



Tip Sheet: Navigating Retirement from a Faculty Position

Introduction

This tip sheet is designed to help retirement-eligible faculty prepare for an orderly transition to retirement. There is no mandatory retirement age in the MSU system, so faculty who meet years-in-service requirements and who are performing well in all their assignment areas and who face no disciplinary action enjoy flexibility about when to retire. Successful retirement begins with leaving your colleagues in a thoughtful and measured fashion so that students and other stakeholders are well served and no one must pick up unexpected duties after you finish your career at MSU. What follows is a rough guide of what to do and when to do it, organized chronologically.

4 Years Prior

Attend the MSU Human Resources retirement seminar to get the basics on retirement eligibility, finances, health insurance, etc. See the [MSU Human Resources web site](#) to enroll in the seminar and access other retirement-related information.

Make sure you can afford to retire. Do some projections with your financial planner. If you are financially able to do so, consider donating to MSU as part of your estate or tax management plan. If you are considering giving MSU a sizeable gift, meet with your College Development Officer to discuss options for giving and how you would like to see the funds used.

Assess your program. When might graduate students finish? When do any current grants end? This will help you solidify your optimal end date.

Stop taking new PhD students unless there's a co-advisor. Co-advising can be an excellent way to help a junior faculty member get started with advising and provides the student with continuity if they need help after they graduate and you retire.

Open a conversation with your unit leader about your retirement ideas. Annual review time is a good moment to introduce it. Most leaders are very open to phase-out arrangements. Be open to taking on different duties (e.g., service, co-teaching) to help the department as your program winds down.

Consider a phase-out model, where duties and pay decline over two or three years, allowing you to focus less effort but keep activities you truly enjoy. If this is attractive, discuss with your unit leader. Can existing grants cover your part-time salary? Draft an MOU with your unit and the college. The MOU might cover percent effort, percent pay, duties, access to an office or lab.

3 Years Prior

Assess your space. Do you still need a full lab, or could colleagues make better use of it? Consider office hoteling in the latter part of your phase-out.

Make sure data and teaching materials are consistently archived as you move towards retirement.

2 Years Prior

Start an orderly transition of your professional materials (e.g., books and other materials). Give books to colleagues, recycle papers, and send potentially sellable items to MSU Surplus. Check whether the library has a need for your books. A good colleague will not leave a large collection items behind that others have to sort. Do not labor under the delusion that your family wants to store your materials!

Inform colleagues in your unit and discipline. If you are on elected or appointed committees where your term runs past your retirement date, inform the responsible administrator.

Bring colleagues onto grants that may run past your retirement date. Plan transitions with members of your grant teams.

Begin finishing Phd students and stop taking new Master's students.

Last Year

Plan your retirement celebration, if any. While these celebrations are often self-funded, some units may be willing to cover up to the \$25 maximum amount per person allowed by university policy. See the [controller's office web site](#) for policies governing retirement celebrations.

Inventory lab or other equipment for the unit to repurpose. If no other faculty will be using the lab equipment, take it to MSU Surplus.

If you are ending your involvement with grants, transition the grants to another PI, or close them out. Complete any necessary IRB/IACUC (human/animal subjects) and Federal effort report requirements. Archive data consistent with grant agency requirements.

Work to finish all remaining students. If you taught courses where students received an incomplete, make arrangements for issuing a grade. Archive your gradebooks with your department main office in case a student disputes a grade.

Communicate your plans to any external stakeholders with whom you regularly collaborate. Introduce the stakeholders to other MSU faculty who may wish to continue the relationship.

Communicate with your students and colleagues about your willingness to help them wrap up publications that are in the pipeline and may require revisions. If you are unwilling to do this work, notify them in writing that it is okay for them to drop you as a co-author (add you to acknowledgements), as many journals now require a certification that all authors have reviewed and approved the work as submitted.

Last Weeks

Finish clearing out your office.

Inform recently graduated or soon to graduate students about your career shift and ability to provide reference letters (yes or no).

Schedule an exit interview with your unit leader and reflect on what you might share with them about how to strengthen the unit going forward.

Near your last day, complete your [termination checklist](#).

Your unit may be open to allowing you to purchase your MSU computer at a reasonable price, making it a bit easier to access MSU systems in retirement (note that some software may not be transferable to a private individual).

Plan a getaway to mark a successful transition!