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A Call Studies

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“It is our belief that journals should publish the results of replication attempts—favorable or unfavorable.”

—Dewald, Thursby, and Anderson (1988)


“Econometric software has bugs.”

—McCullough and Vinod (1999)

“... [R]eplicable economic research is the exception and not the rule.”

—Anderson et al. (2005)

With this issue, *Public Finance Review* issues an open call for papers that report the results of attempts to replicate significant empirical research in public economics, published in this journal or elsewhere.

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The Scientific Need for Replication Studies

A basic requirement for scientific integrity is the ability to replicate the results of research, and yet, with some occasional historical exceptions,

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1.

1. McCullough and Vinod (2003) drew more sweeping conclusions: “Either intentionally or unintentionally, it is fairly easy to trick a solver [of nonlinear optimization problems] into falsely reporting an extremum—whether a maximum for likelihood estimation, or a minimum for least-squares estimation.”

2.

2. The Journal of Political Economy had a “Confirmations and Contradictions” section from 1976 to 1999. Mirowski and Sklivas (1991) reported that 5 of 36 notes appearing in this section from 1976 to 1987 included replications, of which only 1 was successful in actually replicating the original results. Anderson et al. (2005) counted 13 more notes through 1999, of which only 1 included a replication and wrote, “Apparently JPE has allowed the section to die an ignominious death befitting the section’s true relation to replication: It has been inactive since 1999” (Anderson et al. 2005).

3.

3. “[J]ournals provide inappropriate incentives when they publish clarifying comments by authors who have failed to respond to requests for clarification prior to publication of negative results” (Dewald, Thursby, and Anderson 1988).

4.

4. For example, Auerbach, Hassett, and Oliner (1994) reexamined a pair of cross-country empirical studies that measured large excess social returns to equipment investment. Those excess returns turned out to depend entirely on one country, Botswana, whose equipment was used to mine diamonds and which had experienced exceptional economic growth over the time period studied. The surprising result disappeared when Botswana was excluded from the data set.

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