

# What are the Criteria and Standards Used to Appoint Adjuncts, Assistants and Associate Professors, and How Do Their Roles and Functions Differ in a University?

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## ABSTRACT

The selection process for adjunct, assistant, and associate professors in universities adheres to predetermined criteria and standards to guarantee the appointment of competent individuals capable of making valuable contributions to the academic community (Montilla, 2021). The criteria and standards used to designate different levels of professors and their duties and functions are critical to the university's overall academic success and resiliency. Considering this, the proposed study sought to evaluate the criteria and standards utilized to designate adjunct, assistant and associate professors and the distinctions in their roles and functions within a university context. A qualitative research approach was used in the proposed research to thoroughly analyze the criteria, standards, responsibilities, and functions of adjunct, assistant, and associate professors at academic institutions. Secondary data was gathered from scholarly sources and analyzed using content analysis to discover reoccurring themes and trends. The study results indicate that Adjunct faculty members are commonly selected based on their professional background and specialized knowledge in a specific area, thereby imparting practical insights to the academic setting. In contrast, assistant professors are subject to more stringent criteria and standards: they are assessed based on their qualifications, research output, teaching performance and contributions.

On the other hand, associate professors must have a considerable track record of academic achievement, including research publications, grant submissions, teaching ability, leadership talents, and reputation within their areas (Hafsteinsdóttir et al., 2017).

The distinctions in responsibilities and duties among adjunct, assistant, and associate professors are predicated upon their proficiency, knowledge, and scholarly accomplishments.

A recommended strategy for enhancing faculty standards and operations involves a comprehensive approach encompassing transparent evaluation, conducive surroundings, guidance, teamwork, research assistance, leadership initiatives, and periodic evaluation.

**Keywords-** Higher Education, Professorship, University.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The selection of faculty members at various levels is a necessary procedure in academics and academia that considerably impacts an institution's running and overall quality. The names "Adjunct," "Assistant," and "Associate

Professors" refer to different levels of the academic hierarchy, each with its own set of responsibilities and expectations (Alonderiene and Majauskaite, 2016). Understanding the criteria and standards used to choose and promote these faculty members is critical for maintaining openness, fairness, and effective use of academic resources. An Adjunct Professor is a part-time faculty member who contributes particular knowledge to an institution but does not hold a tenure-track position (Drake et al., 2019). They frequently have substantial industrial experience and contribute to education, research, or both. While their significant concentration is on teaching, they are also involved in research activities or mentorship. Assistant Professors are early-career academics who have shown promise in teaching and research. They are frequently on a tenure-track post, implying a long-term commitment and eventual advancement (Gosling et al., 2020). Assistant Professors often teach, undertake research and provide service to the university and academic society. They are required to establish themselves as autonomous scholars by conducting research and publishing. Associate Professors have a higher status and are acknowledged for their contributions to education, research, and service (Drake et al., 2019). They have generally undergone a tenure review and have shown ongoing proficiency in their speciality. Associate Professors frequently have more latitude in their research interests and take on extra administrative or leadership duties within the university.

Faculty appointments and duties are critical in creating the academic landscape of institutions. However, the selection criteria, requirements for Adjunct, Assistant, and Associate Professors, and the differences in their duties and functions have yet to be thoroughly investigated (Alam, 2020). This knowledge gap impedes the creation of a transparent and effective system for faculty selection and use, affecting higher education institutions' overall quality. Moreover, various issues are associated with the established criteria and standards for choosing these professors. For instance, the first issue is more transparency regarding the requirements and standards for choosing Adjunct, Assistant, and Associate Professors (Gordon et al., 2022). While some colleges have rules, there must be a standardized structure to ensure school uniformity. This discrepancy leads to subjective decision-making, which leads to prejudice or the overlooking of eligible individuals (Carmichael, 2020). Aspiring faculty members and university administrators confront difficulties in determining eligibility and making informed judgments without a thorough knowledge of the requirements (Miller, 2016). The second issue is the distinction between Adjunct, Assistant, and Associate Professor responsibilities and functions. While these jobs exist in the academic hierarchy, there needs to be more investigation into each post's exact tasks and expectations (Blotnicky et al., 2018). Understanding these characteristics is critical for matching faculty members' abilities and experience to their employment needs, allowing them to maximize their teaching, research, and service contributions. Failure to identify these positions results in inefficiencies, underutilization of skills, and job ambiguity (Domen, 2016). Considering this, the proposed study aims to investigate the criteria and standards used to appoint Adjunct, Assistant, and Associate Professors and to assess their roles and functions in a university.

