

## **Should Professors be Given More Respect in a University?**

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I have been in academia as a tenured professor for nearly 12 years and have really enjoyed my work which has a lot of variety including research, teaching, writing grant proposals, supervise students, giving keynote addresses and more importantly learning something new in my field every day. Most professors (which also includes academic staff including lecturers) I know work really hard. However I find that some of the non-academic staff in a university often misunderstand the hard work that goes into being a good professor partly due to the flexibility of the work hours of a professor. They seem to feel that professors are overpaid and work very little. This is far from reality. So I decided to write this article to explain what we have to do as academic staff.

First and foremost, it is the academic staff who are the main revenue generators for a university. That is, apart from endowments, donations and government support, much of the revenue comes from professors either through the students or through the grants and contracts. These funds support either in part or in full the jobs of most non-academic staff. That is, the professors get the customers who are either the students or the sponsors (e.g., federal, state and industry). With intense global competition getting high quality students and grants is extremely difficult. Therefore, a university needs professors who are either excellent teachers to excellent in getting grants and conducting research or preferably both. This is not a 9-5 job. Being a professor is almost a 24x7 job. That is, whenever you are not sleeping or taking care of essential family or personal needs you are working. There is no such thing as taking it easy or relaxing when you are not in your office.

A professor has to go through years of studying – usually 8-10 years of education after high school. After that 5-7 years of working day and night, sometimes at the expense of family life, as an assistant professor to get tenure. Then working hard writing grant proposals and supporting graduate students as well as teaching a large number of students especially in state universities. This means keeping up with the professional literature. Sometimes it takes several hours to read and fully understand a research paper. And, one has to read multiple papers a day including during week-ends to be able to compete globally. Furthermore, preparing lectures is not an easy job as one has to include the latest developments in the field as part of the lecture notes. This means the average number of hours a professor works is at least 60 and on average 80. It is usually unlikely that a non-academic staff spends as many hours doing work related duties. Even after tenure many academic staff don't relax as they are trained to learn and therefore most of them learn all the time regardless of whether they are 30 or 60.

With respect to those high salaries and attractive start-ups packages, they are absolutely needed to attract the top quality academic staff in an extremely competitive environment. Universities depend on the rankings. And rankings depend mainly on the feedback given by the peer universities. This means professors have to publish in top quality venues, get substantial grants and be good teachers. You have to be at it almost all the time. Considering the fact that the academic staff generate revenue and work on average 80 hours per week, I believe that they are often underpaid. And yes, the academic staff do have to travel to top tier conferences often held in exotic cities around the world and this also at times might cause resentment among the non-academic staff. But it is absolutely essential for the academic staff to present papers and give invited addresses. If you are not seen by your peers you are often forgotten. It's "out of sight out of mind".

Usually in any organization it is the revenue generators that get the most respect. For example, in most companies the IT departments support the mainstream business units. Until recently the IT departments did not get as much respect. However with IT being intertwined with the revenue in most businesses, it is being appreciated more. Still those who are responsible directly to report revenue are the ones who are regarded highly. Yet I find this is often not the case at universities.

Therefore, I hope this article will make the non-academic staff aware of the hard work that professors have to do. And, without the academic staff there will be no students and hence no university. I do understand that we need the non-academic staff to keep the university going. That is, we need them to support the academic staff in the teaching and research activities. It takes the entire community to make a university successful.

I would like to point out that the purpose of this article is not to diminish the contributions of the non-academic staff in any way, they are vital to the jobs of the academic staff and the university. But they should understand that majority of the academic staff are not doing fun stuff when they are not in their offices. Professors work most of the time to make sure that they can function effectively in the increasingly competitive global academic world regardless of where they are. Therefore, the academic staff should be given the respect that the revenue generators get in most organizations.