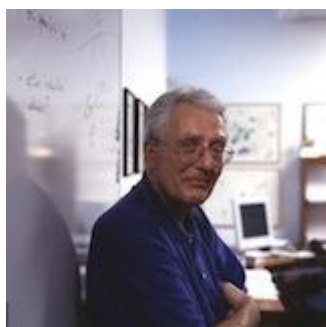


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Klaus Rajewsky (CREDIT: Klaus Rajewsky)

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Career Advice

How to Avoid Retirement

By Lucas Laursen
July 01, 2011

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When biochemist Anthony Norman earned tenure at the [University of California \(UC\), Riverside](#), he thought he'd never have to apply for a job again. But that was before he retired.

Norman, a professor emeritus, continues to run the laboratory he started in 1963. But he recently became a professor of the Graduate Division, a title reserved for retirees who "are fully engaged in research and/or other departmental an appointment letter says. Norman, who will draw his pension instead of a salary, believe post-retirement research career. "It used to be that when you retired your title became you when you write up a grant application," Norman says. In contrast to professor em Graduate Division prove their value every 3 years by passing the same departmental raises to regular faculty members. "We have to jump through the same hoops as ever

"It used to be that when you retired your title became you when you write up a grant application," Norman says.
Anthony Norman

Some universities, such as Norman's UC Riverside, are changing their policies to harm researchers. Others are not. The United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and all banned mandatory retirement. But Japan and many European governments still all bodies to restrict access to employment or funding opportunities for researchers eligible response, some researchers leave before their universities ask them to.

Feature Special on Retirement

Like any other career step, retirement benefits

One is immunologist Klaus Rajewsky. He was forced to accept mandatory retirement in 2001 from his position at the Max Planck Institute in Germany. Rajewsky moved to Harvard in Boston, where he continues to work.

from early planning. Last week freelance writer Vivienne Raper gave a [low-down](#) on how to map the route to retirement. This week freelancer Lucas Laursen describes the solutions some senior researchers have found around mandatory retirement ages.

chair in pediatrics and a professor of pathology. Next year, Rajewsky plans to return to Germany, where some institutions are making it easier for exceptional retirement-age researchers to stay active.

By any other name

One way to put off retirement is to obtain one of the emerging class of contracts that enable researchers to continue to work after retirement, assuming your institution offers them. The professor of the Graduate Division position at UC Riverside, for example, is very flexible, Norman says. A similar position at [UC Berkeley](#), known as professor of the Graduate School, allows senior researchers to retain their colleagues' respect by letting them focus on what they're good at, says Jack Kirsch, a 76-year-old biophysical chemist at UC Berkeley, who retired from his departmental professorship at age 71 and took the title of professor of the Graduate School. Kirsch continues to pursue research and has started teaching a freshman seminar on art. "Clearly, I don't have the influence I used to," Kirsch says. But "people still come to me to ask about enzymes."



Anthony Norman (CREDIT: Anthony Norman)

Some European countries with a default retirement age, an age above which employers can force staff into retirement, have proposed alternatives to traditional retirement. In Germany, institutes such as the [Helmholtz Centres](#) and states such as Niedersachsen are offering research fellowships to researchers who have retired from their official jobs. In the Netherlands, sociologist Siegwart Lindenberg of the [University of Groningen](#) negotiated a 10-year extension that started at age 65, his university's default retirement age. He is paid from his pension and has a research grant from the university. He remains eligible to apply for new grants, though he believes that "the chance of getting them is lower once you are above 65."

Lindenberg started talking to his departmental colleagues 2 years before his impending retirement. "The reaction was, 'No, we can't do that because it's against the rules,'" he recalls. It was against the rules, but it was not against the law: The Netherlands allows workers to continue working beyond age 65. Lindenberg presented his dean with evidence of how he was still useful to the university, including a list of recent publications and continued invitations to collaborate. It took about a year to turn his dean into an ally and another year to persuade the university to agree to an unusual contract that allows him to focus on his research. "When you stay on, they let you concentrate on your stronger points rather than on [departmental administration] duties," he says.