### ***1.1 The following are the objectives of the study***

- To assess the criteria and standards used to appoint Adjunct, Assistant, and Associate Professors in a university.
- To determine the difference between the roles and functions of a university's Adjunct, Assistant, and Associate Professors.
- To provide recommendations to improve the criteria and standards used to appoint Adjunct, Assistant, and Associate Professors and to improve their roles and functions in a university.

It is imperative to tackle the issues identified in the research gap and knowledge in this context to enhance the appointment procedure and optimize the responsibilities and duties of academic staff in higher education institutions (Gerken et al., 2016). Therefore, the proposed study offers valuable insights and recommendations by examining the criteria and standards for appointing faculty members and exploring the variations in their roles and functions. The results of this research initiative will aid in augmenting transparency, equity, and efficacy in faculty appointments, ultimately yielding advantages for universities and the wider academic population.

## **II. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Establishing clear and exhaustive criteria and standards ensures transparency, impartiality, and consistency in appointing faculty members at different ranks, including Adjunct, Assistant, and Associate Professors. According to Lubicz-Nawrocka and Bunting (2019), qualifications, experience, research productivity, teaching effectiveness, and contributions to the academic community all play a role in the appointment process. Qualifications and educational background are frequently used as evaluation factors in professor assignments. According to Gibbs Jr et al. (2016), higher degrees, such as a PhD or equivalent, are a fundamental prerequisite for Assistant and Associate Professor jobs. However, it is essential to note that the individual subject and field determine the necessary educational credentials for a certain level. For instance, significant professional experience and recognition receive similar weightage in domains such as fine arts or performance-based disciplines (Fan et al., 2018). Another important factor in faculty appointments is research output, particularly regarding scholarly publications. The publication of research results in peer-reviewed publications and the presentation of findings at conferences are signs of an individual's contribution to the academic community. Several studies have found a link between academic rank and research production (Eaton, 2018). However, emphasizing research must be balanced with acknowledging other types of scholarship, such as artistic works, patents, or contributions to professional

practice (Schimanski and Alperin, 2018).

For professor appointments, teaching efficacy and demonstrated pedagogical abilities are critical factors. Quality evaluations, student feedback, and teaching portfolios are frequently used to assess a candidate's ability to engage students, successfully convey information and foster a good learning environment (Nafari et al., 2021). Teaching experience, mentoring talents, and innovations in curriculum design or pedagogical techniques are also considered by institutions (Kwangmuang et al., 2021). Contributions to the academic community and volunteer work are also considered during faculty appointments. It includes serving on committees, handling administrative duties, coaching younger faculty members or students, and joining trade associations. Beyond individual research and teaching activities, the capacity to interact, network, and contribute to advancing the academic area is highly regarded (Greenhow and Askari, 2017). Even though these criteria are often used, it is crucial to remember that different institutions and fields give different amounts of weight to each criterion. For instance, colleges concentrating on research value research output more highly than universities focusing on teaching and emphasizing teaching effectiveness (Day et al., 2016). Additionally, there is a growing focus on ensuring diversity and inclusion in faculty appointments, which calls for considering equality, representation, and cultural competency (Sun and Chen, 2016).

Adjunct, Assistant, and Associate Professors' responsibilities and duties within a university are numerous, reflecting the many contributions they offer to the academic community. While some tasks overlap, significant differences determine their roles and expectations. Adjunct Professors are essential to the university's instructional goal. They frequently provide industrial expertise or specialized knowledge to the classroom, improving students' learning experiences. Their primary focus is education, which includes offering high-quality courses and engaging students in the practical application of the subject matter (Maxwell et al., 2018). Adjunct Professors also assist in curriculum development by bringing industry viewpoints to the table and ensuring that course content is relevant to the current professional context (Tessema and Abejehu, 2017). While research is not generally required for adjunct faculty roles, individuals engage in scholarly activities to keep current and provide cutting-edge ideas to their teaching (Matthews and Wilder, 2018).

