	4	4	5	13
Total Responses: 28				
<b>10. IS SSCI A SUFFICIENT CONDITION FOR "PEER REVIEWED"?</b>				
Please evaluate the following statement: At your institution if a journal is include (indexed) in SSCI, then that journal is regarded as a peer-reviewed journal. In				

<b>other words, at your institutions SSCI inclusion is SUFFICIENT to make a faculty members' work in that journal count as a peer reviewed publication.</b>				
	A10	B10	C10	ALL
That is correct. If a journal is included in SSCI, we automatically count it as peer reviewed.	0	0	1	1
That is broadly correct: If a journal is included in SSCI, we would count it as peer reviewed unless there were some salient reason not to.	2	5	1	8
SSCI inclusion is not sufficient, but it helps.	0	3	3	6
SSCI inclusion is not a factor in recognizing a journal as peer reviewed.	4	4	5	13
Total responses:27				
<b>INVITATION TO MAKE OPEN-ENDED COMMENTS</b>				
<b>11. Would you like to make any clarifications or related comments about the utilization of cites or about this survey? If you would like to receive notice of the posted results of this survey, please indicate that here.</b>	[Nine respondents wrote something.]			
<b>YOUR PREFERENCE REGARDING BEING IDENTIFIED</b>				
<b>12. Would like to keep the source of your responses unidentified? Please check one of the following options:</b>				
	A10	B10	C10	ALL
There is no need to keep any of my responses unidentified.	1	3	4	8
Keep my responses unidentified.	8	7	6	21
Other [write in your instructions]	0	0	0	0
Total responses: 29				

## CONCLUSION

Though not the case for all schools, for the economics profession on the whole citation counts play a significant role in personnel decisions, and a journal's SSCI inclusion plays a significant role in deciding whether a publication is "peer reviewed." The trend has been toward putting greater weight on citation counts.

Investigating the behavior of economists is always ripe with irony. Many economists maintain an official belief that policy judgments must be backed up by "serious research" or are otherwise mere "advocacy." Yet there seems to be very little research to back up the policies that economists actually pursue as academics and administrators. In particular, we are aware of no economic work that suggests that the profession's common practices are led by an invisible hand to promote social welfare. This modest paper documents what some of the profession's practices are. Assessing those practices calls out for scholarly attention and discussion.

## REFERENCES

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