



Pleasures and perils of joint appointments

April 21, 2009
alice.young@ttu.edu

Science 8 October 1999:
 Vol. 286, no. 5438, pp. 226 - 227
 DOI: 10.1126/science.286.5438.226 [Prev](#) | [Table of Contents](#) | [Next](#)

News Focus


INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH:
 NIH Roadmap for Medical Research

Integrative Graduate Education and Research Traineeship (IGERT)


Science Careers From the journal *Science*

Career Advice
Faculty Positions: Multidisciplinary Matters
 By [Peter Gwynne](#)
 September 08, 2006

As universities increasingly emphasize multidisciplinary research and teaching, would-be faculty members must demonstrate their ability to cross disciplinary boundaries. But they must make sure that they don't lose academic depth when they gain new breadth.


Sounds great! What can go wrong? 

[www.aacu.org/meetings/annualmeeting/AM09/
 HypotheticalPromotionandTenureCase.pdf](http://www.aacu.org/meetings/annualmeeting/AM09/HypotheticalPromotionandTenureCase.pdf)


% Respondents who reported 'neutral' or 'negative' impact 

Graph showing ~31% of graduate students, instructors, postdocs; ~28% of untenured faculty; and ~24% of tenured faculty reported neutral or negative impact.

From: Rhoten D, Parker A. Risks and Rewards of an Interdisciplinary Research Path. *Science* 17 December 2004, Vol. 306, no. 5704, p. 2046

Perils 

- Some people view joint-appointment holders as "neither fish nor fowl," with no loyalty to a particular department.
- You need to satisfy two units, neither of which fully understands or appreciates what other does.

Perils 

- University may not have fair and/or workable procedures in place for
 - Promotion & tenure
 - Raises
 - Credit for funding, publications, teaching, or service
- Requirements for tenure might be different for joint appointments

Perils



- Units may not have clear visions
 - Of what they expect of you
 - Of how they will communicate with each other
 - Of how they will evaluate you
 - Of what's likely to happen if one unit disappears and/or when leadership changes

Perils




- Bottom line - don't accept a joint appointment without a clear written vision of what both departments will expect of you.

- **Get everything in writing!!**


Other risks?




- You can't be in two places at once
- You have two bosses (or more)
- Each boss/department has own expectations
 - *Competing demands*
 - *Conflicting demands*
 - *Demands aren't synchronized*
- Each boss/department has own experience and culture
- Evaluation criteria may differ or compete

Strategies to get it right:
Know types of joint appointments 

- Membership in 2 different Departments
- Tenure home in a Department, and membership in a “Program”, “Institute”, or “Center”
- Membership in a “Center”, with retreat rights to a department
- Membership in one department, with adjunct appointment in another
- Some other arrangement


Strategies to get it right:
Ask questions 

- During & after interview; during evaluation
- What does employer want?
- What strategies do they have in mind to help you succeed?
- Do both units pay part of your salary? Can distribution change?
- Who will be responsible for your evaluations (annual, term, tenure, promotion)?

Strategies to get it right:
Ask about evaluation plans 


- **Who decides retention, tenure, promotion, salary?** One unit, or both?
- Will there be one joint committee, or two separate ones? If joint, how are members chosen?
- Will committee be “de novo” or experienced with joint appointments?
- Will committee be created now or at time of evaluation?

Strategies to get it right:
... More to ask about evaluation



- Can you arrange face-to-face interviews with both supervisors present?
- How will external evaluators be chosen? What information will they have about your joint appointment?
- Will your evaluation consider how your work expands interdisciplinary opportunities?


Strategies to get it right:
Ask about resources and credit



For research


- How is space allocated?
- What about internal funding?
- And access to core facilities?
- Will both units receive credit for your funding?
- For your publications? Students?
- Who gets your IDC / F&A \$\$?

Strategies to get it right:
Ask about resources and credit




For teaching and service


- Who will schedule teaching and get credit?
- Who gets credit for cross-listed courses?
- Will you be able to recruit students to program?
- How will service be assigned and rewarded?

Strategies to get it right:
Ask about resources and credit 

- Voting rights?
- What does each department know about the other? Can they work together and “play nice”?

Strategies to get it right 

Get everything in writing

Be visible in both units 

- Find a few people in each department with whom you have common interests and communicate with them regularly.
- At least initially, attend meetings of both units and speak up occasionally. Your goal is to have people in both units see you as an active member.
- Have students share seminars, lab meetings, projects.

Examples of what some schools are trying



- 50/50 appointments
- College-level oversight committee
- Joint evaluation, especially for promotion & tenure and salary
- Revisit procedures every few years, especially as young joint faculty members get tenure.

“A woman is like a tea bag – you never know how strong she is until she gets into hot water.”



Eleanor Roosevelt

The same can be said for anyone with a joint appointment!
