

The Dual-Career Dilemma: Responding to the Challenge of Recruiting and Retaining Dual-Career Academic Couples

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As science and engineering departments seek to stay competitive by recruiting the most sought after talent in the Academy, the need to provide professional accommodations for spouses and partners becomes increasingly evident. This issue often arises in efforts to recruit women. Women scientists are more likely than men to be married to other scientists, and they are more likely to be married to older scientists. 62% of married women with science PhDs have husbands who also have science PhDs, while only 19 % of men with science PhDs have wives with science PhDs (Sonnert and Holton, 1995). Another study of over 600 physicists found that the relative age difference between respondents and their spouses to be 2.1 years, with the male being the older partner 85% of the time (McNeil and Sher, 1999). Not having a strategy for accommodating dual-career couples can affect a department's ability to recruit women. Moreover, ad-hoc accommodations can lead to resentment.

The prevalence of dual-career policies at universities has been widely documented (*see, e.g.*, Ferber and Loeb, 1997; Wolf-Wendel et al., 2003), but evidence of the impact of these policies has not been entirely conclusive. A survey of 360 universities found that policies seem to help, but success is not guaranteed: of those institutions with policies, 73% reported finding jobs for fewer than half of those they attempted to assist, compared to 88% of institutions without policies (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2000). A uniform policy is further complicated by three factors that are highly variable within universities: the seniority of the initial target of recruitment or retention, the needs of the spouse or partner, and the availability of department resources. Every case is different and every position is hand-crafted. A commitment of administrative resources can help, but a policy is only as effective as the people who implement it.

Finding professional or academic opportunities outside of the institution for spouses and partners can be a challenge in itself, but the risk of backlash is the greatest when the partner seeks placement within the same institution as the initial recruit. The Earth Institute ADVANCE program at Columbia has begun an informal study of accommodation practices at peer institutions. Initial anecdotal reports from administrators at five institutions have revealed two distinct models of the governance. At some institutions (including Columbia) it is up to the department chair to negotiate spousal accommodations with other chairs and / or with the administration. At other institutions (e.g., Stanford and Princeton) there is a designated faculty broker in the senior administration that takes responsibility for creating opportunities for accompanying partners. The latter model appears to be a more effective way of 1) distributing ownership of the situation across the institution, 2) expediting the process, and 3)

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ensuring that the accompanying partner or spouse actually feels wanted. After all, even the most lucrative offer can be permanently tainted by the appearance of reluctance or insincerity. The former model places the responsibility of finding spousal accommodations firmly on the shoulders of the department chair – a responsibility that can potentially lead to resentment. We have found that chairs often and understandably feel constrained in these situations because of a lack of expertise in the particular field of the spouse or partner. They might also feel that job-hunting for others is out of the scope of their duties as a department chair.

While we have not yet determined the best solution for Columbia, we are now asking different questions than we were before we began our study. Instead of trying to define a one-size-fits-all policy or funding formula, we are now seeking to define the ideal broker. Should this person be responsible for both internal (academic) and external (academic or professional) job accommodations? Clearly the broker must have credibility - perhaps as a former chair – and influence. Another critical component of this position is access to resources, whether they reside at the level of the Provost, Dean, or in a dedicated diversity-enhancing or dual-career hiring fund. By approaching dual-career hires on a case-by-case basis, a broker can utilize all of the options available for new job creation (see Table 1).

Finally, we are becoming increasingly aware that language matters. The type of rhetoric used during a recruitment or retention effort can have a direct impact on the outcome. Phrases such as “partner placement” and “trailing spouse” are inherently belittling and they imply reluctance. Wolf-Wendel et. al (2003) suggest the use of “initial” and “accompanying” instead of “leading” and “trailing.” We are learning that discussing the issue from a “job creation” framework can turn a problem to be solved into an asset to be worked with.

The market for talented, diverse faculty is highly competitive, particularly in science and engineering. Success in such a market depends on the ability of institutions to persuade candidates that they will thrive, both professionally and personally, but finding job accommodations for spouses and partners is a heavy burden for a single department chair. Designating a mediating actor seems to not only add legitimacy to the process, but also demonstrates a commitment on the part of the institution to the success of the hire. As we continue to study these challenges, we hope to further define the role of the faculty broker and the steps necessary to achieve accountable governance across the institution.

TABLE 1

Options for Accommodating Academic Spouses and Partners

Conditions	Policy	Pros	Cons
Partner seeking job in same or another dept.	Dual-career hiring fund - cost-share between depts & the administration -Dean or other central figure coordinates between depts. e.g. Purdue “Bridge” Program, Georgia Tech	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Multiple funding options: each dept can contribute or it can be solely funded by the administration - Central coordination can increase equity & decrease turnaround time (Norrell & Norrell 1996) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Requires buy-in & investment from the depts & the administration - Public good problem: some depts will benefit more than others - Risk of backlash from other members of the dept (this varies substantially by dept) - Requires complete buy-in from the receiving dept - Lab, equipment, & other start-up costs not included - Applicant pool of 1 - Risk of dept backlash
	Cost-share Lead dept pays 1/3, receiving dept pays 1/3, Provost pays 1/3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Only depts that benefit have to pay - Funding can be temporary - Financial incentive for receiving dept 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Requires buy-in from the Provost & receiving dept. - Lab, equipment, & other start-up costs not included - Applicant pool of 1
Both qualified for same position in same dept.	Job-sharing 1 single position, each partner receives ½ salary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lower cost – 2 for the price of 1 - Decision & funding only involves 1 dept 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If the couple splits, position could be subject to dispute - Some evidence indicates decreased productivity when academic spouses collaborate over the long-term (Creamer 1999) - Requires complete buy-in from receiving dept - Limited group of people actually meet these conditions - Half-time faculty often end up working as much as full-time
Partner will take temp appointment	Faculty fellowships Usually 1-year appointments 1-time stipend	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - More options: adjunct, post-doc, etc. - Less backlash & less costly - Allows time for fair evaluation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -No guarantee of permanent employment -Difficult for partner to transition later to a permanent position
Partner willing work unpaid	Courtesy appointment Status & service, but no pay or benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Partner could serve as a PI on funded research - No cost for receiving dept 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Partner assumes lesser status - Difficult for partner to transition later to a paid position
Partner just seeks local employment	Relocation assistance Job search assistance, access to job postings, interview assistance e.g. Purdue, Univ. of WI, UC Davis, Univ. of IL, OR State	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Services don’t have to be limited to dual-career couples - Centrally coordinated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Requires at least a part-time coordinator & collaboration with other local institutions & professional organizations (e.g. the NYAS) - Requires a central “clearinghouse” of job opportunities at the university, at other universities, & in the area

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