

Towards the Establishment of a Teaching Professor Track: An Exploratory Discussion

[Michael Clarkson](#)

Senior Lecturer, Computer Science

[Charles Van Loan](#)

Professor Emeritus, Computer Science

DRAFT — September 11, 2023

Cornell needs a three-rank Teaching Professor track. Properly designed and implemented, it would elevate the quality of undergraduate education — just as the Clinical Professor, Professor of Practice, and Research Professor tracks have elevated the quality of graduate and professional education.

We emphasize that this document is not itself a proposal — at least, not yet. Rather, it is an exploration of the job title and track situation for teaching-track faculty at Cornell, with an eye toward how that situation could improve. We discuss some options, make some recommendations, and identify some questions that need to be answered if a concrete proposal is to be developed.

This document is structured as follows. In Section 1 we provide our rationale for introducing a Teaching Professor track. In Section 2 we describe the various existing teaching tracks at Cornell and provide data that speaks to the extent of their contribution to the education of our students. In Section 3 we examine the Lecturer track in particular, and we examine how the colleges implement that track. In Section 4 we present three options for how a Teaching Professor track might be designed to co-exist with the Lecturer track, replace it, or merge with it. In Section 5 we review how the Clinical Professor, Professor of the Practice, and Research Professor tracks are authorized for college use through an “enabling legislation” approach, which could also be used for a new Teaching Professor track. In Section 6 we summarize some important open questions that need to be answered before developing a concrete proposal for a Teaching Professor track.

Two companion documents to this exploratory discussion provide further background, perspective, and guidance:

- *Senate Deliberations on Teaching-Related Titles*, which summarizes the history of previous Senate discussion regarding titles used for teaching faculty.
- *A Study of the Teaching Professor Track at Some Peer Universities of Cornell*, which addresses several questions about how our peers have instantiated a Teaching Professor track.

These will be referenced below as the “Senate Deliberation Doc” and the “Peer Comparison Doc.”

1. The Need for a Teaching Professor Track

A substantial fraction of undergraduate teaching at Cornell is delivered by nearly 400 faculty who are appointed as Lecturers and Senior Lecturers. Some of these faculty develop innovative course content, often at the foundational levels of the discipline. They are on the front lines of identifying and implementing improved pedagogy in their own courses, thereby making significant contributions to the Cornell undergraduate experience. They complement their colleagues on the tenure track in ways that enable the University's combined commitment to excellence in education and research.

The Lecturer track was created at Cornell in 1974. (See the Senate Deliberation Doc for more history.) Half a century later, its titles are ill-suited to address some current challenges:

- The two-rank Lecturer track creates a disparity with the three-rank Research Professor, Professor of Practice, and Clinical Professor tracks now in use at Cornell. A talented individual who devotes their career primarily to research can be titled Research Professor. A talented individual who devotes a substantial part of their career outside of academia, then pivots to on-campus teaching, can be titled Professor of Practice. A talented individual skilled at teaching in a clinical setting can be titled Clinical Professor. These relatively new title opportunities have a positive effect on graduate and professional education. In contrast, a faculty member whose role is to make sustained, excellent contributions to undergraduate education is denied both a professorial title and the motivations for professional growth that accompany a three-rank track.
- The Lecturer titles hinder recruitment. All else being equal, if an outstanding teaching-focused candidate can take a job with the title "Professor" at another university, why would they not? Indeed, this point was part of the motivation for the creation of the Research Professor, Professor of the Practice, and Clinical Professor titles.
- The Lecturer titles suggest to students, parents, and donors that many courses are not being taught by "real" faculty. The University can ill-afford to send a signal to increasingly savvy constituents that the educational talents of its Lecturers and Senior Lecturers have sub-professorial status.

2. The Existing Teaching Tracks and Their Scope

It is important to appreciate the scope of teaching handled by faculty in non-tenure tracks across the University. Below we provide tables that quantify the number of these faculty and the extent of their teaching.¹ These tabulations provide a numerical perspective on how essential the *teaching tracks* are to the educational mission of the University.² The teaching tracks include the following titles:³

¹ Faculty data were obtained from the [Office of Institutional Research and Planning](#). Enrollment data were provided by the Office of the University Registrar.

