

Universities that close a university email account when a professor retires, even if they are still academically active, can't be considered age-friendly

Google AI Mode 26.06.2026

Universities that permanently close email accounts for active, retired professors are generally not considered age-friendly. Advocacy groups, institutional policies, and academic consensus widely frame this practice as a form of *digital ageism*. It directly contradicts the foundational tenets of the [Age-Friendly University \(AFU\) Global Network](#), which mandates promoting lifelong learning and honoring the continued contributions of older adults.

While some administrations defend the practice on pragmatic grounds, it creates significant systemic and personal barriers for active professors.

Why the Practice Opposes Age-Friendly Principles

- *Disruption of Ongoing Scholarship:* Many retired faculty remain highly productive, continuing to publish research, review journal submissions, and manage grants. An institutional email address is vital for maintaining these academic workflows.
- *Loss of Professional Identity:* For lifelong academics, their university email is a foundational symbol of their status and belonging in the global scholarly community. Deactivation can feel like an abrupt, disrespectful severing of their professional legacy.
- *Damaged Mentorship Networks:* When an account is terminated, incoming messages from former students seeking letters of recommendation or guidance bounce back, severing vital intergenerational connections.
- *Digital Exclusion:* Deactivating an account often locks the professor out of broader single sign-on (SSO) systems, instantly terminating access to university libraries, research databases, and cloud archives.

The Administrative Arguments (and Counterpoints)

Universities that enforce universal deactivation typically point to technical and liability concerns, which critics argue can be managed more inclusively:

- *Cybersecurity Exposure:* Administrations argue that unmonitored accounts increase an institution's threat surface. However, academic IT literature notes that active seniors demonstrate high cyber-caution. Implementing mandatory Multi-Factor Authentication (MFA) solves this without account termination.
- *Identity Lifecycle Management:* IT departments prefer clean "off-boarding" to avoid tracking thousands of inactive licenses.
- *The "Emeritus" Divide:* Many institutions allow *Emeritus* professors to keep their email but strip it from standard retired faculty. Advocacy groups like

the [Professors Emeriti Network](#) argue this is an unfair and short-sighted double standard that ignores the scholarly contributions of non-emeriti faculty.

Age-Friendly Alternative Frameworks

Truly age-friendly institutions employ flexible, secure transition strategies rather than blanket deletion:

- *Nomination and Contribution Tracking:* Universities like the [University of Cambridge](#) allow retired staff to retain IT accounts if they are nominated by their department for continuing to actively contribute to the institution.
- *Retiree-Specific Domains:* Providing a distinct domain designation (e.g., professor@retiree.university.edu) maintains security while preserving the institutional affiliation.
- *Permanent Email Forwarding:* Setting up automated, indefinite forwarding rules so that incoming academic inquiries are safely routed to a personal account.

ChatGPT 26.06.2026

A university that automatically terminates a professor's institutional email account upon retirement, despite the professor's continued academic activity, falls short of the principles of an age-friendly university. Continued access through an emeritus or affiliate account would better support lifelong scholarly engagement while addressing institutional administrative and security requirements.