

# 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.

arrows indicate typical promotion paths

tenure-line faculty norms vary for law and medicine when tenure-eligible

research faculty  
teaching faculty  
clinical faculty  
obligations vary  
see description

practice faculty

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**Meanings of Symbols in the Table:**

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

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**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.

**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

Although not shown here, **service** is another set of duties, such as serving on university committees and organizing conferences. Higher ranks come with greater expectations of leadership in service.

