



Reflections on Academia

A Wuffle

PS, Vol. 19, No. 1. (Winter, 1986), pp. 57-61.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0030-8269%28198624%2919%3A1%3C57%3AROA%3E2.0.CO%3B2-P>

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Reflections on Academia*

A Wuffle**

University of California, Irvine

On Research

A professor must have a theory as a dog must have fleas.¹

H. L. Mencken

*Excerpted from *The Collected Wit and Wisdom of A Wuffle*: Vol. I, *The Early Years*; Vol. II, *The Not So Early Years*; and Vol. III, *The Center Year*. I am indebted to Sue Pursche for bibliographic assistance, and to the staff of the Word Processing Center, UCI School of Social Sciences, and to Virginia Heaton, CASBS, Stanford, for typing earlier drafts. I dedicate this essay to Wilson Mizner, whose words, "to steal from one author is plagiarism, to steal from many is research," have provided hope to many young scholars.

Only the famous are famous enough to be quoted. Thus, anything quotable said by someone not famous will (a) be attributed to someone famous, (b) be forgotten, or (c) be attributed to anon. Also as Arthur Clun ("The Rule of Anticipated Reactions," *PS*, Winter 1974, 12) was the first to point out (but for which he will not be remembered) most quotable quotes are attributed by graduate students to their senior professors. For example, "nine out of fourteen Yale graduate students attributed 'Politics ain't beanbag' to Robert A. Dahl. Nearly as reliable was the attribution of 'we have nothing to fear but fear itself' to Richard E. Neustadt among Harvard Ph.D.s in government." Similarly, "University of Chicago economics graduates correctly named Milton Friedman as the author of 'Prosperity is just around the corner.'"

** A Wuffle is an assistant to Professor in the School of Social Sciences, University of California, Irvine. Recently the author of "The Compleat Guide to Exercise in Bed," his latest research, inspired by Mondale's 1984 presidential campaign, deals with a new theory of spatial political competition, "Political Suicide as an Equilibrium Outcome." This manuscript was begun while he was a Guest Scholar at the Government Studies Program, Brookings Institution, fall quarter, 1984, and completed in 1985 while he was a Fellow of the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, Stanford—but neither organization is to blame for its contents.

¹Cf.

An academic is one who knows more and more about less and less.²

Source Unknown

If I have seen less far than others, it is because I have stood on the shoulders of pygmies.

Isaac Fignewton (A Wuffle)

I stopped being a behaviorist when I realized that I couldn't take credit for my own ideas.

Anita Greene

In academia, as in country music, only your successes count, not your failures. It doesn't matter how many publishers or journals rejected the manuscript, it only matters that it be published. One good paper is remembered; a dozen mediocre ones forgotten.

Ami Glazer

The thing that keeps most empirical political scientists honest is that somewhere out there is an unknown graduate student with your name on it.

John Ferejohn

Theory like mist on eyeglasses—obscures vision.

Charlie Chan
(quoted by Jon R. Bond)

The plural of anecdote is data.

Ray Wolfinger

Mowrey's Law: Funded research tends to

Lucy: "I've just come up with the perfect theory. It's my theory that Beethoven would have written even better music if he had been married!"

Linus: "What's so perfect about that theory?"

Lucy: "It can't be proved one way or the other."

"Charlie Brown" (Charles Schultz)

²Cf. An intellectual knows almost nothing about almost everything. An academic knows almost everything about almost nothing.

³Resemblance to Gresham's Law may or may not be intentional.

Forum

drive out unfunded in the marketplace of ideas.³

David Mowrey

In academia, citation is the sincerest form of flattery.⁴

A Wuffle

Academic courtship consists of the exchange of reprints.

Helen Wildman

Lending a book is, for most academics, the highest form of friendship.

Simon Brett

A researcher and his hypotheses are never parted—except by death.⁵

d'après Thomas Kuhn

Scholars who rest on their laurels are perhaps confusing their laurels with another part of their anatomy.

Sue Anderson

No research paper is ever remembered for more than one idea.⁶

A Wuffle

It is better to be the second author of a first-rate paper than the first author of a second-rate one.⁷

A Wuffle

On Universities

There were 93,000 professors in the

⁴Cf. The quote attributed to Mae West, "I don't care what they say about my morals as long as they spell my name right."

⁵Cf. "The great tragedy of science is the slaying of a beautiful hypothesis by an ugly fact." Thomas Huxley

⁶i.e., no more than one idea is ever remembered from any research paper. Most papers, however, are simply not remembered. (Whether there were any ideas there to be remembered remains an open question.)

