

Survey of Economics Dissertations, 1996-2000
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What is the nature of the work produced by U.W. Economics doctoral students? What proportion is empirical, and how much is theory? We examined all the economics dissertations on the U.W. library shelves in Sept. 2001, starting with those of the 1996 graduates. The survey therefore encompasses the 5-year period of 1996-2000 (2001 theses were not yet shelved). For results to be representative, one must assume that empirical and theoretical theses are equally likely to be checked out of the library.

We did two things:

1. We recorded the number of chapters in each thesis, not including introductory nor summary/conclusion chapters. Then we recorded how many of those chapters fell into each of three categories:
 - a. descriptive (this includes literature reviews, reviews of existing models, and descriptions of the backdrop for the thesis such as insitutional arrangements, *etc.*).
 - b. empirical (those that consist of empirical analysis, or data explorations of some kind).
 - c. theoretical (those that developed analytical or numerical models).

2. We classified each thesis based on the distribution of the chapters. This was somewhat subjective, because what constitutes a "chapter" was quite different for different students. For some, a chapter was a complete paper that had background, theory and empirical analysis. For others, it was more like a section in an essay. Descriptive chapters didn't affect the classification outcome. A thesis with all theoretical chapters (other than descriptive chapters) was classified as a "1". If all the non-descriptive chapters were empirical, the thesis got a "5". Two empirical chapters and one theory chapter got a 3 or a 4, depending on a subjective assessment (by Best) of the relative weight of emphasis. And so on.

Results:

Overall Thesis Classification (# 2 above).

There were 44 dissertations.

The number and proportion of each type of dissertation was:

Classification:	1 (all theory)	2	3	4	5 (all empirical)
# of Dissertations:	4	5	10	7	18
Frequency:	0.09	0.11	0.23	0.16	0.41

Distribution of chapters (#1 above).

There were 177 chapters.

Classification:	Descriptive	Theory	Empirical
# of Chapters:	38	36	103
Frequency:	0.22	0.20	0.58

