



Do University Values End at Retirement?

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Universities are guided by fundamental values: *curiosity, critical thinking, integrity, openness, inclusivity, and social responsibility*. These values are at the heart of the academic community. They should not cease to matter when a professor retires from employment.

Yet, in an era of rapid digitalization and artificial intelligence, some universities deactivate the university email accounts of professors upon retirement—even when those professors remain academically and professionally active.

This raises a simple question: **Should retirement from employment mean the loss of a professor's long-established digital academic identity?**

For a professor who has used a university email address for many years or even decades, that address is more than a technical service. It provides continuity of academic identity and professional communication and connects the professor with colleagues, researchers, students, professional associations, conferences, journals, and digital services. Closing that account can therefore have consequences extending far beyond email.

Who loses?

The retired professor loses continuity of digital academic identity and an important means of remaining professionally engaged.

The university loses an opportunity to benefit from the knowledge, experience, international networks, reputation, mentoring capacity, and continuing contributions of its former professors.

Society loses when accumulated academic knowledge and professional networks become more difficult to mobilize for research, education, mentoring, public discussion, and intergenerational cooperation.

The issue has become even more important in the age of artificial intelligence. AI and other digital technologies make it easier than ever for retired academics to continue contributing their expertise, collaborating internationally, mentoring younger colleagues, and participating in academic and public life.

And there is evidence that another approach is possible. Universities in several countries already provide continued university email access to retired faculty under defined conditions. Their experience demonstrates that retirement from employment does not necessarily require termination of a professor's university email account.

The question for university leaders should therefore not simply be:

“Why should retired professors keep their university email accounts?”

A more forward-looking question is:

“Why should a university digitally disconnect professionally and academically active retired professors precisely when new technologies make it easier than ever for their knowledge, experience, and networks to continue benefiting the university and society?”

Universities rightly emphasize openness, inclusivity, social responsibility, lifelong learning, and intergenerational cooperation.

Continued digital connection with professionally active retired professors is a practical opportunity for universities to put these values into practice.

CONNECTED BEYOND RETIREMENT

Retirement should end employment—not academic identity, professional contribution, or the opportunity to remain connected.

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Universities Providing Continued Email Access After Retirement

The following examples demonstrate different approaches already in practice:

University of Padua, Italy

Retired professors who wish to continue contributing to the University may be granted the title of *Senior Scholar (Studioso Senior dello Studium Patavinum)*. Senior Scholars retain their personal university account on the UniPd.it domain and may continue receiving university email without a time limit. They also retain access to University Library System services and resources.

University of Michigan, United States

Retired faculty and staff who have a Google U-M email account may continue using their U-M email. Retirees whose accounts are based on Outlook can request a U-M Google email account in order to continue using their U-M email address after retirement.

University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, United States

Email access for retiring Urbana faculty and staff is continued for life. Their Microsoft 365 licensing changes after retirement, but web-based Microsoft 365 services remain available.

University of Notre Dame, United States

Retired faculty may continue to have access to their nd.edu accounts, subject to the University's eligibility requirements for retiree status.

University of Manitoba, Canada

Academic and support staff may receive a retiree email account. Retirees with Emeritus or Senior Scholar appointments have additional provisions for retaining or transitioning their university email accounts.

University of Saskatchewan, Canada

Retired faculty and staff may retain email access through membership in the University of Saskatchewan Retirees Association, subject to the University's applicable arrangements.

These examples differ in eligibility, duration, and technical arrangements. But together they establish an important fact:

Terminating university email access at retirement is a policy choice—not an unavoidable consequence of retirement.