Postdoc Academic Chat #8

Academic Couples - Take Me, Take My Partner

Having two people who are together looking for academic positions can be a challenge but also a special advantage. We will discuss how to raise this issue during your job searches and what you need to do to negotiate a win-win for you, your partner, and your future institution.

Wednesday, May 13, 2020

Readings

#1. Married Profs Sound Off on Dual Academic Career Hiring
#2. Pas de Deux: Dual-Career Searches
#3 The A to Z of Dual-Career Couples

#1. Married Profs Sound Off on Dual Academic Career Hiring

The article below gives some interesting insights into the life of dual career academic couples. It if by Stephanie Liou from the Tuesday, February 9, 2010 article that appeared in the Stanford Daily [http://www.stanforddaily.com/]. Copyright © 2010 Stanford Daily. All Rights Reserved. Reprinted with permission.

Whether they have shared last names, work in similar fields or have completely separate academic identities, married professors are not uncommon at Stanford and add a certain “nerdy-romantic” dynamic to the Farm.

Sociology Prof. Andrew Walder and his wife, political science Prof. Jean Oi, were jointly recruited to Stanford and have collaborated on publications and other academic endeavors.

“We definitely wanted to work at the same school, not only for convenience, but because we share similar interests and it’s nice to already have a colleague you like to work with,” Walder said. “Harvard, where we worked before, was definitely more discouraging [of having married faculty].”
Current freshmen may be well acquainted with another academic power couple, Michele Elam, English professor, and Harry Elam, Jr., drama professor. Aside from moderating the Three Books talk at the beginning of the year, the Elams taught the “Beyond Survival” Introduction to the Humanities (IHUM) class together this fall quarter.

“We share similar tastes, interests and commitments and are close intellectual companions,” said Michele Elam. “We submitted a proposal together to teach an IHUM because we are both interested in diversity, art and politics. Students quickly realized that we were married, and I guess this led to some entertainment value during class when we would appear to disagree.”

The Elams also collaborate on research and are currently writing a book together. They said they are not fazed by the overlap between their professional and personal lives.

“No — I absolutely love working with my wife!” exclaimed Harry Elam. “We are excited by each others’ work, intellectual curiosity and love of teaching.”

Working closely together has only enhanced their relationship, the Elams revealed. They share an office at home and enjoy “talking about Stanford all the time.” And while occasional confusion occurs when students contact the wrong Dr. Elam, they say they are incredibly happy with their situation.

Christine Wotipka, education professor, shared similar sentiments about work with her husband.

“We’re both workaholics,” Dr. Wotipka admitted. “With such busy lives and two young kids, any chance to be together is appreciated. Even if it’s a meeting, work becomes time together.”

However, she and husband Anthony Antonio, education professor, also work in the same department, which has the potential to complicate matters.

“I feel like having an academic couple work in the same department would be less beneficial due to issues with voting,” Walder said. Michele Elam agreed, pointing out the increased opportunities for conflicts of interest as well as the constant — perhaps excessive — contact.
“Because we still work with different programs, there are no conflicts of interest,” Wotipka said. “Plus, I benefit from having a nurturing, ‘in-house’ mentor, which can be difficult for many junior faculty to find.”

The University also stresses the attention it pays to Dual-Career Academic Hiring.

“It’s] a very serious topic,” noted Londa Schiebinger, history professor and director of the Clayman Institute for Gender Research. In addition to being the wife of Dr. Robert Proctor, a fellow history professor, Dr. Schiebinger published a detailed research paper and policy guide regarding dual-career academic couples in 2008.

According to her research, over a third of academic professionals are married to another academic professional, and finding suitable employment for a spouse is considered a very high priority by most. Over the past decade, the joint hiring of academic couples has increased significantly, and many universities have started to realize the potential value in having a couple work together to recruit and retain top talent.

The Elams and Walder agreed that they would have had no qualms about choosing a less prestigious institution if Stanford had not hired their respective spouses. Their opinions reflect Dr. Schiebinger’s research, which found that 88 percent of dual-career faculty nationwide would have refused their current position if their spouse had not also been hired.

