

Dual Career Couples: Review and Recommendations

University Women's Professional Advancement

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A guiding principle of the commitment voiced by Southern 150 is to “...recruit, hire and retain faculty that are diverse in terms of gender racial/ethnic, national origin, sexual orientation, disability, cultural, socioeconomic and religious differences, with the goal of reflecting the diversity of the larger society” (Southern 150, addendum p. 2).

Introduction and description of problem

Couples in which both individuals seek faculty positions are becoming increasingly prominent. In an Association for Women in Science (AWIS) (1990) sample, 80% of faculty surveyed reported that they have a partner who is in a tenured or a tenure-track faculty position (Didion, 1996). Dual career couples face unique challenges, and these challenges frequently translate into university administrative problems. Employment opportunities for partners were an issue in almost 20% of faculty appointments and resignations (Burke, 1988). Furthermore, McNeil and Sher (1999) reported that 60% of a sample of 632 faculty scientists indicated that either they or their partners had to take a lower level or non-scientific position in their most recent job search in order to live and work within a reasonable geographical distance from their partners.

Dual career couple issues are most salient for women faculty. Women faculty are more likely to have academic partners (49%) than are men faculty (12%) (Didion, 1996). Also, women faculty are more likely to

leave an academic position (21%) than are men faculty (5%). Of those women who reported resigning from an academic position, 76% cited their partners' career as the main reason for their resignation. Partner employment, or lack thereof, was three times more likely to be the reason for women to resign than was maternity leave (McElrath, 1992).

Furthermore, women are more likely to experience negative career consequences as a result of leaving an academic position. McElrath (1992) reported that women in academia who experienced career disruption were less likely to receive tenure than were their men counterparts who had also experienced career disruption. Women faculty with career disruptions who eventually received tenure, took longer to achieve tenure than women with continuous careers, whereas career disruption did not impact the duration of time to tenure for men faculty. For these reasons, policies designed to facilitate the career paths of dual career couples would likely have greater impact on the recruitment and retention of women than of men.

SIU-C Current Stance on Dual Career Couple Issues

Although Southern 150 states that a primary aspiration is to recruit and retain high-quality faculty and advocates that we "...offer strong hiring packages to candidates that include...partner placement assistance so that we will be successful when competing for faculty with

peer institutions (Southern 150, p. 24), SIU currently does not have a formal policy regarding hiring dual career couples. If the issue arises, most departments handle the situation in an informal manner. In many cases, support is offered only if the job candidate requests such support. An informal approach offers the advantage of flexibility for both job candidates and the department; however, these informal policies are often ineffective because they carry little weight with the administration, depend upon the initiative and good-will of particular individuals, and are often applied inconsistently (Nerad & Aanerud, 2003). Given the increase in dual career couples vying for academic positions, more formal policies and procedures for hiring academic couples may prove beneficial. There are several advantages to adopting such policies: Highly qualified candidates, who otherwise may not consider a rural campus like SIU, may apply if their partner were offered a position; retention of newly hired faculty would improve if fewer faculty left due to partner career concerns; dual career couple issues and solutions more directly impact and benefit women. SIU would be proactive in increasing diversity on campus by attracting and retaining qualified women job applicants.

What Other Schools Are Doing

We have identified five primary ways with which other institutions accommodate dual career couples: (1) providing assistance in finding

employment; (2) giving priority to partners who wish to apply for open faculty positions in the same or different departments; (3) creating soft money, research or adjunct positions; (4) offering shared positions within the same department and (5) offering split positions within the same department.

Job assistance programs are either formal or informal. Formal programs provide candidates with available job information as well as opportunities for enhancing skills related to the job search. At a more informal level, some institutions assist with networking and encourage partners to apply for vacant faculty positions. Most departments and some offices at SIU regularly provide such informal assistance. However, more formal programs would probably not be feasible for a rural institution, like SIU. In this rural community, there are few academic positions outside of SIU and few non-academic jobs for doctoral level persons. Furthermore, current budget constraints preclude the additional staff required to implement such a program.

Some institutions require that the department housing the partner's discipline give priority to the partner for available faculty positions. There are several disadvantages to this approach: faculty colleagues in the partner's department may resent their loss of autonomy in selecting new faculty; and the partner may feel "second-rate" and unwanted since he or she was not selected in the usual competitive fashion. A variation of

this approach is for the partner's department to create a new faculty position specifically for the partner. This type of position is usually funded by the primary candidate's department, the partner's department and the central administration with each unit taking responsibility for one-third of the cost of the partner's position. Creating a new position, however, requires resources that are currently not available at SIU-C. And, this model does not eliminate the problems discussed above. Furthermore, allowing departments the autonomy to select faculty in their standard competitive fashion enhances our ability to "recruit and retain high quality faculty" (Southern 150, p. 23).

