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"We all agree that your theory is crazy, but is it crazy enough?"—Niels Bohr

Pointers from Recent Publishing Seminars

By Cynthia Verba

At the recent publishing seminars in the GSAS Grantsmanship and Professional Development Series, speakers offered practical advice on publishing articles in journals and converting dissertations into book manuscripts. Highlights follow:

- Write your dissertation with a large audience in mind. Readers look for scholarly writing that is comprehensible, and readability is simply another way to evaluate good writing. Try reading your own writing aloud.

- One common tendency in dissertation writing that works against readability is presenting overly long descriptions of the secondary literature. Giving this secondary material too much emphasis can overshadow the main subject of the dissertation. Students run the risk of appearing as if, after an exhaustive search of the literature for "that tiny window of opportunity," they at last located a topic no one else wanted to do. Of course, one may discuss related works, but they should be introduced as integral parts of the main argument or relegated to footnotes. It is essential to keep your secondary sources

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The Scholar as Activist: A Colloquium Explores These Dual Roles

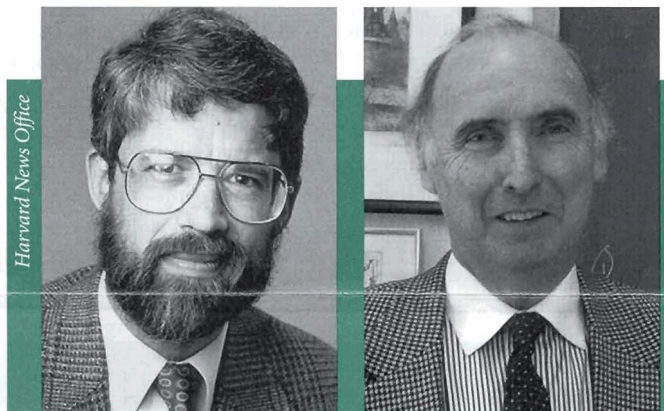
By C.-Y. Cynthia Lin

"How can I make a difference in the world?" This query has puzzled and prodded many an ambitious person at one time or another. For graduate students and others in academe, the issue has an interesting twist: What is the role of the academic

scholar in promoting public policy and societal change? Does a scholar who decides to advocate policy risk losing credibility? This past March, four environmental scholars representing a diversity of disciplines and degrees of activism grappled with these questions in "Environmental Scholarship and Advocacy," a colloquium sponsored by Harvard's Graduate Environment and Ecology Network (GREEN).

Being both a scholar and an agent of change in the larger world is "a harder trick than it sounds," said panelist Bill McKibben (AB '82). An environmental activist and author (*Long Distance: A Year of Living Strenuously* and *The End of Nature*) who is currently a fellow at Harvard's Divinity School Center for the Study of Values in Public Life, McKibben explained that one of the reasons he chose not to work in academia was that he "sensed some of the difficulties of translating that work into real action."

Richard Forman, Professor of Advanced Environmental Studies in Landscape Ecology at the Graduate School of Design, agreed, stating that many academics have difficulty reaching a wider audience. "I've never written a book that has sold more than 10,000 copies," he said. Scholarship and discourse generated from within the academy are too often confined there.



Professors John Holdren (left) and Peter Rogers of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences agree that being a scholar and an advocate need not be mutually exclusive.

Although it may be difficult to pursue both scholarship and advocacy, the former can provide support for the latter; advanced knowledge can catalyze, instigate, and undergird change. "I don't think one can understand the case for environmental policy, never mind offer sensible advice about prescriptions that would advance public policy in this domain, without understanding what is known and what is not known about the scientific, technological, economic, institutional, social, cultural, legal, and other dimensions of the issue you're trying to address," said John Holdren, professor of environmental policy and director of the Science, Technology, and Public Policy Program at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government. The factual dimensions, he says, are "indispensable." Isolated as scholars may be from the public realm,

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they can still wield influence over its function and development.

While scholarship can strengthen and steer advocacy, the two may be inseparable in the area of environmental protection. According to Peter Rogers (PhD '66, applied sciences), Gordon McKay Professor of Environmental Engineering, researchers choose an advocacy role the moment they define a problem, frame the questions, and decide which variables and parameters to consider. For example, when engineers construct models that omit variables concerning other species, they are taking a "*homo sapien-*, *status quo*-oriented" point of view, Rogers explained. Thus, although the academy may appear to be marked by objectivity and, as McKibben called it, a "straight-faced seriousness," academics frequently cannot help but be subjective. "As a researcher, I don't think I have very much of a choice, even though I pretend at times that I am purely impartial," Rogers admitted.