This also supports the steps that Stanford has been taking in order to acquire top-notch faculty, which include creating a special administrative position to assist with dual hires, encouraging departments to find suitable positions for spouses and operating several databases containing information about available jobs on campus and in the area.

“It’s impossible to hire some of the best without hiring a couple, and Stanford does a really good job at this,” Walder said. “I can’t think of any place in the world that would be more open!”

Although they met and married at Stanford after being hired separately, Antonio and Wotipka left Stanford briefly to pursue promising positions and were only convinced to return when the University was able to make an attractive offer to both parties.
“If we were to come back, it had to be as a family,” Wotipka said. “Luckily, Stanford definitely has more resources and great staff to attract dual hires.”

Evidence suggests that dual-hiring might boost faculty satisfaction and retention rates and improve hiring for minorities and women, without many detriments. Even when a second professor is hired because their spouse was recruited, productivity levels do not drop, and Stanford in particular is still very strict about upholding its high standards.

“People come with lives — it is definitely beneficial to the couple and to the institution if a couple can receive tenure at the same place,” said Michele Elam. “Of course, both candidates still need to undergo the same rigorous vetting processes, but more priority or a second glance will be offered in a potential dual-hire. And it is important to note that this applies to same-sex couples at Stanford, as well.”

Students have also noticed advantages to having professors who are content and share good camaraderie.

Taylor Nguyen ‘13, who was a member of the Elams’ “Beyond Survival” IHUM, felt that having a married couple co-teach a class “actually added to the dynamics of the class.”

“They are both brilliant professors with a lot of valuable insight,” she said. “During lectures they were very professional, but [during discussions] you could definitely tell that the seamless flow of the discussion was aided by their years together.”

Also, it was just nice to see professors working together “who had such great respect and admiration for each other,” she added.

2. Pas de Deux: Dual-Career Searches

From Inside Higher Ed November 11, 2015

Elizabeth Simmons and R. Sekhar Chivukula, a dual-career academic couple, offer advice on navigating joint searches for new positions.

Academics are increasingly part of dual-career couples, and when one
partner is ready to make a transition to a new position, perhaps in a new location, two professional trajectories need to be maintained. If you are confronting your first job search as a couple, you may wonder how to undertake the search jointly and what factors to bear in mind.

We would like to share some ideas on how to approach these transitions, based both on our experiences as spouses who have been through several job changes together and on stories from friends who are in dual-career couples. We are married to each other and both of us are physics professors at the same institution. We met when Sekhar was in graduate school and Elizabeth was an undergraduate, wed after finishing our doctorates, and have raised two children (one grown, one still at home). We place great value on living together in one household and have made career choices with this in mind. We have worked at both private and public universities, have undertaken a long-distance midcareer move together, and have dealt with a year where one of us split time between two cities.

This essay will talk about aspects of dual-career searches that span the full transition cycle: from preparing to apply through the interview process and establishing new routines. The focus is on a subset of issues that particularly impact dual-career couples.

**Negotiations**

While we usually think of negotiation as happening near the end of a search, as one responds to a job offer, a couple needs to engage in a process of negotiation when preparing for a job search, especially if it involves the possibility of relocation. Many factors go into the choices that must eventually be made; these should be openly acknowledged and discussed with care.

For instance, you will need to decide where to apply for jobs. Of the 4,000 institutions of higher education in the U.S., which would appeal to the academic members of your household? If one of you is not an academic, which locations would offer appropriate career opportunities? Each of you, working separately, might identify a different set of institutions (or locations) that look interesting for particular reasons. Working separately to enumerate the viable possibilities and the key factors governing your choices is a good place to start. Along the way, each of you should examine your current situations: What works well now professionally and personally?
What is missing?

To identify opportunities of mutual interest, you will need to reconcile your understanding of the current situation with that of your partner and combine your lists of appealing institutions (or locations) before sending out résumés. So set aside time for a conversation. Since this will be a negotiation, perhaps you should review the basics of integrative or interest-based bargaining beforehand.

