



Characteristics of the Members of Twelve Economic Associations: Voting, Policy Views, and Favorite Economists

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[LINK TO ABSTRACT](#)

This article offers characterization of members of twelve professional economic associations, based on a survey of economics professors in the United States.⁵ There seems to be very little literature comparing and characterizing such memberships.⁶

Previously we published an article entitled “Economics Professors’ Favorite Economic Thinkers, Journals, and Blogs (along with Party and Policy Views).” The article reports on a large-scale survey conducted in March 2010. The response rate was only 15.2 percent, but the gender ratio and party-voting ratio of the respondents give reason to believe that the set of 299 respondents is reasonably

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 5. We thank the College of Business and Global Affairs at the University of Tennessee at Martin for funding the survey, and we thank Robert Whaples for valuable feedback and Paul Mueller for valuable research assistance.
 6. Copp (1992) is based on a survey of samples of the members of the American Economic Association, the Union for Radical Political Economists, and the Association for Evolutionary Economics. The paper does not provide information that would enable comparison to our results.

representative of economics professors in the United States. Details are found in the paper (Davis et al 2011).

The survey instrument ([link](#)) included the following question:

The following list contains the names of 12 economics associations in the United States. Kindly mark your membership, both in terms of the present and for any time during the past ten years.

[Check all that apply. Please check only if the membership is in your own name (not that of an institution).]

TABLE 1. Association Membership Frequencies, of 299 respondents

	Member at present		Member any time during the past 10 years		Member at present or any time during the past 10 years	
American Economic Assoc. (AEA)	197	66%	101	34%	254	85%
Assoc. for Evolutionary Economics (AFEE)	9	3%	8	3%	14	5%
Assoc. for Private Enterprise Education (APEE)	14	5%	9	3%	20	7%
Eastern Economic Assoc. (EEA)	23	8%	49	16%	65	22%
Econometric Society (ES)	45	15%	47	16%	78	26%
Intern'l Assoc. for Feminist Economics (IAFFE)	10	3%	7	2%	15	5%
Public Choice Society (PCS)	9	3%	18	6%	27	9%
Society for the Advancement of Socio-Economics (SASE)	5	2%	4	1%	9	3%
Society for the Development of Austrian Economics (SDAE)	4	1%	1	0.3%	4	1%
Southern Economic Assoc. (SEA)	46	15%	63	21%	96	32%
Union for Radical Political Economics (URPE)	9	3%	8	3%	16	5%
Western Economic Assoc. (WEA)	34	11%	59	20%	85	28%

The numbers and percentages in the first two data columns come from the check marks that the respondent made on the survey. If we collapse those two columns into a single column, *Member at present or any time during the past 10 years*, we get the third column (which was not in the survey question). The denominator of the third column is the set of 299 respondents. In the remainder of this paper, except where stated otherwise, we use that combination response; that is, when we refer to the members of an association, we mean respondents who checked being a member “at present” or “any time during the past 10 years” or both.

We see that 85 percent of our respondents had been American Economic Association members during the preceding ten years. The next highest percentage

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is 32 percent for the Southern Economic Association. To the best of our knowledge, the survey mailing to 2000 economics professors did not have a regional bias. The next highest is 28 percent for the Western Economic Association. Then comes 26 percent for Econometrica Society, and then 22 percent for the Eastern Economic Association. There is then a big drop down to 9 percent for the Public Choice Society, and the other six have smaller percentages.⁷

Of the twelve associations, then, seven are represented by rather small numbers in our sample—27 or fewer. We believe, however, that even a sample of 14 members is helpful in revealing salient characteristics of the membership, and ten of twelve associations are represented in sample by 14 or more individuals. We report on all twelve, even the Society for Advancement of Socio-Economics (represented in the sample by nine individuals) and the Society for the Development of Austrian Economics (represented by just four individuals), but we caution the reader about the small numbers in those cases.

The voting question was as follows:

To which political party have the candidates you've voted for in the past ten years mostly belonged?

