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Postsecondary and College Teaching Careers, Jobs, and Employment Information

Career and Job Highlights for Postsecondary Teachers

- Many teaching positions at colleges and universities are estimated to improve, but many will be for part-time or non-tenure-track employment.
- Fewer people apply for positions teaching academic areas that offer attractive nonacademic alternative job opportunities, such as personal trainers, business, and computer science, causing better opportunities for teaching jobs in those subjects.
- Depending on the subject being taught and the type of school, postsecondary teacher qualifications include anything from a PhD to expertise in a certain field.
- One out of every ten postsecondary teachers is a vocational or occupational education teacher; one out of eight is a graduate teaching assistant.

Postsecondary Teaching Career Overview

Postsecondary teachers include career and technical education teachers, university and college faculty, and graduate teaching assistants. They teach a wide range of vocational and academic subjects to students, extending beyond the high school level. Students may take these classes solely for personal improvement or to work towards a degree.

The majority of postsecondary teachers are University and College faculty. They do a considerable part of our nation's research, and instruct and advise over 15 million college students, both part- and full-time. As faculty keep up with recent developments in their field, they often consult with local, charity, business, and government organizations.

Based on their subject matter of expertise or field, faculty are often organized into divisions or departments. They typically teach several different courses that are related to their subject—for example geometry, pre-calculus, and trigonometry. Their students may include graduate or undergraduate students, or both. Their teaching responsibilities may include leading students in completing laboratories, instructing small seminars, or give lectures to hundreds of students in big auditoriums. In addition to teaching, faculty must prepare lectures, homework activities, and laboratory exercises; grade tests and projects; and have time set aside to advise and work

individually with their students. The research and teaching that graduate students are doing at universities is supervised by faculty. As the student population becomes more and more varied including students from differing cultures and ethnic backgrounds, and older students returning for their education part-time, college faculty have the opportunity to work with this shifting populace.

Many faculty members contribute to the knowledge in their field by conducting experiments, gathering and studying data, and drawing conclusions from other research. They often publish their results in books, scholarly journals, and internet databases. While faculty contribute to current literature in their field, it is important that they also read what other experts have published to stay informed on existing issues. Attending lectures and conferences are other ways they stay informed.

Computers and other technology are playing an increasingly prominent role in the work place of university and college faculty. The Internet, CD-ROMs, electronic mail, and software programs are frequently used resources. Students enjoy the improved communication they have with their teachers through the use of technology such as e-mail and chat rooms. They also appreciate improved lectures and access to information enhanced by the use of computers as teachers present computer generated lecture slides or presentations in class and post class lectures, notes, a course syllabus or other assignments on the Internet.

In addition to their academic responsibilities, many faculty members belong to administrative or academic committees. These committees may deal with issues ranging from institution policies, curricula, money allotment, scholastic issues, equipment purchases, or hiring. Some student and community organizations require faculty involvement. Department chairpersons are faculty who have sometimes heavy administrative responsibilities in addition to the few classes they teach.

Depending on the institution, faculty devote varying amounts of their time to either teaching, researching, completing administrative tasks, or taking care of other obligations. University faculty typically focus a significant amount of their efforts on research, much more than the faculty at 4-year colleges and even more than at 2-year colleges. Reversely faculty at 2-year colleges have a more significant teaching-load compared to teachers at 4-year colleges or universities. Assistant professors, instructors, and lecturers at all types of institutions spend more time teaching than full professors who usually spend the bulk of their time conducting research.

Teachers who offer instruction for occupations that need specialized training, but not necessarily a 4-year degree, such as an auto mechanic, doctor's assistant, cosmetologist or carpenter, are classified as postsecondary vocational education teachers, or postsecondary career and technical education teachers. These students often attend classes in an environment where they participate hands-on, like in a lab or shop. Cosmetology instructors may demonstrate certain styling techniques and precautions then supervise the students as they repeat the desired task to insure they are performing the task up to standard. It is becoming more common for technical education curricula to consist of a combination of practical skills and academic learning so the students receive an education applicable to real life situations.

There are many similarities between the responsibilities that college and university faculty have

compared with those of career and technical education teacher. They must stay current in their respected field, evaluate assignments, attend faculty meetings and prepare lesson plans. By informing students about prospective job openings and launching internship programs, technical education and career teachers at career and technical schools and community colleges play a big part in helping their students' transition from school to work.

