Combining academia and activism

Common obstacles and useful tools

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Academics who engage in activism face a series of challenges and obstacles, including attacks, threats to security and advancement, output expectations, disciplinary pressures, epistemological expectations and peer influences. Practical means – a toolkit of strategies – can be used to overcome or mitigate these obstacles.

Introduction

Academics can engage in and contribute to activism in various ways. Some are involved in action groups on issues such as climate change and treatment of asylum seekers. Some undertake research and speak to the media about indigenous, environmental, gender and other issues. Others campaign on matters of concern within universities, including through unions and professional associations. Other possibilities include undertaking research that informs or supports activism, and advising and supporting activist students.

These and other forms of academic activism can be risky. Academics who seek to combine activism with work in the university can be subject to threats, abuse, silencing tactics, and peer pressure and scholarly expectations to shift away from activism. In this paper we explore these obstacles with an emphasis on strategies for avoiding the pitfalls and maintaining commitment as an activist-oriented academic. Drawing on our diverse experiences of activism, academia and community-engaged research, we suggest possible responses to the many pressures on activist academic work, paying particular attention to the challenges faced by early career academics.

Academia can be a site for activism in at least four ways (Downs & Manion, 2004; Zerai, 2002): (1) as a means to produce knowledge to inform progressive social change; (2) as a means for conducting research which itself involves social change; (3) as a site for progressive strategies of teaching and learning; and finally (4) as an institution whose power relations themselves may be challenged and reconstructed. (See Ward (2007) for another framework of approaches to academia and activism, highlighting activist, participatory and policy geographies. These share an ideological commitment to social and personal change but differ in terms of whether they see themselves as working *as, with,* or *for* particular publics respectively.) We briefly review the nexus of academia and activism before offering strategies for combining them.

First, academics may produce knowledge that, intentionally or not, informs progressive social change. Academic research may be taken up by activist and advocacy organisations for their own campaign work. Academics may contribute to policy debates and political change by participating in public debate or by direct submissions to policymakers.

Second, academics' conduct of research itself may involve social change. The term 'action research' describes a family of research methodologies that involve simulta-

neously pursuing social change ('action') and scholarly understanding ('research'). Action research typically is participatory, with all relevant parties in a particular community or organisation involved in examining current practice in order to change and improve it (Herr & Anderson, 2005; McIntyre, 2007; Smith, Willms & Johnson, 1997). Thus, academics may conduct activism *as* academic work, validating (particular forms of) activism in the name of their intellectual value.

Teaching and learning are the bread and butter of university business, and pedagogy – the practice and philosophy of teaching – itself is an important site of activism. Some teachers seek to use and rework teaching and learning practices in university classrooms to foster critical self-reflection, political empowerment and collective mobilisation (Curle, 1973; hooks, 1994; Newman, 2006; Shor, 1980). Some conduct conventional academic work in novel contexts in conjunction with activism, such as running academic seminars simultaneously with blockades of nuclear weapons bases (Vinthagen, Kenrick & Mason, 2012). Marking activism off as a domain removed from academia negates the potential for an activist engagement in reworking academics' teaching practices themselves.

Finally, universities can be criticised for their inflexible bureaucratic systems and for their subordination to state and corporate agendas, for example via military and corporate funding (Hil 2012; Newson & Buchbinder, 1988; Slaughter & Leslie, 1997; Smith, 1974; Veblen, 1918). Challenging these agendas, for example by pushing for greater student-staff participation in university decision-making, is the fourth sense in which academia is a site of activism.

Some academics engage in activism not directly related to their paid work, outside working hours and off campus. For example, a zoologist might be involved in the peace movement or a computer scientist involved with homelessness. In such cases, academic employment can provide an income and security that can help sustain activism.

To complicate the discussion, in some fields, for example in feminist studies (Eschle & Maiguashca, 2007) and human geography (Ward 2007), there has been a critique of the dichotomy between 'academia' and 'activism' itself. However, rather than discussing the theoretical framing of these terms, we focus on practical strategies to sustain one's activism as an academic (Cancian, 1993; Hale, 2008; Smith, 2007; Zerai, 2002).

We look particularly at the situation of academics who also practise activism, rather than activists who also do academic work. While we acknowledge that academics' work may contribute to repressive political agendas and that serving authoritarian state power or militarism (for

example) can be seen as a kind of 'activism', we focus on forms of activism which are more challenging for universities and dominant political interests.