Democratic Green Libertarian Republican other

The results for the entire sample were 56.1 percent Democratic, 1.7 percent Green, 5.7 percent Libertarian, 20.7 percent Republican, with the remaining 15.8 percent being other/cannot or do not vote/no reply.⁸

As in our previous paper, we use the following party-voting index: $(\#Democrats + \#Greens) / (\#Republicans + \#Libertarians + 0.1)$. The “+ 0.1” appearing in the denominator is there to solve the problem that arises when it is otherwise zero. In reading the report that follows, when you see a party-ratio score that is wildly large, it is because there is nothing in the denominator except the 0.1.

7. We tried to obtain from each of the 12 associations its 2010 individual membership total, but succeeded with only six of them: the AEA, APEE, ES, SDAE, URPE, and WEA. Using those membership numbers and the “at present” data from our survey, we did an analysis that leads us to think that the AEA representation in our survey is very accurate to the population, that the ES is under-represented somewhat, the WEA is over-represented somewhat, and the three smaller associations are all over-represented at least somewhat. This analysis is available upon request.

8. Subsequent to publishing our 2011 article, we discovered that the party coding of one survey (#5011) was entered as Democratic when in fact the respondent's answer was Libertarian (the mismatch between the entered party coding and the policy views led us to double check). For this reason the percentages for those two parties differ very slightly from the reporting in our 2011 article—and other numbers in the 2011 paper are off slightly because of the error.

Crudely speaking, the index is the ratio of Left to Right.⁹ Using this party index with some misgivings,¹⁰ we arrive at a Left to Right ratio within the entire sample of 2.19.¹¹

The 17 policy questions took the form as shown in the sample statement below:

Higher minimum wages:

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
support strongly	support, not strongly	neutral	oppose, not strongly	oppose strongly	have no opinion

We followed the format shown in asking these 17 policy questions:

1. Higher minimum wages
2. Tighter restrictions (e.g., tariffs and quotas) on imported goods
3. Tighter requirements for the permitting of new pharmaceuticals and medical devices
4. Tighter restrictions on private parties engaging in discrimination (on the basis of race, gender, age, ethnicity, religion or sexual-orientation) against other private parties, in employment or accommodations?
5. Tighter restrictions on the buying and selling of human organs
6. Tighter workplace safety regulation (e.g., by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA))
7. Tighter air-quality and water-quality regulation (e.g., by the Env. Protection Ag. (EPA))
8. Tighter requirements on occupational licensing
9. Tighter restrictions on prostitution
10. Tighter restrictions on gambling
11. Tighter controls on immigration
12. Tighter restrictions on adult women having an abortion

9. When we use these terms in this paper, capitalizing the first letter, we mean merely these party groupings.

10. Our chief misgiving is in lumping the Libertarians with the Republicans. On the 17 policy questions, we find that the Republicans and Democrats are more alike than are the Libertarians and Republicans. Also, on three of the questions, the Democrats are meaningfully more liberal than the Republicans. But the Libertarian group is small, and there is a virtue in parsimony in reporting (as with our party index). Also, our respondents are all professors, and, in matters of the professoriate, it is well known that Democrats (along with a few Greens) dominate, and all else is periphery.

11. Regarding this value of 2.19, notice that the 5.7 percent Libertarian make this index quite different from the straight Democrat/Republican ratio, which for our sample is 2.71.

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13. Tighter restrictions on “hard” drugs such as cocaine and heroin
14. More redistribution (e.g., transfer and aid programs and tax progressivity)
15. More funding of the public school system
16. More benefits and coverage by Medicaid
17. More American military aid or presence abroad to promote democracy and the rule of law

Each policy question posits a reform that ratchets up restrictions on individual liberty or that expands tax-funded government activities. We create a *liberalism*¹² score of domain [0, 4] by scoring the responses as follows: “support strongly” was scored as 0, “support, not strongly” as 1, “neutral” as 2, “oppose, not strongly” as 3, and “oppose strongly” as 4 (and “have no opinion” as missing data, not as “neutral”). Higher scores are deemed more liberal. We are aware of the gray areas, the semantic controversies, and the other controversies (“Doesn’t abortion violate the liberty of the fetus?” “What about when immigrants support interventionist policies?” “Doesn’t the American military sometimes promote liberty?”), but we simply exercise our judgment and move on.¹³

