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*The Making of an Economist* expands upon a *Journal of Economic Perspectives* article that the authors published under the same title in the Fall of 1987. In addition to the original article, which appears as Chapter 2, the authors have added an introductory chapter with some useful data on the economics profession, a chapter with further results related to the published article, four chapters of conversations with students at major graduate schools, (MIT, Harvard, Columbia and Chicago), a chapter by Klamer interpreting the results, and a chapter by Colander interpreting the results.

The survey and (especially) the interviews lend themselves to multiple interpretations. Even those more sympathetic to the current state of the profession can find much

here that is interesting. Klamer and Colander note, for example, that George Stigler was heartened to read the confirmation that Chicago students really are different from students at other graduate schools in their lack of cynicism about the profession.

In one of the more dramatic portions of the survey, the authors asked students to rate seven characteristics on the basis of how important the characteristic was for success in the economics profession. A majority of the students thought that “being smart in the sense of being good at problem solving” and “excellence in mathematics” were very important to success. While a small minority thought “having a broad knowledge of the economics literature” and “having a thorough knowledge of the economy” were very important. In the interviews the students do a lot of complaining about graduate education (except the Chicago students). Some of the complaining is about broad issues, such as the importance of math, and some is about narrow issues, such as the Columbia students’ comments on the scarcity of problem sets in their program. The authors believe that “...the interviews suggested a definite tension, frustration, and cynicism that, in our view, went beyond the normal graduate student blues” [1990, 18].

A finding that will surprise some is that the graduate students express widely differing views on some important, basic policy issues. For example, 70 percent of the Chicago students strongly agree with the statement that “a minimum wage increases unemployment among young and unskilled workers” while only 15 percent of the Harvard students strongly agree. At Chicago, 66 percent of the students strongly agree that “tariffs and import quotas reduce general economic welfare” while at Harvard only 20 percent strongly agree.

As an aid to interpreting the survey (and especially the interviews) the authors should have provided more information on whether the participants were a random sample of all students in the population. In his interpretation, Klamer indicates [1990, 176] that graduate school was more exciting during the Keynesian revolution just after World War II. He cites as evidence biographical statements by some Nobel prize winning economists. But if an earlier Klamer and Colander had conducted a similar survey and interviews during the Keynesian revolution, would the future Nobel prize winners have participated? Or would they have been so excited about the intellectual adventure of their studies that they would not have found time to answer questions from those known to be skeptical about the current direction of the profession? It seems reasonable to suppose that those participating in the Klamer and Colander project would disproportionately be those who are unhappy (and hence inclined to be reflective) about their experience.

The authors are surely correct when they recognize that the fundamental value of their work is to give the reader a glimpse of the oral communication that is essential to understanding modern day economics. The authors see in their survey and interviews an indictment of the economics profession. They find students who want the process of doing economics to be more intellectually challenging and the content of economics to be more relevant to policy.

In their separate concluding chapters the authors emphasize different aspects of the study. Klamer mainly summarizes and generalizes (albeit with sadness) the results, while Colander comes out swinging (albeit with little hope of success) on how economics

ought to be done. One of the big surprises of the study for Klammer was the extent of diversity across different graduate schools. One dimension of diversity is in students' career ambitions. He suggests that the students want (by varying degrees) to become intellectuals, social activists and teachers. Instead they are socialized into becoming what Klammer labels as "the academic professional." The Chicago students are different here too. They avoid the cynicism of students at other schools because they believe that they really are intellectuals, fighting a lonely, tough-minded battle for the truth. (On the picky side, Klammer [1990, 177] mistakenly identifies the economics department at Chicago as being in the Graduate School of Business, instead of in the Division of the Social Sciences.)

In Colander's concluding chapter, he contrasts the positivist methodology of the economics profession with his own "sociological" methodology. His account calls to mind the writings of Don McCloskey on rhetoric. Those who object to McCloskey are apt to object to Colander for similar reasons. I find the critical portion of both authors to be engaging and usually on the mark. What causes anxiety is the lack of a constructive methodology. McCloskey and Colander come uncomfortably close to the "anything goes" methodology of Paul Feyerabend's *Against Method* (with which McCloskey has explicitly expressed sympathy).

The authors note that in response to their original 1987 article, a Commission of the American Economic Association surveyed American graduate students with the aim of assessing the current state of graduate education in economics. The authors believe that "for such a committee to find something egregiously wrong with graduate training would be about as likely as the American Bar Association condemning the law school experience or the American Medical Association severely criticizing the medical school experience. It's possible, but we wouldn't bet on it" [1990, xv]. At the 1989 AEA meetings in Atlanta, the Commission presented its preliminary findings. I attended the packed session. Lee Hansen presented the main discussion paper. Committee members Alan Blinder, Claudia Goldin and T. Paul Schultz presented more informal comments on the commission's preliminary findings, as did Robert Solow who is not a member of the Commission. (The edited version of Hansen's discussion paper and the comments of other session participants appear in the May 1990 issue of the *AER* under the section heading "The AEA Commission on Graduate Education in Economics".)

Klammer was in the audience near the front on one side of the room, Colander was near the front on the other. I was surprised to hear that the preliminary Commission results, as well as most of the interpretation, seemed largely supportive of the Klammer and Colander results. In the Commission study, students and faculty alike seemed to agree that the skills most useful for important academic work (skills like creativity and critical judgment) were much less emphasized in graduate school than were mathematical skills. My memory is that only Solow defended the profession on this issue. His defense was that, sure, creativity and critical judgment matter most, but nobody knows how to teach those. He claimed that mathematical puzzle solving, though less important, was both important and teachable. Lee Hansen disagreed with Solow, suggesting that methods exist to encourage creativity and critical judgment (presumably some of the methods Hansen talks about in his "What Knowledge Is Most Worth Knowing—For Economics Majors".)

When the discussion was opened to the floor, I had the feeling that Klamer and Colander had been primed for a strong response, but had little to respond to. Whether the discipline will change is another matter. We have no good theory about how disciplines prosper or decline. My own guess is that abstract suggestions that the discipline become more policy-oriented and less mathematical are likely to fail. Any changes will come in the form of concrete suggestions for changing the institutions of the discipline. These might take the form of increasing the importance of courses in the curriculum that require writing (such as history of economic thought and economic history). Or it might take the form of double blind-refereeing at the major journals to increase the openness of the profession to alternative approaches. Whatever the outcome, Klamer and Colander have done the discipline a service by focusing important concerns in a manner both thoughtful and stimulating.

#### REFERENCES

- Hansen, L.** What Knowledge is Most Worth Knowing — For Economics Majors. *American Economic Review*, May 1986, 149-52.
- Hansen, L.** The AEA Commission on Graduate Education in Economics. *American Economic Review*, May 1990, 437-50.

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