

THE ECONOMICS OF REGIONAL ECONOMICS ASSOCIATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Membership and conference attendance trends of regional economics associations are reported and analyzed. Although membership and conference attendance grow steadily at the American Economic Association, both are stagnant for the regional associations. Membership elasticity for economics associations ranges from -0.25 to -0.50 ; conference attendance is very inelastic with respect to registration fees. While the regional associations may find it challenging to grow, they have the capacity to expand revenues if that should be necessary to survive.

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Professional associations play an important role in the work lives of many economists¹. The professional association structure in economics consists of one major national association--the American Economic Association--four larger established regional economics associations--the Southern Economic Association, the Western Economic Association, the Midwest Economics Association, and the Eastern Economic Association--several smaller regional associations--for example, the Missouri Valley Economic Association and state economics associations--a number of national field specific associations--the Industrial Relations Research Association, the Econometric Society, the Industrial Organization Society, the Cliometrics Society--and a number of regional field specific associations--the Midwest Econometrics Group, the Southeastern Theory Group, etc.

In this article I consider some economic issues related to the four established regional economics associations. I will occasionally use the American Economic Association as a benchmark. Three of the regional associations were formed before World War II, the Western in 1922, the Southern in 1927, and the Midwest in 1934. This was a period when travel was dominated by trains rather than planes. The Eastern Economic Association began in 1974.

The Southern, Western, and Eastern associations each publish a journal². The Midwest Economics Association is affiliated with the Quarterly Review of Economics and Finance, but does not publish it, and membership in the Association does not include a subscription to the journal.

Each of the regional associations organizes an annual domestic conference³. The Southern conference is usually in November, the Midwest and Eastern in March or April, and the Western in June or July. The Western association currently has a membership of about 2,000;

the Southern about 1,000, the Eastern about 700, and the Midwest about 500. The annual budget of the Western Economic Association currently is about \$600,000, the Southern about \$250,000, the Eastern about \$100,000, and the Midwest about \$50,000. As a benchmark, the AEA currently has a membership of about 20,000 and an annual budget of about \$5 million.

Membership Trends

Membership in the three regional economics associations that pre-date World War II has been stagnant or declining in recent decades. Membership in the Southern has fallen approximately 25 percent since 1974. Membership in the Western has declined about 15 percent since 1982. The largest drop, however, has been experienced by the Midwest Economics Association, which has suffered a decline in membership approaching two-thirds since 1982⁴.

In contrast to stagnant or declining membership in regional associations, AEA membership has increased from around 18,000 in the mid 1970s to about 20,000 today. This modest rise is consistent with a fairly steady level of new entrants into the profession. New Ph.D.'s awarded in economics have ranged between 850 and 950 for most of the last quarter century, while the number of Ph.D. economists reaching the typical retirement age of 65 has remained under 300. The proportion of faculty who are members of the AEA has remained fairly constant, ranging between 74 and 79 percent from 1955 through 1995 (Siegfried, 1998).

AEA membership has shifted geographically, however (Smythe, 1999). Since 1969, the AEA's membership has moved from the East and Midwest to the South and West. As Table 1 shows, the largest reallocation has been from the Midwest to the South. The absolute number of AEA members in the Midwest actually has declined over the past quarter century.

The declining number of economists living in the Midwest cannot account for all of the

decline in the Midwest association's membership over the past two decades, however. Indeed, the Southern and Western associations also lost members during the period, yet the relative share of economists in their regions of the country grew. There seems to be no escaping the conclusion that regional economics associations are in decline, apparently playing a less important role in the professional lives of economists today than they did in the 1960s and 1970s.

Demand for Regional Economics Associations

To investigate the declining interest in regional economics associations I first consider the sources of demand for membership. Beyond the choice of service mix and quality standards, the supply side of the market is unlikely to explain much of the membership slide. The regional associations pretty much blanket the country. They do not compete directly in many areas, although the establishment of the Eastern Association in the 1970s may have diverted the allegiance of a few economists residing in Pennsylvania, Delaware, and Maryland from the Midwest and Southern Associations⁵.

More importantly, short run supply is almost perfectly elastic. None of the associations is close to enrolling all eligible members and each will take as many new members as are interested and willing to pay the existing dues. Beyond paying

dues, there are virtually no other requirements for membership in the associations⁶.

The regional associations provide two principal services. Each publishes or is affiliated with a general interest economics journal, and each organizes an annual convention held in its region. The demand for both of these services appears to be derived from a demand for information and a demand for recognition. I consider each of these in turn.

