



Tip Sheet: Principles and Practices for Hiring Dual Career Couples

Introduction

The recruitment and retention of world-class faculty often depend on support for the accompanying spouse/partner of the recruited individuals. Michigan State University (MSU) and the Office of the Provost welcome and encourage spousal/partner hires to help recruit world-class faculty. Per university [policy](#), MSU regards spousal/partner hires as a legitimate exception to the normal practice of competitive recruitment. Candidates being considered for spousal/partner hire must meet the qualifications and standards for the position.

This document summarizes the key principles and practices in recruiting a tenure-system faculty member who may be interested in a spousal/partner hire. It also describes the process steps for requesting funds and/or an exception to the posting process from the Office of the Vice Provost for Faculty and Academic Staff Affairs (FASA).

Overview of Spousal/Partner Categories

The spouse/partner of a prospective faculty candidate may be interested in various careers. Provided is an overview of the types of options and the individuals and/or offices who can aid in navigating options:

Table 1. Spouse/Partner Career Pathways and Points of Contact

| The spouse/partner is interested in: | Individuals and offices who can assist in identifying positions |
|---|---|
| 1. Positions outside of Michigan State University | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Director of the MSU Higher Education Recruitment Consortium (see the Resources section for contact information) |
| 2. Faculty and academic staff positions within MSU | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The office of the Dean of the initial candidate• Office for Faculty and Academic Staff Affairs |
| 3. Administrative (staff and executive) positions within MSU) | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Office of the Dean of the initial candidate• Office for Faculty and Academic Staff Affairs• Human Resources |

Please note that most of this document outlines practices and processes related to positions within MSU (categories 2 and 3). MSU's Higher Education Recruitment Consortium (HERC) Director may be able to assist with identifying opportunities outside of MSU (category 1), however, there is no guarantee of placement.

Eligibility for Positions within MSU

Tenure system faculty are eligible for consideration for an arrangement for their spouse/partner at MSU. Ideally, both partners in a dual career couple are hired competitively, but this may not be an option in many cases. Spouses/partners may be considered for a faculty, academic staff or administrative position at MSU.

Decision Process

The decision to pursue a spousal/partner arrangement within MSU rests with the Office of the Dean. The dean takes responsibility for looking across the university for possible spousal/partner arrangements. Requests are evaluated on a case-by-case basis, including consideration of available funding. If the Office of the Dean authorizes the request, they will attempt to identify an appropriate hiring unit within the university to accommodate the spouse/partner. Considering available funds and/or need, if the potential hiring unit agrees to consider an appointment for the spouse/partner, it will invite the spouse/partner for a full interview and deliberate according to the norms of a competitive search for the role.

Funding

Direct Hires

In cases where a position does not already exist within MSU, typically, the salary for the spouse/partner will be shared equally (i.e., 1/3 split) for the first three years by:

- the Office of the Provost,
- the department/school of the original candidate and
- the hiring unit of the spouse/partner

Funding from the Office of the Provost is limited to the initial three years. These three years of support are intended to give the spouse/partner time to secure permanent employment either at MSU or outside of MSU. The spouse/partner is strongly encouraged to search widely throughout mid-Michigan for a suitable position during this time frame. If the spouse/partner remains in the position they were initially hired into at MSU, after the initial three years, the entire salary of the spouse/partner will be the responsibility of the spouse/partner's hiring unit. In such a case, the hiring unit must plan for the success and sustainability of the spouse/partner hire after the initial three-year funding end date.

Occasionally, the department/school of the original candidate and the hiring unit of the spouse/partner come to an arrangement in which funding from the Office of the Provost is not needed to support the position.

Vacant Positions

The above cost-sharing arrangement is not available for vacant positions, as departmental/school/unit funds are already available in these cases.

When to Discuss Spouse/Partner Arrangements

Search committees, unit administrators and HR administrators may receive questions from candidates regarding whether there is an opportunity for dual career support at MSU. It is unlawful for any employee of MSU to ask questions of candidates that elicit information based on their marital status during the pre-employment process. Care must be taken when entering these discussions to avoid inadvertently eliciting information about a candidate's marital status. Any discussions on dual career support before an offer is made should be limited to a general statement that the university works diligently to support dual career couples and welcomes discussion from the candidate at the time of offer.

Sometimes candidates are unaware that dual career support is possible, or they are reluctant to inquire. A practice utilized within the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources is for the chair/school director to send a letter (Appendix 1) to identified finalists (typically assistant professors) that encourages them to think about resources and other factors that might help them succeed (e.g., salary, start-up funds, physical space, professional development opportunities, dual career support). The letter also encourages them to feel comfortable entering the discussion with the chair/school director on the resources/factors (if they are offered the position), and to identify the priority they place on each in the context of their career goals.