Assistant Professors are responsible for a variety of tasks. They must excel in both teaching and research. Assistant Professors plan and teach courses, guide students, and analyze their learning outcomes as educators. They provide a welcoming and engaging learning environment, using successful pedagogical practices and remaining current on professional developments (Cruess et al., 2019). Assistant Professors are actively involved in research simultaneously, conducting independent investigations, obtaining research funding, and communicating their findings through publications and conference presentations (Maxwell et al., 2018). This combined emphasis on teaching and research enables them to contribute to knowledge generation while impacting their students' educational experiences.

Associate Professors have a higher position and often have tenure or a comparable degree of professional recognition. They have consistently exhibited brilliance in teaching, research, and service. Unlike Assistant Professors, Associate Professors frequently have a lower teaching load, allowing them to devote more time and attention to advanced research and intellectual pursuits (Nafari et al., 2021). They are expected to undertake independent and essential research that adds to the body of knowledge in their profession. Furthermore, they may mentor junior faculty members and graduate students, promoting their professional growth (Eaton, 2018). Associate Professors frequently assume leadership responsibilities within their department or university, taking part in administrative chores, curriculum development, and institutional decision-making (Fan et al., 2018).

Furthermore, faculty members' duties and functions differ among subjects and institutions. In subjects such as engineering or computer science, for example, faculty members participate in collaborative research projects with industry partners, leveraging their knowledge to address real-world difficulties (Simpson et al., 2017). Faculty members in the arts or design fields have extra obligations, such as mentoring students in creative projects, exhibits, or performances (Lakin, 2016).

Improving the appointment process and the duties and activities of faculty members, especially Adjunct, Assistant, and Associate Professors, is critical to assuring institutions' efficacy and success. Improving the appointment process entails developing rigorous criteria and assessment procedures that encourage openness, justice, and consistency. Cruess (2019) advocates for clear rules and expectations for each faculty level, ensuring the selection process is merit-based and aligned with the institution's aims and values. It is critical to evaluate many forms of scholarship and reward various contributions, such as multidisciplinary work, community involvement, and pedagogical innovations (Eatman et al., 2018). The findings of Ollila and Yström (2017) also emphasize the necessity of including different stakeholders in the appointment process, such as faculty members, department presiding officers, and administrators. Collaborative decision-making and inclusive committees assist in thoroughly examining applicants by considering various viewpoints and experiences (Bowe and Armstrong, 2017). Furthermore, offering chances for professional development for employees participating in the appointment process, such as training on unconscious bias and equitable assessment techniques, can attenuate biases and guarantee a fair evaluation of candidates (Köchling and Wehner, 2020).

Improving faculty duties and functions necessitates the creation of an environment that promotes professional development, engagement, and work-life balance. Mentoring initiatives for young faculty members help them transition into educational institutions, navigate the tenure process, and develop their careers (Lubicz-Nawrocka and Bunting, 2019).

Building a collaborative and interdisciplinary research culture fosters creativity and facilitates cooperation among faculty members of various levels and disciplines (Miller, 2016). Recognizing the significance of teaching, institutions give faculty members tools and assistance to help them improve their pedagogical abilities. Workshops, training programs, and chances for peer observation and criticism are all part of such (Gordon et al., 2022).

Furthermore, developing mechanisms for recognizing and rewarding outstanding teaching, such as teaching awards or teaching-focused promotion tracks, incentivizes faculty members to invest in their teaching efficacy (Baker et al., 2017). Institutions adopt workload regulations that consider the various responsibilities of faculty members at various ranks to manage workload problems. Maintaining a healthy mix of teaching, research, and service helps reduce burnout and improve productivity (Shanafelt and Noseworthy, 2017). Furthermore, providing support mechanisms such as research aid, administrative assistance, and research and travel funds reduce some constraints and allows faculty members to focus on their primary tasks (Davies et al., 2017).