TABLE 2. Each Association’s Party Voting Scores and Liberalism Scores

Association	N	Percent of 299	Party voting score	Liberalism score
AEA	254	85	2.14	2.29
AFEE	14	5	130.00	1.45
APEE	20	7	0.50	3.30
EEA	65	22	3.20	2.14
ES	78	26	2.70	2.26
IAPFE	15	5	116.67	1.69
PCS	27	9	0.48	3.02
SASE	9	3	7.27	1.63
SDAE	4	1	0.00	3.94
SEA	96	32	1.64	2.55
URPE	16	5	22.50	1.56
WEA	85	28	1.65	2.38
None	27	9	2.79	2.12
All	299	100	2.19	2.27

12. We use the term *liberalism* in the original or classical sense that is still revealed in the verb *to liberalize* and is still current in much of the world.

13. Liberalism scores varied substantially by party affiliation: Democrats 1.94, Greens 1.57, Libertarians 3.52, Republicans 2.71.

On the American Economic Association

The bottom row of Table 2 shows the results for all respondents. We see that the party voting and liberalism scores for the AEA are very close to those for the set of all respondents. That closeness might be unsurprising, since AEA was checked by 85 percent of the sample. It has been suggested by Klein (2006) and McEachern (2006) that the AEA is more Democratic than the profession at large; however, the present results indicate that those who have been a member during the preceding ten years are ideologically equivalent to the population of U.S. economics professors; in fact, the 45 non-members surveyed have a 2.45 voting score, putting them slightly to the Left of the members (2.14).

During a ten-year period, most any economics professor might join the AEA, if only because he or she attends the annual conference for reasons related to the economics job market. One might figure that a respondent who checked AEA membership “at present” is more likely to be an AEA faithful, so to speak, than one who checked AEA membership “during the past 10 years” but *not* “at present.”¹⁴ The liberalism score of the 197 respondents who marked “at present” was 2.32, while that of the 57 who did not mark “at present” (but did mark “during the past 10 years”) was 2.26, which would indicate that the average ‘faithful’ AEA member is very slightly more liberal than the average lapsed member, going against the speculations of Klein and McEachern. However, the party voting score for ‘faithful’ members is 2.31, which is to the Left of the lapsed members’ score (1.91). Still, that 2.31 voting score is close to the voting score of the entire sample of respondents (2.19). This study fails to support the notion that the AEA’s membership is significantly more Democratic than the population of economics professors.

It should be acknowledged that there is an important distinction between an association’s membership and its leadership.¹⁵ That distinction highlights a limitation of the present study: We are drawing out characteristics based on mere members, not leaders. In the case of the general/regional associations such as the AEA, SEA, WEA, and EEA, people often join them for reasons having little to do with what the leadership happens to be like. So it could be that their leadership has features that are not evident in the body of regular members.

14. Ideally, the two options about membership would have been neatly partitioned as follows: “at present” and “any time from ten years ago up to one year ago.” That would have given three distinct sets to compare. But we opted for an overlapping second option “any time during the past 10 years,” yielding us only two clearly distinct sets of members, because we thought it would be too tedious to ask the respondent “any time from ten years ago up to one year ago.”

The Southern, Western, Eastern, and Econometric Associations

The entire sample of economics professors had a party voting score of 2.19 and a liberalism score of 2.27, and the AEA had scores very close to those. The three regional associations show some departure. The Southern Economic Association has a party score of 1.64 and a liberalism score of 2.55, indicating that its membership leans less to the Left than does the entire sample, and the Western Economic Association has a party score of 1.65 and liberalism score of 2.38, indicating that its membership also leans less to the Left. By contrast, the Eastern Economic Association leans even more to the Left than does the general population of economics professors, with a party score of 3.20 and a liberalism score of 2.14. The Econometric Society is an association that might also be regarded as a “general” association; its party score is 2.70 and its liberalism score is 2.26.

