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INTRODUCTION

What Does a Teaching-Focused Career in Higher Education Look Like?

It was 4:00 a.m. on a Sunday, and Regan was on his way to the Denver airport after attending a conference. His overly enthusiastic Lyft driver was clearly a creature of the night. At every chance, he threw questions to Regan, his very sleepy, exhausted, passenger. The first one turned out to be almost a textbook measure of self-concept: "What do you do?" he asked. With a millisecond reaction time reflective of the salience of the answer, Regan, albeit befuddled in his early morning stupor, replied, "I teach."

Of course, all three of us do much more than teach. Even as he answered the driver's question, Regan was tempted to list all the other things that he did as an academic at a college with a heavy teaching load. He wanted to add in the research studies, the data analysis, the publications, the committee work, the administrative gigs, the countless hours advising students, the joys of faculty meetings, and the pain of budget cuts—the thrills and the spills that are life in higher education. The reality is that few people outside of academia know what it is really like to be an academic. Even within academia,

https://doi.org/10.1037/0000261-001
Thriving in Academia: Building a Career at a Teaching-Focused Institution, by P. I. Ansburg, M. E. Basham, and R. A. R. Gurung
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few people are aware that the day-to-day work varies tremendously depending on the type of job and the type of institution.

You may think that you already know what a career in academia looks like. And you're probably wrong. For most people, when they envision such a career they think of someone who spends most of their time on scholarly pursuits, either in a library or a laboratory. Although this version of the job is true for some, it is far from the reality of most.

There are approximately 4,300 colleges and universities in the United States alone (Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, n.d.). Less than 7% of these institutions are research universities. The vast majority of higher education institutions are teaching focused. If you are surprised by this information, don't feel bad. Most people's perceptions of higher education are inaccurate. Most books written for graduate students preparing for academic careers tend to focus on research schools (e.g., Calarco, 2020; Darley et al., 2003; De Los Reyes, 2020). Although many of the advice guides have good information, the examples that they provide, and their emphasis, tend to skew toward the research side of the ledger (Sternberg, 2017). Not many books acknowledge the differences among tenure-track and yearly contract positions, instructors, lecturers, visiting professors, and adjunct positions, or between doctoral universities, master's-degree universities, baccalaureate colleges, and community colleges (see Boysen, 2019, for a notable exception). That is where *this* book comes in.

Teaching-focused institutions are a different world from large research universities. If you are a graduate student looking forward to a career in academia, this book will help you prepare and apply for a teaching-focused job. If you are an early-career faculty member, this book will help you understand the many aspects of the job that you were never trained for: teaching, of course, but also advising students and institutional service. We will also show you how to develop and sustain a program of scholarly activity. Time, money, and mentoring are important yet scarce commodities for anyone hoping to succeed in a teaching-focused career, so we offer advice for finding all three. For readers in tenure-track positions, this book will help you prepare for tenure; for those with non-tenure contracts it will prepare you for promotion. And for those of you who have already spent a decade or more in higher education, this book will help you navigate the unique challenges that come during the middle and late years of your career. We draw from our combined decades' worth of experience at different institutions, in a variety of types of departments, as faculty members and administrators. For all readers, our goal is to help you thrive at one of the most rewarding occupations: a teaching-focused career in higher education.

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COMPARING TEACHING-FOCUSED AND RESEARCH-FOCUSED INSTITUTIONS

On the surface, there are many similarities between the job of a faculty member at a teaching-focused institution and one at a research-focused institution. After all, people in both types of faculty positions teach and advise students, perform service, and conduct research. But if you scratch the surface ever so slightly, you'll discover that a vast chasm exists between how faculty members at teaching-focused institutions and those at research-focused institutions approach and execute their work.

It will come as no surprise to you that faculty members at teaching-focused institutions spend a lot of their time teaching, whereas those at research-focused institutions spend a lot of time conducting research (although, as we discuss in Chapter 1, there are some teaching-focused faculty positions at research-focused institutions). But the two types of jobs differ in ways that are much more profound than just the relative balance between time spent teaching and time spent engaging in scholarship. It is inaccurate to think of a faculty position at a teaching institution as a pale simulacrum of a real faculty position. Instead, think of these two types of positions as siblings who, despite sharing the same parents and upbringing, could not look and act more different from one another. Most readers will have spent a significant amount of time in the company of the research-focused sibling; you likely have been living in their environment for years and know their motivations, habits, foibles, follies, and incentives deeply. With this book, it is our pleasure to give you a similarly intimate introduction to the other sibling: the teaching-focused faculty position.

