

An Overview of Dual-Career Assistance Programs at Four-Year Higher Learning Institutions

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Abstract

An obstacle to hiring faculty is the inability to offer a spouse or partner an appropriate faculty position or other employment. The development of clear dual-career faculty hiring policies can be a significant step forward in establishing a consistent approach to securing employment for spouses or partners of intended faculty hires. Dual-career programs at a variety of universities were analyzed to determine if any common features existed that could be adapted by a university seeking to implement such a program. This paper presents the results of that study, including recommendations for universities to consider as they develop dual-career hiring programs.

Keywords: Spousal-hire policy, dual-career hire policy, spousal hire program, dual-career program, faculty

1. Introduction

It is not at all unusual for dual-career faculty to seek to advance their careers by relocating to join another university. In such cases, universities with clearly articulated dual-career hiring programs, policies, and procedures can be highly competitive for attracting talented faculty who also require employment for their spouses or partners. However, a common obstacle in the hiring of a faculty member is the inability of a university to offer that faculty member's spouse or partner an appropriate faculty position or other form of employment. And yet the prevailing wisdom on many campuses continues to be that other universities are, in fact, able to do so – and are thereby more successful in hiring their first-choice faculty.

Of course, the issue of employment for dual-career couples is not new – Tryon and Tryon (1982) reviewed a number of employment issues specific to dual-career couples that were of primary concern at that time, including, "... career interruptions, household chores, childcare, and marital difficulties." They also offered suggestions for counseling dual-career couples as they jointly pursued employment opportunities with a single employer. In another early study, Schulz, et al (1997) conducted a survey, "... to determine the common attributes of successful dual career searches where both members of the dual-career team successfully found tenure-track positions in engineering." Based on the results of that survey, they were able to also, "... provide some guidelines to dual career couples seeking academic positions and to administrators and faculty seeking to work out hires involving dual career couples."

Some particular consequences of concern that stem from universities not being able to hire the partner or spouse of its first-choice faculty hire are the inability (whether real or only perceived) of those universities to prioritize hires that contribute to faculty diversity. Furthermore, without proper guidelines and policies to guide department chairs and deans, attempts at hiring the spouse or partner of an intended faculty hire can be ad hoc, without any consistency or guidance from a university's upper administration.

Additionally, Culpepper (2024) found that certain aspects of dual-career hiring processes and academic culture(s) can, "... undermine the legitimacy of members of dual-career academic couples, particularly those who are the second hires and who identify as women." Recognizing then, that we in the academy must do better to improve the professional experiences of these faculty members, in a subsequent study, Culpepper (2025) offered some suggestions on, "... how dual-career hiring policies and practices can be improved to better meet the goals of recruiting, retaining, and advancing a diverse and thriving faculty." Clearly then, the development of clear and detailed spousal / partner hiring policies and guidelines for their implementation can be significant steps forward in establishing a consistent approach to securing employment for the spouses and partners of intended faculty hires.

Wolf-Wendel, et al (2000) used survey research to determine what successful strategies, whether they be formal or informal, institutions have available to them to facilitate the recruitment and retention of dual-career couples, and to summarize the issues that typically face university administrators engaged in those activities. It is interesting to note the main finding of a recent study by Morton and Kmec (2018), who examined a specific aspect of risk-taking in the academic job search process, namely, "... how the timing of academics' decisions to reveal their status as a part of a dual-career couple affected their later work-related experiences." Their study showed that, "... couples who took the risk of revealing their dual-career status before a job offer [had] significantly more positive career experiences related to promotion and productivity than those who did not reveal their status during the job search."

In an effort to provide universities with some basic information regarding how other universities operate dual-career or spousal hiring programs, a study was conducted to analyze existing dual-career faculty hire programs and policies amongst a wide variety of universities and then determine whether or not there were any common traits or practices that could be adapted by a university seeking to implement such a program or policy. As this study evolved, the following aspects of dual-career hiring processes emerged as important points to keep in mind when developing new (or updating existing) policies and implementation guidelines:

- A university's dual-career policy should include strategic aspects that can be used to prioritize those dual-career hires that contribute to faculty diversity, e.g., it should be especially used when hiring a spouse or partner who will help in the hiring or retention of a faculty member from a historically underrepresented group;
- It is important to not penalize departments that take on a dual-career hire to help another department close the deal on hiring a faculty member (i.e., future faculty lines that such departments might otherwise have had should not be taken away); and,
- Funding sources and distributions should be clearly identified and should be consistently used so that individual departments or colleges are not financially penalized.

