
You do not have this authority -- Re: Mandatory Professional Development Courses on AI and Education

Carsten Holz <carstenholz@gmail.com> Mon, Sep 16, 2024 at 7:11 AM
To: Office of the Provost <provost@ust.hk>, yikeguo@ust.hk
Cc: majfung@ust.hk, smcminn@ust.hk

Dear Professor Guo,

Regarding your command of 10 September 2024 for faculty to take your mandatory 7.5 hour course on AI-assessment/integration and pass your exams, I argue that, at a university, you have no authority to impose such a requirement on faculty.

I make two arguments.

1. You violate academic freedom.

Academic freedom is the very foundation of academia. HKUST's core values include "Excellence, Integrity, and Academic Freedom" (<https://hkust.edu.hk/about/mission-vision>).

The definition of academic freedom referenced by HKUST [1], namely Cary Nelson's definition at <https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2010/12/21/defining-academic-freedom>, includes:

"6. Academic freedom means that the political, religious, or philosophical beliefs of politicians, administrators, and members of the public cannot be imposed on students or faculty."

Your command of 10 September 2024 reads "[...] we believe all faculty members should [...]" before springing the term "mandatory" on faculty. Your *beliefs* are of no relevance at a university where the faculty enjoys academic freedom.

Should you want to claim that your beliefs are not of philosophical nature, please take a look at, for example, this HKUST document, <https://carstenholz.people.ust.hk/Initiative/2024-2-8-GuidelinesTeachingPortfolio.pdf>, where, under "Teaching *Philosophy*" [emphasis added], you will find "course design, teaching practices, and assessment activities of the course(s)."

2. Professional ethics: You violate professional norms.

Commands such as yours are unprecedented for (and do not belong in) our profession.

Your command reveals a total disrespect of the profession and the professoriate. Each of us has gone through PhD training, and many if not most of us have decades of professional practice under our belts. We are not unskilled temporary workers in a privately owned

sweatshop. (And have you considered the consequences of your unprofessional behavior? That the professoriate, in turn, loses all respect for you, and acts accordingly?)

If you feel so strongly about sharing your 7.5+ hours' worth of knowledge of AI-assessment/integration, then there are much more elegant ways of sharing your enthusiasm, without the need to put down, humiliate, and devalue the only asset of a university, the faculty. You could, for example, present your recommendation, supported by strong arguments. Or you could put your money where your mouth is and offer each faculty member who successfully completes your courses a one-time HK\$10,000 payment. You would seem to have plenty of spare cash at hand given the ceaseless growth of your administration [2] (unless paid for by pinching faculty salaries), an administration which, in order to justify its existence, needs to find ever new ways to harass the faculty (and prevent it from doing their job).

I am sharing this email widely, with colleagues, and will post it on my personal homepage (<https://carstenholz.people.ust.hk/>), where I will also post any further communication in this matter, should there be any.

Sincerely,
Carsten Holz

[1] For this definition of academic freedom referenced by HKUST see, for example, HKUST President's email of 7 September 2020 titled "A message to the HKUST community (7 September 2020)," available at <https://carstenholz.people.ust.hk/Initiative/2020-9-7-MessageToHKUSTcommunity.pdf>.

[2 See, for example <https://hkust.edu.hk/news/announcements/hkust-welcomes-legcos-passage-hkust-amendment-bill-2023>.

On Tue, Sep 10, 2024 at 4:16 PM Office of the Provost <provost@ust.hk> wrote:
Dear colleagues,

We hope the new academic year is off on a good start.

As Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) tools continue to rapidly evolve, it is crucial that we equip ourselves with the necessary skills and knowledge to integrate AI effectively into our teaching practices. In line with this, HKUST emphasizes the importance of upholding quality assurance in teaching, academic integrity, and students' positive learning experiences. To ensure this, we believe all faculty members should be prepared to teach and administer courses in the AI era.

The Center for Education Innovation (CEI) offers four self-paced online courses focused on Generative AI and Education. These courses are designed to provide you with foundational knowledge of AI, including its applications in education, course design, pedagogy, and, critically, assessment design. The impact of AI on academic integrity and effective evaluation methods is a particular focus, given the potential for students to utilize AI in unsupervised assessments.

Recognizing that some of you may already be familiar with the basics of AI and prompt engineering, we have structured the professional development requirements accordingly:

Optional Courses:

GENAI-001: Introduction to Generative AI and Education (~2 hours)

GENAI-002: Prompt Engineering for Generative AI in Education (~2 hours)

Mandatory Courses:

GENAI-003: AI-Enhanced Assessment: Frameworks and Guidelines for Innovative Design and Practice (~3 hours)

GENAI-004: Enhancing Your Course with Generative AI (~3.5 hours)

Faculty members are required to complete the mandatory courses by August 31, 2025, which will ensure that you are well-prepared to address the challenges and opportunities AI presents in our educational environment. The optional courses are recommended for those who wish to deepen their understanding of AI applications in education.

For your convenience, we have implemented auto-enrolment and reporting features. Each course can be completed within 2-3 hours and includes quizzes to check understanding, with a passing score set at 80%. Upon completion, you will receive a badge issued by the Academy of Education Excellence (AEE).

Your participation in these courses is essential for maintaining the high standards of teaching and learning that define our institution. Thank you for your commitment to advancing our educational practices and supporting our students' success in the AI era.

For enquiries, please contact cei@ust.hk.

Best regards,

Yike Guo, Provost

Jimmy Fung, Associate Provost (Teaching & Learning)

Sean McMinn, Director of Center for Education Innovation