

Terminating university email accounts for professors as they retire is not consistent with the principles of an age-friendly university

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How do university administrations justify terminating their professors' university email accounts because they retire?

University administrations often justify terminating retired professors' university email accounts based on a mix of policy, security, and resource considerations. Here's how they typically explain it:

1. IT and Security Policies

Data security: Universities are responsible for safeguarding sensitive information (e.g., student data, research, internal communications). Retired faculty, no longer being employees, may be seen as security risks.

Account access control: IT departments aim to minimize “orphaned” accounts that aren't actively managed. These can become targets for hackers.

2. Licensing and Cost

Email services often come with per-user licensing fees (especially when using platforms like Microsoft 365 or Google Workspace for Education). Retaining accounts for non-active staff can increase costs.

Storage management is another concern—emails and associated cloud storage can pile up, adding to infrastructure demands.

3. Employment Status

Email accounts are often considered employment-related tools, not personal entitlements. Once someone retires, they're technically no longer affiliated in an official capacity—unless they're given emeritus status (which can change things).

4. Policy Consistency

Applying a uniform policy helps prevent claims of unfairness. If one retired professor keeps their email and another doesn't, it can lead to complaints or confusion.

5. Legal and Compliance Reasons

Universities may have compliance obligations regarding data retention and deletion, especially when it comes to emails containing student records, research subjects, or federally funded project information.

That said, some universities do allow retirees to keep their email, especially if they are granted emeritus status or continue to contribute (e.g., mentoring, part-time teaching, publishing). These institutions often provide:

- A limited-access version of the email account

- Email forwarding

- A grace period before deactivation (e.g., 6–12 months).

Who points out the inappropriateness of terminating university email accounts for professors because they retire?

The inappropriateness of terminating university email accounts for retired professors is often pointed out by faculty advocates, retired professors themselves, academic freedom organizations, or university faculty senates. Some notable voices include:

The American Association of University Professors (AAUP). They have historically advocated for academic freedom and may raise concerns when universities cut off email access, which can hinder continued scholarly work and communication.

Retired faculty and emeritus professors. Individuals directly affected often voice opposition, especially if they are still active in research, mentoring, or publishing.

University Faculty Senates. At many institutions, these bodies debate and sometimes pass resolutions to protect email access for retired faculty.

Academic blogs and publications. Writers in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, *Inside Higher Ed*, and similar platforms frequently feature opinion pieces or news stories critiquing such policies.

The Professors Emeriti Network, comprising retired academics from various institutions, has been vocal about this issue. In [a letter dated May 20, 2024](#), they highlighted the challenges faced by non-emeriti retired professors who lose access to their university email accounts upon retirement. The network argues that this practice hampers ongoing scholarly activities and community engagement, labeling it a form of "digital ageism" or "digital discrimination." They urge university administrations to allow all retired faculty members to retain their email accounts to promote inclusivity and intergenerational collaboration.

This appeal reflects a broader concern within the academic community about maintaining access to institutional resources post-retirement, especially for those who continue to engage in scholarly activities. The initiative's stance highlights the importance of supporting retired professors in their ongoing academic endeavors.

Can a university that terminates university email account from professors upon retirement be considered "age-friendly"?

That's a really thoughtful question—and it gets into the nuanced space of what "age-friendly" truly means in practice, not just in name.

Short answer:

It depends on the context and how the policy is implemented. But generally, removing email access from retired professors could be seen as not age-friendly, especially if it's done without alternatives or support.

Here's why it might be considered not age-friendly:

Continued Engagement: Age-friendly institutions, particularly universities, often emphasize lifelong engagement, valuing the continued contributions of older adults—including retired faculty. Cutting off email account can severely delete important professional and personal ties.

Respect for Contributions: For many professors, their university email account is part of their professional identity. Losing it can feel like a loss of status or connection, particularly after decades of service.

Barriers to Ongoing Scholarship: Many retired professors remain active in research, mentorship, or committee work. Losing their email account can create unnecessary obstacles to collaboration.

Digital Inclusion: An age-friendly approach would ensure older adults are not digitally excluded. Removing access without support or transition assistance might make retirees feel left out of the academic community.

However, it could be justifiable if:

The university offers a retiree-specific email account or forwarding options.

There's a clear and respectful transition plan that includes retirees in academic life through other means (e.g., emeritus status perks).

There are privacy, security, or cost concerns that are communicated transparently and addressed with dignity.