The significance of these issues and the critical need for them to be addressed in a new or updated policy and process has been noted in a number of "best practices" reports, including a recent one published in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (Perlmutter, 2022), in the report by the AAUP on equitable and effective dual-career hiring policies and strategies (AAUP, 2010), and the website of the American History Association (2017). Two recent studies of dual-career hiring practices, philosophies, policies, and procedures, one by Stanford University (Schiebinger, et al, 2008) and one by Cal State San Bernardino (Van Wart, et al, 2021), discuss these issues as well as other "best practices" approaches to developing and implementing robust dual-career hiring strategies, policies, and programs.

In the end, the potential impact of any new or expanded dual-career accommodation policy on faculty morale and well-being can be tremendous. With the implementation of such a policy, a university will be able to take a significant step forward in developing a much healthier work environment with a demonstrated commitment to improving the diversity of its faculty. And, as a whole, that university could become known as an equitable university that is particularly welcoming to women faculty, and that it is an environment where all faculty flourish and thrive.

2. Review of Existing Dual-Career Hiring Programs and Policies

An internet search was conducted to find as many university dual-career or spousal/partner hiring policies as possible within a reasonable timeframe. These policies were then reviewed to determine if there were any commonalities among them regarding implementation and funding. In the end, a total of 72 university dual-career or spousal/partner policies were reviewed for this purpose. The universities whose policies were reviewed for this study were a mix of rural and urban institutions; private and public; and ranged in size and mission from small liberal arts colleges to large and very large comprehensive state colleges and universities. A summary of the information gleaned from the review of the policies at these 72 universities can be found in Appendix A; detailed information for these policies and / or programs can be found online by searching the name of the university and either spousal or dual-career hiring program.

Of the 72 policies reviewed, 13 contained provisions whereby department chairs could request a waiver of the university's standard search processes; 19 policies included provisions for an expedited search process; and, 3 policies allowed for department chairs to either request a waiver or an expedited version of their universities' standard search processes. In total, then, approx. 50% of the policies reviewed contained provisions for either waiving or expediting standard search procedures.

Additionally, 36 of the 72 policies included information regarding job seeking assistance services provided by the university for the spouse or partner. The services provided ranged from simply providing website referrals to resume and cover letter writing assistance to dedicated offices and staff that worked side-by-side with spouses and partners

to find suitable employment opportunities. The availability of such services was noted in approx. 81% of the policies (i.e., 29 of them) that required a spouse or partner to go through the standard hiring process (i.e., those processes without a waiver or expediting option), while the remaining 19% of these 36 policies (i.e., 7 of them) provided job seeking assistance services in cases where process waivers or expediting could be requested.

Regarding the funding of an on-campus position for a spouse or partner, 15 of the 72 policies provided specific information regarding what would be the source(s) of those funds and for how long of a period of time such funding would be available. In just over 50% of the policies that provided funding information, the distribution of the source of the funding to support a spouse or partner hire was 1/3 from the Provost, 1/3 from the Dean of the primary faculty hire, and 1/3 from the department of the spouse or partner hire. The funding distributions in the remaining 7 policies were varied, ranging from 50% Provost support and 50% TBD, to funding sources being identified at a later time when funding was actually required. In terms of the duration of the availability of the initial funding, in nearly 3/4 of the policies that provided that information the duration was either 2 or 3 years, with a vast majority being 3 years. In the remaining 25% of the policies that provide this information, the duration of the funding was either no specified or something other 2 or 3 years. A summary of the funding plan details gathered from a review of these policies can be found in Appendix B.

Just under half of the 72 policies reviewed are fairly detailed regarding the process to be followed to facilitate the hiring of the spouse or partner of a newly-hired faculty member. These details include procedures to be followed, sources of funding, duration of initial funding, and in some few cases, fillable forms to be used to request a dual-career hire, a waiver of the standard hiring procedures, or an expedited search process to facilitate the dual-career spousal or partner hire. Examples of such fillable forms can be found on the following websites:

- University of Florida (<https://aa.ufl.edu/resources/dual-career-services/dual-career-academic-hire-procedures/>),
- University of Missouri – Kansas City (https://info.umkc.edu/hr/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Request-for-Waiver-of-Recruiting-Process_9-17-2019.pdf), and
- University of North Texas (https://vpaa.unt.edu/sites/default/files/documents/faculty_search_waiver.pdf).

The other half of the policies either provide only top-level hiring information, or just provide a listing of resources or services that the university can provide to spouses or partners seeking on- or off-campus employment.