Graduate teaching assistants, or graduate TAs, complete teaching assignments or other teaching-related responsibilities for staff, namely department chairs, professors, or other faculty. Assistants are in the process of earning a graduate degree, such as a masters or a PhD, thus they perform these duties while attending school themselves. Graduate TAs can have assignments ranging from teaching an introductory class—including planning lectures, writing exams and assigning grades; to assisting a faculty member with the courses they teach by grading papers, running review sessions, giving quizzes, or teaching mandatory laboratory sessions. Each faculty member works differently with assistants, some like assistants to be involved during class time, while others prefer to have them complete out of class tasks. Faculty normally meet with their assistants at the beginning of the year to determine what their assistants' role will be. One faculty member may be assigned one graduate teaching assistant or several depending on their teaching load.

Career Training and Qualifications for Postsecondary Teachers

Depending on the content area and the specific institution, the qualifications, meaning education and training, to teach at the postsecondary level can be very different. Teachers employed at 4-year research universities must meet high educational standards, while experience and real life expertise is most important at career and technical institutes.

Postsecondary teachers are apt to analytical thinking and are very inquisitive. They have a passion for gaining and sharing knowledge. They receive very little direct supervision so it is imperative that they be self-motivated. It is important for postsecondary teachers to have the ability to relate and communicate well with students. They should enjoy working with and motivating students.

The training requirements differ by State and by subject for technical education and postsecondary career teachers. Typically a bachelor's degree or higher in addition to experience in the field, such as work or research experience, is needed for teachers. Depending on the field, sometimes all that is required to teach to a license or certificate that authenticate your qualifications. In order to uphold their certification, teachers continue their education by attending workshops or other training programs. It is helpful for teachers to communicate with companies or businesses to be familiar with the skills that are currently most valuable in the workplace so they can prepare their students accordingly.

Full-time, tenure-track positions are generally granted to doctorate degree holders. Those with master's degrees or PhDs in certain disciplines, such as the arts, are usually hired for temporary or part-time positions. There are four ranks into which most university and college faculty positions fall: instructor, assistant professor, associate professor, and professor. Most start their academic careers as instructors or assistant professors. A small percent of faculty are hired as

lecturers. They typically hold single academic term contracts and are not included on the tenure track.

Those with master's degrees make up the majority of full-time teachers at 2-year colleges. Although as competition increases for these positions, hiring committees can be harder to please. Greater competition may result in applicants with master's degrees to being passed over for those holding doctoral degrees. Many 2-year institutions prefer applicants with experience with distance learning or teaching. Candidates holding dual master's degrees are at an advantage because they can teach more than one subject.

Taking into account time to complete a master's degree and a dissertation, it usually takes 6-8 years to earn a Doctoral degree. Some programs take longer to complete than others, for example engineering programs are usually shorter than humanities programs. Even if candidates specialize in a subfield of a discipline, such as American history, organic chemistry, or modern art, they still must take classes that cover the complete subject. Students must take comprehensive tests that cover all major areas of their field, attend seminars, take 20 or more classes that become progressively more specialized, and complete a dissertation. To complete a dissertation, candidates must complete original research in their field of study and write a report on their findings. This typically consists of proposing a model or hypothesis and then testing it. Humanities students may study published texts such as original documents, those in engineering or natural sciences disciplines usually perform laboratory work. Faculty advisors are assigned to give direction and guidance to students working on their dissertation. It generally takes 1 or 2 years of full-time work to complete a dissertation.

It is not uncommon for students in some fields, such as natural science disciplines, to conduct postdoctoral research for an additional 2 years before they take a faculty position. If they are unable to find a faculty job, some PhDs lengthen postdoctoral appointments, or take new ones. Postdoctoral appointments can earn a small to modest salary.

A good way to get experience teaching college is to work as a graduate teaching assistant. You must be in a graduate school program to qualify. Some colleges and universities require teaching assistants to take classes or receive training before they are permitted to work.

Traditionally graduate teaching assistants have worked in the department at the university where they are getting their degree. However, it is recently becoming more common for institutions that do not offer graduate degree programs to have teaching or internship employment for graduate students from other universities. For example, the Association of American Colleges and Universities and the Council of Graduate Schools has a program called Preparing Future Faculty which coordinates the job placement of graduate students from research universities at liberal arts, community colleges, or other types of institutions. Many of these programs now run independently. These graduate students work with a mentor as they learn to teach classes and develop their teaching skills. They get first hand experience of what it is like to be a faculty member as they write their curricula, attend committee and faculty meetings, and learn to balance administrative responsibilities, teaching, and research. This experience gives these graduate students an inside look at the different kinds of institutions where they make work in the future and also gives them helpful learning opportunities to improve their teaching

techniques.

