

How Professors View Students: the Most Satisfying and Challenging Part of the Job

 [chronicle.com/interactives/faculty-survey](https://www.chronicle.com/interactives/faculty-survey)

October 3, 2018

By [Audrey Williams June](#)

October 3, 2018

Faculty members juggle teaching, grading assignments, and conducting research. They write grants, run labs, and serve on the committees that keep their academic departments and institutions going.

One aspect of their jobs that stands out in both its rewards and its challenges is working with students. Here are key findings from a *Chronicle* survey of nearly 1,000 faculty members:

Most faculty members find teaching students to be satisfying work.

Out of four key tasks that contribute to a faculty member's workload — teaching, mentoring students, doing service work, and conducting research — teaching stood out as being satisfying for the largest share.

A greater proportion of [adjunct faculty members](#), who carry out the bulk of instruction at the nation's colleges, were satisfied with teaching than were their tenure-track peers. [At public colleges](#), faculty passion for teaching outpaces that of their private college peers.

I'm satisfied with teaching students

Somewhat or very satisfied

- By Field
- By Title
- By Type

By academic field

Overall

90.9%

Business

92.7%

Education

92.7%

Engineering/Math

91.7%

Humanities

87.4%

Science

91.1%

Social Science

87.6%

Visual/Performing Arts

98%

Professor

89.1%

Adjunct/Instructor

94.9%

Private

89.1%

Public

94.1%

They believe students have a high opinion of them.

Higher education has its share of skeptics who don't think professors are worth the paychecks. But faculty members don't believe those kinds of critics are in the classroom. Visual and performing-arts faculty members ranked the highest when it came to reporting how much students respected their jobs, with a mean score of 2.47 on a scale of 0 being respected to 10 not respected. Humanities professors aren't quite as sure of their status with students. Their mean score was 3.46.

My job is respected by my students

on a scale from 0 (respected) to 10 (not respected)

- By Field
- By Tenure

- By Salary

By academic field

Overall

3

Business

3.07

Education

2.85

Engineering/Math

2.78

Humanities

3.46

Science

2.71

Social Science

3.41

Visual/Performing Arts

2.47

Tenured

3.08

Untenured

2.91

less than \$50,000

2.67

\$50,000 - \$74,999

3.31

\$75,000 - \$99,999

3.06

\$100,000 - \$124,999

2.87

\$125,000 - \$149,999

2.59

\$150,000 - \$174,999

2.13

\$175,000 - \$199,999

3.3

\$200,000+

2.35

Faculty members see the big picture when it comes to teaching.

Every interaction with a student is an opportunity to shape the minds of the next generation. And nearly all faculty members — no matter the discipline, how much they earn, or where they work — believe that teaching has an impact on the lives of students.

My teaching benefits students and their lives

Agree or strongly agree

- By Field
- By Salary
- By Type

By academic field

Overall

98.5%

Business

98.2%

Education

97.6%

Engineering/Math

100%

Humanities

97.9%

Science

94.6%

Social Science

94.7%

Visual/Performing Arts

100%

less than \$50,000

97.1%

\$50,000 - \$74,999

98.9%

\$75,000 - \$99,999

95.7%

\$100,000 - \$124,999

92.6%

\$125,000 - \$149,999

100%

\$150,000 - \$174,999

100%

\$175,000 - \$199,999

100%

\$200,000+

100%

Private

98.2%

Public

95.9%

Student engagement is a thing of the past.

Overall, faculty members agree that engaging students in class is trickier than ever before. Professors age 70 and up are the most satisfied with the engagement levels of the current generation, along with untenured professors and those in the visual and performing arts. The least optimistic outlook on student engagement comes from faculty members in the sciences.

Today's students are more engaged than students of years past

Agree or strongly agree

- By Field
- By Tenure
- By Age

By academic field

Overall

20.7%

Business

21.8%

Education

29.3%

Engineering/Math

16.7%

Humanities

13.7%

Science

8.9%

Social Science

15.9%

Visual/Performing Arts

23.5%

Tenured

13.8%

Untenured

19.2%

30-39

10.3%

40-49

15.6%

50-59

20.1%

60-69

15.3%

70+

24.3%

Teaching used to be more fulfilling.

Roughly one out of four faculty members in business, education, and engineering and math agree that they get the same satisfaction out of teaching students today as in years past. That's about equal to the share of professors 70 and up who feel the same.

Teaching today's students is more fulfilling than teaching students of years past

Agree or strongly agree

- By Field
- By Tenure
- By Age

By academic field

Overall

22.1%

Business

23.6%

Education

22%

Engineering/Math

22.2%

Humanities

13.7%

Science

12.5%

Social Science

14.2%

Visual/Performing Arts

11.8%

Tenured

18.5%

Untenured

13.8%

30-39

4.6%

40-49

12.8%

50-59

20.1%

60-69

19.8%

70+

21.6%

Just over half of faculty members agree that teaching is harder work than it used to be.

Business professors feel the strain of working with students most prominently, with 61.8 percent of them agreeing that students are harder to teach. Nearly 60 percent of tenured professors find teaching more challenging, compared with 47.2 percent of untenured faculty.

Today's students are harder to teach than students of years past

Agree or strongly agree

- By Field
- By Tenure
- By Age

By academic field

Overall

62.8%

Business

61.8%

Education

41.5%

Engineering/Math

55.6%

Humanities

52.6%

Science

50%

Social Science

54%

Visual/Performing Arts

51%

Tenured

58.6%

Untenured

47.2%

30-39

43.7%

40-49

48.9%

50-59

57.6%

60-69

60.3%

70+

59.5%

Source: Survey of 997 faculty members commissioned by *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, conducted by Maguire Associates, with support from TIAA.

Contact Audrey Williams June via Twitter, [@chronaudrey](https://twitter.com/chronaudrey) or email audrey.june@chronicle.com.

Page design and charts by Brian O'Leary.