

A Periodic Table of Faculty Job Titles at US Universities

What do all those professors do?

The Big Picture: At US universities, *faculty* are employees who teach or perform research. This chart shows common faculty job titles and their connotations. However, these are norms—not standards—and many exceptions exist.

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arrows indicate
typical promotion
paths

tenure-line faculty
norms vary for law and medicine

librarians
when tenure-eligible

research faculty

teaching faculty

clinical faculty
obligations vary—
see description

practice faculty

Meanings of Symbols in the Table:

- Must perform research
- Salary reliant on grants
- Must perform librarianship
- Must work with clients or patients (e.g., lawyers, medical doctors, therapists)
- Has tenure
- Must teach

**assistant
rank**

Assistant Professor

Assistant Librarian

Assistant Research Professor

Assistant Teaching Professor

Assistant Clinical Professor

**associate
rank**

Associate Professor

Associate Librarian

Associate Research Professor

Associate Teaching Professor

Associate Clinical Professor

**“full”
rank**

Professor

Librarian

Research Professor

Teaching Professor

Clinical Professor

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Tenure is a special kind of job security that allows faculty to focus on long-term projects with greater benefits to society. Typically, eligible faculty must apply after a fixed number of years (often six) and must leave the university if they don't get it.

Special modifiers to faculty job titles include:
Adjunct: Temporary part-time teaching position
Affiliate: Has some faculty privileges in a department, but main job is elsewhere
Distinguished: Recognized by the university for outstanding performance at the “full” rank
Emeritus: Retired, no salary, few or no duties
Visiting: Temporary position, mostly teaching

Tenure-line faculty teach and perform research, in a ratio that varies by department and by university. These faculty, and sometimes librarians, are the only ones eligible to receive tenure.

Librarians are faculty at roughly half of US universities. Some are tenure-eligible. They perform librarianship and research, and they may also teach.

Research faculty mostly perform research. Unlike other faculty, their salary (and their job) relies on continually winning grants. Other research faculty titles may exist at a university.

Teaching faculty mostly teach, often many courses. **Clinical faculty** vary by department. All teach, but some also work as practicing professionals, such as lawyers, medical doctors, or therapists.

Practice faculty had distinguished careers outside academia prior to becoming faculty. They are hired to teach based on those prior experiences.

Although not shown here, *service* is another set of duties for many faculty. These include serving on university committees and organizing conferences. Higher ranks are expected to perform more service.