

Date: 23 October 2014
To: Tony Chan, President, HKUST
From: Carsten Holz, Professor, SOSC, HKUST

Dear President Chan,

I herewith lodge a grievance against the EVPP/Provost and the Dean of Humanities and Social Sciences for system design failures in the merit salary review system that lead to severe unfairness and promote the exercise of cronyism. The results grossly and adversely affect my welfare at the workplace and the terms and conditions of my employment at HKUST (the grounds for a grievance in accordance with the HKUST Grievance Procedures).

The issue is the evaluation of service as part of the annual merit salary review. The evaluation of my service as “good” (2 votes) and “satisfactory” (2 votes) in the SOSC division head’s review letter made apparent the system design failures. (I received the division head’s review letter on 25 September 2014 by forwarded mail, being currently on sabbatical leave at Harvard University.) This is not a grievance about the particular evaluation of my service—an evaluation which I think is grossly unfair—but a grievance about the system design failures upheld by provost and dean that cannot but lead to unfair outcomes. My own case illustrates the failures.

The HKUST performance evaluation guidelines (“Guidelines for Faculty Performance Assessment,” section “Defining Excellent Performance”) include a statement regarding “excellent performance in service” that states “All faculty are routinely expected to serve on departmental, school, and university committees...” There are two system design failures:

(i) The SOSC Division Faculty Merit Review Committee (DFMRC), of which I was the Chair, was in no position to evaluate service: we did not know which faculty members are being remunerated by the division head or the dean for their service, either through monetary compensation or through a reduction in teaching load or through some other benefits.

(ii) What kind of service one provides depends *not* on the faculty member but on the division head and the dean, and the evaluation of service per se therefore is an evaluation of the division head’s and the dean’s decisions. To give three examples:¹

(1) The division head asked me to fulfill a certain set of services to the division and I complied in full.

(2) Mervyn Cheung, HSS School Administrator, in fall 2013 asked me on behalf of the dean to serve on the University Appointments and Substantiation Committee (UASC) and I agreed. In a division meeting some months later when I mentioned that I am on the UASC, the two SOSC hires of the dean of HSS, to my great embarrassment, announced

¹ There are further examples and I am happy to elaborate if requested. I currently refrain from doing so because they are probably of less immediate relevance, and some would take longer to elaborate. (On balance, these further examples may have a neutral effect on the evaluation of my service.) This grievance is not about the evaluation of *my* service, but about system design failures that are *illustrated* by my case.

that no, I am not on the UASC, because they are. It turned out they were correct. I had been asked to serve on the UASC and agreed, but the dean later denied my providing that service. (When I brought it up with the dean, he appeared apologetic and blamed Mervyn.)

- (3) At a School Board meeting in fall 2013, I volunteered to be part of a committee on the new Arts Center (admittedly with great hesitation because of a potential conflict of interest, and only after the dean repeatedly looked in my direction). Subsequently, this committee, established by the School Board, was never convened.

In my personal case, by providing all service that division head and dean assigned to me (and volunteering for additional service), I have fulfilled the official requirement for “excellent performance.” “All faculty are routinely expected to serve on departmental, school, and university committees...” Every committee that I was asked to serve on, I served on in perfectly professional manner. I also have nothing to fear from an evaluation of my professional service outside the institution (which somehow gets lost, even in the official definition of what is excellent service).

I repeat that there are two system design failures:

- (i) An evaluation committee cannot evaluate faculty members’ service to HKUST if the committee is not being informed about which faculty members receive monetary compensation or a reduction in teaching load or some other benefit for some or all of their services.
- (ii) Faculty members cannot be held responsible for service allocation decisions made by division head and dean.

The outcome is perfect cronyism: the dean appoints his hires to a very great number of service and executive positions—apparent to the DFMRC. The DFMRC does not know the allocation of the dozens of favors the dean has available for distribution. Come merit review, the dean can easily justify salary increases for his hires by pointing to their superb service.

I conclude that I cannot be evaluated on “service” within HKUST, not by the DFMRC because it does not have sufficient information, and not by any administrator (division head, dean, or provost) because the service decisions are not made by me (but by the division head and dean).

I request that the two system design failures be resolved.

Sincerely,
Carsten Holz