
Your comments on my sabbatical leave completion report

1 message

Carsten A. Holz <socholz@ust.hk>

Sun, Jul 5, 2026 at 7:08 PM

To: [Dean, School of Humanities and Social Science (SHSS)]

Cc: carstenholz@gmail.com

Dear [Dean, SHSS],

(1) On 30 June 2026 I received via various staff a scan of my 16 May 2026 sabbatical leave completion report on which you had written (in handwriting), with a line to the relevant passage, “What is the status of this monograph? Any plan to complete it?”

I fully answered your questions on 1 July 2026:

“Regarding The Process of Economic Development in West Sichuan, China

Status: active. Plan: complete it”

On 2 July, I received (again via various staff) another message from you: It starts with:

“I’m not satisfied.

I need to know.”

Underneath my answer of 1 July 2026, you wrote:

“When do you plan to complete it (your time frame/time line), and what are the steps taken to ensure its completion in the timeframe?”

To which I respond: When I have a deadline, I tend to end up breaking it. To me, academia is not assembly line work. If my job were to tighten X bolts, I could give you a precise answer as to how long it will take. But not when I am working in a creative profession. I am interested in quality work and not in rushing something to quick completion by a date (which, furthermore, has no scientific justification).

As to “steps taken to ensure its completion in the timeframe”: The steps are to do my research when HKUST management allows the time to do so. (Your messages and your request for answers subtract from my research time.)

(2) In your first message of 30 June 2026, you also wrote (in handwriting), with a line to another passage, “What is this short monograph? Is it published?”

I also fully answered this second question of yours, on 1 July 2026:

“Regarding the short monograph on academia in Hong Kong and at HKUST

Proposal is under submission with publisher; have complete manuscript, need a publisher”

As to the first part of your question, “What is this short monograph?”, well, it is a short monograph.

In your subsequent, forwarded message of 2 July 2026, you added the following sentences underneath my response: “Please submit the completed manuscript along with the report. What publisher do you plan to submit this to? Or what academic outlet are you planning to submit this to?”

I am not providing you with a private copy of the completed manuscript. I have two options: I make the manuscript widely available, in which case you, too, will have access to it. In all likelihood, this voids any chance of having it published with a book publisher. At the moment, I prefer to go the book publisher route. What publishers I have submitted to I see no need to share with you. If a publisher accepts my manuscript, we will have a fact that I add to my CV and enter in the annual activities report.

The HKUST sabbatical leave regulations do not list a requirement for me to submit work done during the sabbatical leave to anyone
(https://w5.ab.ust.hk/jsecm/ecm_get_policy_document?encryptedId=VDJqa1FreU5NcmZCdXN3QnZmdlpMMGJIYk9hNUtnNIQ0NUkrZUovMDZOTGZRZ0VFUzV2emJpdEQ3cHpuQXZaWGUvK1FyV2FWcXILcVpla0RLRHdCM1E9PQ==).

The letter of approval of my sabbatical leave requires me to post-sabbatical do the following: “You are required to submit a short report (in no more than a page) to the Provost via myself [division head] and the Dean, within 3 months upon resumption of duty, on whether the planned activities during the sabbatical leave have been fulfilled and their results.” – I have fulfilled my obligation.

Appended is AI’s view on this matter, which I interpret as being clear. See Addendum 1.

3. The next and final sentence in your message of 2 June 2026, before you sign off, is: “I would like to reiterate that sabbatical leave is not a right but a privilege of the faculty serving an institution of higher education.”

I am aware of the HKUST sabbatical leave regulations, which, among others, specify “Sabbatical leave is not an appointee's contractual right and is subject to approval by the University on application.” Over the years, I have carefully studied HKUST’s sabbatical leave regulations as well as HKUST managers’ practices.

4. Appended to your message of 2 July 2026 is what appears to be a second message from you to your various staff on, specifically, 30 June 2026, with this second message apparently at the time not forwarded to the staff in the Division of Social Science. (All messages from you to me have been received by me from a staff in the Division of Social Science; they include what are apparently fragments of emails that were apparently sent from you to your various staff.) This add-on reads: “Please also note that his sentence in the report that “the university management complies” is out of place — sabbatical leave is not a right, but a privilege given to faculty applicants. This is my understanding from all the universities (in the US and in Hong Kong) that I have served.”

