

COMPLEXITIES & CHALLENGES FACED BY ASSISTANT PROFESSORS IN DEGREE COLLEGES

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Abstract

Assistant professors in degree colleges face a wide range of complexities and challenges that can significantly impact their professional growth and personal well-being. This article explores the key obstacles encountered in their roles, including the difficulty of teaching, research, and administrative duties, the pressure to publish, and the pursuit of tenure. Additional challenges such as managing large classes, limited resources, and facing institutional politics further complicate their responsibilities. The article also examines the effects of job insecurity, the evolving demands of educational technology, and the struggle to maintain work-life balance. By identifying these challenges, this article emphasizes the need for academic institutions to provide better support systems, mentorship, and professional development opportunities to help assistant professors succeed in their academic careers. Addressing these issues is crucial for creating an environment that promotes academic excellence and faculty well-being.

Key wards:

Assistant Professor, Higher Education, Academic challenges, Education, Learning, Technology-Integrated Education, Faculty Workload, Educational Technology, Mentorship, Professional Development, Job Insecurity

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Introduction

The role of an assistant professor in degree colleges is integral to shaping the academic and professional futures of students. However, the position comes with a unique set of complexities and challenges that often go unnoticed. Assistant professors are tasked with balancing teaching responsibilities, research, administrative duties, and the need for continuous professional development. They are frequently expected to publish papers, mentor students, and participate in academic committees, all while managing large class sizes and limited resources. Additionally, the pressure to secure tenure, institutional politics, and meet the evolving demands of education further complicates their roles. This article aims to explore these challenges, shedding light on the multifaceted nature of the position and how assistant professors strive to overcome these obstacles in their pursuit of academic excellence.

The role of an Assistant Professor in a degree college comes with several challenges:

1. Student Engagement

Student engagement is a critical factor in higher education where students are expected to take a more active role in their studies. However, engaging students in higher classes presents significant challenges that educators must address to enhance learning outcomes. The Factors that affect student engagement in class include diverse student motivations, large class sizes, course structure, technological distractions, and the evolving role of the teacher in modern education. One of the most common challenges in engaging students in higher classes is the increased diversity in student motivations. In undergraduate and graduate programs, students come from different academic backgrounds, and their reasons for pursuing higher education vary widely. Some may be deeply passionate about their field of study, while others may view their degree merely as a stepping stone to employment or career advancement. This divergence in motivation makes it difficult for educators to craft a one unique approach to engagement. Students who are less intrinsically motivated may be more likely to skip classes, or perform poorly in class, creating a gap between intended learning outcomes and actual performance.

Another challenge is managing large class sizes, which is common in many higher education institutions. In India the Teacher-Student ratio at undergraduate level is 1/40 while in some courses it is 1/60. In such environments, students may feel reluctant to ask questions, participate in discussions, or engage with the instructor. The lack of personalized attention and the difficulty in fostering meaningful

interactions between students and teachers further complicate efforts to boost engagement. Moreover, large class sizes make it harder for instructors to implement interactive teaching methods, such as in-depth discussions, which are essential for deep learning and engagement.

Course structure and content delivery also play a significant role in student engagement. In higher classes, the curriculum is often old and outdated. Traditional lecture-based teaching methods, which are still prevalent in many institutions, may fail to stimulate active participation. Innovative teaching methods, such as smart classrooms or project-based learning, have been shown to increase engagement, but they require more effort from both instructors and students.

Technological distractions present another barrier to engagement in higher classes. With the widespread use of laptops, tablets, and smartphones, students often multitask during lectures, switching between social media, messaging apps, and class-related activities. This divided attention reduces their ability to focus on the course material and participate in class activities.

Finally, the evolving role of the assistant professor is a critical factor in addressing student engagement. Instructors are no longer just content deliverers; they must now act as facilitators, mentors, and motivators. Building a connection with students, fostering a sense of community in the classroom, and creating a supportive learning environment are key to keeping students engaged. However, this requires significant time and effort, particularly in higher classes where students are expected to be more self-directed.

In conclusion, student engagement in higher classes is a multifaceted challenge that requires a combination of innovative teaching strategies, personalized approaches, and an understanding of the diverse needs and motivations of students. By addressing these challenges, educators can foster a more interactive and engaging learning environment that promotes academic success and personal growth for students in higher education.

2. Administrative Responsibilities

In the Indian higher education system, assistant professors hold significant administrative responsibilities in addition to their primary roles as educators and researchers. These responsibilities are often integral to the smooth functioning of academic institutions, yet all these are quite demanding and time-consuming.

