

Section 5

The Context of Postsecondary Education



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Summary: The Context of Postsecondary Education

Postsecondary education takes place in various types of public and private institutions, including less-than-2-year institutions that provide short-term vocational training, 2-year institutions that offer associate's degrees and vocational certificates, and 4-year colleges and universities that offer bachelor's degrees or higher. Postsecondary education serves adults of all ages, and these individuals enroll with a wide range of career-related and personal objectives. Issues such as access and attainment (see section 3 and the *Essay*) have been prominent, but the context in which postsecondary education is delivered has attracted attention as well. Among these issues are curriculum content, student access to courses and faculty, the use of technology, and the availability of student support services. The national data available on these topics are limited, but these data provide important insights into the context in which postsecondary education takes place.

COURSETAKING AND STANDARDS

Many students arrive at postsecondary institutions without adequate preparation in reading, writing, or mathematics to succeed in college-level work. To address the needs of these students, virtually all public 2-year institutions, 81 percent of public 4-year institutions, and 63 percent of private 4-year institutions offered remedial courses in reading, writing, or mathematics in 1995 (*Indicator 50, The Condition of Education 2000*).

The debate about whether postsecondary institutions should offer this instruction is ongoing. Some maintain that remedial courses expand opportunities for students with academic deficiencies. Others believe that precollege-level courses do not belong in the college curriculum and compromise the quality of postsecondary education because they divert resources from college-level activities. Which types of postsecondary institutions are the most appropriate

locations for remedial work is also the subject of debate (Breneman 1998).

LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

Students' learning opportunities are influenced by the range of courses from which they can choose, the size of their classes, the teaching skills of the faculty, and the types of instructional methods they use. In recent years, the expansion of distance education and the use of Web sites and e-mail for faculty-student communication have also affected learning opportunities.

Students' perceptions provide a useful perspective on the quality of learning opportunities at their institutions (although the views of others would also be needed for a more complete assessment). Most students enrolling in postsecondary education for the first time in 1995–96 reported being satisfied with course availability, class size, and their instructors' ability to teach (*Indicator 51, The Condition of Education 2000*). At the 4-year level, beginning students at private, not-for-profit institutions were more likely than those at public institutions to be satisfied with course availability (81 versus 73 percent), class size (97 versus 88 percent), and instructors' ability to teach (93 versus 87 percent). Within the public sector, beginning students at 2-year institutions were more likely than those at 4-year institutions to be satisfied with each of these aspects of instruction.

Despite beginning students' high level of satisfaction with learning opportunities, concern exists about the extent to which undergraduates interact directly with full-time senior faculty (Boyer Commission 1998). The majority of full-time senior faculty (professors and associate professors) with instructional responsibilities at 4-year institutions do some undergraduate teaching. In fall 1998, 63 percent of full professors and 71 percent of associate professors at



Summary: The Context of Postsecondary Education

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doctoral institutions taught at least one undergraduate course for credit (*Indicator 47*). At nondoctoral institutions, about 89 percent did so.

Lecturing remains the primary instructional method in postsecondary education. In fall 1998, 83 percent of faculty and staff with instructional responsibilities at the undergraduate, graduate, or professional level reported using this format as their primary instructional method in at least one class taught for credit (*Indicator 46*). For grading undergraduates' performance, 61 percent reported using competency-based grading in some or all of their classes and 30 percent reported grading on a curve. Instructional methods varied by discipline, as did assessment methods.

In 2 years (between fall 1995 and the 1997–98 academic year), the proportion of institutions offering distance learning courses grew from 62 to 79 percent among public 4-year institutions and from 58 to 72 percent among public 2-year institutions (*Indicator 53, The Condition of Education 2000*). Institutions offer distance education courses for many reasons, including increasing students' access and improving the quality of course offerings (NCES 98–062).

Concerns have been raised about the impact of distance education on faculty workload and compensation (American Council on Education 2000). In fall 1998, 6 percent of full- and part-time instructional faculty and staff at degree-granting institutions who had any instructional duties for credit indicated that they taught at least one class or section through a distance education program (*Indicator 49*). Furthermore, about 8 to 10 percent reported teaching at least one class using a primary medium other than face-to-face instruction, such as a computer- or TV-based class. The data show that in fall 1998, full-time instruc-

tional faculty and staff teaching distance education classes taught more overall than those who did not teach these classes (an average of 3.1 versus 2.5 separate subjects taught), but their incomes were generally similar.

