Quality, quality, quality. Everyone—faculty and administrators alike—agrees that dual hiring works only when both partners are well qualified; each appointment must be based on the highest standards in research and teaching. Faculty emphasize that second hires are made on a case-by-case basis with no guarantees given to candidates. As one engineering dean put it, “We don’t want another department to lower its standards to take a spouse.” Whatever the case may be, second hires are the first to plead that faculty be hired on merit. It is essential, many counsel, that both partners are “wanted” by their respective departments.

Tenure-line hires are scrutinized so that excellence is not compromised, and second hires are no exception. As in any hire, partners brought forward as part of a couple hire present a full dossier of published work and teaching evaluations, go through a full set of interviews, and are vetted through letters of recommendation. Departmental faculty must have an opportunity to look carefully at a partner if that partner is to join their faculty in some capacity (see Types of Positions).

The search process is in essence the same as for any candidate with several exceptions:

• A search waiver may be requested
• Departments may be asked to be flexible in both the rank order of candidates and the candidate’s field of specialization.

From the report: Dual-Career Academic Couples: What universities need to know by the Michelle R. Clayman Institute
Importance of Factors for Partner Hires

Many of the universities we studied are among the top universities in the country. They strive to hire faculty not merely tenurable at the institution but the very “best” in their fields nationally and internationally. Although departmental autonomy to accept or reject a candidate remains paramount, universities suggest that when asked to consider a partner hire, departments be prepared to be flexible and willing to hire from among the top five scholars in any particular discipline. This request can be complicated by the fact that departments cannot cover all subfields in a particular discipline and many set out hiring priorities to guide the intellectual coherence of their offerings (and to assuage battling factions).

When a couple for hire comes along, a department may find itself suddenly offered an expert in environmental history or genetics rather than in the planned area of Latin American history or neurobiology. The candidate may be a star in his or her own right—but may not necessarily add to the current strengths of the department or plug an important gap. His or her hire may mean sacrificing strength in another area. Even if a partner does not fit within a department’s top three priority areas, faculty may be asked to consider whether the potential hire can contribute in positive ways to their group. Not surprisingly, respondents in our survey consider a second hire’s area of specialization important to partner hiring decisions 87 percent of the time (Figure 26). When done carefully, partner hires do not necessarily impinge upon departments’ intellectual coherence. When asked to evaluate

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specific dual-hire recruitment and retention cases on their own campuses, only 26 percent of faculty respondents agreed that couple hiring disrupted a department’s intellectual direction (Figure 23).
Top Factors for Considering Second Hire

When reviewing the qualifications of a potential second hire, our study shows that faculty are persuaded to make an offer based on the following considerations: (1) the second hire’s quality of scholarship, (2) the second hire’s “fit” with the department, (3) the availability of university funds for the second hire, and (4) the second hire’s area of specialization (Figure 26). Between 87 and 93 percent of faculty agree that these factors are important to departments’ final hiring decisions.

Role of the First Hire

The “star quality” of the first hire is also an important factor—although not the most important one—driving employment decisions for second hires. The “desirability of the initial hire” ranked at 84 percent among survey respondents as a reason to hire a partner (Figure 26). Faculty are also likely to favor a partner hire when their department benefits directly from the initial hire; that is, when the first hire is in their department. Sixty-four percent of respondents reported faculty members in their department favored a dual hire or retention when the first hire is in their own department (Figure 23). Only 37 percent of respondents reported that they favored a partner hire when their department got the second partner only (Figure 23).

Faculty Perceptions

In addition to being asked how faculty perceive partner hiring, respondents were asked how their departments use partner hiring. Twenty-four percent agree that departments used couple hiring to recruit nationally and internationally renowned faculty “a great deal” or “a lot,” whereas another 55 percent agree that departments
Faculty Perceptions of Departments

use dual hiring for this reason “a moderate amount” or “a little” (Figure 27). Faculty also agreed that departments use partner hiring to retain good faculty (Figure 27). A number of professors commented that couple hiring provides “great strength to a department’s ability to attract top talent,” especially at the rank of full professor. Survey respondents also commented that couple hiring can bring stability to departments if each partner is well-placed professionally. Fifty-six percent of respondents agreed that academic couples benefit their departments by “adding something valuable” (e.g., loyalty, socializing, synergy) (Figure 23).

Concerns with Partner Hiring

Still, couple hiring raises concerns. In our survey, 44 percent of faculty overall (and a little more than one-third of academic couples themselves) worry that hiring a couple in the same department may create conflicts of interest (Figure 23). Concerns can run high when one member of a couple takes on an administrative position. When this happens, some faculty express fears about nepotism, and some dual-hire couples find it “awkward.” One woman department chair “bent over backward” not to favor her husband in any way. Another woman in a law school did not step up to become dean, because her husband was on faculty. Some universities have policies against couples directly supervising each other’s work. In such cases, oversight might be transferred to a noninterested party: a dean, provost, or another independent.

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administrator. This, too, has its problems. One female professor thought that she lost out professionally by being supervised by an administrator outside her department who did not know her work well; she thought that she lost the "advocacy" usually associated with a department chair.

Although a number of faculty worry that by accommodating a partner hire their department will miss out on future hiring opportunities, some departments game the system to increase the size of their group. One second hire applied for an open position in a particular department but was told to withdraw her application and go the partner-hiring route. She obliged and commented that through this arrangement her department got two faculty members for the price of one: She cost the department one-third of her salary; the new faculty member hired through the open search (into a field that complemented her own) was hired at two-thirds of the usual cost by virtue of being appointed jointly with another department.

Founded in 1974, the Clayman Institute for Gender Research at Stanford University creates knowledge and seeks to implement change that promotes gender equality at Stanford, nationally, and internationally.