

# **Developing and Implementing Guidelines for Dual Career Hires**

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## **Abstract**

Like many land grant institutions, Virginia Tech is located in a part of the state with limited employment options. In order to attract and retain an outstanding faculty, Virginia Tech must increasingly address issues related to the employment of faculty spouses and partners. These issues are particularly important for women faculty, since women are more likely to be married to other professionals, especially academics, than their male colleagues. As part of Virginia Tech's NSF ADVANCE Institutional Transformation grant focused on increasing the participation and success of women in academic science and engineering careers, a committee of faculty and administrators collected information on services provided to dual career couples at other institutions, reviewed Virginia Tech's existing practices, and drafted guidelines for dual career hires. In addition, the Advance project's assessment team interviewed 20 Virginia Tech faculty members who were identified as dual career hires about their experiences with the hiring process, satisfaction with their current positions, and the receptivity of their colleagues to dual career hires. The study is currently being expanded to include faculty at three other ADVANCE institutions. This paper will describe the development of guidelines for dual career hires at Virginia Tech and lessons learned from the experiences of dual career couples.

## **Introduction**

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, founded in 1872 and popularly known as Virginia Tech, is Virginia's largest university with almost 26,000 students on the Blacksburg campus and is one of the top 50 research institutions in the nation. A land grant institution located in Blacksburg, Virginia, Virginia Tech encompasses eight colleges and a graduate school, and offers 60 bachelor's degree programs and 110 master's and doctoral degree programs. The College of Engineering is made up of a dozen departments with some 300 faculty, 5,700 undergraduate majors, and 1,600 graduate students. *U.S. News & World Report* ranks the undergraduate program 10th among engineering schools at public universities and 19th in the nation among all accredited engineering schools that offer doctorate programs.

Blacksburg has a population of approximately 39,700 citizens on just over 12,000 acres of land bordering the Washington-Jefferson National Forest. The town is located in the Appalachian mountains of rural southwest Virginia, 42 miles southwest of Roanoke VA and 270 southwest of Washington DC. Montgomery County (including the town of Blacksburg) boasts a population 83,629. Virginia Tech is the town's largest employer with more than 10 times the employees of the next largest employer.

According to the National Science Foundation [1], 84.4% of employed female PhDs in science and engineering who are married have husbands who work full time, while only 45.9% of employed male PhDs in science and engineering who are married have wives who work full time. For those individuals whose spouse is employed, 50.2% of female PhD scientists and engineers have spouses who are also scientists or engineers (71.2% if social sciences are included in addition to natural sciences and engineering), while only 31.1% (53.3% if social sciences are included) of male PhD scientists and engineers report spouses who are also scientists or engineers. Astin and Milem [2] estimate that of married faculty, 35% of men and 40% of women have a spouse who is also employed in higher education, and for women the rates are higher in technical fields (45.2%) than in non-technical fields (28%).

Wolf-Wendel et al. [3] reviewed the existing literature on dual career academic couples in 2000 and noted that no national studies of policies and practices towards dual career couples in academia existed at that time. To remedy that gap, they surveyed members of the American Association of Colleges and Universities to assess the range of approaches employed by academic institutions towards dual career couples. They found that the vast majority of schools indicated a willingness to assist faculty members in finding employment for their spouse or partner, but only about one quarter of the institutions that responded to their survey actually had a written policy or procedure. Research universities were more likely than other types of institutions to have a formal policy. The institutions surveyed offered a range of assistance for dual career couples, from providing contacts outside the institution to creating shared, part-time, or full-time positions. Location of the institution and availability of local employment alternatives impacted how important the institution viewed accommodations for spouses and partners of faculty members. The reason that colleges and universities gave for having dual career policies was in order to recruit and retain the best faculty.

The goal of the National Science Foundation's ADVANCE program is to increase the participation of women in the scientific and engineering workforce through the increased representation and advancement of women in academic science and engineering careers. To that end, the ADVANCE program provides grants for both individuals and organizations: Fellows Awards, Leadership Awards, and Institutional Transformation Awards. With each of the three types of ADVANCE awards, NSF seeks to support new approaches to improving the climate for women in U.S. academic institutions and to facilitate women's advancement to the highest ranks of academic leadership. Virginia Tech is one of 19 recipients of a \$3.5 million, five year ADVANCE Institutional Transformation grant. Areas of emphasis for Virginia Tech's Advance program include preparing graduate students for faculty careers, providing support to search committees to identify highly qualified female faculty candidates, developing women faculty into leadership roles in the university, and ensuring that university policies and procedures create an environment in which all faculty members can achieve their career goals.