Traditionally obtaining tenure is a significant part of the academic career for faculty members. Generally hired as assistant professors or instructors, new tenure-track faculty must work under term contracts for a period of time, typically 7 years. At the end of this time the institution reviews their research, documentation of teaching, and overall involvement at the institution—a positive review grants tenure. Those who fail to attain tenure typically are obliged to leave the institution. Once obtaining tenure, professors must be given just cause and due process before they can be fired. The academic freedom of the faculty is protected by tenure. They can conduct research and teach freely without worrying about being fired for promoting ideas that may be unpopular. Tenure gives both stability and security to faculty and the institution as a whole—the stability to conduct effective teaching and research and financial security for the faculty. To promote continuous evaluation of even those with tenure, some institutions have implemented review programs for post-tenure faculty.

As students' interests change and institutions desire a more flexible approach to financial matters the number of tenure-track positions is anticipated to decrease. The shrinking tenured populace will be replaced by employees with part-time and limited term contracts, or adjunct faculty. Some institutions are currently offering limited-term contracts to prospective faculty. These contracts can range anywhere from 2-5 years of full-time teaching and may be terminated or extended when they conclude. These contracts seem to be replacing tenured positions because there is no requirement for the institution to grant tenure to contract holders. There is a limited percentage of faculty who can even be tenured as some institutions.

Advancing in the postsecondary arena usually takes of the form of managerial or administrative positions for most teachers, such as becoming a department chair, dean, or president. An advancement of this nature requires a PhD at 4-year institutions. At 2-year colleges a doctoral degree is only required for the highest administrative positions, though helpful for other positions as well.

Job and Employment Opportunities

The job market for postsecondary teachers is estimated to grow rapidly compared to the average for all occupations through 2012. Part-time positions will make up a considerable amount of these new jobs. Many openings for teachers at all types of postsecondary institutions are resulting from retiring teachers coupled with steady increases in student enrollments.

As the population of 18- to 24-year-olds increases it is estimated that enrollment in university and college will also grow over the next decade. Adults returning to college and foreign-born students will also add to enrollment increases, especially in fast growing States such as California, Texas, Florida, New York, and Arizona. There will be new opportunities for postsecondary teachers especially at community colleges and commercial institutions that accommodate working adults as employers insist that their workers keep their skills up to date. During the first years of the projection period however, many postsecondary educational institutions will be restricted in their ability to enlarge to meet this growing demand. This is due largely to limited State and local budgets from which they receive a considerable part of their

funding. Despite this factor, large numbers of postsecondary teachers are expected to retire in the next ten years, creating still more openings for postsecondary positions. In the late 1960s and into the 1970s a large number of teachers were hired to teach the baby boomers. Many of those teachers are anticipated to retire in the approaching years.

The majority of doctoral degree holders who seek employment work at postsecondary institutions. There are expected to be more job openings for postsecondary teachers available now to those with PhDs compared to in the past. In the previous decade there was a 10 percent raise of earned doctorate degrees, which is much higher than the 4 percent projected increase to occur over the years 2002-2012. As 4-year universities and colleges replace tenure positions with renewable and part-time appointments, those seeking tenure-track positions will still face fierce competition despite fewer qualified applicants.

It is anticipated that there will be good opportunities for graduate teaching assistants. The number of undergraduate students attending schools that offer graduate degrees are expected to be almost double the enrolment number of the preceding decade, while graduate student enrollment over the years 2002-2012 are expected to increase a little slower than the 1992-2002 enrollment, creating a plethora of teaching prospects. Graduate teaching assistants make up more than 12 percent of all postsecondary teachers and are likely to do so in coming years as well.

The most favorable job opportunities for postsecondary teachers are likely to be in disciplines where job growth is predicted to be strong during the next ten years. This is because students often obtain postsecondary degrees to qualify for employment. Fields that anticipate strong growth include Health specialties—such as dietary consultants, personal trainers, and nursing; business; and biological and computer sciences. Community colleges and other institutions offering technical and career education are expected to have many openings for postsecondary teachers because the need for the type of education they offer has been in demand.