The journals. Economists read economics journals to learn about new research findings that may be useful in their own research or that may be otherwise useful in their jobs. Academic economists frequently look for articles that can be used in teaching, either as a direct assignment, or as input for the instructor's personal interpretation and conveyance to a class. General journals are more likely to publish such articles than field journals because articles in general journals more frequently are self contained, describing in detail the question being considered and what was previously known about it, how the present research advances our understanding, the methodological approach, the source(s) of information, the results, and the importance of the findings for other economic research and for public policy. In contrast, articles in field specific journals often de-emphasize the first and last of these components--the "why are we doing this" and "who cares" parts of the story. As a result, articles in general journals more frequently read like a story, including a beginning, a middle, and an end, and are therefore less intimidating to students who are unfamiliar with the background literature and do not understand the issue-specific jargon.

One possible explanation for the decline in membership in the regional associations, then, is that their journals have veered away from a traditional role of publishing research contributions directed toward generalists. If this were true, those generalists would lose interest in the journals. Anecdotal evidence suggests, however, that the style of articles in the Southern Economic Journal, the Eastern Economic Journal, and Economic Inquiry has not changed much since the 1970s.

Alternatively, substitutes for general interest economics may have improved. With the focus of faculty and deans on national reputations, the American Economic Review, Journal of Political Economy, and Quarterly Journal of Economics have surged ahead in terms of citations

and reputation, reflecting, in part, the more general phenomenon of winner-take-all markets evolving from dramatic changes in communication technology. In addition, the Journal of Economic Perspectives began publishing in the mid 1980s. It has captured a lot of space on course reading lists that might have otherwise gone to articles appearing in regional general interest journals.

Another explanation for declining membership, of course, is that the demand for general interest economics has declined. As scholarship has progressed and communication costs have declined, the net return to specialization may have increased. If that is the case, increasingly specialized economists may find less and less of the content in new issues of generalist journals to be relevant. If so, they will be less willing to pay the dues necessary to receive those journals.

Economists also demand journals as an outlet for their own research, as an affirmation of the quality of their professional work, and as a means of professional recognition. Thus, the demand, in some part, comes from those who produce the articles published by the journals, not unlike Roger Noll's explanation of the demand for intercollegiate athletics rising from a quest by college students for recognition and credentials that set them apart from other students (Noll, 1999). Substitute vehicles for disseminating research results and affirming the quality of research would, then, diminish the demand for the general journals published by the regional economics associations.

There is no question that the number of field specific economics journals has grown substantially over the past quarter century. Many of these newer journals quickly acquired considerable stature. Because of the overall growth in economics journals, relatively fewer economists publish in the regional associations' general journals today. In addition, the regional

associations' second-tier general interest journals have lost relative stature. Ellison (2000) finds a dramatic decline from 1980 to 1998 in the rate at which articles appearing in second tier general interest journals are cited relative to the rate at which articles in the top general interest journals are cited. Consequently, fewer economists are likely to join the associations that offer second-tier general interest economics journals as a member benefit.

The meetings. Economists attend conventions for various reasons (Siegfried and Nelson, 1979). The annual convention provides an opportunity to present research findings to one's professional colleagues and receive constructive criticism, to observe the frontiers of economic research, to meet old friends, to discuss professional issues with colleagues at other institutions, to generate research ideas, to re-live the "good old days" of graduate school with old friends, to gossip about the profession with anyone who will listen, sometimes to have one's employer pay for a vacation that would have been taken anyway, periodically to participate in the labor market for economists, to examine new books and software first hand at the publishers' exhibits, to honor distinguished colleagues, and occasionally to have egos inflated or crushed.

A survey in the late 1970s found that conferees at four professional business conventions reported spending an average of 46 percent of waking hours in professional activities such as meetings, seminars, and discussions with professional colleagues, 30 percent spent in social activities, and 21 percent seeking employment or recruiting (Thompson, Gaedeke, and Tootelian, 1979). Data from the Allied Social Science Associations convention reveal that on average 25 percent of registrants attend sessions during each of the nine session slots. About a third of ASSA registrants are actively seeking a job, and almost 40 percent are involved in interviewing job applicants at some time during the meetings.

Clearly, a bit of time at conferences is occupied by activities other than attending sessions

or interviewing for jobs, and a lot of that is what the computer age has dubbed "networking." Hotel lobbies at both the ASSA meetings and regional economics conventions host many informal discussions. One of the most popular activities at the annual ASSA meetings is the receptions hosted by economics departments from 6 to 8 pm⁷. Disentangling the social aspect of cocktail discussions from professional networking at the receptions would be impossible, however.

A very important service of conventions is the opportunity to present a paper. Not only might the author receive comments from a discussant with interests and research experience on the topic of his or her paper, but a convention presentation also provides professional exposure. Ultimately "reputation" is one of the things that universities ask their faculty to maximize. In some cases, especially if the program is selective, a presentation may serve to verify the quality of a faculty member's research. This is more likely to occur at the AEA meetings than at regional conventions, because the acceptance rate for individually submitted papers to the AEA program hovers around 10 percent, while that at regional meetings fluctuates widely, but probably averages closer to 90 percent.

