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Say 'No' to slavery

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To: Carsten Holz <carstenholz@gmail.com>
Bcc: [School faculty]

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Dear [Dean] and HSS colleagues (all bcc'ed to avoid long list of addresses),

Before Billy's [head of Humanities Division] draft was circulated last Friday, I was not planning to engage in the sabbatical leave topic since I have strong feelings about it (see appended below this email). You/the dean wants our views, so here are mine.

-- I don't know how you are planning to run the Monday meeting and I think there may be no minutes (or no minutes that are being distributed within a reasonable time frame, such as one week). I would also have doubts about the quality of minutes. If I come to the meeting, I will record it.

1. Regulatory framework

The university sabbatical leave rules ("the Rules") say:

"In considering each application, the needs and priorities of the University shall prevail and the granting of sabbatical leave shall be subject to sound justification, the University regulations and on such other terms as the University may determine from time to time."

Searching Faculty Handbook / VPAA website etc., I have not found "the University regulations" re sabbatical leave that the Rules refer to. I have also not found anything regarding "such other terms as the University may determine from time to time." My contract is with a public university and not with a triad organization (secretive clique that renders the formal regulatory framework, or parts thereof, ineffective). Regulations that regulate my work life must be readily accessible to me. Since I have found none (besides the Rules), I conclude that there are none. If there are, please point me to the correct website. If I come to the meeting and there is any mentioning of triad orders re sabbatical leave, I will take my recording of the meeting into the public realm.

2. HUMA [Humanities Division]

What is the reason for there being a larger number of sabbatical leave applicants in HUMA than Billy wants to approve? Is this the outcome of management failure? Did Billy turn down sabbatical leave applications in the past, or did he in the past spread the word that he would not approve sabbatical leave, or...? – If so, then I expect that Billy take full responsibility for his past decisions.

If the number of sabbatical leave applicants is a pure chance event, then why is it not being resolved in an efficient manner? The dean at the fall School Board Meeting let drop that he had millions in reserves that he would make available for this or that (positions, teaching) if we jumped when he says 'jump.' HKD 300,000 should pay to cover the teaching duties of a faculty member, so either the dean can easily solve any teaching problem, or Billy can

borrow from the dean for a year and repay the dean in a subsequent year when there are fewer sabbatical applicants and an instructor is therefore not needed in that year.

If Billy wishes to make a convincing argument that he needs X numbers of regular faculty present (please make the argument first), then he can easily solve the issue by offering incentives: those who defer sabbatical leave for a year will have their sabbatical claim clock (for the next sabbatical leave in 7 years' time) start again in a year's time (when they start the deferred sabbatical leave rather than when they end the deferred sabbatical leave). If there is no taker, offer a course off for deferring. If there still is no taker, offer financial compensation for deferring.

The University rules on sabbatical leave do not give Billy the authority to regulate sabbatical leave. Neither dean nor division heads are authorized by the sabbatical leave regulation to manipulate (add, subtract from) these rules.

If someone comes along and tells you "You are my slave! Come here, sit down with me and let's write the rules that you as my slave will have to obey", what would you say?

Best,
Carsten

-- Here's my recent history with sabbatical leave:

What if thieves burgle your house and steal a million HKD, and you know who the thieves are. But they are also the police? What if the thieves then come back and tell you they'll help themselves to some more?

Facts: Michelle [division head], James [dean] and the Provost turned down my sabbatical leave application to go to Stanford in 2012/13. They approved my no-pay leave application to go to Stanford, and I financed Stanford on my own. A million HKD in HKUST salary and pension contribution are missing from my bank account.

This is how Michelle turned down my sabbatical leave application in spring 2012 to go to Stanford:

"Given his repeated series of no-pay leaves, I could not recommend a sabbatical request now. (As per attached email)"

And in her attached email:

"As I understand, Dean James met with you in late February and told you that given your repeated series of no-pay leaves and your previous history of non-participation in university service, he could not approve a sabbatical request now. That being said, he would be delighted to revisit this issue after a few years of due diligence from you. I concur with James' analysis. (I also wish to remind you that the School is planning to implement the policy of having the faculty on sabbatical to do one extra course before or after the sabbatical leave.)

a. The Rules allow rejection of my application on grounds of "the needs and priorities of the University shall prevail" or if I do not provide a sound justification. This is a vast

territory and yet Michelle and James resort to a rationale for denying sabbatical leave that the Rules do *not* authorize them to use. The Provost signs off.

Why are we being asked to talk about more rules—illegitimate rules in the first place, since the Rules do not authorize alterations or additions—when Michelle, James, and the Provost give a damn about rules?

b. With management treating the Rules rules as joke, do its actions at least make some sense?

Am I to conclude that taking no-pay leave to go to Princeton and USC is a bad thing? It's free for the university. HKUST takes credit for my publication record, CV, and citations established during the period that didn't cost HKUST a penny, and it can take my non-pay and hire plenty of replacement teachers. It's a total win for HKUST. What's the problem? What logic does Michelle's "Given his repeated series of no-pay leaves, I could not recommend a sabbatical request now" come from??

Or am I to conclude that because I have been away from HKUST for a long time, I should not be allowed to go away any longer? Then why did Michelle approve no-pay leave?

Regarding Michelle's statement on history of "non-participation" in connection with not approving sabbatical leave: (i) the Rules do not allow her to deny sabbatical leave on such accounts; (ii) Michelle was not the division head during the period she refers to ("Michelle did not eat her spinach at age 3, therefore she cannot be a professor at HKUST now"), (iii) at no prior point was there any mentioning or complaint from division head or dean about any "non-participation" in university service (a plain assertion, to begin with, the accuracy of which has not been established). Instead of single-handedly playing kangaroo court for a matter that she knows nothing about, invents it to be a case to be judged, appoints herself the judge, and then metes out a penalty, Michelle could have mentioned that *on her watch* (and before) I continued to serve on the academic review committee even as I was on *no-pay leave* (while HKUST was not paying my salary).

What am I conclude? That HKUST is triad-run? That HKUST is a mental institution? That we are governed by sadists? Or by black-mailers who need to extract private services before they let a slave go? Or by people who are so stupid that they can't even write a sabbatical leave denial that conforms with the Rules? Or by North Koreans who run a system of fear ("How do I prevent every single one of my colleagues from thinking that I may not be doing 'enough' this or that, a perception which they will then use ten years down the road when they are division head to pass high judgment that I may not use the toilets at HKUST?")

There are a number of oral statements by the dean that are far from helping the matter. --

What I am looking for is not yet more rules—not authorized by the HKUST sabbatical leave regulations to begin with—but a large-scale transfer of power from a non-administration to the faculty members, functioning constraints on the abuse of authority by management, and clear mechanisms to penalize and depose managers who abuse their authority. [End]