Why Consider a Career in Academia?

• You enjoy teaching. Teaching offers opportunities to design a course; develop a unique teaching style; share your ideas with students and receive feedback; influence young people. You can be a mentor: you can make a real difference in the world. Teaching can be a very satisfying and rewarding experience.

• You enjoy conducting research. You have freedom to define an area of research, set up a research lab and lead the lab in exciting new directions. You work on problems that are important and interesting to you. Collaboration with other faculty, carrying out interdisciplinary research can be stimulating and fun.

• You may value flexible hours to help balance an outstanding academic career with family responsibilities.

• You have the opportunity to receive tenure that has its own unique privileges: you can embark on risky research, a problem into which no scientists have researched, without needing to produce short-term results. Tenure provides you with status, security in your job and academic freedom.

• You have the opportunity to be mentored by outstanding faculty to advance your career. The academic environment has the potential for exciting collaborations with colleagues on publications, research, and teaching.

• You enjoy presenting the results of research at conferences and in scientific journals (you are not bound by corporate restrictions on publication). You will be able to assemble knowledge and skills into deliverable/experienceable units.

• You enjoy the intellectual satisfaction of gaining new knowledge and carrying out research that contributes to your field or serves community needs.

• You like the university environment, enjoy the lifestyle/casual atmosphere.

Read short interviews with faculty members as they share their thoughts about academia.

Melinda Piket-May, Assistant Professor, Electrical and Computer Engineering, University of Colorado, Boulder
"A career in academia is certainly challenging. You have to love it, and it has to be an integral part of your life. You work more than 40 hours a week, but it is flexible time for the most part, which is a major advantage. I can not think of a better profession for myself. I have the freedom to go after what I am passionate about and the ability to make a real difference in the world. If you are looking for a comfortable job, where you know what you will be doing from day to day, this profession is not what you are looking for."
Dr. Laura Steinberg, Assistant Professor, Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering, Tulane University
"Get some experience in industry and if you find you are bored at work and wish for challenges that are more intellectual than managerial, you may be a good candidate for a career in academia."

Dr. Theresa Good, Assistant Professor, Department of Chemical Engineering, Texas A&M University
"I worked for a while before going back to graduate school. From my perspective, any job I had I could master and got bored within a short period of time. The benefits of an academic career to me are working on problems that I find really interesting and important and sharing my enthusiasm for them with a group of talented students. There is no other environment in which I would have as much freedom to pursue what interests me. I also really enjoy working with students and being a teacher."

Dr. Rocki-Lee De Witt, Dean of Business School of Administration, University of Vermont
She reports she left a non-academic career because she wanted to spend more time learning and engaging others in learning. Her top four reasons to encourage students to consider an academic career are: 1) you get paid to learn; 2) you have a tremendous amount of discretion over what you will spend time on; 3) you get to touch the lives of the next generation; and 4) you can always leave academia and do something else, but it is much harder to do the opposite.

Dr. Holly Lewis, Associate Professor of Management Science, Pennsylvania State University
I enjoy being a faculty member most because of the “intellectual stimulation/creativity; an opportunity to make a difference in other people’s lives; flexibility; and professional freedom.”

Questions to Ask About a Career in Academia
Are you considering a career in academia? Where can you find answers to questions like:
- What are the career paths in academia for someone with a Ph.D.?
- Are there opportunities for a career in academia for someone with a Master's degree?
- What type of teaching or research experience do I need to be a good candidate for a faculty position? Does this differ depending upon if I want to obtain a position at a research university, teaching university, or community college?
- How do I assess what type of institution (research university, teaching university, or community college) would suit my career goals and lifestyle?
- Is a postdoc a requirement to a career as a faculty member or researcher, or is it optional? Does it depend on my field?
How should I search for a faculty or research position?
What questions should I ask during a job interview for a faculty or research position?
What do I need to keep in mind when I negotiate a job offer? and many other questions.

Academic Careers in Science and Engineering

An excellent source of answers and useful information is in the book “Tomorrow's Professor: Preparing for Academic Careers in Science and Engineering” by Richard M. Reis, Stanford University.

The author gives insight on academia, science and engineering in higher education, and challenges for the professorate. He describes how to prepare for a career in academia, professional preparation strategy, value of research and teaching experiences prior to becoming a faculty. The author discusses the way of finding and getting the academic position you want. The book is rich with insights on managing/balancing your personal and professional life, teaching and learning, research, professional responsibility, tenure, etc.

See selections from “Tomorrow's Professor”, including the Table of Contents, Preface, and Introduction at http://cis.stanford.edu/structure/tomprof/frontmatter.html
See the full text of Chapter 4, "Your Professional Preparation Strategy" from “Tomorrow's Professor” at http://cis.stanford.edu/structure/tomprof/chapter4.html Read reviewer/reader comments at http://cis.stanford.edu/structure/tomprof/reviews.html

Subscribe to Tomorrow's ProfessorSM Listserv at http://sll.stanford.edu/projects/tomprof/.

Academic Careers in Business


“Tomorrow's Professor: Preparing for Academic Careers in Science and Engineering” by R. Reis is a good general guide.

Related Forum Topics at FFF Web Site

How to Choose a Graduate Program: Is a Faculty Career for Me?
This electronic forum discussion will explore the benefits and drawbacks of attending graduate school and pursuing a faculty career, identify the characteristics of strong and weak departments and discuss some common misperceptions about grad school.

**Balancing Work, Family and Community: Now and as a Faculty Member**
This electronic forum discussion will look at the realistic time commitments and expectations of graduate school and faculty careers, and discuss balancing commitments to community and family.

**Pros and Cons of Post Docs: On the Way to Faculty Careers**
This electronic forum discussion will help to define exactly what a post doc is and address benefits and drawbacks to doing one. It will also offer advice on how to find post doc opportunities and discuss the importance of choosing an advisor.

**Job Search: Starting Your Career in Academe**
This electronic forum discussion will focus on learning about what options are available for faculty careers after graduation. It will include interviewing techniques, advice on CV writing, and current events in higher education.

**Returning to Academe: Making the Transition**
This electronic forum discussion will target professionals in industry or government who are interested in returning to higher education, whether it is to obtain a further degree or pursue an academic career.

Visit Faculty For The Future Electronic Forum at http://www.engr.psu.edu/fff/misc/forumhome.asp