A Retrospective Look at *Business Economics*

By Bruce Kratofil*

The Historical Index of Business Economics (BE) is an author and subject index reflecting the first twenty-nine years of publication. Examining it for clues as to the evolution of BE, one can see the change to a more qualitative, "magazine" style journal. Trends in the subject matter are examined, including a stronger international viewpoint, as well as the background of the contributors.

THE *Historical Index of Business Economics* has just been updated through 1992, reflecting the first twenty-nine years of publication. In preparing this index, it was apparent that *Business Economics* has gone through many changes in both design and focus over time. This article will review some of the trends in *BE's* history, and show how it has changed over the years.[1]

Much of this change can be attributed to the development of NABE itself, and also the differing interests and perspectives of the editors and editorial board. The first issue was published in the summer of 1965, six years after the formation of NABE itself. Before this, NABE published a newsletter similar to the present-day *NABE News*. However, many members felt that NABE needed a more professional, in-depth publication for its membership. In the first issue of *BE*, NABE President George James wrote that he hoped that the journal would give business economists "an exchange of view,. . .a forum for the discussion of common problems. . .and exhibit our professional thinking to our peers and our management, as well as our academic counterparts."

The first editor, and one of the leaders in the formation of the new publication, was William Chartener of Goldman, Sachs & Co., who served from 1965 to 1966. The other editors have been: Jack L. McCroskey, the University of Denver, 1967-68; Morris Cohen, Long Island University, 1969-72; David L. Williams, Acme-Cleveland Corporation, 1973-75; William J. Brown, Northern Illinois University, 1976-81; Morris Cohen, Morris Cohen & Associates, 1981-1983; Max Mozer, of Virginia Commonwealth University, 1983-1985; and since 1985, Edmund A. Mennis, Consultant to Investment Management.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, there was considerable movement toward making *BE* more of a refereed, academic-type journal. To complement this, the editors during this period were mostly academic economists, and articles were more theoretical and quantitative during this period. However, this trend was reversed in 1985, when the NABE Board decided that business economists would be better served by a format that emphasized: (1) a "magazine" approach to applied business economics as contrasted to a theoretical journal approach; and (2) an emphasis on solicited articles rather than refereed articles.[2] This change can be seen in both the topics selected for articles as well as the type of articles published. The format change also means that issues are focused around certain themes, so that one issue may have four or five articles about the same topic. Before this, the article subjects in a given issue were more random.

There have been 1,162 articles published in *BE* through 1992. In addition to the standard bibliographic information collect in the index, the articles have been classified in a number of ways. The old subject classification system of the *Journal of Economic Literature* was used to categorize articles by subject matter. In this system, ten broad topic categories are defined, under each of which are narrower topics.[3] Each article was placed in one of these subject areas. In some cases, a secondary category was also assigned to articles that covered more than one topic. For instance, the 1974 article "Oil and the Balance of

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[1] See footnotes at end of text.

Payments" is classified under both "431: Open Economy Macroeconomics" and "723: Energy." In addition, each article was classified as to the background of the authors, the highest level of math used, and whether any sort of empirical testing was done in the article.

ARTICLES BY SUBJECT

Table 1 shows the breakdown of subject matter over the years. By far the most popular category was "Growth, Planning, Forecasting, and Fluctuations." Counting only the primary classification, 23 percent of the articles were in this category; if you also count the secondary classification, the percentage climbs to 28 percent.[4] This category encompasses some of the business economist's most important concerns, including forecasting, economic fluctuations, inflation and deflation, and stabilization policies. Not surprisingly, articles about forecasting were the most numerous, with macroeconomic, microeconomic, financial, and international forecasting accounting for 16 percent of all articles.

Table 1
Articles Classified by Subject

Category	Primary Only	Primary & Secondary
General Economics	4%	5%
Growth; Planning; Forecasting; Fluctuations	12	28
Quantitative Economic Methods and Data	12	16
Domestic Monetary and Financial Theories and Institutions	14	19
International Economics	11	13
Administration; Business Finance; Marketing	8	12
Industrial Organization; Technological Change; Industry Studies	8	12
Agriculture; Natural Resources	2	3
Manpower; Labor; Population; The Profession of Business Economics	14	15
Welfare; Consumer Economics; Urban and Regional	3	4

When counting both the primary and secondary subjects, the category of "Domestic Monetary and Financial Theories and Institutions" was in second place with 19 percent. This area includes all articles about both monetary and fiscal policy, and also includes articles about commercial banks and other financial intermediaries, capital markets, and credit flows. "Quantitative Economic Methods and Data," which includes topics such as econometric methods, modeling, computers, software, and economic statistics, was third with 16 percent. The "Manpower, Labor, Population" category, buoyed by the inclusion of articles about the profession of the business economist, as well as articles about labor markets, productivity, trade unions, and demographics, was fourth with 15 percent.

Over time, this mix of articles has changed. Table 2 shows the breakdown by subject matter, divided by decades (or partial decades). The biggest change in focus has been internationally. In the 1960s and 1970s, articles about International Economics accounted for 6 and 9 percent of the articles, respectively. This climbed to 16 percent in the 1970s, and have accounted for 23 percent of the total thus far in the 1990s. The International category includes articles about trade relations, balance of payments, exchange rates, international business, and long-term capital flows. The Quantitative category has also gained importance, helped along by the Statistics and PC Corner columns that run in every issue. During the 1990s, this topic has been covered in 23 percent of the articles. This growth has come at the expense of the forecasting articles, down to 18 percent in the 1990s, and the Monetary and Fiscal articles, which are down to 10 percent so far in this decade.