⁷In general, allocation of authorship credit is not zero-sum. The exception is married couples—only one of whom (usually the husband) is ever given credit for co-authored work.

U.S. in 1936 compared to 867,000 coal miners. Now the figures are dramatically reversed. In 1978 there were more than 600,000 professors while the number of miners had shrunk to less than 150,000.

Everett C. Ladd, Jr.

No wonder there's an energy crisis!

A Wuffle

There are two kinds of professors. Those who add prestige to their department and those whose prestige rests primarily (if not exclusively) on the fact they're in the department they're in.

William Schonfeld

The present reputation of any department is based on the past work of its past members. Thus, the reputation of some departments can best be attributed to racial memory.

Anon.

The aim of every recruitment effort should be to recruit people who are better than you are. If you can't do that then you shouldn't be hiring.

Joseph Tanenhaus

The worst mistake any job candidate can make is to assume that people have read the material that's been sent them.

Nelson Polsby

All academics without tenure are young: all academics with tenure are (at best) middle-aged.

A Wuffle,
inspired by F. M. Cornford

Forty: The age at which academics are no longer allowed to be "promising."

Arthur Clun

University politics are vicious precisely because the stakes are so small.

Attributed to Henry Kissinger

On Teaching

Professor: One who talks in other people's sleep.

Anon.

Work: "What scholars do when they're not teaching."

Anon.

God gave all the easy problems to the physicists.

James March

He who can does; he who can't teaches; he who can't teach teaches teachers; he who can't teach teachers administers teacher ed.

Immemorial Cant

In the social sciences, waiting for Newton is like waiting for Godot.

Lee Cronbach and Philip Converse

Required Course: One that no student would take otherwise.

Anon.

The validity of a science is its ability to predict.⁸

Harry L. Schwartzburg
RCA Engineer

(although I doubt he said it first)

Scholars have students; only gurus have disciples.

A Wuffle

Most teachers teach facts, good teachers teach ideas, great teachers teach how to think.

Jonathan Pool

To avoid the problem of scientific validity, three strategies are commonly followed in the social sciences: (a) eschewing falsifiable statements; (b) denying the possibility of objective truth, and (c) writing in French or German. The combination of these three strategies has been shown to be virtually irresistible, even to strong minds. Statements which on the face of it are unintelligible gibberish can always be blamed on a bad translation.

A Wuffle

Peretz' Law: If you understand the material you teach, then you try to present it clearly and simply to your students; if you don't understand it completely, you try to make it complicated, lest you be challenged in such a way as to let your ignorance show.

Paul Peretz

Field research is to anthropology what the blood of the martyrs is to the Church.

C. G. Seligman
Professor of Anthropology

Student-faculty cooperation: The implicit deal that most students make with their professors that if you don't bother me, then I won't bother you.

Anon.

All good education is elitist in that it says to a student, you are not adequate as you are. There are better people than you. And you will be taught how they think, how they write, how they talk and what they know.

Neil Postman

⁸By that test, economics may have claim to science—it was Lord Keynes who said, "In the long run we are all dead"—perhaps the only consistently accurate prediction ever made by a macroeconomist. On the other hand, historians have shown some ability to predict the past (or at least to show its inevitability). (Cf. the Fagin-Wuffle Law: "Hindsight is the only exact science.") Political scientists have been predicting the disintegration of the U.S. party system for nearly two decades. If we wait long enough, they're sure to be right. The most famous prediction in anthropology is that of Levi-Strauss: "Cannibals who eat kin should boil them; cannibals who eat strangers should roast them." Unfortunately for structuralist theory, this prediction is false. Indeed, baking is the most common cooking method used by anthropopagi; moreover, "natives . . . have discovered a veritable smorgasbord of ways of preparing people" (Paul Shankman, "Le Roti et le Boulli," *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 71 (1961), at p. 61, quoted in Marvin Harris, *Cultural Materialism*, Random House, 1979: 189).

The problem of education is that students don't know enough to know that they don't know enough—and most don't want to learn.

A Wuffle

On the Social Sciences

Thou shalt not commit a Social Science.

W. H. Auden

Forum

The age of chivalry is gone. That of sophisters, calculators and economists has succeeded—and the glory of Europe is extinguished forever.

Edmund Burke, circa 1790

An economist is one who observes something that works in practice and wonders if it will work in theory.

