

## **Non-Traditional Assessment Tracks for Obtaining Academic Ranks at Universities in Thailand**

Gamon Savatsomboon  
*Maharakham University, Thailand*

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Wouldn't it be great if academics could obtain their academic ranks without (assessors) readers' assessment? If yes, Thai universities and academics must take an advantage of this golden opportunity. This opinion piece focuses on the two non-traditional tracks for obtaining academic ranks stipulated by the Office of the Higher Education Commission (OHEC) of Thailand for the first time in history. The criteria were introduced in the Gazette of OHEC in 2020 and will be fully effective on June 23, 2022. The two non-traditional tracks require no assessment from readers to obtain academic ranks for associate and full professorships. These non-traditional tracks are designed only for associate and full professorships in several fields, for example, business and economics. According to the Chairperson of the Policy Driving and Monitoring Working Group, Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research, and Innovation (Thai Post, 2021), the reasons driving this change are due to the outdated guidelines and an attempt to make the entry of academic rank internationally recognized and improve Thai universities' recognition on the world stage.

To obtain an associate professor rank through the non-traditional track, an applicant must already be an assistant professor (in business and economics disciplines, for example). In addition, five published academic papers indexed in Scopus are required; however, the applicant must be the principal investigator (PI) or corresponding author (CA) on only three of them. Furthermore, there is a requirement of 150 lifetime citations (excluding self-citations) by journals indexed in Scopus and the life-time H-index must be at least 4 and must be published in Scopus journals only. Finally, the applicant must be head of at least five projects that are receiving/have received funding from external sources. If the applicant has legitimate credentials, academic rank will automatically be granted (no human assessment required). To obtain the rank of full professor, ten published papers indexed in Scopus are required, and the applicant must be PI or CA on all of them. In addition, the

lifetime citations by Scopus-indexed journals must be higher or equal to, for example, 500 for the business discipline and 200 for the economics discipline (excluding self-citations) and the life-time H-index (based on publications in Scopus journals only) must be at least 8. Last, the applicant must be head of at least 10 projects that are receiving/have received funding from external sources. Similar to the previous appointment, if the applicant has legitimate credentials, academic rank will automatically be granted (no human assessment required). Four traditional tracks for associate and full professors are available, two for each, but they are not covered in this piece because they are not of interest at present. In short, I support the two non-traditional tracks described in this section for two reasons:

- (1) Introducing internationally recognized criteria into the Gazette of OHEC for obtaining academic rank is appropriate. In my opinion, these non-traditional tracks are golden opportunities for people to advance in their careers. In addition, I believe that the criteria set by OHEC could be achieved by competent academics. In summary, this process can be viewed as professional growth and development at the faculty (individual) level.
- (2) At the institutional level, if researchers could achieve academic ranks through the non-traditional tracks, it basically indicates that they would have internationally accepted research outputs. In turn, these research outputs could be used to boost their universities' ranks that are rated by the university ranking institutions, such as the QS Ranking. Six QS Ranking criteria, namely, academic reputation (40%), citations per faculty (20%), employer reputation (10%), faculty/student ratio (20%), international faculty ratio (5%), and international student ratio (5%) exist (Staff Writer, 2021). Please note that the first two categories are combined into 60%. Thai universities could gain marks for the first two categories based on their teaching and research reputations, which are linked to the non-traditional tracks described in this paper.

Non-traditional tracks are not without criticism. According to Sindecharak (2020), there is concern about the new non-traditional tracks through Isara, a national (online) newspaper although overall, he agrees with the non-traditional tracks (not assessed by readers). On the other hand, he thinks that the criteria are too stringent and not achievable. Specifically, he states that the required numbers of publications, citations (both must be based on Scopus journals only), and research projects, and level of H-index (based on publications in Scopus journals only), for example, are too high and that these numbers need to be reduced. He also states that the non-traditional tracks should be extended for the academic rank for assistant professors. His latter remark, however, is also a positive one. As a reminder, other traditional tracks that Thai academics could follow to achieve higher academic ranks can be found.

In summary, I think the new non-traditional tracks stipulated in the OHEC's Gazette are very appropriate because these tracks open opportunities for competent academics to obtain their academic ranks without assessment by readers (human bias also avoided); again, this process provides a golden opportunity. Universities could gain higher reputation from academic successors of these non-traditional tracks, which could lead to higher ranking (at least against their domestic rivals). In addition, these tracks are signs that indicate that Thailand is beginning to push harder to make

Thai academics gain higher competency at a level recognized by the worldwide academic community. Thus, the time is right for OHEC to introduce these non-traditional tracks described in this paper. All in all, Thai academics must strive to obtain their academic ranks through this golden opportunity to further their international reputations. Likewise, Thai universities must align their ecosystems to take the advantage of the golden opportunity.

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**GAMON SAVATSOMBOON**, DBA, is a faculty member in the Department of Management at Mahasarakham University, Thailand. He teaches courses in research and management both at undergraduate and graduate levels. In addition, he provides research-software training courses at basic and advanced levels. Email: [gamon.s@acc.msu.ac.th](mailto:gamon.s@acc.msu.ac.th)

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