



A Brief Guide to People within the Academy

We've been using the word "faculty" a lot . . .
but what do we mean by that anyway?
Check out this chart for some more
specific details about the different
structures and hierarchy within
the academic world.

Tenure Track

Tenure is the ongoing right of a faculty member to receive annual employment contracts within an institution; status is not subject to periodic renewal and is normally only subject to loss through "adequate cause" or a financial crisis of the department or institution.



Assistant Professor

Usual entry-level rank for "tenure track" faculty (this depends on the institution/field).

It's important to think of this category as "pre-tenure." Their focus is putting together their portfolios.

Typically, failure to be promoted to an associate professor result in termination following a one-year appointment.

It's critical for them to keep a healthy perspective, remain true to their core beliefs and faith, and find a good mentor.



Associate Professor

A mid-level, usually tenured, faculty member.

In order to be prepared for the application to become a full professor, they must keep up with research, writing, and teaching evaluations.

Their committee workload increases.



Professor (or Full Professor)

A mid-level, usually tenured, faculty member.

This often brings more expectations to participate in university or department committee work.

Depending on an institution's economics and politics, some associate and full professors could lose their jobs if a department is cut.



Distinguished, Endowed, or University Professor

This is an honor often given because of research/merit. It feels more secure and may bring with it less class time.

This is just a step apart from the regular professor; how that looks and functions in a department likely depends on the institution.

Non-Tenure Track (Generally)

These can be quite varied, depending upon the institution and/or department. The key feature with positions like adjuncts and lecturers is that these may be subject to on-going review and renewal.



Adjunct Professor

Normally denotes part-time status (usually less than half-time). Adjunct faculty may have primary employment elsewhere (either another school or as a practicing professional). At some institutions, the job title Part-time Lecturer (PTL) is used instead.

(It often doesn't include retirement/health benefits or long-term contracts).

This is a growing group on campus. Taking an adjunct position is a way to stay in the academy when you've not been able to find a full-time position. Institutions often use adjuncts to save money.

Realize that these people are in a very vulnerable situation professionally. Serve this group well through support, listening, community, and discernment coaching.



Lecturer/Instructor

May teach full-time or have some administrative duties but have no research obligations (essentially the converse of "research-only" faculty). Both lecturers and instructors typically hold advanced graduate/professional degrees. The term "professor" may often be used for people holding any kind of faculty position.

As with adjuncts, this category is growing as institutions work to cut their budgets. They are generally underpaid and may have experienced some disappointments, like not securing a tenure track position.



Visiting Professor

Almost always indicates a temporary appointment, often to fill a vacancy due to a sabbatical or temporary absence of a regular faculty member. Sometimes used as a way to bring different people to the institution or provide entry-level academics with an opportunity to demonstrate their potential (for their next employer).

These people often come from other locations. They can bring new ideas and life into a faculty group, but they also need hospitality and relational initiation to bring them alongside their colleagues.



Research Professor

People who often work for a research institute not directly connected to a university. May also refer to faculty in a department performing only research, typically on grant-based "soft money."

This group can feel as though they don't fit in. It's important to acknowledge and value their work.

Many will be around the university as long as a teaching professor and may prove to be good ministry partners.



Clinical Professor

A full-time or part-time non-tenured teaching position with limited or no research responsibilities; especially in the health sciences but also in other "professional" fields like law, business, and engineering. May also be known as Professor of Professional Practice.

Again this group may feel like they don't fit into a regular faculty category.

Their availability may also fluctuate with varying degrees of responsibilities and schedule pressures.

Academic Support



Post-Doctorate (post-doc)

A short-term research post (1–2 years, typically). Many PhDs go into these posts for additional research and networking opportunities.

They aren't grad students, and they aren't faculty. It's a tough spot in terms of figuring out where to relate (up or down).



Teaching Assistants (TAs) & Research Assistants (RAs)

Graduate students who teach and do research as part of their funding

These grad students often carry a heavy load: their own work plus the typical responsibilities of a TA.

Admin/Support



Administrator (dean, chair, provost, etc.)

Also known as academic administrators, most likely have a PhD and teaching/research experience. Their work is related to the institution and its management/development.

Moving into these positions often changes the power dynamics with former colleagues.

They have more institutional responsibility pressures depending on the ebbs and flows of campus/state political shifts.



Librarians

Librarians sometimes have a rank structure parallel to that of tenure-track faculty (Assistant Librarian, Associate Librarian, Librarian, etc.). Some senior librarians/head librarians may have faculty or faculty-equivalent rank.

Again be attentive to how these people might best be served. Their concerns may align better with faculty at some points or support staff in other cases.



Student Affairs / Support Services

These positions offer support to institutional life (e.g., Student Affairs, Residential Life, Multicultural Affairs). There can be quite a divide between these positions and those that are solely academic.

Volunteers serving these staff need to understand that these people are often distinct from the academic stream with their own frame of reference and needs.



Staff

Includes secretaries, grounds, food services, etc.

This is another one of those areas where a power/concern difference may be experienced. For example, there may be a desire to gather for prayer, but doing that with faculty may not serve everyone well.