² In this document we write "teaching tracks" to refer to the subset of RTE faculty whose primary responsibility is on-campus teaching of Cornell students. Although some Research and Extension faculty may at times have on-campus teaching responsibilities, they are not included in our tabulations.

³ The [Faculty Handbook](#) describes these titles in greater detail.

- *Lecturers and Senior Lecturers* who are responsible for classroom teaching, contributions to departmental curriculum, applications and development of pedagogy, and training of other teachers.
- *Instructors* who are responsible for teaching and research and are expected to be able to plan and conduct courses with little or no supervision.
- *Teaching Associates* who have the duties and the responsibilities of a Graduate Teaching Assistant but are not registered students. Teaching Associates are responsible for assisting in the classroom and carrying out a variety of assignments under the guidance of a course leader.
- *Professors of the Practice* (Assistant, Associate, and Full) who provide practice-oriented instruction based on extensive experience outside academia. Although Professors of the Practice may have additional research, service, or outreach obligations, teaching is their primary responsibility.
- *Clinical Professors* (Assistant, Associate, and Full) who serve an essential teaching function in clinical settings. Although Clinical Professors may have additional research, service, or outreach obligations, teaching is their primary responsibility.

Table 1 shows that the distribution of faculty in the teaching tracks is far from uniform across units. This is unsurprising, because teaching needs vary across colleges.

Unit	Lect.	Sr. Lect.	Visit. Lect.	Instr.	Teach. Assoc.	Prof. of Prac.	Clinic. Prof.	Teaching Tracks TOTAL	Tenure Track
CALS	27	20	10			15		72	339
AAP	9	2	18	5	3	7		44	53
A&S	40	90	77		13	4		224	500
Brooks	32	6	2					40	27
CIS	8	9	5					22	63
ENG	15	21	27			14		77	203
CHE	13	4				2	1	20	58
ILR	1	6	6					13	59
LAW	2	1	5		1	1	17	27	37
JCB	16	25	27			1	3	72	103
CVM	11	8	3	6		25	45	98	128
Tech		1	8					9	27
TOTAL	174	193	188	11	17	72	66	721	1599

Table 1. *Distribution of Titleholders Across Units, Fall 2022*

Table 2 shows that the number of tenure-track faculty has held steady at around 1600 over the past decade, while the number of faculty in the teaching tracks has grown steadily.⁴

Term	Lect.	Sr. Lect.	Visit. Lect.	Instr.	Teach. Assoc.	Prof. of Prac.	Clinic. Prof.	Teaching Tracks TOTAL	Tenure Track
Fall 2014	148	188	117	11	28	—	29	521	1623
Fall 2015	142	198	123	17	23	3	31	537	1615
Fall 2016	152	197	116	20	22	15	29	551	1623
Fall 2017	165	194	144	14	10	23	32	582	1583
Fall 2018	176	204	142	8	8	28	39	605	1600
Fall 2019	178	211	135	15	16	35	40	630	1592
Fall 2020	195	212	118	14	16	35	41	631	1600
Fall 2021	194	195	157	9	19	64	63	701	1575
Fall 2022	174	193	188	11	17	72	66	721	1599

Table 2. *Distribution of Titleholders Over Time, 2014–2022*

Enrollments have also increased over the past decade, so it is worthwhile to compare student and faculty numbers:

Year	Undergraduate Students	Professional Students	Graduate Students	Teaching Tracks Faculty	Tenure Track Faculty
Fall 2014	14453	2257	5140	521	1623
Fall 2015	14315	2324	5265	537	1615
Fall 2016	14566	2448	5305	551	1623
Fall 2017	14907	2504	5605	582	1583
Fall 2018	15182	2580	5838	605	1600
Fall 2019	15043	2700	6284	630	1592
Fall 2020	14743	2638	6239	631	1600
Fall 2021	15503	2978	7101	701	1575
Fall 2022	15735	2907	7256	743	1599
% Increase 2014-22	9%	28%	41%	43%	Approx. 0%

Table 3. *Overall Enrollments and Total Faculty Counts over Time, 2014–2022*

Since it is primarily the tenure-track faculty who teach and mentor graduate students, it is perhaps astonishing that their growth rates are so different. We wonder whether, as the tenure-track faculty have increased their efforts in this area, they have had less effort remaining to teach undergraduate students. That would explain the apparent need for growth in the teaching tracks.

