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Merit review system

Carsten Holz <carstenholz@gmail.com>

Tue, Nov 19, 2013 at 11:04 AM

To: weishyy@ust.hk

Cc: [Division faculty]

Dear Professor Shyy,

earlier this semester my division head (SOSC) informed the division merit review committee (of which I am the chair) that you are changing the merit review evaluation categories. She also wrote that you requested us to come up with criteria for each category.

(1) I find it strange to receive requests from you around two corners. If you want something from the merit review committee(s), why don't you put it in writing so that we know exactly what it is you want? I also lack information as to which aspects of the merit review process and content—affecting choice and form of evaluation criteria—we can determine, and which ones you have pre-determined.

(2) The division merit review is a farce and you are not addressing the real issue. (I have consistently boycotted it, with exceptions for very specific reasons.)

(a) The division merit review committee evaluates, the division head evaluates, and the dean decides who gets what and informs the individual faculty members. The division review is a farce because the dean can fully ignore the evaluation of the division merit review committee.

I expect something like: all materials submitted by individual faculty members are open to viewing by all faculty members, the evaluation done by the merit review committee is open to viewing by all faculty members, and the salary decision is open to viewing by all faculty members.

(b) Historically, the selection of division merit review committee members is biased. I have seen the same people on the committee for years on end and I do not regard this as fair.

I expect something like: divide all substantiated faculty into four or five groups by discipline and have one person from each group be on the merit review committee. Within each group, rotate the delegate to the division merit review committee according to a pre-determined rule (say, according to alphabetical order of second letter of last name), every year or every second year.

(c) There is a disconnect between a division merit review committee evaluating for the purpose of salary changes and the fact that the current salaries of faculty members are unknown.

If I look at the CVs of persons A and B in a merit review exercise and find that both performed equally but don't know that person A's current salary is twice that of person B,

then I don't see how my evaluation for salary change can be fair (which I would want it to be).

(3) In the bigger picture, the merit review appears pointless.

(a) If I compare my salary increase of early fall 2013 (presumably the 50% that's equally distributed) to the CPI and if I assume this pattern continues into the future, then by the time I retire my salary will buy about half of what it buys today. Sharing information around the school, it seems that not even the best research record prevented a real salary decrease.

(b) In the early 2000s, the administration made abundantly clear that anyone who cares about income should teach extra courses in the self-financing program and forget about research. Even if one teaches just one extra course every year, one is likely better off for the remaining period until retirement than with the most stellar research record. That has not changed. (I have so far not taught in the self-financing program.)

Given the importance of teaching in the self-financing program for personal income, are the arrangements for such teaching fair? Access to such teaching is not equal, and not transparent. The administration increasingly constrains the number of such courses that one can teach as well as remuneration. It discriminates against SOSC compared to, for example, the B-School.

In other words, you decrease our (real) salaries in merit review exercises and cut our other income.

(c) Beyond the self-financing program, dean and division head distribute money-making opportunities to particular faculty members, with some of these decisions apparent and some not ("don't tell anybody"). Merit salary increases appear the smallest part of a dean's bag of monetary favors to distribute (and that doesn't yet include the non-income favors).

(d) Specific to me, when you deny sabbatical leave and I decide to self-finance most of a year at Stanford out of my savings (on no-pay leave from HKUST), the foregone HKD 1mio in salary and pension contribution exceeds any extra income I can possibly get from merit review salary increases over my remaining lifetime at HKUST.

If you are not running a clean system, with real incentives, then I prefer you drop the pretense of a "merit review" at the division level—i.e., proceed as currently, let the dean decide in private, and drop the add-on division-level review farce.

Sincerely,
Carsten Holz
SOSC

Wei SHYY <weishyy@ust.hk>
To: Carsten Holz <carstenholz@gmail.com>
Cc: [Division faculty and others]

Tue, Nov 19, 2013 at 4:46 PM

Dear Carsten:

Thank you for the message.

You have used many strong words. I appreciate your frustration. But why don't you bring these matters to the Division faculty meetings first and seek a consensus from the faculty within SOSC. After all, we are in a university, and the fact that you wrote me shows that we do have an open structure, and nobody monopolizes the wisdom or logic.

I am coming to visit SOSC tomorrow and look forward to engaging you and other colleagues so that we can at least clear the factual matters. A reasonable discussion can be done only if we agree on the factual matters first.

Best,
Wei
[Quoted text hidden]