The Role of University Associations in Ensuring Email Continuity for Professionally and Academically Active Retired Professors

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A small technical issue with large consequences

What happens to a professor's university email account on the day the professor retires?

At some universities, nothing changes. Retired professors can continue using their established university email addresses. At others, continued access is provided only to professors emeriti or to selected categories of retirees. At still others, the account is terminated after retirement.

What may appear to be a technical or administrative matter can have significant consequences for professors who remain professionally and academically active.

A university email address accumulated over many years is more than a mailbox. It is part of a professor's *academic identity and professional continuity*. It may appear in publications, research projects, professional networks, conference records, databases, correspondence, and contacts developed over decades.
Its importance is increasing as universities move further into digital environments and as artificial intelligence tools become part of academic work.

The question therefore deserves attention beyond individual university IT departments:

Should associations of universities encourage their member institutions to ensure email continuity for professionally and academically active professors after retirement?

There are already workable models

Universities do not have to start from scratch. Different institutions have developed workable approaches.

The University of Padua provides an especially interesting European example. Retired professors who wish to continue contributing to the university may become *Senior Scholars of the Studium Patavinum*. A Senior Scholar maintains a personal university account and can receive university email without a time limit, while also retaining access to university library resources.

The University of Michigan provides continued university email to retirees under its computing-services arrangements. Faculty and staff retiring with a Google U-M email account can continue using their U-M mailbox and established university identity at no charge.

Florida State University explicitly includes retirees in its institutional email policy. Retired employees may continue using their @fsu.edu accounts, subject to provisions concerning inactivity and appropriate use.

The University of Cambridge demonstrates another possible model. Its policy recognizes that people who leave a contractual relationship with the university but *continue actively to contribute to the university's mission* may qualify to retain their university email address. The policy simultaneously addresses institutional concerns such as cybersecurity, data protection and appropriate authorization.

These examples demonstrate an important point: *email continuity and cybersecurity need not be competing objectives*. Universities can establish eligibility criteria, authentication requirements, acceptable-use rules, periodic confirmation of activity, and procedures for terminating inactive or misused accounts.

Why university associations matter

Decisions about email accounts are normally made by individual universities. But university associations have an important role in identifying common problems, exchanging good practices and encouraging their members to develop appropriate institutional policies.

This issue is particularly suitable for such cooperation because hundreds of universities are confronting essentially the same questions:

Who should qualify for continued email access? How long should access continue? How should active status be demonstrated? How can cybersecurity risks be managed? Should emeritus status be a prerequisite? What should happen to professors who remain academically active but have not received an emeritus title?

There is little benefit in every university solving these questions independently.

A university association could collect existing policies from its members, identify successful models, examine costs and cybersecurity implications, consult retired and active professors, and prepare *recommended principles for post-retirement digital academic continuity.*

Associations that could contribute to the discussion

In Europe, the issue could usefully be considered by regional and national university organizations including the Danube Rectors' Conference (DRC), UniAdrion, Alps Adriatic Rectors' Conference (AARC), Universities Austria, Association of Professors at Austrian Universities (UPV), Hungarian Rectors' Conference (HRC), German Association of University Professors and Lecturers, Universities of the Netherlands, Conference of Italian University Rectors (CRUI), Hellenic Universities Rectors' Conference (HURC), Council of Rectors of Portuguese Universities (CRUP), swissuniversities and the Irish Universities Association.

Regional cooperation could also involve the Nordic Association of University Administrators (NUAS) and the Baltic Sea Region University Network.

At European level, the European University Association (EUA) provides an important forum through which universities can exchange institutional experience.

Beyond Europe, relevant organizations include the Association of American University Professors (AAUP), Australian Association of University Professors, Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT), Japan Association of National Universities (JANU) and National University of Singapore Society (NUSS).

The Australian Association of University Professors provides an interesting indication of continuing professional affiliation: its membership explicitly includes emeritus and retired professors, with special arrangements for retired colleagues.

Finally, organizations with an international reach—particularly the International Association of Universities (IAU) and Worldwide Universities Network (WUN)—could help place the question within the broader discussion of digital inclusion, academic collaboration and universities' relationships with their retired scholars.

The organizations listed above are not presented as organizations that have already endorsed university email retention for retired professors. They are identified as organizations whose missions, memberships or constituencies make them potentially important participants in the discussion.

Retired does not necessarily mean academically inactive

A fundamental distinction is easily overlooked. *Retirement from university employment is not necessarily retirement from academic and professional activity***.**

A retired professor may continue publishing, participating in research projects, reviewing manuscripts, mentoring younger researchers, organizing conferences, contributing to professional associations, serving on committees, participating in international networks, engaging with the community, or collaborating with the university from which he or she retired.

The distinction between **p***rofessors emeriti and other professionally active retired professors* is especially important.

Professors emeriti frequently retain university privileges, including email accounts. Yet colleagues without the emeritus title may be equally active professionally and academically. A digital-continuity policy based exclusively on honorary status can therefore exclude precisely the people whose continuing activity provides a reason for maintaining their university connection.

Cambridge's approach is noteworthy in this respect: continued contribution to the university's mission can itself provide a route to email retention rather than making emeritus status the sole criterion.

From individual requests to good university policy

The issue should not have to depend on an individual retired professor asking an IT department for an exception. A more sustainable approach is institutional policy.

University associations could help their members formulate a simple principle: *A professor who retires from employment but remains professionally or academically active should have a reasonable pathway to retain the established university email*

address, subject to appropriate security, acceptable-use and periodic-verification requirements.

Such a principle does not prescribe one technical solution for every university. Nor does it imply unlimited access to all university information systems.

It recognizes something more fundamental: *retirement changes an employment relationship, but it need not terminate an academic relationship.*

Five practical actions for university associations

University associations could make a significant contribution without imposing rules on their members.

They could:

1. *Survey member universities* to determine what happens to professors' university email accounts upon retirement.
2. *Identify and publish good practices*, including policies that distinguish email continuity from access to other sensitive university systems.
3. *Examine cybersecurity, legal, administrative and cost considerations* rather than assuming that account termination is the only secure solution.
4. *Consult professionally active retired professors and their associations about* the practical consequences of losing long-established institutional email addresses.
5. *Develop voluntary recommendations or guidelines* encouraging member universities to provide secure email continuity for professionally and academically active retired professors.

The growing Retired Professors Associations Network (RPAN) is already collecting examples of universities that provide email continuity and asking how associations of retired professors can help their members retain university email access.

The Professors Emeriti Network has similarly argued that access to university email is an important condition for retired professors' continued participation in digitally enabled academic networks.

An invitation to university associations

We therefore invite associations of universities, rectors' conferences, associations of university professors and international university networks to place this question on their agendas:

What can our association do to encourage universities to ensure secure email continuity for professionally and academically active professors after retirement?

The first step need not be a declaration or a new regulation.
It could simply be to *ask the question, collect evidence and compare existing practices.*

The results could then be shared among member universities. Universities with successful policies could help others. Retired professors could explain what continued digital academic identity means in practice. IT and cybersecurity specialists could identify proportionate safeguards.

From this dialogue, practical recommendations could emerge.

The objective is simple: *enable professors who continue contributing their knowledge, experience and networks after retirement to remain digitally connected to the academic community.*

In an age of artificial intelligence, international e-collaboration and lifelong academic engagement, maintaining that connection is not merely a courtesy to retired professors.

It is an opportunity for universities to retain access to knowledge, experience, relationships and intellectual capital accumulated over a lifetime.