

University Professor

Teach and research at a university. Ten years of training, and the secure jobs are disappearing.

TYPICAL PAY

\$79,870

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$46k to \$177k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

9 to 14 years

after high school

DEMAND

Limited

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

No

anyone can do it

WHERE YOU WORK

**Universities, community colleges,
research labs, lecture halls**

How you get there

- 1 High school** Grades 11 and 12
Strong grades in everything, plus real reading in whatever subject grips you. Nothing here is specialized yet.
- 2 Bachelor's degree** 4 years
Major in your future field. Keep a high GPA, get to know professors, and try to work on a research project with one of them.
- 3 Doctorate** 5 to 7 years
A funded PhD (doctor of philosophy) program: coursework, exams, then an original dissertation. You teach undergraduate classes as part of the deal.
- 4 Postdoctoral position** 0 to 4 years
Common in the sciences, less so in the humanities. A short research contract while you publish and apply for faculty jobs.
- 5 Tenure track and tenure** 6 to 7 years
Hired as an assistant professor, then judged on research, teaching and service. Pass and you are tenured. Fail and you usually have to leave.

Pros and cons

- + You get paid to think about one thing deeply
- + Enormous control over your own schedule
- + Tenure is job security almost nothing else offers
- Ten years of training for a job you may never get
- Most teaching is now done by underpaid part timers
- You have to move wherever the one offer is

Optional boosts

Publications. Grant money. Teaching record. Conference presence.

Good to know

Faculty flipped from half part time to more than half full ti...

Between 2011 and 2022 full-time faculty positions grew 11% while part-time positions fell 13%, moving the split from about even to 56% full time. Total faculty numbers still barely grew.

Tenure started as a free speech protection

American tenure was built in the early 1900s so professors could publish unpopular findings without being fired by trustees or donors. It was never meant as a reward for long service.

Where these numbers come from

O*NET OnLine: Postsecondary Teachers, All Other (25-1199.00)
National Center for Education Statistics: characteristics of postsecondary faculty
National Center for Education Statistics: tuition and cost of attendance
Council of Graduate Schools

Numbers checked September 2026. Pay figures are typical full-time annual amounts in United States dollars, based on Bureau of Labor Statistics wage data and published pay scales. They vary by state, employer and experience. Tuition is for in-state students at public schools unless the card says otherwise. Sources, links and the click-through version: <https://career.help/us/careers/university-professor>



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