

DEO ESSENTIALS

Retiring Faculty

Retirement is a natural part of any career path. Helping your faculty make decisions about when to retire and then guiding them through the process is an important part of being a good leader. Below are suggestions for how to help faculty through the retirement decision and process.

CREATE A CULTURE

Here are some ways in which you can create a culture in your department where retirement is a natural part of the faculty career path.

- Ensure all faculty are aware of resources the university offers to faculty at various stages of their careers. You could do this annually through an email or by devoting a portion of a faculty meeting to it; additionally, you could link to these resources from your department's website or incorporate them into your department's faculty handbook.
 - New Faculty: New Faculty Development Program go.unl.edu/nfdp and Research Development Fellows Program go.unl.edu/rdfp.
 - Mid-Career Faculty: Faculty Development Leaves go.unl.edu/fdl, FLAIR go.unl.edu/flair, and Research Leaders Program go.unl.edu/rlp.
 - Senior Faculty: Phased Retirement go.unl.edu/phased, Emeritus Status go.unl.edu/emeriti, and Emeriti Retirees Association go.unl.edu/era.

Make a practice of sharing all of this information with all faculty rather than trying to determine which pieces are relevant to which individuals, since the lines between “new”, “mid-career”, and “senior” faculty are not clear. In addition, it can be beneficial for newer faculty to know what to expect later in their careers and for more senior faculty to be able to mentor newer faculty about what is available to them. Furthermore, sharing all information with all faculty will alleviate potential concerns about age discrimination or other forms of targeting.

- As a standard part of the annual evaluation process, ask each faculty member about their goals for the next 3-5 years. This practice is tied to the N2025 goal that faculty should have individualized professional development plans. By encouraging faculty to be thinking about the future, you may also create an opening to discuss retirement with those faculty who are nearing that point of their careers.
- Be deliberate about filling roles of retiring faculty. While a new faculty member can take over teaching a course, for example, a committee that was chaired by the retiring faculty member might need to be taken over by someone more senior. Ensuring that a faculty member's contributions will continue even after that individual retires is a sign of respect that will help retiring faculty feel more comfortable with their plans.
- Celebrate retirements in a visible way. At a retiring faculty member's last faculty meeting, publicly thank that individual for their contributions. Consider hosting a reception of some sort, perhaps with a meaningful gift from the department.
- Involve emeritus faculty in the culture of your department in meaningful ways. Include them in social events when appropriate and invite them to colloquium talks, performances, and other special events. Some emeritus faculty members may enjoy giving guest lectures in classes, and some can be excellent mentors to students and junior faculty.



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GET SPECIFIC

Some individuals choose to retire as early as they can afford to do so; others are able to be productive faculty members well past what might be considered a typical retirement age. On occasion, you may have a faculty member whose productivity is waning but who has not yet brought up the idea of retirement with you. Navigating such situations can be tricky. Here are some best practices.

- If the faculty member brings up retirement as part of their plans for the next 3-5 years during the annual evaluation process, use that opening to explore their retirement plans further. You might discuss succession planning for some of the roles the individual has been filling, or whether a phased retirement arrangement would be mutually beneficial to the individual and the department, college, and university. Ask what might prevent them from following through on their plans to retire, and brainstorm with them how any such barriers could be removed. Talk through the timeline for submitting the retirement letter, and make sure they know about resources offered by the Emeriti and Retirees Association.
- Depending on what the individual's goals for the next 3-5 years are, it may be logical and organic to ask them during the annual evaluation meeting whether they have begun thinking about retirement even if they do not mention it first. You can remind them about the information you have previously shared in faculty meetings about Phased Retirements, Emeritus Status, and the Emeriti and Retirees Association. Be sure to do this only if it is logical and organic, and not to mention the faculty member's age in the conversation. If the faculty member says they are not interested in thinking about retirement, then do not push the issue.

GUIDE THE PROCESS

Once a faculty member has shared with you that they are interested in retiring, you will want to help guide them through the process.