Before highlighting the challenges of activism, it is worth noting their rewards. Many academics engaged in social change work experience powerful personal and professional benefits. Activist academics can find meaning and comfort in the sense that their work contributes to the greater good, nourishing a sense of personal and collective purpose. Many of them find pleasures in friendships and alliances with like-minded others and in participating in collective activist networks and communities. Their personal and political investments in 'making a difference' can give impetus to their professional work, motivating both intensified research and public engagement.

In turn, academia can be a valuable base for activism. Scholarship fosters useful skills in writing, argument, public speaking and critical reflection. Universities can provide resources for activism, including print and electronic dissemination of activist materials, public credibility, and authoritative speaking positions.

Our discussion of obstacles to using academia as a site for activism is organised into sections on attacks, security and advancement, output expectations, disciplinary expectations, epistemological expectations and peer influence, including a number of vignettes drawn from our own experiences or, in disguised form, experiences of others we know. Although abuse and campaigns of reprisal may not be the most commonly faced of these challenges, attacks can include significant threats to personal safety and employment security, and we begin with a discussion of these challenges.

Attacks

Academics who engage in activism may face reprisals, both externally from political opponents and internally from those within the university who perceive their involvement as nonconformist (Martin, Baker, Manwell & Pugh, 1986; Meranto, Meranto & Lippman, 1985; Nocella II, Best & McLaren, 2010). Attacks by external opponents are often politically motivated, intended to silence academics and thwart their political impact. Some methods of attack by outsiders include sending hate mail, making threats of violence, sending complaints to employers seeking reprimands or dismissal and complaints to funding agencies seeking termination of funding, and vilification on websites and in e-newsletters. Internally, both academic peers and students may perceive activist academics as violating their appropriate roles, with students for example com-

plaining that their lecturers teach 'propaganda' or that campus diversity initiatives are 'biased' (Vaccaro, 2010).

When academics come under attack, it is valuable to build and maintain the support of peers and superiors. One useful technique is to keep colleagues informed of political activities. Taking the initiative in this way allows activist academics to frame the issues in their terms, casting their engagement in public debate as an understandable and indeed desirable extension of their scholarly work. The developing discourse of 'community engagement' offers one way to frame activist activities as part of the university's core values.

Students sometimes hinder progressive activism, but they also can sustain it. Another strategy is for academics to enlist or mobilise student activism in support of their efforts. Where academics approach their teaching as a site of activism, student engagement and increased student interest in social change issues or campaigns can provide an important source of inspiration and positive reinforcement for the activist academic.

Academics who make controversial public statements or support causes perceived to be 'radical' may be criticised as politically biased, dangerously subversive, or tarnishing the name of their institutions. Such criticisms may be particularly troubling when they come from an individual's university peers or employers. In this context, another useful strategy is to draw upon discourses of free speech and debate, inviting one's colleagues to adopt the spirit of 'I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it' (Evelyn Beatrice Hall, biographer of Voltaire: see Kinne, 1943). Academics may call on their universities to defend their academic freedom to offer public commentary and to resist efforts to silence them, whether through public statements or legal defence.

It is worthwhile carefully documenting one's own performance and benchmarking it against that of colleagues. Internal attacks are commonly justified by referring to the allegedly poor performance of the target, when actually the target's performance is equal to or better than that of colleagues who are not subject to attack. Exposing such double standards can discredit the attackers.

Whether interacting or corresponding with one's colleagues or one's political opponents, behaving courteously is a sensible strategy. It is valid for academics to engage in robust, passionate and deeply critical text and talk. On the other hand, engaging in personal attacks, hostile threats and other disrespectful behaviours can damage your credibility, and it is far better to be able to point to them among your detractors. More generally, academics who are 'good colleagues' – friendly, respectful

and collegial – are more likely to be supported by their peers and by university officials, and to receive support when under attack.

> Michael has received a range of hostile and abusive correspondence, including e-mails, phone calls and web postings, in response to his public critiques of anti-feminist men's and fathers' groups and his participation in online debates on their websites. On one occasion Michael was called into his university employer's office, after the employer and a number of others received a letter alleging that Michael had behaved dishonestly and unethically in his research and public commentary. Michael was able to explain the political context for this correspondence and to reassure his employer. Michael also learned that similar letters from anti-feminist advocates calling for the termination of his funding and employment had been sent to his funding body and to the Minister for Education.

