

# naturejobs

**THE CAREERS  
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**"D**istance has no way of making love understandable," goes the refrain to *Radio Cure* by rock group Wilco. That chorus could have been penned with scientist couples in mind. After I wrote about the difficulties researchers have in maintaining romantic relationships (see *Nature* **446**, 463; 2007), I received the largest ever e-mail response to this column. Almost all of the messages agreed that maintaining a marriage while building a scientific career is difficult — especially when the spouse or partner is also a scientist. The main reason cited was the difficulty of both partners being able to find a job in the same city — or even the same time zone — as the other.

Many of the couples said they spend most of their disposable income on travelling to see each other at weekends. Several of the long-term success stories came after one partner decided to give up lab life for a more stable family future. In one case, an ecologist couple attained 'first prize' and managed to secure two tenure-track jobs at the same university, although in different specialities.

Distance in scientists' relationships can come in more forms than just geographical. Couples who are at different stages in their career also reported difficulties. One Swedish scientist wrote that her now ex-husband agreed they would balance family responsibilities as they took turns in career progression. But as her husband, who had gained more scientific seniority, advanced, that covenant broke down. The woman was left to care for the children while trying to advance her career. Several other young researchers say that they had problems maintaining relationships as they moved from undergraduate to graduate, as their partner wasn't prepared for the amount of time required by lab work and literature reading.

Unfortunately, the various messages were unable to offer a concrete solution to the problem, other than to say that partners need to be aware of the distance issue — both temporally and spatially — and must commit to bridging it with humour and understanding.

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