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Features and Information

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WILLIAM WALSTAD, Section Editor

Comparative Research Productivity Measures for Economics Departments

David A. Huettner and William Clark

Resource reallocations among academic departments become increasingly necessary as total university budgets grow more slowly. Economics and other departments frequently find themselves in competition for slices of a resource pie of given (or shrinking) size. For economics departments administratively located in colleges of business administration, the competition typically comes from accounting, finance, management, and marketing departments. For arts and sciences economics departments, the competition comes from disciplines ranging from chemistry, microbiology, and physics to history, sociology, and English. Although clearly needed, reliable indicators of differences in interdisciplinary productivity are hard to find.

National rankings of departments within the same discipline are currently based on surveys of department chairs, graduate program directors, deans, and other administrators (Webster and Massey 1992). Such surveys may be biased by the personal experiences and predilections of the respondents. Establishing such bias is difficult because the evaluation criteria are seldom expressed as quantitative performance standards.

In an effort to avoid inappropriate interdepartmental comparisons, we tried to develop a simple theoretical model to evaluate interdisciplinary differences in research productivity. We then used this model to analyze some information currently available on research productivity.

David A. Huettner is a professor of economics and department chair, and William Clark is an associate professor of economics at the University of Oklahoma.

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