Quality vs Quantity: What Does Matter More for Tenure in Economics?

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Introduction

An assistant professor in any academic research institution always faces a tradeoff between quality and quantity of publications because tenure clock is generally fixed in a window of 6 to 7 years. That’s why we investigate to what extent the quality and total volume of publication affect the tenure outcome decision. Using data from the CVs of academic economists from the top 96 Ph.D-granting economics departments in the US, we find that the total number of publications does not affect the successful tenure promotion. In contrast, the quality publication defined as the Top 5 or the Top 20 economics journal publications significantly increase the probability of tenure acceptance. Estimating the heterogeneous impact over time, we find that the marginal impact of quality publication on tenure decision increase about 0.1 in post-2000 because publishing in the Top 5 has become harder since the last two decades.

Figure 1: Tenure Acceptance Rate in First Attempt by Employed School Rank

Data and Results

We construct a unique dataset by using the CVs of all assistant professors who were up for tenure from 1984-2017 at the top 96 Ph.D-granting economics departments in the US. The data include individuals’ complete academic work histories, where and when they received their Ph.D., their primary research field and their number of publications. We also collect information on gender, year of Ph.D., the number of publications during the Ph.D. and the year and institution at which they first received tenure. After excluding 426 faculty members who either did not upload their CVs on the university’s website or did not have sufficient information in their CVs, our final sample size is 1,090.

Model Specification

To estimate the impact of quality publications on the tenure outcome decision, we run the following linear regression model:

$$
Y_{it} = \alpha + \beta_0 \times n_{it} + \beta_1 X_{it} + \epsilon_{it}
$$

where $n_{it}$ is a set of specific range of publications. We have used the following four specific range of publications: (i) 1-6, (ii) 7-10, (iii) more than 10, and (iv) more than median.

Table 1: The Impact of Quality Publications on the Tenure Acceptance in First Attempt

Table 2: Estimating Different Quantity of Publications on the Tenure Acceptance in First Attempt

Conclusion

- This study shows that there is no trade-off between quality and quantity of publication because only quality publications affect the successful tenure promotion in the top 96 ranked economics departments in the US.
- The Top 5 or the Top 20 ranked journal publications increase the probability of tenure acceptance by 0.16 to 0.17, and other publications have no significant impact on tenure outcome.
- We show that since 2000 the marginal impact of quality publication has increased about 0.3 compared to the period 1984-1999 because the Top 5 journal acceptance rate is decreasing since last two decades.