The Evolutionary, Feminist, Socio-Economic, and Radical Associations

Four associations—the Association for Evolutionary Economics (AFEE), the International Association for Feminist Economics (IAFEE), the Society for the Advancement of Socio-Economics (SASE), and the Union for Radical Political Economics (URPE)—have a Left preponderance that goes far beyond the entire sample. None of the respondents who checked AFEE, IAFEE, or URPE mem-

15. When Klein and McEachern suggested that the AEA leaned Democratic, however, it was not chiefly the general membership that they had in mind. Although Klein (2006, 196-199) offered sparse data about AEA membership and voter registration—the drift of which our present results fail to support, or even go against—the chief focus both of Klein and of McEachern was the *leadership* of the AEA, including the editorships of the journals. McEachern (2006) provides data on campaign contributions during the 2004 election cycle. Regular members of the AEA were five times more likely to give to Democrats than to Republicans, but this might not be meaningful because only 3.8 percent of the membership gave to the Democrats. What is more significant is how that percentage climbed as one goes up the AEA pyramid: From 3.8 percent among regular members, the rate goes to 7.1 percent among *American Economic Review* authors, 10.4 percent among authors of the discretionary journals (*JEL*, *JEP*, and *AER P&P*), 14 percent among editors of those journals, and 16.2 percent among search and nominating committee members (McEachern 2006, 168-170). Meanwhile, the Republican support becomes remarkably scant. The data strongly indicates that the elites of the AEA supported the Democratic Party vastly more than the Republican Party and that the lopsidedness increases the higher up we go in the AEA structure.

bership responded merely Republican or Libertarian to the voting question, and only one SASE respondent did so. And compared to the 2.27 liberalism score for the entire sample, the liberalism scores of these four groups indicate that they are particularly interventionist: 1.45 for AFEE, 1.69 for IAFEE, 1.63 for SASE, and 1.56 for URPE. All of these scores are below the “neutral” mark of 2.00, which means that the members of these groups lean toward supporting the 17 proposals for stepping up incursions on liberty—not in every case, of course, but on the whole.

The Private Enterprise, Public Choice, and Austrian Associations

Three of the associations—the Association for Private Enterprise Education (APEE), the Public Choice Society (PCS), and the Society for the Development of Austrian Economics (SDAE)—have party scores below 1.00, which means they tilt to the Right: 0.50 for APEE, 0.48 for PCS, and 0.0 for SDAE. Only four respondents were members of the SDAE. It is important to note that among the 38 respondents who checked membership in any of those three associations, the party score is 0.47. Thus, the subset of economists who have been members in the three Right associations seems to lean to the Right only about as much as *the whole population of economics professors* leans to the Left!

As for liberalism scores, the four SDAE respondents nearly reached libertarian perfection, with a score of 3.94. The 20 APEE members scored 3.30 and the 27 PCS members 3.02. As economics is the only discipline among the humanities and social sciences for which the professoriate is not highly dominated by Left voting and corresponding policy views (Klein and Stern 2005; 2009), these three scholarly associations are probably quite exceptional among *all* humanities/social science associations for their liberalism and Right voting.

Favorite Economists of Various Ages

We also asked respondents to name their favorite economic thinkers, ranked first, second, and third, for each of four time frames. Table 4 shows for each age the three favorites of each association, according to our tallying system, which gave six points to a first-place response, five points to a second, and four points to a third. We also list in parentheses the number of pure mentions of the named individuals. In almost all cases the point-based ranking agrees with the number

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of pure mentions, but there is one (strict) exception: For AEA members' favorite economists under the age of 60, Greg Mankiw ranked slightly ahead of Daron Acemoglu, but had one less mention.¹⁶

TABLE 3. Each Association's Favorite Economic Thinkers (number of mentions)