Regional conferences face a dilemma with respect to program selectivity. The more selective they are, the more valuable is a spot on the program if the selectivity can be incorporated into the reputation of the meetings. However, as program standards are tightened and more papers rejected, relatively

more potential registrants are excluded from the program and the financial viability of the convention is put at risk.

A recent survey at the AEA meetings found that about 25 percent of registrants are

reimbursed for travel only if they are "on the program." Another 30 percent are eligible for reimbursement whether they are on the program or not. The remaining 45 percent are ineligible for reimbursement. Potential registrants at regional economics associations are more likely to qualify for reimbursement contingent on a program appearance, and frequently only if they present a paper. Regional conventions attract fewer economists who can tap special research accounts to cover travel costs. Regional conventions also attract fewer job candidates, who constitute a large portion of those whose expenses are not reimbursed by their employer at the ASSA meetings.

Opportunities to appear on the ASSA program grew rapidly over the last several decades. The program doubled from 227 sessions in 1978 to 549 sessions in 1998. With the greater prestige associated with an appearance on the program of a "national convention," and with a limited travel budget or number of trips per year, regional conventions must have lost priority to the ASSA meetings over the past two decades. This, in turn affects membership in the regional associations because each of them offers a bundled convention registration and association membership at a lower price than the sum of the two purchased separately.

Over the longer run, declining travel costs, both in terms of time and money, have made the ASSA convention a better substitute for regional meetings. After the economic deregulation of airlines in 1978, the relationship between air fares and travel distance gave way to a stronger relationship between fares and market power, so that it now costs much less to fly from Nashville, Tennessee to Los Angeles or Chicago than to Atlanta, St. Louis, or Cincinnati. As the connection between travel cost and distance eroded, so too did some of the relative cost advantage of regional association conventions. Today only those economists within driving distance of a convention realize substantial travel cost savings, although this may still make

some difference⁸.

Finally, a changing labor market for Ph.D. economists has not been friendly to the regional associations' conferences. Job Openings for Economists began operating in 1975, and quickly came to dominate listings of jobs for economists. In fulfilling its goal, JOE broadened the labor market for economists, thereby reducing the value of regional contacts between hiring department chairs and faculty at nearby Ph.D. producing universities. JOE led to a more "national" market, and increased the mobility of economists, if only between their graduate alma mater and their first job.

The job market at the annual ASSA meetings has grown dramatically over the past several decades. Because of network economies and declining transportation costs, it has developed into the dominant time and location in the world to hire economists⁹. Another university with which I am affiliated, the University of Adelaide in South Australia, annually interviews job candidates primarily from Canada, Europe, and East Asia at the ASSA meetings in a U.S. city. Frequently no one in the interview room is from North America. The ASSA meetings also have a strong advantage in timing, occurring at about the latest possible moment to interview candidates prior to the winter "fly-back" season for hiring faculty in North American colleges and universities. The timing of the conventions of the other associations are either too early (Southern) or too late in the annual labor market season, and moving their convention closer to the annual ASSA meetings could be suicide for the regional associations.

Survey Results

To examine the demand for regional economic associations directly, I surveyed individuals who failed to renew their membership in the Midwest, Southern, and Western Economic Associations in the late 1990s¹⁰. Out of the 808 surveyed members, 253 responded,

for a response rate of 31 percent.

The respondents were asked four questions: (1) Why did you drop your membership in the regional economic association; (2) What did you substitute for membership in the regional association, if anything; (3) What useful role, if any, do you believe a regional economic association can play today; and (4) What could the regional economic association do to persuade you to rejoin?

It is clear that former members dropped their membership primarily due to concerns about the annual convention rather than concerns about the associations' journals. As reported in Table 2, participation in the conference and the quality of conference papers and discussants constitute the overwhelming reasons for failing to renew.

Surprisingly few respondents identified the quality of the journal as a reason for dropping their membership. In the case of the Midwest association, it is not clear how many of the former members would have linked the Quarterly Review of Economics and Finance with the association because a subscription to the journal is independent of membership. More former Southern association members identified journal quality as motivating their decision. Because the editorship of the Southern Economic Journal changed in 1996, it is not clear whether respondents, who had dropped their membership over several years in the late 1990s, were referring to the old grey SEJ or the new green post-1996 SEJ, however.

The one variable that is under direct control of the Boards of the associations is price--the convention registration fee (and associated submission fees) and annual member dues. As would be expected, the response frequency of "too expensive" grows in proportion to the level of dues and convention registration fees, rising from only two of 99 former members of the inexpensive Midwest to 17 of 108 former members of the higher priced Western.