E-mail, the Internet, and Web sites are rapidly becoming core components of postsecondary life (Green 1999; NCES 2001–153). In fall 1998, 97 percent of full-time instructional faculty and staff at 2- and 4-year institutions had access to the Internet, 69 percent used e-mail to communicate with students, and 40 percent used a course-specific Web site (*Indicator 48*). Those at 4-year doctoral institutions were more likely to use e-mail and course-specific Web sites than were those who taught at 4-year nondoctoral or 2-year institutions. This pattern may reflect different levels of access to technology by students and faculty.

SPECIAL PROGRAMS

By law, education institutions must provide access and reasonable accommodations to qualified students with disabilities. In 1996–97 or 1997–98, about three-quarters of all 2- and 4-year postsecondary institutions enrolled students with disabilities, and nearly all institutions with such students (98 percent) provided at least one support service or accommodation (*Indicator 54, The Condition of Education 2000*). Among the most common services were alternative exam formats or additional time to complete exams (88 percent) and tutors (77 percent).

FACULTY CHARACTERISTICS

Adequate salaries are necessary to attract and retain highly qualified faculty. Adjusting for inflation, the salaries of full-time instructional faculty declined from the early 1970s through the early 1980s (*Indicator 55, The Condition of Education 2000*). Since then, average pay across the ranks as a whole has risen, but the purchasing power of salaries within each rank has not



Summary: The Context of Postsecondary Education

Continued

kept pace. For example, in constant 1997–98 dollars, the average salary for a full professor was \$72,500 in 1972–73, \$57,400 in 1980–81, and \$68,700 in 1997–98.

COLLEGE RESOURCES

Decisions that colleges and universities make in areas such as faculty workload, tenure, and instructional time have important implications. Across all types of degree-granting postsecondary institutions, full-time faculty members with any instructional responsibilities reported working an average of 53 hours per week in fall 1998. Of this time, 57 percent was spent performing teaching-related activities, and 15 percent was spent conducting research (*Indicator 51*). The time allocated to teaching and research varied by faculty rank, with junior faculty (assistant professors, instructors, and lecturers) reporting spending proportionately

more time than full professors on teaching-related activities.

Part-time faculty provide institutions with a flexible work force that allows them to adjust to enrollment changes, fill temporary vacancies, teach specialized courses, and reduce faculty costs. Despite the advantages to employers, part-time faculty are less likely than full-time faculty to have tenure and typically lack the job benefits and institutional support provided to full-time faculty (NCES 97–470; Townsend 2000). Some faculty teach part time by choice, but others do not and must work at several institutions to support themselves (Gappa and Leslie 1993). In fall 1998, 43 percent of all instructional faculty and staff worked part time, and part-timers constituted a majority at public 2-year institutions (62 percent; *Indicator 50*).



Learning Opportunities

Instructional Methods of Postsecondary Faculty

Among postsecondary and instructional faculty and staff, lecturing is popular. Eighty-three percent reported using this format as their primary instructional method in at least one class taught for credit.

Postsecondary instructional faculty and staff use many methods to promote student learning and to measure student achievement. Among such staff, lecturing remains popular. Eighty-three percent reported using this format as their primary instructional method in at least one class taught for credit in fall 1998. Although instructional faculty and staff use various teaching and assessment methods, the ones they selected were related to their teaching disciplines, as one might expect. Compared with the overall average, for example, instructors in the health sciences (38 percent) and fine arts (34 percent) used labs/clinics more often than average. Instructional faculty and staff in education (13 percent) and the health sciences (10 percent) provided opportunities to engage in fieldwork such as internships and apprenticeships more often than average.

For grading student performance, instructional faculty and staff indicated they more frequently use competency-based grading rather than grading on a curve (61 percent versus 30 percent). There were differences among disciplines, with

engineering (58 percent), natural sciences (38 percent), and business (38 percent) faculty and staff grading on a curve more frequently than average. Fine arts (70 percent) faculty and staff were more likely than average to have chosen a competency-based approach to grading for their classes.

To assess students, instructional faculty and staff in the humanities (80 percent) and social sciences (71 percent) were more likely than average to use essay examinations, while those in engineering (45 percent), fine arts (51 percent), health sciences (48 percent), and natural sciences (48 percent) were less likely to do so. Instructional faculty and staff in the social sciences (76 percent), education (68 percent), and humanities (72 percent) were more likely than average to use term/research papers. Instructional faculty and staff in the natural sciences (41 percent) were less likely to do so. Education (49 percent) and humanities (66 percent) instructional faculty and staff were more likely than average to have students submit multiple drafts of written work (see supplemental table 46-1).