Security and advancement

Concerns about job security and advancement are pervasive in most occupations. Two trends have heightened such concerns in higher education, and thus intensified the tensions between academia and activism. First, the higher education sector is characterised by the growing casualisation of the labour force (DeSantis, 2011). Junior academics strive for tenure – an ongoing appointment – as opposed to the common forms of employment in short-term contracts or teaching paid by the hour. Second, university life is characterised by an increasing emphasis on research productivity and the quantification of research output. This is embodied by national exercises focused on research output such as Britain's Research Assessment Exercise, and expressed also in shifts in the criteria used in universities regarding hiring, departmental funding, PhD scholarships and a host of other matters.

A third factor underlying academics' job-related concerns is the investment in career associated with middle-class and white-collar professions in general. University lecturers and researchers historically have held significant class privilege, and university education itself has constituted an important form of cultural and material capital (Bourdieu, 1988; Collins, 1979; Kosut, 2008). Possession of class privilege is associated with a greater investment in securing and advancing in one's career. Individuals from privileged social backgrounds are more likely to take as given their involvement in socially and materially rewarding work, to actively cultivate career trajectories, and indeed to realise them. Academics who risk their job security and advancement by engaging in activism may therefore do so in a context in which their employment is more

vulnerable than before, their scholarly outputs are subject to increasingly explicit quantitative evaluation, and careers *per se* have substantial symbolic and personal value.

One solution here is to postpone activism until you have obtained tenure. In many countries, tenure is not a guarantee of job security, but it can reduce the risk from articulating and involving yourself in radical politics. The danger with this approach is that activism is postponed indefinitely. Once an aspiring academic has passed through the ritual hurdles of obtaining a PhD and established a series of practical and intellectual routines that marginalise activism, these gain a certain material and habitual weight, making it increasingly difficult then to put activism back in (Schmidt, 2000). In foregoing activism, the academic may also lose the interpersonal networks and habits of mind that accompany activism, in a sense becoming 'rusty' at activism and increasingly comfortable in a working life without it. On the other hand, it may be more feasible for academics to decide to forego *some* activist involvements, especially those that employers are likely to see as highly threatening, until they have greater employment security.

Another way academics may seek to protect their careers and career advancement while engaged in activism is to maintain academia and activism as separate domains. Here, activism becomes something one does *after hours.* Activism then can be framed as akin to a private pursuit or hobby. It may be peculiar, even frowned upon, but tolerated as long as it does not intrude on regular academic work. If concerns are raised, academics can reassure their employers that their activism is an independent activity that does not compromise the successful completion of their duties. This 'separate worlds' strategy is compatible with substantial involvements in activism, particularly for individuals whose paid work is either part-time or flexible. It is more likely to be successful when the activism seems unrelated to work roles, such as an engineer being involved with an anti-racism group.

This strategy limits the threat to academics' job security and advancement. And it may be the only practical strategy for those academics whose scholarly work is tightly controlled or highly circumscribed because of political and institutional environments, funding constraints, or other limits. However, this 'separate worlds' strategy is less valuable for academics for whom academia itself is a potential site of activism, as discussed above. A 'separate worlds' strategy abandons the challenge of working to change the power relations of academia as an institution and to construct alternatives to the hierarchies of value embedded in universities.

Academic unions and professional associations can provide important support for activist academics, particularly where job security or career advancement is threatened due to institutional concerns about activist work. Maintaining an active membership and working relationships with organisers and officers enables scholars to access advice that is independent of their institution, and draw on the backing of the union or association if faced with disciplinary action or dismissal.

Output expectations

The expectation to 'publish or perish' can create significant challenges for activist academics, particularly as universities increasingly value refereed publications in prestigious international journals. While refereed papers may hold the key to career progression and grants success, the most prestigious journals are often not interested in activist scholarship, due to peer influence and disciplinary expectations (discussed below). In addition, these sorts of publications are seldom the best way to reach relevant audiences for activist-oriented research, such as other activists, non-government organisation (NGO) or advocacy groups, community organisations and policymakers. For example, social movement scholarship has been criticised as being of little use to activists (Croteau, Hoynes & Ryan, 2005).

