

Transcript for *Activism on the Hill*, Episode One, "Institutional Memory"  
Hosts: Chae Chun, Basile Moreau

00:00 **Basile:** Hello. You're listening to the second episode of *Activism on the Hill*, a podcast about student activism at Tufts University. Today we'll be talking about institutional memory. Today's hosts will be me, Basile, [**Chae:**] and Chae.

00:17 **Basile:** So after our interviews with various student activists at Tufts, one of the themes which kept coming up was this idea of institutional memory.

00:26 **Chae:** So there's a lot to unpack with this topic. It brings up a lot of questions like first, how do we preserve and pass on knowledge and memory? Why are certain movements remembered while others are forgotten? And then third, do we even want to institutionalize the experiences of student activists?

00:41 **Basile:** Molly, who does work for Students for Justice in Palestine, or SJP, talks about the importance of sharing stories about SJP's past with others, especially with the younger members. Let's listen to her.

00:57 **Basile:** How do you feel about leaving Tufts campus and your activism after graduation? Do you think your experiences and campaigns will be passed down to future Tufts generations or do you think...?

01:08 **Molly:** Yea, I mean, I feel super optimistic about next generation of Tufts activists. There's so, so many awesome underclassmen who are involved in every single activist club at Tufts. We also last year in SJP at the end of the year had a big meeting where we really tried to talk about the history of SJP and tried to pass down that institutional memory, and the seniors last year were talking about things that had happened from all the way from their freshman year and even things before that that they knew about, so we had more than seven years of knowledge that we could be talking about, which I think is really important. We had a Skype call earlier this year with some of our alumni who talked about what they did while they were at Tufts, but also talked about what they're doing now and how they're bringing these values into their lives now.

02:00 **Chae:** Hannah, who is active within Tufts Climate Action, talks about the importance of organizational structure in maintaining institutional memory.

02:08 **Chae:** I'm wondering how you, as a graduating senior, feel about your position within the movement as a student, and since you're so focused, right, on Tufts and the local level, once you graduate what does that mean for you as a climate activist?

02:28 **Hannah:** It means that I have to take a step back and put a lot of faith in the future generations of Tufts students and the amazing younger students that I've met and know that they're just as passionate, maybe even more passionate, about this issue than I am. But it also means forming connections to make sure that there's infrastructure in place for these students to thrive. For example, making connections with faculty at Tufts who can continue to pass along the institutional memory, and making sure that as Tufts Climate Action leadership, we're including younger students in our agenda setting, so that they know how to do this next year on their own. And also just knowing that we're with them. When I'm an alum I don't just want to drop off all my responsibilities onto the next generation, I want to be available for resources and also for support when needed.

03:26 **Basile:** Yea, I think both Hannah & Molly's points are really important in helping think more about what work is needed to preserve knowledge on campus, because there's definitely a variety of ways that memory can be sustained and passed on to the following generations.

03:42 **Chae:** Yea, and preserving knowledge and those memories can be really challenging, but I think on the other hand even though it is challenging, maintaining that knowledge helps current movements continue and build off of those past efforts, and I think this kind of discussion that we're having right now is especially needed at a place like Tufts, where students and especially students of marginalized identities are always fighting for basic needs and resources.

04:06 **Basile:** Yea. So in order to continue that fight, you have to know the history. But what happens after we spend our four years or five years at Tufts? We graduate, and this makes it a lot harder to hold Tufts accountable beyond that four to five years graduation cycle.

04:22 **Chae:** Um hmm. Yea, so actually Molly gives some really interesting insight into the relationship between the Tufts administration and the constant student turnover, so let's listen to her.

04:32 **Molly:** But I also think with these cycles of activism that we sometimes see, in certain ways it is really beneficial to the administration that there is this four-year turnover, because they don't have to be dealing with the same people all the time, and they know that there are lots of things that will get forgotten.

04:54 **Chae:** And this cycle doesn't just affect the administration, but it also impacts how students engage with this kind of work. Campbell, who is active with the Tufts Dining Action Coalition, or TDAC, spoke to us about how to deal with the impact of the graduation cycle and the need for continual student labor.

05:10 **Campbell:** It's not to say that you weren't investing with yourself, but you weren't really taking the time to, like, breathe. [laughs] And the other thing is like, you think that if you just give a little bit more, then they're not going to ask for anything else, but the thing is people are always going to need your help and people are always going to be asking for your help, and I heard Tarana Burke say this when she came to speak, she gave a little pre-talk to the Women's Center staff and ASAP and Green Dot, I think, and she was saying if you need to take a break, if you need to take a step back, if you are burnt out - stop. The work will still be there when you get back, and I, like, cried. I was like, you're right! Damn, the work is still gonna be there when we get back, cuz there's so much work to ever stop, right. And that kind of like, but it also made me hopeful, in a way, it's kind of depressing, there's too much to fix, but it's also like, you don't need to put it all on you, you need to take your breaks when you can, and that will always be justified because there's always a need for a break when there's infinite amounts of work, so come back and do a different piece of work when you're ready. And yea, that was a very good moment for me.

06:35 **Basile:** I think Campbell's point is really important, that activism work is hard. And you know, this work will unfortunately always be there. But that reality itself can be reassuring when trying to prioritize self-care while being a student activist. In a similar vein, Molly talks about how the four-year cycle can actually maintain student energy, because there's so many younger student activists who are ready to hold and carry out the work that graduating students pass on to them.

07:03 **Molly:** But I also think that the cycles aren't necessarily inherently bad. I think that, you

know, it obviously would be wonderful for us to be just like building on campaigns every single year, growing stronger, and just continuing to build, but I also think the fact that people now are saying the exact same thing they were saying in 2011 shows how important that message is and shows that every generation of Tufts students cares about this and it's not just a one-time issue that once people graduate, they can just forget about it.

07:41 **Chae:** So as we wrap up, I think it's also important to acknowledge what has come out of student activism on this campus and what has become institutionalized after students fought for a cause, and I think it really helps to remember work that's been done in the past in order to process how we move forward with student activism. I also think it gives us some hope that change can be made on this campus.

08:02 **Basile:** Yea I mean, for example, the Group of Six resource centers came out of student efforts to create a community space for marginalized students on campus.

08:11 **Chae:** Yea, and in our freshman year, Tufts celebrated Indigenous People's Day instead of Columbus Day, and that also came out of student activism.

08:18 **Basile:** Yea, there's so many other things. The Race & Ethnic Studies that became the Race, Colonialism and Diaspora department. We could keep going on and on, but unfortunately, that's all the time we have.

08:33 **Chae:** Thanks for tuning into *Activism on the Hill*, and we'll see you next time.