

You Have a PhD! What Next?

Author

Enago Academy

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A PhD is the highest qualification you can have and is essential for a career in academia. However, there are many challenges to getting academic jobs as some PhDs have interest in non-academic careers. You should have a plan for your career after your PhD. What path will you take? What can you expect from life after your PhD?

Difficult Job Climate

The job market information is not encouraging. A [recent report](#) by the National Science Foundation on PhDs found that a PhD takes about eight years to complete. PhD graduates have significant debt and more than 12% of graduates owe \$70,000 in student loans. They often do not have a job soon after graduation. Almost 40% of 2014, PhD graduates did not have a job offer.

The ones who get a tenure-track job will earn about \$60,000 a year. About 39% of PhDs will do a post-doc where the average salary is \$40,000 a year. This is less than the median entry-level salary for a B.A. graduate, which is \$45,478. Some of the PhD graduates with academic jobs are part-time or adjunct professors. These positions comprise [76% of the academic labor force](#). They pay less than \$3,000 per class, and offer neither benefits nor job security.

Are There Too Many PhDs?

Despite these depressing statistics, more people are doing PhDs. In 2014 alone, 54,070 PhDs were awarded. This is 12,000 more graduates than in 2004. Every field had more graduates in 2014 than 2004 except for education. Science and engineering had the biggest increases. However, what are all these graduates to do?

The majority of these people will not find work in academia. [A recent study](#) has found that there is a definite bias to those who become a professor. Just 25% of universities produce 71-86% of tenure-track faculty. Graduates of more prestigious universities have a much better chance of getting tenure. For example, history graduates from the top 10 universities produce triple the number of professors as the universities ranked 11 through 20.

It is possible to [become a professor](#) without graduating from an Ivy League school; however, this is extremely difficult. This requires a lot of hard work. Landing a postdoctoral fellowship where you can show your skills helps as does having an influential mentor. This incredible bias also means that important discoveries from lower ranked universities can end up being ignored.

The difficulty in getting an academic job may not be a bad thing. Only 56% of economics PhDs stayed in academia in 2011. Regardless of field, PhD programs teach some invaluable skills. Doing a PhD teaches you to be self-motivated and helps in understanding complex ideas. PhD programs also help in learning to communicate complex ideas clearly and force students to come up with innovative solutions to problems. These are valuable skills outside of academia as well.

The labor market is changing. The most successful people will be those with advanced skills who can work alongside machines. This will require thinking and technical skills and such advanced skills are acquired during a PhD. The days when doing a PhD guaranteed a comfortable academic job is now behind us.

What Should a PhD Graduate Do?


For starters, learn how to transition. PhD programs generally do not teach students how to market themselves for non-academic jobs. [A few mistakes](#) are common during job search. Networking is essential and important to make connections with people who will not be competing for the same jobs. An interview is not a chance for you to get as many questions right as possible. It is important to treat every job interview as your chance to see if the company is a good fit for you. You should also know your worth.

You could start your career after your PhD by investigating [the possible jobs](#) relevant to you. Once you know what the options are, you can decide to which non-academic position you wish to apply. There are many [different niches](#) that you could fit into.


If you want a career in academia, there are [a few things you can do to get a job](#). Publications are critical. Being able to show a clear plan for your future research can't






hurt. Above all, you will have to be persistent. Do not give up when your applications are rejected. It is also important to have an alternative job plan. As you have seen, this is a difficult path and very few succeed in getting tenure.






A career in academia can be very fulfilling as academic jobs offer intellectual freedom and allow you to pursue research ideas that interest you. You can also [tailor your life](#) after PhD. There is the option of either choosing a research-intensive academic job or a position with a greater emphasis on teaching. You could also be interested in non-academic jobs, which could mean working in industry. Your career after PhD could also mean working in a job that is [close to academia](#). Although getting a job in academia is difficult, the good news is that academia is not the only place where your PhD is valuable.




Practical Tips for Postdoctoral Fellowship Application





-  Start early in your job search to collect relevant details
-  Get advice from your PhD advisor (Hint: Choose referees wisely)
-  Identify a research field of your interest (Hint: Find a good fit)
-  Explore opportunities outside your specialization (Hint: Receive training in new areas)
-  Apply for funds to simplify your application process


-  Customize your fellowship application for each position
-  Draft an impressive cover letter and CV highlighting your transferable skills
-  Follow application guidelines required by the organization/company
-  Proofread your application for unnoticed errors
-  Follow up

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Cite this article

Enago Academy, You Have a PhD! What Next?. Enago Academy. 2017/10/13. <https://www.enago.com/academy/you-have-a-phd-what-next/>