⁴ It would be interesting to observe relative demographics of the teaching tracks vs. tenure track, including gender and underrepresented minorities.

Many teaching-track faculty teach undergraduate courses with larger-than-average enrollments. Thus, to accurately assess the volume of undergraduate teaching rendered by this group, we need to tabulate their fraction of credit hours taught at this level⁵. The entries in Table 4 are quotients of the form X/Y, where

X = total credit hours taught by teaching-track faculty at the indicated level

Y = total credit hours taught at the indicated level.

Unit	1000 Level	2000 Level	3000 Level	4000 Level
CALS	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD
AAP	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD
A&S	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD
Brooks	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD
CIS	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD
ENG	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD
CHE	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD
ILR	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD
JCB	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD
LAW	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD
CVM	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD

Table 4. *Fraction of Credit Hours Taught by Teaching-Track Faculty, AY 2022–23*

[We are waiting for the Administration to supply us with the data necessary to complete this table.]

3. The Current Implementation of the Lecturer Track

Here is what the Faculty Handbook says about the positions of Senior Lecturer and Lecturer in its [list of approved academic titles](#):

The title senior lecturer implies significant professional qualifications. Senior lecturers are expected to teach in the classroom or laboratory; to meet with students during scheduled office hours; to prepare and grade assignments and examinations; to contribute to the design, syllabi, and organization of departmental course offerings; and to know applications and development of pedagogy in the field. Senior lecturers often carry administrative duties that include activities such as developing independent or team taught courses, producing teaching materials and methodologies, and training or supervising lecturers and teaching associates.

Lecturers are responsible for classroom teaching and its related activities. The position is based on professional qualifications in teaching. Lecturers are expected to teach in the classroom or laboratory; to meet with students during scheduled office hours; to grade assignments and

⁵ For a given offering of a particular course, “credit hours taught” is the product of enrollment and credit hours. An instructor who teaches 300 students in a four-credit hour course is responsible for 1200 credit hours taught.

examinations; to contribute to the design, syllabi, and organization of departmental course offerings; and to know applications and development of pedagogy in the field. Lecturers who have served for several years may be asked to assume administrative responsibilities for departmental course offerings or to train and supervise less experienced colleagues.

It is up to the colleges to augment these descriptions with information about how they will process appointments, renewals, and promotions.

Although there is general agreement that promotion to Senior Lecturer requires six years of excellent teaching at the rank of Lecturer (or equivalent), there is great variation in how much detail the colleges provide in their Lecturer-track documentation. The following table provides a *rough* overview of this documentation as provided by AAP, CALS, CAS, ENG, CHE, ILR, Brooks, CIS, CVM, LAW, and JCB. Because some of these units preferred not to have their documentation made public, we have randomly indexed units. In the table, “x” means “yes”.

Does the documentation discuss/mention...	Unit										
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
the timing of renewals and promotions	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x
the content of the candidate’s CV	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x
the candidate’s teaching statement	x	x	x		x	x		x	x	x	x
the candidate’s service statement					x	x					
that teaching materials need to be supplied		x			x	x	x		x	x	x
course evaluation data	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x
letters from students/TAs	x	x	x		x	x			x	x	x
that peers should evaluate teaching		x			x	x				x	x
what “good teaching” means		x		x	x	x	x			x	
rules about reference writer selection	x	x			x				x		
the possible relevance of external visibility					x	x			x		
the advising of students	x				x				x		
the role of annual reviews	x	x			x	x					x
criteria for promotion to senior lecturer		x	x		x				x	x	
the dept promotion/renewal process	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x
the college promotion/renewal process	x	x	x	x	x	x	x			x	x
how a negative decision can be appealed		x		x	x			x		x	
voting rights		x			x				x		X
mentoring		x			x						

Table 5. Lecturer Track Documentation Across the Colleges

It would be unfair to conclude from this table that Lecturer-track appointment and promotion is uneven across campus or in need of reform: colleges and departments might have supplemental communications that “fill in the blanks” in the table. Nevertheless, some units seem to have thought more deeply about their Lecturer-track faculty than others.

