

Academic career, two misconceptions.

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When I google “academic career”, the first result is the web page “*What is an academic career?*” from the University of Edinburgh (Available at <https://www.ed.ac.uk/careers/postgrad/phd/options/academic-career/what-is-it>). That web page states “*Most people will progress through a number of roles when pursuing an academic career. These include: Research-only role, where the bulk of your time is spent conducting research with limited or no teaching commitment; Teaching-only role, where majority of your time is for teaching with little or no time allocated for research; Research and teaching position, i.e. a lectureship, where you will be expected to both teach and conduct research. The route you take will depend on your interests, the funding and opportunities in your subject area and the job market at certain points in your career*”. That definition is clearly biased towards research and (subsequently) to teaching because the web page is intended for PhD students.

However, the second result from that Google search is from the University of Manchester, the web page states a very similar idea, “*Many people dream of becoming an academic. Some of these dreams are fuelled by a passion for research, a drive to extend the frontiers of knowledge and a desire to enthuse the next generation of undergraduates with a love for an academic subject*” (Available at <http://www.academiccareer.manchester.ac.uk/foryou/>). In fact, most results link the academic career to research and teaching, in that order, not in reverse. The Université de Laussane states that “*In most scientific disciplines, the next stage after the PhD is now termed the postdoc: other posts and titles exist, depending on the institution and the country, but all are understood as a necessary step on the way through the hierarchy towards a professorship or senior researcher position*” (Available at <https://www.unil.ch/graduatecampus/en/home/menuinst/carriere-avec-doctorat/la-carriere-academique.html>).

When I read those statements from these and other universities around the world, I understand that an academic career is research-driven, is a career (path, race or way to advance), and it has some form of meritocracy in its foundations. Unfortunately, in other institutions, the academic career has other characteristics or requirements.¹

For example, for some, loyalty (exclusiveness) to institutions is an important asset in order to advance in the academic career. According to the Oxford Dictionary, loyal is “*Giving or showing firm and constant support or allegiance to a person or institution*” (Available

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at <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/loyal>). However, if an academic career demands some kind of loyalty, it should not be to a person or institution, but to excellence in your subject area. Furthermore, it is not rare than many distinguished academics have academic positions in two or more universities. The implicit value of this situation is cooperation, but for some, to cooperate with other institutions represents some kind of betrayal. At the end, the demand for loyalty and exclusiveness is just a trap that hinders academic and science advancement.

A second misconception about the academic career is the necessity of long periods in order to advance or to gain better academic positions. Of course, this misconception is

linked to loyalty, thus, some institutions demand that one only works in that university for many years in order to get promoted. But when you set long periods for each stage of the academic career, the faculty just makes the minimum effort to obtain the minimum score needed to advance to the next stage or just to remain in the same position.

Despite the academic career being a professional career inside an institution, all institutions must recommend their faculties strive to make significant contributions to research and teaching, and the incentive for that effort is the resulting academic career advancement. But the demand of long periods of institutional loyalty is just the path to mediocrity.

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