

NURTURING ACADEMIC CAREERS: DUAL CAREERS AND SHARED POSITIONS

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ADJUSTING UNIVERSITY POLICY TO ACCOMMODATE ACADEMIC COUPLES

In recent decades, much attention has been placed on the need of universities to attract women and minorities into science and engineering disciplines. However, the issue of how to retain and advance women scientists has received much less emphasis. One of the most important topics for women in academe today is the subject of advancement and tenure in their fields.

I firmly believe that everyone benefits from an environment supportive of women, particularly in terms of the ability to balance career and family options. Nonetheless, the current climate for women scientists in academe is often chilly. Some improvements can be made through personal intervention, such as mentoring, but without institutional change, there will be no long term impact. In its ongoing effort to act as catalyst for change, the Association for Women in Science (AWIS) has developed models and resources in its *Women Scientists in Academe* pilot program designed to achieve lasting improvements for women in scientific disciplines.

The AWIS pilot program, funded by a grant from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, examined issues relevant to women faculty members, such as promotion and tenure, career development, dual career concerns and child care.

AWIS studied several existing models during the development of their pilot program, including the American Physical Society's (APS) site visit project. Then, AWIS identified common denominators and specific differences among three science departments (chemistry, mathematics, and biology) of the selected institutions. Based on their findings, AWIS designed appropriate strategies for increased retention, promotion and tenure of female faculty. This paper focuses on one issue addressed by the pilot program, that of dual careers and shared positions.

Although both women and men generally begin school equally equipped to learn science and engineering, the number of women who ultimately follow academic science and engineering career paths is relatively low. As Figure 1 indicates, in 1993, women comprised 20 percent of science and engineering faculty in American higher education institutions.⁷ Only 10 percent of women attained the level of full professor, showing the uneven distribution of women across faculty positions.⁷

These percentages reflect how important tenure and promotion issues are to women as they continue to remain under-represented as tenure-track faculty. In 1991, 72 percent of male doctoral scientists and engineers were tenured, but only 48 percent of women in the same fields were tenured.⁸ Although the number of women pursuing the sciences has increased, the number of women in the higher echelons of academe is still very low.⁸

Along with the issues of advancement, tenure, and promotion, women science faculty face obstacles in the academic system in matters of dual-career couples, family and work, and child care. A careful evaluation needs to be done of how to foster women's and men's careers through the use of flex-time, dual career appointments, and other policies. The integration of family and career is a major issue facing women and men scientists today, and a topic that arose frequently during the AWIS pilot program.

Women searching for faculty positions often must try to coordinate their careers with those of their spouses or partners. In the AWIS survey sample, 80 percent of faculty had spouses, many of whom were employed in a tenured or tenure-track position, the private sector, or the public sector (see Figure 2). Interestingly, women faculty were much more likely to have spouses jointly employed in academia, with 49 percent of female faculty's spouses versus only 12 percent of male faculty's spouses either tenured or working as tenure-track faculty (see Figure 2).

Figure 1. Percentages of higher education faculty in science and engineering by sex.⁷

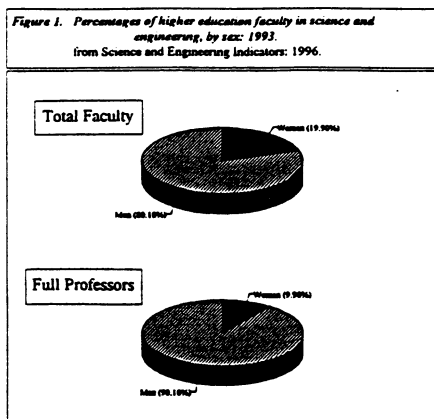
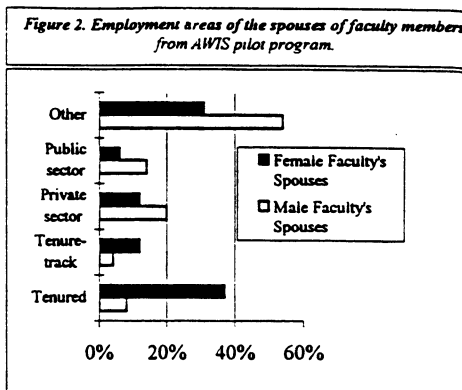


Figure 2. Areas of employment of the spouses of faculty members (from AWIS pilot program).



The AWIS pilot program focused strongly on dual career couples, particularly since none of the institutions AWIS visited had a formal dual career policy, having only made decisions on a case-by-case basis. However, both faculty and administrators are beginning to recognize the importance of exploring dual career and shared position policies. For example, one university we visited had recently assigned a provost the responsibility of brokering dual career hires, and the biology department of that same institution established a steering committee that develops options for spouses of dual career candidates.

Couples seek time-sharing positions for a number of reasons. They include the shortage of assistant professor openings, a desire to work in the same place and avoid commuting, and an urge for both to maintain a professional career while having a family. Shared and split positions have been a professional and personal success for both the institutions and the academics involved in such an arrangement.⁵

In an article in the December 1995 issue of the *American Physical Society News*, Natalie Adolphi described the position shared between her and her husband in the physics department at Knox College. They hold a joint appointment and each is expected to fulfill half the duties of a full-time position. Adolphi suggested that if a university does not have a policy in place, it may be difficult to convince the administration to implement one in the midst of a job search. Administrations should be encouraged to develop policies before the searches begin at their institutions.

Universities will also benefit indirectly from a joint position policy because women students in the sciences will witness first hand a workable alternative to the traditional full-time faculty research position. As Lee Katterman writes, "when young women observe overtaxed faculty members struggling to meet all of their professional and personal goals, many shy away from science fearing the professional chances and family life cannot coexist."⁵

In fact, the principal investigators of the APS-AAPT physics department study noted that "attention to improving the climate for women students will inevitably have a positive impact on improving the overall climate for all students."³ I would argue that effective dual-career policies result in a more responsive and productive environment for all members of the academic community-faculty, students, and administrators.

Note: The results of the findings of the Women Scientists in Academe pilot program are expected to be published in the spring of 1997 as the AWIS Resource Book. For more information, contact AWIS. Telephone: (202) 326-8940; e-mail: awis@awis.org; address: 1200 New York Ave., NW, Suite 650, Washington, DC 20005. If your institution has developed policies to respond to dual career needs or if you have successfully negotiated a dual career hire, please share your experiences with me as I will be exploring a variety of models in future columns.

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