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# Life as an Academic: Why You Should Want to be a Professor

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# What's involved in being a faculty member?

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- Teaching
  - Syllabus, lecture, lab, exam, and project preparation; grading, TA coordination, office hours, advising, lecturing
- Research
  - Coming up with ideas, formulating research plans, writing proposals, networking, recruiting/advising students, writing/presenting/publishing conference papers and journal articles
- Service
  - Manuscript review, associate editorships, conference organization, professional society involvement, proposal review panels



# Why the job is so cool...

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- You have the **freedom** to work on ideas that you come up with and that you want to work on!
- You get to control much of your daily schedule – great flexibility for raising a family.
- You don't have a "boss" in the traditional sense of the word.
- Your work can have impact on technology, science, and, most importantly, people.



# Why the job is so cool...

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- You get to spread your enthusiasm for your field to students through teaching and research!
- You get to work with young people with new ideas and perspectives all the time, no matter how old you get, which means that you're always thinking about things in new ways.
- If, after a period of time, you meet the expectations of your department for tenure, you could have a job for life.



# Why the job might look intimidating or stressful...

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- You have to come up with new research ideas.
  - Tap your creativity and ingenuity: this may seem daunting, but it just takes practice. Find inspiration in collaboration across disciplinary boundaries.



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- In many situations, you'll need help to work on your ideas, so that means finding and funding interested students...
  - This means that you'll have to write some proposals that "sell" your research so that someone else thinks that it is cool too.
  - You'll also have to shop for or recruit good students to work with you.



# Why the job might look intimidating or stressful...

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- You also have teaching responsibilities, which are rewarding, but they also take some time to do well.
- As you become more successful, people may ask you to do other things as well (e.g., associate editorships, professional society service, administration)
- You may feel pressure about the tenure/promotion process, but this gets better with a little perspective...



# Advice on Advice (1)

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- **There is more than one way to be a successful professor.**
  - You'll get advice that will tell you how to be a professor the way others have done it.
- Find an institution and a department that will value the contributions that **you want to make.**
  - Not everyone has to work at a top ten research university to be happy and have impact.
  - But...don't underestimate yourself either!



# Advice on Advice (2)

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- Consciously assemble your own mentoring team:
  - People who can tell you how to get things done (support).
  - People who can introduce you to giants in the field and research program managers, help you get involved and get exposure (access).
- Volunteer for proposal review panels at NSF and conference organization.
  - Great ways to see what makes good/bad proposals and to network, build your reputation.
- Consciously target established faculty in your field to meet and with whom you can network and collaborate.
  - At each conference or meeting, make yourself a short list of people that you want to meet, and find a way to make it happen!



# Advice on Advice (3)

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- Don't be afraid to be wrong or to make mistakes.
  - Not every idea or student or lecture is a gem.
- Ignore the posturing of others.
- If you get advice from any source that intimidates you or that you don't like – ignore it!!!
  - Some examples: lecture preparation time, children before tenure
- **HAVE FUN AND MAKE A LIFE THAT YOU ENJOY!**