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# Seek Social Change Through Activist Jobs

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Whether students come from wealthy, middle-class, or poor families, an Oxy education bestows certain advantages. Oxy students have more choices than most Americans about what they do with their skills, intellect, and ambition.

But no matter what profession you pursue-teacher, biologist, architect, city planner, engineer, accountant, aide to an elected official, epidemiologist, doctor, nurse, nutritionist, lawyer, graphic designer, psychologist, or journalist, among them-how you utilize your education is not simply a matter of what skills you've learned. It is also a question of your values. What goals do you want to use your skills for? What kinds of organizations do you want to work for?

With the same skills, you can help move society in a more progressive direction or you can defend the status quo. A physician can set up a practice in a wealthy area which already has an abundance of doctors, or work in a medical clinic serving the poor or a public health agency. An architect can design corporate skyscrapers or help community groups build mixed-income housing. A scientist can work for an oil, chemical or drug company or for a government agency or advocacy group working to protect consumers and the environment. A lawyer can work for a corporate law firm helping the rich get richer or for one of many public interest law firms that link lawyers with grassroots movements and helps address the problems of poverty, the environment, human rights, and other social justice causes. (Next fall, Thalia Gonzalez, an attorney who has worked for public interest groups, will join the Politics Department faculty and offer courses on law and social change).

So it is quite heartening to see that more and more Oxy students want careers with a conscience-jobs that help make the world more humane, fair, and environmentally sustainable. They want to put their idealism and skills to work promoting social justice.

I'm impressed that an increasing number of Oxy students are asking faculty and staff about internships, summer jobs, and careers working with non-profit, advocacy, and grassroots organizing groups.

To help students and alums find opportunities for meaningful work, the Urban & Environmental Policy Institute has created two websites -Jobs for Change (<http://departments.oxy.edu/uepi/uep/jobs.htm>) and Internships for Change (<http://departments.oxy.edu/uepi/uep/internships.htm>).

At Oxy and other campuses, this activist trend has been evident for at least a decade. But without a doubt, Barack Obama's campaign and election lit a spark, accelerating student interest in organizing. He has described his community organizing experience in Chicago as "the best education I ever had." He inspires people by reminding us about the important role that social movements have played in bringing about major changes. He has restored a sense of possibility and hope to American politics.

Fortunately, there are many more opportunities today to work for social change than when I was in college in the 1960s or even when Obama was in college (at Oxy and Columbia) in the 1980s. The number of organizations engaged in the struggle for social justice-community groups, unions, environmental and

consumer groups, public health and food justice groups, women's and gay rights groups, fair trade and anti-sweatshop groups, groups advocating for children, the disabled, the elderly, and immigrants-has mushroomed dramatically.

Perhaps because so many students get practical experience while still in college, working with off-campus groups, today's student activists are much more pragmatic, savvy, and patient than their counterparts a generation or two earlier.

Oxy has long been a spawning ground for effective organizers, such as alums Ernesto Galarza (1905-1984) and Jim Drake (1937-2001), who both worked as organizers with Mexican-Americans and farmworkers. Drake, an advisor to Cesar Chavez, conceived the idea for the nationwide grape boycott, a pressure tactic that helped improve conditions for farmworkers.

Many recent Oxy alums have followed in their footsteps and become organizers. To cite just a few examples: Lanita Morris '00 (Downtown Labor Center), Regina Clemente '03 (LA Gay and Lesbian Center), Deanna Furman '03 (California Nurses Assn.), Colleen Callahan '04 (American Lung Association), Lydia Avila '05 (East Los Angeles Community Corp.), Max Podemski '06 (Pacoima Beautiful), Andrew Grinberg '06 (Clean Water Action), Madeline Wander '08 (Southern California Assn. for NonProfit Housing), Sua Iris Hernandez '08 (Coalition for Economic Survival), and Tope Sosanya '08 (SCOPE's green jobs campaign).

Grassroots organizing is only one way to have a career with a conscience. Whatever professional path they pursue, it is wonderful to see so many Oxy students and recent alums seeking ways to combine their analytic abilities, practical skills, political values and their passion for justice.

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