Solving the Two Body Problem: An Evaluation of University Partner Accommodation Policies

Jared L. Woolstenhulme
Benjamin W. Cowan
Jill J. McCluskey
Tori C. Byington

The Two Body Problem:
- Joint hiring of couples has been increasing.
- Academic couples face the challenge of finding two jobs in the same location at the same time.

A Simplified Version of the Theory
- We present a simple model of the academic labor market which includes:
  - Academic couples.
  - University offers to candidates based on productivity.
  - Candidates may be single or form a couple.

Candidate's Problem
- Candidates accept their "best" offer:
  - Single candidates prefer the best school that offers them a job.
  - Candidate couples prefer the best school that offers jobs to both partners.

Average Policy
- In each period each candidate couple attempts to find jobs in the same location at the same time.
  - Each candidate in the couple is able to accept a job offer.
  - A candidate couple's productivity is the sum of the productivity of the individual candidates.

Independent Policy
- The academic labor market for non-couple candidates and couple candidates is equal.
  - Job candidates in the same location at the same time.

University's Problem
- University makes offers to candidates with productivity above a minimum threshold, \( \tau \).
- May use 1 of 2 possible evaluation rules for couples:
  - Independent evaluation of candidates.
  - Evaluate productivity of couple as a single entity.

Results for Productivity
- We empirically compare productivity between couple hires and non-couple hires in lower vs. upper tier schools.

Testing the Theory
- Washington State University began keeping record of those hired via a "partner accommodation program" in 1999.
  - This policy resembles an independent approach to hiring.

Summary
- Our model predicts that when universities evaluate members of couples as independent candidates, they will be relatively more productive in all but the top schools.
  - Using WSU as a case study, we find that couple hires publish more on average and are more likely to obtain grants that comparable non-couple hires.
  - We also find that couple hires have longer durations of employment at WSU.

Acknowledgments
- We would like to thank the National Science Foundation and WSU ADVANCE for their generous funding.