



Research Article

What do Emeriti in Canada do?

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Abstract

In Canada, the end of a mandatory retirement age for university and college professors in the 2000s caught long-term faculty who were approaching retirement off guard. Rather than having to retire by age 65, senior faculty will choose a time that seems right for them. They will also have a clearer choice about what to do in retirement. Judith Hall's published studies identify three general paths taken by senior professors or professors emeriti in the field of pediatrics. Each path she describes suggests the strengthening of ties to various communities. This begs the question: Are university retiree associations regarded as beneficial communities worthy of the support of either faculty retirees or their respective universities? Also discussed here is the example of a successful model of a faculty retiree association: the Emeritus College of the University of British Columbia.

Key Words: active aging; advocacy; associations of emeriti; end of mandatory retirement age

A major change for Canadian university and college emeriti occurred in the early phase of what would be a much broader shift to the elimination of mandatory retirement at age 65 for the country as a whole. The end of mandatory retirement for senior professors in the late 2000s occurred due to overall adjustments to human rights legislation around age discrimination, as well as other social and economic realities in the country (for example we are living longer and healthier). In Canada most senior faculty in the early days of a post-retirement age world wait until they are age 72 to retire, the age when they must start taking their pension benefits.

Paths in Retirement when Emeriti choose when

A distinguished Professor Emerita of Pediatrics and Medical Genetics and past Principal of the UBC Association of Professors Emeritus, Judith Hall has on several occasions captured patterns in the choices emeritus professors make for a life in retirement when they can decide when. In what was an early call to action on the topic, Hall's 2005 Special Article in Pediatrics Research [1] highlights the untapped potential and career challenges for senior pediatricians facing mandatory retirement. To this end, she surveyed retired members of the American Pediatric Society (1,444 individuals) and department chairs in medical schools in the United States and Canada (148 individuals), experiencing impressively high response rates (35% and 40% respectively) around the question of retirement planning and pathway development.

Hall discovered that questions about when to retire from the university usually produced a pattern of choices: one third become deeply involved with family and social communities, perhaps undertaking volunteer activities but not thinking much about pediatric academia again; one-third continue doing roughly the same work of teaching and research, but perhaps at their own expense; another one-third explore ways in which to use their known skills but they apply those skills in alternate ways [1]. Hall's examples of the latter included: holding executive positions in professional associations, teaching in community education courses, and much more. Of course the choices outlined here would likely shift somewhat over the retirement phase and changing circumstances, e.g., aging, of an individual. The main outcome is that these choices for retirement were providing models for the generations of emeritus professors who followed.

Each one of the three approaches to what to do in retirement when retirement is no longer mandatory imply commitment to community. This raises a critical question: Are faculty retiree associations considered to be beneficial communities worthy of the time and support of emeritus professors? Discussed here is an example of a new model: the University of British Columbia's active-aging and academically focused Emeritus College, founded in 2018. It grew from the former Association of Professors Emeriti, an artifact of the 1980s it might be that the most important difference between Canada, and North America more generally, and European experience, too, is the trend to endorsement of a mandatory retirement age for university faculty in the 2000's. A

second, less obvious difference in North American settings is that it is usual for university retiree associations to include staff, which means that achieving common ground on the mission, vision, and a range of programs desired by the emeritus members is near to impossible.

College and University Retirees Association of Canada (CURAC)

In Canada, the one-size-fits-all organizational structure is mirrored in the national organization of Emeriti associations: the modest purpose of which has been to maintain communication with individual member institutions and to use the weight of membership numbers for CURAC to lobby the federal government on issues of relevance to older persons. Recent new initiatives of the CURAC board include the launch of a Later-life-Learning (LLL) committee that works with volunteer members across Canada to gather and disseminate remotely news of the remote and in-person delivery of research talks from member colleges and universities.

Another CURAC initiative is the current arrangement with the national newsletter for colleges and universities in Canada, University Affairs, to dedicate a regular 1,000-word magazine column (with the slightly unsettling name of “Academic for Life”) to stories on any topic by Professors Emeriti [2]. A member of the CURAC Board and retiree of the University of Alberta, Carole-Lynne Le Navenec, launched and edits this publishing initiative; she also found and now co-chairs CURAC’S established and LLL committee.

It is clear that retirements under the legally mandated “no fixed date” scenario pose a threat at some Canadian universities and colleges. In the words of Walter Archer, “where measures [to recruit faculty] are blocked, the nobbled retiree association is in a constant struggle to survive...and may succumb” even if in a large university [2]. And yet, there are workable solutions to bureaucratic barriers to functioning retiree associations: link the retiring faculty list and membership applications and even fee collection for the emeritus associations to the alumni association site; include a brochure on the local retiree association in university retirement document packages. Co-sponsoring with the university annual “preparation for retirement seminars” is another method that has met with success.

