

Professors Emeriti Network

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Professors Emeriti Network. We walk what we talk.

When it comes to keeping a university email account upon retirement, American universities are more favorable to professors than European ones

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The differences in how American and European universities handle the retention of email accounts for retired professors are shaped by a combination of cultural, institutional, and legal factors.

Cultural Differences:

Academic Culture and Respect for Professors: In the US/Canada, there is a strong cultural emphasis on the continuing influence and contributions of emeritus professors. Universities often see the retention of email accounts as a way to honor retired faculty members and maintain their connection to the academic community. This aligns with the broader American cultural values of respect for individual legacy and continuity in professional identity.

Networking and Professional Identity: American academic culture places a high value on professional networking and the maintenance of academic identities even after retirement. Email accounts serve as a critical tool for retired professors to stay engaged in research, collaborations, and professional networks.

Institutional Differences:

Institutional Loyalty: American universities often cultivate a sense of loyalty and long-term association with their faculty, which can include lifelong privileges such as retaining an email account. This is seen as a way to foster continued involvement in university life, whether through research, mentorship, or alumni activities.

Resource Availability: American universities, particularly well-funded ones, often have more resources to manage and maintain email systems for retired faculty. The financial and IT infrastructure to support this is generally more robust in the U.S. than in many European institutions.

Legal and Data Protection Regulations:

GDPR and Data Protection in Europe: European universities are subject to the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which imposes strict rules on data retention, privacy, and management. The regulation can create complexities around retaining email accounts after a faculty member has retired, as universities must ensure compliance with stringent data protection requirements. In some cases, this leads to more cautious policies regarding email retention.

Institutional Policies and Legal Frameworks: European universities may also operate under stricter institutional policies or national laws that limit the retention of email accounts post-retirement. These regulations may prioritize data privacy and security over the continued use of email accounts, leading to a more conservative approach compared to the U.S.

Retirement Policies:

Emeritus Status: In the U.S., many retired professors are granted emeritus status, which often includes certain privileges like keeping a university email account. This is less uniformly applied in Europe, where the concept of emeritus status and the associated benefits may be less formalized or vary significantly between countries and institutions.

Pension and Post-Retirement Engagement: U.S. universities may also have more structured programs for engaging retired faculty, which include keeping email accounts as part of ongoing communication. In contrast, European universities might place less emphasis on post-retirement engagement, leading to fewer benefits like email retention.

Overall, the difference stems from a combination of cultural reverence for retired faculty, resource availability, and legal considerations, with American universities generally more inclined to maintain long-term connections with their retired professors through institutional privileges like email accounts.

The Consequences

The difference in email retention policies between American and European universities has several consequences for retired professors, affecting their professional, personal, and academic lives.

Professional and Academic Engagement:

Continued Collaboration and Research Opportunities: In the U.S., retired professors who keep their university email accounts can continue to engage in academic collaborations, access research networks, and contribute to ongoing projects. This allows them to remain active in their fields, attend conferences, and publish research. In Europe, where email retention might not be as common, retired professors may face challenges in maintaining these professional connections, potentially leading to reduced involvement in academic activities.

Mentorship and Advising: Retaining a university email account allows retired professors to continue mentoring students and junior colleagues. In the U.S., this ongoing role is often encouraged, fostering a sense of continuity and contribution to the academic community. Without a university email, European retirees may find it harder to continue in these roles, leading to a diminished ability to mentor and support future generations of scholars.

Personal Identity and Professional Legacy:

Maintaining Professional Identity: For many professors, their university email address is tied to their professional identity. In the U.S., retaining this email helps retired faculty maintain their sense of professional self, contributing to a smoother transition into retirement. The loss of a university email account in Europe might contribute to a sense of disconnection from the academic community and a quicker erosion of professional identity post-retirement.

Legacy and Recognition: Keeping a university email account can be seen as a recognition of a professor's contributions to the institution. In the U.S., this can enhance a retired professor's legacy, allowing them to remain associated with their university. In contrast, European professors who lose their university email may feel less recognized and valued by their institutions after retirement.

Access to Resources and Networks:

Institutional Access: In the U.S., having a university email often comes with access to institutional resources such as online libraries, databases, and academic journals. This allows retired professors to continue their research and stay updated in their field. European professors who lose their email accounts may also lose access to these resources, limiting their ability to stay current or engage in new research.

Networking: A university email is a key tool for networking. American retirees can continue to communicate easily with colleagues, collaborators, and students, maintaining their professional network. In Europe, where retired professors may lose their university email, they might struggle to maintain these networks, potentially leading to professional isolation.

