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Experience with sabbatical leave applications at HKUST, through August 2024

In 2012-2013 I visit Stanford University for a mostly self-financed year due to the eventual denial by HKUST administrators of my sabbatical leave application. The denial of my sabbatical leave application is covered in the second half of this write-up [here](#). An email of mine to division head and dean gives some insights into the personal dependency structures enforced by HKUST management ([here](#)). The division head's argument for the denial is "Given his repeated series of no-pay leaves, I could not recommend a sabbatical request now." I was then granted a third year of no-pay leave.

2014 / 4 / 6 The head of the Humanities Division drafts school faculty's "voluntary" self-restrictions on sabbatical leave (which may have been distributed in form of hard copies as, years later, I cannot find an electronic record) and the Dean calls a meeting of faculty to agree on rules on how to limit their access to sabbatical leave. [Here](#) is my response, which also covers how HKUST managers ignoring university regulations (and using astoundingly illogical argumentation) rejected an earlier sabbatical leave application of mine. Management's secret rules for "sabbatical leave"—in contradiction of the University sabbatical leave rules—are eventually imposed top-down and at the time not shared with faculty.

2020 / 1 / 31 I inquire about sabbatical leave from the division head and the Human Resources Office and hear back from the division head (only, [here](#)), who attaches a document that provides evidence that HKUST management has abolished sabbatical leave ([here](#), "Operational Guidelines"). The Council has not abolished it. The term "sabbatical leave" is now used to describe *condensing* one's teaching such as to create teaching-free semesters (pp. 6 and 10 of the pdf, not the page numbering at the bottom of the pages).

2021 / 3 Division head and Dean violate HKUST sabbatical leave regulations.

I apply for sabbatical leave in 2021/22 ([here](#)). (i) In my reading, the Human Resources Office confirms that the division head and dean violate university rules on sabbatical leave, and (ii) the dean turns down my application with one false and one irrelevant statement.

Ad (i): The division head's staff ask me how I will "make up" my "normal teaching duties" while on "sabbatical" leave. Note the contradiction in terms, at HKUST sabbatical leave means "normal teaching duties."

I request the Human Resources Office confirm that the university regulations on sabbatical leave posted on its website—regulations which include no requirement to "make up" the teaching of the sabbatical leave year—are the only relevant rules for sabbatical leave, and the Human Resources Office confirms that "The posted Regulations are accurate and include all relevant information" ([here](#) [staff's email, my response, Human Resources' response]).

The Human Resources Office thus regards as irrelevant (or illegitimate?) the dean/provost's unpublished "Operational Guidelines" ([here](#)). Since dean and provost need to approve sabbatical leave, the dean/provost's private "Operational Guidelines" take precedence over and invalidate university regulations.

How this is consistent with HKUST's proclaimed "[core value](#)" of "integrity" is beyond me. (Though it might be consistent with another HKUST core value, the "can-do spirit" which would mean "management *can do whatever they like*, in gross disregard of university regulations." Not that it matters: HKUST has no supervision mechanisms, let alone enforcement mechanisms for management's proclaimed "core values.")

Ad (ii) Separately, following my application, the division head informs me that the dean rejects my sabbatical leave application, giving two arguments; I respond that one argument is false and the other irrelevant ([here](#) [my initial email, the division head's negative email, my response]).

Subsequently, staff informs me on 12 April 2021: "Your application form is returned to you in your mailbox as Provost Office advised that no further process is required for application not recommended by both Head and Dean.

As you are aware of, kindly please be reminded again that:

- "Sabbatical leave is not an appointee's contractual right and is subject to approval by the University on application."
- "Faculty members should be reminded not to view sabbatical leave as an entitlement."

What gets lost is that, given the dean/provost's "Operational Guidelines," I *de facto* never applied for sabbatical leave but for a specific temporal allocation of my teaching obligations combined with permission to at other times fully engage in academia, outside the dean/provost's detention center.

2021 / 10 / 18 I apply for sabbatical leave in 2022/23 and HKUST administrators require me to violate HKUST's sabbatical leave rules, as I explain [here](#). My (unanswered) sabbatical leave application becomes redundant when I apply for and am being granted no-pay leave for 2022/23 in late January 2022.

2024 / 3 / 14 I apply for sabbatical leave for the academic year 2025/26, which is promptly (orally) denied. I then apply for sabbatical leave for 6 months (with no answer as of September 2024). See my email exchange with the division head, [here](#), regarding HKUST managers' re-definition of English language for "sabbatical leave" to mean "re-arrangement of teaching duties for a particular year in order to create a teaching-free period," and the implications of HKUST managers emptying the English language of its meaning for the whole of HKUST's English language regulatory framework.

The provost's memo invalidating HKUST's sabbatical leave rules are [here](#); it carries the abbreviation V6, presumably meaning version 6, as I have also access to a V3, [here](#), while faculty members appear to never have been given access to the other versions. In V3, note the dozen of internal policies regarding sabbatical leave dating back to 1993 that were *never* shared with faculty members before 25 April 2017! (It seems the extent to which these internal policies would be implemented depended highly on division head and dean, reflecting somewhat of a state of anarchy where the formal regulatory framework is irrelevant, and fluid power structures among the power holders then allowed for varied outcomes at varying times.)

The provost's memo further references a power point slide, [here](#), as "current sabbatical guidelines," and it references a provost webpage with two further "guidelines" on sabbatical leave that are inaccessible to me (I am "unauthorized" to access these). HKUST's sabbatical leave rules—rather than the provost's edicts—are [here](#), and *not* referenced by the provost! In other words, HKUST's sabbatical leave rules are irrelevant. The only thing that matters are obscure, typically for the longest time unpublished notes by some manager.

The Office of the Provost nowadays has a webpage titled "Below are some guidelines issued after discussion at various meetings" (<https://provost.hkust.edu.hk/reference.html>).

Virtually none of these "guidelines" have been circulated to faculty. Bottom line: what matters at HKUST is not HKUST's formal regulatory framework, but the top manager's varying notes on how he wants the show run.

Supplementary material: My sabbatical leave application ([here](#)), Cover Letter ([here](#)), and additional submissions: My earlier responses to unprofessional/false manager comments on sabbatical leave [here](#) and [here](#).