4. Designing a New Three-Rank Professorial Track for Teaching

The current Lecturer track has two ranks: Lecturer and Senior Lecturer. When created in the 1970s, it was modeled upon a pair of two-rank tracks that were already in use: the Research Associate track, and the Extension Associate track. The newer Clinical Professor and Professor of the Practice tracks, on the other hand, have three ranks (Assistant, Associate, and Full). See the “Senate Deliberation Doc” for details on the creation of these titles.

We recommend the creation of new professorial titles for teaching based on the phrase “Teaching Professor.” “Teaching Professor” would emphasize the specialized focus these faculty have, just as Clinical Professor, Professor of the Practice, and Research Professor already do for other faculty and focuses. We also recommend that these new titles be used to create a three-rank track similar to what we have for the other professorial title tracks.

We have studied twenty of Cornell’s peer universities, of which ten have designed this kind of professorial track for teaching; see the “Peer Comparison Doc” for details. From that study, we have identified three options, which can be summarized as follows:

- The Teaching Professor Track **coexists** with the Lecturer Track.
- The Teaching Professor Track **replaces** the Lecturer Track.
- The Teaching Professor Track **merges** with the Lecturer Track.

The dominant model is coexistence, with eight peers implementing it. The other two models, replacement and merger, each have only one example of a peer implementing them. We now explain each model, and we identify some ways of transitioning to each.

4.1 The Coexistence Option: The Teaching Professor track *coexists* with the Lecturer track.

A new Teaching Professor track is created with these titles:

- Assistant Teaching Professor
- Associate Teaching Professor
- Teaching Professor

And these Lecturer track titles continue to exist:

- Lecturer
- Senior Lecturer

Peers. Eight of ten of our peers in the Peer Study Doc have adopted this Coexistence Option.

Job Descriptions. With two tracks in coexistence, a distinction needs to be made between them — that is, we need “job descriptions” for the five titles. At the eight peer schools that have adopted this option, the primary distinction between the two tracks is:

- The Teaching Professor track is a full-time academic career with expectations of impact beyond just the courses taught.
- The Lecturer track is part-time, short-term, and/or narrowly focused on specific courses.

The University and colleges would need to develop criteria that instantiate those ideas at Cornell and determine what the qualifications are for Teaching Professor vs. Lecturer. See the Peer Comparison Doc for a summary of those criteria at ten other universities.

For sake of discussion, here are two exemplars of how the tracks could be distinguished:

1. Work status: Part-time (<50% FTE) and temporary faculty are Lecturers. Full-time (or >50% FTE) faculty are Teaching Professors.⁶
2. Intellectual impact:⁷
 - a. Lecturers “focus on effective delivery of instructional material, assessment, and grading for a course or series of courses within a sub-discipline, working independently or under general supervision of a faculty member.”
 - b. Teaching Professors have “a terminal degree and demonstrated expertise in a relevant discipline”, “make significant contributions to their unit or department’s broader teaching mission, advance teaching and learning in their discipline, and use innovate strategies that produce course and/or curriculum improvement”, “may engage in the scholarship of teaching and learning and have an instructional and curricular impact both within their department and beyond through scholarly or expressive publications, sharing of creative and scholarly work, or the publication of textbooks or other related activities involving their discipline”, and “may be involved in department, college, or university service, and may supervise teaching assistants.”

Transition Process. The transition to this option would involve promoting those Lecturer-track faculty who qualify to the Teaching Professor track. Though the details would necessarily involve the criteria developed, one possibility is for qualifying faculty to make the following transitions:

- A qualifying Lecturer transitions to Assistant Teaching Professor.
- A qualifying Senior Lecturer who has not yet been reappointed-at-rank transitions to Associate Teaching Professor.
- A qualifying Senior Lecturer who has been reappointed-at-rank transitions to (Full) Teaching Professor.

