



Made available through Montana State University's [ScholarWorks](#)

DRAFT: Slow Librarianship as a Catalyst for Change: Reimagining Academic Library Culture while Maximizing Impact

Jacqueline Frank

Copyright Litwin Books 2025

Accessibility Disclaimer:

For a more accessible version of this document, please submit an accessibility request form through the Montana State University Library website.

**DRAFT: Slow Librarianship as a Catalyst for Change:
Reimagining Academic Library Culture while Maximizing Impact**

Jacqueline Frank, Montana State University Library, jacqueline.frank@montana.edu

Abstract

This chapter presents slow librarianship as a transformative approach to academic library work, capable of addressing systemic cultural issues while maximizing individual and institutional impact with a values-based approach.

Beginning by contextualizing slow librarianship within the broader slow movement and academic landscape, this chapter draws connections to *Essentialism*, *The Slow Professor*, and minimalism as theoretical foundations that can be applied in the library context.

A critical analysis of the current academic library environment follows, examining how burnout culture and constant growth expectations contribute to unsustainable work practices. This chapter argues that embracing slow librarianship is not just about individual work habits, but about fostering a (literally) healthier culture that challenges these harmful norms.

The chapter then delves into practical strategies for enacting slow librarianship and maintaining a sustainable work rhythm throughout the academic year. These techniques include identifying core values, selective engagement to maximize impact, saying "no" effectively, and managing workload to protect quality. These strategies are presented as tools for cultural change, demonstrating how individual actions can contribute to broader institutional shifts. Along the way, I candidly discuss successes, challenges, and lessons learned, offering insights into how librarians can navigate potential criticisms and resistance to change.

Particular attention is given to the surprising strategy to maximize impact by doing less. Central to slow librarianship is the process of deeply reflecting on core values and connecting them to work priorities and decision-making. This chapter is also careful to emphasize that slow librarianship is not merely about doing less, but that we can make the most significant impact by utilizing this values-aligned, less-is-more approach.

By blending theoretical foundations, practical strategies, and an aspirational perspective, this chapter aims to inspire a reimagining of academic library culture. The chapter concludes with a hopeful vision for the future of academic librarianship, outlining how widespread adoption of slow librarianship principles could reshape the profession. It offers a call to action,

encouraging librarians at all career stages to embrace the slow movement and initiate a culture shift in academic librarianship. By offering concrete, actionable strategies alongside thoughtful reflection, this chapter will equip librarians with the tools they need to maximize their impact while fostering a more sustainable and fulfilling professional life.

Introduction

Too many of us feel overwhelmed, burned out, and exhausted while constantly busy without much impact. No wonder we dream of a future with enough time for deep thought, creativity, and self-care. If this sounds familiar, you're not alone. The current culture of academic librarianship, and American culture in general, often pushes us toward constant growth and achievement at the expense of sustainable practices and meaningful impact.

As we navigate busy seasons, tenure expectations, and unspoken institutional pressures, it is important to reflect on our current pace and culture to determine if it is serving us well or if we are simply performing the role we are expected to. Many of us already know or, more accurately, feel the answer but don't know how to make a change.

Slow librarianship offers a different path forward. As Meredith Farkas notes, it is "really about being driven by reflection, solidarity, and our professional values, rather than achievement culture, individualism, and white supremacy" (Juarez, 2022). This chapter explores how we can embrace slow librarianship by intentionally prioritizing, doing less, and aligning our work with our values to maximize our impact, make time for leisure, and build a healthier professional culture along the way.

As an aspiring minimalist, I have personally found that the more I follow minimalist principles at home and work, the more calm and balance it brings into my life. On my path to [try to] embrace minimalism, I have discovered *Essentialism* by Greg McKeown, *The Slow Professor* by Berg and Seeber, and the broader slow movement. This chapter draws connections between these principles and slow librarianship within the context of an academic library. We'll examine how focusing on what truly matters – and deliberately letting go of what doesn't – can transform our work and profession.

In addition to discussing specific strategies to actively reduce your workload, we'll explore something counterintuitive: doing less to accomplish more. This approach to slow librarianship isn't just about doing less – it's about doing what matters most and, equally important, doing it well.

Offering personal reflection and practical strategies, this chapter will:

- Share insights on what slow librarianship means in practice, with a focus on identifying our core values and aligning our daily work with those priorities
- Offer concrete strategies for implementing slow librarianship principles, even amid the pressures of academic culture
- Consider how this intentionally slower pace actually drives more meaningful impact in our communities

This isn't just about individual practice – it's about catalyzing systemic change in academic libraries. We will explore how setting thoughtful priorities and doing less can lead to a more meaningful and sustainable professional impact while contributing to a broader culture shift in academic librarianship. Together, we'll explore how to resist the corporatization of academia while building something better: a sustainable approach to librarianship that honors our values, serves our communities effectively, and preserves our ability to do meaningful work for years to come.