### **Development of guidelines for dual career hires at Virginia Tech**

One of the areas of focus for Virginia Tech's Advance program is university policies. A work group of faculty and administrators was established in late 2003 to review existing policies and their implementation and recommend changes to existing policies or development of new policies. The work group includes faculty from the colleges of engineering, science, natural

resources, agriculture, and veterinary medicine, as well as two department heads, the dean of the graduate school, the associate vice-president for research, the associate provost for academic administration, and the vice-president of the faculty senate. Based on discussions among work group members and at a university-wide workshop sponsored by Advance in January 2004, the work group chose as its first project to develop written guidelines for dual career hiring at Virginia Tech.

Like many land grant universities located in a rural setting that offers limited employment opportunities outside the university, Virginia Tech had been working to accommodate faculty spouses and partners on an informal basis but did not have a formal policy or procedure in place. In order to attract and retain an outstanding faculty and achieve its goal of becoming a top 30 research institution, Virginia Tech recognized a need to take a more coordinated approach to dual career hiring. The first step in developing the guidelines was to collect information from other institutions. Work group staff searched the web sites of top 30 research institutions and additional universities identified as peers by the State Council of Higher Education in Virginia for information on programs to assist dual career couples. An initial search identified fifteen of the top 30 and an additional six peer institutions that posted information on their web sites regarding employment assistance for dual career couples. Follow-up phone calls were made to selected universities. Ultimately, information on services for dual career couples was collected from 24 schools. The support provided ranged from general relocation information, job search support, counseling, referrals, and networking, to specific procedures for spouses or partners seeking academic positions, including waivers of search requirements and transitional funding from the college or university for temporary positions.

The associate provost for academic administration and the vice-president of the faculty senate worked together to prepare an initial draft of the guidelines that was then reviewed and revised by the work group. Input was sought from department heads and deans in the various colleges and the university provost as the guidelines went through multiple iterations over the course of a semester. Wording of the document received considerable attention in order to eliminate negative terminology such as “trailing spouse”, to allow appropriate flexibility, and to emphasize that all action must be in the best interest of the university as a whole. The ultimate product represents a consensus approach that identifies responsibilities for communication between and among the hiring department, the candidate, other departments, and university administration.

The final guidelines highlight the university’s willingness to respond to the needs of dual career couples within available resources and consistent with the university’s mission and goals. The guidelines present a variety of options, depending on the individual’s qualifications and desires, ranging from referral to other employers in the region and review of existing university vacancies to creation of a temporary or permanent university appointment. In cases where a position is created, emphasis is on appropriate fit with the needs of the receiving department in the interest of the long-term success of the arrangement. Approval from the provost and president is required in order to waive standard search procedures. Financial support from the provost is available in some cases when overall benefit to the university can be demonstrated.

Policies, procedures, and guidelines are only as useful as their implementation. In order to make sure that department heads are aware of the guidelines for dual career hires, the associate provost

for academic administration and the chair of the Advance Policy Work Group met with department heads in the various colleges during one of their regularly scheduled meetings to distribute the guidelines, answer questions, and discuss their implementation. The guidelines have also been posted on the provost's web site (see Appendix), and a brochure describing resources for dual career couples is in development. The question of when during the hiring process to raise the issue of employment for a spouse or partner is always a difficult one, and Virginia Tech is attempting to address the issue by making information on resources for dual career couples available to all faculty candidates through links on the appropriate university web pages as well as written materials.

### **Faculty perceptions of dual career hires**

Efforts to find positions for faculty spouses or partners can all be for naught if the individuals involved are not able to establish themselves and develop successful academic careers. In order to explore the impacts of dual career hiring practices, the Advance program at Virginia Tech conducted a pilot study of individuals involved in dual career appointments. Twenty individuals, 10 women and 10 men, from several science and engineering departments were interviewed for the study. Participants were asked to describe (a) their experience with dual-career hiring and how the process unfolded; (b) their own and their spouses' satisfaction with the process and the positions negotiated; (c) their experiences at other institutions, if they interviewed elsewhere, (d) the attitudes of their co-workers toward spousal hires; and (e) the relationship between their own research productivity and their spouses employment. Participants were also asked if they had any recommendations about how the university could improve the process of hiring dual-career couples and if they would consider leaving the university to improve the employment opportunities for their spouse. The study is currently being expanded to other institutions that are recipients of Advance Institutional Transformation awards. This paper focuses on the perceived attitudes of co-workers toward spousal hires.

