

# Professors: What are they good for?

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Why do universities hire professors?

I doubt anyone asks this any more; professors are expected to be there and to teach the students. These questions are not being asked so much that even educators of educators don't know why professors are there, instead spending their efforts to find *how* to teach more effectively. "Flipped" classrooms (three days online, one day in person), hybrid (combination of online and in person), POGIL (small groups supposedly teach themselves by filling in assignment pages), other things (I don't keep track of all the methods being taught to professors) are taught to professors. Those methods are intended to make us more "effective," by which they mean, higher retention and higher grades.

Retention benefits the university administrators by providing more income for them via tuition, so they always push retention. Grades benefit employers by pre-sorting their applicants for them, so they really don't care unless the grades are inflated so that employers can't tell good students from poor ones. So which of those benefit the students? Neither. Retention might help the occasional student who isn't ready to take classes seriously now, but might later. I think it would be better to send them on, work until they see by experience why a college education is good for them, then come back and start paying tuition. Some students just aren't ready to be students yet. Or aren't ready to be serious because they are in the wrong major for a reason that doesn't make them care. When it's easier to change your major than to change your grade, you are in the wrong major or you should be out working.

So why not take all classes online? That meets so many administrative and professional goals. Students learn something, and it's cheap for the university (meaning more bucks for the administrators, a primary goal of all universities)? Because they don't work. Students come out dumb, dull, and lazy, which they seem to like at first but later regret. We've been struggling with this for the past two years, coming out of COVID and the government-forced online classes. The students just aren't very good at being students because they missed something very essential in their education: time with professors.

Professors are in the classroom for one reason only: to be examples worthy of emulation. Examples of what? Doing interesting things with knowledge, showing how to be intelligent, and to demonstrate the benefits that follow hard work. Students need to see these in action, by someone they like, someone who was once like they are so the student knows all the hard work isn't in vain (not that there is all that much vanity in being a student).

For a professor, being knowledgeable, intelligent, and working hard are essential job skills, and I've worked hard over the years on hiring committees sorting out those who weren't, and on the tenure committee sorting out assistant professors who fell behind on those skills. And it's always a joy when we find those who are also likable and a little charismatic. It helps.

Professors, what are they good for? Being examples.

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