If we adopt the following notation, the transitions are easy to state:

- L1 = Lecturer, L2 = Senior Lecturer not yet reappointed-at-rank, L3 = Senior Lecturer reappointed-at-rank.
- T1 = Assistant Teaching Professor, T2 = Associate Teaching Professor, T3 = (Full) Teaching Professor.

The transitions are then L1 → T1 and L2 → T2 and L3 → T3.

Given the number of Lecturer-track faculty who could qualify for these transitions, it would be important to identify expedient processes to reduce the workload on deans, department chairs, and administrators. Although it might be tempting to stagger that workload by implementing transitions only

⁶ This is the essence of the [proposal at the University of Washington](#) in 2020.

⁷ These quotes are from the [proposal at the University of Wisconsin–Madison](#) in 2019.

when an individual is next due for promotion/reappointment, we do not recommend that strategy: it creates title inversions within units that could negatively affect morale and recruitment.

On the other hand, there will be some Lecturer-track faculty who do not immediately meet the criteria for transition to Teaching Professor, but might in the future. (They might even be inspired by the new track.) We recommend that these faculty should later be permitted to apply to new Teaching Professor job postings and demonstrate their qualifications as those manifest.

4.2 The Replacement Option: The Teaching Professor track *replaces* the Lecturer track.

A single track is formed with these titles:

Assistant Teaching Professor
Associate Teaching Professor
Teaching Professor

The existing Lecturer track is phased out, and the Lecturer and Senior Lecturer titles are discontinued.

Peers. Only one of ten peers in the Peer Study Doc has adopted this Replacement Option.

Job Descriptions. The University and colleges would need to develop job descriptions for this three-rank track, based on the existing descriptions for the two-rank Lecturer track. The second and third ranks in particular would need to be distinguished.

Transition Process. The transition to this option could involve the same processes as the Coexistence Option, specifically:

- Lecturer transitions to Assistant Teaching Professor. (L1 → T1)
- Senior Lecturers who have not yet been reappointed-at-rank transition to Associate Teaching Professor. (L2 → T2)
- Senior Lecturers who have been reappointed-at-rank transition to (Full) Teaching Professor. (L3 → T3)

Comparison. Compared to the Coexistence Option, the transition process is simpler, because there is no need to distinguish who qualifies to be a Teaching Professor vs. who stays a Lecturer.

Given the relative simplicity of this Replacement Option compared to the Coexistence Option, why do our peer universities decisively prefer the Coexistence option? We suggest that it is because there are true differences between properly designed Lecturer and Teaching Professor tracks, and the broader impact that faculty on the Teaching Professor track will have.

4.3 The Merger Option: The Teaching Professor track *merges* with the Lecturer track.

A single track is formed with some subset of these titles:

Lecturer
Senior Lecturer
Associate Teaching Professor
Teaching Professor

The main possibilities are:

- Lecturer, Senior Lecturer, Teaching Professor (a three-rank track)
- Lecturer, Associate Teaching Professor, Teaching Professor (a three-rank track)
- Lecturer, Senior Lecturer, Associate Teaching Professor, Teaching Professor (a four-rank track)

Peers. Only one of ten peers in the Peer Study Doc has adopted this Merger Option, and it used the four-rank track.

Job Descriptions. The University and colleges would need to develop job descriptions, teasing apart the existing descriptions for the two-rank Lecturer track into three or four ranks.

Transition Process. For either of the three-rank Merger Options, the transition could involve the same processes as the Coexistence and Replacement Options. Specifically:

- Lecturers remain Lecturers.
- Senior Lecturers who have not yet been reappointed-at-rank transition to Rank 2 on the new track.
- Senior Lecturers who have been reappointed-at-rank transition to Rank 3 on the new track.

The four-rank Merger Option would require additional design to determine how to distribute Senior Lecturers over three ranks.

Comparison. We do not recommend the Merger Option over the Coexistence or Replacement Options, because the Merger Option fails to solve recruitment and retention problems: there will still be faculty in the track with a Lecturer, not professorial, title. It also could become a point of confusion for those outside of the Cornell community, who could reasonably expect that Lecturer and Teaching Professor titles would be on separate tracks.