What Is a Teaching-Focused Institution?

So, what is a teaching-focused institution? How would you recognize one when you see it? Surprisingly, there isn't a simple answer (see Boysen, 2019, for details about types of institutions). Two-year community colleges that offer associate's degrees are a good example of teaching-focused institutions, as are small liberal arts colleges that offer baccalaureate degrees. These institutions exist primarily to provide higher education; the focus of the faculty is clearly on teaching undergraduates. But what about a regional university that offers baccalaureate and master's degrees and maybe a few professional doctorates, or regional campuses of large research universities? Certainly, the faculty members at these institutions teach undergraduates, and often the campuses have the feel of small liberal arts colleges, but these institutions

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also compete with large research universities for grant monies, and their faculty are often incentivized accordingly. Are these teaching-focused institutions, or are they research focused? What about institutions that offer classes primarily, or entirely, online? At first glance, an online institution seems like it would be teaching focused by definition, but sometimes online colleges are affiliated with research institutions. One solution to this potential confusion is to distinguish between primarily undergraduate institutions and master's degree– and doctoral degree–granting institutions, with the former categorized as teaching focused and the latter categorized as—well, the distinction breaks down there because some master's degree–granting institutions can still have a teaching focus.

Another possibility is to differentiate institutions by their size: Small colleges and universities are teaching focused, and large ones are research focused. But a distinction based on size doesn't hold up, either: Pam works at a teaching-focused institution that has more than 20,000 students. The defining characteristic of a teaching-focused institution isn't the size or the type of degrees offered. Really, the only way to know whether an institution is a teaching-focused one is by understanding its mission.

The Importance of Institutional Mission

The institutional mission echoes throughout an organization and is reflected in the job demands of all employees, including faculty members. The missions of teaching-focused institutions are based on principles that foreground the importance of fostering individual learning, whereas the mission statements of research-focused institutions highlight the production of knowledge and its contribution to humankind. For example, compare the first sentence of Metropolitan State University of Denver's (MSU Denver's) mission statement—"The mission of MSU Denver is to provide a high-quality, accessible, enriching education that prepares students for successful careers, post-graduate education, and lifelong learning in a multicultural, global, and technological society" (see https://www.msudenver.edu/academic-affairs/about/mission/, para. 2)—with Yale University's mission statement, which reads, "Yale is committed to improving the world today and for future generations through outstanding research and scholarship, education, preservation, and practice" (see https://www.yale.edu/about-yale/mission-statement, para. 1).

There is no doubt these two different institutions vary on many factors (MSU Denver is a state-funded Hispanic-serving institution and a college of opportunity, and Yale is, well, Yale), but one of the most important ways they differ is how each has chosen to view its role in society. An institution's

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mission will determine which initiatives will earn human and financial capital and, as such, what kind of work will be incentivized. At a research institution the priorities will focus on how to support the research endeavor: building laboratory spaces; acquiring research equipment; and creating graduate programs and offices of sponsored research programs to feed research with cheap labor, new ideas, and external funding.

What you may not realize is that these priorities also provide an implicit framework that underlies institutional decisions made about the kinds of service (i.e., committee work) faculty engage in, about teaching assignments and expectations, and about how faculty members are evaluated and rewarded. Although the priorities themselves are different at teaching-focused institutions, the impact of the priorities works in the same way as at research institutions. The differences in these institutional missions trickle down and permeate the daily work life of faculty so much so that, although there is a family resemblance between faculty jobs at these two types of institutions, you'll not be able to simply map what you've come to know in graduate school as a life in academe to the life of a faculty member at a teaching-focused institution.

To be a successful faculty member at a teaching-focused institution (or a teaching-focused faculty member at a research institution), you will need to arrange your professional life to support teaching and learning first and foremost. This means that, along with the time you spend in the classroom providing direct instruction, you will spend hours working on service activities to create policies, processes, and structures that support students and improve instructional efficacy. You'll even be expected to articulate how your scholarly activities inform and enhance your teaching as well as how your scholarship advances your discipline.

WHERE DOES THE TIME GO?

