



The Quality of Resource Economics: Academic Politics vs. Scholarly Productivity

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The Quality of Resource Economics at UCR
Academic Politics vs. Scholarly Productivity
Summary of a Statement by Mason Gaffney
January 23, 1984 (rev. February 3, 1984)

SUMMARY:

The External Review Committee Report (Brazier et al.) on Graduate work in Economics at UCR refers critically to the faculty and program in Resource Economics at UCR, and recommends making greater use of 5 economists on campus outside the Department, to the end of upgrading quality. The White Report, endorsed by the Graduate Council, echoes and magnifies this theme, emphasizing the "excellence" of the outside economists. It recommends salvaging a "respectable" graduate program in Economics to be centered around them.

The rump report signed by Hanna and Vaux of the Summer Committee disparages the resource economists in the Department in the harshest terms. To control them Hanna-Vaux broach the idea of putting outside economists in power over them but reject even this as inadequate to salvage something of value from such low-quality material. Finally the Graduate Council, endorsing all the foregoing, issues an open invitation to propose new graduate economics programs, evidently with outside economists of high quality as the essential core.

To evaluate these judgments and proposals, data are presented here on citation productivity. They offer little support to the Graduate Council position, but rather show Departmental personnel to be of high quality relative to their assailants and relative to the allegedly superior outside economists. The issue posed for UCR is straightforward. Shall programs and personnel be advanced on the basis of productivity or academic politics?

The Quality of Resource Economics at UCR
Academic Politics vs. Scholarly Productivity
A statement by Mason Gaffney, January 23, 1984
Revised February 3, 1984

As most readers of this statement are aware, Economics at UCR has been under review since January, 1983, beginning with a Report from an External Review Committee headed by Harvey Brazier. Resource Economics in the Department of Economics has been referred to critically or slightly at several stages in this review. The present statement marshals the several criticisms and associated suggestions, and then produces some objective evidence that may have been overlooked.

The Brazier Report contains the following aspersions and suggestions.

1. The work of Gaffney, (along with Kogiku and Sherman) is said to be devoted mainly to exposition of existing ideas (p.2). In contrast, other senior faculty and junior faculty receive specific plaudits.

2. In reference to Baritelle, Moffitt, Knapp, Gardner, Vaux, Davidson, Edmunds, Shulman, and Wood, we find this suggestion:

"Particularly because the Department is so small it is unfortunate that greater use is not made of this potentially rich and productive resource." (p.7)

For various reasons, the statement applies effectively only to the first five of those.

"We believe that the Department's claims regarding the quality of its offerings in Resource Economics are currently not justifiable. The program could recover at least some of its former strength if ways could be found to make substantially greater use of economists on the campus who now play only a small role, or none at all, in the Department." (p.13)

"Finally, we recommend that means be found to establish a more productive role within the Department for the 8 or 9 professional economists on campus who are not now contributing to the Department's doctoral program. Working

"Groups" might be established, through workshops, offering of jointly taught courses, and other means. This approach is seen as a means particularly of re-establishing a program in Resource Economics of the highest quality."
(p.15)

The White Report (Review Committee of the Graduate Council)

1. The White Committee picks up these ideas and moves them to front and center.

"Since ... UCR has a substantial number of persons with background in (economics), we urge the central campus administration to forge a strong interdepartmental "group" program in resource economics with those faculty and any from the department capable of working with them."(p.1)

The burden here is placed squarely on members of Economics to be capable of working with those outside the Department, but not the other way around. This viewpoint is repeated later.*

"The team felt some of the department's previous strength in resources could be recovered in this area if 'ways could be found to make substantially greater use of economists on campus who now play only a small role or none at all in the department.'(p.13) ...without a substantial contribution of outside resource economists the department could not claim this as an excellence equivalent to political economy."
(p.8)

"There is too little cooperation between department resource economists and those in Natural and Agricultural Sciences and elsewhere on campus, especially if the campus wants to have an excellent resource economics program."
(p.11)

"With the exception of Ransom the full professors are not doing 'fundamental research aimed at uncovering (sic) new knowledge' but are engaged in the dissemination of existing ideas." (p.12)

*Concerning the nature of the burden placed on Economics, see below under The Economics Graduate Students Reply to White.