Theoretical Foundations

Slow Librarianship and Its Principles

At its core, slow librarianship emerged as a response to the relentless push for productivity, constant achievement, and innovation in academic culture. As Meredith Farkas explains, it "was in response to... realizations about... ambition, striving, productivity, self-optimization, and achievement culture. It felt like the answer to all this was to slow down, to notice and reflect, to focus more on being true to our values than innovating, to build relationships, to really listen (to our communities our colleagues, and ourselves), and to be in solidarity with others" (Farkas, 2021 a). While this movement acknowledges the systemic pressures we face, it also offers a path forward that doesn't sacrifice quality for speed; instead, it encourages us to redefine what productive work means for our libraries and communities.

This isn't about working at a snail's pace – it's about being intentional with our time and energy to maintain our highest quality of work. An “emphasis on slowing down and ensuring the best possible service is crucial to Slow Librarianship, strongly advocating for librarians to resist the cultural pressure to rush and prioritize quality and reflection in their work” (ALA, 2024).

As these quotes suggest, the slow movement builds on the principles of "resisting cultural pressures to hurry" (Glassman, 2017) to create space for meaningful work and reflection.

Drawing from Carl Honoré's work, it encourages us to do "fewer things and have time to make the most of them" (Honoré, 2004) – a simple idea that represents a significant departure from current academic culture.

The Slow Professor and Academic Resistance

The principles of slow librarianship align with the vision offered in *The Slow Professor*. Berg and Seeber (2016) argue that approaching our professional practice through the lens of the Slow movement can disrupt the corporate culture of speed that has spilled over into academia. Instead of constantly declaring what we're producing, Berg and Seeber encourage us to embrace different ways of describing our work: "we might say to ourselves and others, "I am contemplating..." or "I am conversing with..." or even "I am in joyful pursuit of..." (p. 57) This shift in language reflects a deeper shift in how we approach our work and measure its value.

One of their most powerful insights is the need for honest dialogue about how we actually spend our time, including the anxieties, disruptions, and setbacks we all face. Rather than presenting ourselves as "overachieving writing robots" (p. xi) designed to satisfy assessment metrics, we can create space for authentic conversations about our work lives.

Essentialism in Academic Libraries

Greg McKeown's book on Essentialism provides a powerful framework for implementing slow librarianship principles in academic libraries or any context. As McKeown explains, essentialism "isn't about getting more done in less time. It's not about getting less done. It's about getting only the right things done" (McKeown, n.d.). This distinction is crucial – we are not discussing time management tricks or productivity hacks. Instead, we are examining how to align our time with our deepest professional values.

McKeown poses a challenging question: "I challenge you to here and now to make a commitment to make room to enjoy the essential... do you think you will regret such a decision?" (p. 27). This gets to the heart of essentialism's relevance to librarianship. By identifying what is essential, we can eliminate the rest in order to maximize our efforts towards the things that matter most.

Remember John Maxwell's famous insight: "You cannot overestimate the unimportance of practically everything" (p. 28). This isn't about doing more in less time – it's about doing less to begin with, focusing only on the most important activities or projects. McKeown notes that "saying yes to any opportunity by definition requires saying no to several others" (p. 52).

The Minimalist Mindset

Underlying these concepts is minimalism, which Joshua Becker defines as "The intentional promotion of the things we most value and the removal of everything that distracts us from it" (Becker, n.d.). This framework helps us see that sometimes, what we *don't* do is just as important as what we do. The power lies in intentionally choosing what to eliminate so we can focus on what matters most.

Minimalism has also been defined as a "design or style in which the simplest and fewest elements are used to create the maximum effect" (Ongaro, n.d.). In other words, minimalism isn't just about doing less, it's about doing *as little as possible* in order to maximize our time for the things that matter most. This is important because, as Ongaro (n.d.) notes, "we only have a certain amount of energy, time, and space in our lives. In order to make the most of it, we must be intentional about how we're living each day." This concept applies the same to our work lives as it does to our personal lives, and reminds us to be intentional and highly selective about how we spend our finite time at work (and home).

Resisting Corporatization in Academia: Enacting Slow Librarianship

Together, these frameworks provide tools for pushing back against the corporatization of higher education. They emphasize reflection, choice, and meeting local needs over standardized metrics and performative productivity. As Mary Oliver famously asks, "Tell me, what is it that you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?" The answer likely isn't "spend it in endless meetings" or "respond to every email immediately."

We can take this advice and apply it within our current context. We can reevaluate our priorities, align our work with them, cut out the noise (admittedly, this is the hard part), and realize it is essential to make time for deep contemplation and ensure we produce our best work. We can use this framework to help enact slow librarianship in our daily lives.

These theoretical foundations remind us that living – and working – is so much more than accomplishment. By making space to listen, play, sleep, and thoughtfully select our priorities, we can create a more sustainable and meaningful approach to academic librarianship.

The Current Landscape of Academic Librarianship

Let's be honest – our current professional culture is unsustainable. Between endless email threads, packed meeting schedules, and the constant pressure to produce more (especially for

those on the tenure track), we've normalized a level of busyness that undermines our ability to do our best work.