As a faculty member at a teaching-focused institution, you'll be engaged in several different but related tasks: teaching, advising, service, scholarship, and mentoring. On many of your days you will spend at least some time involved in all of those tasks, and on other days you'll be able to devote yourself to just two or three. Teaching will take up more time than you think. It is one thing to be a teaching assistant who runs a recitation section and does some grading; it is another thing entirely to be the instructor of record for three to four courses per semester. If you don't believe us, just do a thought experiment regarding the time investment required for just one part of the teaching job—responding to student questions outside of class time. You'll discover that

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students will find you right before class and walk with you, or ask if they can follow you back to your office after class, to ask a few questions. Although those interactions are signs that you are doing something right as an instructor (and should be encouraged), they do steal about 20 minutes per day per class period: If you teach three classes in a day, that's an hour of your workday accounted for. Plus, you'll have student emails and, less frequently but not absent, student phone calls to respond to.

Let's say that you teach a typical four-course load per semester and have moderately sized classes of 40 students each and that you can expect to receive a message from 5% of your students per day. Using our numbers, that means you can expect to hear from eight students per day. Assume you spend an average of 3 minutes reading and 3 minutes responding to each email; you can mark off another 48 minutes of your workday. So, on days when you have heavy teaching loads you can count on spending close to 2 hours simply answering student questions outside of class. This estimate doesn't include the time you spend with students during your required weekly 4 to 5 hours of office hours. Of course, the relative portion of in-person, synchronous, and asynchronous extra-class communication with students will vary depending on the delivery method of the course, but the point remains: Establishing and maintaining even the most basic relationship with students is time consuming. We haven't even addressed the significant amount of time you will devote to designing and delivering instruction.

Please don't mistake this characterization to mean that you will spend all of your time prepping and delivering instruction and mentoring undergraduates. You will do *a lot* of that, but, simultaneously, you will be expected to shoulder a significant service load and, at many institutions, maintain an active research program. As a new faculty member, at a bare minimum you will be required to attend department meetings, usually weekly. You may also be asked to serve on one or more department, division, school, college, or university committees, or serve as a faculty sponsor for a campus club or organization. Just in meeting time alone these service commitments can take up a lot of your workweek. And, of course, committees and clubs are only useful if they actually *do* something, so you'll need to spend additional time outside the meetings working on service activities.

At most teaching-focused institutions you'll also need to carve out some time to devote to scholarship. The days as a graduate student or postdoctoral researcher when you could devote most of your time to research or creative works are over. At a teaching-focused institution you'll have to learn how to shoehorn those activities into a work schedule that is already very full. Although expectations about your scholarly productivity will be lower than at a research-focused institution, you will still be expected to engage in

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scholarship. No amount of excellent teaching and service can relieve you of this expectation.

After reading the previous three paragraphs, you may be wondering why anyone would want this job. Let us assure you that the time spent is well worth it. Those student questions that you're spending 2 hours a day on? They keep you intellectually engaged. When you know the answer and see the "Aha!" moment in a student's eyes, you will rightfully feel like you've changed their understanding of their world. It can be even more satisfying when you don't know the answer and the question sends you scurrying back to your computer to search the primary literature to find the answer, and then both you and the student know something new. For most of us, the time we spend on scholarly pursuits is intrinsically rewarding, but it is even more fun when you get to share that pursuit with enthusiastic, excited students. And all the time you will spend in meetings, committees, clubs, and so on, provides chances for you to interact with interesting colleagues, people who share many of your interests and have chosen the same career path as you.

IS THIS THE CAREER FOR YOU?

To enjoy being a faculty member at a teaching-focused institution, you'll need to be social, creative, and curious. The ability and desire to build strong interpersonal relationships are fundamental to this job. Sure, having excellent communication skills and liking to use them are crucial for success—but that's not enough. To be effective at a teaching-focused institution, you'll need the desire to communicate with people with the intention of changing them and affecting their future decisions.

Students likely choose to attend a teaching-focused institution because they are seeking a close relationship with their instructors; you should choose to work at a teaching-focused institution for the same reason. Underlying these relationships is the ability to speak and write clearly, compellingly, and compassionately. Whether you are designing a lecture, making a point during a committee meeting, discussing a student's future career plans, or presenting your scholarship to an audience of your peers, you'll need to be cogent and have a clear message. Much of your communication will be in formal settings, such as classrooms, committee meetings, and conferences, but a surprising amount of it takes place in informal social settings, such as hallway conversations and happy hours. Regardless of the setting, it is important that you are highly attuned to the state of others around you and that you can adjust your message to meet them where they are. You need to be able to detect what they need from you: Are they confused, frustrated,

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convinced, engaged, or inspired? That sensitivity is directly related to the strength of the social connections you've built with your students, colleagues, and collaborators.

