

The Last Word

Transforming Retirement

by Patrick C. Cullinane, President, AROHE

Is America missing a treasure? Is higher education also missing treasured opportunities? Every year tens of thousands of faculty and staff retire from full-time work in higher education and transition to next life chapters of 20 to 30 years. Many leave healthy, still productive with valuable institutional knowledge and a continuing desire to be engaged and continue contributing to the best interests of their institution. It is time for this untapped resource to be engaged for the mutual benefit of the institutions, their faculty and staff and society at large. It is time to transform our vision for retirement in higher education.

What is AROHE?

AROHE, the Association of Retirement Organizations in Higher Education, is committed to transforming retirement in higher education, to champion transformative practices to support all stages of faculty and staff retirement and their mutually beneficial engagement and continuing contributions. AROHE is a dynamic network of 100+ organizations, representing over 100,000 individuals that include retired faculty and staff associations, campus-funded retiree centers, emeriti colleges as well as campus departments such as human resources, academic affairs, development/ advancement and alumni relations.

AROHE promotes a culture that recognizes, encourages, and values retired faculty and staff's continuing contributions to all aspects of campus and community life. AROHE offers advice and consultation on how to make the retirement process – both the preparation for retirement and the actual transition – a more productive and less stressful life course change.

“The Retirement Problem”

Higher education faces a “retirement problem.” First, colleges and universities across the land urgently need help in facilitating retirement of their aging faculty. Second, individual faculty members and senior staff especially need personalized

assistance in the sometimes unsettling process of retiring from academic institutions – preparing for it, passing through the transition itself, and then fashioning a meaningful next chapter of continuing creativity and service. And third, the issue of retirement in higher education has national implications in terms of failure thus far to take full advantage of the tremendous resource that an active retired professoriate and staff represent.

Every day 8,000 baby boomers in the USA are beginning to retire. Faculty and staff in higher education are well represented in this group. The professoriate especially is visibly “graying.” This population is both living longer and staying longer in full-time employment.

Freedom from a statutory retirement age in the United States has affected academic retirement more than retirement from business or industry. *The Impact of Uncapping of Mandatory Retirement on Postsecondary Institutions*, (NYU, New York, NY) (*Educational Researcher*: Accepted, June 24, 2013) noted that “...Although only 11% of faculty who were subject to mandatory retirement remained after age 70 (those with special arrangements), we find after the law changed that 60% of faculty no longer subject to mandatory retirement are expected to remain employed beyond age 70...”

The Retirement Opportunity

A few programs have begun to emerge to address this trend. A key to success appears to be that they have ways to support senior faculty in the process of approaching and transitioning into retirement. Such programs focus on making retirement a positive step into the future for faculty rather than a surrender of so much that they hold dear, a bridge to a preferred future vs. a plank off the campus ship.

AROHE has functioned very effectively as a retirement coach and adviser for faculty and staff because it understands why academics and staff resist retirement. Once economic concerns are out of the picture, it is the psycho-social aspect of retirement that figures most prominently. Academic professionals and senior staff/administrators in particular don't usually refuse to retire out of fear of boredom. Rather, research has shown that the most important factor keeping faculty and senior staff from retiring is simply overwhelming job satisfaction as stakeholders in a community of thinkers and institutions

created to develop greater good for society. Most say they love what they do and cannot easily conceive of not doing it. AROHE believes academic retirement is fundamentally different.

Transformation Benefits

Higher education across America stands to benefit enormously if its retired faculty and staff are organized. These are highly-educated and talented people, whose personal skills and professional expertise fairly demand to be channeled into productive activities. The evidence suggests, however, that only structured campus-based options and retirement organizations can manage the very substantial job of compiling, coordinating, and managing this richness of human resources.

AROHE Services and Programs

- A **biennial conference** brings retiree organization leaders from across North America together for two full days of workshops, forums and networking opportunities.
- *AROHE Matters*: an electronic newsletter of resources that is sent every other month to AROHE members and non-members.
- An organization Start Up Kit, geared toward newly-established groups
- The **AROHE website** (<http://arohe.org>)
 - An **online member directory** allows members to search for and seek assistance from other member organizations that will be most aligned with their needs.
 - An **online discussion forum** allows members to share ideas or to ask questions of other members.
 - **Member-shared resources** in six different topical areas: programs and events, awards and recognition, fundraising and scholarships, volunteers and service, communications and marketing, surveys and reports, organization management and pre-retirement programs.
- A new mentoring program pairs new or less-experienced members with more experienced members for one-on-one consultation.

Come Join Us

Share your ideas and concerns at info@arohe.org. Join AROHE and transform retirement in higher education.