

Retired professors may be hesitant to ask university administrators why their university email account was closed

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A retired professor's university email account is closed. The professor would like to ask the university administration why, and perhaps complain about the decision—but is afraid to do so.

There are several reasons why *retired professors may hesitate to ask university administration why their university email account has been closed*. In many cases, the fear is less about the email itself and more about the *power relationship between the retired professor and the institution*.

When asked why they do not complain, the answer may be: “*Other universities are doing the same.*” But is that a sufficient justification?

Universities are institutions built on inquiry, critical thinking, open discussion and the questioning of established practices. Professors spend their professional lives teaching students to ask difficult questions and to challenge assumptions.

Why, then, should a retired professor be afraid to ask the university administration a legitimate question about the termination of their university email account?

And an even more fundamental question: *Would we expect such a culture of silence and fear in an academic environment in increasingly digitized society?*

If professionally active retired professors are afraid to question an administrative decision, perhaps the issue is no longer merely about email. *It is about the relationship between the university and its professors after retirement—and about whether academic culture continues beyond the end of employment.*

How can an association of retired professors help their members feel confident and entitled to ask questions of their universities—even after retirement?

If the root of the problem is *fear of questioning the university*, associations can do something much more constructive than simply collecting complaints. They can make it *safe for an individual retired professor to ask*. A six-step approach may be suggested:

1. *Make the issue collective, not personal.*

Instead of an individual professor asking, “*Why did you close my account?*”, the association can ask:

“What is the university's policy concerning university email access for professionally active retired professors, and what are the reasons for this policy?”

2. *Ask for the policy and its justification in writing.*

Associations should request:

- the formal policy or regulation;
- who makes the decision;
- the stated security reasons;
- whether exceptions exist;
- whether professionally active retired professors are treated differently from inactive retirees;
- and, importantly, *what the university actually saves by terminating the account.*

3. *Give members a collective voice.*

An association could establish a small *Digital Rights / Connected Beyond Retirement working group*. Individual professors would no longer have to confront the administration alone.

4. *Collect evidence internationally.*

Ask associations in other countries:

- Do their universities terminate retired professors' email?
- Are exceptions available?
- What happens to academically active retirees?
- Can retired professors retain their academic identity and institutional affiliation?

“*Other universities do it*” then becomes something to investigate rather than an argument that ends the discussion.

5. *Ask university associations to address the issue.*

Retired-professor associations could jointly approach rectors' conferences and university associations with a simple question:

What should be the appropriate digital relationship between a university and a professor who has retired from employment but remains academically and professionally active?

6. *Create a culture in which asking is legitimate.*

This may be the most important step. Associations could explicitly tell their members:

You are not doing anything wrong by asking.

You are not being disloyal to your university.

You are exercising the academic culture you helped create.

The associations could adopt a short *“Right to Ask” principle: A retired professor should not have to fear asking a university to explain an administrative decision that affects their continued academic and professional participation.*

That turns fear into *a positive role for associations*. The objective is not necessarily to demand that every retired professor retain an email account under every circumstance. The first objective is *transparency, dialogue and dignity*. From there, associations can work toward fair policies.

This gives *Connected Beyond Retirement* a broader significance: *it is not only a campaign about email—it is a campaign about whether academic relationships, academic identity and academic freedom to question survive retirement.*

We are asking university administration to explain how they believe the university–professor relationship should continue in the digital age.

From fear → to confidence.
From individual complaint → to collective dialogue.
From silence → to constructive questions.



“We Walk What We Talk”