Along with actively cultivating relationships, you'll need to be a flexible problem solver who is not afraid to think on your feet. Be ready to take risks. You're going to need to think creatively about how to engage your students through discussions, small-group work, student presentations, and more. Most of the time, you can plan these activities in advance, but more often than you'd expect what you have planned won't work and you'll have to be creative in the moment to salvage a class period. This is also true in committee work; plans can easily become mired in the muck of bureaucracy. When a committee's work has stalled or encountered an obstacle, you'll need flexible thinking to come up with an effective solution. Your scholarship will require creativity in ways that it wouldn't at a research-focused institution. Teaching-focused institutions have scant resources to support scholarship, so you'll need to be clever about finding funding. But that won't be enough—you're going to have to think creatively about how your scholarship can get done with less money. It helps if you can program your own software and build your own equipment. You will need to be the type of person who can think outside of the box, roll up their sleeves, and get things done.

A faculty member at a teaching-focused institution needs to be curious. The person who will thrive at a teaching-focused institution is consistently inquisitive. You'll need to be open minded about others and genuinely want to know who they are, where they came from, what they know, and what you can learn from them. A healthy curiosity about teaching and learning is necessary to keep your pedagogy and content exciting, fresh, and relevant. Students in your classes will ask you questions that take you off topic. The best teachers join the students in exploring these intellectual side trips. Your curiosity will also be an asset in your service work; sometimes the committee that you knew little about before joining is the most interesting one. Of course, you'll need to have strong scholarly curiosity. Even at teaching-focused institutions you will be expected to have a research program and make ongoing contributions to your academic field. To keep your scholarship vibrant, be prepared to take long intellectual journeys outside your academic niche: from psychology to aerospace, from neuroscience to literary analysis. True lifelong learners will find a home at a teaching-focused institution. If you enjoy being deeply embedded in a life of intellectual growth, if you like pursuing the answers to difficult questions, if you like transforming the lives of others, and if you see yourself in the previous descriptions, then a teaching-focused career in academia may be for you.

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A BIRD'S-EYE VIEW OF THIS BOOK AND THE LIFE OF A TEACHING-FOCUSED ACADEMIC

You won't really understand what a teaching-focused career is like until you have one—unless you read this book. Although this book isn't a substitute for real-world experiences, the chapters that follow this one will give you a much better understanding of what a career at a teaching-focused institution entails and how to thrive in that environment.

We start at the very beginning with how to get a teaching-focused job in academia. Chapter 1 describes where to find a teaching-focused job and the skills and education you need to be a competitive candidate for those jobs. We show you how to write a teaching-focused cover letter and curriculum vitae. We discuss how to adapt your current research program to fit a teaching-focused environment. We explain what a philosphy-of-teaching statement, a research plan, and a diversity statement are and how to make yours stand out. We describe what you can expect during a video or on-campus job interview and provide tips about how to give an outstanding teaching demonstration and research talk. Finally, we talk about comparing multiple job offers and negotiating your final contract.

Chapter 2 is devoted to teaching. Entire books, and many websites, offer instruction about effective teaching, and we mention our favorites throughout this chapter. Because a single chapter can't cover it all, we focus on the competencies of model teachers and give insider tips on student learning objectives, course designs, assessments, and online teaching. We highlight common teaching mistakes to avoid and provide information about how to find, and effectively use, teaching resources. Student advising is closely related to teaching, and we address this part of the job in Chapter 3. We describe different models of advising and show how they result in different demands on you as a faculty member. We offer practical advice about how to help students select courses, choose a major, and decide on a career (or at least a postbaccalaureate plan). Chapter 3 will also help you to be an effective faculty advisor for student clubs and affinity groups.

Many faculty members view institutional service as something that they have to do, not something they want to do, so in Chapter 4 we describe how you can choose service activities that you will be eager to do and that will have a positive impact on your institutional and professional communities. We will show you how to engage in collegial service that benefits both you and your peers and how to ensure that your service contributes to students' success. This chapter will help you choose the service activities that are best for you, develop the skills that you need to be a strong committee member

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and leader, and show you how to gracefully say no to service requests without jeopardizing future opportunities.

There are some teaching-focused jobs, usually at 2-year community colleges, that have no requirements that their faculty members engage in research, scholarship, or creative works. These are the exceptions. Most teaching-focused institutions have some expectation that, in addition to your teaching and service, you will engage in scholarship or creative work. Chapter 5 is devoted to helping you develop a sustainable program of scholarship. We discuss many of the challenges of conducting research at teaching-focused institutions and how you can turn those challenges into opportunities. We give advice about where to find collaborators and how to work with them effectively. On the basis of more than 70 years of combined experience, we provide practical guidance about involving undergraduate students in research endeavors, and we end the chapter with some simple steps to help build an inclusive research group. We even include a sample undergraduate scholarship mentoring agreement.

