



THE **FIRST YEAR**

SPOUSE/PARTNER

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COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES



Patricia T. Appleberry

Spouse of AASCU President James B. Appleberry (1991–1999)

When *First Year Spouse on the University Campus* was first published in 1993 it reflected the challenges that faced presidential spouses at a time of rapidly changing roles and expectations. Although the roles of presidential spouses have evolved and become even more diverse over the years, many of the central challenges of the position remain unchanged. AASCU has reissued this handbook in Pat Appleberry's memory and in the hope that its insights and wisdom will be equally helpful to spouses/partners who face both the joys and the dilemmas of the role today.

THE FIRST YEAR SPOUSE/PARTNER

Introduction

Your spouse has just been named president at one of the fine public institutions of education across the country. As the two of you move to your new address and responsibility, you have been entrusted with living in the midst of one of the community's major educational and economic resources, and leading an organization that affects the lives of many people. The decisions your spouse makes in his or her tenure on campus have consequences for the entire community, and cause a high level of interest and attention in both the university and local community. This booklet is prepared with suggestions to help you manage those first new experiences, as you bring your own personality and uniqueness to this place.

The president is the leader of the university, but the role of the spouse in whatever manner chosen can enhance the presidency. In the past many spouses chose to be part of a *2 fer* team—two for the price of one. This concept is changing as more spouses are making very deliberate choices in deciding how to spend their lives, whether as a volunteer teammate, choosing a separate career, or a combination of the two. The key is the choice the presidential couple finds will work for them and their relationship together. Establishing this pattern early on in the presidency is important.

You the Spouse

There is no correct job description for the title of spouse, and expectations vary according to the institution's location and size and history of the presidency at that university. The important consideration is to know yourself and decide what you want to do. Don't become so absorbed by all of the attention that you usually receive, upon your arrival, that you are controlled by those influences and your decisions become made for you by others. You will be a happier and more effective spouse if you make your own choices. Relationships you establish with others will be affected by decisions the president makes. There will be some who will move in on you immediately to become your *friend* or *confidant* so they can exert their influence through you to the president. If you choose the volunteer teammate role, the demands on your time may be excessive, and yet you may feel quite alone. The first year it is normal to feel as though you live in a *goldfish* bowl. Everyone will watch you and want to help *feed the fish*, particularly if you live in a smaller community.

I encourage you to give your spouse counsel and support for the president is often asked to *walk on water*. The responsibilities of the job are determined by many different forces, be they local, state or national. There will be many days of travel and time away from you and other members of the family. The situation becomes even more difficult if there are children living at home or aging parents who need care. As the spouse, you may be able to assert yourself to help protect your time together by carving out time on the calendar for the two of you to share private recovery time. Sometimes your relationship may be strengthened if both of you vent your feelings and share your concerns.

Enabling Skills to Assist You in Your Role as Spouse:

- ▶ Be flexible.
- ▶ Roll with the punches.
- ▶ Be a positive representative.
- ▶ Listen carefully and speak with both caution and wisdom.
- ▶ Find your own space to do what you want and develop it as you choose.
- ▶ Don't compare either your choice or your style with any of your predecessors. It is now your time to write your own history.
- ▶ Read, study and take training if possible to know how to work effectively with the media. In your role as spouse, especially as you first arrive, you may be interviewed by print or electronic media, asking your opinion on a variety of subjects, some of which may be laden with past meaning for the campus or the community of which you are not aware.
- ▶ Remember that the work week for the president will often be seven days a week.
- ▶ Keep a good friend.

The Big Move

You have already learned all you could about the new community and its people before the big *announcement* was made and your pictures appeared on television and in the paper. The announcement probably carried the history of where you have been, what you have been doing, and predictions about the addition you will make to the life of the campus and the community. Make sure you have

learned all you can about the new community and its people so you can claim this new address as your home. It will be important for your own happiness that you establish your roots, even if it may be for a limited amount of time. (The typical AASCU presidential tenure is from five to eight years.) Don't make comparisons between your new location and where you were earlier. Always remember there are negatives and positives in every community. Find out all you can about your community, the surrounding area, the people who have made it what it is and the political forces that have fostered the progressive movement of the area.

Community Welcome

People are eager to show you their love for and identity with their community. Allow them this pleasure and enjoy their interest and welcome. One new president and spouse arrived on July 1, served as grand marshals for the fourth of July parade, and attended 12 welcoming parties in their first 14 days on the campus. They also welcomed alumni in the presidential home on moving day as the van was being unloaded! The alumni director arrived in the front yard with alumni from another state who had never seen the residence and would not be back in the area before they *died*. Ha! Ha! They were back twice that first year. Believe it or not, these kinds of things happen with regularity.

You will be asked to participate and join many different organizations in your new community soon after you arrive. One spouse, who is now retired, made a deliberate decision to accept no invitations for membership until six months had passed. Choose carefully how you want to make your contribution. Remember volunteer work should be personally satisfying to the volunteer.