NOTE: Instructional methods include all class levels (i.e., undergraduate, graduate, and professional). Assessment and grading methods include only undergraduate classes. Percentages may not add to 100.0 because faculty and staff could give multiple responses.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, NCES, National Study of Postsecondary Faculty (NSOPF:1999), Data Analysis System.

INSTRUCTIONAL METHODS: Percentage of postsecondary instructional faculty and staff who used specific instructional and grading methods in some or all of their classes, by teaching discipline: Fall 1998

Teaching discipline	Primary instructional method					Grading methods	
	Lecture	Seminar	Lab / clinic	Field-work	Other	Curve	Competency-based
Total	82.7	14.7	21.8	5.3	7.4	29.7	60.7
Agriculture/ home economics	84.3	10.2	31.8	9.6	3.9	36.8	63.6
Business	90.6	10.4	16.6	3.0	6.1	37.9	57.8
Education	77.1	20.7	16.2	12.7	7.8	19.7	67.2
Engineering	87.7	8.9	21.5	3.1	5.0	57.9	58.3
Fine arts	69.4	14.8	34.0	5.2	20.4	21.4	70.4
Health sciences	75.7	14.9	38.0	10.2	5.0	22.9	64.3
Humanities	88.0	16.5	10.8	3.0	6.9	20.4	58.8
Natural sciences	86.3	10.3	24.7	2.3	5.3	37.7	56.0
Social sciences	89.5	22.9	8.9	3.7	4.7	35.0	52.9



FOR MORE INFORMATION:
Supplemental Note 8
Supplemental Table 46-1
NCES 1999-022

Learning Opportunities

Instructional Faculty and Staff Who Teach Undergraduates

Most instructional faculty and staff at 4-year institutions who taught classes for credit taught undergraduates in fall 1998, but the percentage doing so declined as academic rank increased.

Although faculty in postsecondary institutions have many responsibilities, many people believe that teaching undergraduates is their primary responsibility. The percentage of instructional faculty and staff, particularly full and associate professors, who teach undergraduate classes provides a measure of faculty involvement in undergraduate education.

Among full-time instructional faculty and staff who taught classes for credit at 4-year institutions in fall 1998, 79 percent reported teaching at least one class for credit to undergraduates. Fifty-eight percent reported teaching undergraduate classes exclusively. Reflecting the broader missions of their institutions and the greater number of graduate students, full-time instructional faculty and staff at doctoral institutions were less likely than

their colleagues at nondoctoral institutions to teach undergraduate classes.

Most full and associate professors at 4-year institutions who taught classes for credit did some undergraduate teaching. For example, at 4-year doctoral institutions, 63 percent of full professors and 71 percent of associate professors taught at least one undergraduate class for credit, as did about 89 percent of full and associate professors at 4-year nondoctoral institutions.

At 4-year institutions, particularly doctoral institutions, the percentage of full-time instructional faculty and staff who taught undergraduate classes and who taught these classes exclusively declined as their academic rank increased.

UNDERGRADUATE TEACHING: Percentage of full-time instructional faculty and staff in 4-year institutions who taught at least one undergraduate class for credit or who taught only undergraduate classes for credit, by academic rank: Fall 1998

Academic rank	Taught at least one undergraduate class for credit			Taught only undergraduate classes for credit		
	All	Doctoral	Nondoctoral	All	Doctoral	Nondoctoral
Total*	78.7	68.6	90.0	58.2	43.9	74.0
Professor	74.5	63.3	89.2	51.3	37.1	69.7
Associate professor	79.4	70.9	89.5	55.1	42.0	70.6
Assistant professor	79.5	68.6	90.3	60.2	44.0	76.1
Instructor	87.9	80.1	93.9	79.6	68.3	88.2
Lecturer	92.1	88.2	97.6	79.1	75.6	84.0

*Included in the total but not shown separately are those with other or no academic rank.

