Academic Activities by Faculty After Retirement:
Survey Findings

November 2023

The Professors Emeriti Club published data last year showing that emeriti make significant financial contributions to the University. In 2022, for example, emeriti made donations of over 3 million dollars to the University. However, we have only anecdotal information about emeriti 's continued academic activities after retiring. To gather data on this topic more systematically, the Emeriti Club distributed a survey in Fall of 2023 to explore this continued involvement in the areas of research, teaching, mentoring, and other professional activities. Documenting the ways in which emeriti continue to add value to the mission of the U of U, beyond their financial support, can, in turn, help the University expand the ways it supports its emeriti.

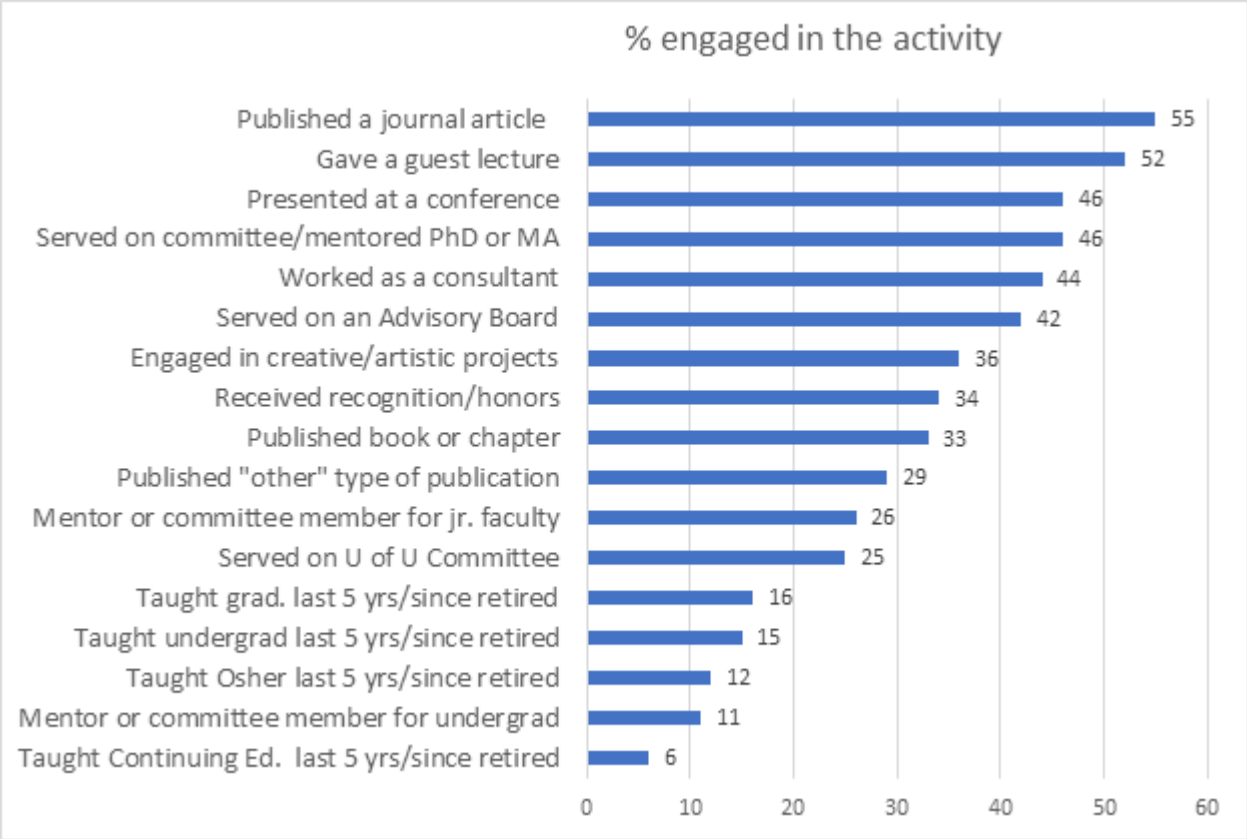
The Emeriti Club distributed a questionnaire to about 700 emeriti professors in the September newsletter, with several reminders. (A copy of the questionnaire is available upon request.) The deadline for returning survey responses was October 14. We received 85 completed surveys. In terms of time since retirement, 42% of respondents retired within the past 4 years (2020-2023), 25% within 5 to 10 years (2015-2019), and 6% retired before 2005.

Findings

- **Type of Academic Activity:** Emeriti respondents are engaged in a wide range of activities spanning research, teaching, and service. The most frequent post-retirement academic engagements were reported in these areas:
    - More than half of the retired faculty have published a journal article, and a third or more have published a book or book chapter.
    - Around half presented at a professional conference or were invited as guest lecturer.
    - About half said they continued mentoring PhD or Masters' degree students.
    - 40% of the respondents were engaged in creative projects.
    - About a half of the emeriti continued to consult or serve on advisory boards.