### III. METHODOLOGY

The systematic approach of Research Methodology is employed to collect, scrutinize, and construe data to address research inquiries or accomplish research goals. The term refers to the comprehensive scheme and tactics utilized in a research endeavour, comprising the research guidelines, techniques for gathering data, approaches for analyzing data, and ethical considerations (Babchuk, 2019). The present investigation utilized a qualitative research methodology. The primary objective of qualitative research is to investigate and comprehend social phenomena by employing thorough analysis and interpretation of subjective experiences, viewpoints, and connotations (Mohajan, 2018). This particular design was selected based on multiple factors. Initially, it enables an in-depth and comprehensive investigation of the criteria, standards, roles, and functions of an academic institution's Adjunct, Assistant, and Associate Professors. According to Ozuem et al. (2022), qualitative research is a suitable approach for comprehensively capturing the intricacy and subtlety of human experiences. This method offers detailed insights into the context and dynamics of the studied phenomena.

The present study opted for the utilization of secondary data collection. According to van den Akker et al. (2021), secondary data pertains to data previously gathered for a distinct purpose and is currently accessible in pre-existing sources—the present study employed secondary data obtained from academic journals, conference proceedings, and reputable educational databases. Secondary data was deemed appropriate for various reasons in this study. Initially, it facilitated the accessibility of a diverse array of extant literature about the appointment prerequisites, benchmarks, and responsibilities of academic workers in higher-education institutions. The dataset offered a thorough and expansive collection of information that would have posed difficulties to obtain solely through primary data collection techniques (Mittelstadt and Floridi, 2016). Using secondary data has reduced the time and resources required for data collection, enabling a more efficient and targeted analysis. The criteria for data collection involved selecting pertinent scholarly articles and publications that addressed the standards and criteria utilized in the appointment of Adjunct, Assistant, and Associate Professors, as well as the associated roles and functions in academic institutions. The databases utilized for data acquisition comprised scholarly databases such as JSTOR, ProQuest, and ERIC. The literature search was conducted using specific keywords such as "adjunct professors," "assistant professors," "associate professors," "appointment criteria," "standards," "roles," and "functions." Implementing this measure guaranteed that the gathered data would be congruent with the research aims and furnish exhaustive perspectives on the subject matter under investigation.

Data analysis systematically arranges, comprehends, and derives meaning from the gathered data. The present investigation employed content analysis as a method for data analysis (Wang et al., 2018). The content analysis process entails a methodical classification and examination of qualitative data, such as textual materials, to identify recurring themes, patterns, and associations (Vaismoradi et al., 2016). Content analysis was used due to its capacity to conduct a thorough and methodical analysis of textual data. This approach facilitates recognizing and explaining recurrent themes and patterns associated with the criteria, standards, roles, and functions of Adjunct, Assistant, and Associate Professors. The methodology offers a systematic framework for examining qualitative data and streamlines the process of extracting significant insights and drawing conclusions (Castleberry and Nolen, 2018). The study's ethical considerations encompassed the meticulous adherence to proper attribution and citation protocols when utilizing secondary data sources. Ensuring preserving the primary authors' and publications' authenticity and proprietary rights is crucial, achieved by furnishing precise citations and recognizing their contributions to the respective domain (Harvey and Mahard, 2020).

### IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### *4.1 Theme 1: Criteria and Standards for Appointing Adjunct, Assistant, and Associate Professors*

The selection process for adjunct, assistant, and associate professors in universities adheres to predetermined criteria and standards to guarantee the appointment of competent individuals capable of making valuable contributions to the academic community (Montilla, 2021). Adjunct faculty members are commonly selected based on their professional

background and specialized knowledge in a specific area, imparting practical insights to the academic setting. The appointment criteria frequently prioritize practical experience and the capacity to connect theoretical knowledge with practical applications (Datnow and Hubbard 2016). In contrast, assistant professors are subject to more stringent criteria and standards. These individuals are considered early-career academics, having successfully obtained their doctoral degrees and exhibiting promising capabilities in both research and teaching (Herschberg et al., 2018). Academic institutions evaluate the academic credentials, calibre, and influence of research publications, pedagogical aptitude, and capacity to make meaningful contributions to the organization (Chakraborty and Biswas, 2020). Assistant professors are typically expected to possess robust research agendas, as academic institutions prioritize individuals capable of conducting independent research and contributing to advancing knowledge within their respective disciplines (Jung et al., 2021).

