

*Hey Jane!*

## **Negotiating and navigating a joint appointment**

Welcome to Column 42 of *Hey Jane!* This is a project of the SWS Career Development Committee. Questions are generated by the committee and SWS members.

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***Hey Jane! I have the opportunity to accept a joint appointment. What do I need to know while negotiating and navigating this type of appointment?***

Joint appointments can be beneficial to faculty, particularly those whose work spans different disciplines or those looking to garner the resources of multiple units. But there are also pitfalls to consider. Most joint appointments involve one appointment in a home department (sometimes referred to as your “tenure home”) and one appointment in another department or unit that is a different discipline, including interdisciplinary units. Despite all of the discussion of interdisciplinarity, institutions of higher education vary in the extent to which their policies and practices meaningfully support interdisciplinary scholars and their work. Whether you are newly on the job market or on your way to tenure and promotion, there are ways to make interdisciplinary/joint\* appointments work. The first step is to understand the specific institutional framework for interdisciplinary work. Some of this information may be available online, but you should also ask questions of colleagues or potential colleagues, the department chairs, and the dean(s). Ideally, they can point you to documentation about how the institution handles interdisciplinary appointments. Some institutions have a formal process that incorporates the use of memoranda of understanding (MOUs)\*\* signed by the faculty member and all involved units. Even without a formal framework in place, you can ask for important elements to be incorporated into your hiring contract. The chair, director, or head of your jointly appointed unit can be invaluable in the process of explaining the value of your interdisciplinary efforts in research, teaching, and service to your home department. As part of your assessment, the role of your chair/director/head of your joint appointment should include at least a meeting with your home department chair, and ideally a written assessment of your work.

Best practices for joint appointments focus on ensuring clarity for the faculty member, all units involved, and anyone who will be evaluating the faculty member. Everyone should understand and have in writing expectations, criteria for evaluation, and the set of individuals who will weigh in on annual review and any tenure and promotion evaluations. Some department cultures are less welcoming than others to participation by other units. For faculty in those situations, having clear expectations in writing is critical to a faculty member's success. However, even those faculty whose departments embrace interdisciplinary work and joint appointments should follow these recommendations. A change in dean or department chair can void an unwritten agreement. If your home department will be the only arbiter of your tenure and promotion, it may be better not to accept the joint appointment.

### Research

The research criteria required for promotion, tenure, and periodic raises can vary among disciplines, and discipline-based colleagues may feel less able to assess the value and quality of interdisciplinary research. Therefore, research expectations need to be included in your MOU. The specific content that should be included will vary by institution, but generally you will want to make sure that the MOU specifies how each unit of your appointment is to participate in your assessment. You will also want some clarity on the types and quantity of productivity required, appropriate disciplinary and interdisciplinary publication outlets, and how co-authored work is counted, given that interdisciplinary research is frequently collaborative. External reviewers also play an important role in a fair assessment of your work. You will want clarity on whether and how reviewers outside of your disciplinary department will be selected and who will participate in that selection.

### Teaching

Teaching expectations should similarly be spelled out in writing. You may want to specify, for example, how many and which courses will serve each unit and whether they will be cross-listed. Can you teach a course in the other unit that does not necessarily contribute to your department's curriculum? For example, it may be important to you and your professional development to be able to regularly teach Feminist Theory or Introduction to Queer Studies. Any courses or curriculum development that you do as part of your joint appointment should be included in your assessment. Be aware that your different units may assess teaching using different methods (for example, if one unit uses quantitative student evaluations and the other uses qualitative assessments). If teaching observations are part of your evaluation, determine how the units will coordinate.

### Service

While service is often a small segment of our duties, it can cause disproportionate difficulty for those in joint appointments. Faculty often experience a lack of recognition for the service work that they perform for an interdisciplinary program or a department outside their "home," even when that work is something as

quantifiable as student advising. Less quantifiable service, such as serving on interdisciplinary program committees and participating in the intellectual life of an interdisciplinary program, is even more prone to erasure. Spell out expectations for all of the ways you will participate in each unit. Without clarity and proper recognition of all service responsibilities, faculty can end up doing double service or finding themselves identified as under-contributing to their department. Spelling out responsibilities helps insure a fair load and proper recognition of your contributions.

In summary, having all of these expectations in writing will provide you clarity in what each unit expects of you, and it will be a document that you can point to when writing your personal narrative for tenure and promotion. While it is best to have a conversation with your chair or dean about expectations and evaluation *before* taking on a joint position, it is still worthwhile to have that conversation and set out expectations in an MOU after your appointment is made.

Joint appointments are increasingly important for the work of universities, so administrators are invested in keeping jointly appointed faculty happy in those positions. If you find you are in a less-than-ideal joint appointment, talk to someone about how particular issues might be resolved, including a possible renegotiation of the terms of your appointment.

\*We use the terms interdisciplinary and joint appointments interchangeably to include formal joint appointments as well as less formal responsibilities that occur across units.

\*\* For an example, see MOU templates at Lehigh University:  
<http://www.lehigh.edu/~inprv/faculty/jointappt.html>