Ethical issues in making university information technology available to retired professors

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Ethics Aspects of Circular Economy.
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Retired university professors are a component of circular economy.

A circular economy is a model of production and consumption, which involves sharing, leasing, reusing, repairing, refurbishing and recycling existing materials and products for as long as possible. We believe that the concept can be applied to people as well when we consider numerous university professors which could be "re-used" (re-employment) after retirement. Retired university professors can be considered re-usable in the context of the Circular Economy, albeit not in the same way physical products or materials are reused. Their ongoing contributions and engagement in various educational, research, and advisory roles align with the principles of the Circular Economy by extending the value and impact of their expertise over time.

There are several reasons why retired university professors can play a role in the circular economy: knowledge transfer, consulting and advisory services, research and writing, advocacy and policy support, community engagement, continuing education, innovation and entrepreneurship, knowledge preservation.

In many cases, the professor's previous professional work ends when she/he retires. Many want it, but not all. Some would still like to actively participate in the framework of their achievements, but they are prevented from doing so. It is worth looking at the websites of the universities, from which it's clear that their long-time professor disappeared with retirement, she/he is no longer mentioned anywhere. This harms the individuals, the university and society.

In order to remain active, the retired professor should be allowed to use the university's information technology (IT) unchanged. At many universities, this is not the case: the university email account is closed on the date of retirement (Retired Professors Entitlements for Access to University IT: Universities Policy. Report By Jože Gričar. March 2022 📄 Retired professors entitlements for access to university IT March 2022). Some universities allow the use of IT after retirement, some do not. This depends on the policy of the university management and its attitude towards retired colleagues.

University professors should be entitled to use university IT.

Professors should be entitled to use university IT resources after retirement for several reasons: continued research and scholarship, mentorship and collaboration, educational support, preserving institutional memory, access to library resources, engagement and networking, encouraging lifelong learning. publications and outreach, philanthropic engagement.

An additional reason for the urgency of providing university IT to retired professors is the need for assistance in its use. The University IT Help Desk can only assist students and employees, not retired faculty. Of course, they often help and don't follow the rules because they are friendly. In the era of accelerated digitization of all processes, this is not enough.

Allowing a retired professor to continue using a university email address can be seen as a supportive and age-friendly policy. It's important to note that the extent of IT resource access for retired professors does vary among universities. Policies should be established to balance the benefits with any potential security, resource allocation, or administrative concerns.

Universities not allowing their professor to use IT after retirement are unfair and unethical.

The question of whether it is fair and ethically correct for universities to restrict IT access for retired professors is a complex and nuanced one, and opinions may vary on this matter. We are supportive to the availability of IT to retired professors for the following reasons:

A Retired Professor's Contribution to the University: Universities that allow the use of IT after retirement emphasize on their websites that this is a sign of gratitude for the long-term contribution of the professor.

Continuity of Contributions: Retired professors often have a wealth of knowledge and experience that can continue to benefit the university. Allowing them IT access can facilitate their involvement in research, mentorship, and collaboration.

Preserving Institutional Memory: Retired professors may possess historical insights and institutional knowledge that can be crucial for maintaining the identity and legacy of the university.

Academic Freedom: Restricting IT access could be seen as limiting academic freedom, hindering retired professors from engaging in research, scholarship, and educational activities.

Mentorship and Collaboration: Retired professors can contribute to the academic community by mentoring students and collaborating with active faculty members. IT access can enable such interactions.

Mutually Beneficial Relationships: Allowing retired professors to use IT resources can foster positive relationships between the institution and its retired faculty members, potentially leading to continued support and engagement.

We kindly invite the reader of this note to encourage actions in her/his environment that will contribute to providing university IT to professors after retirement. Similar to that provided to professors emeriti.