

The relations between graduate programs in economics in Brazil: A structural equivalence analysis

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Received 15 December 2016; received in revised form 1 February 2018; accepted 13 March 2018

Available online 29 March 2018

Abstract

We analyze the educational background of Economics Professors in Brazilian Economics Graduate Programs, in terms of PhD affiliations. Using a method of structural equivalence, we propose three groups among institutions that granted PhD degrees to Brazilian Economics Professors.

JEL classification: B20

Keywords: Structural equivalence; Economics Departments; PhD affiliation

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1. Introduction

“Men are not narrow in their intellectual interests by nature; it takes special and rigorous training to accomplish that end” (Jacob Viner¹)

It is widely recognized that the theoretical positions taken by economists regarding issues and their alliance to certain school of thoughts is related to where they studied, mainly where they obtained their PhD degrees — “what economists do is what they are trained to do in their graduate programs” (Hansen, 1991, p. 1054). Or yet, as Colander and Klamer (1987, p. 95) said,

“The graduate school experience plays an important role in determining economic discourse; it certifies economists as professionals, it establishes economists’ view of argumentation and guides them as to what is important to study and what is not. To understand economic discourse one should have a good sense of the professionalization of economists that occurs in graduate schools.”

Differences in views among Departments are not uncommon. The saltwater vs. freshwater divide is an example in the United States. The education pursued in a particular graduate school can influence an economist’s view of the

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¹ Cited in Colander and Klamer (1987, p. 98).

Peer review under responsibility of National Association of Postgraduate Centers in Economics, ANPEC.

world and, if they go on to become University Professors, it tends to have a much larger influence over third parties who did not have a direct contact with that particular school.

The study of the composition of Economics Graduate Programs is relatively common in the United States — there are many papers that show the importance of graduate school affiliation for the professional success of an economist (Siegfried and Stock 1999, 2004; Siegfried and Stock, 1999; Stock and Alston, 2000; Barbezat, 1992; Carson and Navarro, 1988). Other analyses focus on the educational background of those who publish in leading journals (Hodgson and Rothman, 1999; Kocher and Sutter, 2001; Kocher et al., 2002) showing the great importance of an economist academic history. There are also papers that focus on the differences between Departments and its effect on the education of new students and soon-to-be-economists like Colander and Klammer (1987), who analyzed graduate students' perceptions of the world in six top graduate programs.

Still concerning the profile and origins of Professors and its effects on student's education, there is a body of literature – unrestricted to Economics – that analyses what is known as academic inbreeding, that is, the hiring of former students as Professors by Universities. There is a consensus that the phenomenon is common, although, there are disagreements on its effects on department's productivity (Wyer and Conrad, 1984).

In Brazil, discussions regarding the importance of economists' education have been taking place ever since Economics was established as a separate field in the mid-twentieth century, focusing mainly on the low quality of teaching in the 1950s and 1960s (Gudin, 1956; Simonsen, 1966) to the need of graduate schools *in loco* (Furtado, 1962) and the evolution of this trajectory through time (Loureiro and Lima, 1994; Loureiro, 1997; Biderman et al., 1997). Analyses regarding the great number of institutions and their profile (Anuatti Neto, 1997; Szmrecsányi and Coelho, 2007) lacked, however, a more detailed investigation on the relationship between these Departments.

The goal of this paper is to analyze the educational background of Economics Professors in Brazilian Economics Graduate Programs, in terms of PhD affiliations and based on this information, understand the role of these institutions in the Brazilian Economics Academia as whole. From that, we wish to classify these institutions and to understand the roles they assume in this environment.

The discussion according to theoretical positions such as one of an Orthodoxy vs. Heterodoxy flavor is very heated in Brazil but it is very hard to classify an economist in such a way, let alone a whole Graduate Program. Most attempts to differentiate people and groups this way were carried by their theoretical positions — for this, they had to establish *a priori* these positions.

We chose to take a different approach. Our goal is to analyze Graduate Programs in Economics in Brazil without having to look at individual theoretical positions — so we chose a “sociological” approach. For each individual institution, we will look at which other institution they have closer ties to, with the assumption that these closer ties determine the characteristics of this first institution. That is, they might claim to be something but it may not hold up to how they relate to one another — it may not match who they are close to.

There are obvious limitations in this approach, but we believe we bring a contribution as we did not find anything similar neither in Brazil nor in the international literature, and given that our community is rather divided, we think this might be an interesting exercise as to show an attempt of a quantitative picture of what is usually only guessed.

This paper is divided in four sections. Section 2 brings a brief description of the institutional background of the Brazilian Economics Academia, while the third section describes our data, our methodology and our results and the fourth brings our conclusions.

2. The institutional background

Economics was established as a separated field in Brazil in the mid-twentieth century and the first graduate programs were established a few decades after that. The expansion of Economics in Brazil is related to, in some cases, to an inflow of foreign Professors sponsored by several programs such as the Ford and the Rockefeller Foundations and to an outflow of Brazilian PhD candidates abroad, mainly to the United States (FGV, 2000).

In this more than half of a century of evolution, Brazil has successfully established a network of universities and research centers. However, the individual roles that each institution plays are not the same. Anuatti Neto (1997) argues that in the 1960s, the newly established Graduate Programs structure in Economics was a specialized one, in which

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