



Strategic Intervention Brief #10

Support for Dual-Career Couples

Meeting the needs of dual-career couples is critical to recruiting and retaining highly qualified women faculty in STEM and other fields. Institutions with ADVANCE IT projects in Round 1 and 2 were keenly aware of this issue; nearly all (80%) of these projects addressed dual-career hires in some capacity.

Rationale

Over 70% of academics have partners who also work, and of these, about half have academic partners (Astin & Milem, 1997; Schiebinger, Davies Henderson & Gilmartin, 2008). Moreover, women are more likely than men to have academic partners. These women report that job opportunities for their partner or spouse are important to their own career choices, and they will actively refuse job offers if their partner cannot find satisfactory employment (Schiebinger, Davies Henderson & Gilmartin, 2008). Therefore, to attract and retain excellent women in STEM fields, universities felt it important to address the needs of dual-career couples.

Purpose

Dual-career initiatives sought to positively influence the decision of a preferred candidate to accept a faculty position and to attract both members of a talented couple to enrich the community. Successful placement of a partner may increase faculty job satisfaction of new hires and thus to help retain them at the institution. Finally, making job applicants aware of possibilities for dual-career hiring during the recruiting process was felt to signal an institution's family friendliness and to attract applications from talented people for whom the availability of opportunities for both partners was a strong consideration. By broadening the pool of talented applicants for faculty positions, and by making the institution and broader community an attractive place for professional couples to work and live, dual-career initiatives were viewed as enhancing universities' ability to hire and retain an excellent faculty.

Audience

While ADVANCE projects targeted their efforts toward attracting STEM women, policies were generally written to apply to both men and women and to include same-sex partners where this was not otherwise legally prohibited. Institutions most commonly targeted hiring of early-career faculty into tenure-track positions; however, in some cases, they used the same approaches to hire a senior woman or to retain a current faculty member. A few institutions used their dual-career policies or practices to recruit or retain senior-level administrators or non-tenure track faculty.

Institutions in rural locations reported partner hiring to be a more salient issue than institutions in urban areas with more varied employers—a “fundamental fact of faculty hiring,” as one interviewee put it.

Models

Three major types of interventions were identified from the data. Some projects worked to develop and implement an institutional policy on dual-career hiring where this did not exist, or to strengthen and/or publicize an existing policy. Formal policies were the approach chosen to address the hiring of two

academics, due to the substantial financial and institutional commitment that this represents and the lengthy formal hiring process for academic faculty. Such policies typically stated the institution's willingness to pursue dual-career hires while asserting units' autonomy in making hiring decisions. Practical details defined processes for proposing and pursuing a dual-career hire, specified language for advertising and roles in the recruiting process, and spelled out funding mechanisms and commitments.

Another approach was to provide partners with assistance in finding positions on campus or in the community, by working to develop and formalize linkages with potential employers. Tactics might include working through the human resources office to connect partners to non-academic campus jobs, building connections with other academic institutions and employers in the community or region, or providing the partner with access to the services of an outside firm specializing in placement and relocation.

Finally, many ADVANCE leaders provided informal assistance to job candidates during the recruitment process. Most often, this meant participating in on-campus interviews as a neutral party who was well connected but external to the hiring committee. The ADVANCE contact could confidentially ask candidates if they wished to share their family situation and needs, then provide information and make personal connections to assist with partner placement or to initiate a dual-career hiring effort. In some cases, this role was formalized as "point person" for dual-career assistance. This approach could operate in combination with either or both of the previous interventions, and it was sometimes used as an initial means to identify dual-career needs and opportunities while more formal processes and relationships were being developed.

1. Strengthening policy

Some institutions that had a dual-career hiring policy in place reviewed and re-evaluated their policy. In some cases, this review revealed that, while strong policies existed, chairs and faculty did not know of them or were reluctant to use them. These projects worked to ensure that policies were refined, expanded, or simply implemented more fully, taking steps such as

- updating language, procedures, or protocols to make the policy more clear, easier to use, and more effective because better aligned with what works in practice;
- identifying funds that could be used to enable a dual-career hire; and
- disseminating the policy to deans, heads or chairs, and faculty through workshops, guidebooks, brochures, meetings, websites, or presentations to change understanding of, and perceptions and attitudes about, the policy.

Those institutions that created a new dual-career policy typically took the following steps; they

- engaged stakeholders to study issues, assess needs, build buy-in, and investigate options, such as examining policies at comparable institutions;
- drafted a policy; and
- followed local governance procedures to propose and implement the new policy.

The resulting policies might identify

- mechanisms for inquiring about a candidate's dual-career needs and interest without introducing inappropriate information into the search;
- processes for opening partner hire negotiations with other departments;
- procedures for waiving a search or expediting an application;
- bridge funding to support a second hire;
- incentives for departments to consider a partner hire; and

- pathways for converting a partner from an initial soft-money or non-tenure-track position to a tenure-track position.

The most common cost-sharing arrangement reported was division by thirds, with a third of the salary for the second position covered by the hiring department, a third covered by the partner's department, and a third covered by the dean or provost. Typically, this arrangement lasted 2 or 3 years, giving the hiring department time to reallocate funds to cover the salary for the long term.

2. Building institutional linkages

Several institutions offered assistance to spouses or partners for job placement, connecting individuals to institutionally maintained networks. Respondents described engaging support from the university human resources office, drawing upon alumni networks, participating in the Chamber of Commerce and other civic networks, and contracting with a local firm to assist with placement. At *Utah State University*, partners seeking university staff positions were referred to appropriate units within the university and given priority when positions became available. Several institutions were already members of their regional HERC, or Higher Education Recruitment Consortium, and made a practice of referring candidates to this resource.