The former members of the associations were asked whether they had substituted something else for membership in the association. Although I anticipated that respondents would identify other economics associations, I also received listings for the local yacht club, the American Fisheries Society, the American Mathematical Association, and, perhaps one of the more forthright responses--leisure time. Of the 253 respondents 12, the exact number who reported moving as the reason for dropping their membership, indicated that they joined a different one of the four established regional economics associations. Thirteen reported joining smaller regional economics associations or their state economics association. About 30, or only 12 percent, identified a wide variety of field specific associations or journals as substitutes for their membership in the regional economic association. One hundred ninety-eight of the respondents did not report substituting anything for their membership in the regional economic association.

Declining association membership does not appear to be related to explicit new forms of competition. Interestingly, it does appear related to the annual convention. This is interesting because, like the American Economic Association, with the exception of the Midwest, the regional associations do not require membership in the association to either attend or appear on the program of the convention. In the case of the Midwest, the modest membership dues are simply a (prerequisite) portion of the convention registration fee. I presume they have remained separate because for some reason, some people, including myself, continue to pay membership dues to the Midwest even when they do not attend the convention. Exactly what we think we are buying is an interesting question.

In the case of the other three regional associations, however, unlike the AEA, the conference registration fee is discounted for association members. The fact that economists who

participate on the program can join the association at a discounted rate that year creates a link between association membership and the attraction of the annual convention. Also unlike the ASSA meetings, which attract about 8,000 registrants and include more than 3,000 different individuals on the program, the vast majority of registrants at the regional association meetings appear on the program. Thus, it is not unexpected to see that many drop their membership when their participation wanes.

The lesson to be learned from the survey seems to be that convention size, structure, and the connection of convention registration fees with association membership dues are important decisions for the long-term membership vitality of the regional associations. As can be seen in Table 3, the former regional association members see the annual regional conferences as significantly more important services than the regional associations' general interest economics journals, or, for that matter, anything else.

Empirical Estimates

It also is possible to investigate the demand for association membership and convention attendance directly. The American, Southern, and Western associations each produced a time series of both association membership and convention registration. I also secured annual convention registration numbers from the Midwest for most of the period between 1985 and 2000. Tables 4, 5, 6, and 7 report membership and conference attendance data, dues and registration fees, and other relevant information for selected years.

With these data I have estimated the demand for membership and conference attendance for the American, Southern, and Western associations, and the demand for conference attendance for the Midwest association, assuming supply to be perfectly elastic at the existing price.

Because the elasticity of demand naturally should vary with the price level, I limited the time series for each estimate to a period that avoided substantial changes in the real price level¹¹.

Membership. Ordinary least squares (OLS) membership equations for the American, Southern and Western associations, without any corrections for autocorrelation, are reported in Table 8. Because there is no theoretical basis on which to expect a particular functional form, I estimated them using both linear and logarithmic forms. Membership is hypothesized to depend on: (1) time, reflecting a secular trend, and (2) price¹².

The estimates indicate that membership in the AEA increases about 123 per year, WEA is stable, and SEA declines about 17 per year. The results imply that demand is inelastic for all three associations, which is plausible. The log-log estimates indicate an own-price elasticity of -0.25 for the American, -0.27 for the Southern, and -0.59 for the Western association. Each of these elasticity estimates is statistically significantly different from both zero and unity.

Not surprisingly in light of the level of dues relative to typical income levels of economists, it appears that price does not have a significant effect on membership levels. The associations could enhance their revenues, if they so wished, by raising dues.

Convention attendance. Comparable OLS estimates of convention attendance are reported in Tables 9 and 10. Convention attendance is hypothesized to depend on: (1) time, (2) price, or registration fee; and (3) the convention location. In addition, for the ASSA meetings, I control for those specific years early in the data period when the American Statistical Association was included in the meetings, the three years when the meetings were held in August or September, and the shift in 1993 from meeting between December 28-30 to meeting during the first weekend after January 2.

The ASSA convention results reported in Table 9 suggest an upward trend in registration of 144 per year and no sensitivity of attendance to the registration fee. This is not surprising, as the ASSA registration fee has only recently been raised to \$50, and is a small fraction of the total cost of attending the convention.

The results indicate that the departure of the American Statistical Association from the ASSA meetings did not cause a significant drop in attendance. Nor did the move from the last week of December to the first week of January. The three experiments with an August or September meeting, however, were an attendance disaster, causing an expected decline in attendance of over 40 percent, *ceteris paribus*. Finally, in comparison with the average of the benchmark cities of Anaheim, Atlanta, Atlantic City, Dallas and Denver, which collectively hosted only 7 of the 28 conventions, New York and Washington DC attract about 1600 more registrants. This finding confirms anecdotal impressions of the convention staff.

