

2013-14 UBC Faculty Retirement Study: Executive Summary

CONTEXT:

In 2013 a study of faculty retirement at UBC was conducted through the office of the Senior Advisor to the Provost on Women Faculty¹. The purpose of the project was to examine the various contributing factors shaping faculty retirement for men and women in an attempt understand observed gender differences in retirement patterns. Furthermore, the study considered the multiple factors that influence decisions related to retirement of faculty at UBC, both for senior faculty who choose to retire and for those who choose to continue working past the common retirement age of 65. Additional perspectives on attitudes and approaches to retirements, activities in retirement, retirement options and processes, and experiences at UBC in retirement are gained from the study.

The topic of retirement has received increased attention, particularly with the lifting of mandatory retirement at universities across North America. As noted in the recent report by the Canadian Association of University Teachers²– the proportion of fulltime university teachers in Canada employed beyond the common retirement age of 65 has quadrupled from 2001 to 2011. The topic of retirement in academia is also covered regularly in the news in North America³. We expect that the findings of the UBC study will fill some gaps observed in the literature in this area. The results also complement the findings from 2011 Faculty Relations focus groups, providing data and perspectives from a variety of resources.

KEY FINDINGS:

UBC DATA:

UBC data on average retirement rates and average age at retirement was collected for 1997-2013. After the moratorium on mandatory retirement in 2007, the average rate of retirement among faculty age 55 and over decreased from 7.6% to 3.3% and the average retirement age increased. More than one third of those retiring between 2007-2013 took retirement after age

¹ With BREB approval

² “Academic Staff.” *CAUT Almanac of Post-Secondary Education in Canada*. 2012-2013 ed. <http://www.caut.ca/docs/almanac/2012-2013-caut-almanac-of-post-secondary-education-in-canada.pdf?sfvrsn=0>

³ Colleges and Universities See Graying Workforce Holding on to Coveted Positions, PBS Newshour , March 18, 2013. http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/business-jan-june13-makingsense_03-18/

65. Of the three Faculty Retirement Options taken by some faculty – Phased-in, Part-time, or Reduced Scope – the latter two were the most popular.

MAIN THEMES (ALL FACULTY): Interviews (53 participants) and Online Survey (70 participants)
The main themes drawn from the in-person interviews and online portions of the study can be grouped into four categories: 1) personal experience in the retirement process; 2) contributing factors in the decision or approach to retirement; 3) outlook for retirement and activities; and 4) views on retirement policies and processes at UBC. Experiences reported from those retired and not retired are discussed further in the section on Gender Differences below.

Among both retired online and retired in-person participants, over 70% indicated satisfaction with their retirement process, with this level of satisfaction also reflected in responses of various subgroups. Areas indicated for improvement included financial advice, accessibility of information seminars, flexibility in the approach to retirement, reorganization of workload to support a smooth transition, and knowledge and clarity provided by heads of units. Among those who had not retired, nearly half indicated expectations to retire in the next 5-10 years. Their comments emphasized that a variety of factors influence their consideration of retirement and that clarity in the process is important.

The key factors reported most frequently in retirement considerations were financial issues, personal or family considerations, and health. In addition, workload, recruitment of the next generation of scholars, and unit politics or change were indicated as key factors by some participants. These six themes also came up regularly when participants were commenting on other topics such as planning for retirement or their approach to retirement. A number of faculty who had retired before 2007 also noted the significance of mandatory retirement in their cases.

On the topic of outlook for retirement, the themes of identity and agency were frequently mentioned. Many indicated that their work was an important part of their identity, and ensuring one's legacy was cited regularly in interviews. Participant comments also reflected the diverse approaches to retirement, ranging from anticipation of different activities to concern about the unknown to continuation as before. Agency, flexibility, and varied interests were commonly mentioned as important ingredients in a positive transition to retirement. Participants reported a variety of (planned) activities in retirement, with many continuing or planning to continue scholarly work in retirement. Once again flexibility was a regular theme, with comments frequently covering the full spectrum of activities in retirement.

Participants gave valuable perspectives on the lifting of mandatory retirement. A common concern was the issue of faculty productivity, with many respondents highlighting this as an increasing problem for UBC, if not handled well in the absence of mandatory retirement.

Financial incentive packages or other financial perks were mentioned as important influences by a number of participants. The agency and flexibility afforded through customized retirement options or paths were highlighted as factors in positive retirement experiences. Emphasizing the continued potential and productivity of retirees, participants urged recognition and engagement of those who continued to be active at UBC.

GENDER DIFFERENCES:

The average age at retirement was lower for female retirees compared with that of men, both before and after the lifting of mandatory retirement. Post 2007, this difference in average retirement age has more than doubled.

Gender differences were found in the area of working environment for senior faculty, specifically in department or institutional encouragement to retire, in feelings that contributions were valued, and in the atmosphere towards older academics. Among those not retired and retired interviewees, women reported significantly more negative experiences than men in these groups.

