

香港中文大學取消學院院長選舉  
The Abolition of Faculty Dean Election at CUHK

A Faculty Member's notes on the Proposed Changes to  
Faculty Deanship (English only)

Dear Colleagues,

I strongly support the Employees General Union and the University Education Concern Group in pushing for a delay in approving the move to appointed deanships and in seeking extensive, meaningful consultation with university colleagues before any decision is made. The CUHK Council deserves praise for its wise decision to hold off voting on the reform proposal and begin consultation and discussion. There is simply no reason for haste in this matter.

In handling this proposal, the university administration has violated both liberal democratic values and the values of the university as an open, collegial institution for study and learning. Most colleagues learned of the issue only in the last few days of November, during the busy examination period, when the administration circulated an outline of the proposal, dated November 18 and strangely marked "Confidential." Colleagues who wished to voice an opinion were given just six days to respond. Despite the rush, many offered comments questioning the rationale for and consequences of the proposed change. To my knowledge, the administration has yet to respond to these queries. The proposal was then pushed through the Senate on December 13, again apparently without acknowledgment of the legitimate doubts and questions raised during the all-too-brief "consultation" period.

This unacceptable conduct aside, the proposal to move to appointed deanships is deeply in need of critical scrutiny and discussion. The November 18 document offers a seven-point rationale for the change. Supposedly, under the proposed system:

- "Deans will have clearer responsibilities and accountability lines.
- They can focus more on longer-term strategic planning, resource allocation and management roles
- They will have a clearer identity as a member of the senior management team of the university

- There will be a devolution of authority and responsibility (including budgetary and personnel-related functions) to the Faculty Deans
- They will have more resources at their discretion to meet special needs within their respective faculties
- There will not be any required teaching or research load for the full-time Faculty Deans
- They will not be subject to conflict of interest and conflict of commitment in discharging their management responsibilities"

The second, fourth, fifth, and sixth of these points are all consistent with a system of democratically elected deans and so provide no reason for changing to centrally appointed deanships.

That leaves the first, third, and seventh points as the major justification for the proposed system. The gist of these three points is that the faculty dean is "a member of the senior management team of the university," whose principal "responsibilities," "accountability," "interest," and "commitment" lie not with the faculty he or she leads, but with the administration's "management team."

This is an extremely controversial stance, one that contradicts widely accepted views about the nature of a university and the aims of university administration. The organizational model behind the proposal seems that of a commercial or military organization, not a university -- a mutually supportive community of scholars brought together for the purposes of higher learning and research. The proposal entails a radical change in the role and identity of faculty deans. It would be reckless and irresponsible to allow such a change to take place without extended public discussion and debate.

Under the current, democratic system, the deans are chosen by the faculties to represent their interests while also handling necessary administrative tasks. That the deans are democratically elected helps give them the legitimate authority they need to perform their leadership and administrative roles effectively. At the same time, to members of the faculty, the deans essentially remain colleagues and representatives, not the managers or supervisors the administration's proposal would have them become.

The present, democratic system is the more appropriate one for CUHK. As former Vice Chancellor Arthur Li once said, criticizing the idea of appointed deanships, "the University is not a commercial organization and should not be managed like one." Indeed, Professor Li suggested that under a system such as that proposed, "the university will run the risk of becoming a dictatorship." (Professor Li's remarks are

from the *CUHK Newsletter*, No. 153 , 4.11.1999, online version available at <http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/puo/newsletter/issue/153/eugcvc.htm>. )

Professor Li was right in opposing a system of appointed deanships. I hope that after a genuine, substantive process of consultation and discussion, the CUHK Council too will reject the proposal and the inappropriate organizational model that underlies it.

Chris Fraser  
Department of Philosophy  
Faculty of Arts