



TIAA-CREF Institute

Understanding the Faculty Retirement (Non)Decision

Research from the TIAA-CREF Institute
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About the research

This research overview – part of the TIAA-CREF Institute’s body of work on [academic workforce trends and issues](#) – is based on the survey responses of 770 tenured faculty, age 50 or older, from the *Faculty Career and Retirement Survey*.

The survey, fielded in 2014, examined faculty expectations and preferences regarding whether and when to retire and factors that influence the retirement dynamic.

To read the full research report, click [here](#), or copy and paste this address into your web browser: <https://www.tiaa-crefinstitute.org/public/pdf/understanding-the-faculty-retirement-nondecision.pdf>

Addressing financial and psychosocial barriers to retirement can benefit both faculty and their institutions.

About a third of tenured faculty age 50 or older expect to retire by “normal” retirement age,¹ while fully two-thirds anticipate working past that age or have already done so. This latter group is sometimes called “reluctant retirees,” and when their numbers swell on campus, it can lead to productivity declines, limited advancement opportunities for junior faculty, a lack of openings for new hires, and difficulty reallocating institutional resources. To address a reluctant retiree phenomenon and better manage faculty retirement patterns, college and university leaders need to understand the thought process among senior faculty regarding whether and when to retire.

Faculty retirement expectations

In terms of their retirement expectations, tenured senior faculty fall into three groups, as shown below.

Types of Tenured Senior Faculty

Traditional Retirees	Expect to retire by normal retirement age	35% of faculty
Reluctantly Reluctant	Would like to retire by normal retirement age, but expect to work longer	16%
Reluctant By Choice	Would like to and expect to work past normal retirement age	49%

What drives faculty perceptions?

A two-part dynamic is at play among traditional retirees. First, not surprisingly, these faculty believe they can afford to retire at the normal age; 59% rate this as a major reason for their expectation. Second, the prospect of retirement exerts a “pull” by offering something attractive; 65% cite wanting to spend more time with family, and 60% feel strongly they will be ready to do something different. In contrast, “push” factors are seldom important considerations. For example, only 10% of traditional retirees feel they will no longer enjoy teaching when they reach normal retirement age.

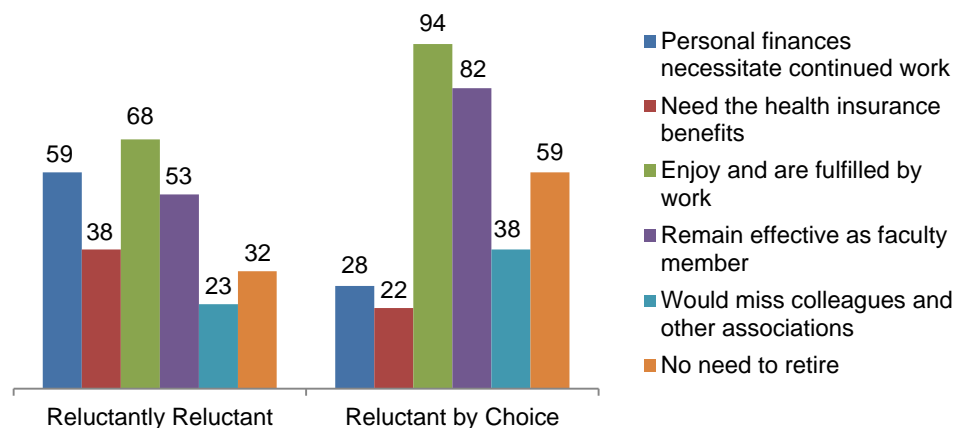
Among reluctant retirees, significant differences in key drivers are evident between those reluctantly reluctant and those reluctant by choice. Personal finances are the main issue for those reluctantly reluctant, while psychosocial factors dominate for those reluctant by choice.



Financial Services

Reasons for Expecting to Work Past Normal Retirement Age

Percentage considering each factor a major reason



Faulty assumptions?

While finances are a key barrier among those reluctantly reluctant, less than one-half of this group has carefully evaluated when they can afford to retire. So they assume, but do not know, that they cannot afford to retire. A similar dynamic exists among those reluctant by choice regarding how they could spend their time in retirement; they assume that nothing outside academe could provide the same level of professional fulfillment. But this is an unexamined assumption, as most have not carefully considered what they could do if retired.

Faculty Who Have Considered Key Retirement Issues

	Traditional Retirees	Reluctantly Reluctant	Reluctant by Choice
Carefully evaluated when you can afford to retire	68%	47%	62%
Received advice on how to spend your time once retired	8%	1%	8%

To learn more

For more research of interest to higher education leaders, go to www.tiaa-crefinstitute.org > Audiences > Higher Education.

¹ Normal retirement age is defined as age 67 – the age at which those currently age 50 can begin to collect full Social Security benefits.



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