I do not know what you are referring to. I am not aware of having written a sentence that includes “the university management complies” and do not know what the context might be.

As to your sentence “This is my understanding from all the universities (in the US and in Hong Kong) that I have served”, where the word “This” presumably refers to the previous sentence’s “sabbatical leave is not a right, but a privilege given to faculty applicants”, I do not question your understanding.

My own understanding of the practices from Cornell to Stanford, Princeton or Yale is that no matter what the formal phrasing of these institutions’ sabbatical leave regulation may be, it is an unquestioned, automatic practice that every faculty member has a one-semester sabbatical every 3 years or a two-semester sabbatical every 6 years (unless there are special circumstances, in which case department head and faculty member communicate, typically with some form of compensation for delayed sabbatical leave). At the University of Toronto, sabbatical leave nowadays does not even require the faculty member to return to the university afterwards to “work off” the sabbatical leave. My understanding is based largely but not solely on the practice in economics departments. Things could be different in other departments where department heads—sabbatical leave is primarily a matter for department heads—might be less conscious of the consequences of their actions on the welfare of their institutions because they are less likely to ground their decisions and behavior on, among others, incentives, opportunity costs, and trade-offs, i.e., second-nature considerations for economists; I do not know.

May I also point out that I had to teach for a period of 9 years before I was granted this recent sabbatical leave, and my sabbatical leave was capped at 6 months. HKUST management forced me to forfeit 6 years’ worth of sabbatical leave credit.

In a related matter, regarding the question of what can be achieved, research-wise, during the limited sabbatical leave approved by HKUST management, I am still waiting for a response from the Provost’s Office to the three sets of questions that I raised in my sabbatical leave completion report. (The three sets of questions were apparently omitted by the division from my report and I submitted them to the Provost’s Office on 23 May 2026.) See Addendum 2. The failure to, so far, provide any meaningful answer to my questions raised directly with the Provost’s Office does not match the professionalism that one would expect from a university leadership.

I also wish to point out that according to the HKUST sabbatical leave regulations, sabbatical leave from HKUST is explicitly intended for three purposes (emphasis added): “Sabbatical leave with full pay may be granted to eligible academic staff members where provided for in their Letters of Appointment *for purposes of academic research, scholarly pursuits and professional development* so that they will continue to give a high standard of service to the University upon return from the leave.” HKUST’s sabbatical leave regulations make no mentioning of research *output.*

-- I much appreciate the research-friendly policies you have recently introduced. And: Of all the messages I have received during my 31 years at HKUST, these recent messages of yours regarding my sabbatical leave completion report are a first in their form, style, and content.

Since the mid-2000s I am sharing with colleagues those of my communications with management that I consider to be of broader interest to the faculty.

Best,
Carsten

Addendum 1:

Carsten's question to Gemini 3.5 Flash:

At a top research university, does a dean have the right to require a faculty member to submit their unpublished manuscript to the dean?

Gemini 3.5 Flash answer:

At a top research university, the short answer is **generally no**. A dean does not have a broad, unilateral right to demand that a faculty member hand over an unpublished manuscript simply for personal review, curiosity, or pre-publication approval.

Doing so without a specific, legally or institutionally justified cause severely violates the principles of **academic freedom** and standard university governance.

However, like most things in academia, this operating rule depends on the context. A dean can only compel a faculty member to submit unpublished work under specific, narrow exceptions.

Why Deans Lack General Oversight Over Unpublished Work

In the vast majority of research institutions, the relationship between administration and faculty research is governed by two foundational principles:

- **The "Teacher Exception" to Copyright:** Under standard U.S. copyright law and traditional university policies (strongly backed by organizations like the American Association of University Professors, or AAUP), faculty members own the intellectual property of their traditional academic works—including articles, books, and manuscripts. Because the university does not own the copyright, a dean has no proprietary right to demand or alter the text.