Start by exploring each person’s underlying priorities (interests), whether academic or personal, and be flexible about detailed solutions (positions). For example, first discuss the relative importance of general geographical issues, such as proximity to family, daily commuting times or weather, before suggesting specific regions in which to focus your search.

**Trade-offs**

Can you recall the last time you moved to a new home either as an individual or as part of a couple? You probably thought about where to live relative to your workplace(s). The various locations you considered for your home likely varied along many dimensions, such as affordability, proximity of recreation facilities or quality of K-12 schools. Yet some neighborhoods that were desirable for those reasons may have also required a longer commute or using a car to reach your workplace. You probably made trade-offs among different factors in order to pick where to live.

Job searches are notoriously rife with trade-offs. Even if you will continue to live in the same home as before, you may have to choose among factors like commuting time, salary and job satisfaction. Working farther from where you live may enable you to make enough money to retire earlier or to purchase services that make the commute more tolerable. Perhaps a job that promises more interesting or fulfilling work will be more attractive than one that is better compensated. When your search involves possibly moving to a new home, the inconvenience of moving and the changes to your quality of life should be included in your evaluation of the relative merits of different jobs.

But the trade-offs inherent in a dual-career search are even more complex. Each pair of positions you contemplate will present a different combination of benefits and challenges, whether you are looking at professional or
lifestyle issues. Each of you may have different preferences. For instance, one of you may be far more amenable to taking on a longer commute in return for a higher salary or shorter workweek.

Each person’s choices can also have dramatic effects on the other partner. For example, every hour your partner spends commuting is potentially an hour less you spend together as a family. To understand the interplay of these issues, it is crucial to discuss the factors and your preferences openly. That tempting pair of job offers in adjoining towns may turn out to be a nonstarter if the affordable homes near the biking trails are far from the workplace of the partner who finds long commutes exhausting.

Even when you are attempting to promote the careers of both partners, it is likely that a given move will offer a more interesting opportunity or better professional fit to one partner at any given time. If both are academics, for instance, one may be moving to a department with many potential teaching or research collaborators in their area while the other will be the only person working on their topic at the entire institution. It is important to remain aware of this throughout the search and to explicitly compare the opportunities available at every new place to the possibilities for each partner in the current location.

Sticking Together

One of the murkiest stages of the dual-career job search is the interview process. Ultimately, each of you must interview for specific openings and be considered on your individual merits as a prospective employee. But when one of you is invited to campus, it may be unclear how to ensure the other will also be interviewed by a nearby employer. The path toward that additional interview may be full of long waits, sudden requests for information and last-minute applications for positions not originally on your radar.

Some institutions offer assistance in connecting the partners of employees or new hires to job opportunities at the university or in the area. For example, a list of universities advertising dual career programs is here. Alternatively, the Academic Human Resources website of an institution often contains information about whom to contact for further details on these issues. Higher Education Recruitment Consortia (HERC) and regional employment networks (see e.g., MI-WIN) are now becoming more widely
available. National dual career search tools enabling academic couples to search for institutions where there could be jobs for both of them are now also being offered online, including one at Inside Higher Ed.

At some point, you will likely wish to inform an institution that you are part of a dual-career couple. People’s strategies in this regard vary widely according to their circumstances. An early-career academic, or anyone who must definitely make a move, may prefer to receive a job offer before requesting spousal accommodation. This enables them to discuss the issue when they have the maximum leverage and when they know the request will not impact their candidacy. Indeed, addressing dual-career issues is now commonly part of negotiating the details of a job offer (see, e.g., this essay) so the employer will not be surprised if the issue is raised at that point.

On the other hand, someone who already has a permanent position, or who otherwise does not feel compelled to move, might ask about the possibility of dual-career assistance even before submitting an application. This gives the institution more time to explore options for the second partner, which can increase the probability of a successful dual recruitment. If both of you are senior academics, and especially if the search committee is likely to already know you are both academics (e.g., if you are both in the same small field), then you may wish to contact the college dean or the associate provost of academic human resources for a confidential conversation about how the university handles dual-career situations.

