

**THIRD SPACE ACTIVITIES OF ACADEMIC STAFF MEMBERS:
A PRELIMINARY STUDY FROM A FACULTY OF SCIENCE AT A
STATE UNIVERSITY IN SRI LANKA**

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The traditional roles of staff in higher education institutions have become increasingly blurred over time. This has led to a new form of work referred to as the third space in higher education institutions. The primary role of academic staff has focused on teaching and research. However, multiple reasons, such as increasing regulations of higher education and performance evaluations have resulted in a gradual expansion of the primary academic duties. While there is a fair understanding of the blurring boundaries between academic and professional staff in the international context, there is limited understanding of the identities of academic and professional staff in Sri Lankan higher education institutions. Hence, this study aimed to provide insights from a preliminary study conducted on the role of academic staff members in universities in Sri Lanka. Data on participation in selected activities in 2024 were collected from 23 academic staff members of a Faculty of Science, at a state university in Sri Lanka, through an online questionnaire and analysed. The majority of respondents were female (55%), and the participants included professors (20%), senior lecturers (60%), and probationary lecturers (20%). Respondents reported weekly engagement in lectures, tutorials, or laboratory sessions (100%), course coordination (73.9%), student administration (73.9%), and research project management (91.3%). At least once a month, 47.8% were involved in student counselling, 56.5% in research dissemination, 56.5% in student welfare and grievance resolution, 47.8% in faculty committee membership, 60.9% in university committee membership, and 43.5% in career guidance for students. Respondents reported rare participation in outreach activities (69.6%), science-industry interactions (56.5%), financial delegations for example serving as senior treasurer (34.8%), and academic and professional quality assurance (39.1%). The results indicate strong engagement with teaching, research, and academic administration; moderate involvement in student support and well-being; and limited participation in outreach activities and institutional development and governance among the respondents. It was concluded that the respondents are primarily engaged in their core academic responsibilities while extending their contributions to third space activities. An emerging recommendation from this study is to strengthen faculty support and recognition for third space roles of the academic staff.

Keywords: Academic, Boundaries, Higher education, Third space, Traditional