P.S. (little reminders):

- ▶ Don't forget the *thank yous*.
- ▶ Make sure you have a good basic wardrobe. You will need it, but remember to be yourself. If that means jeans and cowboy boots, wear them.
- ▶ Enjoy the *honeymoon*, because pains of change do come!

Managing the Home

The presidential family may reside in a home owned by the university, or one which they have purchased. If the home is owned by the university, it may be located on the campus or in the community. While styles differ, most university homes were built or purchased with the purpose of entertaining in mind. Many members of the community will think of your home as a place where *rich people* live and will think it is staffed by thousands of people. There are many misconceptions about these dwellings and how they are used. One spouse tells the story of their January move with a fourth grade son who was asked by his teacher on his second day of attendance to stand and tell the class all about his house—how many rooms it had, the number of bathrooms and who was there to do the work. Most of us in the public eye would not vote to give this teacher an excellence in teaching award. However, it is a fact that you must face that everyone wants to know about how you live. In the winter, this same little boy was seen standing on the top of a snow pile shouting naughty words to express his feelings of stress. It just so happened he was doing this in a neighbor's yard. This neighbor became a close friend of the spouse and they chuckled each time the story was retold.

Hints for taking charge of the home:

- ▶ Determine the resources available to you for staff help in caring for your residence, whether owned by the university or you personally.
- ▶ Make sure you have the authority to hire the house staff that fits your needs and life-style.
- ▶ Learn how to coexist with physical plant people who seem to be ever present and the loss of personal privacy that comes with having so many around all the time.
- ▶ Establish a private area to have for your personal space and an area to use as your office.
- ▶ Put a lock on the bedroom door.
- ▶ Expect that people will open your drawers and closets when they visit your home whether you are looking or not!
- ▶ Determine the kind of events and functions you want to host in your home. Remember, it is your home and you have the right to decide even if you are living in university owned property. You have been permitted to live there, but do not let others rob you of the right to determine how you will use your home and the activities that you will host there. Learn when and how to say *no*. Some presidential families choose to use the home very little for university entertaining. Whatever you decide, be aware of the tax consequences of your decision.
- ▶ History tells us that the campus-owned presidential home has a great potential for controversy when architectural or decorative changes are made. Approach it with caution. Whatever is done, the governing board should take the responsibility and handle any criticism that may come. Some advise that it is best to do the major decorating as

you move in; after you have lived there for a period of time, a new project may be viewed as an unwise use of the taxpayers' money. The question may be, *if you have lived there this long without spending the money, why can't you live with it the way it is?* You may be viewed as only taking faculty salary money for your personal comfort. Neither the campus nor the public understands the amount of wear and tear on the house and contents even though it may be used by hundreds of guests every year.

- ▶ Keep a list of those things that are your personal possessions and a list of property that belongs to the university. If you use things that belong to you personally, make sure if they are used, broken or damaged they can be repaired or replaced. You may not want to use great grandmother's fine crystal vase for the flower arrangement because it might accidentally be dropped by the staff in the clean up after an event is over or tipped over and broken by a guest.
- ▶ Staff should not be expected to establish their own duties, for they are not aware of the scope or intensity of your responsibilities. It may be helpful and much more productive for you to make a task list for the person or staff who works in the home on a regular basis. If this is not done, you may find the time takes up the work rather than the work being accomplished efficiently. It also helps the staff person to know clearly what you expect.
- ▶ Keep a level of professional distance between yourself and the staff. They have a job to do and so do you. The old adage that familiarity breeds contempt has a basis in fact, and supervision of staff can become a problem if personal feelings override the ability to direct the work effectively. One spouse has reported feeling hostility from

a member of the household staff who was nearly the same age as the spouse, and who had children who were the same age as those of the presidential family. The employee was resentful of the perceived privileges the presidential children received.

- ▶ If you live in a residential area, the neighbors may become resentful when they see university vehicles helping with any of the work of maintaining the home and grounds. You should be prepared for these kinds of comments. It may be helpful to clearly state how the residence is used for university-related functions. Wherever you reside, be a good neighbor. Some presidential families host a picnic or some similar seasonal activity which will help the neighbors get to know both of you and your family.
- ▶ Remember, regardless of who owns the home or who has lived there before you, the home is not a museum. You need to make sure the home fits your family's needs.

Entertaining: Fund and Friend Raising

Entertaining is considered a vital tool for the growth and development of a university. The choice of the location for these events varies according to the style of the president, the facilities available, and the character of the event. Sometimes the home is the most appropriate choice for the ambience it provides and the statement it makes to the guests. On other occasions it may be more appropriate to use another university facility or a location in the community. The purpose of social functions may be to educate, communicate, or persuade. An example of the benefit of such activity is reported by one spouse of an individual giving the university a check for \$200,000 because she had been *invited*. In difficult budgetary times,

this was a most welcome gift. As the spouse, you may or may not choose to be involved, but social and entertaining activities will require much of the president's time.