The department chair/school director may initiate conversations and/or negotiations regarding specific spousal/partner arrangements after a candidate has been selected and an offer of appointment has been made. The department chair/school director should submit the spouse/partner's CV to their dean.

Exploring Partner Arrangements within MSU

After assessing the spouse/partner's qualifications, the Office of the Dean will determine whether to pursue an arrangement. If the office decides to pursue an arrangement, they will establish the position type for which the spouse/partner may be considered (e.g., faculty/academic staff or administrative staff) and work to identify possible university hiring units. The Office of the Dean may contact their FASA liaison to explore opportunities when spousal/partner hires are being considered.

The Office of the Dean approaches the dean's office/unit leadership of a potential hiring unit to explore the arrangement and indicate the funding involved. The Office of the Provost encourages collaboration amongst the deans with the principles of reciprocity and mutuality. The potential hiring unit is highly encouraged to explore possibilities, although they are not required to accept a spouse/partner. Each spouse/partner will be evaluated by the potential hiring unit based on their qualifications, skills and expertise. Reasons a unit may decline often include the lack of need, incompatible qualifications for a suitable position, or lack of funds, although requests should be given all due consideration.

Faculty and Academic Staff Appointments

Spouse/partners may be interested in arrangements for faculty and academic staff appointments. This typically includes, but is not limited to, the following categories:

- tenure system faculty
- fixed-term faculty and academic staff (e.g., instructional and/or research)
- academic specialists (e.g., advising, curriculum development, teaching, research, outreach)

Executive and Staff Appointments

Spouse/partners may also seek arrangements for an executive or administrative staff position within MSU. Sometimes, with executive and administrative staff positions, there is not as much opportunity for an immediate potential arrangement. As above, the Office of the Dean will work to identify where (and if) there is a need for a person with the qualifications of the spouse/partner.

If a suitable staff position needs to be created, the Office of the Dean must consult with FASA. For staff positions, FASA will send the arrangement request to Human Resources Employee Relations for their consultation with the applicable union.

Additionally, spouses/partners are encouraged to consult the HR website to identify available positions to which they might apply. They may also wish to consult directly with Human Resources (517-353-4434) regarding position opportunities. However, there is no guarantee of employment for open, competitive positions.

Offers of Hire to the Spouse/Partner

If a spouse/partner is offered a position at MSU, they will receive a separate offer from the original faculty candidate. The offer made to the spouse/partner is contingent upon acceptance of the offer made to the original faculty candidate. This statement must be included in the offer letter to the spouse/partner. The offer should provide clear expectations around the responsibilities of the position, length of appointment, what will happen after the appointment has ended, and that reappointment beyond the end date (if applicable) is subject to available funds, future needs of the unit and performance.

Resources for the Hired Spouse/Partner

The hired spouse/partner is entitled to appropriate unit resources (e.g., computer, IT and staff support, professional development, supplies) to successfully fulfill their responsibilities consistent with any other non-spouse/partner hire. Both leaders in the hiring unit of the spouse/partner and the department/school or unit of the original faculty candidate should explore, discuss and ensure suitable and appropriate resources are available for the hired spouse/partner.

Memorandum of Understanding

If a spouse/partner arrangement is made, both leaders in the hiring unit of the spouse/partner and the department/school or unit of the original faculty candidate may want to establish the degree of support that will be provided. Examples of what to cover include salary support, time frame, basic staff support,

supplies, computers and related IT support, professional development, travel, contract and grant support, indirect cost sharing and plans for sustainability. Units are highly encouraged to document the arrangement in a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with all impacted units signing the agreement.

No Opportunities Available

While the university is committed to facilitating support for faculty candidates, it is not always possible to find a spousal/partner arrangement. In some cases, if a potential opportunity for a spouse/partner does not immediately exist, the interested parties may agree to take future steps to try to find an arrangement within MSU. In these cases, the original faculty candidate should work with the Office of the Dean and the department chair/school director to specify these steps.

The timeline for these cases may extend beyond the timeframe for the original faculty hire. In such cases, any offer letter to the original faculty hire may not guarantee employment for their spouse/partner. The faculty candidate's department chair/school director will be responsible for continuing the search for a position for the spouse/trailing partner.

Conflicts of Interest in Employment at MSU

The hiring unit of the spouse/partner should assess and address any conflict of interest in employment considerations due to the spouse/partner arrangement. If the spouses/partners are to be employed in the same unit/MAU, in addition to completing and submitting the [Conflict of Interest in Employment Form](#), plans for navigating any conflict of interest within the unit/MAU should be developed, documented and shared with both spouses/partners. The unit's FASA liaison may assist with concerns around conflict of interest and the development of management plans.