Estimated attendance for the regional conventions is reported in Table 10. Unlike the ASSA meetings, there appears to be no trend in regional association convention registration. The own price elasticity of demand is very low, as only one of the six estimates is significantly different from zero, and that one (the log specification for the Southern convention) suggests an elasticity of only -0.35. The relevant cities of course differ among the regional associations. Chicago raises attendance by 17 percent for the Midwest and Washington DC boosts attendance by 26 percent for the Southern. Location does not appear to affect attendance at the Western meetings. Whatever is important for the Western meetings is not captured well by the included variables, as less than a third of the variation in attendance is explained. Obvious omitted factors that likely affect attendance at all the association meetings include the size of the program and the entrepreneurial enthusiasm and marketing efforts of the staff.

In contrast to association membership, which is declining for most of the regional associations and stable, at best, for the AEA, economic convention attendance appears to be stable (for the regional associations) or rising (for ASSA). The stable or upward trend in convention attendance may reflect "meet space." Although cyberspace seems to provide an alternative for face-to-face meetings at conventions, cyberspace also induces much more communication and increases the number of contacts with whom economists network. And, there appears to be a demand for face-to-face meeting of people whose first and perhaps only contact has been in cyberspace.

Conclusion

It is not obvious what to make of all this. The demand for less prestigious general interest economics journals appears to be waning, the demand for regional economics conferences is holding steady, and the price elasticity of demand for both regional association membership and convention registration is very low. Associations could raise sufficient revenues to stay in business.

So far as I can determine, there is no other study of the relative and absolute decline of the regional economics associations in the U.S. Perhaps that is because only the boards of the individual associations have any interest in their viability. Given the increasing mobility of economists, lower real transportation costs, the growth of field specific societies and journals, the Internet and its impact on the costs of communication among scholars of similar interests regardless of location, and the quest for national recognition by a wide array of institutions, including many that once were satisfied with an image as excellent regional colleges and universities, the future of regional economics associations does not look promising. It will take hard work and loyalty among a significant core of members to maintain their viability through

the next several decades. They would do best to focus their attention on providing an annual convention that continues to attract participants.

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Table 1. Regional Distribution of AEA Members,
1969 and 1997.

Region	1969	1997	Change
East	32%	30%	-2

Midwest	31	25	-6
South	21	27	+6
West	17	19	+2

Source: David J. Smyth, "Where the Economists Are,"
Journal of Economic Perspectives, (Fall 1999), p. 271.

Table 2. Reasons for Dropping Regional Association Membership

	Midwest	Southern	Western
Responses	99	50	108
Response rate	33%	26%	33%

Didn't participate in conference	40%	22%	44%	
Quality of conference papers/discussants	13	2	13	
Changed job and/or moved		10	8	12
Retired		9	10	6
Too expensive		2	6	16
Overlooked renewal		5	14	0
Quality of journal		0	10	4
Insufficient interest in conference	7	6	0	
Employer would not reimburse		3	4	4
Joined only for job market at conference	1	4	0	
Switched to AEA		0	4	0
Unfriendly meeting environment		2	0	0
Other		8	10	3
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Percent reporting they substituted to an alternative association	30%	21%	21%	
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Source: Survey in Spring 2000 of recent discontinued members provided by each association. Four respondents to WEA survey provided two responses each. Otherwise number of responses equals number of respondents.

Table 3. What is a Useful Role for Regional Economics Associations?

	Midwest Southern Western		
Responses	99	50	104
Hold conferences to share papers	40%	52%	35%

Network and interact with economists from the region	28	26	20
Publish a journal		2	10
Hold a job market		3	2
Focus on research of special concern to the region	3	8	5
Faculty development		2	0
No response	22	2	33

Source: Survey in Spring 2000 of recent discontinued members provided by each association.

Table 4. AEA Membership and ASSA Convention Data, 1950-2001

Year	Total Members*	Nominal Dues	Real Dues**	New Ph.D.=s per Year** *	Convention Registration	Nominal Convention Registration Fee	Real Convention Registration Fee**	Convention City
1950	6936	6	24	200	3458	1	4	Chicago
1951	7068	6	23	223	2948	2	8	Boston
1952	7267	6	22	239	2729	2	7	Chicago
1953	7335	6	22	242	4664	2	7	Washington D.C.
1954	7486	6	22	245	2001	2	7	Detroit

