

The Academic Time-Share

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Employment practices at US colleges and universities continue to evolve as administrators step up efforts to recruit full-time, multidepartment faculty. These appointments are distinct from “joint research,” “joint teaching,” or “courtesy” appointments in that multidepartment faculty typically divide their time proportionately across a specific set of departments (or academic units) while fulfilling the basic functions of a faculty member in each location.

Faculty assignment across academic boundaries within an institution does not necessarily confer interdisciplinary status. According to the National Research Council, a deeper understanding of these multidepartment appointments has the potential to inform studies of “team” formation in the sciences and engineering — whether for teaching or research — and, ultimately, the emergence of interdisciplinary specialties.

The Psychology of Science in Policy (PsySiP) Project, a nonprofit research group based in Washington, D.C., previously described the role of “thought leaders” in facilitating the emergence of the interdisciplinary specialty of behavioral neuroscience within psychology. However, it was PsySiP’s documentation of the recent, rapid rise in full-time, nontraditional faculty appointments that suggested further information may be needed to understand the contribution of multidepartment appointments at US colleges and universities.

The PsySiP board of directors has identified the analysis of full-time, multidepartment faculty appointments as one of its priority policy research areas in 2016. However, there is no national database that can tell us at this time where to locate these faculty. Thus, PsySiP would like to invite psychological scientists hiring or serving in full-time, multidepartment appointments to contact PsySiP to advance national discussion in this area. PsySiP intends to convene a series of meetings to learn more about the contributions of this new cadre of research scientists and scholars to the psychological sciences. At their planned invitational meetings, they would like to pursue some of the following study design issues:

- Effective approaches for estimating the number of full-time, multidepartment faculty in the United States (e.g., via vice presidents for research versus department chairs)
- Employment locations, including the concept of a “home department”
- Disciplinary units within an institution that typically host shared faculty appointments
- Teaching arrangements across departments or academic units and innovative teaching opportunities, including graduate-training infrastructure
- Research arrangements across departments or academic units and the types of research issues — and publication strategies — tackled in collaboration with other disciplines
- Career paths before and after multidepartment employment

It is not often that planners and policymakers have an opportunity to develop a strategy to monitor the implementation and evolution of a faculty arrangement as unique as full-time, multidepartment

appointments. One of PsySiP's goals is to lay the groundwork for the design of a national study of these appointments across the sciences, engineering, and the humanities. PsySiP believes the experience of research–doctorate faculty in psychology represents a critical starting point in the design of that national effort.

References and Further Reading

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