There are a number of strategies to address this dilemma. A common tactic is to simply work harder, producing both refereed publications to satisfy the demands of the institution or discipline and, quite separately, activist-oriented publications designed to contribute directly to social change campaigns.

Perhaps more common is the strategy of publishing multiple versions of a single piece of research for different outlets and audiences. As an example, research into a social problem might be published in a refereed journal article, as well as a more accessible report for an NGO, and also disseminated via an open-access website. In each case the research is described and analysed in slightly different ways, and communicated in the forms most appropriate to the different audiences and uses.

In the course of his research on anti-feminist fathers' groups in Australia, Michael published a journal article for an international journal and made available on his own activist website shorter and more accessible summaries of the research and 'fact sheets' on key issues such as false allegations of violence and abuse in family law proceedings. The latter (Flood, 2010), rather than the academic article, was cited in a recent government report on family law. In develop-

ing a model of tactics against injustice, Brian published articles in a variety of academic journals, and prepared a four-page introductory leaflet, an annotated slide show and a manual for activists, all available on his website (Martin, 2012).

Strategies for publishing in both refereed and non-refereed outlets require hard work and also expertise in diverse modes of research and communication. The effort and skills involved are not always recognised or rewarded within academic institutions. This approach may be difficult to sustain in the long term, particularly if the activist academic is also faced with peer pressure, attacks or institutional expectations to pursue only peer-reviewed publications.

Another strategy involves developing publications that satisfy both institutional and activist demands. In this case, community-engaged academics can work to expand what counts as scholarship within the academy.

> A community engagement programme at an Australian university developed a research report series and e-journal in order to publish community-engaged research. The publications are fully refereed in order to meet institutional requirements, and to encourage rigorous research. Contributors and referees are clearly reminded that the publications are intended to address an interested public rather than only academics. The resulting publications are accessible and relevant to advocates and activists working outside the university, but also count towards the recognised research output of individual researchers and their institutions (UTS 2012).

This example suggests several possibilities for shifting the conventional criteria for academic publications, while also striving to publish community-engaged research. The publications have expanded the definition of 'peer review' to include experts working for NGOs, key government bodies and community groups as reviewers. The editors have also reworked conventional peer reviewing guidelines in order to clarify the focus on community relevance in the publications – so that reviewers are asked to evaluate not only the academic merit of the papers under consideration, but also their value and accessibility for an informed wider public. In this way, the publications work both to extend the reach of peer-reviewed research and to generate formal recognition for community-engaged research, thereby challenging the conventions of academia as an institution and developing alternative modes of value.

The increasing emphasis on 'community engagement' or 'outreach' across the university sector provides a valuable means to legitimate activist work, as well as opportunities to shift institutional expectations. Contemporary universities stress community engagement as 'core business' and academics are increasingly expected to demonstrate the relevance of their research and public engagement beyond the ivory tower. Activist work such as participating in public debates, media interviews, organising events and collaborating with community or NGO partners can often be successfully positioned as 'outreach' work which fulfils the university's community engagement mission.

Legitimising activism in terms of institutional priorities also raises the possibility of being co-opted or depoliticised. When universities promote their commitment to 'community engagement', this can in practice refer to a wide range of activities, many of which serve to entrench rather than to challenge vested interests. For example, many universities have stretched the definition of community engagement to include, or even prioritise, partnerships with industry. Here activist academics may need to argue for the significance of working with social change advocates, and may need to resist pressures for 'community engaged' work to provide positive publicity for the institution, or to bring in research funding via private partnerships.

In contrast to the strategy of working within institutions to develop processes for supporting activist-oriented scholarship, it is also possible to ignore institutional expectations and set your own standards. Instead of attempting to work with the institutional preference for prestige publications in refereed journals, you can set your own priorities for outputs, such as interest from the community or usefulness to social change workers. The ability to ignore institutional expectations may be dependent on achieving a measure of employment security first – or retiring!

Disciplinary expectations

Most scholars receive training in one or more disciplines such as philosophy and physics. The dominance of disciplines has declined; there have been innumerable discussions about multidisciplinarity, transdisciplinarity and approaches to practical problems not based in disciplines. Nevertheless, disciplines can be a powerful influence on academic behaviour (Becher, 1989).