NOTE: Percentages are based on full-time instructional faculty and staff who reported teaching at least one class for credit at 4-year institutions in fall 1998 (88 percent of full-time instructional faculty and staff at 4-year institutions taught classes for credit). Instructional faculty and staff at 2-year institutions are excluded because all of them reported teaching undergraduate classes for credit in fall 1998.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, NCES. National Study of Postsecondary Faculty (NSOPF:1999), Data Analysis System.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:
Supplemental Notes 8, 10





Learning Opportunities

Technology in Postsecondary Teaching

Access to the Internet is almost universal for full-time postsecondary instructional faculty and staff, but the use of e-mail and course-specific Web sites is greater at 4-year doctoral institutions than at 4-year nondoctoral or 2-year institutions.

E-mail, the Internet, and Web sites are rapidly becoming core components of postsecondary instruction for students in the United States (Green 1999; NCES 2001–199). In fall 1998, 97 percent of full-time instructional faculty and staff at 2- and 4-year institutions had access to the Internet, including 98 percent of those at 4-year doctoral institutions, 96 percent of those at 4-year nondoctoral institutions, and 94 percent at 2-year institutions.

Although access to the Internet was almost universal for full-time postsecondary instructional faculty and staff in fall 1998, the use of e-mail to communicate with students was lower (69 percent) and varied by type of institution. Full-time instructional faculty and staff at 4-year doctoral institutions were the most likely to use e-mail to communicate with students (77 percent), followed by those at 4-year nondoctoral institutions (71 percent). Those at 2-year institutions were much less likely to use e-mail for this purpose (48 percent). This may reflect different levels of access to e-mail by students as well as faculty.

Of the three types of telecommunications technology described here, a course-specific Web site was

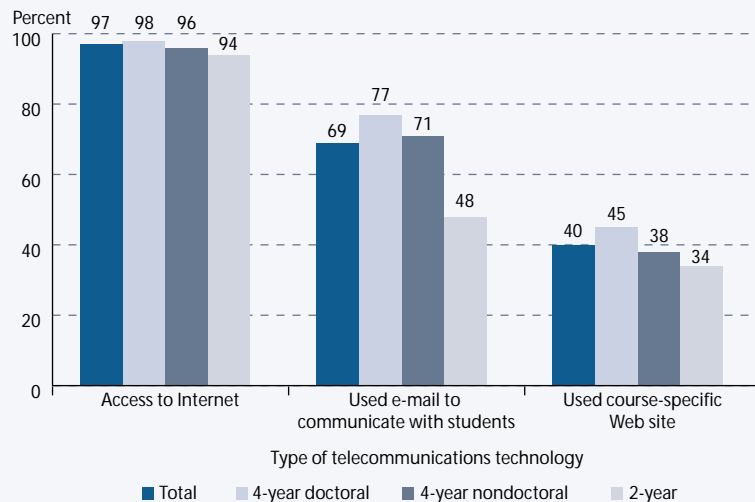
the least commonly used (40 percent). Full-time postsecondary instructional faculty and staff who taught at 4-year doctoral institutions were more likely to use Web sites to post course-related information (45 percent) than were those who taught at 4-year nondoctoral institutions (38 percent) or 2-year institutions (34 percent).

Use of e-mail and course-specific Web sites also varied by principal field of teaching. Higher than average percentages of full-time instructional faculty in the fields of engineering and computer sciences and the social sciences used e-mail to communicate with students (82 and 79 percent, respectively), and lower than average percentages of full-time instructional faculty in health sciences and vocational fields did so (50 and 49 percent, respectively). A higher than average percentage of those who taught engineering and computer sciences used a course-specific Web site (58 percent). These differences may reflect the type of institutions in which these subjects are taught, common instructional methodologies, and the propensity of faculty in various fields to use telecommunications technology (see supplemental table 48-1).

NOTE: Based on faculty and staff with instructional duties in fall 1998 who were teaching one or more classes for credit or advising or supervising students' academic activities. Access to the Internet includes access at home, at work, or both.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, NCES. National Study of Postsecondary Faculty (NSOPF:1999), Data Analysis System.

TEACHING WITH TECHNOLOGY: Percentage of full-time postsecondary instructional faculty and staff who had access to and used telecommunications technology, by type of institution: Fall 1998



FOR MORE INFORMATION:
Supplemental Notes 8 and 10
Supplemental Table 48-1
NCES 2001–199
Green 1999

Learning Opportunities

Distance Education by Postsecondary Faculty

Instructional faculty and staff teaching distance education classes teach more overall than those who do not, but their compensation is generally similar.

Distance education at postsecondary institutions is increasing: 44 percent of 2- and 4-year degree-granting institutions offered distance education courses in 1997–98, in contrast to 33 percent in fall 1995 (NCES 2000–013). Faculty workload is a key issue in this growth (American Council on Education 2000): Are distance education courses offered in addition to a regular teaching schedule, or do these courses replace others? How does compensation differ between those faculty members who do and do not teach distance classes?

