

## APPENDIX B: ACADEMIA FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

*Academia* is a term that refers to the community of professors and researchers (called academics or scholars) who work at universities or other research institutions. Research institutions are usually associated with universities or are run by governments. For example, the National Microbiology Laboratory in Winnipeg is one of the research institutions that has made Manitoba a centre for medical research. (There are different types of research. The research found in academia is very specific, and differs from the market research that is done at advertising company, for example.)

Academics usually hold advanced university degrees, such as Ph.D.s. *Ph.D.* stands for Doctor of Philosophy, even though the degree can be in any discipline, not just philosophy. It is the highest academic degree. Individuals who have earned a Ph.D. are addressed as “Doctor.” In this case, it is not the same as a medical doctor.

Academics specialize in one academic **discipline**. A discipline is a division of knowledge taught and researched at universities. There are hundreds of disciplines and subdisciplines, including fields like sociology, literature, criminology, languages, the arts, biology, engineering, and so on.

Academics have two major responsibilities. The first is teaching university classes. The second is conducting research, and writing articles for academic journals based on their research, or reviewing and writing about the research of other researchers in their discipline. **Academic journals** are written by and for academics specializing in one discipline. There are thousands of journals in many languages. Academic journals play a very important role in developing theories and determining facts. Academics are expected to review articles written by their **peers**—other academics who specialize in the same discipline. That’s why academic journals are said to be **peer-reviewed**.

When writing articles for academic journals, academics write in a style called **academic writing**. It is very technical, and uses words that are specific to that discipline. For that reason, and because the articles deal with a specific section of the discipline, only academics in that discipline really understand journal articles in that discipline.

Writing articles is a very important part of an academic’s career. In fact, there is a saying that academics must “publish or perish.” In other words, they are expected to have articles and reviews published regularly. Academics make sure that they support their statements with careful investigation of the evidence, including research conducted by other academics. Some of that evidence is **quantitative** (based on numbers and statistics) and some is **qualitative** (based on interviews, observations, etc.). The articles are long and detailed, and include many pages of citations of their sources. When they review articles, academics examine the **citations** to make sure that the writer interpreted them appropriately.

Here is an example that shows how academic articles help academics arrive at theories and facts, and how these theories and facts can change. One of the subdisciplines of sociology is criminology, which is the scientific study of crime and criminals. One of the issues in criminology is the effectiveness of incarceration—putting people in

jail—in reducing crime rates. When criminologists (such as university professors specializing in criminology) publish an article stating that incarceration is a very effective way to deal with crime, some of their peers will carefully read that article, and publish their own articles agreeing or disagreeing with the original article. Later, the writer of the original article might publish a rebuttal or defence. Other academics might then respond to the rebuttal, and so on. All of their conclusions must be based on evidence. This process might go on for a long time. In the end, governments examine those articles to decide on their **policies** regarding incarceration. Policies are guidelines that governments use to guide their decisions.

In order for academics to do their work, they need to be free to criticize organizations such as governments, corporations, universities, and researchers. This is called **academic freedom**. Academics at universities like the University of Manitoba have gone on strike in order to protect their academic freedom (among other issues) (Dehaas). That is one reason why academics work under a **tenure** system, under which they cannot lose their jobs for making criticisms based on their research.

Here is an example to illustrate the principle of tenure. Say that criminologists were threatened with losing their jobs because they were critical of their government's policy on incarceration. Academics on both sides of the issue would protest, stating that, because of tenure, the criminologists have the right and responsibility to criticize the government's policy because their criticisms are based on evidence.

In the fall of 2020, there was a situation where the University of Ottawa suspended one of its teachers for using the n-word in a metalinguistic way, which sparked a controversy over academic freedom (Wikipedia, *Controversy*).

Academia is sometimes criticized as being too theoretical and having little practical value. Academics are sometimes criticized for being too far away from the “real world,” and for not understanding the day-to-day lives of ordinary people. Regardless, it is important to understand academia because you will become part of it if you attend university. For example, if your professors ask you to write papers, they will expect you to follow an academic style.