" Thus there is the possibility that a respectable graduate program could be salvaged from non-departmental economists and any from the department capable of working with them. We recommend additionally that the campus administration explore the possibility of finding such a group of economists on campus and establishing a UC quality graduate program."(p.17; emphasis supplied)

This is White's parting word. It is quite clear that the present personnel are not quite "respectable", but some of them might pass muster if they could benefit from the admixture of the other economists on campus to raise the average quality and respectability.

The underlined portion must be read in conjunction with the Graduate Council's final recommendation, q.v., and the observations on Vaux, q.v.

The Economics Graduate Students' Reply to White

Our otherwise loyal graduate students seem to accept the judgment against resource economics:

"D. We agree here as well with the Graduate Council subcommittee. There is no question that the previous stature of the Resource Economics program has been diminished in the last several years. This is, however, another problem that could be rectified fairly quickly if better use were made of the resource economists on campus who are not members of our department." (p.14)

Although we have no documentation of this, it is relevant to note here that some graduate students have quoted some of the outside economists as saying they would not consider working with economists inside the Department, and as having criticized Departmental resource economists on "ideological" and perhaps other grounds. It should be obvious that that attitude expressed by outside economists has posed and will pose an obstacle to Departmental economists seeking to work with outsiders.

So far as we are aware, Departmental economists have not expressed any such attitude toward outside economists, but only a positive interest in their work and findings.

Hanna and Vaux of the Summer Committee

Hanna and Vaux of the Summer Review Committee judge the Departmental Resource Economists in the harshest terms. We invite particular attention to the role of Henry J. Vaux, Jr. for the following reasons.

1) The case of Vaux is cited by Brazer to support an allegation that personnel departures from Economics "have been inspired at least in part by the Department's internecine battles." Brazer says that Vaux gave up a joint appointment (p.4), by implication for this reason. One may wonder if a person who gave up a joint appointment in Economics because of what he perceived as "internecine battles" should have been named as a judge of its quality and an arbiter of its destinies.

One may also wonder about the hypocrisy of persons (and Vaux is not alone) who launch internecine attacks on their fellows at UCR on the pretext that their fellows must be punished for their propensity to have internecine battles.

2) Vaux is a former student of Brazer, for whom Brazer inquired most solicitously.

3) Vaux was the last person to see Brazer when, after official duties were done at UCR, the old friends took dinner together. Vaux may well be, therefore, chief among those "other economists on campus" referred to on p.1 of Brazer as a source of insights into the Department of Economics.

4) Vaux is the senior person in resource economics at UCR outside the Department of Economics, and the logical repository of authority which it is proposed to take away from Economics.

5) Dean Warren has stated that senior faculty in the Department are lacking in "credibility". His appointment of Vaux to the summer review committee indicates that Vaux possesses the credibility with UCR deans that Department members lack.

6) Vaux was promoted to full professor in Soils at about the same time that he issued his summer report.

7) As a newly minted full professor in a NAGS department Vaux presumably represents the standard of UC quality that NAGS members, who were heavily represented on the Council that condemned Economics, feel to be lacking in the Department of Economics.

8) Vaux is the only member of the summer committee who is an outside economist and a Senate member. Presumably his opinions carried extra weight with his colleagues and with the Graduate Council, which acted on them immediately.

9) In the Hanna-Vaux dual rump report which condemns Economics and its Resource Economists most truculently Vaux is the key figure, since Hanna does not know the resource economists and is not in their profession.

10) Vaux has worked closely with Guy Phillips and Adam Rose, both resource economists manques at UCR, both of whom have been quoted as being bitterly critical of UCR resource economists in the Department.

Hanna and Vaux "are unable to identify fields which the Department can adequately staff and within which students can obtain UC quality training in depth." (p.2) "We are not convinced that the department can offer either field (Money or Resources), even with FTE subventions." It would be hard to frame a more complete condemnation -- even new people cannot offset the damage done by present faculty. Evidently present faculty not only dilute, they contaminate.

Hanna and Vaux continue,

"... three of the five tenured faculty no longer appear to be on the cutting edge of academic research. ... we remain unconvinced that senior faculty are capable of responding to and carrying out suggestions for curricular development."