During the interview stage, you may be tempted to focus on one ideal outcome to the exclusion of others. But you should consciously resist. The world does not owe you a solution to your unique situation; happenstance, your priorities and your degree of flexibility will all play a role. If it is important for your professional satisfaction that both of you achieve tenure-system positions, do not assume one will definitely materialize for a partner who is initially hired in a fixed-term or postdoctoral position.

If either of you is entering an untenured position, do not bank on achieving tenure. The vagaries of the national and state economies, enrollment trends, grant availability, the publishing industry and other such factors are beyond your control -- and any of these could derail your assumptions.

As you complete the interview phase, be sure to get all of the important elements of each job offer in writing. If tenure requires a vote of the Board
of Trustees, wait till the trustees have actually voted before making decisions predicated on your having tenure. If relocating depends on your both receiving jobs in the new location, make sure you each have a written offer in hand before resigning your current posts or putting your house on the market. Even with the best intentions on all sides, unwritten promises may not survive the term of the administrator who made them.

**Projecting the Future**

When preparing to choose among your options (and we hope you will have several), think through in detail what it will be like to live and work in a new location, in comparison with your present lifestyle.

For instance, locate your proposed workplaces, the neighborhood where you would probably live and any amenities you would visit regularly (e.g., grocery, gym, schools, medical clinics) on a map. Talk through your typical days as if living them on fast-forward. Given your professional schedules, who will be responsible for daily chores like walking the dog, picking up dry cleaning, cooking dinner or gathering kids from day care?

If one of you has a schedule that will require longer or fluctuating work hours (e.g., being on call or attending dinner meetings), does that mean that the other person will have to take on more home-based responsibilities for a time?

If you are moving from a situation where you both had similar hours and commutes to one where they will be quite dissimilar, it is especially important to talk this through in advance. We went through such a move once and had not anticipated the impact of differential schedules. As a result, our first year was more frustrating and exhausting than it need have been; each of us felt the other was failing to appreciate the “true” stresses of the new situation. With some advance planning, we could have set up clearer expectations for ourselves.

As mentioned earlier, a contemplated move will often be more beneficial for one partner than the other. This is the time to discuss in detail how you will handle the situation and to decide whether the differential benefit is acceptable or is, ultimately, a deal breaker. For instance, are there opportunities for further training or education that would enable the less-advantaged spouse to prepare for later professional advancement while
living in this location? Are there accommodations that can be made in your personal life to partially compensate for professional disadvantages? Finally, be aware that each partner may develop new interests or encounter fresh opportunities over time. Anticipate evolution. Don’t consider only how to optimize life during the first year after you move; try to project likely future configurations that may emerge.

For instance, suppose that you are moving because one of you is becoming department chair and the other will be a regular faculty member at a different institution. Clearly, you should think about how the details of everyday life will work under that scenario, where one partner needs to keep administrative 8-5 hours and the other has greater flexibility, including the ability to elect a longer commute and shorter workweek.

But no one is chair forever. Five years down the line, the partner who was chair may well return to the faculty and the other partner may be asked to lead a campus research center. Will the way you are thinking of configuring your life be able to accommodate such a shift? Or should you rethink where you might live?

Making a move as a dual-career couple is truly a challenge … and the impact continues long after the last box has been unpacked. While the professional aspects of the new location may be paramount in your minds, don’t forget to tend the home fires: talk about complex issues related to family, as well as career, when they arise.

Over time, keep examining the balance of duties each of you is undertaking at work and at home as your jobs change and as your children grow or your parents age. The practice that undertaking the job search will give you in communicating your priorities, asking for (rather than guessing) your partner’s viewpoint and preparing for a variety of possible outcomes will stand you in good stead.

**BIO**

Elizabeth H. Simmons is dean of Lyman Briggs College and R. Sekhar Chivukula is associate dean of the College of Natural Science, both at Michigan State University.
3. The A to Z of Dual-Career Couples

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By Female Science Professor* JULY 04, 2011

Much has been written in academe on the topic of dual-career couples, and it remains a major issue for many institutions and people, particularly for women in science, engineering, and math.