The Schedule

Frequently, one of the most unanticipated shocks to a new president and the presidential family is that their life is controlled by the appointment book. The president, and in some cases the spouse, may be booked six months or more in advance. You as the spouse may be involved in part or all of the activities. Even if you have chosen to follow your own independent career, the presidential schedule will be important to you, for you may find that for you to have any real time together it must be scheduled on both of your calendars. Whatever the circumstances it is easy to get lost between the pages of schedules. Be careful not to let the schedule become the boss. The two of you must take charge. Plan ahead and protect important family time and events. If you do not claim the date, someone else will do that for you.

The Children

Children of public figures are often compared to preachers' children. The public watches them closely and holds them to a higher standard. If you are living in a more rural area, the *watch* can become intense. There are no easy answers for raising children in this environment. Children react differently to this intense scrutiny. Always keep in mind that few other parents are often as quoted or seen as frequently in media as the president. This can become a burden for the children as they mix and meet with their peers. It can become especially intense during periods of controversy

or conflict on a campus. Acknowledge the factors your children have to deal with, be prepared to discuss them, but do not dwell on them. These experiences can develop great strengths in your children. Reinforce the fact that all professions have negatives and positives. Laugh a lot, keep them busy, and let them be as normal as possible. If you have children of university age, consider thoughtfully whether they should attend the university where their mother or father is president.

Getting to Know the Governing Board

Your trustees or board members are individuals who are volunteers. Most are motivated by a desire to support the president and assist the university in strengthening as it changes. Support them, educate them, and develop them into the kind of supporters the university needs. Learn their strengths, weaknesses, and *what makes them tick*. Know their likes and dislikes. Some may have been accustomed to running large corporations and carry with them their own definite ideas. For others, service on the governing board may be the most important responsibility they have ever held. Learn their individual preferences, food likes and dislikes, favorite topics of conversation, family relationships, drinking habits and political beliefs—as starters. Remember these are the president's bosses. The *care and feeding* of the members of the governing board are among the more important responsibilities of the president, regardless of whether the spouse is involved.

Advice to the President: How to Help Your Spouse

- ▶ Make sure your spouse knows your schedule.
- ▶ Let the spouse know which events or activities are most important for your involvement as a couple. This is particularly important if you are pursuing separate careers.
- ▶ Designate someone from the presidential staff to make sure the spouse has access to the help needed, particularly if the spouse role chosen is the partnership model—assistance with tasks such as responding to correspondence, sending invitations, and on and on. It may also be important to provide the spouse with assistance in responding to the media. Having these resources available will make the first year much smoother.
- ▶ Both the president and spouse need to be alert to the differences in compensation or *perks* that may exist within the state or system. To be knowledgeable concerning these issues helps to avoid conflict or embarrassment as you interact with other presidents or spouses. Differences do exist.
- ▶ Remember, as the president you have individuals with whom you interact daily for discussing and planning your tasks as the leader of the university. The spouse may also need individuals with whom he or she can share, discuss, and vent concerns if needed. Understand and support this.
- ▶ Keep the spouse informed of pressing concerns that may bring attention via the media including such potentially visible events as: relocation or discharge of staff or faculty; illness or family concerns that affect the lives of university personnel, including activities that may be scandalous if known.

- ▶ Keep your spouse informed of changes in the lives of colleagues, whether those changes involve matters such as stressful job situations, changes in health, or family concerns. Extending to others an encouraging word or a hand of friendship is important, for any of us may find ourselves in the same situation someday.
- ▶ Both the president and the spouse should remember that leadership is usually accompanied by the *loneliness factor*. Highly successful persons who have decision-making responsibility that affects the lives of many people may often feel separated from friends and colleagues. This separation needs to be understood as a common consequence of leadership and not be viewed as a personal failing.
- ▶ Remember to tell your spouse *Thank You*.
- ▶ Give your spouse and family part of your time. Your job will always be challenging, it will always be changing, and it will never be done.

As the Years Pass

The diverse experiences in which the spouse has opportunity to participate provide a wealth of knowledge in the understanding of people. They also give the spouse a perspective on the changes in the world that few others in the community ever have an opportunity to experience. Not many individuals entertain the heads of state, artists, or corporate executives in their daily activities. You have the privilege of being a part of the world and its many different people and cultures.

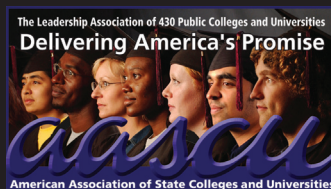
The view through a kaleidoscope is an appropriate analogy to the many roles of the spouse. As you view that beauty of color, every time the instrument is moved and turned, a new and different pattern is seen. The role of the spouse and the way it is interpreted is always changing, very individualistic and intriguing. Throughout the nation there are great differences. With this individuality there are still many pieces of the presidential and spouse experience that remain the same. May this document help you establish the patterns you wish to use in managing your life and the university environment while you are there.

Delivering America's Promise

AASCU's membership of 430 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 on-line 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.



1307 New York Avenue, NW • Fifth Floor
Washington, DC 20005-4701
202.293.7070 • fax 202.296.5819 • aascu.org

October 2010