Another option utilized by institutions is to create soft money, research or adjunct positions to accommodate the faculty partner. These positions are considered temporary placements until the partner can find full-time employment. Again, these options are more reactive, than proactive, and may not be readily available in all circumstances. Soft money is variable and availability is limited. Adjunct positions are often low-paying or non-paying positions and receive little departmental support; therefore, these positions may not promote retention of either the new faculty hire or his or her partner. Research positions depend on available grant money and again would only offer a temporary solution. Some authors have suggested offering faculty partners a research fellow position which would provide institutional affiliation and the opportunity to

seek external research funding (Gee, 1991). Such a position would allow opportunities for career development; however, the money for such positions are often reserved for graduate and postdoctoral students and are often viewed as “second-class” to faculty positions. Although these options can provide a temporary solution to the dual career couple issue, dissatisfaction, in the long term, with these positions seems likely. Nevertheless, they are useful on an ad hoc basis and are currently utilized when possible at SIU.

The last two options are limited because they apply only to situations in which both partners are in the same discipline. In a shared position, the partners share a full-time position. They are treated as a single entity; advancement and promotion are considered jointly, rather than individually. The primary disadvantage to the shared position is that each partner is not evaluated on his or her own merits. Instead, the couple is evaluated as a unit and either both receive tenure or neither does. This arrangement is inconsistent with both the underlying philosophy of academia and the nature of today's partner relationships. Shared positions have the potential, therefore, to breed dissatisfaction for both partners as well as for colleagues. Split positions, however, offer a viable alternative.

The split position offers an independent .5 FTE, nine month, tenure track position in which each person has a separate contract. Each

person commits to doing half of the usual teaching, research and service duties required in the position. Each is eligible for separate benefits and is evaluated individually for raises, promotion and tenure. This approach offers numerous advantages to both the faculty couple and to the university. For the university, split positions may attract more women applicants since they are more likely, than are men, to be directly impacted by dual career couple issues, as suggested above. Second, the university gets "two for the price of one". The department acquires two highly qualified candidates who typically put in more than the requirements of a half time position. Each partner brings his or her own specialities, interests and experiences to the department, thus increasing academic diversity. Furthermore, the university may benefit from increased research grants and patents.

For the couple, a split position would afford each partner the opportunity to work part-time and still remain in the mainstream of academia. This arrangement would have benefits for couples with small children, as well as for couples who wish to pursue outside interests. The primary concern for couples with a split position is a financial one. Typically, couples who have been in split positions have supplemented their incomes through extra teaching opportunities and through research grants (Lubchenko & Menge, 1993)

Recommendations

Adopting a formal dual career couple policy would be advantageous for SIU. Since the campus is located in a rural area where there are few job opportunities, a dual career couple policy would increase the likelihood of attracting and retaining talented faculty. Furthermore, such a policy would increase diversity within departments by attracting and retaining more women faculty. Of the options described, the “split position for dual career couples” offers the most advantages without creating undue hardship for the university. The autonomy of departments would not be threatened, and the new faculty would not feel or be perceived as “second-rate”.

In order to adopt such a policy, it is vital to be proactive in developing and implementing the plan. The expectations, requirements, and benefits must be explicitly outlined. The following are recommendations based on a review of the existing literature on split positions:

- Definition of partner: This is self-defined. If two individuals describe themselves as “partnered,” they may apply for a split position. Since the underlying purpose of this policy is recruitment, it is important that the university is respectful of the applicant’s personal definition.

- Advertising: The following is an example of the information to be included in a description of a job that is available as a split position:
“This position is available as a ‘split position’ for dual career partners. If applying for the split position, both partners must apply and interview. Neither partner will be considered the ‘primary’ candidate. Each will be considered on the basis of her/his own merits and qualifications. If a couple applies for the split position, neither applicant can apply for the position as a primary candidate.”
- Job Duties: Each partner is responsible for half of the teaching, research and service responsibilities of the full-time position. If one or both partners later prefers a full-time position within the department, he or she is given priority over external candidates.
- Raises/Promotion/Tenure: Each partner is evaluated independently for raises, promotion and tenure. Each partner is evaluated within the same time frames as full-time faculty; however, they are expected to meet only half of the standard requirements for teaching, research and service.
- Resignation/Leave of absences: If one partner leaves the position, the other partner will be given priority to assume full-time duties but will not be obligated to assume the position full-time. If one partner

takes an extended leave of absence, the working partner is not expected to assume the duties of the absent partner.

- **Benefits:** The university will provide both partners with the basic benefit package. Current SIU-C policy on health care provides full benefits to individuals working at least half-time. However, the further one deviates from full-time, the greater the monthly premium the individual must pay for the health insurance. It is recommended that the University pay the difference between the full-time and half-time monthly premium. In this way, individuals on a split-position appointment would enjoy the same health care benefits for the same price as full-time employees. Concerning retirement benefits, contributions are based on salary so no special arrangement is required; each partner accumulates “years of service” at half the rate as full-time faculty.
- **Sabbatical:** Faculty in a split position may apply for sabbatical after six years of half-time service. During sabbatical, the faculty member receives his or her regular, half-time salary for one semester

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