In most cases, one spouse or partner initiates the hiring process and at a later point the subject of a position for the second spouse or partner arises. Four of 10 second hires in this study obtained tenure-track positions and six were hired in other part- and full-time positions, most with concentrated teaching responsibilities. Titles for the off-track positions include instructor, visiting professor, research associate, and adjunct faculty. The most creative arrangements seemed to apply to second hires who, in a less rural location, would normally seek employment outside of the university. Second hires as a group in this study are under-employed. Most sought a position that was intellectually challenging without necessarily aspiring to a tenure-track position. The single policy that frustrated second hires in non-tenure track positions the most was their inability to serve as a principal investigator on funded research if they were hired into a non-tenure track position.

The receptivity of co-workers to spousal hires varied substantially by department. Of the 20 individuals interviewed, six felt that their coworkers were supportive of spousal hires, three reported a combination of positive and negative feedback, and 11 reported somewhat unsupportive or unsupportive feedback from colleagues. Those with a position in a department with little or no prior experience with couples were much more likely to characterize their experience as negative than those entering departments with prior positive experiences.

Responses to questions about departmental climate with regard to dual career hires varied dramatically by department, point in time hired, the department's experience with previous spousal hires, the process used to accomplish the hires, and perception of administrative involvement in the hiring process.

Comments from the interviewees about the atmosphere in their departments ranged from "There are a number of people in this department with spouses in this department or other departments. In this department, I think it's very friendly" to "I have to be a little careful, frankly. I'm the extra one here; my wife was the one hired". The language used in the department to describe a dual hire situation reflects departmental attitudes:

*"Some view spouses as an opportunity; some people view them as a problem. The way it's phrased here is it's a two-body problem.... I wish they would view it more as a two-body opportunity."* (Male, first hire)

Some of the faculty interviewed felt that spousal hires had to overcome a perception that they were not as highly qualified as their colleagues:

*"I do think that there is a stigma associated with it. It's probably with everybody; it's probably with me too. This person is a spousal thing and it may turn out to be a good thing but they're going to have to prove themselves. I think everyone has to prove themselves when they come to a new job but I think a spousal hires is under a little more scrutiny."* (Male, second hire)

The long-term outcome of a dual hire can be jeopardized if a negative departmental attitude results in the second hire not receiving the resources they need for success:

*"The major other thing I see is that I've heard through the grapevine from other individuals who have been in my position that usually if there is a second hire, the trailing person, whether they deserve it or not, usually have much fewer resources available to them. You're already stacking the cards toward failure."* (Female, first hire)

Receptivity of co-workers was strongly linked to the department's prior experience with dual-hires. Participants seemed to gauge the receptivity of co-workers by the stories told about the department's prior experience with other couples and dual-hires and with the department head's attitudes. Participants in departments with no previous dual-hires often reported being uncomfortable talking about their situation with colleagues. Taking steps to communicate that dual hiring is a routine practice is a strategic way to defuse the stigma sometime associated with the second hire.

## **Recommendations**

Findings of this pilot study indicate some steps that administrators at the department, college, and university level can take to increase the probability of long-term success of dual-hires. Department level administrators considering a spousal, especially in departments with no prior experience or with a negative previous experience with couples, have the added responsibility of

anticipating the reception a dual-hire might receive from colleagues in the department. A negative climate can be off-set somewhat by approximating conventional hiring practices and keeping the visibility of the administrative role low-key. University-level recommendations fall under four general themes:

**Visibility:** It's important that the university's willingness to work with dual hires be visible to potential employees. This visibility could be obtained through mention of dual career guidelines or policy in the job announcement and/or on the university website. This puts job candidates more at ease about raising the issue of a position for a spouse or partner.

**Oversight:** Faculty interviewed expressed the need for someone who was in a position to negotiate across departments and colleges. This individual could facilitate coordination and communication about dual hires, including both on- and off-campus job opportunities.

**Dual Hire Fund:** Any dual career policy or procedure must be sufficiently flexible to address the unique demands of each dual career case. A pool of money set aside to help departments with dual career hires would certainly go a long way to improving the receptivity to such hires.