5. Implementing a Teaching Professor Track

When it comes to managing faculty appointments and promotions, Cornell operates as a loose confederation of colleges. University-wide descriptions of all the available titles are specified in the [Faculty Handbook](#), but the implementation details are delegated to the colleges. Even for tenure reviews, the colleges have considerable latitude within the guidelines specified by the Faculty Advisory Committee on Tenure Appointments (FACTA).

With a few minor exceptions, RTE appointments, promotions, and reappointments are totally controlled by the colleges — there is no university-level component to an RTE review. Thus, the colleges manage their Lecturer, Extension Associate, and Research Associate track reviews with just a modicum of guidance from the Faculty Handbook.

The same is true for the existing RTE professorial titles, although for these tracks the Senate added a level of university oversight. Before it can use an RTE professorial title, a college is required to submit a proposal in which the college justifies the use of the title, and how the college intends to handle appointments, promotions, reappointments, and other matters. The required format of the proposal is detailed in Senate Resolutions regarding so-called “enabling legislation” — that is, the Resolutions

enable the individual colleges to use the professorial titles following a proposal process.⁸ Through this mechanism the Senate is effectively telling the colleges that an ad hoc implementation of these long-term professorial appointments is unacceptable, and that the university requires a carefully documented implementation plan before authorizing use of the title.

We recommend that the same enabling-legislation approach be used for the creation of a Teaching Professor track. If a college wants to adopt the Teaching Professor title, then it should seek Senate approval by following the same process that is already in use for the Clinical Professor, Professor of Practice, and Research Professor tracks. In particular, the college should be asked to do the following:

- A. Justify the need for having a Teaching Professor track.
- B. Provide a description of the track, i.e., a “job description” of the expertise that is associated with each of the three ranks and harmonizes with the title descriptions in the Faculty Handbook.
- C. Detail the terms of appointment, i.e., search methodology, expected credentials, approval process.
- D. Outline the processes for reappointment and promotion.
- E. Specify a percent limitation (if any) on the number of Teaching Professor track faculty relative to the number of tenure-track faculty.
- F. Describe the rights connected to the Teaching Professor title, e.g., the right to appeal negative promotion decision, the right to vote on education-related issues.
- G. Discuss the anticipated impact that the Teaching Professor track would have on the tenure track and other RTE teaching tracks.

Although it could be tempting to instead suggest that a college be allowed to implement a Teaching Professor track without Senate approval, we recommend against that possibility. Well-written guidelines for the required proposal make the responses to A-G straightforward. Moreover, the act of putting together a Teaching Professor proposal will elevate faculty appreciation for RTE teaching. And, it adds clarity to the reappointment and promotion processes.

6. Discussion Points

We have recommended the Coexistence Option, in which the existing Lecturer track is augmented by a new Teaching Professor track. That is the option adopted by most of our peers, as detailed in the Peer Comparison Doc. Nonetheless, we need to work out the best option for Cornell. And regardless of which option is favored, several important questions need to be answered before proceeding with a concrete Teaching Professor proposal:

- Which of the options best addresses recruitment and retention concerns?
- What will the new Faculty Handbook descriptions be for all the impacted job titles? In particular, what would the revised descriptions be for Lecturer and Senior Lecturer (if both continue to exist)? What would the new descriptions be for Teaching Professors (at whatever ranks are created)?

⁸ Senate Resolutions 30, 42, 102, and 109. See the [RTE Working Group](#) page for links to each Resolution.

- If the Coexistence Option is pursued, how do we gracefully handle the division it creates between those who remain Lecturers and those who transition to Teaching Professor? Is it better to pursue a distinction based on work status, intellectual impact, or something else?
- What would be the timeline for transitions to a new track?
- How do we minimize administrative overhead in implementing the transitions, while treating them with the care and thought they deserve?

Finally, we mention two related issues: tenure and sabbatical. We regard institution of those —or not— in the Teaching Professor track as out of scope in the current discussion. As described in the Peer Comparison Doc, some of our peers do grant some form of formalized long-term job security (not called tenure) to Teaching Professors, and some of them grant sabbatical. These are decisions that we recommend leaving to the colleges as part of their design for a Teaching Professor track that best works for them.