"Finally, we think that, even if it were possible to specify one or more fields of concentration, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to monitor the quality of course offerings."

Hanna and Vaux go on to broach a unilateral control mechanism:

"ExRev (Brazer) indicates that non-departmental economists

could enrich the graduate program. ... in order to extend the right to vote and to influence departmental policy, a sine qua non of appointment, appointees would need to be given fractional positions in Economics; in order to protect these individuals from senior faculty in Economics, such appointments would require non-reciprocal voting rights (emphasis supplied), with members of Economics excluded from voting on the new appointees (sic) personnel cases. ... there are no more than three tenured ladder (sic) faculty who might participate in the program (Edmunds, Vaux, and perhaps Auerbach). This group is neither large enough to change departmental policy effectively nor to offer protection to junior faculty nor to create a substantial Resources contingent in the department." (p.5)

That proposal speaks volumes about the mindset and intent of its authors and their patrons. First, it deals with Resource Economists specifically. Second, it presumes a need to control Departmental policy from outside, and to change it. Third, it assumes that it would be desirable to strip senior faculty in Economics of voting rights in personnel cases (by implication the reference is to the senior faculty member in Resource Economics, Gaffney).

However, even that is not enough. Even with Gaffney in chains, the outsiders with their non-reciprocal voting rights would not be enough to change policy, protect junior faculty, or create a substantial Resources contingent. Therefore the case is hopeless:

"... the Department of Economics as presently constituted cannot mount a UC quality graduate program."(p.6)

The picture drawn here is a senior faculty of incompetents whose work must be monitored and yet cannot be, and of monsters who must not be allowed to vote: everyone requires protection from them. In addition it is said that Gaffney and Hall (and Kogiku, some of whose work is in Resource Economics), even with the addition of the senior faculty specified plus whatever junior faculty, are still too few to offer work in Resource Economics. The implication is that they not only fail to count positively, they must be offset, and even that is not enough: their contamination is so virulent that termination is the only solution.

This is a harsh judgment indeed, both as to quality and character. The

basis and substantiation of the opinion are not given; but Hanna and Vaux cannot be accused of equivocating. Professional courtesy and diplomacy are cast away. Their damnation of Resource Economics is total, and extends to persons as well as practises.

The proposal for non-reciprocal voting rights seems to follow up on Garbarino's Addendum A to the Brazer Report. Garbarino called for changing the "political orientation of the Department faculty" (emphasis supplied), and to that end to have "some structure that will provide influence for other affected campus units over personnel actions of the Department ..." (Brazer, p.17)

While Graduate Council members occasionally ask informally to be dissociated from the evident invasion of academic freedom, the Council consistently includes it, in its official statements, among the documents on which its decisions are based. Hanna-Vaux supply a structure, and the Council adds Hanna-Vaux to the list of documents on which its decision is based.

It is widely believed that Garbarino's reference was to the alleged "Marxists" in Economics, but Hanna-Vaux associate their proposal specifically with Resource Economists. The evidence here might suggest that it is the politics of the Resource Economists that Hanna-Vaux are concerned with. (Our "Marxists" seldom engage in politics. Gaffney does, and his politics are adverse to some clients of the Experiment Station and patrons of the UCR Foundation.)

Whalen of the Summer Committee

Whalen's report says that Political Economy should be the only area of specialization available to advanced students. No reasons are given, but the rejection of work in Resource Economics is evident. Presumably Whalen is guided by the opinions of Vaux, the only resource economist on the Committee to present such an opinion.

Ransom of the Summer Committee

Ransom reports the following of the deliberations of the Summer Review Committee.

"...the argument for termination of the program stems from

a very negative evaluation of the senior staff in economics. I feel this accounts for the very negative view generally that the Report (Hanna-Vaux) takes in addressing the department's problems. 'Yes, but what would we do about professor X?' was a persistent question as we explored various options -- and discarded each one. Staffing, as opposed to programatic (sic) considerations, dominated the discussion."

Ransom seems to be saying that the views of Hanna-Vaux were personal condemnations of senior faculty, which is to say of Gaffney in this case. Since Hanna does not know Gaffney, it boils down to a personal attack on Gaffney by Vaux. There is more than a little irony and hypocrisy in UCR people's waging an aggressive internecine war on Economics at the same time they blame the victim for its alleged habit of internecine warfare.