**Language.** Replacing language such as "accommodation," "two-body problem," and "trailing spouse" with more neutral language, such as "dual-hire" and "initial" or "second" hire, is another strategy to communicate a positive climate.

Additional research may reveal additional strategies to increase the probability of success for dual-career hiring opportunities.

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## Biographical Information

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Dr. Eckel is an Advance Professor and Professor of Economics. She chaired the Advance Policy Work Group during the development of Virginia Tech's guidelines for dual career hires.

## Appendix: Virginia Tech Faculty Dual Career Guidelines for Department Heads

Virginia Tech is committed to responding to the needs of dual career couples within available resources in cases that are consistent with our mission and goals. These guidelines outline the basic conditions under which dual career hires will be considered. However, the guidelines do not create an entitlement. Given limited resources, the lack of disciplinary fit in some cases, and the university's mission and aspirations as a research university, it simply will not be possible to respond to the employment needs of all dual career couples.

The employment preferences and needs of dual career couples vary from one case to another. Information about employment opportunities in the region may result in an appropriate placement for some. In other instances, referral to existing vacancies on the faculty or staff may provide an appropriate match between opportunity and the individual's skills. In cases where a faculty position does not currently exist, and the individual's credentials merit appointment to the faculty, it may benefit the university to allocate a temporary or permanent appointment to accommodate a dual career recruitment or retention. The following guidelines address this latter instance:

1. Allocation of a position, either temporary or permanent, for a dual career partner should address demonstrated institutional and/or departmental needs and goals. Given limited funding, priority will be given to individuals with outstanding faculty credentials where the primary candidate is being recruited for a tenure-track faculty or senior administrative position.
2. There must be an appropriate fit between the qualifications of the individual and the available or proposed position.
3. Following an appropriate interview and evaluation process, an offer of employment to the

partner shall be extended only if there is strong support on the part of the department where the position is to be located.

4. University search procedures allow an exemption to search for a dual career appointment to a faculty position. Requests for an exemption to a search are approved by the provost and president. Please note that searches cannot be waived for classified positions. Consult with Personnel Services for procedural advice concerning classified positions.

### **Implementation Procedures for Department Heads:**

**1. Informing Candidates:** There is a natural tension between the hiring department's need to know as soon as possible about a dual-career hire and the candidate's possible reluctance in revealing that information if they believe that it might negatively affect their consideration. There are several strategies departments can use to encourage candidates to let them know of their needs earlier in the recruitment process. Creating a link to the dual career guidelines and the Family Work/Life Resource Center on the recruitment web site or in the posted position ad is one strategy. Distributing an information sheet or brochure may also be useful; share such information with all candidates when they are invited to interview. Remember that it is illegal to ask a candidate directly about whether they are part of a dual career couple.

It is important to proceed with the interview and offer process to the primary candidate even if the possibility of an appointment for the partner is not yet clear or the individual is not suited to a position at the university. Do not discriminate against a candidate because of a dual career situation – the decision to accept or reject an offer should be made by the candidate.

**2. Identifying Possibilities for Appointment:** The primary candidate lets the hiring department head know about the need for dual career consideration and supplies information regarding the partner's educational background, experience, and employment history. Suggestions for appropriate placements should be solicited from the candidate and/or partner. The primary department head identifies and investigates the best possibilities for employment in consultation with the Provost's Office, if needed. The relevant deans should also be kept apprised of any discussions.

In cases where classified staff positions are appropriate and of interest to the individual, referral should be made to Personnel Services to review both opportunities and strategies for pursuing staff positions. Other options are described below.

**3. Target Unit Evaluates and Interviews the Potential Candidate:** The target unit initiates an evaluation process, including a review of a vita/resume and references of the individual, and conducts an interview with the potential candidate. If there is an appropriate personnel or standing search committee in the department, they would normally be involved, as would other faculty members depending on the nature of the proposed position. The candidate's qualifications should be evaluated using criteria appropriate to the proposed role and credentials required in the field. For example, it may be appropriate to consider whether the candidate might have been on a short list had the opening been advertised.



Standard review and appointment procedures should be used when appropriate and the level of review should be consistent with that accorded similar positions and types of appointments. For example, if the appointment involves a rank above assistant professor or includes tenure, then the appropriate departmental committee must approve such an appointment.

