

Research

He who controls the present controls the past. He who controls the past controls the future. — George Orwell, 1984

In our peace or justice activism, we are often accused of naivete or idealism. Progressive people are dismissed as “emotional” and “uninformed,” even when we are articulate and knowledgeable on numerous issues. Meanwhile, the powers that be are often portrayed as objective purveyors of truth and fact.

Much of what we see in the media is written by those with money and power. How we perceive the world is largely determined by how such media portray it. It is difficult to call attention to problems when those responsible for them are able to frame the discussion around them.



One essential tool of activists is research. By doing research, we can expose what’s going on behind closed doors. We can pressure those in power through such exposure. And we can build support for our cause by showing people the facts they wouldn’t otherwise see and demonstrating our credibility.

Research can be as simple as going to the school library or clipping news paper articles. You can get an amazing amount of information just by asking institutions for data. For example, if your administration wants to raise tuition, call them up and ask them to send you the facts behind the increase, including information on financial aid, teacher salaries, and investments.

If you go to a public university, this information should be easy to obtain. If the administration denies you the information you need, then this becomes a political issue and can

be made part of your campaign: “what are they hiding?”

For campus organizing, it may be useful to answer some questions about your school. The answers may help you understand “where the money is coming from,” “who pulls the strings” on your campus, and what issues your group might choose

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to work on.

In many ways, information is power, and being able to access information is an essential democratic right. Getting this information can be very difficult. People who benefit from withholding certain facts will often try to prevent you from getting it, such as by ignoring your requests.

Most students do not realize that they are often legally entitled to many records and data, through the Freedom of Information Act and other laws. You may need to file Freedom of Information Act requests (FOIA’s) to get certain documents. There are several manuals that will help you understand this process, such as “Manual of Corporate Investigation,” “Tapping Of-

ficials’ Secrets,” “Research Methodology Guide,” “Raising Hell,” “The Military in Your Backyard,” and “The Opposition Research Handbook.” Please see the bibliography for more information about these guides.

Filing FOIA’s can be a long process, but can yield amazing results. For instance, you can find out how university research is being used by corporations or the government, how much certain alumni or corporations are donating, what pesticides and chemicals your universities use, what animal testing they are engaged in, how much your administrators are paid, etc.

Once you shed light on the wheelings and dealings of campus officials, they may find it more difficult to carry out their regressive agenda or to undermine yours. By doing and publicizing such research, your movement will also expand its own power, gaining both confidence and members. Activists have used this information to win successful campaigns in the past. For example, student activists in Arizona and Michigan were able, through FOIA information, to stop the investing of their universities into the construction of a telescope on Mount Graham, on sacred Native American land in Arizona.

Sources of information about your school	What information you can find about your school
Local County Courthouse	List of lawsuits against your school
City Assessor’s Office	Property owned by your school and its staff
Treasurer’s Office	Investment portfolio; university budget
Sponsored Research or Grants and Contracts office	Listing of research contracts on campus
Neighborhood Groups	Activists with 20-year history of the community
Registry of Deeds	Property transactions made by your school
School Newspaper Archives	Names of activists on campus 10-30 years ago whom you can invite to speak to your group
Alumni Office	Names of high donors to your school
Internal Revenue Service	Salaries of top university officials
National Center for Money and Politics	Political contributions made by professors