AAUP

- **Protection Against Pre-Publication Censorship:** Academic freedom fiercely protects a scholar's right to research and publish without administrative oversight. Compelling a faculty member to submit work prior to publication implies a right of administrative censorship or veto, which is antithetical to the mission of a research university.

The Narrow Exceptions: When a Dean *Can* Require It

There are specific, legally binding scenarios where a dean—acting as an agent of the university—has the authority to demand an unpublished manuscript:

1. Formal Misconduct Investigations

If a formal allegation of research misconduct (such as data falsification, fabrication, or plagiarism) has been levied against the faculty member, the university is legally and ethically obligated to investigate. In this context, the dean or an appointed research integrity committee has the right to sequester data, lab notebooks, and drafts/manuscripts as evidence.

2. Intellectual Property and Technology Transfer Agreements

If the research involves patentable technology, software, or highly commercializable discoveries, university IP policies usually dictate that the institution owns the underlying patent rights (even if the faculty member owns the wording of the manuscript). If a "disclose before publishing" agreement is in place to protect patentability, the dean or the tech-transfer office can require a review of the manuscript to ensure proprietary data isn't prematurely made public, which would ruin patent chances.

3. Institutional Grant or Contractual Compliance

If the research is funded by a corporate sponsor, a defense contract, or a specialized government grant that mandates pre-publication security or proprietary screening, the university must enforce those terms. If the faculty member refuses to comply with the grant guidelines, the dean can step in to enforce the contract.

4. Standard Personnel Reviews (Tenure, Promotion, Annual Evaluation)

During formal promotion, tenure, or annual review cycles, institutional bylaws often allow or require the submission of "work in progress" to evaluate a scholar's trajectory. However, this is part of an established, transparent committee process governed by the faculty handbook—it is not an arbitrary, ad-hoc demand from the dean's office.

The Takeaway: If a dean demands an unpublished manuscript out of the blue without tying the request to a formal investigation, an explicit IP contract, or an established institutional review process, the faculty member is typically well within their rights to refuse, often relying on their Faculty Senate or AAUP chapter for protection.

Addendum 2:

Questions submitted to the provost's office on 23 May 2026

1. Please clarify the rationale for capping sabbatical leave at 6 months. A six-month period is incompatible with a productive sabbatical leave: Moving out of an apartment in Hong Kong consumes two months (I have neither HKUST housing nor a housing allowance and retaining an empty apartment at half my salary would leave, after tax, only 35% of my salary); shipping to the U.S. and back takes a total of four months; finding an apartment in the U.S. (standard minimum rental period 12 months) and settling takes time, as does buying/selling a car; eventually, another apartment has to be found back in Hong Kong. The logistics exceed six months (and are stressful). Additionally: What is your justification for translating 9 years of sabbatical leave credit into only 6 months of sabbatical leave, contrary to HKUST rules?

2. You cut my annual 'leave passage' allowance in half due to my 6-month sabbatical leave. Please explain your rationale for "The faculty member incurs *extra expenses* to exercise their profession during sabbatical leave and we *reduce their income*."

3. Please explain why sabbatical leave does not earn annual and short leave credit. (Do you equate "sabbatical leave" with "vacation?") Separately, what is your rationale for forcing me to take all my annual leave credit *before* going on sabbatical leave?

I appreciate scientists who provide a cogent rationale for the restrictions they impose on fellow scientists.



Carsten Holz <carstenholz@gmail.com>

Sabbatical leave final report

2 messages

[Secretary, Division of Social Science (SOSC)]

Thu, Jul 2, 2026 at 10:28 AM

To: Carsten Andreas HOLZ <socholz@ust.hk>, Carsten Holz <carstenholz@gmail.com>

Dear Prof Holz,

Please find below two emails from Dean Li.

Kindly please reply.

Best,

[Secretary, SOSC]

From: [Dean, School of Humanities and Social Science (SHSS)]

Sent: Thursday, July 02, 2026 10:04

To: [Manager, SHSS]

Cc: [Officer, SHSS]

Subject: Re: Fw: sabbatical leave final report

I'm not satisfied.

I need to know

Regarding The Process of Economic Development in West Sichuan, China

Status: active. Plan: complete it

When do you plan to complete it (your time frame/time line), and what are the steps taken to ensure its completion in the timeframe?