**4. Cases where there is an Existing Position or Funding Available in the Receiving Department and/or College:** Receiving departments (and/or colleges) that have available funds and/or positions and are prepared to make an offer for a dual career partner may develop an appropriate job description (if not already available) and proposed offer and then seek an exemption to search, using the usual EO forms. Attach a letter of explanation including a brief statement of how the proposed appointment benefits the receiving department and/or college and documenting the process used to review and evaluate the candidate. Attach the candidate's vita. The exemption request must be approved by the department head, relevant dean or senior manager, the provost, president, and the EO Office. The offer may not be made until approval has been granted.

**5. Cases where a New Position Must be Allocated and Shared Funding Arranged:** In cases where the receiving department/college does not already have a position and/or adequate funds available to support the proposed appointment, the expectation is that the hiring and receiving departments (and colleges) and the Provost may share in funding the position on a transitional basis. After the approval of the proposal, the Provost typically commits bridge funding for up to two years at half salary or three years at one-third salary, with the remainder shared by the primary hiring and receiving departments or respective colleges. Permanent funding, in the case of hard-funded appointments, is the responsibility of the hiring department and/or college at the end of the transition period. Bridge funding available from the Provost is limited and may not be available to support all requests. Typically the highest priority would be to support a faculty position in response to a tenure-track or tenured faculty hire or senior administrative hire.

Departments requesting funding assistance should submit a written proposal through the responsible dean to the Provost's Office. The following information is needed to evaluate the request:

- An explanation of the situation,
- An explanation of how the university will benefit from the appointment and how the proposed appointment fits within the priorities of the receiving department and/or college,
- The vita of the individual under consideration,
- The proposed salary, type of appointment, and job description,
- A statement indicating the source and amount of funds from the participating units, and the amount requested for bridge funding from the Provost, and the time period involved in the transition, and
- Information about potential future funding. (The goal is to move employees from temporary funds to permanent funds whenever feasible and appropriate.)

**6. Make an Employment Offer:** Upon approval by the provost, president, and the EO Office, the receiving department head is authorized to make the offer to the dual career partner using the

standard Terms of Faculty Offer detailing the nature and conditions of the appointment. Expectations should be stated very clearly so that any special conditions are fully documented for the record. Every effort should be made to welcome the new faculty member in the receiving department and help make him or her become a full participating member of the faculty. Helping the individual succeed will serve both the department and employee, and help accomplish the primary goal of the dual-career hiring program, which is to recruit and retain talented faculty members.

**Dual Career Issues Associated with Retention:** Retention of talented individuals currently on the faculty can also be affected by employment opportunities for their partners. In the case where there is a determination that a dual career appointment is critical to retaining the faculty member, and it is in the university's interest to try to respond to this need, the process described above provides general guidance for how to proceed.

### **Options Other than Tenure-Track Appointments:**

**Affiliated Research Faculty** (see section 6.2, *Faculty Handbook*): Status as an unpaid Affiliated Research Faculty member may allow a fully credentialed person to pursue grants and contracts as a member of the Virginia Tech faculty. The host department may provide lab or office space, or other resources as available, to support the individual's efforts to obtain sponsored funding or to continue his or her research. The request to establish an affiliated research faculty appointment is handled on a P-86 form approved by the host department, college, and Office of the Vice President for Research. With the appropriate credentials and research faculty rank, the individual may serve as PI on a grant with permission of the department.

**Research Faculty Appointments:** Research faculty appointments are often an appropriate way to provide employment opportunities for well qualified academic partners. Full or partial bridge funding over several years can be provided with the expectation that the individual develop a viable research program and receive sponsored grants or contracts that cover salary and benefits beginning at a specified point in time. If the individual fills the need on an existing grant or contract, the procedure for hiring is similar to that described above – a position description should be developed, credentials evaluated, the individual interviewed, and a request made for an exemption to search. The Office of the Vice President for Research is also involved in approval of such requests.

**Other Restricted Appointments:** Individuals may fill important institutional or departmental needs that are not yet defined or funded as permanent positions. These can be full or part-time, instructional or administrative.

**Enrollment in Graduate School:** It is relatively common that a spouse or partner may prefer enrollment in a Virginia Tech graduate program rather than full-time employment. Such potential students must be admitted through usual departmental procedures and should be considered for whatever departmental funding is offered to all students. Where such funding is not available, the primary department may consider paying for a full or partial assistantship in the receiving department in order to facilitate the enrollment and support of the partner of the primary recruit.