There are two things that all faculty members wish they had more of: money and time. To those two, we would add one other: mentoring. Chapter 6 describes how to get more of all three of these. We begin the chapter by showing you how to find a quality mentor. We also describe the characteristics of an effective mentoring relationship. We then discuss how to find money for travel to conferences, engage in scholarly pursuits, and other things that make your job easier. We cover both well-known formal sources of support as well as how to access the hidden money that can be found at all institutions. We end the chapter by discussing the hardest thing to get more of: time. You can't create more time in your day or week, but we show you how you can manage your workload to take control of the time that you have. We also show you how to get reassigned time to support your scholarship and service. (See Chapter 6 for a discussion of reassigned time.)

Our final two chapters take a long view of a career at a teaching-focused institution. Chapter 7 is focused on tenure: what it is and how to get it. For faculty members at institutions without a tenure system we explain how to get, and keep, long-term contracts. We show you how to survive, and thrive, pre-tenure or without tenure, and discuss the keys for a successful application for tenure or promotion. And, although we hope it never happens to you, we show you how to recover if your application for tenure or promotion is denied. Chapter 8 addresses issues specific to mid- and late-career faculty members. We discuss how to keep your teaching and scholarship invigorated and how to redefine yourself throughout your career. We also address the opportunities and challenges involved in moving to a new

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institution mid-career and how to transition from being a faculty member to being an administrator.

In each chapter we provide teaching-focused tips, key takeaways, and a set of recommended readings. All of the chapters, including this one, conclude with a reflection from one of us about our personal experiences at teaching-focused institutions. We present these stories to illustrate the challenges and opportunities you might encounter in your career and to provide personal insights to help guide you.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The missions of teaching-focused institutions differ in significant ways from those of research universities.
- A teaching-focused job involves teaching, service, and scholarship.
- Successful people in teaching-focused jobs are social, creative, and curious.

MARK REFLECTS ON A TEACHING-FOCUSED CAREER: NOT WHAT I EXPECTED

During the course of my career, I've been directly involved in the hiring of dozens of new faculty members. When I think back on those individuals' first years at a teaching-focused institution, or even recall my own earliest days as a new faculty member, I'm struck by how little any of us knew about what the job really was. My first full-time faculty appointment was to teach four courses a semester. I quickly calculated that this meant that I'd be in a classroom for 10 to 12 hours a week. This sounded so much better than the 50+ hours a week I had been spending in a lab as a postdoctoral researcher. I thought that in a typical week I would have plenty of time for teaching, research, and attending weekly department meetings. I figured I'd even have enough time to sneak off during the day for the occasional hike. The reality during my first couple of years was that I never felt like I had enough time to get anything done. The 12 hours in the classroom required at least an additional 24 hours preparing and grading. The one meeting a week quickly become three when I was added to two standing committees. The time spent chatting with students and colleagues in the hallways and in my office expanded exponentially each week. I couldn't find any time to devote to research. I came to campus early, ate lunch at my desk while I worked, and

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left late. I never went for a hike. What happened? I, and all the new faculty members I've met, grossly underestimated how much time, and energy, it takes to do all the parts of the job.

The point is, you won't *really* know what it is like to be a faculty member at a teaching-focused institution until you are one. This book will help—a great deal, I hope. If you follow the advice that we give you will not only survive this job, you will thrive in this career. I still get a thrill every time I step into a classroom. The teaching is what drew me to the job in the first place, and it never gets old. I love the challenge of taking the complex and making it understandable; I love the satisfaction of helping students see their world in new and interesting ways. I've discovered that I love the other parts of the job as well. I get great satisfaction from serving on a committee when that work leads to concrete changes that improve the university. I look forward to the weekly meetings with my undergraduate research assistants, and I celebrate every time a student whom I've worked closely with on a research project gets accepted into graduate school. I enjoy chatting with my colleagues, and hours can go by sitting in the campus coffee shop discussing the latest developments in disciplines far afield of my own. Each May, I get a little bit teary during graduation when the students I've advised for the past 4 years leave our campus and embark upon the rest of their lives. And every once in awhile, I even sneak away from campus during the day for a hike. As a faculty member at a teaching-focused institution, you will work long, hard, wonderful hours and, with this book as your guide, it can be a fantastic, rewarding career.