

Rationale for a Dual-Career Program

Meeting the needs and expectations of dual-career academic couples— while still ensuring the high quality of university faculty—is the next great challenge facing universities.

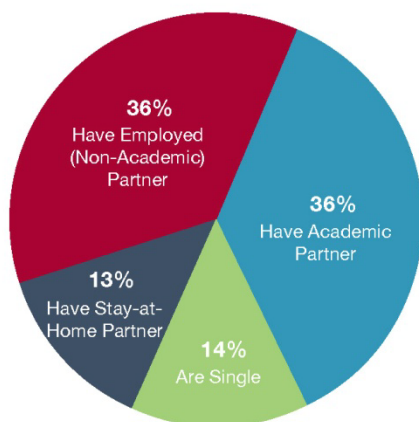
Academic couples comprise 36 per-cent of the American professoriate— representing a deep pool of talent (Figure 1). The proportion of academic couples (i.e., couples in which both partners are academics) at four-year institutions nationally has not changed since 1989.

An Increasing Rate of Dual-Career Hiring

What has changed is the rate at which universities are hiring couples. Academic couple hiring has increased from 3 percent in the 1970s to 13 percent since 2000. In a recent survey of Canadian science deans, couple hiring emerged as one of the thorniest issues confronting their faculties. Administrators in this study concur.

FIGURE 1: PARTNER STATUS OF U.S. ACADEMIC WORKFORCE

9,043 Full-Time Faculty from 13 Leading Research Universities



Seventy-two percent of full-time faculty in this study have employed partners. Thirty-six percent have academic partners.

All data derive from the Clayman Institute's Managing Academic Careers Survey unless otherwise noted. Percentages do not add to 100 due to rounding.

Dual-Career Programs

Dual-Career Hiring has been Difficult

One department chair commented that no other aspect of his job arouses as much controversy as dual-career hiring.

Despite the sizable number of academic couples in the workforce, little institutional and national data exist describing their career trajectories. Institutional approaches to couple hiring tend to be ad hoc, often shrouded in secrecy, and inconsistent across departments. Faculty tend to be unfamiliar with key issues and solutions, and many know little about their own university's policies and practices.

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But Change is Afoot

Universities across the country have begun devoting attention to dual-career issues. In recent years, a number of conferences and collaborative efforts have sprung up, and university hiring practices are evolving to keep pace. In the same way that U.S. universities restructured hiring practices in the 1960s and 1970s in response to increased access to higher education and the advent of equal opportunity legislation, institutions are again today undergoing major transitions in hiring practices with respect to couple hiring.

Ten percent of faculty respondents in this study are part of a couple hire, or “dual hire,” at their current institutions (this figure includes both recruitment hires and retentions). Ten percent is a small, but important, proportion of faculty hiring. Universities are in danger of losing some of their most prized candidates if suitable employment cannot be found for qualified partners.

In independent internal studies analyzing factors influencing failed faculty recruitment, two prominent U.S. research universities found that partner employment ranked high (number one or two) in lists that included salary, housing costs, and some 14 to 15 other factors. Similarly, a German study found that 72 percent of German scientists abroad cited “career opportunities for the partner” as a decisive factor for scientists contemplating a return home.

Three Key Reasons

Excellence. Our study suggests that couples more and more vote with their feet, leaving or not considering universities that do not support them. Support for dual careers opens another avenue by which universities can compete for the best and brightest. A professor of medicine in our survey commented that talented academics are often partnered, and “if you want the most talented, you find in-novative ways of going after them.”

Diversity. Over past decades, universities have worked hard to attract women and underrepresented minorities to faculty positions and, in many instances, are meeting with success. The new generation of academics is more diverse in terms of gender and ethnicity than ever before. With greater diversity comes the need for new hiring practices. Institutions should not expect new participants to assimilate into current practices built around old academic models and demographics. This undermines innovation, opportunity, and equity. New hiring practices are needed to support a diverse professoriate—and one of these practices is couple hiring.

Quality of Life. Faculty today are a new breed determined more than ever to strike a sustainable balance between working and private lives. Couple hiring is part of a deeper institutional restructuring around quality-of-life issues. To enhance competitive excellence, universities are increasingly supporting faculty needs, such as housing, child care, schools, and elder care, in addition to partner hiring. Attending to quality-of-life issues has the potential to contribute stability to the workplace. Faculty may be more productive and more loyal if universities are committed to their success as whole persons. While often costly up front, assisting faculty address the challenges of their personal lives may help universities secure their investments in the long run.

As a relatively new hiring practice, couple hiring is fraught with complexities and pitfalls. The reality is, however, that 21st century universities increasingly hire couples. One purpose of this report is to help institutions do a better job of partner hiring. To this end, we recommend that universities develop agreed-upon and written policies or guidelines for vetting requests for part-ner hiring and seeing that process through the university. The ultimate goal is not necessarily to hire more couples but rather to improve the processes by which partner hiring decisions are made.



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