

## Defining “Research Active” in SHSS\*

*\*Approved by HUMA, SOSC, & SHSS Executive Committees in Spring 2020, following extensive consultation and revisions that started in Fall 2019. Formally announced as policy at the SHSS School Board Meeting on 29 April 2020.*

### **Background:**

As indicated in a 28 June 2019 memo from the Associate Provost for Teaching and Learning, HKUST expects regular-track faculty (RTF) to teach three courses/year, and teaching-track faculty (TTF) are expected to teach twice that amount, i.e. six courses/year.

Furthermore, at HKUST, RTF are generally expected to spend 40% of their time on research, 40% on teaching, and 20% on service.

The university is concerned that some RTF are “research inactive,” which poses a drain on resources (e.g., space) and is not fair to RTF who are teaching a full load, applying for grants, and publishing at the level expected for faculty at research universities. At the same time, the university acknowledges that research activity takes different forms and occurs at different rates of return across disciplines.

**Objective:** All schools have been asked to develop definitions of what constitutes “research inactive” faculty in their respective disciplines with the policy consequence that “research inactive” faculty should teach one additional course/year on an in-load basis starting in 2020-21.

### **Proposed Definition of Research Active RTF:**

Due to confusion over earlier efforts to define “research inactive,” for greater clarity, the following phrases the definition of research activity in positive rather than negative terms.

A SHSS faculty member is research active as long as s/he fulfills all three of the following conditions:

1. **Published at least one peer-reviewed output.** This may be a peer-reviewed book, peer-reviewed article, peer-reviewed conference proceeding, or peer-reviewed chapter in an edited volume (published by an academic press) within the past three years.
2. **Applied for at least one external grant** (GRF, residential fellowship, etc.) within the past three years for SOSC and within the past five years for HUMA. The application does not have to be successful, but the attempted application has to be to an external/non-HKUST source of funding.
3. **Delivered at least one research presentation** (invited talk, seminar, workshop, or conference) within the past three years.

### **Caveats:**

1. Only #1 and #3 will be used for the purposes of 2020-21 course planning. The grant application requirement (#2) will be waived due to insufficient time to apply for GRFs and other grants this late into the academic year.

2. In the case of exceptional performance in one of the categories (e.g., prize-winning book, Principal Investigator of a large Collaborative Research Fund (CRF) or Area of Excellence (AoE)), one of the other categories may be waived at the discretion of the division head.
3. The three-year/five-year time frame will not apply to faculty who have taken extended sick leave, maternity leave, or bore primary responsibility caring for a critically ill family member. Faculty should inform their division head in confidence about such circumstances.

#### FAQs:

**1. What if I am an assistant professor on my first contract with a reduced teaching load?**

Assistant professor contracts are only three-years long, so it is unlikely that a contract would be renewed in the absence of a single publication, single grant attempt, or single research talk during a three-year period—unless your substantiation clock had been frozen for a year due to sick leave, maternity leave, or other extenuating circumstances.

**2. Can I teach two sections of the same course and have it count as two courses?**

Yes, as long as those sections are enrolled up to the expected quota. The divisions have their own guidelines on class sizes and expectations of meeting the quota (e.g., whether 80% of the quota would be enough), etc.

**3. What if I get an external grant that pays for my teaching replacement? Do I still have to teach the full load of three courses by myself?**

No. Any course taught by your grant-funded teaching replacement will be credited to your teaching. This is the existing practice.

**4. What if I am assigned four courses in one year due to being defined as “research inactive,” but then I apply for a grant that year, publish, or give a research talk?**

In the next three years, you would return to teaching a normal load of three courses/year.

**5. What if it looks like I haven’t published anything for three consecutive years because a book or article is going through a lengthy production process?**

In SHSS, we all understand that it can take two or three years for a single high-quality manuscript to go through the entire publication process, starting with a lengthy peer review process, R&R, copyediting, page proofs, indexing, more page proofs, and so on. As long as you have some piece of peer-reviewed work officially “accepted” by a publisher, then that will count towards #1. It does not have to be out in hard copy in a particular year.

**6. What if I would prefer to spend 40% of my time on service and just 20% of my time on research?**

HKUST is a research university. If you prefer to spend less than 40% of your time on research, then your RTF appointment may not be a good fit. However, faculty with administrative appointments indeed spend less time on teaching and more time on service. Unless you are appointed to an administrative leadership position such as division head, dean, associate vice provost, vice president, etc., there is no reduction in the expectation of time spent on research and teaching relative to service. The divisions maintain their own metrics for granting teaching credit to faculty who assume particularly demanding/heavy service loads. Please consult your Division Head for further detail.

**7. Who will implement and enforce this policy?**

Division Heads, in consultation with their UG/Curriculum committees.

**8. Why should I apply for GRFs/grants just to help the university's budget allocation?**

Our ability to secure GRFs helps the school's academic salary budget more than it helps that of the university. While each GRF yields a HK\$400K download from the UGC to HKUST, for SHSS each successful GRF contributes approximately HK\$1.6 million towards our academic salary budget. Securing a GRF, no matter how small the monetary amount, is the most efficient way to reduce our deficit in the academic salary budget. All of our salaries are paid from this line item in the university's budget model.