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What Do Faculty Do?

Most people, when thinking about what faculty do, picture a professor in a classroom lecturing to students, or perhaps someone in a lab coat conducting an experiment. Teaching and research are widely recognized as the basic tasks of faculty members. Less well known are the many responsibilities that accompany these basic functions. According to the 1999 National Study of Postsecondary Faculty, published by the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics, full-time faculty members work about fifty-five hours a week, and part-time faculty work nearly forty. That figure includes paid and unpaid hours completed on and off campus. Here are some of the duties, aside from teaching and research, that you might find a professor doing if you followed him or her during the course of a day.

Student-Centered Work

- Updating a course to incorporate new research findings, or creating a new course
- Helping students with subject matter in person, by e-mail, or by way of an electronic bulletin board
- Developing a class Web site to further student involvement in a course, or advising students about how to use technology in the field
- Working with colleagues to modify the curriculum to keep up with changes in the discipline
- Advising students about their choice of major or mentoring graduate students
- Coaching students who want to go beyond the required coursework in a class
- Counseling students about personal problems, learning difficulties, or life choices
- Writing letters of recommendation to help students enter graduate programs or secure jobs or internships
- Keeping in touch with alumni to assist with employment searches or career changes
- Reading student research papers, undergraduate honors theses, or doctoral dissertations
- Directing or serving on a student's master's or doctoral committee
- Establishing a foreign study program or supervising students overseas
- Sponsoring a student literary journal or overseeing a drama club

Disciplinary—or Professional—Centered Work

- Serving on a committee interviewing candidates for new faculty positions
- Evaluating a colleague's work for promotion or tenure
- Participating in a departmental self-study
- Reviewing potential library resources and advising on acquisitions
- Writing a recommendation for a colleague for a fellowship or award
- Serving on a university committee that writes policies for academic programs, student scholarships, or financial aid
- Applying for a grant for the department, or helping to raise money for the university
- Participating in the activities of a professional association to advance standards and research in the field
- Giving a scholarly presentation at a disciplinary society meeting
- Editing a professional journal to help disseminate new knowledge in the field
Reviewing articles and books submitted to journals and publishers and advising about whether to publish them

Community-Centered Work

- Giving a presentation to a business or school group, often at no expense to the group
- Providing professional advice to local, state, or national government
- Providing professional advice to associations, businesses, or community groups
- Answering phone calls from citizens and offering professional expertise
- Helping to keep the public informed about issues by talking to the media
- Serving on the boards of local, state, or national group

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