Associate professors are subjected to rigorous, demanding criteria and standards. Individuals must possess a substantial track record of academic accomplishment, encompassing special research publications, prosperous grant proposals, and demonstrated aptitude in teaching (Bebbington and Unerman, 2018). In addition to possessing leadership abilities, individuals are also anticipated to engage in academic service and attain recognition within their respective fields. Being promoted to associate professor entails thoroughly assessing the candidate's achievements and impact on the academic community and the university (Schimanski and Alperin, 2018). The distinctions in responsibilities and duties among adjunct, assistant, and associate professors are predicated upon their proficiency, knowledge, and scholarly accomplishments. Adjunct faculty members prioritize pedagogy and practical applications, whereas assistant professors must strike a balance between instructional duties and cultivating a research agenda (Duffy, 2020). Due to their higher level of experience and expertise, associate professors frequently assume leadership positions, guide less experienced faculty members and make substantial contributions to research and service endeavours.

#### **4.2 Theme 2: Roles and Functions of Adjunct, Assistant, and Associate Professors**

In a university, adjunct, assistant, and associate professors have various duties and functions. Adjunct professors provide real-world experience and practical skills to the classroom, concentrating on teaching and bridging the gap between theory and practice (Roh, 2016). As early-career academics, assistant professors must combine teaching and research commitments. They teach undergraduate and, in some circumstances, graduate courses while conducting their research to increase their knowledge in their profession (Ginsberg et al., 2017). Adjunct instructors bring essential industrial expertise and contacts, while assistant professors contribute to research and participate in departmental activities. Associate professors are essential in leadership and mentoring, offering their knowledge to guide junior faculty and contribute to the university's overall academic and administrative duties. Understanding these positions is critical to ensuring a balanced and successful faculty organization.

Associate professors are at a higher level of academic advancement and have often established themselves as distinguished academics. Their responsibilities and activities transcend beyond teaching and research. Associate professors, such as program directors or department chairs, frequently assume leadership roles within their department or university. They significantly contribute to the academic community by mentoring and encouraging junior faculty members in their teaching and research pursuits (Hafsteinsdóttir et al., 2017). Associate professors must have a strong research focus and continue to produce high-quality material. They frequently engage in peer review procedures, serve on academic journal editorial boards, and contribute to conferences and academic organizations.

#### **4.3 Theme 3: Strategies and practices for the improvement of the criteria, standards, roles, and functions**

Improving adjunct, assistant, and associate professor criteria, standards, duties, and activities at a university necessitates a diverse approach. Initially, institutions could enhance the hiring process by creating a transparent assessment system. It includes considering academic credentials, practical experience, teaching qualities, and research potential. Multiple stakeholders, such as faculty members and external experts, are included in the review process to achieve complete assessments (Ruben and Gigliotti, 2019). Clear standards and expectations for each role aid in the maintenance of consistency.

Creating a supportive and collaborative work atmosphere to improve roles and functions is critical. Mentorship programs are also formed in which senior academic members mentor junior colleagues (Yun et al., 2016). It promotes lifelong learning and professional development. Professors' roles within the larger academic community are expanded by encouraging multidisciplinary cooperation and offering networking possibilities. A mix of teaching and research is required to optimize the functions of assistant professors. Universities must provide research resources and assistance, such as grants and devoted research time (Chetlen et al., 2018). The integration of teaching and research activities improves their academic contributions.

Associate professors' positions in the institution could be enhanced through leadership development programs and administrative training. Involving them in decision-making processes and creating outlets to exchange knowledge help ensure successful academic leadership (Ashcroft et al., 2020). Regular reviews and stakeholder comments are critical for identifying areas for development. This feedback creates updated criteria, norms, and regulations that align with the institution's and academics' changing demands.

## V. DISCUSSION

According to Neffati et al. (2021), assistant professors are evaluated based on academic credentials, research publications, pedagogical aptitude, and capacity to contribute to the organization. On the contrary, associate professors must have a considerable track record of academic achievement, including research publications, grant submissions, teaching ability, leadership talents, and reputation within their areas (Hafsteinsdóttir et al., 2017). Assistant professors' primary tasks are establishing themselves as independent scholars and lecturers. They work hard to increase their publishing record, improve their teaching abilities, and actively participate in departmental committees and service activities (Hutchins and Rainbolt, 2017). Meanwhile, associate professors have already attained a particular academic achievement and reputation. They frequently take on leadership responsibilities, coach junior professors, supervise graduate students, and help shape their department's curriculum and research agenda (Ginsberg et al., 2017).

