

Weird Things About Professorship

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Why did you leave industry?

- I had a sense I wanted to be a professor and almost did a postdoc.
- But I got enticed into doing the Google Brain Residency and then enticed into staying at Brain for a few years.
- I value mentorship and there's limited mentorship in industry.
- Now, my job almost entirely revolves around mentorship.
- If you also find mentorship rewarding, you should consider being a professor. If you'd rather just do your own research, consider industry.
- I also get a lot more control over a long-term vision and get to coordinate a lot of projects towards that vision.
- I'm also learning a lot!

Is it hard to go from industry to academia?

- Faculty hiring is incredibly conservative.
- Most places want to hire people that they hope to tenure, so they are basically planning to hire you for 30+ years.
- Anything that deviates from the standard path is seen as a yellow flag.
- Being a professor involves many responsibilities and stressors.
- Hiring committees want evidence that you are aware of and have some experience with those stressors.
- Most industry positions don't prepare you for these stressors - hence the yellow flag.
- In addition, industrial research is only a thing in some subfields of CS.

How's it going?

- Great! It's incredibly rewarding and I'm really happy.
- It's also about 10x more stressful because you are responsible for the success of a group of students.
- It often leads to self-doubt:
 1. You often get no direct feedback - there is a power dynamic that makes it hard to get your students to be honest with you.
 2. You have very little time, so you have to be able to spend almost no time on something and trust that you did a good job.
 3. You have very little experience doing many parts of the job.
- But it's awesome!

Thanks!

Some reflections on professorship:

<https://colinraffel.com/blog/reflecting-on-two-years-of-professorship.html>

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<http://bit.ly/colin-talk-feedback>