Based on this review, the following recommendations can be made for the consideration of universities working to develop and implement either new or updated spousal / partner hire programs:

1. An important element of a university spousal / partner hiring program is a full-time staff member to support the various facets of that program. A dual-career program coordinator would also be available to meet with department chairs and deans to discuss the university's dual-career hiring process, options, resources, and services, as well as with the spouses or partners of either potential or new faculty hires. Wolf-Wendel, et al (2004) have previously noted that such an individual can be highly effective in securing employment for a spouse or partner. This person should report directly to the Provost (or similar position) to send a clear message regarding the significance of this activity.
2. In addition to developing and maintaining a comprehensive website describing the university's dual-career hiring processes, options, resources, and services, the activities of the dual-career program coordinator could also include working with external constituents as well as offices and organizations within the university. One such activity might include, for example, developing and maintaining relationships with HR personnel of companies within a 50-mile radius of the university for the purpose of keeping track of and posting information regarding the opportunities at those companies that could be of interest to potential spouses or partners seeking employment in the local areas (i.e. creating something analogous to a job board that would be accessible not only by potential university applicants or employees, but also by local and regional industry partners). Active participation in regional, collaborative employment efforts has been shown to have marked positive impact on the ability of universities to help spouses and partners of intended faculty hires to secure employment (see, e.g., McNerney, 2018). Additional information regarding how a dual-career program office can be created and suggestions for its operations and services is provided by Brust, et al (2018).
3. Information regarding what would be the source(s) of the funds for spouse / partner positions and for how long of a period of time such funding would be available should be identified and clearly specified. Common practices for these two items are as follows.

- The distribution of the source of the funding to support a partner hire is typically 1/3 from the Provost, 1/3 from the Dean of the primary faculty hire, and 1/3 from the Dean of the partner hire's department.
 - In the vast majority of the policies at other universities that provided information regarding the duration of partner funding availability, that duration was either 2 or 3 years, with a vast majority being 3 years.
4. The existence of fillable pdf forms, or links to online fillable forms, which are to be used to request a dual-career hire, a waiver of the standard hiring procedures, or an expedited search process to facilitate a partner hire should be well-publicized and made readily available to Deans and Department Chairs.

These findings and recommendations complement those of Monahan, et al (2024), who reviewed dual-career policies and procedures at a variety of R1 universities and found that sustained funding commitments and consistent infrastructural support are key to successful dual-career hiring programs. The recommendations from this study also echo those of Layne, et al (2005) based on their work developing guidelines for an enduring dual-career hire program at Virginia Tech, including the need for visibility of a university's dual-career program, a central office and personnel charged with coordinating dual-career programs and opportunities across campus, a sustainable funding source to support dual-career hires, and improved communications that use neutral language to communicate a positive and energized campus climate.

3. Intersectionality Aspects of Dual-Career Hiring Programs

As spousal / partner hiring policies are being updated or re-written to better facilitate dual-career faculty hires, it is important to be mindful of the intersectionality and effects of a number of intersecting marginalizing identities. These include, for example, ethnic origin, disability, immigration status, cultural traditions, and others. All of these overlapping identities shape the way faculty interact with each other on campus as well as wherever their professional activities take them. Blake (2022) confirmed that the concept of intersectionality can be used to glean additional insights on the factors that continue to inform the decisions of both primary and secondary hires when seeking employment as part of a dual-career couple.

For example, a Black woman might not have the same experiences as a Black man, even though they are both Black. Similarly, Asian women who are immigrants or here on visas will experience different barriers than Asian women who were born in the United States. In addition, a dual-career hiring program that strictly focuses on simply increasing the number of women faculty in STEM fields might not capture the full breadth and depth of the experiences encountered by, for example, Latinas and women with multiple marginalized identities (see, e.g., Mora, et al, 2018).

Additionally, Wolf-Wendel, et al (2000) found that, "... not only do men and women experience dual-career couple issues differently, the available literature also suggests that unmarried heterosexual couples and partners in same-sex relationship (see also, Miller and Skeen, 1997) as well as African American couples (see also, Perkins, 1997) may face different professional and personnel issues than do white, married heterosexuals."

It is, therefore, important that any policies or programs developed are equitable across intersecting marginalized identities, and do not inadvertently disadvantage members of multiply marginalized groups. The policies should include text that, at a minimum, encourages departments and their faculty to work with dual-career hires so that they are able to reach their full potential, even if they are initially engaged in temporary positions. To help reduce the feelings of isolation that could be experienced by dual-career faculty hires, it is also likely that policy changes and initiatives in other areas of a university will be necessary. These can include, for example (see again, Mora, et al, 2018):

- more clearly articulated options for the adjustment of the traditional "tenure-track clock";
- flexibility of instructional assignments and delivery modes;
- formalized mentoring tailored to particular faculty;
- prioritized access to family-friendly facilities on campus, including day care, pre-school, and after-school operations;
- reorganizing meeting schedules and social events to allow as broad participation as possible; and,
- re-educating tenure review committees to be mindful of such issues in their reviews.

