Partners can be hired into all types of academic positions, and universities have been creative about finding good fits. The gold standard for academic employment is, of course, tenure-track or tenured jobs. In our survey, we found that most second hires are in fact placed in tenure or tenure-track positions (see Figure 4; it is important to remember that our sample includes full-time faculty only). Offering tenure-track or tenured positions to qualified partners can be “a win–win” situation for everyone involved. Our findings reveal that second hires are as productive as their disciplinary peers (see Are Second Hires Less Qualified Than Other Hires? below).

**Adjunct Roles – 17% of Second Hires**

Partners who are not hired into regular faculty positions are often taken on as adjuncts—lecturers, research associates, visiting professors, and the like—with renewable contracts. A few even become permanent, senior lecturers or the equivalent with good job security.

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From the report: [Dual-Career Academic Couples: What universities need to know](https://michellerclayman.org/research/dual-career-academic-couples-what-universities-need-to-know) by the Michelle R. Clayman Institute
Types of Partner Positions

Overall 17 percent of second hires in our survey are taken on as adjuncts, research associates, and so forth. Universities who hire partners as research professors or research associates sometimes provide salary for two years as part of a startup package, but thereafter they expect candidates to provide their own salary and research money through sponsored research. These soft money positions can work in the sciences but are rarely sustainable in the social sciences or humanities where external funding is less available. Several partners in our survey commented that they held appointments that allowed them to work as principal investigators in laboratories but were offered few other resources. One vice provost noted that adjuncts at his university generally sought better positions as soon as possible; another reported that lecturers at her university had unionized in efforts to improve conditions.

These temporary or ad hoc positions for partners allow couples to move together, and some are designed to tide a partner over until a tenure-track position opens. Nonetheless, these types of positions can also disadvantage partners’ ability to find good permanent employment because temporary positions typically do not provide the resources required to further careers. It is worth reiterating that, once the first hire has formally accepted an offer, his or her power to negotiate

What if the Partner is not Complete with his or her Ph.D.?

One difficult situation institutions face is making offers to junior faculty whose partner will not finish his or her Ph.D. or the equivalent for another couple of years and will then go on the job market. Universities may lose their junior hire at that time or need to create another job. One university in our study allows a department or college to “lock in” a good-faith agreement (backed up with available funds) to consider hiring a partner of a particular candidate in the future. Another university may offer a partner of a junior hire a two-year postdoctoral fellowship. Although low-income positions, many postdoctoral fellowships require little teaching and allow the partner to build up a good research profile. This buys the university time to be able to perhaps place that partner.

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Shared Positions

diminishes. One professor of English commented that universities need “to face the issue and bite the bullet” at the time of the first hire. Another professor commented that her department lost “a stellar hire” because the departments where the partner might “fit” would not make tenure-track offers. According to this professor, the couple ended up accepting offers at a “comparable university” (in terms of size, location, and research character) that offered the couple two tenure-track positions.

Nevertheless, some partners are willing to accept temporary lectureships, even unpaid courtesy appointments. Couples who wish to be together may choose to maximize their overall situation by accepting one partner’s best job offer and settling for a less-than-optimal position for the other.

Shared or Split Tenure-Track Positions

A number of respondents to our survey expressed interest in shared or split tenure-track positions. “These can,” one biologist commented, “be very family friendly.” Less than 1 percent of respondents with academic partners in our survey share or split a position. Only one university in our study offered shared faculty positions as an advertised option. Typically, if a position is split and each partner holds 50 percent, each is eligible for tenure. A number of faculty in our survey expressed interest in such fractional but mainstream positions (for any faculty

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member, not only couples) as a way to accommodate faculty who might have heavy family responsibilities and suggested that these positions be reviewed every five to seven years with options for new career opportunities as family circumstances change. This scenario works only in areas where the cost of living is sufficiently low for each faculty member to survive on half a salary. It should be noted that job sharing is often not an option for same-sex couples in states that do not allow partner benefits to be offered to unmarried couples.

**Job Sharing**

Although we did not study job sharing in detail, universities with experience in this area suggest that each half position is best treated as a completely independent position in terms of tenure, evaluations, and salary increases. They also note that expectations for "part-time" work should be laid out carefully ahead of time; part time can easily expand to full time without extra compensation or reward. Expectations for expanding part-time to full-time positions also need to be understood on both sides of the table before contracts are signed. Other considerations of importance for shared positions include the following: How independent or interdependent are they? If one half becomes vacant, does a partner have the right to assume the full position, or does that half revert to the department or central administration? What is the tenure process for fractional appointment?

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Are Second Hires Less Qualified?

Are Second Hires Less Qualified than Other Hires?

One problem with couple hiring is that a stigma of “less good” often attaches to a second hire; as noted above, 74 percent of second-hire respondents in our sample are women. Twenty-nine percent of respondents in our survey reported that their departments had, in fact, hired a partner whom they considered “under-qualified,” and 37 percent of all respondents report that a second hire is treated with less respect than a first hire in their departments (Figure 23). These findings have serious implications. Hiring under-qualified faculty dilutes the quality of departments. Treating faculty as second-class citizens disrupts departmental collegiality, leading to poor working conditions all around.