Assn (N)	Pre-20th Cent.			20th Century – deceased		
	1st	2nd	3rd	1st	2nd	3rd
AEA (254)	Smith, Adam (193)	Ricardo, David (91)	Marshall, Alfred (60)	Keynes, J.M. (114)	Friedman, Milton (113)	Samuelson, Paul (80)
AFEE (14)	Smith, Adam (11)	Marx, Karl (7)	Mill, John Stuart (6)	Keynes, J.M. (10)	Veblen, Thorstein (7)	Galbraith, John K. (5)
APEE (20)	Smith, Adam (18)	Menger, Carl (4)	Marshall, Alfred (4)	Friedman, Milton (12)	Hayek, Friedrich (10)	Mises, Ludwig von (4)
EEA (65)	Smith, Adam (46)	Ricardo, David (26)	Mill, John Stuart (18)	Keynes, J.M. (38)	Friedman, Milton (24)	Samuelson, Paul (16)
ES (78)	Smith, Adam (56)	Ricardo, David (32)	Marshall, Alfred (17)	Keynes, J.M. (35)	Friedman, Milton (32)	Samuelson, Paul (31)
IAFFE (15)	Smith, Adam (8)	Marx, Karl (5)	Ricardo, David (5)	Keynes, J.M. (10)	Robinson, Joan (4)	Veblen, Thorstein (4)
PCS (27)	Smith, Adam (26)	Marshall, Alfred (9)	Ricardo, David (8)	Friedman, Milton (16)	Hayek, Friedrich (8)	Keynes, J.M. (7)
SASE (9)	Smith, Adam (7)	Mill, John Stuart (3)	Marx, Karl (3)	Keynes, J.M. (4)	Galbraith, John K. (3)	Polanyi, Karl (2)
SDAE (4)	Smith, Adam (4)	Menger, Carl (4)	Ricardo, David (1)	Hayek, Friedrich (4)	Mises, Ludwig von (3)	Rothbard, Murray (2)
SEA (96)	Smith, Adam (74)	Ricardo, David (34)	Mill, John Stuart (21)	Friedman, Milton (52)	Keynes, J.M. (38)	Samuelson, Paul (23)
URPE (16)	Marx, Karl (12)	Smith, Adam (12)	Ricardo, David (11)	Keynes, J.M. (13)	Robinson, Joan (5)	Galbraith, John K. (5)
WEA (85)	Smith, Adam (71)	Ricardo, David (28)	Mill, John Stuart (24)	Keynes, J.M. (40)	Friedman, Milton (38)	Samuelson, Paul (21)
All (299)	Smith, Adam (221)	Ricardo, David (106)	Marshall, Alfred (67)	Keynes, J.M. (134)	Friedman, Milton (124)	Samuelson, Paul (90)

16. Details about how we sorted out responses so as to put the responses into the proper era are found in Davis et al (2011, 133 n. 12).

TABLE 3 (cont'd). Each Association's Favorite Economic Thinkers (number of mentions)

Assn (N)	Living 60 and Older			Living Under 60		
	1st	2nd	3rd	1st	2nd	3rd
AEA (254)	Becker, Gary (58)	Arrow, Kenneth (39)	Solow, Robert (31)	Krugman, Paul (56)	Mankiw, Greg (20)	Acemoglu, Daron (21)
AFEE (14)	Davidson, Paul (2)	Sen, Amartya (2)	Daly, Herman (2)	Krugman, Paul (4)	Galbraith, James K. (3)	Mankiw, Greg (1)
APEE (20)	Buchanan, James (8)	Coase, Ronald (8)	Tullock, Gordon (4)	Easterly, William (5)	Shleifer, Andrei (3)	Cowen, Tyler (3)
EEA (65)	Arrow, Kenneth (11)	Becker, Gary (10)	Stiglitz, Joseph (10)	Krugman, Paul (17)	Mankiw, Greg (6)	Levitt, Steve (5)
ES (78)	Becker, Gary (19)	Arrow, Kenneth (17)	Solow, Robert (15)	Krugman, Paul (15)	Acemoglu, Daron (6)	Mankiw, Greg (4)
IAFFE (15)	Arrow, Kenneth (4)	Stiglitz, Joseph (3)	Ferber, Marianne (2)	Folbre, Nancy (5)	Krugman, Paul (2)	Galbraith, James K. (2)
PCS (27)	Buchanan, James (11)	Coase, Ronald (10)	Becker, Gary (8)	Acemoglu, Daron (4)	Easterly, William (4)	Shleifer, Andrei (3)
SASE (9)	Stiglitz, Joseph (2)	Sen, Amartya (2)	Klein, Lawrence (1)	Krugman, Paul (3)	Frank, Robert (2)	Folbre, Nancy (1)
SDAE (4)	Coase, Ronald (2)	Kirzner, Israel (2)	Reisman, George (1)	Shleifer, Andrei (2)	Easterly, William (2)	Stringham, Edward (1)
SEA (96)	Becker, Gary (31)	Coase, Ronald (15)	Arrow, Kenneth (10)	Krugman, Paul (18)	Mankiw, Greg (13)	Levitt, Steve (10)
URPE (16)	Sen, Amartya (5)	Stiglitz, Joseph (4)	Becker, Gary (3)	Krugman, Paul (5)	Galbraith, James K. (4)	Folbre, Nancy (3)
WEA (85)	Becker, Gary (25)	Arrow, Kenneth (14)	Coase, Ronald (12)	Krugman, Paul (19)	Mankiw, Greg (12)	Levitt, Steve (12)
All (299)	Becker, Gary (65)	Arrow, Kenneth (41)	Solow, Robert (35)	Krugman, Paul (60)	Mankiw, Greg (22)	Acemoglu, Daron (22)