My point of view on the subject is that of a full professor in the physical sciences at a large research university. I am also writing as a member of a dual-career couple fortunate to have two faculty positions at the same institution. Whenever I write about this topic on my blog, I am quickly reminded by the comments that some people are hostile to the concept of accommodations being made for academic couples. In the topics below, arranged from A to Z, I have tried to reflect the agony, the ecstasy, and the anger surrounding the issue of dual-career couples in academe.

Advantages. People often focus on the difficulties of being in a dual-career couple, primarily in terms of the challenge of finding two appealing academic jobs in the same place or at neighboring institutions. But for many of us there are also advantages. A major one is the high level of understanding of each other's work.

Bodies (two of them). Studies of married female faculty members show that many women in the physical sciences and math are married to other academics, the majority of them in the same or similar fields. Although the two-body problem may arise when institutions try to hire male faculty members, it more commonly occurs with female candidates. The issue, therefore, has become inextricably linked with that of hiring and retaining women in science, engineering, and math. Some dual-career couples hope for two tenure-track or tenured positions; others want (or are willing to take) one such position, with the other member of the couple accepting a job as an instructor, a support-staff member, or a research scientist with partial or no support (other than a title and
a desk). For some couples, the first scenario is ideal, and anything else will cause stress in the relationship. Others are fine with the second scenario. Couples need to discuss this issue thoroughly and figure out what is best for them.

**Competition.** Say that both members of an academic couple are in the same field, department, or institution. Are the two in competition with each other? If so, how stressful is that? Some women write to me and say that they don't want to "compete" with their partner and that, perhaps, it's best if there is "only one professor in the family." Every couple is different, of course. For some, being in the same department or institution or even on the same career path is stressful and stifling. Others enjoy sharing their professional lives in that way.

**Deans.** If department heads are uninspired about how, or whether to, create job opportunities for a dual-career couple, deans (or provosts or other administrators) can make things happen. In fact, that was my situation when my current university was trying to figure out whether they could hire both my husband and me: The department didn't think it would work, but administrators at a higher level made it happen. Fortunately, the department head was pleased with the arrangement, so we did not have to worry that one of us was hired against the will of the department. The stumbling blocks in our hiring were related to faculty lines, salary, and start-up costs. Deans can be important even when both hires are in the same department, and are essential when the partners are in separate departments. Some departments are very reluctant to give any sort of position to the spouse of someone being hired in another department, even if the spousal candidate has expertise and talents that could benefit the department, and even if there are economic incentives provided by the institution to support the hire. Perhaps there is no way to overcome such resistance, but university-level administrators should work with reluctant department heads and find constructive solutions.

**Economics.** Budget constraints can make hiring a dual-career couple difficult. Likewise, economic woes can follow two partnered academics throughout their career. I have encountered colleagues (and one department head) who thought that dual-career couples should be treated as an economic unit—meaning that if two faculty members in one department are married to each other, that circumstance should be considered in decisions about salary and raises, and their combined salary should be a more significant consideration than either individual salary. In my opinion, a faculty member should be considered on his or her merits—no matter the circumstances of the initial hiring, just as is the case in tenure and promotion.
Fields. Which is more difficult—finding two nearby jobs in the same field or in different fields? The short answer is "yes." A more specific answer is that the difficulty of finding two jobs in one department at the same institution might be offset somewhat by the fact that it may be easier for one administrator to accommodate two partners than it would be to involve multiple departments (see "deans") in the negotiations. The degree of difficulty also relates to the size and resources of the institution, and whether there are other nearby campuses or just one rather isolated college or university.

Gender. Institutions that are serious about increasing the number of female faculty members in underrepresented fields must be willing to find solutions for dual-career couples (see "bodies"). The problem may be particularly severe for institutions in isolated locations with few other job opportunities for academics, or at institutions with limited resources for making multiple hires. I know of one search in which all of the top candidates for a tenure-track position were female scientists married to other scientists. The institution had to decide whether to fail the search and hope for another pool of excellent candidates with less complicated personal lives, or create a second position and hire a spouse as well. They ended up hiring a couple.

Higher Education Recruitment Consortium. National and regional consortia help solve the two-body problem for academics by facilitating dual-career job searches and providing information to help administrators with the institutional challenges of such hires.