Ransom's own proposals are designed to "allow the department to explore its present strength in political economy." There is no mention of resource economics.

The Graduate Council

Finally the Graduate Council concludes:

"Although the Graduate Council is recommending the termination of the Graduate Program in Economics because it fails to be of UC quality, we believe that there should be a UC quality economics graduate program at the UCR. Consequently we remain open to any proposals for new economics graduate programs." (10/13/83, p.3)

That would appear to be an invitation to those outside Economics. Reading that in conjunction with the White Report, endorsed by the Council, it is clear that those outside Economics are to be the essential core, and present Economics faculty are to be admitted only on sufferance, if at all.

Very well, Resource Economics at UCR seems to be condemned on every hand, and to be in the hands of incompetents. It could only be rescued, if at all, by fortifying its weak staff with an infusion of superior faculty from outside Economics. Thus speak the academic statesmen from the vantage of their superior quality.

To test this hypothesis I have consulted the I.S.I. Indexes of Citations of scholarly work. There are three: for Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities, and Natural Sciences. I do not allege that the raw numbers of citations reported here are a perfect measure of scholarship, obviously. They are one index to visibility in the scholarly literature, and visibility is one index to quality. There is a long list of caveats in the Appendix which will follow this statement, and show the details of the work. Here, to meet a deadline, I simply give totals of raw numbers of citations as reported in the Indexes.

Note that the Indexes include citations to books. The works where the citations appear are journals; but the items cited include books. I mention this to dispel what I gather is a frequent misconception.

The individuals whose citation records are reported are arranged in four groups. The faculty of economics; the external review committee; the UCR resource economists outside the Department of Economics; and models of UC quality. The last group is chosen from those who have condemned Economics for falling below UC quality. Economics has requested its critics to define UC quality, but they have declined. It seems reasonable to assume therefore that they are acting to prevent people of low quality from diluting the high standard which they honor and guard and of course represent.

I. Citation productivity: tenured faculty of economics + D.C.Hall, 1965-82

Name	SS	AH	NS
M.M.Gaffney	265	0	66
D.C.Hall	34	0	38
K.C.Kogiku	30	0	2
V.D.Lippit	37	1	0

R.L.Ransom	181	71	4
H.J.Sherman	204	8	2

II. Citation productivity: the External Review Committee, 1965-82

Name	SS	AH	NS
H.E.Brazer	231	2	7
J.W.Garbarino	204	0	12
J.G.Gurley	471*	8	11
J.E.Roemer§	70	5	2

*Plus or minus 30. Where numbers were large, estimates were used.

§Self-citations were subtracted here because they were a large share of the total in the case of Roemer.

III. Citation productivity: UCR Resource Economists domiciled outside of Department of Economics, 1965-82

Name	SS	AH	NS
J.L.Baritelle	4	-*	2
P.D.Gardner	1	-	3
K.C.Knapp	2	-	1
L.J.Moffitt	1	-	4
H.J.Vaux,Jr.§	8	0	6

*AH citations were not looked up, because of the low probability that there would be any.

§Care was taken to separate the citations to H.J.Vaux Jr. from citations to H.J.Vaux Sr. who is a well-known writer on forest economics.

IV. Citation productivity: models of UC quality, 1965-82

Name	SS	AH	NS
C.F.Cranor¶	2 or 1	1§	0
M.D.Reagan	167	3	15
R.Hanna	0	12	0

H.J.Vaux,Jr.	8	0	6
R.S.White*			

¶One of the two SS citations is simply to "Cranor", with no initials given, and it is not clear from the title if the writer is C.F.Cranor. To be safe we have credited this to C.F.Cranor in the text. The difference is trivial in absolute terms, although large in percentage terms.

§Cranor's self-citation is not counted.

*Data on White are still in process. It is time-consuming to process these citations because several persons publish under the initials R.S.White, and the ISI Citation Indexes list citations by initials only. There also are many self-citations in this case, complicated by multiple authorships with White listed last.

A few tentative inferences may be drawn from the data.

1. A thesis of Brazer is that the "quality of offerings" in Resource Economics in the Department of Economics is weak, and would be strengthened by blending in outside economists to the end of "re-establishing a program in Resource Economics of the highest quality."