In fall 1998, 6 percent of full- and part-time instructional faculty and staff at degree-granting institutions who had any instructional duties for credit indicated that they taught at least one class or section through a distance education program (not defined for respondents). In a separate question, about 8 to 10 percent reported teaching at least one class using a primary medium other than face-to-face instruction, such as a computer- or TV-based class. Though not necessarily offered through formal distance education programs, these classes may have a strong distance-learning component.

The teaching load was higher for instructional faculty and staff teaching either type of distance class than for those not doing so. On average, faculty who taught distance classes taught at least one class or section more in the fall 1998 term than those not teaching distance classes. They also averaged more course preparations (separate subjects taught); for example, full-time faculty teaching distance classes had about 3.1 course preparations, compared with 2.5 preparations for their counterparts. The base salary that instructional faculty and staff received did not vary by participation in distance education. Full-time employees who taught any classes offered through a distance education program earned about \$1,700 more per year in other income from their institutions (such as teaching overload or summer session pay) than those who did not teach such classes. However, there was no difference between those full-time faculty who did and did not teach nonface-to-face classes. There were also no differences in other income for part-time faculty teaching either type of distance class.

DISTANCE EDUCATION INSTRUCTION: Percentage distribution of instructional faculty and staff and average workload and compensation, by participation in distance education and full- or part-time employment: Fall 1998

Participation and employment status	Percent	Workload		Compensation	
		Number of classes/sections	Number of course preparations	Salary	Other income
Total	100.0	2.9	2.1	\$37,580	\$2,630
Taught in distance education program		Full time			
Yes	6.0	5.0	3.1	55,040	5,640
No	94.0	3.6	2.5	55,150	3,920
Taught nonface-to-face class		Part time			
Yes	9.5	4.7	3.1	54,160	4,320
No	90.5	3.6	2.5	55,240	3,990
Taught in distance education program		Part time			
Yes	5.7	3.5	1.9	11,550	720
No	94.3	2.5	1.6	11,230	780
Taught nonface-to-face class		Part time			
Yes	8.3	3.5	1.9	12,930	1,060
No	91.7	2.5	1.5	11,090	750

NOTE: Includes faculty and staff with some instructional duties for credit at degree-granting institutions. "Distance education program" was not defined for respondents. Nonface-to-face classes are those with a computer, TV-based, or other primary instructional medium. Base salary and other income (such as for a teaching overload or summer session) are for calendar year 1998 from the institution at which the respondent was sampled.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, NCES, National Study of Postsecondary Faculty (NSOPF:1999), Data Analysis System.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Supplemental Note 8

NCES 2000–013

NCES 2001–162

American Council on Education 2000





College Resources

Part-Time Instructional Faculty and Staff

Postsecondary institutions rely heavily on part-time faculty. In fall 1998, 4 of 10 instructional faculty and staff worked part time.

Part-time faculty provide institutions with a flexible work force that allows them to adjust to enrollment changes, fill temporary vacancies, teach specialized courses, and reduce faculty costs. Despite the advantages to employers, part-time faculty are less likely to have tenure than full-time faculty and typically lack the job benefits provided to full-time faculty (NCES 97-470). Part-time faculty are also less likely than their full-time colleagues to receive other institutional support such as access to an office and computer (Townsend 2000), which in turn undercuts their ability to be involved with students and may eventually diminish the quality of their students' education.

Some faculty, such as those who care for children, teach part time by choice, but others do not. Those who teach part time but desire full-time work sometimes teach at several institu-

tions in order to support themselves (Gappa and Leslie 1993). Consequently, they may be less available to students and less able to participate in the institutional activities than are other faculty.

In fall 1998, 43 percent of postsecondary instructional faculty and staff were employed part time as defined by their institution. Instructional faculty and staff at public 2-year institutions were the most likely group to be employed part time (62 percent versus 22 to 49 percent at other types of institutions).

Women were more likely than men to work part time at each type of 4-year postsecondary institution but not at 2-year institutions. Instructors and lecturers were far more likely than faculty with higher academic rank to be employed part time.

*Included in the total but not shown separately are those with other or no academic rank.