Women reported more satisfaction with their retirement processes, and they reported starting to think about retirement earlier than their male counterparts on average. Among both interviewees and online participants, a larger percentage of women participants reported activities in retirement that were not focused solely on scholarly work.

In the context of reasons for retirement, the topics of family considerations and workload came up more frequently in the comments of female interviewees than for male interviewees. Some men also commented that they expected family considerations to be a larger factor for women, both in their job and in retirement. The theme of strong connections between identity and work appeared more frequently in the comments of men or in participants' perceptions of their male colleagues.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS:

Address negative environments toward senior faculty, reported significantly more often by women faculty While the majority of participants reported positively about their working climate, there were significant differences between the percentages of male and female participants providing positive comments. Observations of this type have been reported more generally in UBC Faculty working climate surveys at UBC and at other universities, with gender differences a regular theme in "chilly climates". Participant comments stressed the importance of productivity and contributing to the unit or the university, and the topic of workload appeared more frequently in the comments of female participants.

Ensure that retirement options are used fairly and productively. While flexibility is a valuable aspect of the options, there must be vigilance to ensure options are applied consistently. While the retirement options were generally identified as a positive contribution to the agency and flexibility desired in retirement, the gender differences indicate areas where the implementation of retirement options requires careful attention. Women faculty reported less positive working environments, and reported more often on external factors that could contribute to a choice to retire earlier. The data also confirmed that they are retiring earlier on average. These factors could potentially undermine their negotiation position when they seek to plan their retirement. Since they may be leaning towards retirement more readily, this could contribute to a trend where they are offered fewer retirement perks or incentives than their male colleagues. **Therefore, we recommend that Faculty Relations continues to work with Faculties on appropriate and fair use of the retirement options, and that the types of options and associated agreements are tracked and reviewed to ensure equitable use of these options.**

Increase awareness about retirement planning and options at the department and unit levels, among faculty members and their leadership. The results from the survey point to the value of planning as part of a positive transition in retirement. This planning depends on the faculty member's circumstances in her/his department or faculty, and the heads' and Deans' offices ability to facilitate this planning. Awareness about the variety of individual retirement perspectives and retirement options, from both faculty members and leadership viewpoints, is a necessary basis for planning for retirement and for identifying attractive arrangements for all involved. Beyond understanding the options, it is important to be familiar with the combination of factors that impact retiring decisions, to recognize that many faculty are interested in productivity and faculty renewal, and to balance those interests with flexibility in the retirement approach.

Many valuable recommendations came directly from participants. Some addressed the broader approach to retirement, as one retired woman suggests, "We (UBC) should be leading the way in terms of a multidisciplinary evaluation, and new models, and helping people to see the new models, and encouraging them to make changes." Another retired participant states, "I think just to understand the psychology of what retirement means is exceptionally important." The theme of agency in retirement planning and productivity are woven throughout the dialogue and the online comments; for example, a non-retired faculty member noted "I would just like to commend UBC for having options because ... I think it's good for us to have some possibilities of graduating out", while others highlighted the importance of understanding the impact of the moratorium on mandatory retirement.

Other recommendations about UBC's general approach to retirement include the following:

- Recognition of actual and potential contributions to UBC by faculty who are retired or transitioning to retirement, valuing legacy, experience, expertise, and productivity. This includes opportunities for retired faculty to be involved with and contribute to UBC, when interested to do so.
- Understanding the ways that retirement connects to UBC's strategic priorities
- Integrating improvements into the transition of faculty to retirement, that address financial, scholarly, and social interests

Collaborations between UBC and the Association of Professors Emeriti:

Conversations with the Association of Professors Emeriti, Human Resources, and Faculty Relations indicated a number of additional positive steps that contribute to realizing these recommendations.

- Two MOU's between UBC (VPA and Alumni Association) and the Association of Professors Emeriti have been signed in 2014: see <http://www.emeriti.ubc.ca/MOU>
- Three directions have been identified for consideration in support of professors emeriti:
 - 1) Provide reduced- or no-fee access to UBC Continuing Studies, comparable to what is provided to staff
 - 2) Consider strategic UBC-funded grants related to retirements that would support wrap-up projects, preservation of legacy in established programs, and transitions in critical areas
 - 3) Identify areas where retired and emeritus faculty can be included in UBC-wide priorities and programs, recognizing that there are opportunities to match experience and expertise and provide additional capacity to UBC projects - e.g. international initiatives, infrastructure and campus planning, leadership support, and collaboration in scholarly activities,

Clearly ensuring equity in access to these programs as they come on-line will be important, in accordance with the recommendations above.

- The Association of Professors Emeriti is also working with its members to understand access to resources, such as space.
- There is joint interest to increase the visibility of retirement-related series provided by UBC and the UBC-Faculty Association, as well as information sessions provided by the leadership of the Associate of Professors Emeriti (specifically mentioned as valuable by study participants)