As told to Bernard Nelson
by Victor Fuchs

If you put all the economists in the country end to end, they'd still point in different directions.

Harry S. Truman

The Economists' Motto: To err is human, to be paid for it divine.

Victor Fuchs

The leading advocates of the need to subject everything to the competitive test of the market are tenured economists.

Sheen Kassouf
Professor of Economics, UCI

Most adolescents dislike having to learn history. As children, they were taught that it was desirable to let bygones be bygones.

Anon.

Those who do not know the past are condemned to repeat History 101.

Anon.

Do not worship at the shrine of that Bitch-Goddess QUANTIFICATION!

Carl Bridenbaugh
Presidential Address
American Historical Association, 1962

Geography is such an innocent science that we can expect much insight from it.

William Burne
Professor of Geography, ca. 1966

I dropped out of American Studies after the first exam, when I found out that the correct answer to all four questions was "hegemony."

Emily Polsby

The end or purpose of every art and science is some good. That of the most authoritative, i.e., of political science, is the greatest and most eagerly desired good—justice, or, in other words, the common welfare.

Aristotle, *Politics*, Book III

Pick one and only one answer (be prepared to justify your response):

Politics is to political science as

- a. rhyme: reason
- b. id: ego
- c. faith: charity
- d. trial: tribulation
- e. Abbott: Costello

A Wuffle

Political science is the only discipline in which regression is progress.⁹

A Wuffle

If you can understand an article in the *APSR* then something must have gone wrong in the refereeing process.

Anon.

A sociologist is a scientist who blames crimes on everything and everyone except the person who commits it.

Laurence J. Peter

Sociology is the branch of science with the most methods and the least results.

Henri Poincaré, circa 1909¹⁰

Economics is all about how people make decisions; sociology is all about why they don't have any real decisions to make.

James Duesenberry
Professor of Economics

It is necessary to study sociology in order

⁹Cf.

Q: "Why didn't the political scientist climb the mountain?"

A: "Because the statistical program to do so wasn't available in SPSS."

¹⁰In fairness to Poincaré, he wrote this at a time before modern political science had been invented.

to learn why the advice of economists is so consistently ignored.

Wilfred Pareto

It is necessary to study economics in order to learn why the advice of all other social scientists should be consistently ignored.¹¹

Any randomly chosen economist
(A Wuffle)

In Conclusion

The only great social scientist is a dead social scientist.

Anon.

Tenure is never having to say you're sorry.¹²

A Wuffle, May 1976

¹¹Cf. "Politics is too important to be left to economists" (A Wuffle, July 29, 1981).

¹²Publish or perish is not, however, meant to be taken literally. In April, 1984, a University of South Carolina assistant professor who was denied tenure kidnapped the president of the university and unsuccessfully sought to convince him to reverse the tenure denial. When that strategy failed, the assistant professor committed suicide. Cf. Confucius Say: "He who has assistant professors for friends need not watch soap operas."

Living a Dissertation

Kim Lane Scheppele
University of Michigan

At the end of George Orwell's novel *1984*, Winston Smith is taken to the mysterious Room 101 for the final phase of his torture. Although he has already been subjected to horrible deprivations and has maintained his resolve to keep his secrets, the horrors of Room 101 break his spirit and make him reveal the name of his illicit lover, Julia, a symbol of his resistance against the regime. The torture that breaks through all of Winston's defenses makes him confront his private worst fear, and Winston is powerless against this invasion of his own mind.

Dissertations are a bit like the personalized torture of Room 101. In writing dissertations, at least high-risk, ambitious dissertations, we ask questions that we take to be fundamental, and it is precisely because we take our tasks so personally and so seriously that dissertations are capable of becoming our means of torture. Just as Julia represented Winston's



Gayle Binion of the University of California, Santa Barbara, chair of the selection committee for the Edward S. Corwin award, recognizes Kim Lane Scheppele (left).

**Writing a Dissertation:
Advice from
Five Award Winners**

Editor's note: PS invited the recipients of APSA's 1985 dissertation awards to reflect on their experiences in writing a doctoral thesis and to offer advice to others. Five responses are printed below. Citations accompanying the awards can be found in the Fall 1985 issue of PS, pp. 976-979.

Kim Lane Scheppele is the recipient of the Edward S. Corwin award for the best doctoral dissertation completed and accepted during 1983 or 1984 in the field of public law. Her dissertation, "Legal Secrets: Common-Law Rules and the Social Distribution of Knowledge," was submitted by the University of Chicago. Her dissertation chair was James Coleman.