

# DIFFERENTIATING ACADEMIC TITLES, ROLES AND FUNCTIONS

## **Goal:**

To present a universal understanding and appreciation of some of the many academic titles and their usual interactive job roles, relationships, and functions.

## **Introduction:**

Academic titles, functions, positions, and roles within colleges and universities (Higher Education/Post Secondary) are very different than non-academic organization/business requirements, titles, functions, and roles.

The definition of a job “position” describes the usual *functionality, tasks, roles, and responsibilities* of a job assignment. A job “title” is the *label* given to you, as an employee. Both are considered to provide important historical and current information when applying for any job or role---particularly in higher education.

Therefore, the following categories represent the most often (not all) used or accepted titles, roles, functions, responsibilities, and expertise required of academic/higher education employment. These categories are usually educationally acquired and are continually driven by ongoing academic achievement and success.

The word Emeritus usually indicates a person has retired from academic employment as a professor, but still holds some connection with the academic higher education system by retaining the academic title and often special privileges on campus or within the college/university system.

An exception to the following hierarchal list can be observed in some two-year programs/colleges where the only educator’s title(s) is a lecturer/instructor. Therefore, academic accomplishments and expertise may not always be title

driven. Also, there are new titles that appear in higher education—the most recently noted to be, “College Program Planner.”

## **Academic Role Differentiation:**

**Provost:** The *Chief Academic Officer* of a higher education campus.

**President:** The *person in charge of the higher educational system*—even though there might be more than one educational campus.

**Chancellor:** A high-ranking chief officer who is responsible for *overseeing the effectiveness, efficiency, and appropriateness of public business while maintaining public relations*. Some higher education situations place this role below the president’s role and function or equal to or below the provost’s role and function. Presidential academic appointments and dismissals are sometimes upon the request/recommendation of the Chancellor, with no parliamentary approval necessary.

**Dean:** An academic administrator who *oversees the management of everyday happenings* of a college or specific school or program within a higher education system.

**Professor:** A higher education expert usually hired full-time in a *permanent* tenured faculty position. There is usually strong job security within a specific/associated field of study. The position often involves *professing, teaching, creative writing, and doing related research to enhance and further the information/knowledge in their area of expertise*. The academic titles are usually PhD (doctorate based on education or research) or EdD (doctorate based on educational administration and related processes).

**Associate Professor:** A mid-level, tenured track faculty position in a field of study ranked above an Assistant Professor, often after a few years as an Assistant Professor. The role usually involves an increase in responsibilities more than an Assistant Professor in *teaching and research to enhance and further the information/knowledge in their area of expertise*. Serving on higher education committees restricted to tenured track positions and the development of curricula is sometimes a significant part of the role.

**Assistant Professor:** A rank below that of an associate professor and is often an untenured faculty position. The role is usually representative of a person having completed a doctoral degree or other professional degree (or equivalent). There is a commitment to *teaching and contributes scholarly or professional contributions of exceptional quality*. There is often active participation in academic affairs.

**Lecturer/Instructor:** The academic requirement usually involves at least a master's degree or equivalent with often academic evidence of pursuing a doctorate. This title is most often given to new faculty in higher education teaching capacities who have recently completed doctoral training and are working toward an Assistant or Associate Professorship. Effectiveness as a *teacher/lecturer is required or sometimes optional according to the expected role*. If approved by the academic institution and the superior academic leader, the person may attend and participate in faculty meetings, specific academic assignments, and have the right to academic voting.

**Adjunct Faculty:** A part-time untenured academic lecturer/instructor/professor who works on a contractual basis, therefore, and ineligible for the responsibilities and benefits of a full-time professor.

**Vice President of Academic Affairs:** A position directly responsible for the leadership, administration, planning, development, maintenance, and operation of the academic curriculum and non-credit programs.

**Collegiate Academic Advisor:** This role is usually considered to be a part of the Registrar's Office and can be helpful to students in many ways. It usually involves *helping students navigate their academic and career choices and pathways, planning course schedules, understanding campus resources, assuring the maintenance of academic standards, and helping to problem-solve personal concerns that may have an impact on a student's educational process and progress*. The position usually requires at least a master's degree or a teaching or counseling license.

## **Importance of Universally Accepted Job Titles:**

Communication as to job titles representing the type and expectations of a job is one of the most important shared forms of information for the self and others. Inconsistencies in universal job titles have universally shown to often result in more confusion and unclear job expectations than is desired. External and internal information about a specific job title is intended to present the intended expectation of the work assignment, that is, what a person does within their higher educational role.

When potential academic employees seek a job, it is most helpful for the academic institution to share a universal understanding as to what the job is expected to entail-- therefore, encouraging appropriate applicants to give evidence of meeting the universal requirements of a titled job through experience and expertise.

A warning: Trying to set forth for potential employees an unrecognized (non-universally accepted) job title with often different than usual job expectations has been found to decrease the applicant's understanding of the role or position for which he/she has applied. Therefore, uninformed applicants increase the likelihood of decreased ability of the applicant to meet optimum expectations of the job role and function.

Literature concurs that the following standardization and universal use of academic job titles encourages:

1. Clarity and understanding of a universal job title, responsibilities, and usual reimbursement for successful job performance.
2. Motivation for successful career progression.
3. Understanding of higher education roles and performance of specific job tasks and responsibilities.
4. Successful recruiting of job candidates who meet known specific job requirements.
5. Acquisition of a well-known salary range and equity in financial compensation.
6. Increased bargaining power when discussing a new title and position.
7. Standardization of job opportunities and promotions.

**Conclusion:**

A true higher education leader understands that universal job titles with their accepted universal role and functions add a dimension of positive job uniformity, stability, and shared community understanding of specific quality higher education job expectations. Such basic understandings add stability and performance accountability to the academic employment hierarchy. Seeking personal employment advancement often increases personal efforts toward academic job compliance, prestige in job qualifications, academic prestige, and an increased wage.

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