Academic objectivity becomes all the more elusive when one pursues an active role as an advocate for a cause. As a consequence, a scholar who decides to back a particular policy runs the risk of compromising his or her credibility. Holdren advises those seeking to minimize the tension between being a scholar and being an advocate to treat opponents' arguments fairly, to distinguish between their take on the facts and their "value-laden, preference-driven" policy prescriptions, and to analyze how their [opponents'] values and preferences affect those prescriptions.

Holdren also recommended that scholars be honest about uncertainties. "Your credibility as an analyst will be much higher if you 'fess up and say 'there are important aspects of this problem that are uncertain' and then explain why, in spite of those uncertainties, [there] are sensible ways to proceed." The trick to maintaining academic objectivity and credibility while holding subjective views is to openly acknowledge the subjective nature of these views.

In addition to a loss of credibility, another potential obstacle faced by scholars who wish to affect the larger world is that their work may be too specialized or technical for non-specialists to under-

stand. According to McKibben, "One of the great disconnects between the academy and the rest of the world has become language and the narrow specialization of that language and the inability to say plainly what it is one wants to say." Though necessary for understanding environmental problems and for gaining a place at the bargaining table, specialized knowledge can sometimes serve as a barrier not only among scholars of different disciplines, but also between academics and the public. It is therefore imperative for scholars who advocate policy to explain how and why their specialized insights drive their policy proposals. "Make those links for your listeners, for the public, and for the policy makers," Holdren advised.

Some panelists shared anecdotes about their own forays into the policy arena. Forman described his efforts as an assistant professor in translating his research on landscape ecology in central New Jersey into actual environmental change. When the reprints of his article arrived, Forman sent handwritten notes to county commissioners urging them to use his ideas to save the land in their counties. "I'm sure they all laughed or threw it in the trash . . . but for the next ten years I would get [into] these really interesting conversations about these articles," he reminisced. Although Forman's work did not result in tangible reform, it did manage to spark the attention of several politicians. Raising public awareness through the discovery and dissemination of knowledge is perhaps one of the most effective routes academics can take to become advocates.

For those who may be pursuing advanced study in hopes of making an impact on the world, panelists stressed the importance of keeping one's passions aflame. "I am out looking at nature," Forman explained. "I got my inspiration that way, and I have to keep that inspiration through my career." The most fervent advice came from McKibben, who urged: "[Be] outdoors as much as you can . . . [Be] active, angry, involved, passionate as much as you can."

GREEN is a graduate student group funded by the Graduate Student Council that is dedicated to raising environmental awareness, promoting interdisciplinary scholarship on environmental issues, and fostering environmental activism among members of the Harvard community,

specifically graduate students in arts and sciences. For more information about GREEN, contact co-presidents Ninian Stein at nstein@fas.harvard.edu or James Wang at wang7@fas.harvard.edu.

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Publishing Seminars

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secondary. Try to have faith in your own arguments and to be confident about presenting your ideas.

- Alternatively, avoid attacking all the secondary literature on your topic. Instead, be highly selective and attack only works of major relevance to your own arguments.

- Adding too many qualifiers to your arguments can almost cancel out your meaning. This tendency can stem from a fear of criticism. Again, try to have more faith in yourself. By the time you are ready to write the dissertation, you are undoubtedly more of an expert on your topic than most anyone else. The goal of the scholarly enterprise is to encourage people to discuss your ideas, to agree and to disagree. It is far worse to arouse no interest than to inspire someone to argue with your position.

- The parts of the dissertation should fit together as a whole, and there should be a linear development throughout the work. Use transitions to help the reader see why something is there; the end should echo the beginning. This applies to the structure of chapters as well as to paragraphs. The reader should experience a sense of having been on a journey and of arriving at "an unexpected expected end."

- Begin your sentences with subjects; participial beginnings are an invitation to confusion.

- Be careful about long sentences. Try to avoid a proliferation of dependent clauses that can take attention away from the subject and lead to a loss of clarity. Two exemplary writers—George Orwell and Richard Ellman—rarely use consecutive sentences with dependent clauses.

- Keep subjects and verbs close together. Avoid separating them with large modifiers or clauses.

- Cut back on adjectives. They act as qualifiers that can be destructive to argu-

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