  Areas where faculty were less engaged included teaching undergraduate or graduate courses and teaching in the Osher or Lifelong Learning programs (6% to 16% across categories).

The following graph shows the percentage of survey respondents who report being engaged in each of seventeen scholarly activities since retirement:



- **Awards and Honors**: About a third of the emeriti responded to an open-ended question asking about the different types of professional honors and awards they had received since retirement. These recognitions, which bring prestige to both the individual and the University of Utah. came from a variety of sources, including professional organizations, professional journals, and even from governmental offices at the state and national level.

- **Respondent Comments:** We asked emeriti to elaborate on their answers and to include additional comments. We received about 30 responses from faculty covering a wide range of academic activities and providing detailed information about these activities. The comments are too numerous to list, and only a few are provided below as examples. Most of the comments related to continued scholastic activities by our emeriti.

    - I wrote a book published by the American Diabetes Association….
    - I have a new patent application under consideration….
    - I use my background as a political scientist to advocate for better public policy at the state level.

- I continue to engage in teaching pre-college students, mentoring college students, and am active in two national associations. One of my students won a national teacher award…..
- I am still funded by NIH grants, also serve as primary mentor for several junior faculty….
- Continue to serve as editor of a journal
- Since my retirement – 3 journal peer reviews, 1 book proposal review, co-edit a book series…..
- Member of an advisory committee for a national media archive

A few respondents commented on impediments to their continued engagement in the life of the University of Utah or their desire for support. Here are examples:

- "I am still very active in my discipline and serve as an associate editor of a journal, reviewer of conference papers, reviewer of journal articles, mentor, etc. I also continue to write and publish. My bio always includes the U of U. And yet, I lost access to Microsoft and had to purchase a plan so that I could edit, write, review."
- "The concept of an emeritus faculty member continuing to engage in mentoring, scholarship, etc. appeared to be a foreign concept upon my transition. I am glad to see this survey and look forward to next steps to ensure that those who want to continue are culturally accepted and provided a modicum of resources."
- "I have several research projects that I hope to complete. Having UIT support will be very helpful to me."

Conclusions

Several themes emerged as we analyzed the responses:

1. Retired faculty directly contribute to all dimensions of the University of Utah's mission and, in the process, continue to bring positive visibility to the institution. They continue to write and publish as well as teach and mentor PhD and Masters students. In addition, emeriti continue to consult, serve on advisory boards, and give lectures and presentations.
2. Emeriti show an enduring engagement with the University, but, as would be expected, it diminishes over time.
3. The University of Utah plays an important role – actual and potential – in supporting the continued productivity of retired faculty.

Recommendations

The data clearly show that emeriti continue to make significant contributions to the University, and they deserve the University's encouragement and support as well as recognition of their accomplishments.

- **Technology Support**: A major impediment to faculty engagement has been the lack of access to software that faculty need but to which they no longer have access after retirement. In recent months, the Emeriti Club has been working with the UIT office and obtained additional software benefits such Zoom and the cloud Microsoft Suite, but more is needed. Access to specific software could perhaps be granted on a case-by-case basis, particularly when the need can be documented. Alternatively, it might be possible for emeriti to purchase discounted software from the University Office of Software Licensing; currently, it is not clear if and when this is possible.

- **Recognition of Emeriti's Academic Achievements**: We were pleased to read about the many awards and recognitions that emeriti received after retirement. However, the University does not systematically gather and publicize this information. One respondent phrased the desire for recognition this way: "I co-authored 26 journal articles since retirement. These further built my reputation as one of the leaders in my field of the ……. Department, and the University as one of the top research universities in the US. This is the kind of achievement rarely recognized for emeriti."

  We recommend that a type of clearinghouse be established at the University level (perhaps in the AVP's office). Such a repository, where emeriti can provide information on their articles, book chapters, awards, etc., could be placed on the internet and linked to the Emeriti Club's website. This would allow the University to keep a record of these academic activities in a systematic way and subsequently use this information to publicly recognize emeriti for their continued scholastic endeavors.

- **Support for Emeriti Club:** We recognize and appreciate the financial support provided to the Emeriti Club by the Office of the Academic Vice President. These funds are only sufficient, however, to cover the costs of publishing the Club's newsletters and partially underwrite its monthly luncheons held in the Student Union. At many universities across the country, emeriti organizations report to and are supported by the Office of the President or Vice President for Academic Affairs. Our Club does not have such a reporting relationship. As a result, there is little or no communication between the Club and these offices. This, in turn, makes it difficult for the Club to communicate to Central Administration the extent to which emeriti continue their scholarly activities to the benefit of the University. We recommend that the AVP Office appoint someone on its staff to serve as liaison to the Emeriti Club. This would not only facilitate solving the many problems faculty experience as they transition to emeritus/a status but would also demonstrate to the emeriti that they are still a valued part of the University for both their financial support to the institution and their continued scholarly accomplishments.