The UBC Emeritus College formed an effective partnership with UBC Faculty Relations and UBC Faculty Pension Plan to co-produce annual half-day planning for retirement seminars. At these meetings UBC Faculty Association members over age 55 (and their spouses/partners) consider a range of models and relevant information with which to reimagine and finance their retirement from their university positions.

Becoming UBC Emeritus College

Here we are in 2025, seven years and one pandemic after the advent of the UBC Emeritus College, taking stock [3]. The College retained most of the old activities developed by the former UBC Association of Professors Emeriti (APE).

As a condition of our change in status, the College dropped membership fees and arranged for automatic enrollment of faculty as they retired. Membership in the College rose from approximately 400 fee-paying (active) members in UBC-APE to 1,900 automatically enrolled, non-fee-paying members, of whom approximately 600 are at present active in the College. Nevertheless, the operating funds from UBC that were meant to replace membership fees is subject to budgetary setbacks, which is problematic.

While the College hosts multiple active-aging special interest groups, covering everything from slow walks in the forest, to poetry writing and cycling, to photography and film appreciation and travel clubs. The College also funds several academically oriented award programs. First are two competitive awards given annually to College members: one award is for “Excellence in Innovative and Creative Endeavour” and the other is the “President’s Award for Distinguished Service,” so named in recognition of the steadfast support of the then UBC president, Santa Ono. A different award, also competitive, is from the College’s “Subsidy for Scholarly Activities” fund, with roots in UBC APE. Successful applicants receive modest partial remuneration for expenses in support of scholarly activity within a broad range of categories.

Important to mention is the annual UBC President’s reception for newly retired emeritus faculty. The event is held at the President’s campus home. Members of College Council attend, including past principals and presidents of the APE and the Collage, respectively, UBC vice presidents and faculty deans. This special occasion is the penultimate recognition of the value and contribution of the Emeriti faculty. The APE executive negotiated this event and many of the others mentioned here, during the transition to an Emeritus College. However, this event may not continue.

Also negotiated by APE and the College was the promise of a modest but dignified office and meeting space at an accessible central campus location. Because the space offered was in a soon-to-be constructed structure, the College was able to join campus planners in designing the office space in a new building as it was being built.

Large numbers of awards and honors have been received during retirement by College members: they hold office in professional associations; donate money to the university for everything from student awards to research endeavors. Emeriti mentor young faculty and graduate students as well as senior faculty who plan to retire (or have only just retired). They write books and research papers, edit scholarly collections, deliver distinguished lectures, create artistic performances and open new fields of research and practice. They win awards for their scholarship, volunteerism, and even competitive swimming accomplishments. They enhance the reputation of their departments and the university [3].

Moreover, two decades prior to the end of mandatory retirement at UBC in 2008, any retired faculty member could and still can: Serve in university leadership positions via temporary contracts with or without financial compensation and benefits; supervise/co-

supervise graduate students and sit on or chair PhD exams; and serve as elected senators-at-large on the UBC Senate.

Emeriti also occupy other spaces at UBC: library space; research space—though “space” belongs to individual departments and is a sensitive often divisive subject. In some cases faculty once retired are able to keep their departmental offices for few years; others are moved to dedicated shared space which could be little more than a closet in the basement of a building (many department heads do not encourage their retired faculty to stay around and do not want to give up academic ‘real estate,’ even to the point of excluding emeriti from mention on the department website). It is certain that faculty members will take into account their the treatment of retired colleagues before deciding when to leave a position with a salary, benefits, a proper office, and a page on the department’s website [1].

Emeritus faculty have free access to: a UBC identification card; the UBC Library System; basic UBC internet and email services; and an internet account as well as basic assistance with computer technology, including for cell phone links. Senate-approved Emeritus faculty receive free parking on campus, which is a significant financial and practical benefit, given all the campus-based activities and services emeriti now have access to.

Faculty have continued to accept appointments to “unpaid” roles (e.g. executive members of UBC Emeritus College) and “Paid” appointments on a contract or honorarium basis elsewhere within the university.

Emeriti can continue to lead or join in grant-funded research that the university is willing to administer through its research units. Retired faculty can enroll in UBC faculty health plan (medical and dental), but with no UBC financial input, so reduced coverage and higher rates). The former Association of Professors Emeriti

negotiated an alternate arrangement with a private health care provider that has served many faculty retirees satisfactorily (especially because of the superior health and accident insurance coverage when travelling).

In addition to all this, the Emeritus College has co-launched with Green College a new Emeritus Visiting Scholars in residence program encompassing two visitorships. Residency is for up to two-weeks or one month stays on UBC campus in order to interact with Emeritus College members and with graduate student members of Cecil & Ida Green College Graduate residential college, where the Visitors will be housed and fed. An expression of interest from distinguished members of EAPE with a track record of interdisciplinary practice or engagement are welcome. Nominations are by UBC Emeritus College members are welcomed in summer and fall. For further details contact the program chair, Professor Emeritus Donald Fisher, care of UBC Emeritus College: emerituscollege.ubc.ca (“Contact Us”).

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