

Why Professor 'in Migration Studies'?

By Carlos Vargas-Silva, University of Oxford

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I have been recently conferred the title of Professor (yay!). One the most exciting aspects of this process, at least in Oxford, is that you can make your own title. That is, you become Professor in/of _____ and you get to fill the blank. There are limits of course. For example, the title has to be related to you own research. Therefore, not having the possibility of using my preferred title of "Professor X", I had to search for an alternative.

Looking for a title

From the start, I was clear that disciplinary titles would not represent my whole research agenda. My research interests expand beyond any discipline and certainly beyond economics, my original academic background. Having discarded disciplinary titles, I looked around for other possibilities.

I have spent most of my academic career at the Centre on Migration, Policy and Society at the University of Oxford and this has shaped my research agenda. Therefore, my first inclination was for the title of Professor of Migration and Policy. However, while I enjoy interacting with policymakers and most of my research has direct policy implications, other components of the research are purely intellectual. My brother is a theoretical physicist and often tells me that his research has no obvious practical application. I occasionally feel that way.

Migration Studies

My search for a title brought me next to Migration Studies. This is a term that I am very familiar with. I have taught in the master's programme in Migration Studies at Oxford for a long time, I am the Director of the doctoral programme in Migration Studies and I am the current editor and co-founder of the Migration Studies journal. This made it a strong candidate for the title.

Nevertheless, in order to use it as a title, I needed to have a clear idea of what is "Migration Studies". This is a conversation that I have had with many colleagues over the years without reaching a consensus. To some it refers to research that involves migration in some form. For others it is a way of addressing topics in particular disciplines. For instance, researchers looking at something related to migration to provide insights about broader questions in anthropology, economics, sociology, political science, etc. This important research is not what I consider Migration Studies.

I consider Migration Studies to be the adoption of conceptual and research tools from across disciplines to study migration. Here, the ultimate purpose is not to answer disciplinary questions, but to have a better understanding of migration in all its different forms.

Having clarified that question, I found the right title: Professor in Migration Studies.