> **One solution here is to postpone activism until you have obtained tenure... The danger with this approach is that activism is postponed indefinitely.**

Many jobs require an advanced degree in a particular discipline *or equivalent* – but having a degree in the discipline rather than some other field can be an advantage. Many top journals are discipline-based; interdisciplinary journals seldom have the same prestige. Within universities, struggles over jobs and promotions are regularly waged using claims about rigour, originality and relevance, often implicitly judged in relation to disciplinary expectations.

Disciplinary expectations can be exerted bluntly, as in the rejection of applicants outside a domain, or subtly though casual comments that assume the superiority of certain approaches and the lower status of others, for example the greater value of abstract theory or the lesser value of local case studies. These expectations can be conveyed through appointment committees, journal referees, thesis supervisors, conference organisers and peers. Because so many academic units are organised around disciplines, and because scholars tend to congregate with those having similar orientations, disciplinary expectations often overlap with peer influence.

None of this would matter if disciplines were oriented to public engagement, but very few are. Indeed, disciplines build their status by claiming exclusive ability to judge contributions within the field. This means that there is an ongoing pressure to orient work to others in the discipline. In other words, disciplines are inward-looking and give greater status to theory over applications. They are not havens for community engagement but more commonly vessels for building frameworks that are obscure to outsiders.

> Jeannette, a peace activist, was doing a PhD in peace research, working in a unit in which political science was the dominant perspective. Jeannette was not overtly told that her work was lower status, but she picked up vibes from corridor conversations, seminars and conferences. Those who worked on mainstream politics projects were given more attention and credibility; their publications were treated as more significant. Jeannette submitted a couple of papers to politics journals but was discouraged by condescending comments from reviewers.

Acquiescing to disciplinary pressures means accepting, at some level, the value of using the language, acknowledging contributions in the field, publishing in suitable journals, attending relevant conferences and interacting with people in the field. It is possible to do all this but to put oneself in the activist corner of the discipline, which means, for example, publishing activist-oriented articles and making connections with like-minded scholars in the field. This is easier in some fields, such as sociology

(Feagin & Vera, 2008), than in others, such as mathematics (Powell & Frankenstein, 1997).

In disciplines whose content has no obvious or immediate connection to current social issues – for example geology or civil engineering – one strategy is to do activism that is quite separate from one's academic work. Anyone can do anti-poverty work. This 'separate worlds' strategy, discussed above, is sometimes the safest way to combine academic and activist efforts, namely so they don't seem to be combined. The most famous practitioner using this strategy is Noam Chomsky, whose political engagements are largely separate from his academic work in linguistics.

It is important to note a common phenomenon: when scholars enter the public arena, peers – especially in one's discipline – may think this lowers their standing (Ali & Barsky 2006). When a scientist writes a popular article on a current topic, this might be seen as a negative in terms of academic standing. Serious scholars, so the thinking goes, do not debase the currency of academic standing by becoming popularisers. As an astute commentator noted over a century ago,

> The Principle of Sound Learning is that the noise of vulgar fame should never trouble the cloistered calm of academic existence. Hence, learning is called sound when no one has ever heard of it; and 'sound scholar' is a term of praise applied to one another by learned men who have no reputation outside the University, and a rather queer one inside it (Cornford, 1908, p. 11).

This problem is aggravated when media misrepresent, often inadvertently, an academic's views, such as when a television station broadcasts just 30 seconds from a 30-minute recorded interview. Colleagues unfamiliar with media processes may mistake media portrayals for a scholar's considered views. It is also possible for activists to use research work or invoke the names of academics in ways that damage their reputations among peers.

On the other hand, in disciplines such as sociology, there is greater discussion of engagement in public debate and its impact on the standing of scholars and the discipline, including well-developed articulations for example of a 'public sociology' (Burawoy, 2005; Calhoun, 2005; Clawson, 2007).

Another way to deal with disciplinary pressures is to get a job in a studies area, such as environmental studies or Asian studies. In these sorts of areas, the influence of disciplines is moderated. Making a contribution to the area doesn't require aiming for disciplinary journals. The greater openness often gives more freedom to be involved in activism. Furthermore, a few studies areas, in some places, are havens for activism, especially when

undergraduate students are involved, for example peace studies units in which student engagement in campaigns is encouraged.

Yet another way to deal with disciplinary pressures is to try to ignore them and carry on regardless. This is fine if you have a permanent position and are not seeking advancement, but can be hard for junior scholars trying to obtain a niche in the field.