Best-Case Scenarios

In the best-case scenario, departments make careful decisions, and second hires are well qualified and treated with respect. One female faculty member wrote, “Even though I was an accompanying hire, I have been treated with the utmost respect in my position, have received ample support, and have been very successful in reaching my goals. I am currently going through the tenure/promotion process (successfully so far) and feel that I have a rewarding future in front of me at this institution.” A woman professor in the humanities wrote, “My colleagues are wonderful and I have never been treated as a second-class citizen (in fact, I was told that they hired my husband so that they could hire me—not true, but a nice gesture).” Still another woman added that her experience has been good; her institution has treated both partners as regular faculty members each with distinct roles.

Not-So-Rosy Picture

More often, though, the picture is not so rosy. A number of respondents commented that they have been treated like “trailing spouses” since they were hired. “It is a

“One partner is almost always perceived as better than the other. The other partner then suffers, in terms of what is offered, in reduced long-term support, and also psychologically as a second-class citizen.”

— Professor of Medicine

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highly stigmatized situation,” one lamented. Another stated, “Some colleagues see me first as someone’s wife.” A male faculty member noted that his institution regularly treats “secondary” hires as second-class citizens, regardless of gender, by offering the second hire a rank below his or her previous academic rank or, in his case, refusing to continue tenure, or both. A male professor of medicine commenting on couple hires said, “One partner is almost always perceived as better than the other. The other partner then suffers, in terms of what is offered, in reduced long-term support, and also psychologically as a second-class citizen.” He continued that, in his view, the most successful partner hires are those where couples are hired at the same rank and either work together as an effective team or work completely independently in separate departments. A second hire (a biologist) wrote that the downside for a second hire (when viewed as a trailing spouse) is that the university does just enough to keep him and his partner but that the package given him was limited in terms of position, salary, laboratory space, and money. Not having a “full laboratory,” he continued, “slows down productivity and makes movement into a tenure-track position either here or elsewhere more difficult.”

In some cases, institutional and departmental priorities and cycles may determine who becomes the first hire, and academic couples may flip lead partner over the course of their careers. In our survey, dual-hired faculty explained that at some times and in some places the current second hire has been the first hire. One partner in a same-sex couple in the humanities noted that she and her partner had managed four dual hires over 16 years at “full rank and full salary.” Our data suggest this kind of success is rare. Her partner commented further that for two of

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those hires she was the first hire and for two of those hires her partner led. In a sense, who is the first hire—in couples who are well matched professionally—can be arbitrary and depend on the hiring priorities of an institution and what job has been advertised.

No matter who is hired first, however, the second hire may be made to feel unwelcome. Moreover, women who were hired by institutions through an open search and not as part of a couple hire are sometimes, nonetheless, seen as a “spousal” hire with the stigma that that might entail.

Measuring the Academic Productivity of Second Hires

Given the strong views on this topic, we set out to measure the academic productivity of second hires in our data set. Academic productivity is complicated to examine and difficult to quantify. A scholar’s productivity is a function of so many tangibles and intangibles, and measures of productivity—number of journal articles, number of books, their impact, and so on—vary greatly from discipline to discipline. In our data set, the issue of productivity and second hires is further complicated by small sample sizes. Among 9,043 respondents to our survey, 291 identified themselves as the second hire in a dual-hire scenario; when split by discipline, these numbers become, obviously, even smaller. Despite these methodological limitations and conceptual caveats, our data suggest that second hires are not less productive than are their disciplinary peers, contrary to the stereotypes and stigma attached to the partner who “follows.”

Taking the three disciplines with the largest second-hire sample sizes in our data set (natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities), and looking at assistant, associate, and full/endowed professors only, we examined the relationship between second-hire status and number of articles published over the course of a career after controlling for the respondent’s gender and rank, two major and interrelated “predictors” of publication rates. Although journal articles may carry more or less weight by discipline (in terms of calculating total productivity), we examined each discipline separately, such that an individual’s article count was always compared with article counts of other scholars in her or his own discipline. Article counts varied reasonably in each discipline; to compensate for the skewed nature of the variable, we used a natural log transformation of number of articles to normalize the distribution.

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Because books, rather than articles, are particularly important indicators of productivity for scholars in the humanities, we also examined the number of books published among respondents in this field alone, again using the natural log transformation of the variable and the same controls as we used in the articles analyses. (Appendix C in the full report provides additional details about methodology.)

Starting with simple correlations, being a second hire was negatively correlated with the number of articles in both the natural and social sciences, but this relationship was reduced to statistical nonsignificance once gender and rank were controlled using linear regression procedures. In the humanities, being a second hire was not correlated with either measure of productivity (articles or books), and the variable did not enter either regression equation as a significant predictor.

Thus, our data suggest that productivity levels among second hires are not significantly different from those among their peers after data are disaggregated by field, and gender and rank are accounted for. We should reiterate, however, that these data describe full-time faculty employed in tenure-track positions, that is to say, faculty who successfully landed tenure-line jobs and are still employed in academia. Of course, future analyses of productivity among larger samples of second hires and their peers must explore the many additional and complex factors that affect both publication count and record, such as impact of scholarship, available resources for research, and the like.