Illegal. Many women write to me to complain that they are asked "illegal" questions about their spouses during job interviews for faculty positions. Despite efforts to educate faculty members and administrators about what is permissible to ask about a candidate's personal life, women are commonly asked about their marital status. Or hiring committees seek that information through indirect means. Some women who write to me want to know if they can refuse to answer, or should answer all questions even if they are inappropriate. The trouble is, refusing to answer a question about a spouse or partner is the same as acknowledging having a "two-body problem." So most women just answer the question when asked, even if they worry that their answer will jeopardize their chances at a job offer.

Job-sharing. Some institutions hire both members of a dual-career couple only if they agree to share a job. That may be an attractive option for some, as long as each member of the couple qualifies for benefits (health insurance,
At some institutions, for example, a half-time position wouldn't qualify you for benefits, but 75 percent of a position would, so the couple might share 1.5 faculty lines instead of just one job. In theory a part-time position comes with reduced teaching and service work, but in reality it may not.

**Kids.** A few years ago, while visiting another university, I had lunch with some female graduate students and postdocs. All of them said they did not want an academic career, because it was impossible to have children and be a professor, especially if you were married to another academic. They had arrived at that belief because the one female professor in their department was childless. To me that was a dramatic illustration of the importance of role models. Of course it's possible to be in a dual-career academic couple and have kids. In fact, it is more than possible; it can be a very nice life, with opportunities for family adventures.

**Long distance.** Should two partners live separately for a while if it might increase their chances of getting jobs together later on? I am often asked that question, but it's something each couple has to decide. There is no one right answer. My husband and I lived apart for a few years because we decided that independently pursuing our careers was the best plan for us, and we were fortunate that we eventually ended up living and working in the same place. Partners need to decide: How long is too long to live apart? What will we do if both of us get tenure-track jobs, but nowhere near each other? Will one of us give up the job? How will that be decided? Or will we live apart for longer than we planned until we can both get jobs we want near each other?

**Midcareer move (dual-career edition).** If you and your spouse are lucky enough to find academic positions near each other, does that mean you can never leave that campus? Not necessarily. When my husband and I have been approached by other institutions seeking to recruit one of us, we are typically told upfront, "And of course we would hire both of you." Being in a dual-career couple may make you less movable, but it doesn't mean you will never have any opportunities to move.

**Nepotism.** Some people object to the apparent nepotism of dual-career couples, particularly in the same department. However, partners at the same institution, or even in the same department, don't have decision-making roles regarding each other's hiring, salary, or promotion. If one member of a couple is the department chair, the other member of the couple reports directly to a dean or
other administrator. Policies are in place to avoid conflicts of interest with dual-career couples.

**Offices.** There are many nice things about landing two jobs in the same place. There are also continuing challenges (see "economics") and minor annoyances. An example of the latter: Colleagues or students are looking for my spouse but can't find him, so they come to my office and ask where he is. Thus far I have confined my responses to polite answers (typically, "I have no idea"). A few times I have looked under my desk and in a drawer, then announced, "Well, he doesn't seem to be here." I have been tempted to get a leash and hold it up when asked the "Where is your husband?" question and say, "Oh, no! He's off the leash again!" Somehow I have resisted the urge.

**Partners.** What if you aren't married but have a long-term partner? Can you negotiate a position for your partner, or do you have to be married? I know of a few examples of dual-career couples who were not married but who nevertheless negotiated two positions. But I believe that's still rare. Clearly this is a relevant issue for gay couples. Even though there is no guarantee that married couples won't divorce, some administrators are uncomfortable hiring unmarried partners, because they somehow perceive such relationships to be less stable or more easily abandoned.

**Qualified.** A concern commonly raised by critics of the general concept of dual-career couples is that only one of the people in the couple is likely to be any good. The other person, critics claim, might not even be qualified for the job that's offered. The issue of what defines "qualified" is tricky, but it is not in the interest of a department or institution to hire an unqualified person, even for the sake of increasing diversity. If the "other" member of the couple is deemed unqualified for a faculty position, institutions are unlikely to offer one, even if it is economically feasible.

