

Traits of an Academic

Prof. Arun S. Mujumdar
NUS Mechanical Engineering Dept

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So, you want to be an academic!

- Here, thoughts and ideas to be presented are entirely my own
- Backdrop- long years of experience in academia and industry
- Also, networking with academics around the world
- Not all traits listed can be present in every academic (except in a super-academic!)- they are listed for an **Ideal Academic**

Typical Tasks of an Academic

- Teaching
- Research- primarily initiation/supervision
- Service- to Department, Faculty, University, Society, Profession, and Industry/Business
- *Distribution of time/effort between above depends on institutional culture and seniority of individual*

Important Traits

- Willingness to work very hard with not-so-attractive compensation : nine-to-five syndrome is a recipe for failure in academia
- Common misconception among the lay people is that academics have a “cozy” job- far from it in most major institutions!
- Remember that practically the whole world will judge your performance as an academic !
- Your record is public information and accessible to any one who wishes to have access!

Important qualities required

- Ability to be self-critical, accept external criticism and be creatively destructive and innovative
- Dislike of status quo is key to innovation in teaching, research and service
- Must recognize time-dependence of research results, teaching/learning technologies
- Must be able to think productively, creatively and critically
- Willingness to share 100% of knowledge with others without reservation

More on Important Qualities

- Must have vision ,which should be pursued with missionary zeal
- Accept change enthusiastically but wisely
- Be enterprising, creative, innovative
- Must have students' welfare in mind at all times
- Must be selfless, open-minded and aware of multi-disciplinary and multi-cultural aspects in education and research

Qualities (contd)

- Must keep abreast of current literature on pedagogy, instructional technology, and research in areas of interest
- Must have breadth in research area and depth in sub-areas (a recognized expert!)
- Must be a leader and not follower
- Must be able to impart leadership skills
- Have excellent oral/written communication skills
- Must inspire confidence and enthusiasm in students under tutelage

Qualities (Contd -2)

- Must be a team player
- Must think globally but able to act locally
- Must be an excellent role model
- Must be able to develop a network of peers
- Must enjoy difficult tasks and assignments and carry them out with real enthusiasm
- Must focus on quality at all times

Qualities needed for success

- Excellent inter-personal skills
- Ability to interface with students, peers, academic and industrial colleagues
- Genuine desire to make lasting contributions to students' careers, institutional visibility and profession on an international scale
- Willingness if required to sacrifice personal gains in some instances

Qualities required-contd

- Academics must uphold highest ethical standards- also must become role models
- Must not hold bias of any kind
- Must have logical mind, strong motivation
- Must develop critical thinking skills while being creative at all times and in all tasks- teaching, research or service
- Must possess a global outlook
- Must take pride in peers' and students' success as a measure of own accomplishment

Ethics- a key issue

- Increased global competition can lead to temptation to employ undesirable means to succeed superficially- highly undesirable trait!
- Ethical behavior is a must in teaching, research and service
- Always give due credit, never claim credit for others' work (present or prior, here or elsewhere!)
- Ethics can make or break a career!

A list of desirable traits for an Ideal Academic!

- This list is very broad and long- not all academics or academics-to-be can possess all desired traits. Aim to have as many as possible!
- Possesses: Resourcefulness, initiative, keen interest and motivation , deep and current knowledge of field, self-learning ability etc.
- Attracts respect of peers and students, values time, makes contributions to institution, profession ,society etc
- Is committed, hardworking, excellent communicator, leader not follower, a desirable team member, etc

How can one measure academic success ?

- No magic measurement scale accepted universally!
- You know it when you see it!
- Highly subjective judgment –based on objective criteria commonly listed by institutions
- Various criteria for teaching, research and service contributions- a weighted average is what really counts. Different institutions give different weights to each- best to try to excel in all
- Difficult but feasible!
- See websites of well known institutions and visit criteria for promotion and tenure for details!

Some criteria of success

- Each individual may have a different list –basically must meet one's own criteria first!
- Teaching: Student and peer evaluations, past students' performance , authorship of texts etc
- Research: More obvious: publications in archival peer reviewed journals, international conferences, invitations to give keynotes, plenary lectures, seminars, workshops ,consult etc, editorships, monographs, handbooks , patents international awards of recognition etc, international profile and recognition- focus on quality and not quantity. Professional performance of past research students.
- Above list is not all-inclusive

Closing Remarks

- Presents some personal viewpoints on what an ideal and real academic should be like
- No one is a superman- don't expect all qualities in one individual.
- Some qualities are absolutely necessary e.g. ethical, willingness to work hard, good communication skills etc. Others are highly desirable
- Some traits must pre-exist prior to taking up an academic position; others will follow with good mentorship and commitment to excellence.
- Good academic environment must be provided by institutions if they wish to excel themselves. Academics make the institution!

Some traits of an Ideal Researcher/ Research Student

- Many of the same characteristics expected of an academic are also desirable for an ideal researcher/research student
- Not all traits can be found in one individual
- Some are prerequisites, some are co-requisites while others must develop under proper mentorship of an Ideal Mentor!

Some desirable traits- A list

- Has initiative
- Is resourceful
- Is motivated
- Is self-starter
- Is self-learner
- Is logical
- Is ethical
- Is critical in thinking processes

List of positive attributes desired

- Is aware of current state-of-the-art
- Is eager to learn and know more!
- Is cooperative, team player
- Has ability to think independently
- Is analytical
- Has good experimental skills
- Has good oral/written communication skills
- Is sincere, conscientious

List (cont)

- Is not risk-averse
- Wants to contribute to knowledge, make a difference
- Hard-working, curious
- Patient
- Has global outlook
- Likes to network

- Note: Some attributes develop with maturity as researcher

Thank you !

- ANY QUESTIONS?