

DRAFT Priority Letter: Dual-career Hiring Practices

A major problem with hiring in academia is the “two-body problem” where candidates poised to accept a job offer have spouses or partners who are also required to seek new employment. Rough estimates are that over a third of academics in the U.S. also have academic partners and another third have working partners who might need assistance with transitions in their careers. At William & Mary, candidates often base their decisions to join our faculty on available employment options for their partner and employment of a spouse or partner can be vital in hiring and /or retaining faculty.

There are many advantages to dual-career hiring practices. Faculty partners can meet the needs of a variety of departments and programs often bringing new expertise in research, teaching, and administration. Dual-career hiring improves the chances of recruiting and retaining women and underrepresented minorities. A recent Stanford study found that 88% of faculty who successfully negotiated a dual hire at their institution indicated that they would have refused the position if their partner had not found suitable employment. One excellent report produced by CSU San Bernadino documents the details of dual career programs at two dozen institutions of varying sizes and includes the various financial, legal and practical aspects of all of numerous issues.

At Virginia Tech and UVA, there are offices dedicated to spousal/partner hiring. They say that roughly one half of the partners are looking for academic positions and that these partners are successful about 50% of the time (more often with NTE than TE appointments. The office is in the provost’s office, and the provost, dean and department will each contribute 1/3 to a new academic position for the first three years. William & Mary is substantially smaller than Virginia Tech and UVA, so a dedicated office on campus might not be practical, but there are other models. For example, Lehigh an institution similar size to William & Mary has put together a consortium of Lehigh valley institutions. They have 15% of a staff position dedicated to dual-career issues. The office doesn’t take action until an acceptance letter is signed, so this approach may not be as valuable for recruitment; still, it is a step in the right direction.

William & Mary could form a “Dual Career Tidewater Consortium” with CNU, Hampton, ODU, Norfolk State and possibly VCU and Richmond. Included could be Jefferson Lab, NASA and other large organizations in the area. The group could apply to the NSF ADVANCE program for initial funding. (Many Lehigh valley schools did this successfully). Of course, if a candidate mentions the partner and only a few weeks (or days) is given to find a position, then the issue might have to be handled completely internally. But informing ALL candidates, prior to on-campus interviews, of the existence of a consortium could facilitate communication. Chris Lee, Director of Human Resources, is familiar with the consortium model and could possibly contact counterparts at these other universities.

Update: Chris Lee and I spoke with people at at VCU, CNU and ODU recently and Deborah is contacting others at other institutions. We hope to zoom in a couple of months to discuss the Consortium. I’ll be contacting appropriate program directors at the NSF. The hope would be to apply to the NSF program in the middle of 2023. Whether the ADVANCE application succeeds or not, a Consortium could still be formed.