Epistemological expectations

Academics whose research or teaching is oriented towards activism will often experience expectations, among their peers and within institutions, to use academic frameworks in their work. Scientists are expected to 'stick to the science' (and avoid policy and ethical dimensions of issues) and social scientists are expected to study structures and explanations but not strategies (Jasper, 2006, pp. xii-xiii). Using an activist-friendly framework can be seen as being unscholarly.

> During her doctoral research, Tanja received negative feedback about her focus on activist activities and her use of activists as informants in the research. A supervisor told her she should not use quotes from an activist as these were not a scholarly source. Interview comments from activists were described as 'crude', 'predictable' and 'too political', and assumed to be unrepresentative of 'ordinary' people. Activist perspectives were seen as out of touch or extreme. Tanja employed a form of discourse analysis that highlighted the key frameworks and concepts used by activists, and analysed the ways these reflected and contributed to debates in academic theory (Dreher, 2006).

In this example, Tanja attempted to put community concerns into academic frameworks, a key strategy for community-engaged research and some academic activism. Academic frameworks can be used to analyse activist and social change projects – although this runs the risk of producing outcomes that satisfy academic requirements but are not relevant to the projects being analysed. Academic research of this type can lend visibility and legitimacy to activist work.

A more mutually beneficial approach is to develop work that maximises the productive exchanges between academia and activism. There is a long history of social movements influencing academic work, such as in the development of women's studies and environmental studies. Conversely, movements for progressive social change have been influenced by academic debates and theories, such as the wide-ranging impact of Edward Said's 'Orientalism' on cultural interventions that challenge misrepresentations of Arab and Muslim Australians during the 'war

on terror' (Dreher, 2003, 2010). Activist academics can address and further these cross-cutting influences in their teaching and research.

Another strategy is to build in opportunities for feedback from community members, such as working with a community reference group, or expanding the pool of peer reviewers as described above. Here community and activist expertise is recognised and collaborative processes are encouraged. Community input can mitigate peer pressures and institutional expectations, as well as contributing original insights and innovative possibilities. Activist academics may also seek out opportunities to co-author publications with activists or community workers.

Innovative publication formats are another way to negotiate between epistemological expectations and the expertise and priorities of activists working outside the academy.

> A collaborative research team developed a number of publications from in-depth interviews with community workers and activists, which were published in refereed academic journals. Interviews were transcribed, edited and then published as 'practitioner profiles', engaging non-academic workers and activists as co-authors rather than as only the subjects of commentary by an authoritative academic voice (Chidiac & Lloyd, 2009; el-Gawley & O'Donnell, 2009).

Public forums, conferences and other events also offer opportunities to include non-academic activists as presenters, discussants and participants.

Finally, the 'scholarship of engagement' seeks to develop an epistemological framework for community-engaged research (Barker, 2004; Boyer, 1996). While not all work developed under this rubric is activist oriented, a key feature is the over-arching social-good orientation of community-engaged work. This scholarship advocates research that specifically addresses community-identified needs rather than being driven primarily by academic curiosity.

Peer influence

The people around us can have a big influence on what we think is worthwhile to do. Consumerism is driven, in part, by peer influence, commonly known as 'keeping up with the Joneses'. What others, through their behaviour as well as their talk, put as priorities can influence one's own priorities. It can be difficult to maintain a commitment to an endeavour when others never show any interest in it.

This sort of influence works in the academic world much the same as elsewhere. Most academics prefer to get on well with their immediate colleagues, including ones in nearby offices, ones most commonly seen through

Table 1: A Toolkit of Strategies and Tips

Obstacles to activism or community engagement by academics	Possible response strategies	Practical tips / guidelines
Attacks	• Build a network of support. • Maintain courteous interactions and respectful relationships	• Keep peers and superiors informed to maintain their support • Draw on student activism • Draw upon discourses of free speech and academic freedom • Carefully document performance • Be a good colleague
Threats to security and advancement	• Postpone activism • Activism and academia as separate domains • Draw on support from a union or professional association	• Consciously weigh up the demands of career and activist orientations • Pursue activism unrelated to work roles for a successful 'separate worlds' strategy • Join a union or professional association • Maintain relationships with union or professional association organisers and officers
Output expectations	• Work harder! • Produce different publications for different audiences and purposes • Produce publications that satisfy institutional and activist demands • Ignore institutional demands	• Maintain a website for publications aimed at an activist audience or the wider public • Work to shift the conventional criteria for what 'counts' in academia • Set your own standards
Disciplinary expectations	• Work in the activist-oriented corner of the discipline • Maintain 'separate worlds' • Ignore expectations	• Get a job in a studies area • Go your own way
Epistemological expectations	• Put community concerns into academic frameworks • Develop productive exchanges between activism and academia	• Obtain feedback from community members, e.g. reference group • Push the boundaries with innovative or collaborative publication formats
Peer influence	• Use willpower to resist • Interact with different peers • Maintain relationships with activists	• Develop joint projects such as community engagement • Collaborate with like-minded peers • Find non-academic reference points