3. Offering case-by-case informal assistance

Making personal contact with faculty candidates during their campus visit was an approach that could be implemented right away, in parallel with other, more formal, policy or networking efforts. ADVANCE team members not on the search committee could meet with the candidate to find out whether dual-career issues would affect a candidate's interest in taking the position if offered, to answer questions, and to serve as a resource for any other work/life issues. The institution could often be more proactive if knowledge was obtained earlier about the influence of a dual-career situation on a candidate's response to a potential offer.

Examples

Review of policies at the *University of Washington (UW)* showed that the university had many policies in place that provided flexibility for faculty, including dual-career hiring and others, but department chairs and faculty were either reluctant to use these policies or did not know that they existed. UW-ADVANCE thus focused on changing the attitudes, knowledge, and perspective of faculty and department chairs, by reviewing policies at their quarterly leadership workshops and focusing one workshop session on dual-career hiring as a featured topic. UW-ADVANCE also proactively highlighted these institutional policies when meeting with female faculty candidates. Here, the role of ADVANCE was to increase understanding of the needs for and rationale behind these policies within their institution.

The ADVANCE program at the *University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB)* partnered with UAB's human resources department to assist spouses and partners interested in university employment. An external consulting group was contracted to assist with job searches and relocation for partners and spouses of faculty and senior administrators interested in employment outside the university. UAB planned to continue working with the external firm beyond the life of the grant.

New Mexico State University worked to establish a regional hiring consortium with other academic and technical institutions within commuting distance.

At the *University of Montana*, PACE team members were instrumental in developing a new policy, working through a presidential task force. They first gathered qualitative data to identify issues for recruitment and retention of faculty in their rural and geographically isolated setting, then brought these issues to the attention of university leadership. The task force examined a suite of issues related to work/life flexibility, developed policies where these were needed, and moved them through the university policy approval process. PACE also helped to build a new website to share information about the new policies and other work/life resources.

Evaluation

Projects commonly reported the number of successful hires in which assistance had been provided or policies applied. Comparison of such data to periods prior to the ADVANCE grant may show how awareness and use of the policy have changed. For example, *Virginia Tech* revised its dual-career policy and reported 39 recruitment and 18 retention cases over the life of its ADVANCE grant. The *University of Texas El Paso* created a policy and also worked on a case-by-case basis; they reported assisting 12 dual-career couples, including helping to hire four men of color. *New Mexico State University* reported assisting five dual-career couples on a case-by-case basis; and *Case Western* successfully assisted 13 recruitment and retention cases after adoption of a formal dual-career policy. These data show that the magnitude of impact may depend on the approach used, but certainly depends on the size of the faculty and availability of new positions in any measurement period.

Affordances and Limitations

Dual-career activities were most often emphasized by institutions in rural or isolated locations, where alternate employment for spouses was not readily available in the community. Institutions in larger cities or near to urban centers with multiple academic institutions and other employers found dual-career issues less of a barrier in their ability to hire STEM women faculty.

As several interviewees noted, it is important not only to have a policy and inform faculty about it, but to address stigma associated with the hiring of a partner. This includes avoiding language that labels one person as a primary hire and one as a “trailing” spouse. One ADVANCE project made a point to publicize to chairs the success of both partners in the institution’s initial dual-career hires, showing how this approach could be very positive for a department. Members of dual-career couples also noted ways in which they helped to dispel stereotypes—for example, pointing out examples to highlight that partners did not “vote as a bloc.”

Policy interventions—especially where a new policy was developed or an existing policy significantly revised—were seen as slow and time-consuming, but also as having staying power. In some cases, newly drafted documents did not rise to the level of formal policy because administrators were concerned about permanently committing to support of dual-career hires—but, nonetheless, the drafts were circulated to department chairs, recommended as institutional practice, and put into action. This approach provided fiscal flexibility but also risked inequity, especially some years after the initial policy draft was circulated, when experienced chairs were aware of this informal practice and newer chairs were not. This highlights the need for ongoing dissemination of policies and practices around dual-career hiring.

In addition to helping to attract and retain strong faculty candidates, a number of interviewees noted positive side effects of their dual-career program:

- It sets a supportive tone and demonstrates institutional commitment to supporting faculty work/life. Newly hired faculty reported that even failed efforts to place a partner created good will and a sense that the institution cared about their success and happiness.
- It helps to diminish inequity in standardizing the path by which partners may be accommodated.
- Use of the policy over time helps to diminish stigma, as multiple examples on campus dispel negative beliefs about hiring couples.

We do not have an evidence base by which to compare the effectiveness of the strategies noted above, but several advantages and limitations were noted in interviews:

- A policy enabling dual-career hires and expressing institutional support was seen as a necessary baseline in order to remain competitive with other institutions. Policies are sustainable changes.

- Assisting with placement by working through the networks of a designated liaison is low in cost and could be powerful, but relied on that individual's personal and professional connections, continued interest and ability to maintain contacts, and willingness to participate in multiple searches in this capacity. While initially this approach may demonstrate the merit of providing case-by-case support, this was sustained long-term only when it was designated as a work role in an appropriate office (typically human resources or provost). Campuses varied substantially as to whether placement assistance was seen as within the purview and capacities of the human resources office.
- Hiring an external agency can provide needed expertise and does not add to the work load of campus offices. However, such a firm may not be locally available and the cost must be sustained beyond program funding.
- The idea of a regional network to support couples in finding positions at institutions within a reasonable commute is appealing, but we did not see examples of success in establishing *new* regional consortia among the first 19 institutions. This suggests that building these relationships is time-consuming and—since it may not be immediately productive—less prioritized by busy ADVANCE personnel.

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