Relevant Policies

- [BOT 402: Conflict of Interest in Employment \(msu.edu\)](#)
- [Conflict of Interest in Employment \(msu.edu\)](#)

Requesting Spousal/Partner Funding from the Provost Office

If the arrangement requires centrally funded financial support for a spousal/partner arrangement, the Office of the Dean of the original faculty candidate should submit a request through the [Request for 1/3 Salary Support for a Spouse/Partner Hire Microsoft Form](#) with the following information:

- the name of the original faculty candidate, the position and department/school/unit for which they have been offered a position
- the spouse/partner's credentials and CV
- the position and hiring unit for which the spouse/partner is being considered
- the proposed salary amount for the spouse/partner
- the proposed start date
- the proposed financial arrangement

Once FASA has reviewed the request, they will email the Office of the Dean with a determination. If approved, they will copy the Office of the Provost Budget and Personnel Officer so they can work with units on the logistics for receiving the spouse/partner budget allocation.

Requesting an Exception from Posting a Faculty/Academic Staff Position

After the unit has a) secured funding, b) the spousal/partner arrangement has been agreed to by the department of the original faculty candidate and the hiring unit of the spouse/partner and c) the spouse/partner has accepted the offered position, the hiring unit takes the following steps to officially hire the spouse/partner:

1. Create the agreed upon position via an Academic Exception Request Form through the [EBS portal](#).
 - a. When submitting the form, select the exception reason of “Recruitment and Retention Contingent Hire –Spouse/Partner.”
 - b. Attach documentation of the approval from FASA of any central funding.

Once the Academic Exception Request Form is submitted, it will be routed for review and approval to FASA; the Office for Institutional Diversity and Inclusion; and the departmental/unit, fund and MAU approvers.

2. Initiate hiring paperwork and processes, including the criminal background check, the offer letter, Fixed Term Memorandum, Conflict of Interest Form (if applicable), etc.
3. Once these processes are complete, the hiring unit utilizes the position number provided in the Academic Exception Request Form to complete the appointment form in EBS for the spouse/partner to officially hire them at MSU.

Resources

- [Michigan Higher Education Recruitment Consortium \(HERC\)](#)
 - Contact Maranda Holtsclaw, Director, MI HERC, at mholtscl@msu.edu
- [Office for Faculty and Academic Staff Affairs](#)
 - Contact FASaffairs@msu.edu
- [Office of Human Resources](#)
 - Contact SolutionsCenter@hr.msu.edu

Summary of Responsibilities

Table 2. Responsible Parties and Designated Actions

| Responsible Party | Action |
|--|---|
| Faculty Candidate | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Notifies the unit administrator (e.g., chairperson/school director) of the need for a spousal/partner hire at the time of offer. 2. Determines whether to accept or decline the offer based on identified arrangements (or lack of arrangements). |
| Unit Administrator of Faculty Candidate | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Obtains information about the spouse/partner, their CV, and contacts the Office of the Dean for support. |
| Office of the Dean of the Original Candidate | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Determines whether to pursue spouse/partner arrangements. 2. Identifies potential funding arrangements and hiring units. 3. Reaches out to leadership within the potential hiring units. |
| Potential Hiring Unit of the Spouse/Partner | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Explores internal possibilities considering the qualifications of the spouse/partner presented, alongside the potential hiring unit's unique needs, funds, etc. 2. If opportunities exist, identifies and conducts next steps unique to the position (e.g., interview process). |
| Hiring Unit of the Spouse/Partner | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Follows the processes outlined above for hiring. 2. Identifies and clearly articulates expectations of the position (e.g., responsibilities, length of appointment and expectations around reappointment) in the offer letter. 3. Submits the Academic Position Request Form in EBS. 4. Initiates hiring paperwork and processes and submits the hire form in EBS. 5. Provides resources (e.g., computer, IT support, professional development support) for the spouse/partner to successfully fulfill their responsibilities. 6. Onboards the spouse/partner hire. 7. Works to identify sustainable funding for the position beyond the initial three years, if the hiring unit intends to renew the appointment. |
| Faculty and Academic Staff Affairs | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reviews central funding requests from deans (or their designee). 2. Assists the units of the original candidate and the potential hiring unit with process questions. 3. Supports the Office of the Dean of the original candidate, when requested, in exploring possibilities across the university. 4. Reviews the academic position exception request for spouse/partner hires within the EBS system. 5. Facilitates discussion with HR Employee Relations on no-post staff positions. |
| Office of the Provost Budget and Personnel Officer | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. When requested by the hiring unit, allocates the agreed upon central funding amount for the spouse/partner hire. |