Dual Career Couples and Job Hunting

April 3, 2014

Rosanne Lurie, Senior Associate Director
Julie Miller Vick, Senior Career Advisor
Career Services

Dual Career/Academic Couples

- The Two-Body Problem - Negative phrasing
  - Don’t describe a significant part of your life as a problem
- Many people with advanced degrees on the job market are part of a couple
  - The Clayman Institute for Gender Research at Stanford University finds over 70 percent of faculty are in dual-career relationships; more than a third are partnered with another academic.

Couple possibilities

- Two PhDs
  - Both seeking academic jobs in the same field
  - Both seeking academic jobs in different fields
  - One seeking an academic job and one seeking a non-academic job
- Two professional Master’s degrees
  - Both seeking jobs in the same field
  - Both seeking jobs in different fields
- One PhD and one Master’s
- Other degree combinations
Discussing career issues as a couple

Think of this as an on-going discussion, rather than as a one-time summit meeting. Discussion will develop clarity on goals and identify areas where compromise may be needed.

- Start early communicating with your partner
- Anticipate issues particular to your situation
- Talk to other people who are/have been in a similar situation
- Some topics to cover:
  - Finances
  - Logistics
  - Willingness to live apart or not
  - Timing
- There are rarely perfect solutions and there are no templates for how to address these decisions, as each couple is different.
- Talk to others and learn from what they are doing/did.

Questions to discuss

Career development and planning

- What are your individual personal and professional goals?
- What financial constraints do you have? What is the least you can afford to earn? What is your ideal or goal?
- Are you looking to "settle" on your next move, or are you open to a series of relocations? What locations are you willing to consider?
- Is one person’s career or career goals primary?
- What is each person willing to compromise? What is non-negotiable?
- Is there a timetable or schedule for job hunting in your field?
  - Make sure you understand how job hunting works in your field and in your partner’s.
  - Is doing a postdoc part of the process?

Questions to discuss

What do you do if…

- your spouse/partner gets a job at a European university and you can’t find a good postdoc there?
- you both applied to jobs in the same locations but you each ended up with one offer and they are in different locations?
- you are the one finishing the doctorate and your partner, who is not an academic, has a good job with a good future here?

Friends and family, social networks

- Will it matter to you to move away from the people with whom you now spend time?
- If you’re open to moving to a new location where you don’t know anybody, how will you develop a network of friends?
- Are there family members or others who may try to influence whatever decision you reach?
  - If so, how do you plan to handle them?
More questions to discuss

Children
- If you don’t have children, do you hope to have them?
  - If so, what is a timeframe you would target?
  - What are you thinking of in terms of childcare? How do you feel about nannies, daycare or other family members as caretakers?
  - Will one of you have more responsibility for the child/children?
- How, if at all, will your children affect the range of locations you will consider?

Other Responsibilities
- Do you have, or expect to have soon, responsibilities for other family members?
  - How will they affect your job search?

Discussing dual career issues with your mentors
- Ideally your advisor will be supportive; however some advisors may believe you should prioritize the most prestigious position over a relationship
- When seeking advice it’s good to talk to more than one person
- Think about what you want to do and use your best judgment. Ultimately you must make your own decisions and priorities. Also, understand that priorities may shift.

Preparing for the job search
- Try to determine the friendliness of organizations to helping a spouse/partner
  - look at the website and network
- Consider organizational policies that might be helpful to you
  - partner health benefits, relocation help, paid leaves/time off, flextime, child care
The application process

- Apply as an individual
  - Will you apply nationally or in one/a few specific locations?
- Do not mention dual career issues in your application materials. The main case for your candidacy should be about the institution
- Do mention why the area or region is attractive to you, especially if it less likely to be attractive to most applicants (for example, upstate NY vs. NYC)

Interview logistics*

- Can the dual career status of a candidate be discussed by the search committee?
  - Definitely not. The chairs of search committees (and search committee members) play an important role in helping all committee members ensure that dual career status is not a topic of discussion in evaluating a candidate. It is important to recognize that committee members may have good ideas about potential dual career solutions, but these should NOT play any role in the discussion of the merit or suitability of candidates.
- When is the best time to encourage a candidate to raise a dual career concern?
  - It is illegal and inappropriate at any time to ask candidates any direct questions about their partner situation. However, it is very important to provide all candidates with information about the dual career program very early in the process—ideally before they even visit.

*from the University of Michigan - http://www.advance.rackham.umich.edu/FAQDualCareer.pdf

Interviews: fielding questions about your personal life

- Know they happen despite the fact that it’s illegal to ask them.
- Talk to people who’ve already gotten jobs.
- Prepare in advance for predictable ones.
- Know what you are and are not prepared to share.
- Use a sense of humor.
- Try to distinguish between potentially discriminatory questions and discriminatory intent.
- Answer the legitimate concerns, not the illegitimate questions.
Bringing up the issue with a potential employer

- In general, there is an advantage to waiting till you have an offer
- Sometimes you can negotiate
  - job hunting assistance for a spouse/partner
  - a work schedule that makes it easier to get together with spouse/partner in another location

Resources

- Higher Education Recruitment Consortium
- Higher Education Dual Career Network (HEDCN)
- Clayman Institute for Gender Research (Stanford University)
- Online articles and blogs, from the Chronicle of Higher Education, Inside Higher Ed, and others, such as The Harvard Business Review’s “The Dual-Career Mojo that Makes Couples Thrive” http://blogs.hbr.org/2013/04/the-dual-career-mojo-that-make/
- Articles on balancing work and life from the American Association of University Professors
- University of Michigan’s Dual Career Couples
  - www.provost.umich.edu/programs/dual_career/DualCareerBrochure9201.pdf
- Working Mother online
  - www.workingmother.com/best-company-list/146788