

# How much does a university save (in dollars) by terminating a professor's university email account upon retirement?

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Why don't universities that cite "high costs" as one of the reasons for terminating email accounts publish data on actual direct costs?

Short answer: the direct dollar savings per retired professor are usually very small (often a few dollars per month, sometimes effectively \$0 at scale)—but universities still shut accounts down because of aggregate costs, licensing structures, storage growth, and risk, not because each individual mailbox is expensive.

## What does an email account actually cost?

In modern universities, email is almost always provided through platforms like Google Workspace for Education or Microsoft 365. Costs come from three main components:

### 1) *Per-user licensing (sometimes)*

- Some tiers charge per user; others are “free” but limited.
- Typical ballpark: \$0–\$5 per user/month depending on plan and features.

So eliminating one retired professor might save a few dollars per month at most in licensing.

### 2) *Storage (the big driver today)*

This is where costs have changed dramatically:

- Google ended “free unlimited storage” for universities around 2021.
- Universities now get pooled storage limits (e.g., ~100 TB total).
- Heavy users (faculty often are) can consume tens or hundreds of GB each.

Storage is now a shared, scarce resource, so one account isn't expensive—but thousands are.

### 3) *Operations, security, and compliance*

Even if licensing + storage were free, accounts still cost money indirectly:

- Identity management systems
- Security monitoring (phishing, compromised accounts)
- Legal retention / data governance
- Helpdesk support

These are fixed and labor-heavy costs, not per-account line items.

*So how much does a university actually save per professor?*

Putting it together:

- Best-case (cheap tier, low storage): ~\$0–\$2/month

- Typical (with licensing + some storage): ~\$2–\$10/month
  - High-storage users: could be more, but still modest individually
- So the direct savings from one retired professor is trivial—often under \$100/year.

### **Then why do universities still terminate accounts?**

Because decisions are made at scale, not per person.

#### *1) Scale multiplies tiny costs*

- 10,000 inactive accounts × \$5/month ≈ \$600,000/year
- Some institutions estimate millions annually to maintain large populations.

#### *2) Storage grows indefinitely*

Email is not just email anymore:

- Attachments, research data, cloud files
- Some users accumulate hundreds of GB or more

Universities aren't paying for "an inbox"—they're paying for long-term data storage infrastructure.

#### *3) Security risk ("orphaned accounts")*

Inactive accounts are:

- prime phishing targets
- harder to monitor
- still tied to institutional identity

This is frequently cited as a primary justification, not just cost.

#### *4) Policy and legal clarity*

Universities treat email as:

- an employment tool, not a lifetime entitlement
- subject to records retention laws

Deleting accounts simplifies compliance.

### **Why don't universities publish detailed cost data?**

Good question—and there are a few practical reasons:

#### *1) Costs are not cleanly separable*

There isn't a neat line item like:

"Professor email account = \$3.42/month"

Instead, costs are bundled:

- enterprise contracts (Google/Microsoft)
- shared storage pools
- IT staff salaries

It's hard to attribute exact costs to *one account*.

#### *2) Vendor contracts are often confidential*

Universities negotiate:

- custom pricing tiers

- discounts
- bundled services

These are usually non-public agreements.

### 3) *The real drivers aren't "per-account costs"*

The actual problem is:

- total storage growth
- risk exposure
- system complexity

Publishing "\$3/month per account" would be misleading, because: the real issue is aggregate system burden, not marginal cost.

### 4) *Political optics*

If a university said:

"We're deleting your email to save \$4/month"

...it would look trivial and invite backlash.

So they emphasize:

- "high costs"
- "sustainability"
- "security"

—which are true at scale, but vague individually.

### **Bottom line**

- Per-account savings are small (often just a few dollars/month).
- Universities act because:
  - thousands of accounts → large total costs
  - storage is now limited and expensive
  - security and compliance risks matter more than dollars

The phrase "high costs" is technically true in aggregate, but misleading at the individual level.

## **Google AI Mode 07.04.2026**

Universities typically save between \$5 and \$100 per year in direct licensing and storage costs by terminating a professor's email account. While many institutions historically provided "email for life," a shift in storage policies from major providers like Google and Microsoft has made maintaining retiree accounts more expensive.

### **Direct Cost Savings Breakdown**

The specific dollar amount saved depends on the university's enterprise agreement and the features associated with the account:

- Licensing Fees:
  - Google Workspace for Education: While "Fundamentals" is free, many universities use Education Plus, which costs approximately \$6 per user per year.

- Microsoft 365 Education: Basic cloud-only (A1) plans are often free for eligible institutions. However, higher-tier plans with desktop apps and advanced security (A3 or A5) can cost between \$39 and \$96 per faculty user annually.
- Storage Costs:
  - Previously, Google offered unlimited storage, but now limits institutions to a pooled 100 TB.
  - Retired professors often have large archives. If a university must purchase additional storage to accommodate them, costs can range from \$0.02 per GB per month to higher rates for premium managed tiers. An old account with 100 GB of data could cost the university \$24 or more per year just in storage.

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### *Indirect Financial Impacts*

Beyond the line-item cost of a license, universities cite other financial risks and administrative overhead as reasons for termination:

- Security Risks: Inactive retiree accounts are frequent targets for phishing and ransomware attacks. A single security breach can cost a university millions in mitigation and legal fees.
- IT Administration: De-provisioning accounts reduces the labor cost for IT staff who must otherwise manage password resets, multi-factor authentication issues, and storage compliance for thousands of non-active users.
- Asset Reclamation: Terminating an account may be necessary to recover software licenses for expensive tools like Adobe Creative Cloud or Microsoft Office Desktop, which are often bundled with active faculty email accounts.

### *The "Goodwill" Trade-off*

Some research suggests that terminating accounts may lead to a net loss in value. Retired professors often contribute through:

- Donations: At some institutions, emeriti contribute millions annually (e.g., over \$3 million at the [University of Utah](#) in 2022).
- Intellectual Capital: Continued research, mentorship, and grant applications often require a university affiliation and email.