

# European PhDs., US PhDs. and the Edispuut

or: how to bridge the gap without losing  
what's good about the European system

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# Why this talk?

- Edispuut is extremely valuable...
- ...but it can become more valuable
- ...and avoid some possible pitfalls
- Compare US PhDs. With European PhDs.
- Apologies for any generalizations
  - That's the nature of science: exceptions to any rule

# Why bother with US PhDs.?

- You'll meet them 😊
- They're competitors for journal space
- They (or rather: their advisors) implicitly set research standards, for better and sometimes for worse
- Learn from their strengths!

# The North American PhD system

- Two years of full-time coursework
  - General management courses
  - Major-specific courses
  - LOTS of methodology courses
- Comprehensive exam ('comps')
- One or more summer research projects with faculty (not necessarily PhD.-related)

# The North American PhD system

- Third year: define topic, collect some first data, start writing (reverse engineering?) proposal
  - Get your advisor (often not a full prof.) in your third year
- Fourth year: collect more data, finish proposal, hunt the job market with your job market paper and finish thesis
  - Move to new university and the tenure clock starts ticking...

# The European PhD system

- Much less coursework
- You apply for a fairly specific topic at the start of your PhD. program
- Advisor ('promotor') already known, although daily supervisor later
- First year/two years: grapple with problem, read literature, finish detailed research proposal
- Data collection later (sometimes exploratory in first year)
- Semi-fulltime researcher for four years

# Relative strengths/weaknesses?

- US: Much better methodology-training (not just quantitative)
- EURO: Not much appreciation for methodology, unless its qualitative (and even then not particularly good)...
  - Conceptual thinking more important than rigorous execution
  - Mistaken assumption that rigor is only for quantitative or that rigor comes at the expense of relevance

# Relative strengths/weaknesses?

- US: wider read, but much more focused ('shackled'?) in theory-application
  - Many research discussions during coursework
- EURO: also wide in theory-application
  - Holistic research vs. everything-is-connected-to-everything-else fuzziness
  - Focused research vs. holding-up-the-ball-and-missing-the-point irrelevance

# Key distinction

- Debates among PhD. students are key in the US: defend yourself against highly opinionated other PhD. students (and vice versa!)
- Usually both are wrong, but eventually they figure it out
- The comparative insular European PhD.-culture is less conducive to this

# The role of the Edispuut

- Connect to the PhD. students in broadly the same area
- Foster debate!
- Key:
  - Recognize that formulating thoughts is a way to help you (and the others!) think
  - It's not about who's right and wrong (you're both wrong!)
  - What goes on in the room, stays in the room

# The role of the faculty?

- Evaluation apprehension
- Hierarchy stifles debate
- So: that's why I (and faculty in general) should not be here this afternoon
- I will see you in the Smitse later for more discussions over a beer 😊

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- Key