In our paper on the favorites of the entire sample, we noted the towering place of Adam Smith in the pre-20th century category (especially when place points are awarded, as in Davis et al 2011, 132). The present analysis shows that appreciation for Smith also cuts across associational lines: Smith takes eleven first places and one second place.

The personages selected provide valuable guidance to the character of members of each association. Here we shall not treat the general associations, for the

results mostly mirror those of the entire sample, which are treated in our previous paper (Davis et al 2011). But we pause to comment on the other associations.

All four of the highly leftist associations (AFEE, IAFEE, SASE, and URPE) have Karl Marx in the pre-20th century category, and in the 20th-century-deceased category variously strong showings for J.M. Keynes, Thorstein Veblen, John K. Galbraith, and Joan Robinson. For the over-60 living category, two standouts are Amartya Sen and Joseph Stiglitz; and notable showings in the under-60 living category are for Paul Krugman, James K. Galbraith, and Nancy Folbre.

Likewise, the personages selected by the three liberal associations (APEE, PCS, and SDAE) represent such an outlook—notably, variously, Friedrich Hayek, Milton Friedman, Ludwig von Mises, James Buchanan, Ronald Coase, William Easterly, and Andre Shleifer.

Membership Intersections

Table 4 shows the percentage of the association listed at the top of the column belonging to the association listed in the row. The results show relatively high intersection rates among the leftist associations, and among the liberal associations.

TABLE 4. Percentage of the column association belonging to the row association

	All	AEA	AFEE	APEE	EEA	ES	IAFFE	PCS	SASE	SDAE	SEA	URPE	WEA
N	299	254	14	20	65	78	15	27	9	4	96	16	85
AEA	85%		86%	90%	92%	95%	93%	96%	89%	100%	95%	100%	92%
AFEE	5%	5%		5%	11%	1%	13%	0%	44%	0%	2%	31%	4%
APEE	7%	7%	7%		9%	5%	0%	33%	0%	100%	13%	6%	6%
EEA	22%	24%	50%	30%		24%	47%	19%	33%	0%	28%	69%	27%
ES	26%	29%	7%	20%	29%		13%	15%	11%	0%	26%	13%	31%
IAFFE	5%	6%	14%	0%	11%	3%		4%	11%	0%	3%	25%	5%
PCS	9%	10%	0%	45%	8%	5%	7%		0%	50%	15%	6%	14%
SASE	3%	3%	29%	0%	5%	1%	7%	0%		0%	2%	25%	2%
SDAE	1%	2%	0%	20%	0%	0%	0%	7%	0%		4%	6%	1%
SEA	32%	36%	14%	60%	42%	32%	20%	52%	22%	100%		19%	59%
URPE	5%	6%	36%	5%	17%	3%	27%	4%	44%	25%	3%		2%
WEA	28%	31%	21%	25%	35%	33%	27%	44%	22%	25%	52%	13%	

Concluding Remarks: Up with Characterology

Today, major books such as Daniel Kahneman's *Thinking, Fast and Slow* and Jonathan Haidt's *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion* exemplify a trend toward awareness of the dominating role of subterranean sensibilities, or what David Hume might call the passions. A candid understanding of human psychology leads one into a study of character. Important features of character include political-party orientation and policy views, as well as admired figures. In this paper we have used such variables to characterize the members of twelve economic associations. For reasons articulated by Gunnar Myrdal (1969), we believe that science and ethics are advanced when individuals are open about their character and perspective and informed about those whom they read or listen to.

Appendices

At the survey homepage ([link](#)), one can download the survey instrument ([link](#)), the listing of 300 economics departments ([link](#)), and the Excel files for tables shown in this paper ([link](#)). The raw data for this paper are available upon request and will be posted online in September 2012.

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