Such new roles offer professors a chance to redefine the final years of their careers. They are encouraged to recognize their limits and abide by them. Lindenberg, for example, says he won't take on new Ph.D. students anymore but will help supervise those of his colleagues. Sacrificing some power to younger colleagues may be a fair price to pay to keep doing research, Kirsch suggests. "In a way, it hurts your ego to lose power, but it's as it should be."

Jumping ship -- with a lifeline

Some places still enforce mandatory retirement policies, or at least apply



pressure. Sometimes the pressure is informal: Colleagues suggest that a senior professor hand over the reins to a particular course, Kirsch says, or they stop offering to collaborate on research projects. Other times the pressure comes from the national legal framework or from institutions' standard practices. Rajewsky was offered an opportunity to stay at Cologne and keep his lab space, but the offer was subject to short-term approvals by his colleagues. He refused.

Siegwart Lindenberg (CREDIT: Siegwart Lindenberg)



Jack Kirsch (CREDIT: Jack Kirsch)

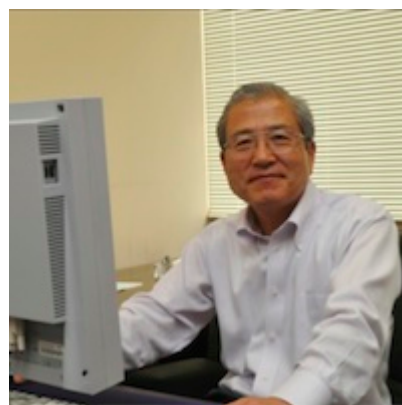
In such cases, the best options are elsewhere, at times within the same country. In Japan, most national universities force researchers to retire at 65, but there are some exceptions. At [Kyoto Prefectural University of Medicine](#), neurophysiologist Minoru Kimura faced mandatory retirement at 63. He left when he was 62 for [Tamagawa University](#) in Tokyo, which made him director of its [Brain Science Institute](#) and won't ask him to retire until he is 68. "Many active people are unhappy to stop working," Kimura says.

Making a successful move requires a lot of logistical planning. Kimura brought colleagues and laboratory equipment to Tamagawa. It helped that he was already collaborating with people there and that two of his postdocs were eager to follow because "it is not easy to find a different institute in the same field," he says. Things went so smoothly that "2

months was enough for me to restart in this institute." Now he is working at least as hard as he was before.

Some researchers who left home to avoid mandatory retirement are finding opportunities to come back. Regional governments are starting to reconsider rules and offer workarounds. Last year, one such change allowed Rajewsky, aged 74, to accept an offer to return. He insisted on one condition, which his new institution, the [Max Delbrück Center for Molecular Medicine in Berlin](#), granted: "I would not go back to a job which had a time limit."

The keys to finding, obtaining, and moving smoothly into post-retirement jobs, older researchers say, are strong connections with colleagues and a compelling track record. Bringing in your own funding can also help: Rajewsky will return to Germany with a 5-year, €2.5 million [Advanced Investigator Grant](#) from the [European Research Council](#). Outside offers also can remind your institution of your value, says Lindenberg, who obtained a concurrent part-time post at [Tilburg University](#) in the Netherlands. Still, he says, "a better strategy is to show that you're still very valuable to the university" by presenting a portfolio and a plan for how you'll contribute to your department.



Minoru Kimura (CREDIT: Tamagawa University/ Minoru Kimura)

Further information for senior researchers

The [Max Planck Institutes](#) in Germany support senior fellows and so do some individual [Helmholtz Centres](#). The German region of Niedersachsen also [supports](#) some senior researchers.

In the United Kingdom, the University of Cambridge has an [agreement](#) for retired researchers to hold grants.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development compiles [pension age data](#) by country

[Releasing the Potentials of Senior Scholars and Scientists: Emerging Productivity in a New ERA](#), co-edited by [Henk A. Becker](#), [Johannes J. F. Schroots](#)

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