Administrative and Practical Challenges:

Communication and Contact: Retired professors in the U.S. who keep their university email accounts can continue to be easily contacted by colleagues, students, and collaborators. This can be important for both ongoing and new opportunities. In Europe, where retired professors might need to switch to a personal email account, there can be a loss of contact with important professional connections, complicating communication and potentially leading to missed opportunities.

Managing Digital Footprint: Transitioning to a personal email account can create challenges in managing a digital footprint, especially if a retired professor's contact information has been widely circulated within the academic community. In the U.S., retaining the same email address avoids these disruptions, while in Europe, the need to update contact information and re-establish connections can be cumbersome and time-consuming.

Psychological and Social Impact:

Sense of Belonging: Retaining a university email helps American professors feel that they still belong to the academic community, fostering a sense of belonging and continuity. Losing access to this in Europe can contribute to feelings of detachment or alienation from the academic world, potentially affecting the retired professor's well-being.

Retirement Adjustment: The retention of a university email account in the U.S. may ease the transition into retirement, as it allows retired professors to remain engaged and gradually reduce their involvement at their own pace. In Europe, where this is less common, the abrupt loss of institutional ties can make the adjustment to retirement more challenging.

In summary, American professors who retain their university email accounts post-retirement generally experience a smoother transition into retirement, with ongoing professional engagement and recognition, whereas European professors may face challenges in maintaining their professional identity, networks, and access to resources, potentially impacting their post-retirement life significantly.

What can retired professors do in Europe?

Retired professors in Europe who lose access to their university email accounts can take several steps to mitigate the impact on their professional, academic, and personal lives. Here are some strategies they can consider:

Plan for the Transition Early:

Set Up a Professional Personal Email Account: Before retirement, professors can create a professional-sounding personal email account (e.g., using their name and field) to use for academic and professional correspondence. This email address can be gradually introduced to colleagues, collaborators, and students before retirement.

Notify Contacts: Professors should inform their academic and professional networks of the upcoming email change well in advance. This includes updating contact information in academic directories, on publications, and in professional organizations.

Redirect Emails: If possible, set up an automatic email forwarding system from the university account to the new personal account before losing access. Additionally, an auto-reply message can be set up on the university email, directing contacts to the new address.

Leverage Academic and Professional Associations:

Join or Engage with Professional Associations: Many academic and professional associations offer members email addresses or other forms of communication tools. Professors can join or become more active in these associations, using their services to maintain their professional identity.

Use Institutional Affiliations: Professors affiliated with multiple institutions (e.g., research centers, journals, or academic societies) might be able to secure an email address through these organizations. This can help maintain an academic email identity.

Engage with the University for Continued Access:

Request Emeritus or Honorary Status: Some European universities might offer email retention as a benefit of emeritus or honorary status. Professors can inquire about this possibility and apply for such status if eligible.

Negotiate Continued Access: Professors can discuss with their department or university administration the possibility of retaining their email account, even on a limited basis, especially if they continue to contribute to the university through research, mentorship, or part-time teaching.

Use Alumni or Retiree Resources: Some universities offer alumni or retiree email accounts. While these may not have all the same features as a faculty email account, they can still serve as a viable alternative.

Maintain Access to Academic Resources:

Library and Database Access: Professors should check if they can retain access to university libraries and online databases post-retirement. If direct access is lost, they can explore access through public institutions, professional associations, or open-access repositories.

Collaborate with Active Academics: By maintaining collaborations with active faculty members, retired professors may be able to continue accessing resources indirectly through their collaborators' accounts.

Develop an Online Presence:

Create a Personal Website or Blog: Professors can establish a personal website or blog to host their professional information, publications, and contact details. This can serve as a central point of contact and a way to maintain their professional presence online.

Utilize Academic Networking Sites: Platforms like ResearchGate, Academia.edu, or LinkedIn can help professors stay connected with the academic community and share their work. These platforms often provide messaging features that can partially substitute for a university email account.

Foster Ongoing Academic Relationships:

Stay Active in Research and Publishing: Retired professors can continue to engage in research, writing, and publishing, which helps keep their professional identity active. This engagement can also maintain their relevance in the academic community.

Participate in Conferences and Seminars: Continued participation in academic conferences, seminars, and workshops can help retired professors stay connected with their field and network, regardless of their email address.

Consider Alternative Communication Tools:

Use Encrypted Communication Platforms: For sensitive academic correspondence, professors can use encrypted email services or other secure communication tools like Signal or ProtonMail, ensuring privacy and security outside of the university system.

Explore University or Open-Source Collaboration Tools: Tools like Google Scholar, ORCID, and Zotero allow for continued academic collaboration and communication, independent of a university email address.

By taking these proactive steps, retired professors in Europe can mitigate the loss of a university email account, maintain their professional identity, and continue contributing to the academic community.