**Recruitment and retention.** When it comes to obtaining an academic position, are there any advantages to being part of a dual-career couple? Some colleagues report that their universities are pleased when a top candidate negotiates for a second position, because that means the candidate is more likely to stay. This phenomenon seems to occur most often at institutions where it can be difficult to attract and retain faculty members owing to such factors as a high cost of living or unappealing (to some) location. Dual-career couples who are successful at separate institutions, but unhappy about having long commutes or only weekends together, may be poached by other institutions. That is not common enough to make it a general feature of the experience of
academic couples, but it's nice to know that sometimes being part of a couple can lead to job opportunities.

**Sabbaticals.** It may be easier for dual-career couples to go away for a sabbatical than it is for couples in different professions—if you can convince administrators to approve your leaves for the same year, and if you can work out the economic issues. Many American institutions pay faculty members 50 percent of their salaries while on sabbatical, so that must be factored into your plans.

**Trailing spouses.** It is rare that an institution has two equal positions open at the same time and hires both members of a couple on an equal footing. It happens, but it is far more common that there is one faculty position (tenured or tenure track) for one member of the couple, and the other is hired as part of a negotiation. In fact, it is typically assumed that one member of a dual-career couple is the "trailing spouse"—the one the institution hired only because it really wanted the other member. "Trailing spouse" is not a neutral concept: The stigma, even in a tenure-track position, can persist for years, particularly if there is unequal treatment in terms of resources (start-up support, space) and workload (teaching, service). Ideally, with time (and some retirements and new hires), the institutional memory of who was a trailing spouse fades away.

**Unfair.** As is probably quite clear, I am sympathetic to dual-career couples. Some people, however, are not—especially if two faculty positions are involved. The objection may stem in part from a feeling that one person is somehow circumventing the search process (see entries on the notion of "qualified" and on "trailing spouses"). There is no escaping the fact that when someone is hired, someone else is not, and it can be hard for unsuccessful candidates in a search to set aside disappointment (or anger) if a second position is created for the spouse of the successful candidate. That two people are hired instead of one, however, does not mean that the second hire is unqualified. In all cases that I know of, the "trailing spouse" is interviewed (gives a talk, meets with faculty members, etc.) before a second offer is made.

**Voting blocs.** One reason that some faculty members are reluctant to hire dual-career couples in the same department, particularly in small programs, is the fear that the couple will form the dreaded Voting Bloc. I am sure there are examples of couples voting the same on some issues in faculty meetings, but I am more likely to vote the same as colleagues in my research field than I am to vote in lock step with my spouse.
When (to bring up your two-body problem), and what (to say). Some administrators have told me that they want to know as soon as possible whether they need to start working on a dual-career hire—even as soon as the interview stage. That might be fine if there is a system that uses the information in a constructive way rather than penalizing candidates for it. Lacking such a system, I think it's better to keep such issues off the table, unless a candidate chooses to mention his or her personal situation. Of course, it is naïve to think that this information is unknown. Many women are asked during an interview about their marital (and parental) status and plans (see "illegal questions"), or this information is acquired through back channels.

What to say? When asked a personal question, it is reasonable to reply, calmly and pleasantly, "I'd rather talk about X," in which X is some topic relevant to research or teaching. Years ago, during my own interviews for faculty positions, I tried to walk a fine line between making it clear that I wasn't going to sit there and discuss my personal life in detail, and not being defensive about it. When asked about my husband, I would say something like, "We're both looking for faculty positions and are just trying to get the best jobs we can." And then I would try to change the subject back to research and teaching.

eXtremely complicated. Will the two-body problem always be so fraught and complicated, or can colleges create systematic ways to deal with these situations that do not penalize the couples and yet result in hires that make sense for the institution? Even in these economically dire times, I think there are ways that human-resource offices and administrators can focus on the long-term benefits of hiring dual-career couples rather than the short-term economic costs.

Zero. That is the number of times I was not asked about my husband during interviews for a faculty position.

Female Science Professor is the pseudonym of a professor in the physical sciences at a large research university who blogs under that moniker and writes monthly for our Catalyst column. Her blog is http://science-professor.blogspot.com.