

# **Academic Positions**

## **Tenure Track**

An academic on the “tenure track” is on the path to a permanent professor position at their university. They will be expected to go up for “review” five to seven years after they start their position at the university. The tenure committee will evaluate the quality of the candidate’s teaching, research, publication record, and service to the university. If the candidate is successful, they are awarded tenure which provides them lifetime employment at their university.

## **Assistant Professor**

This is the entry-level tenure track position. The position comprises of teaching, research and service to the institution (such as being a member of various university committees) and different universities will emphasize different components more. Assistant professors typically teach anywhere from two to four courses per semester in addition to supervising graduate students. They are also expected to be active researchers and publish books, monographs, papers, and journal articles to meet their tenure requirements.

## **Associate Professor**

An assistant professor who has been granted tenure is usually promoted to an associate professor, however, the rank doesn’t always mean the professor is tenured. An associate professor often has a national reputation as a scholar and is involved in service activities beyond their university.

## **(Full) Professor**

This is the final destination of the tenure track. Five to seven years after receiving tenure, associate professors go through another review. If they are successful, they are promoted to full professor. Professors usually have a record of accomplishment that has established them as an international or national leader in their field.

## **Teaching Professor**

Some schools have the same ranks for teaching professors (assistant teaching professor, associate teaching professor, and full teaching professor) for people devoting their time to teaching. They go through similar steps and may receive tenure review, though the review focuses on their teaching and service rather than research.

## **Research Professor**

Many schools have the ranks of research professor (including research assistant professor and research associate professor). These professors dedicate their time to research, generally without teaching

responsibilities, and, importantly, without tenure. They typically have fixed-term contracts of one to five years, and while their contracts can potentially be renewed endlessly, they do not gain the protections of tenure. Research professors can carry out many of the same activities as other professors, including obtaining grants and running a lab.

### **Adjunct Professor**

An adjunct professor is a part-time or non-permanent faculty member who is hired on a semester-to-semester basis to teach a particular course/courses. Adjuncts are often paid per course and as a result many adjuncts teach at multiple universities each semester. An adjunct professor can also be someone whose primary appointment is in another department or at another university.

### **Visiting Assistant Professor**

This is a temporary appointment that can range from one semester to up to three years. These appointments are usually made to replace faculty on leave or to bring in someone who specializes in an area that the department currently lacks. Visiting professors often have a higher teaching load than tenured professors which can leave them with little time for their own research. These positions help entry-level academics gain more teaching experience and demonstrate their potential, but they are unlikely to turn into tenure track positions.

### **Lecturer/Instructor**

A lecturer/instructor is a non-tenure-track teaching position. They often have to teach more courses than tenure-track faculty and have with no research obligations. Lecturer/Instructor positions are more common in the humanities and many teach foreign languages. While lecturers hold advanced degrees, they do not always have PhDs.

### **Research Assistant**

This is a staff position rather than a faculty position. In contrast to a lecturer, a research assistant is primarily focused on research and has little to no teaching responsibilities. These positions are usually funded by grants or fellowships rather than by the university. While they may hold advanced degrees, research assistants are not required to have PhDs.

### **Research Associate/Scientist/Fellow**

A research associate is distinguished by the fact that, unlike a research assistant, they have a PhD and have completed a postdoc. This is a more senior position in the lab with a more significant leadership and grant-writing role. A research associate is primarily a research position, though it may have some teaching responsibilities.

### **Postdoctoral Researcher/Fellow/Scholar**

A postdoc is a continuation of a researcher's training that allows PhD holders to further their professional development and start to transition from student to independent researcher. Postdocs also often take

additional leadership or teaching responsibilities in their lab. These positions are usually two to three years and it is not unusual for a researcher to do more than one postdoc.

### **Non-Tenure Track Positions**

Non-tenure-track faculty account for more than half of all faculty appointments in American higher education. The non-tenure track consists of two major groups: those who teach part time and those who teach full time but are not on tenure-track lines. These types of faculty positions are called by a variety of names at different universities so you might see them advertised as non-tenure track, fixed term, limited term or contract positions and they carry the academic rank of lecturer, instructor or, occasionally, visiting assistant professor.

The advantages of a non-tenure track position are the absence of pressure to publish and the focus on teaching. Contracts are often renewed for those that excel at teaching. On the other hand, non-tenure track positions earn less money than tenure track positions and are often the first positions eliminated when there are budget cuts. And without tenure, there is no guarantee of lifetime employment.

(Sources: [American Academic Job Titles Explained](#); [Overview of Academic Research, Teaching and other Positions](#))