The Two-Body Problem

Can a couple find two jobs at the same institution? For many job candidates, married or unmarried, this is a pressing problem. About 40 percent of academics are married to other academics, and many others have partners with Ph.D.s. Overall, women are more likely than men to have academic partners.

A growing number of institutions (perhaps half) have formal policies regarding couples, and a majority of these policies apply to unmarried as well as married partners. Many other institutions consider ad hoc arrangements on a case-by-case basis.

Only rarely, especially at the junior level, do these policies involve a second tenure-track line. Much more common is career assistance, or offering an administrative position or a short-term adjunct or visiting post. A few will consider joint, split, or shared positions.

In those rare cases where institutions do create a second tenure-track position, the cost is typically divided equally among the Provost or Dean’s office and the departments of the partners.

A college or university’s size and location are the critical factors influencing an institution’s response to academic couples, with research universities, especially those outside of metropolitan areas, the most willing to make accommodations.

For many institutions, the issues surrounding the hiring of couples are complicated. By hiring partners, an institution might attract more qualified candidates, diversify its faculty, broaden its curriculum, and retain valued faculty. But partner hirings also raise issues of fairness—whether these discriminate against other potential job candidates—as well as issues involving departmental autonomy in setting priorities or selecting colleagues. Many departments worry that a partner hire will foreclose the opportunity to make a future appointment.

When Should You Inform the Institution?

Most couples wait until one partner has been verbally offered a job. Many fear that if they inform a department earlier, their application will be dismissed out of hand. Of course, the downside of this approach is that it leaves less time for an institution to devise an acceptable solution.
One exception involves small colleges, when couples are willing to share a single job. In this case, an institution might very well regard this as an opportunity to hire two scholars for the price of one.

Another exception involves exceptionally strong candidates, especially those who are applying to a geographically-isolated institution. These candidates sometimes inform the search committee early in the process, typically at the interview.

**What Should You Say?**

Before you say anything, see if the institution has a formal partner policy. This will give you a sense of what is possible.

Also, figure out what you and your partner are willing to accept. If your willingness to accept a job offer depends on a particular accommodation, say so.

Typically, candidates ask for a department’s help in finding something for the partner, whether this is a replacement position, an adjunct job, or an administrative slot.

**What Might You Expect?**

You aren’t the first candidate to ask for some kind of accommodation. Institutions are accustomed to such requests. Few institutions these days regard this as “bait and switch.”

But it helps to be proactive. When you speak to the department chair, ask how you can find out whether adjunct, replacement, or visiting positions or administrative jobs are available. Consider having the partner visit the institution to speak to the relevant department heads in person.

Securing two tenure-track positions rarely happens overnight. Sometimes, the process can take as long as five years. One not uncommon scenario is for the partner in a tenure-track position to become a valuable and productive colleague, who the institution wants to retain, while the other partner proves to be a perfect fit. Hopefully, your patience and hard work will pay off.

**Sources:**

Dual Career Couples: What Universities Need to Know

Dual Academic Career Job Search Engine
[www.insidehighered.com/career/seekers](http://www.insidehighered.com/career/seekers)

Dual Science Career Couples Page
[www.physics.wm.edu/dualcareer.html](http://www.physics.wm.edu/dualcareer.html)

Two-Body Problem Articles
www.phds.org/jobs/the-two-body-problem/
