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ECONOMICS IN PRACTICE: FOLLOW UP

The Curtailment of Critical Commentary in Australian Economics

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FOLLOW UP TO: COELHO, PHILIP R.P., FREDERICK DE WORKEN-ELEY, AND JAMES E. MCCLURE. 2005. DECLINE IN COMMENTARY, 1963–2004. *ECON JOURNAL WATCH* 2(2): 355–363. [LINK](#).

ABSTRACT

COMPARATIVELY FEW SCHOLARS HAVE EXPLORED TRENDS IN THE NATURE OF papers published in economics journals. These include Laband and Piette (1994), Laband, Tollison and Karakan (2002), Ellison (2002), Coelho and McClure (2005), Coelho, De Worken-Eley and McClure (2005), Coelho and McClure (2006), and Whaples (2006).

Perhaps the most important contribution in this genre is Coelho, De Worken-Eley and McClure (2005), who found that “the space devoted to critical commentary has declined sharply at top economic journals” (355). They investigated the *American Economic Review*, *Economic Journal*, *Journal of Political Economy*, *Quarterly Journal of Economics* and the *Review of Economics and Statistics* from 1963 through 2004.

In Dollery, Byrnes and Akimova (2007), we employed their method for all Australian economics journals from 1962 to 2005. Figure 1 shows the results we obtained.

We concluded that “from the mid-1970s through to around the early to mid-1980s our sample of Australian economic journals was relatively more amenable to publishing ‘critical comment’ pertaining to the articles previously published in those journals (measured as either a proportion of total articles or as a percentage of total pages).” However, “it is striking how the occurrence of critical comment

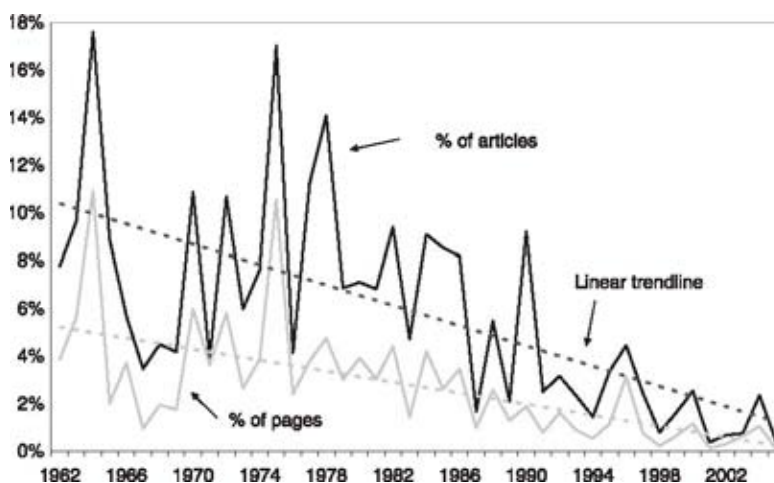
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throughout the 1990s has diminished, almost to the point that it now seems to be a ‘lost art.’” We observed that “this finding concurs closely with the results obtained by Coelho, De Worken-Eley and McClure (2005) for their more limited sample of five top-ranked economics journals” (Dollery, Byrnes and Akimova 2007, 301-302).

Figure 1. Percentage of Critical Commentary Articles as Proportion of Total Number of Articles in Australian Economics Journals, 1962 to 2005



Source: Dollery, Byrnes and Akimova (2007, 302, Figure 1).

Our finding for Australia suggests that the trend shown by Coelho, De Worken-Eley and McClure (2005) may also hold for economics journals generally. Is the trend the same in other disciplines?

Finally, possible reasons for the curtailment of critical commentary are explored and discussed, especially by Coelho and McClure (2006) and Whaples (2006).

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