In *Navigating the Academic Career: Common Issues and Uncommon Strategies*, Shaw takes on the tasks on providing a dual purpose guide for academics pursuing careers in higher education, as well as providing a general examination of academic careers for the general public. In four parts, Shaw addresses professional preparation for an academic career (Part I), obtaining and carrying out the duties of an academic position (Part II), activities required to support an academic career (Part III) and pathways and scholarly identity (Part IV). Each chapter is subdivided into two parts—“Background and Analysis” followed by “Practice and Suggestions”. In each case, the background and analysis section opens with what can be considered an introductory statement about a particular topic and a list of references associated with the topic under consideration. Shaw then seeks to provide some theory about the topic under consideration before moving into practical suggestions.

In addition to seeking to provide a guide for academic scholars at all ranks in all disciplines at a range of institution types and spanning academic and extra-institutional scholarly activities, Shaw suggests that this
text can serve as a public guide about academic scholarship.

In attempting to accomplish so much in a single text, the guide is in many ways too general as to provide real practical insights for an individual scholar as the author does not engage important variations in different disciplines. One salient example of this is the author's description of “a 3-year master’s level graduate education” (pg. 4) as a prerequisite part of professional preparation before entering doctoral-level training without acknowledging or addressing that this is increasingly not common in many of the STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) disciplines. On the other hand, the text is also too detailed to render it likely to serve as a widely applicable and accessible guide for the general public to read and digest.

Shaw does provide some “insider” and non-standard insights in the text that are likely to be enlightening, especially for the general public. For example, Shaw describes educational systems as “both gatekeeper and track-setter” (pg. 4). The gatekeeping comes in the measures used to determine who matriculates, whereas the track-setting aspect arises from the nature of increasing advancement in education to track an individual into a particular discipline or subject and to determine which related product types will be produced and/or acknowledged as validation of one’s success on the path. As education tracks also influence one’s professional networks, which in turn impact current and future success, tracking can also determine the degree to which one may have influence in a particular arena based on a number of factors including the prestige on one’s advisor and university. Furthermore, Shaw aptly describes the distinction between education and affiliation with an institution in an academic position: “Just as education gives them [academic scholars] stamps of proof for entry into the world of scholarship, institutional affiliation provides academicians with “drivers’ licenses” to function in the modern academic enterprise” (pg. 27). He also provides salient advice for individuals to use these rights to drive their personal research agenda, interests and goals that have been internally motivated and self-determined.

Included are individual chapters describing teaching and service, two of what are commonly accepted as the core triad of academic careers—research, teaching and service. The chapters on teaching and service largely give
general advice on what not to do in these arenas. Research is addressed in several other chapters related to publication and grants. In particular, the practical advice given in the “Grant” chapter to collaborate with funded scientists early in one’s career, to build one’s reputation and credentials regarding personal fundability through seeking small grants, and to learn about the proposal vetting process through serving as a reviewer on a grant panel are among the most accurate and salient advice in this text.

Additional information regarding success in academia include advice about the importance of active involvement in academic associations and its link to success in the primary realms of one’s academic career. In a discussion of association involvement, one of Shaw’s most significant points of advice emerges. He suggests that in engaging in service and volunteer opportunities one should “align each of them with your scholarly pursuits” (pg. 99). This advice is critical for allowing a scholar to engage in service activities that do not detract from their core duties and energy, but synergistically builds an integrated career in which one’s engagement in different activities supports their overall career goals and trajectory. Such integrated approaches to a career can truly broaden and extend one’s reach and impact in their association, as well as in their home institution (Whittaker and Montgomery, 2014).