Table 2
Articles Classified by Subject:
Counting Multiple Categories

Category	1960s	1970s	1980s	1990s
General Economics	9%	2%	7%	4%
Growth; Planning; Forecasting; Fluctuations	30	35	24	18
Quantitative Economic Methods and Data	21	9	19	23
Domestic Monetary and Financial Theories & Institutions	21	21	18	10
International Economics	6	9	16	24
Administration; Business Finance; Marketing	15	14	9	11
Industrial Organizations; Technologial Change; Industry Studies	14	9	16	4
Agriculture; Natural Resources	0	7	1	2
Manpower; Labor; Population; The Profession of Business Economics	18	12	16	18
Welfare; Consumer Economics; Urban and Regional	7	5	2	6

Note: Will sum to more than 100% due to multiple categories

It is also interesting to see that the 1970s saw a blip in the "Agriculture and Natural Resources" category, when the various energy crises caused this subject to be covered in 7 percent of the articles. Otherwise, this topic barely caused a ripple.

Another way to look at the changing mix of articles is to examine the breakdown before and after the format change in 1985. This is shown in Table 3. Looked at this way, the Quantitative Methods category, helped by the Statistics and PC Corner columns, jump from 13 percent to 23 percent. Articles about International Economics climb from 9 percent to 22 percent. The categories declining in coverage are "Growth; Planning; Forecasting; Fluctuations," down from 33 to 18 percent, and "Administration; Business Finance; Marketing," which dropped from 14 percent to 7 percent.

Table 3
Articles Classified by Subject:
Counting Multiple Categories

Category	Before Format Change	After Format Change
General Economics	5%	4%
Growth; Planning; Forecasting; Fluctuations	33	18
Quantitative Economic Methods and Data	13	23
Domestic Monetary and Financial Theories and Institutions	20	16
International Economics	9	22
Administration; Business Finance; Marketing	14	7
Industrial Organization; Technological Change; Industry Studies	13	10
Agriculture; Natural Resources	4	0.5
Manpower; Labor; Population; The Profession of Business Economics	14	19
Welfare; Consumer Economics; Urban and Regional	5	3

Note: Will sum to more than 100% due to multiple categories

WHO ARE THE AUTHORS?

The affiliation of each author was counted, and is displayed in Table 4. The "publish or perish" mentality of academia certainly affects *BE*, for the most likely affiliation for contributors was Academic, making up 27 percent of the contributors. Yet, according to the NABE Salary Survey, academic economists make up 11 percent of the membership now, and have been in single digits throughout most of the years. Economists working for nonfinancial corporations were the second-most productive, at 22 percent, followed closely by economists from the financial industry, with 21 percent. Government economists, Consultants, and the Other category (mostly research institutions) trailed.

In terms of individual contributors, the two most prolific authors are the regular columnists, Joseph Duncan and John Qualls, with 22 and 18 entries apiece. Other top contributors included Robert McLaughlin, Francis Schott, Alan Greenspan, Roy Moor, Walter Hoadley and A. John Steigman. Both Duncan and Schott have contributions spanning almost the whole range of *BE's* existence, with Duncan's first article in 1969 and latest in 1992, while Schott's articles span the range of 1967 to 1991.

Table 4
Author Affiliations

Affiliation	Percent	Membership 1992
Academic	27%	11%
Nonfinancial Companies	22	27
Financial Companies	21	23
Government	13	12
Consultants	9	16
Other	8	11

MATH CONTENT

The highest level of math displayed in an article, including the footnotes and appendices, was also totaled. To count as algebra, some sort of equation had to be shown in the article; for calculus, a derivative or an integral had to appear. Overall, 49 percent of the articles had no math at all. Tables and graphs were the highest level of math, used in 32 percent of the articles. Algebra was the highest level of math used in 17 percent of the articles, while calculus was used only 2 percent of the time. (*BE* is different than most academic economic journals!)

Table 5
Math Level by Decades

Math Level	1960s	1970s	1980s	1990s
No Math	69%	42%	44%	60%
Tables and Graphs	20	36	31	36
Algebra	10	20	22	4
Calculus	1	2	3	0

With the change in format to a magazine style, *BE* has become more qualitative and less quantitative. Table 5 shows the math content of the articles over time. Only 6 percent of the articles now use algebra or calculus, while in the 1970s and 1980s the percentage was closer to 25 percent. While more and more business economists have advanced graphing and charting abilities at their fingertips with spreadsheets and presentation graphics packages in their computers,

this has not caused an explosion of chart and table-laden articles in *BE*. This category has stayed fairly stable from the 1970s to the present.

In addition, articles were judged on whether or not they were empirical. A very loose standard was used to determine this: either the results of a regression analysis had to be displayed (or at least the r-squared's shown) or some sort of statistical test of the data needed to be done (for example, correlation coefficients, a t-test, or a chi-squared test.) Only 192 articles, or 17 percent, were classified as empirical under this standard.

Table 6 also shows the math level of the articles before and after the format change. Looked at this way, the trend toward a less quantitative journal is a little more pronounced. Also, only 6 percent of the articles since the change can be considered empirical, compared to 22 percent before 1985.

Table 6
Math Level Before and After Format Change

Math Level	Before Change	After Change
No Math	42%	62%
Tables and Graphs	32	33
Algebra	23	5
Calculus	3	0.2

FOOTNOTES

[1] The *Historical Index* is available for $25, plus $2.95 postage and handling, and can be ordered through the NABE office.

[2] Nancy Regan, "A History of the National Association of Business Economists," 1989, p.94.

[3] The full subject listing is contained in the Historical Index.

[4] When counting both the primary and secondary categories, the totals will sum to more than 100 percent, because the multiple subjects will cause some articles to be counted in more than one category.