

10 December 2018

To: Cameron Campbell, Acting Head, Division of Social Science

cc: Provost, Dean of Humanities and Social Science

From: Carsten A. Holz, Professor, Division of Social Science Division

Re: Your 'merit review' letter of 22 November 2018

Dear Cameron,

I am in receipt of your letter titled "Merit Salary Review 2018," dated 22 November 2018. I am aware that you are forced by Provost SHYY Wei to issue such a letter, and I am responding to that letter.

You list the School of Humanities and Social Science's (SHSS's) priorities for 2018-19. I contest that these are the School's priorities. They were not discussed and decided by the School faculty. Apart from the obvious and widely accepted priority of research and teaching, I suspect that the other priorities are orders from SHYY Wei (you will know). I object to the misinterpretation in your letter of SHYY Wei's orders as "School" priorities.

"Development of more collaborative faculty research." I am not aware that faculty members have made such a decision to favor certain approaches to research over others (and thereby, de facto, limit the scope of research). I have never seen a rationale offered for such a decision. I can see that the highest-paid people in the school can pat themselves on the back, i.e., it's an easy way for rulers to justify their rule and their salaries.

"Tri-modal courses." This has not come from the School (faculty).

"Blended learning through the creation and use of on-line teaching modules." This has not come from the School (faculty). It also happens to be handled under the table. There is no document available to all faculty members that lays out a framework. Instead, some individual faculty members are privately pressured and others are privately incentivized.

Re New budgetary model: 50 percentage points are outside the control of SHSS ("number of UG and PG students taught, number of degrees granted").<sup>1</sup> Thus, the new budgetary model reads: half of SHSS's budget is decided at the discretion of SHYY Wei.

Re Paragraph 9 of the Annual Merit Review Letter Guidelines: Let's call the salary review what it is, a fig leaf for the dean's private and secret favoritism and penalizing of individual faculty members. This is a public university: release the salary (income) records since 2008 before you start talking about "merit review."

Re Summary of assessment results: The math looks a bit funny but can't be pinned down due to the 3-year moving average screen:

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<sup>1</sup> The number of SHSS UG majors is determined not by the School. The number of SHSS credits that students from other schools can obtain in SHSS is limited by the number of credits they are required to take in SHSS and/or by the type of courses that are offered by SHSS and by other schools (which will try to leverage their 'own' students into their courses). The number of PG student is determined by (as far as I know) SHYY Wei, possibly under the cover of some "formula" (that he is responsible for).

Teaching:

2016 2VG/4G<sup>2</sup>

2017 Very Good

2018 Good — which suggests you (or Kellee?) view my pure 2018 annual teaching as Satisfactory or Unsatisfactory?? [vs. the fact that student evaluations are well above average if you control for student numbers enrolled]

Research:

2016 5G/1S

2017 Very Good

2018 Good — which suggests you (or Kellee?) view my pure 2018 research as Satisfactory?? I disagree.

Service:

2016 2G/3S/1US

2017 Satisfactory

2018 Satisfactory. — Here, at least the math seems consistent. Consistent as measurement of the division head and dean's allocation of committee jobs. As measurement of my service to the academe I judge this to be purely political.

I don't want to give face to SHYY Wei's bizarre kindergarten report card practices and consequently did not fill in the "Activities Report." In my view, SHYY Wei willfully destructs academia at HKUST through the intentional harassment and humiliation of academics. You follow his orders.

In the same vain, The China Daily strongly promotes upstaging SHYY Wei, attached.

Please add this letter to the file that you are keeping on me. I'll also submit a hard copy.

Sincerely,  
Carsten

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<sup>2</sup> While in fall 2016 we received the individual evaluations, since 2017 the review has been obscured through the reduction to one summary assessment coming out of the dark (nobody is responsible).

## Accountability finally comes to university teachers

Updated: 2017-06-29 07:35

By Fung Keung(HK Edition)

Starting in September next year, barring violent and unforeseeable protests, all university teachers in Hong Kong government-funded institutions (including all professors and lecturers disregarding their grades) will be held accountable for how they spend time on teaching or research on a daily basis. In a nutshell, it means they have to fill in "timesheets" telling the government how they spend the eight hours on a particular working day.

In the past few weeks, the government's University Grants Committee (UGC) has told the eight local government-funded universities of its plan. It is understood that top university administrators have reluctantly accepted the government's plan. However, it is another story with staff associations. Some of them reportedly will hold demonstrations in the next few days to protest against the government's unprecedented, if not controversial, move.

How does the government's proposal work? Laymen need some enlightenment here. University teachers are divided into two camps - teaching lecturers and researching professors. Teaching lecturers include assistant lecturers, lecturers, senior lecturers and principal lecturers. Typically they are required to teach seven courses a year and do not need to do research unless they volunteer to. On the contrary the professors (including assistant, associate, full and chair professors) teach only four courses a year but need to produce at least two publishable academically researched papers.

The UGC's new plan will require all university teachers to inform the government, apart from hours spent in classrooms, how they spend the rest of the day. In other words, they need to fill in "timesheets" to tell top education brass what else they are doing for the rest of the day or week. If teachers engage in research, well, the government needs to know what the research is all about and how much time they spend on it in a particular day.



**FUNG KEUNG**  
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Some university staff association members accuse the UGC of treating them like factory workers or taxi drivers. These blue-collar workers have to tell employers how much time they put in at work on a particular day so they can be paid accordingly. Some university teachers say the UGC's new move is insulting and humiliating. They might do something to voice their discontent.

I, being a university professor, fully support the government's latest move. It is long-time coming. Most university teachers are responsible people but there is bad blood in any profession. Some university teachers, except in classrooms, are nowhere to be seen. They might simply work three hours a day and spend the rest enjoying life. For professors who are required to do research, there is no mechanism to punish them if they do not produce any research papers. The only drawback they might perhaps have is a delay in promotion.

Teachers are like any other government workers. If they receive money from the government, they are answerable to Hong Kong's taxpayers. I am sure most Hong Kong folks would agree with the UGC's new plan to make all university teachers accountable. The government spent HK\$19 billion on university education in the 2015-16 financial year (the latest figures available). That is a lot of money. A big chunk of this amount goes into the pockets of university teachers and researchers.

It is hoped my colleagues in government-funded universities would embrace the UGC's new plan with grace and honor. When we require other people to be accountable for what they do, we should set a good example ourselves and take time to fill in "timesheets". The government, in fact, is quite generous. It will give university teachers one whole year to digest and swallow the new requirement before they need to do it in September next year.

(HK Edition 06/29/2017 page1)