1955	7555	6	22	239	4007	2	7	New York
1956	8450	6	22	232	2795	2	7	Cleveland
1957	8600	6	21	236	2812	2	7	Philadelphia
1958	9189	6	21	239	2291	2	7	Chicago
1959	10159	6	20	238	5674	2	7	Washington D.C.
1960	10837	6	20	237	3185	2	7	St. Louis
1961	11054	6	20	253	5679	8	10	New York
1962	11285	6	20	268	3853	8	10	Pittsburgh
1963	11973	8	26	327	4528	8	10	Boston
1964	13025	8	26	385	6441	8	10	Chicago
1965	14127	10	31	422	5464	8	9	New York
1966	15239	10	30	458	4687	8	9	San Francisco
1967	16675	10	29	521	9864	8	9	Washington D.C.
1968	17835	10	28	600	5136	8	8	Chicago
1969	19061	10	27	697	8628	5	13	New York
1970	18908	10	25	794	8100	6	15	Detroit
1971	18080	20	49	721	5913	6	15	New Orleans
1972	17286	20	47	794	6119	6	14	Toronto
1973	17933	20	43	845	6352	10	22	New York
1974	18348	21	40	788	4430	10	19	San Francisco
1975	19115	35	41	815	3885	10	18	Dallas
1976	18512	35	60	763	4279	15	26	Atlantic City
1977	16802	35	56	758	6381	15	24	New York
1978	18901	37	54	706	2997	15	22	Chicago
1979	19459	37	48	712	4640	15	20	Atlanta
1980	19459	40	47	677	2516	20	23	Denver
1981	19936	42	45	727	6340	20	21	Washington D.C.
1982	20086	43	44	677	6716	20	20	New York
1983	20162	45	44	734	5735	20	20	San Francisco
1984	19886	46	44	729	5065	25	24	Dallas
1985	20606	49	45	749	7349	25	23	New York
1986	20106	53	48	789	6135	25	23	New Orleans
1987	20092	54	47	750	6384	25	22	Chicago
1988	20647	54	45	825	8203	25	21	New York
1989	21570	59	47	872	6627	30	24	Atlanta
1990	21578	59	44	836	8050	30	22	Washington D.C.
1991	21491	62	45	861	Not held	Not held	Not held	-----
1992	21273	64	45	885	6817	30	22	New Orleans
1993	22005	66	46	906	6158	30	21	Anaheim
1994	21649	69	46	913	7383	30	21	Boston
1995	21565	70	46	952	8290	40	27	Washington D.C.
1996	21056	73	46	979	7320	40	26	San Francisco
1997	21720	75	46	998	7072	40	25	New Orleans
1998	20874	77	47	973	7504	40	25	Chicago
1999	20048	78	46	950	8448	50	31	New York
2000	19668	80	46	925	7815	50	30	Boston
2001	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	8136	50	29	New Orleans

*regular, student, life, and honorary

**1982-84 dollars = 100

***for the years 58, 60, 62, 64, 66, 70, 72, 74 the average of the year before and the year after were used

PhD=s for the year 1999 and 2000 were estimated.

Table 5. SEA Membership and Convention Data, 1974-1999

Year	Membership	Nominal Dues	Real Dues*	Convention Registration	Nominal Convention Registration Fee	Real Convention Registration Fee	Convention City	SEA Members as % of Total Registration
1974	1501	10	19	827	5	10	Atlanta	n/a
1975	1619	12	22	642	10	18	New Orleans	n/a
1976	1636	14	24	849	10	17	Atlanta	87
1977	1730	14	23	1103	10	16	New Orleans	76
1978	1810	14	21	1239	10	15	Washington	71

1979	1824	14	18	992	15	20	Atlanta	80
1980	1870	17	20	960	20	23	Washington	86
1981	1835	20	21	864	25	27	New Orleans	79
1982	1668	25	26	853	25	26	Atlanta	81
1983	1688	25	25	1075	30	30	Washington	65
1984	1711	25	24	827	30	28	Atlanta	79
1985	1676	25	23	642	30	27	Dallas	69
1986	1562	35	32	701	35	32	New Orleans	71
1987	1533	35	30	842	45	39	Washington	68
1988	1482	35	29	754	45	37	San Antonio	67
1989	1481	35	28	773	50	40	Orlando	73
1990	1437	35	26	797	50	37	New Orleans	74
1991	1452	35	25	666	60	44	Nashville	80
1992	1422	35	25	801	60	42	Washington	71
1993	1272	50	34	803	75	51	New Orleans	70
1994	1212	50	33	707	75	50	Orlando	73
1995	1144	50	33	894	75	49	New Orleans	64
1996	1115	50	32	1004	75	47	Washington	54
1997	1101	50	31	783	75	46	Atlanta	64
1998	1174	50	31	697	75	46	Baltimore	56
1999	965	50	30	779	75	45	New Orleans	56