The records in Tables I and III do not appear to give strong support to the thesis. Gaffney and Hall average 202 citations; the 5 outside economists average 6 apiece, or about 3% of the Gaffney-Hall average. Of course the quantity of offerings could be increased, but Brazer's reference is to quality.

2. The working assumption of Dean Warren and the Graduate Council is that Professors Hanna and Vaux are qualified to judge the work of the Department of Economics, presumably because of their higher standing in the professions.

The records in Tables I and IV do not appear to give strong support to the assumption. The damnation of Gaffney and Sherman by Hanna and Vaux seems particularly open to question. Gaffney and Sherman average 272 citations. Hanna and Vaux average 13, or about 5% as much.

We wonder if those of lesser attainments are competent to condemn those of greater.

Here we must enter a strong caveat about interdisciplinary comparisons. The nature of the professional literature in some fields is more productive of citations than others. In the laboratory sciences, for example, citations are many times more frequent than in the writing disciplines. It may be then that Hanna's comparative record is better or worse than the raw numbers indicate.

But the records of Vaux and Gaffney are directly comparable. They publish in the same fields, and often on the same topic, water economics. Gaffney has 331 citations total; Vaux has 14, about 4% of the Gaffney standard. Perhaps we should not add SS citations and NS citations, but take them separately. In SS Gaffney outdoes Vaux 33 to 1; in NS by 11 to 1.

3. Table IV gives a new meaning to the expression "UC quality". C.F.Cranor may be taken as a model of UC quality. Cranor was appointed by his peers on the Committee on Committees to serve on the prestigious Graduate Council, whose task it is to protect the quality of UCR graduate programs. Then he was elected by his peers on the Council itself to be their Chair. He also serves as UCR's representative to the systemwide Coordinating Committee on Graduate Affairs.

It was Cranor who signed the Graduate Council's termination Resolution of June 10, 1983, endorsing White's charge that Economics is not of UC quality. It is widely reported that Cranor has led the internecine assault on Economics because its low quality is unworthy of a UC campus whose standards he venerates, guards proudly, and of course represents. He and his peers on the Graduate Council move in an ambience of such high quality that he, as Chair, did not even find it appropriate to waste the time of quality people hearing from the faculty of Economics during the period when his Council was trying and condemning Economics. Here is clearly a worthy paragon and exemplar of "UC quality", the very type of Luke 18:10.

Everyone on the faculty of Economics appears to meet or exceed Cranor's standard of 3 citations in the period 1965-82. Gaffney, the senior person in the program in Resource Economics meets the Cranor standard and exceeds it by 10,933%.

A higher standard would prevail were we to give Cranor credit for his self-citation. This would raise his AH citations by 100%, from 1 to 2; and his total citations by 33.3%, from 3 to 4. In that event, Gaffney would exceed the Cranor standard only by 8,175%.

A comparison may also be made with the record of M.D.Reagan. This record is exceeded only by three of the Economics faculty, those of comparable seniority. The excess of their mean records over Reagan's is only 45%, an excess which may not be significant when dealing with raw data. It is rather the similarity which is significant. Senior faculty in Economics are not obviously inferior, *prima facie*, to the distinguished Professor Reagan.

The record of R. Hanna falls between those of Reagan and Cranor. With 12 citations he is rather closer to the latter.

4. Table II indicates the External Review Committee to be of quality averaging about the same as Gaffney, Ransom and Sherman. Gurley appears to be better known, Brazer and Garbarino about the same, and Roemer less well known. The data suggest that the Committee should be heeded with interest and respect; but not treated as superior to our own Economists. In particular it seems a bit presumptuous of these brief visitors to pass fine judgments in a few hours or moments on the work of several economists, including some whose records are comparable or superior to their own.

In conclusion, the issue posed for UCR seems quite straightforward: are people and programs to be judged on the basis of scholarship and productivity or on the basis of academic politics? The argument against the latter, even from the viewpoint of successful practitioners, is that it is a negative-sum game where one advances his career by climbing over better people and downgrading the institution on whose stature we all depend. Productivity in contrast is a positive-sum game where people advance their careers by adding to the stature of the institution as a whole in the process of adding to the sum of human knowledge.