One of the key administrative duties of an assistant professor is serving on various departmental and institutional committees. These committees may focus on examination management, accreditation processes, or the organization of seminars,

workshops, and conferences. In addition to committee work, assistant professors are frequently tasked with overseeing student admissions, which includes counseling prospective students, handling documentation, and assisting in the selection process. They are also responsible for mentoring students and guiding them through academic and career decisions. This mentoring role often extends to supervising research projects, dissertations, and other academic assignments. Another important responsibility is the conducting different types of exams and assessments. Assistant professors are involved in setting examination papers, conducting viva voce and practicals, and evaluating student performance. Administrative duties also include organizing extracurricular activities, such as cultural events, sports competitions, and departmental seminars. In the Indian context, the administrative workload of an assistant professor can be substantial, often adding pressure to their teaching and research obligations. Despite these challenges, assistant professors are expected to contribute significantly to the institution's academic and administrative frameworks, balancing their roles effectively for the overall development of students and the institution.

3. Publication Pressure

Many assistant professors face the pressure of publishing research papers in reputable journals for career advancement. Assistant professors are expected to consistently publish articles in peer-reviewed national and international journals. The number and quality of publications directly influence their eligibility for promotions under the Career Advancement. Additionally, publications are crucial for establishing academic credibility, contributing to the field, and gaining recognition within the scholarly community. The publication pressure frequently forces assistant professors to juggle multiple roles—teaching, administrative duties, and research. As a result, faculty members may struggle to produce high-quality work or face stress due to tight deadlines and the need to meet institutional benchmarks. Another challenge is the increasing emphasis on publishing in high-impact international journals, which can be difficult due to the competitive nature of these publications, access issues, and language barriers. Moreover, with the rise of predatory journals, assistant professors may feel compelled to publish quickly, leading to compromised research integrity and quality. In conclusion, the pressure to publish is a double-edged sword for Indian assistant professors. While research publications are essential for academic growth, the excessive focus on quantity over quality, combined with other professional responsibilities, often results in a stressful and unsustainable work environment.

4. Limited Resources

Assistant professors in Indian colleges often face the challenge of limited resources, which affects their ability to effectively carry out their teaching & research. These constraints are often seen in many government institutions and smaller colleges, where funding and infrastructure may not meet the demands of modern higher education.

One of the most pressing issues is the lack of adequate research funding. Many assistant professors find it difficult to secure any grants or financial support to carry out meaningful research. This limits opportunities for faculty to engage in scholarly work, publish in reputable journals, or attend national and international conferences, all of which are crucial for career advancement. The absence of labs, modern equipment, and access to necessary academic resources further exacerbates the issue, making it hard for faculty to stay competitive in their fields.

Library resources are another area of concern. Many Indian colleges have underfunded libraries with limited access to current books, journals, and databases. Access to international academic journals, which often require costly subscriptions, is usually beyond the reach of many colleges. This limits the scope of research for assistant professors and restricts their ability to stay updated with the latest developments in their fields.

Outdated technology and a lack of digital infrastructure make it difficult for assistant professors to incorporate innovative teaching methods such as blended learning or online resources. Many institutions lack reliable internet connectivity, sufficient computers, and smart classrooms equipped with audiovisual aids, making it challenging for faculty to provide an enriched learning experience.

In conclusion, limited resources in Indian colleges create significant hurdles for assistant professors, impacting their teaching effectiveness, research productivity, and overall professional development. Addressing these issues requires greater investment in educational infrastructure and funding, along with policy changes that support academic growth.

5. Job Security

Assistant professors in India often face uncertainty regarding job security, especially if they are in temporary or contractual positions. Many Indian colleges, particularly Aided Colleges and Self-finance institutions, rely heavily on contract-based appointments for assistant professors. These positions often lack the benefits and security associated with permanent roles, such as job continuity, pension schemes, or access to long-term career advancement. The contracts are usually short-term, ranging from six months to a few years, and are subject to renewal based on

institutional needs, student enrollments, and available funding. This precarious nature of employment leads to anxiety and stress among assistant professors, who may face unemployment, if renewals are not granted. The process of securing a permanent position or tenure is highly competitive and influenced by various factors such as the number of vacancies, institutional policies, and government regulations. The path to tenure is often slow, with many assistant professors serving for years in temporary positions without clear timelines or criteria for regularization. Even when positions become available, political influences and administrative complexities sometimes play a role in appointments, further complicating the process. In addition to this, the growing trend of privatization in higher education has intensified job insecurity, as many private colleges prioritize cost-cutting and may not prioritize regularizing their faculty. This is compounded by the limited availability of public-sector teaching jobs, leaving many assistant professors with few options. In conclusion, job security remains a significant concern for assistant professors in Indian colleges. Addressing this issue requires institutional reforms that prioritize long-term employment, transparent recruitment processes, and the creation of more permanent positions to ensure a stable academic workforce.

