

Building a career in academia: things to know

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Despite its unique structural challenges, an academic career offers a contentful professional experience. Whether through original research where you make new and necessary contributions to your field of work or through teaching to prepare the next generation, the role of academia in shaping the future of a country is enormous. Academia is a diverse field, and each niche requires a unique specialisation.

For Social Science and Liberal Arts

The academia of social science necessitates a broad mix of abilities and characteristics. Awfa Islam, a researcher and lecturer at one of the country's top universities, advises against choosing this career path solely based on enthusiasm. The interest to pursue this career is often formed by societal norms and the false exaltation of teaching as a more respectable job than others. Therefore, one should carefully cultivate human skills before signing up for this career. For example, one may be an excellent teacher, but if they are not patient enough, they will find it difficult to be intellectually challenged by their students. "Good students always do not become good teachers. Therefore it is imperative to grow and cultivate your human qualities alongside your academic excellence," says Awfa Islam.

Moreover, it is essential to shape your identity around a niche field for in-depth contribution. Dr Shananzweez Hossain,

Researcher and Assistant Professor at a country-leading university, says it is vital to build your academic portfolio with a coherent identity based on your interest and other works such as your thesis. He adds that this academic domain requires qualitative and quantitative research skills, and one should start learning them early. Knowledge of software such as Stata and SPSS also comes in handy for quantitative analysis - while theoretical knowledge allows for better dissection of numerical findings through qualitative research. He further adds, "Skills related to academic writing, avoiding plagiarism and proper ways of citing are some of the most important skills needed for academia."

For STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics)

When it comes to innovations in academia - STEM plays a crucial role. Branches of STEM academia include mathematics, physics, microbiology, earth science, etc. Many of the pure components of STEM require theory-oriented and quant-heavy skills such as programming language, statistical software, MATLAB, lab experience, etc. STEM academia enthusiasts may start their careers with pure subjects. For higher education, it is often really beneficial to pursue their education abroad and, in some instances, to build their career beyond borders.

It is important to note that academia is also more competitive beyond borders.

Abdullah Al Maruf, Assistant Professor at a leading university in Canada, explains two significant types of academic positions in North America: tenure-track (leading to tenure) and non-tenure-track (primarily contractual positions). Most academic jobs will involve three essential responsibilities - research, teaching, and service to the institute, the profession and the society. Given academic positions are highly competitive, to increase the possibility of getting a job, he suggests, "After getting your PhD, you should evaluate your research profile and decide whether you want to be a professor or move into industry jobs. One or two productive postdoctoral positions will make you competitive in your academic job search."

For Business

The academia of business is divided into several categories and subfields, within which you must determine your specific interests. Across the world, business school researchers have developed domains such as organisational behaviour, accounting, finance and strategy over time. At the current time when business is going global, SMEs are on the rise, microfinance institutions are growing and academia requires more dedicated minds to contribute to this sector, setting aside lucrative corporate job offers that, in some instances, ought to pay more.

In business academia, proper mentorship can take you a long way. This career path requires conducting research and knowledge exchange across industries - it satisfies diverse intellectual curiosity. "To flourish in business academia, you must set and understand your teaching and research philosophy in the early career under an appropriate mentor," says Dr Md. Mamoon Al Bashir, Assistant Professor at a leading public university in the UK. "No matter your country of the profession, you have to think beyond classroom teaching towards theoretical and practical contribution", he adds.

One thing to note here is business policies vary from country to country. Being familiar with the local business environment is a rudimentary qualification for working in business academia for a particular country. For instance, a business student with a marketing major from one country may not initially understand the best marketing practices for another country. On the other hand, developing quantitative skills, majoring in Finance, or obtaining degrees like CFA can give you an upper hand, and you would be able to make the most of your skillset with proper guidance from a mentor.





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