4. Concluding Thoughts

A study was performed in which the dual-career, spousal, and partner hiring processes and policies at 70+ universities were reviewed to determine if there were any commonalities in their approaches to facilitate dual-career hires on their campuses. Based on this review, the following elements were identified as being necessary in the development of new or the improvement of existing dual-career hiring policy and programs:

- a standardized, consistent, and equitable model that will identify funding sources and funding duration of dual-career spousal or partner hires;
- a strategy or plan that prioritizes the hiring of faculty members or spouses/partners from under-represented groups, especially those with multiple under-representations, as a means of guiding campus decisions regarding dual-career spousal or partner hires as the need arises;
- a process with appropriate forms whereby department chairs can request a waiver of current standard faculty search procedures, or at least an expedited version of them;
- a full-time staff member to support the dual-career hiring programs of the university;
- a mindfulness of the intersectionality aspects associated with dual-career hiring initiatives when developing or updating dual-career policies and programs.

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APPENDIX A – Overview of Dual-Career Policy Features

Institution	Policy Has Detailed Process Info	Policy is Top-Level Few Details	Recruiting Waiver Can Be Sought	Expedited Process Can Be Requested	Waiver and Expediting Are Both Options	Follow Standard Process
Arizona State U		X	X			
Auburn U	X			X		
Boston U		X				X
Carnegie Mellon U		X				X
Columbia U		X				X
Cornell U		X				X
Drexel U		X				X
Duke U		X				X
East Carolina U	X					X
Florida State U		X				X
Georgia Tech	X			X		
Indiana U		X				X
Iowa State U		X		X		
Johns Hopkins U		X				X
Kansas State U		X				X
Lehigh U		X				X
Marquette U	X			X		
Michigan State U		X	X			
Michigan Technological U		X				X
Missouri State U	X				X	
North Dakota State U		X	X			
Northeastern U		X				X
Northern Arizona U	X			X		
Notre Dame U		X				X
Ohio U		X				X
OK State U	X					X
Oregon State U		X				X
Purdue U	X			X		
Southern Illinois U	X		X			
Syracuse U		X				X
Texas A&M - CC	X			X		
Texas A&M - Main		X				X
Texas Tech U	X			X		
U Akron	X			X		
U Alabama at Birmingham		X				X
U Buffalo	X				X	
U California System	X		X			

Institution	Policy Has Detailed Process Info	Policy is Top-Level PR Piece	Recruiting Waiver Can Be Sought	Expedited Process Can Be Requested	Waiver and Expediting Are Both Options	Follow Standard Process
U Chicago		X				X
U Cincinnati	X				X	
U Colorado - Boulder	X			X		
U Florida	X			X		
U Houston	X			X		
U Illinois - Chicago	X					X
U Illinois - UC	X			X		
U Iowa		X				X
U Kentucky		X				X
U Maryland	X					X
U Mass Amherst	X		X			
U Michigan		X				X
U Minnesota	X		X			
U Missouri / KC	X		X			
U Nebraska - Lincoln		X				X
U Nevada - Las Vegas		X				X
U New Hampshire	X			X		
U New Mexico		X	X			
U North Carolina - Chapel Hill	X		X			
U North Texas	X		X			
U Oregon		X				X
U South Carolina	X			X		
U Tennessee - Knoxville	X					X
U Texas at Austin	X			X		
U Virginia		X				X
U Washington	X		X			
U Wisconsin - LaCrosse	X			X		
U Wisconsin - Madison		X	X			
Utah State U		X		X		
Vanderbilt U	X					X
Virginia Tech U		X				X
Washington and Lee U		X				X
Washington State U	X			X		
West Virginia U		X				X
Williams College		X				X

APPENDIX B – Overview of Dual-Career Policy Funding Plans

Institution	Provost	Primary College	Partner College	Primary Dept	Partner Dept	Funding Period
Carnegie Mellon U	1/3	1/3	1/3	-----	-----	3 years
East Carolina U	1/3	1/3	1/3	-----	-----	n/a
Georgia Tech	Up to 1/2	-----	-----	Up to 1/2	Remainder	3 years
Iowa State U	TBD	TBD	-----	TBD	-----	n/a
Purdue U	1/3	1/3	1/3	-----	-----	Depends on rank
Texas Tech U	TBD	TBD	TBD	-----	-----	2 years
U Cincinnati	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD	2 years
U Florida	1/3	-----	-----	1/3	1/3	2 years
U Illinois - Chicago	1/3	-----	-----	1/3	1/3	3 years
U Illinois - UC	1/3	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD	3 years
U Maryland	1/3	-----	-----	1/3	1/3	3 years
U Mass Amherst	1/2	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD	3 years
U North Carolina-Chapel Hill	1/3	-----	-----	1/3	1/3	3 years
U Wisconsin - Madison	1/3	-----	-----	1/3	1/3	3 years
Washington State U	Split depends on duration of funding provided					2 or 3 yrs

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