Despite these challenges, the role of an assistant professor is rewarding, providing opportunities for intellectual growth, mentoring students, and contributing to the academic community.

6. Balancing Teaching and Research

Assistant professors are expected to deliver high-quality teaching while also conducting original research. Hence, Balancing teaching and research is one of the most significant challenges faced by assistant professors in Indian colleges. In most institutions, assistant professors are required to handle heavy teaching loads, which include conducting lectures, grading assignments, and mentoring students. This leaves limited time and energy for research, which is equally important for career advancement, particularly in the context of the University Grants Commission (UGC) requirements for publications and promotions. In addition to teaching, assistant professors are expected to contribute to research through publications in peer-reviewed journals, presenting papers at seminars, and applying for grants. However, the lack of dedicated research time, coupled with limited resources such as inadequate research funding, access to academic databases, and laboratory infrastructure, makes it difficult for them to conduct high-quality research. This pressure often forces them to choose between focusing on teaching or compromising their research output. As a result, many assistant professors struggle to maintain the balance between their teaching responsibilities and the need to produce impactful research, impacting both their professional growth and the quality of education delivered to students.

Addressing this issue requires institutional support, including reduced teaching loads and better research facilities.

7. Adapting to Evolving Educational Technologies

Adapting to evolving educational technology is a growing challenge for assistant professors in Indian colleges. With the rise of digital tools, online learning platforms, and virtual classrooms, faculty members must constantly update their skills to effectively integrate technology into their teaching. However, many face obstacles such as inadequate access to training, limited infrastructure, and varying levels of digital literacy among students. Despite these challenges, the shift towards blended learning and digital education demands that assistant professors embrace new methods to enhance student engagement and learning outcomes, requiring both institutional support and personal initiative.

8. Mentorship and Professional Development

Mentorship and professional development are crucial for the growth of assistant professors in Indian colleges. Many early-career academics lack proper mentorship from senior faculty, leaving them without guidance in navigating research, teaching, and career advancement. Professional development opportunities, such as workshops, conferences, and training programs, are often limited or underfunded, hindering their ability to stay updated with advancements in their fields. Without strong mentorship and continuous development, assistant professors may struggle to meet the expectations of academic excellence. To foster growth, institutions must prioritize structured mentorship programs and invest in ongoing professional development initiatives.

9. Slow Career Progression

Slow career progression is a common challenge faced by assistant professors in Indian colleges. The path to promotions, particularly to Associate Professor or Professor Levels, is often prolonged due to rigid processes, limited vacancies, and stringent requirements such as publications, research output, and years of service. Additionally, the lack of proper mentorship and resources further delays career growth. This slow progression leads to frustration, and job dissatisfaction, and hinders academic and professional development in the long run.

10. Lack of Professionalism

It is essential to be up-to-date on a daily basis so that we will be able to know about the daily happenings around the globe. Only by confining ourselves to the books or syllabus we can't provide quality education to our students. In order to be professional an assistant professor has to read journals, magazines, current affairs, etc or he or she can join conferences, and webinars to enhance his/her outlook.

SUGGESTIONS

Some suggestions to overcome these challenges are:

1. Workshops and in-service training should be organized for the Assistant Professor from time to time to maintain the quality of teacher education.
2. The qualification of Assistant Professors should be decided strictly and it should be the NET exam conducted by CBSE, New Delhi.
3. To preserve the standard of higher education in India, timely appointments of Assistant Professors are required.
4. In order to revitalize India's teacher education institutes, funds and other resources should be made available easily.
5. Traditional approaches to teaching should be avoided as far as possible.

Conclusion

The complexities and challenges faced by assistant professors in degree colleges are multi-directional, reflecting the demanding nature of modern academic roles. From balancing teaching and research to navigating administrative tasks and institutional politics, assistant professors are often stretched thin in their efforts to meet the high expectations of their institutions. The pressure to publish books and articles in journals, secure tenure, and adapt to evolving educational technologies further adds to their workload. Despite these challenges, many assistant professors demonstrate remarkable resilience and dedication to their students, their study, and their professional development. Addressing these issues requires a concerted effort from academic institutions to provide better resources, mentorship, and support systems that allow assistant professors to thrive in their careers. Only by acknowledging and mitigating these challenges can the academic community foster an environment that promotes both personal well-being and professional excellence for its faculty.

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