NOTE: Percentages are based on faculty and staff who had some instructional duties for credit in fall 1998. Instructional duties include teaching one or more classes for credit or advising or supervising academic activities for which students receive credit.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, NCES, National Study of Postsecondary Faculty (NSOPF:1999), Data Analysis System.

USE OF PART-TIMERS: Percentage of postsecondary instructional faculty and staff who were employed part time, by sex, academic rank, and type of institution: Fall 1998

Sex and academic rank	Type of institution						
	Total	Research	Doctoral	Comprehensive	Private liberal arts	Public 2-year	Other
Total*	42.6	22.3	35.6	41.4	40.9	62.4	49.4
Sex							
Male	37.8	18.6	31.0	37.1	32.9	63.2	43.8
Female	49.5	30.1	43.1	47.3	50.6	61.6	58.2
Academic rank							
Professor	14.9	10.0	15.6	12.7	10.8	27.2	24.6
Associate professor	12.8	9.5	16.6	12.4	8.9	19.3	18.0
Assistant professor	15.6	12.2	21.5	15.4	10.9	17.4	20.7
Instructor	73.3	57.6	69.4	75.9	75.4	74.5	77.5
Lecturer	76.6	65.8	74.1	77.5	93.8	93.5	65.2



FOR MORE INFORMATION:
Supplemental Notes 8, 10
NCES 97-470
Townsend 2000
Gappa and Leslie 1993

College Resources

Time Allocation of Full-Time Instructional Faculty

Full-time instructional faculty at postsecondary degree-granting institutions worked an average of 53 hours weekly in fall 1998, devoting a majority of their time to teaching. The time allocated to teaching and research varied considerably by institution and academic rank.

Teaching students is only one aspect of a faculty member's job. Instructional faculty also devote their time to research, administrative tasks, and other professional activities. Measures of the length of the faculty work week, the amount of time faculty spend in the classroom, and the allocation of time among work activities can inform debates about workload, tenure, instructional time, and the overall quality of undergraduate education.

In a national survey of faculty conducted in 1999, faculty were asked to estimate their fall 1998 workload. Across all types of postsecondary degree-granting institutions, the average full-time faculty member with any instructional responsibilities worked 53 hours per week. Faculty at research and doctoral institutions worked longer hours than did their colleagues at comprehensive and public 2-year institutions (see *Supplemental Note 10* for the classification of institutions). In

addition, full, associate, and assistant professors worked longer hours than did instructors.

Full-time instructional faculty spent 57 percent of their work hours on teaching activities, 15 percent on research, and 13 percent on administrative tasks. (See *Supplemental Note 13* for a detailed description of what is included in each type of activity.)

Full, associate, and assistant professors typically spent a higher percentage of their work time conducting research than did instructors and lecturers. Assistant professors, instructors, and lecturers spent a higher proportion of their time performing teaching activities than did full professors.

Overall, reflecting the expectations of their institutions, faculty at research and doctoral institutions spent more time doing research and less time teaching than did faculty at other types of institutions.

FACULTY TIME ALLOCATION: Average number of hours worked per week and percentage distribution of time spent on various work activities by full-time instructional faculty, by type of institution and academic rank: Fall 1998

Type of institution and academic rank	Average hours worked per week	Percentage of time spent ¹			
		Teaching	Research	Administration	Other
Total ²	53.4	57.1	15.3	13.4	14.2
Type of institution					
Research	55.8	45.1	26.6	13.2	15.2
Doctoral	55.4	47.3	19.7	14.8	18.2
Comprehensive	52.1	63.4	10.4	13.3	13.0
Private liberal arts	53.8	66.5	8.3	14.8	10.4
Public 2-year	49.2	72.8	3.7	10.7	12.8
Academic rank					
Professor	54.7	53.0	18.2	15.9	13.0
Associate professor	53.6	55.3	17.0	13.6	14.2
Assistant professor	54.4	56.9	17.3	10.0	15.9
Instructor	49.2	71.3	4.9	9.9	13.9
Lecturer	51.1	64.2	7.1	14.4	14.4

¹Percentages may not add to 100.0 due to rounding.

²Included in the total but not shown separately are those with other or no academic rank or at other types of postsecondary institutions.

NOTE: Percentages are based on full-time faculty who had some instructional duties for credit in fall 1998. Instructional duties include teaching one or more classes for credit or advising or supervising students for credit. Staff with instructional responsibilities are not included.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, NCES. National Study of Postsecondary Faculty (NSOPF:1999), Data Analysis System.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:
Supplemental Notes 8, 10, 13



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