

Dual Career Couples and the Job Search

Job searching can be both an exciting and a stressful process. A job search when your partner also has a career commitment can raise additional issues and challenges—issues related to the job search and to the relationship. Will you and your partner be job searching simultaneously? Whose job is “most important”? How can you make sure you each get what you want—or at least some of what you want? How do you negotiate differences in each other’s geographic preferences, timelines, salary requirements, and other issues?

This handout is designed to help you and your partner as you confront the positive and challenging aspects of being part of a dual-career couple. It does not provide the “right” answer or approach, but gives you a framework for considering your decisions and their impact on your careers and your relationship. It may offer some suggestions to help with communication about your career goals individually and as a couple. It may simply describe many of the feelings and concerns you are experiencing.

Before the Job Search

It can be helpful to have a framework in mind as you begin the process of making important career decisions. It will be important to keep lines of communication open with your partner. Some issues to consider and discuss include:

- Clarify the relationship you are in—to what extent is it a factor as you begin your job search?
- Determine individually and as a couple what areas of your life you most value and what aspects of a job are most important; consider how these might affect a job search (e.g., family time, income, prestige, location).
- How do you and your partner view your respective career plans? Are they of relatively equal importance? Is one career primary, due to income potential, greater career commitment, or any other reason?
- Will you consider dealing with reversed roles (e.g., gender roles or previously established roles within your relationship)?
- Discuss possible models for combining two careers and the pros and cons of each choice. Examples might be:
 - a commuting relationship (short term? or long term?) or telecommuting
 - “taking turns” at beneficial career moves
 - linking career decisions to the timeline of the primary caretaker of children
- Recognize the ideal vs. the reality. Can both partners really “have it all?” Should you consider offers that are “stepping stones” to the ultimate goal?

During the Job Search

Your job search will include aspects unique to those who are part of a dual career couple. You will want to be prepared to deal with the issues below along with similar issues. Keep in mind that these are complex issues and that you and your partner may need to review and revisit your decisions regularly.

- Consider if and when to tell potential employers about your partner’s job search needs. Many employers have units or firms to assist with this.

- Account for the realities of a job search (e.g., length of time can extend for months). If you are conducting two job searches simultaneously, one person may receive offers long before the timeline for the other.
- Consider how you will manage external pressures (e.g., from faculty advisors, parents, or children).
- Take responsibility for your own career. Balance this with continually seeking clarification about your partner's expectations, timelines, and availability of support.
- How will you and your partner define a successful relocation?

After the Job Search

Throughout the process of career decision-making, job searching, and beginning a new job, there are stresses, challenges, and a great deal of change. Being prepared for the impact of this change process may assist you in making clear decisions and adjusting to new roles and responsibilities. Use these strategies to anticipate and prepare for some of the effects of the job search process.

- Educate yourself and your partner about change and the experiences that result from it. These may include feelings of grief, loss, anger, and fear.
- Project into the future and consider potential regrets, rewards, concerns, and issues.
- Recognize the impact of multiple transitions in individual identity for each partner as well as the impact on your relationship.

Resources

See the Office of the Provost's Dual Career Information Web site:
http://www.provost.umich.edu/programs/dual_career/index.html

Acknowledgement: This document was created by a group of staff members from the following offices at the University of Michigan: the Career Center, the Center for the Education of Women, Counseling and Psychological Services, the Ford School of Public Policy, and the Office of the Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs.