ACADEMIA THROUGH ANOTHER LENS

A Guide to AASCU’s Spouse/Partner Program
Fitting comfortably and productively into the role of spouse or partner of a university president or chancellor requires deliberation, planning, and a healthy dose of intuition. Your effectiveness in this role can be enhanced through participating in programs at AASCU’s twice-yearly meetings (Summer Council and Annual Meeting), taking advantage of the outreach offered, conversing with peers, and collecting ideas and strategies from other spouses and partners.
This program addresses the needs of novices and veterans in this role and concentrates on common issues, such as expectations, role and identity, relationships, communication and privacy. The program realistically explores a variety of spouse/partner interactions, both within the university and in its broad external community. You are encouraged to share ideas and experiences through networking, informal conversations, and as presenters at spouse/partner sessions.

**Mission**

AASCU’s Spouse/Partner program exists to serve the needs of spouses and partners through networking, professional and personal development, information exchange and guidance, and through highlighting the position’s importance to the university and its greater community.

**Network of Peer Support**

The strength of this program comes from the diversity of its membership, whose knowledge, expertise and commitment serve as great resources. In addition to meeting and talking with other spouses and partners at AASCU meetings, a critical resource we offer is the *Spouse/Partner Directory*. The directory is printed and distributed annually, and an online version, updated quarterly, is available to you in the members only section of the AASCU website.
SUMMER COUNCIL AND ANNUAL MEETING SESSIONS

Spouse/partner programming is designed specifically to address the unique challenges and opportunities you face in this role. The Spouse/Partner Program aims to offer sessions at Summer Council and Annual Meeting that:

• Provide a confidential and comfortable setting for role-specific conversations;
• Energize, stimulate and educate;
• Include content that is relevant, appropriate, thought-provoking, and worthy of time spent in attendance;
• Incorporate feedback and input from our spouse/partner membership;
• Appeal to diverse demographics;
• Improve communication with the membership; and
• Provide an opportunity for sharing ideas for programming that encourage member attendance.

Session presenters and facilitators often come from the very talented spouse/partner membership, as well as from consultants with relevant expertise. Sessions are highly interactive, lively and provocative, and vary in format to include presentations, panels, roundtable discussions, question/answer opportunities, and shared stories.

Summer Council is typically held in mid-July and Annual Meeting in mid-October. Sessions may focus on:

• The Spouse/Partner Role in Friend and Fundraising
• Ideas for Campus and Community Engagement
• Managing Expectations
• The Varying Roles of Spouses/Partners
• Protocol and Etiquette
• Book Discussions
• Crisis Management
• Communication Tools
• Entertaining
• Creating and Maintaining Relationships
• Recognizing and Handling Challenges
PROGRAM GOVERNANCE AND STRUCTURE

Two committees and three staff members are responsible for meeting the needs of AASCU’s spouses and partners.

**The Spouse/Partner Planning Committee (SPPC)**
Through its diverse makeup, 13 committee members provide thought leadership for initiatives and relevant programming and advise AASCU on the needs of spouses and partners. Members of the Planning Committee are proposed by a Spouse/Partner Nominating Committee and are voted upon by the membership prior to Annual Meeting each year.

Members serve two-year terms with one-half rotating off the committee each year. The committee communicates through conference calls throughout the year and meets at both Summer Council and Annual Meeting. The coordinator for planning and outreach and the liaison for the program both serve as ex-officio members of this Planning Committee.

**The Spouse/Partner Nominating Committee**
This committee is comprised of seven spouses and/or partners who have been active in the program and thus are likely to know a broad cross-section of its membership. Committee members serve staggered two-year terms with three-to-four rotating off each year. This committee develops the annual slate
of individuals who have been nominated by the spouse/partner membership and who have agreed to serve on the Planning Committee. This committee is also responsible for nominating new members of the Nominations Committee.

Coordinator of Spouse/Partner Planning and Outreach
The coordinator, a former presidential spouse, works with the Spouse/Partner Planning Committee and AASCU staff to develop program sessions for Summer Council and Annual Meeting. The coordinator also serves as a resource in assessing the value and feasibility of projects and provides individual counseling, advice and mentoring to spouses and partners as needed. In addition, through email, phone conversations, and one-to-one contact at meetings, the coordinator engages spouses and partners of newly appointed presidents and chancellors within the AASCU network.

Liaison to the Spouse/Partner Program
The spouse of the AASCU president serves as the liaison to the Spouse/Partner Program. The liaison is the spokesperson for the group’s collective concerns, an advocate for interests of presidential spouses and partners, and an advisor to the Spouse/Partner Planning Committee on the interests and needs of spouses and partners.

Spouse/Partner Program Associate
The program manager offers day-to-day support for the program from the AASCU headquarters in Washington, D.C. This position provides assistance in on-site meeting arrangements; supports the Spouse/Partner Planning Committee and Nominating Committee, including taking notes and keeping records; facilitates communication among various program elements; manages spouse and partner data; and assists in the production of the *Spouse/Partner Directory*. 
NEW PRESIDENTIAL SPOUSES/PARTNERS

The roles and expectations of presidential spouses and partners vary by region, institution and personal preference. Regardless of these variations, AASCU makes a concerted effort to assist individuals new to this exciting but complicated role. Our goal is to provide knowledge and to foster the understanding necessary to thrive in the university environment, the surrounding community, and in one’s personal life. Efforts include:

• Orientation sessions at AASCU’s Summer Council and Annual Meetings designed specifically for spouses and partners of newly appointed presidents and chancellors;
• Special outreach by email, phone, and in-person conversation;
• A publication that focuses on the special needs of new presidential spouses and partners; and
• On-going support from member spouses and partners and AASCU staff.

Male Spouses/Partners

Until fairly recently, male spouses and partners were regarded as rare since their numbers were small. However, in the past several years, with the proliferation of female presidents and chancellors, the number of male spouses and partners has increased. While this group certainly shares similarities with their female counterparts, there are gender-specific issues and concerns that necessitate focused discussion. Sessions just
for male spouses and partners address a variety of issues and strategies that pertain to this distinctive role.

**How to Benefit from the Spouse/Partner Program**

- Attend and participate in sessions at Summer Council and Annual Meeting;
- Suggest ideas for programming;
- Submit your information for the Spouse/Partner Directory;
- Volunteer to participate as a session presenter, facilitator, member of the Planning or Nominating Committee; and
- Let us know when you are involved in something interesting, unique and exciting on your university campus or in your community. We will spread the work to the membership through the AASCU website and email.

**Confidentiality and Privacy**

AASCU is dedicated to protecting and maintaining the privacy and confidentiality of all members, including presidential spouses and partners. Contact information is shared only with other spouses and partners within the association membership, and meetings are limited to member spouses and partners, presidents and invited guests. Finally, information-gathering activities (surveys, questionnaires, etc.) are used strictly for internal purposes to aid in future development of programming and services for AASCU presidential spouses and partners.
HISTORY
OF AASCU’S
SPOUSES/PARTNER
PROGRAM

The AASCU Spouse/Partner Program was founded in 1971 by Roberta “Bobbie” H. Ostar, wife of then AASCU President Allan W. Ostar. It was initially composed of sessions that focused on the nature of the presidential spouse’s role.

From 1991 to 1999, Patricia “Pat” Appleberry, wife of AASCU President James B. Appleberry, served as coordinator. Pat created programming to address the rapidly changing demographics of the spouses.

From 1999 to 2009, Jo Hern Curris, wife of AASCU President Constantine W. (Deno) Curris, served as director of the Spouse/Partner Program. Jo built upon the work of her predecessors as a fervent advocate for recognizing the many roles and contributions of spouses and partners and creating top-notch programming that responded to their needs.
For Additional Information Contact

- Judy Ingle  •  inglej@aascu.org or jinglesc@gmail.com  •  843.833.3044
- Mickey Howard  •  howarda@aascu.org  •  716.913.1991
- Danita Young  •  youngd@aascu.org  •  202.478.4677
AASCU’s membership of more than 400 public colleges and universities is found throughout the United States, Guam, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. We range in size from 1,000 students to 44,000. We are found in the inner city, in suburbs, towns and cities, and in remote rural America. We include campuses with extensive offerings in law, medicine and doctoral education—as well as campuses offering associate degrees to complement baccalaureate studies. We are both residential and commuter, and offer online degrees as well. Yet common to virtually every member institution are three qualities that define its work and characterize our common commitments.

■ We are institutions of access and opportunity. We believe that the American promise should be real for all Americans, and that belief shapes our commitment to access, affordability and educational opportunity, and in the process strengthens American democracy for all citizens.

■ We are student-centered institutions. We place the student at the heart of our enterprise, enhancing the learning environment and student achievement not only through teaching and advising, but also through our research and public service activities.

■ We are “stewards of place.” We engage faculty, staff and students with the communities and regions we serve—helping to advance public education, economic development and the quality of life for all with whom we live and who support our work. We affirm that America’s promise extends not only to those who come to the campus but to all our neighbors.

We believe that through this stewardship and through our commitments to access and opportunity and to our students, public colleges and universities effectively and accountably deliver America’s promise. In so doing we honor and fulfill the public trust.