*1982-84 dollars = 100

NOTE: Data for 1999 were not included in the regression because the responsibility of soliciting renewals was transferred to Allen Press, rendering the figures inconsistent

n/a: not available

Table 6. WEA Membership and Convention Data

Year	Membership	Nominal Dues	Real Dues*	Convention Registration	Nominal Convention Registration Fee	Real Convention Registration Fee*	Convention City
1982	2286	35	36	821	50	51	Los Angeles
1983	1979	45	44	678	75	74	Seattle
1984	1775	50	47	653	75	71	Las Vegas
1985	1595	55	50	698	75	69	Anaheim
1986	1434	55	50	834	80	72	San Francisco

1987	1519	40	35	816	80	69	Vancouver
1988	1914	40	33	803	80	66	Los Angeles
1989	2080	40	32	1045	85	67	Lake Tahoe
1990	2160	40	30	1142	85	64	San Diego
1991	2200	45	33	1153	88	64	Seattle
1992	2303	45	32	1329	88	62	San Francisco
1993	2334	50	34	964	90	62	Lake Tahoe
1994	2450	50	33	1130	90	60	Vancouver
1995	2135	55	36	988	90	59	San Diego
1996	2200	55	35	973	95	60	San Francisco
1997	2113	55	34	1096	95	59	Seattle
1998	2060	55	34	947	95	58	Lake Tahoe
1999	2002	60	36	1005	115	68	San Diego

* 1982-1984 dollars = 100

Table 7. MEA Convention Data, 1982-2000

Year	Convention Registration	Nominal Convention Charges*	Real Convention Charges**	Convention City
1982	428	5	5	Chicago
1983	550	6	6	St. Louis
1984	N/A	8	8	Chicago
1985	363	16	15	Cincinnati
1986	500	16	14	Chicago
1987	360	16	14	St. Louis
1988	430	16	13	Chicago
1989	360	16	13	Cincinnati

1990	N/A	16	12	Chicago
1991	360	16	12	St. Louis
1992	N/A	26	118	Chicago
1993	400	26	18	Indianapolis
1994	400	30	20	Chicago
1995	252	30	20	Cincinnati
1996	346	40	25	Chicago
1997	252	40	25	Kansas City
1998	350	50	31	Chicago
1999	326	45	27	Nashville
2000	347	50	29	Chicago

* includes registration fee and membership fee

** 1982-1984 dollars = 100

n/a: not available

Table 8. Estimated Demand for Association Membership
(Dependant variable is total individual membership)

	AEA	AEA	SEA	SEA	WEA	WEA
	linear log		linear log		linear log	
	(1971-2000)		(1974-1998)		(1982-1999)	
Average membership	19,997	1,518				2,030

Time (per year)	123**	0.01**	-17.2*	-0.01**	4.9	0.00
	(4.0)	(4.1)	(-2.3)	(-2.5)	(0.3)	(0.4)
Dues (in 1980-82 \$)	-93.8**	-0.25**	-18.9**	-0.27**	-28.6**	-0.59**
	(-2.5)	(-2.5)	(-2.3)	(-1.9)	(-3.6)	(-3.8)

F-ratio 32.7** 33.0** 35.0** 33.2** 7.1** 7.0**

Adjusted R Squared 0.69 0.69 0.74 0.73 0.42 0.41

n 30 30 25 25 18 18

In the log equations membership, dues, new Ph.D.s and retiring Ph.D.s are in logs; time is linear.

Equations estimated with an intercept that is not reported.

*significant at $\alpha = .10$; **significant at $\alpha = .05$.

Table 9. Estimated Demand for AEA Convention Attendance
(Dependent variable is total conference registration)
(1973-2001)

	linear	log
Average attendance	6,322	6,322
Time (per year)	144** (4.4)	0.02** (2.6)
Registration Fee	18.3	0.20

(in 1980-82 \$)	(0.3)	(0.7)	
Joint with AStatA	761 (1.2)	0.13 (0.8)	
August or Sept (n = 3)	-1478** (-3.2)	-0.44** (-3.8)	
January	-398 (-1.0)	-0.07 (-0.7)	
Chicago (n = 3)	277 (0.7)	0.06 (0.6)	
New York (n = 6)	1698** (5.0)	0.27** (3.3)	
Washington DC (n = 3)	1561** (4.1)	0.25** (2.7)	
New Orleans (n = 4)	479 (1.3)	0.09 (1.0)	
San Francisco (n = 3)	485 (1.3)	0.08 (0.9)	
Boston (n = 2)	732 (1.5)	0.13 (1.1)	
<hr/>			
F-ratio	21.7	13.0	
Adjusted R Squared	0.94	0.90	n
	28	28	

(Table 9)

In the log equations attendance and fees are in logs; time, joint meeting with American Statistical Association, months, and city binary variables are linear (or logs in 1 and e). Intercept not reported; t-ratios are in parentheses.