Regarding the short monograph on academia in Hong Kong and at HKUST

Proposal is under submission with publisher; have complete manuscript, need a publisher

Please submit the completed manuscript along with the report. What publisher do you plan to submit this to? Or what academic outlet are you planning to submit this to?

I would like to reiterate that sabbatical leave is not a right but a privilege of the faculty serving an institution of higher education.

Best,
[Dean, SHSS]

From: [Dean, SHSS]
Sent: Tuesday, June 30, 2026 17:25
To: [Assistant Officer, SHSS; Manager, SHSS]
Cc: [Officer, SHSS]
Subject: Re: sabbatical leave final report

Please also note that his sentence in the report that "the university management complies" is out of place — sabbatical leave is not a right, but a privilege given to faculty applicants. This is my understanding from all the universities (in the US and in Hong Kong) that I have served.

Best,
[Dean, SHSS]

From: [Manager, SHSS]
Date: Thursday, 2 July 2026 at 9:45 AM
To: [Dean, SHSS]
Cc: [Officer, SHSS]
Subject: Fw: Fw: sabbatical leave final report

Dear [Dean, SHSS],

Prof. Carsten Holz has provided the following response in relation to your comments on his sabbatical leave report. Please let me know if you require any further information from him.

Regarding The Process of Economic Development in West Sichuan, China
Status: active. Plan: complete it

Regarding the short monograph on academia in Hong Kong and at HKUST
Proposal is under submission with publisher; have complete manuscript, need a publisher

Thank you.

Best,
[Manager, SHSS]

From: [Secretary, SOSC]
Sent: Thursday, July 02, 2026 09:24

To: [Manager, SHSS]
Subject: Fw: Fw: sabbatical leave final report

Dear [Manager, SHSS],

Please find below reply from Prof Carsten Holz's response to Dean's comments.

Best,

[Secretary, SOSC]

From: Carsten Holz <carstenholz@gmail.com>
Sent: 01 July 2026 19:22
To: [Secretary, SOSC]
Cc: [Division Head, SOSC]
Subject: Re: Fw: sabbatical leave final report

Dear [Secretary, SOSC], below my response to the dean's two comments. Best, Carsten

Regarding The Process of Economic Development in West Sichuan, China
Status: active. Plan: complete it

Regarding the short monograph on academia in Hong Kong and at HKUST
Proposal is under submission with publisher; have complete manuscript, need a publisher

On Tue, Jun 30, 2026 at 10:16 AM [Secretary, SOSC] wrote:
[Dear Prof Holz,](#)

[Please see attached comments from the Dean on you sabbatical report and kindly advise by return.](#)

Best,

[Secretary, SOSC]

From: [Manager, SHSS]
Sent: Tuesday, June 30, 2026 17:07
To: [Secretary, SOSC]
Subject: Fw: sabbatical leave final report

Dear [Secretary, SOSC],

Could you please follow up with Prof. Carsten Holz regarding the Dean's comments on his sabbatical report?

Thank you.

Best,
[Manager, SHSS]

From: [Manager, SHSS]
Sent: Friday, June 26, 2026 12:39 PM
To: [Dean, SHSS]
Cc: [Assistant Officer, SHSS; Officer, SHSS]
Subject: Fw: sabbatical leave final report

Dear [Dean, SHSS],

Prof. Carsten Holz took sabbatical leave from 1 September 2025 to 28 February 2026. Attached please find his sabbatical report and the application form for your reference. Could you please let me know if you endorse his sabbatical report? If so, I will ask [Assistant Officer, SHSS] to add your e-signature to it.

Thank you.

Best,
[Manager, SHSS]

From: [Secretary, SOSC]
Sent: Thursday, June 25, 2026 17:29
To: [Manager, SHSS]
Cc: [Division Head, SOSC]
Subject: Re: sabbatical leave final report

Dear [Manager, SHSS],

Refer to Prof Carsten Holz's below email, please find attached sabbatical leave report submitted by Prof Carsten Holz for your further process.

Thanks and best regards,

[Secretary, SOSC]