- The first step is to have a conversation in which you discuss the anticipated retirement date, eligibility for and potential appropriateness of the phased retirement program, processes around emeritus, opportunities for retired faculty within your department and college, and – if it is part of your department's culture – options for a celebration. Be sure to let the faculty member know that they must state their intention to retire via a written retirement letter. The retirement letter can be a simple email, or it can be a formal letter. In either case, it should include the current date, their effective retirement date (see Resources) and, if desired, their request for emeritus status.
- Follow up on the conversation with an email in which you reiterate the points above as well as encourage the faculty member to review the retirement information available through Human Resources (see Resources), including information about health insurance.
- Once you receive the written retirement letter from the faculty member, respond in writing. A formal letter (which can be sent as an email attachment) is more appropriate than an informal email. The letter should include an acceptance of their intent to retire and their effective retirement date, acknowledgement of their request for emeritus status, a timeline for action on that request, and a statement that you will initiate the retirement process and will update them as things progress. Remind them that they should join the Emeriti and Retirees Association and inform them of opportunities to remain connected to the department, college, and university. As a kind and thoughtful gesture, include acknowledgement of their contributions and specific accomplishments they have achieved throughout their career. Copy this letter to your Dean and to the Associate Vice Chancellor for Faculty Affairs or the IANR Associate Vice Chancellor for Faculty and Academic Leader Success.

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EMERITUS STATUS

- If your retiring faculty member is eligible for emeritus status (at least 55 years of age and at least 10 years of employment by the University of Nebraska), ask them if they would like to be considered for emeritus status. If they would, instruct them to give you that request in writing, ideally as part of the retirement letter.
- Upon receipt of the request, acknowledge it and let them know the timeline for the faculty vote.
- Hold a vote of your faculty in a timely manner after you receive the request for emeritus status.
- Many professorships allow the title to be kept in emeritus status, e.g., Willa Cather Professor Emeritus. If you are unsure whether this is allowed for the particular professorship held by a retiring faculty member in your department, contact Faculty Affairs in the Office of the Executive Vice Chancellor or the IANR Associate Vice Chancellor for Faculty and Academic Leader Success for assistance.
- Write a letter to the faculty member giving the result of that vote, copying it to the Dean and the Associate Vice Chancellor for Faculty Affairs or the IANR Associate Vice Chancellor for Faculty and Academic Leader Success. Include in the letter a link to the Emeriti and Retirees Association and opportunities for emeritus faculty in your department and/or college.

DETAILS TO NOTE

- For academic year (9-month) appointments, the effective retirement date is typically the end of the academic year. In such cases, because academic year salaries are paid out on a “9 over 12” basis September-August, the faculty member will continue to receive salary and benefits through the end of August.
- If the faculty member will be receiving summer research salary or teaching in the summer session, the effective retirement date should be the end of the summer session.
- It is also possible to end an academic year appointment at the end of the fall semester. In that case, again because of the “9 over 12” system, the faculty member will continue to receive salary and benefits through the end of February.
- Fiscal year (12-month) appointments can end on any mutually agreeable date.
- If emeritus status is granted, be sure that this is indicated when the Personnel Action Form (PAF) is submitted.

RESOURCES

- UNL Human Resources – hr.unl.edu
- UNL Retirement Information – go.unl.edu/retirement
- UNL Benefits & Retirement – hr.unl.edu/benefits
- UNL Phased Retirement – go.unl.edu/phased
- NU Step-by-Step Process for Retiring Employees – go.unl.edu/retirementsteps
- UNL Emeriti and Retirees Association – go.unl.edu/era
- How to write a retirement letter go.unl.edu/rls
- How to write an acknowledgment of a retirement letter go.unl.edu/srrl
- How to bring up retirement go.unl.edu/htbur
- Can an employer safely ask when an employee plans to retire? go.unl.edu/cesa
- Avoiding Age Discrimination Claims during Succession Planning go.unl.edu/aadc
- Support Retiring Faculty go.unl.edu/sftr