local responsibilities, and ones at a distance in professional contexts.

If none of your colleagues is involved in activism, your own involvement can seem unusual: you receive no reinforcement. If colleagues are tolerant or vaguely interested, you may be able to continue your activism without hindrance, but even so you might be unconsciously influenced to spend more time and effort on the sorts of things your colleagues value. If they think activism is unscholarly or misguided, and respond negatively to your activities, the pressure can be all the stronger.

Peer influence is powerful because the character of casual interactions often makes the difference between satisfying and unsatisfying daily life. Even when peers make no effort to change your priorities, you may gradually go through a process of modifying your interests, your style or your priorities. When you don't notice that

you're changing, the influence is all the more difficult to resist.

To counter peer influence that is taking you where you don't want to go, one response is to become aware of the influence and actively resist it. You can continue to interact with the same peers but resolve to also continue with your activist activities. This is certainly possible but it can take a toll on your willpower that, according to research (Baumeister & Tierney, 2011), can be readily depleted.

To conserve willpower, another option is to interact with different peers, specifically those who are more sympathetic to your endeavours. Considerable effort may be needed to locate others with similar outside concerns, especially if they are keeping a low profile in order to fit in. To cement connections with like-minded peers, a joint project can be valuable, for example research collaboration or a community engagement project.

Sometimes, there are no readily available peers with a similar activist orientation. You might be able to connect with activist scholars in other cities or countries, but there may be no one to discuss the local issues that interest you. One option in this circumstance is to build up a reference group of non-academics. These are friends or fellow campaigners who think what you are trying to do is worthwhile and who are willing to give feedback on your activities, whether research or activism. If you are using an interactive research method such as participatory action research, you may have a ready-made reference group.

More generally, keeping in touch with activists, especially in relation to research, is a powerful way of countering the influence of academic peers. Activists can provide outside perspectives on your activities and priorities, helping to maintain your critical perspective and outward orientation.

> Fred was committed to public engagement, especially on environmental issues. However, his colleagues' keen interest in scholarly conundrums rubbed off on him: he undertook some collaborations on environment politics, but with an academic orientation. By taking a regular spot on a community radio station and interviewing activists week after week, Fred kept in touch with community concerns and retained a portion of his time and energy for community-oriented efforts.

Conclusion

Quite a number of undergraduate students become inspired to make a difference in society, some of them learning about social issues in their classes and others being introduced to them by their friends. They start a PhD thinking this is a way for them to contribute, imagining an academic career as an ideal way to combine satisfying work with social commitment. But traps lie ahead.

Combining academic life with activism is not easy, primarily because of pressures within the scholarly world that discourage social engagement. Some activist intellectuals are targeted for attack, which provides a potent symbol to others to keep a low profile until obtaining tenure or sufficient advancement. However, the process of satisfying academic expectations for publishing, fitting into a discipline, using standard intellectual frameworks and getting along with colleagues makes it very easy to restrict one's social idealism to the syllabus and withdraw from active participation in causes.

From a practical point of view, the first step in countering these influences is to become aware of them and the second is to set up plans and personal systems to maintain desired activities. What to do depends a great deal on one's circumstances: there is no single course of action suitable to everyone or every field. In Table 1 we list some of the options covered in this article.

Perhaps the most important general lesson is not to rely entirely on individual willpower in isolation from others. Talking to others facing the same dilemmas, and building friendships and support groups, can be immensely valuable. So can learning from senior academics who have maintained their social involvement; senior academics can in turn be inspired by the energy and commitment of students and younger colleagues. Although combining activism and an academic career is challenging, it can be immensely rewarding. The greatest resources for those with this goal are others in the same situation, and the many activists outside the academy.

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