Gehrke and Kezar (2017) confirm that associate professors frequently take on leadership roles and contribute to the academic community. Associate professors, such as program administrators or department heads, are particularly suited for leadership positions since they are highly qualified academically. They can use these positions to mentor junior professors, participate in peer review procedures, serve on editorial boards, and actively participate in conferences and academic organizations (Feeney et al., 2019). Associate professors offer their skills and help their colleagues advance professionally by mentoring junior academics. They also benefit the academic community by offering helpful input through peer review procedures (Ginsberg et al., 2017) and changing scholarly discourse through participation on editorial boards (Roh, 2016). They could share information, cooperate with colleagues, and promote their professions by engaging in conferences and academic groups (Chen et al., 2017).

Baker's (2020) findings support the current study in that strengthening the criteria, standards, duties, and functions of adjunct, assistant, and associate professors necessitates a multifaceted strategy. Transparent assessment systems, supportive work environments, mentorship programs, multidisciplinary cooperation, research support for assistant professors, leadership development programs for associate professors, and regular feedback and reviews are among the numerous examples of enhancement strategies (Van den Beemt et al., 2020). These strategies promote equity, faculty development, multidisciplinary cooperation, career advancement, managerial skills, and continual improvement. Transparent evaluation procedures provide fair selection processes, while supportive work cultures promote teacher satisfaction and advancement. Mentorship programs help early-career professors, multidisciplinary collaboration fosters creativity, and research assistance supports intellectual development (Ashcroft et al., 2020). Leadership development programs improve administrative skills, and frequent feedback enables adaptability to changing needs.

## VI. CONCLUSION

Firstly, the study aimed to assess the criteria and standards for appointing faculty members. The findings revealed that assistant professors are evaluated based on academic credentials, academic qualifications, research publications, instructional competence, and capacity to contribute to the organization. On the other hand, associate professors must have a strong track record of academic performance, including research publications, teaching competence, leadership abilities, and a reputation in their fields. The study underlined the differences between adjunct, assistant, and associate professor roles and functions. The findings indicated that assistant professors focus on establishing themselves as independent academics and lecturers, extending their publishing records, enhancing teaching abilities, and participating in departmental committees and service activities.

Meanwhile, associate professors have already achieved a particular academic achievement, frequently take on leadership roles, mentor junior academics, supervise graduate students, and contribute to developing the department's curriculum and research agenda. Finally, the research provides recommendations to improve the criteria and standards for appointing adjunct, assistant, and associate professors, as well as their functions and roles. The proposed ways are transparent evaluation methods, supportive work environments, mentoring programs, multidisciplinary collaboration, research funding for assistant professors, leadership development programs, and frequent feedback and reviews. Several recommendations could be made following the study's findings.

Firstly, the criteria and standards for hiring faculty members must be thoroughly reviewed and refined to ensure they are clear, consistent, and aligned with the developing demands of academia. Secondly, colleges should make every effort to provide professional development opportunities and mentorship programs that are suited to the unique responsibilities and career paths of adjunct, assistant, and associate professors. It will help them develop and improve their teaching, research, and service effectiveness. Finally, institutions must develop a collaborative and inclusive culture that acknowledges the distinctive contributions of each post, encourages shared decision-making, and offers suitable support mechanisms to enhance adjunct, assistant, and associate professors' well-being and work satisfaction.

The current study has a few limitations on the criteria, standards, duties, and functions of adjunct, assistant, and associate professors in a university. Firstly, the study depends heavily on secondary data sources, such as literature reviews and official university records, which may restrict the depth of insight compared to primary data-gathering methods.

Secondly, the study's scope was confined to a particular institution or geographical region, limiting the findings' generalizability. Future studies in this domain should address these constraints. Primary data-gathering methods like surveys, interviews, or observations would give more in-depth insights into the experiences and viewpoints of adjunct, assistant, and associate instructors. Furthermore, broadening the study to include other institutions or areas will improve the findings' generalizability and provide for a better understanding of the criteria, standards, responsibilities, and functions in various circumstances.

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