Benchmark cities: Atlanta, Anaheim, Atlantic City, Denver, Dallas.

*significant at $\alpha = .10$; **significant at $\alpha = .05$.

Table 10. Estimated Demand for Convention Attendance
(Dependent variable is total convention registration)

		MEA linear log (1985 - 2000)		MEA SEA linear log (1976 - 1999)		SEA WEA linear log (1982 - 1999)		WEA
Average attendance		360		850		949		
Time (per year)	-7.2	-0.02 (-1.4)	2.1 (0.2)	0.01	12.8 (1.1)	0.02 (1.3)		(1.6)
Registration Fee	-2.0	-0.12	-6.3	-0.35**	-9.84	-0.65		

(in 1980-82 \$)	(-0.5)	(-0.5)	(-1.1)	(-2.2)	(-1.4)	(-1.4)		
Chicago (n = 7)	63.8**	0.17*						
	(2.5)	(2.3)						
Cincinnati (n = 3)	-48.1	-0.14						
	(-1.7)	(-1.6)						
Washington (n = 6)				226**	0.26**			
				(3.7)	(4.2)			
New Orleans (n = 7)				108	0.13*			
				(1.9)	(2.3)			
Atlanta (n = 5)			66	0.10				
				(0.8)	(1.3)			
San Diego (n = 3)						113	0.12	
						(0.8)	(0.9)	
Lake Tahoe (n = 3)						60	0.08	
						(0.5)	(0.6)	
San Francisco (n = 3)						168	0.17	
						(1.4)	(1.4)	
Seattle (n = 3)						119	0.12	
						(1.0)	(1.0)	
F-ratio	7.1**	6.0**	5.6**	7.6**	2.2	2.5		
Adjusted R Squared	0.76	0.61	0.50	0.59	0.29	0.35		
n		14		14	24	24	18	18

(Table 10)

In the log equations attendance and fees are in logs; time and city binary variables are linear (or logs in 1 and e).

Data unavailable for MEA for 1990 and 1992. Benchmark cities for MEA are: Nashville, Kansas City, St. Louis, and Indianapolis (n=5).

Benchmark cities for SEA are: Dallas, San Antonio, Orlando, Nashville, and Baltimore

Benchmark cities for WEA are: Los Angeles, Las Vegas, Vancouver, and Anaheim (n = 6).

Intercepts not reported.

*Significant at = .10; **significant at = .05.

Endnotes

¹ Professional associations have affected my career. Not only does one of them now pay a portion of my salary, but each of the three American Economic Association (AEA) journals and each of the journals of the four established regional associations have published some of my articles. I also confess that each of those journals has rejected some of my submissions. I have attended all but two AEA conventions since 1971, and have attended each of the regional associations' conventions numerous times.

² Since 1982, the Western association has published a second journal, Contemporary Policy Issues. It contains economic research and analysis on current issues of concern to business, government, and other decision makers, written so as to be accessible to readers with a limited background in economics.

³ The Western also organizes a bi-annual international conference.

⁴ Membership data for the Eastern Economic Association are available only for the past five years. They show little change from a level near 700. Because the Eastern Economic Association was organized only in 1974 and at the beginning necessarily had just one member, the data would reveal an increase in its membership over the past few decades.

⁵ Those in Tennessee, Kentucky, and southern Indiana and Ohio seem comfortable with being simultaneously in both the South and the Midwest for the purposes of regional economics associations.

⁶ Although the AEA bylaws require nomination by an existing member, I can assure you that is not a challenging hurdle. As the current Secretary-Treasurer and a member, I will nominate anyone whose check clears the bank.

⁷ These are also popular with the hotels, as you could easily determine on the basis of the prices charged for drinks.

⁸ About 40 percent of the audience in Cleveland on March 30, 2001 drove to the MEA meeting.

⁹ When I was department chair at Vanderbilt in the early 1980s we regularly interviewed prospective assistant professors at the Southern Economic Association meetings in November. Hardly any universities interview at the SEA meetings today.

¹⁰ The lists of dropped members were provided by the Secretary-Treasurers of the Associations.

¹¹ Real AEA dues almost doubled from 1970 to 1971; the largest jump in the ASSA convention registration fee was in 1973. Thus I used the period 1971 through 2000 to estimate membership and 1973 through 2001 to estimate convention attendance for the AEA. Dues and registration fees for the Midwest meetings doubled from 1984 to 1985 so I began that series in 1985. Because there is no similar abrupt change in either membership dues or the convention registration fee for either the Southern or Western associations I used all of the data available for them, 1974 through 1998 for the Southern's membership and 1976 through 1999 for its convention attendance, and 1982 through 1999 for both the Western's membership and convention attendance.

¹² Standard errors are corrected using the Newey-West (1987) procedure.