

Post-graduate Academic Positions

in Humanities and Social Sciences

Academic postdoc/post-MBA, scholarship- or research-focused

Academic postdocs centered on scholarship are the most common type of postdoc in the humanities and social sciences. They vary greatly in length from as little as one month to as long as three years. Keep in mind that a job search, academic or non-academic, can take up to 6 to 12 months; for shorter postdocs, you will have to balance your scholarly work with networking and applying for jobs.

The goal of many of these postdocs is a short opportunity to focus on research, scholarship, and publishing. Some postdoc fellows aim to revise their dissertation into a book or other publications. Teaching is often voluntary during these appointments (at most a 1-1 course load), allowing you to focus on your scholarship in a way that even tenure-track faculty are not able to. Depending on your field, expectations for productivity during a postdoc may be high since you can focus on research full-time. Some postdoctoral fellowships are located at specific institutions of higher education. Others provide funding and allow you to identify an institution and mentor/advisor for your fellowship.

Research-focused postdocs offer an opportunity to network within your department, but there is not strong evidence that these postdocs are recruited for tenure-track faculty positions at the same institution.

Visiting assistant professor or academic postdoc, teaching-focused

Another common set of positions, visiting assistant professorships (VAPs) and teaching postdocs involve a significant teaching load. Often, the amount of teaching involved with these roles (3-3 course load or higher) means that there is not as much time for scholarship or writing as in a scholarship-focused postdoc. It certainly is feasible to publish or conduct research, but it is not the primary goal. Institutions may not provide resources for scholarly activities either. In contrast to being an

adjunct instructor, these are full-time positions, though all of them are contracted for set periods of time. See this article on Inside Higher Ed for more details about these positions, <http://tinyurl.com/nylxo8z>. Much like research-focused postdocs, VAPs are not actively recruited for tenure-track faculty roles at the same institution.

Non-academic, research

A small number of postdoc positions are available at various non-academic institutions such as nonprofits, institutes, and think tanks. The duration of the postdoc depends on the organization, but often it will be between one and three years. A non-academic postdoc can help you build a network within that organization and across a particular field.

Questions to ask yourself as you contemplate a non-academic postdoc are, "Am I uncertain about choosing a career path in academia or non-academic research?" and "Am I ready to take the plunge and move away from academia completely?" Meet with professionals and have informational interviews to learn more about careers in their field. If you are interested in non-research careers, then a research-based postdoc is not a good fit. You will not gain much relevant experience, so it is often better to find an entry-level position in your field of interest.

There are a few of questions you should ask potential employers. First, where do postdocs go after their program is over? For some organizations, a postdoc program is a pipeline to hiring full-time. Other companies, though, do not hire from the postdoc pool. Second, how does the postdoc salary compare to an entry-level PhD's salary for a full-time position? Third, what professional development opportunities are there? Like an academic postdoc, you should continue to learn and grow. Formal mentorship and career development programs are ways that some companies show they are dedicated to helping you become a research professional.