In an attempt to provide insights into all stages of an academic career, Shaw outlines five distinct stages of an academic career in Chapter 15 “Academic Career Pathways’, which he designates as initiation, routinization, secularization, solidification and graduation (pg. 111). In describing these distinct stages, Shaw largely provides nonspecific generalizations, which leads to limited practical insights or suggestions for academics attempting to climb the ladder in a specific discipline. However, this chapter may serve well for providing the general public with a look behind the mystical curtain into the world of academic scholarly career paths from entering into an academic career trajectory (initiation), through settling into a tenure-track position at an academic institution (routinization) and post-tenure activities in which one moves toward “developing a lifestyle compatible to academic endeavor” (pg. 115; secularization), to moving towards becoming solidified into extraordinary contributions for a select few individuals (solidification) and ultimately transitioning to retirement (graduation).
In the detailed Appendix, Shaw provides numerous pages (43 total pages in fact) that are intended as specific examples regarding documenting one’s academic career. The provided information is too specific in one sense and thus may not be as useful as examples one could obtain that would provide models of success at a particular institution or type of institution in which one is seeking advancement. While being too specific in regards to suggested language and level of detail, the examples are simultaneously also so general as not to serve as efficacious examples for a range of disciplinary or institutional norms.

In this text, there were some cases in which the information presented appeared to conflict with current academic norms, e.g., Shaw states that “one loses one’s years of service for tenure when one leaves the institution…because few academic institutions are willing to grant tenure to a once-tenured scholar from another institution” (p. 17). Further, Shaw describes that “an institution owns a scholar once it grants him or her tenure” (pg. 59). These assessments are not what represent a commonly accepted assessment of tenure. In many disciplines, tenured scholars who have built solid publication records and acquired significant levels of funding for external sources are actively and aggressively pursued by other institutions. Alternatively, tenured professors may choose to seek alternative positions as an opportunity to move to an institution with a better fit and/or renegotiate institutional support. Positions for such individuals almost always assume that the individual will be recruited with their tenure retained. If not offered, the retainment of tenure would certainly be negotiable (Walker, 1983). In this regard, Shaw misses a wonderful opportunity to talk about negotiation, not only in regards to transferring tenure, but during the academic search process at all career stages.

Another point that appears to go against emerging norms of understanding about academic careers emerges when Shaw states that “academicians earn positions through individual efforts” (pg. 33). The individual effort fallacy is pervasive in academia, but has recently begun to be challenged. A more realistic view of the production of knowledge in academia is emerging as a “community effort comprising innumerable interdependent contributions” of multiple individuals (Casadevall and Fang, 2012; p. 893). This view of collaborative efforts in long recognized in STEM disciplines (Casadevall and Fang, 2012), but is also
being acknowledge more broadly, including in the social sciences (Dodson, Montgomery, and Brown, 2009).

**Conclusions**

Shaw is to be commended for attempting to provide a guide for academics that would ‘lift the veil’ on what it takes to be successful, while simultaneously providing general insights that may educate the general public on the academic life. In this text, he does this specifically through addressing a wide range of issues from academic preparation to entering academia and all facets of engagement and productivity in academia until retirement. In doing so, he attempts to engage issues of importance to the scholar on this path as well as to provide general insights that would inform the general public of the academic pathway. In the end, the book falls somewhere in the middle. This text is too detailed for the majority of the general public and yet not detailed or specific enough to serve as a ‘life-long’ guide for an academic in a particular discipline to gain hard-core insights. A wealth of references are provided; however, these occur in a large grouping rather than in the text associated with sentences to which they refer, which would greatly aid in determining the focus of a particular reference and its potential utility. This book likely provides the most insights for beginning graduate scholars, especially in the social sciences or humanities, and does not provide what are likely to be considered breakthrough insights for more senior scholars nor the most applicable examples for individuals in the STEM disciplines. Shaw certainly provides a nuanced, and at times political view, of some aspects of engagement in academia, including somewhat adversarial views about tenure and peer review and the potential exploitative nature of networking. In these instances, the author approaches the promise of “uncommon strategies” included in the title of this volume. In this sense, pairing this text with a more traditional book that outlines the specific guidelines for an academic career in a particular academic discipline could provide strong balancing information for a burgeoning academic scholar.

**References**

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