A study from the 1980s identified academic librarians' top stressors, which sound eerily familiar today: self-imposed, unrealistically high expectations, not having enough time to keep current in our field, feeling overwhelmed by workload, and watching job demands interfere with personal life (Gmelch, 1984, p. 484). Additionally, a study on mid-career librarians of color offers some insight into our culture today by saying, "Those who left [academic librarianship] struggled with acculturating to the overwhelming whiteness of librarianship and the constantly changing, unwritten rules of higher education" (Sterling et. al., 2025). The fact that we are still dealing with similar issues today, whether external or self-imposed, suggests a systemic problem that requires a collective reimagining of what sustainable and productive librarianship looks like.

Because here's the thing – by overworking, as Meredith Farkas points out, "we normalize overwork. We make overwork look like the norm so working the amount that your job description calls for becomes framed as 'quiet quitting'" (Farkas, 2022). This isn't just about individual choices – it's about systems designed to keep us anxiously productive. When we consistently work at unsustainable rates, we inadvertently set inflated standards that harm our colleagues and future generations of librarians. As Farkas notes, capitalism maintains these patterns by keeping us "anxious and in competition with each other" (Farkas, 2021 a), creating workplace hierarchies that divide rather than unite us.

But it's not entirely our fault. As Headlee (2020) points out, "if you don't consciously choose a slower path, you will likely default to the pedal to the metal speeds of modern life... [because] most of us instinctively keep pace with our environment" (Headlee, 2020, Track 3, 15:00).

The tenure track process particularly embodies this problematic culture. Many of us feel trapped in a game of constant achievement, focusing on externally valued metrics rather than meaningful impact. The choice to slow down while seeking tenure often seems idealistic and naive. "I never felt like I could slow down when I was on the tenure track," Farkas shares, "I felt like I had to be laser focused on achieving in all the ways that were externally valued so my tenure file would be bullet-proof" (2021 b). I have felt similar pressures. Even after meeting the clearly outlined requirements for tenure, it still doesn't *feel* like enough. Perhaps this is because I know others have gone above and beyond. So, instead of evaluating my work according to the

agreed-upon written standards, I compare my output to those who have come before me, harkening back to the problem of normalizing overwork. This can also perpetuate a cycle where those who've survived a broken system feel entitled to demand the same sacrifice from newcomers.

And the human cost is staggering. Research shows that low morale among academic librarians can lead to depression, reduced professional confidence, and persistent skepticism – effects that can last even after changing positions (Kendrick, 2017). These impacts ripple through our organizations, affecting both those experiencing burnout directly and those trying to support struggling colleagues.

Here's the paradox: to do our most important work well, we need time to think, play, and rest. “Play helps us develop socially, physically, and cognitively. It can also help teach us how to handle unexpected events.... It helps us create trust, and manage stress.” (Headlee, 2020, Track 10, 36:00). And as McKeown (2014) reminds us, “We need space to escape in order to discern the essential few from the trivial many” (p. 64). Deep thinking requires rest. Creative problem-solving needs room to breathe. Innovation emerges from play, not from racing through endless task lists.

The solution isn't to work harder within broken systems. Through slow librarianship, we can push back in purposeful ways that align with our values while maximizing our impact where it matters most. This means letting some things fall apart so we can rebuild them better. It means letting our capacity gaps become visible rather than heroically covering them up. As Farkas (2022) argues, “Let's stop being complicit in creating cultures of overwork... Real solidarity requires this.” When everything around us demands acceleration, maybe the truly radical act is to slow down – not just for our own well-being, but for the future of our profession.

Aligning Values with Work Priorities: A Practice of Slow Librarianship

Given this challenging landscape, how do we make meaningful change? While systemic transformation happens slowly, we can start with our individual approach to work – an approach that, when adopted at scale, has the power to fundamentally reshape academic library culture. This approach starts with deeply reflecting on our core professional values and connecting them to work priorities and decision-making.

At its heart, slow librarianship isn't really about doing less. As Farkas explains, “For some people, slow librarianship may indeed look like doing less, especially if they have, in the

past, prioritized work over their own well-being. For others, it might mean doing more that is deeply tied to our values. But I think for most people, it might mean producing less, but actually doing more meaningful work" (Farkas, 2021 b).

Let's pause for a moment and try a simple thought exercise to identify our core values and priorities; ask yourself:

- What's most important in your work? What immediately comes to mind?
- In your dream future, what would you have time for? Deep research? Reading more? Creative projects?
- What consistently gets in the way of these priorities?

McKewon suggests a similar thought exercise by asking yourself these two questions:

- "What's one essential thing you're currently under-investing in?"
- "What's one non-essential thing you're currently over-investing in?" (McKeown, 2024).

The answers often reveal a disconnect between our stated priorities and how we actually spend our time. As Kramer (1984) notes, "efficiency is sometimes confused with effectiveness, and the distinction between them is important. Efficiency means performing a task economically; effectiveness means performing the right task." I would argue that effectiveness is more important than efficiency, especially in a library context where our main mission is to help people.

This is where the power of subtraction comes in. When faced with a challenge, our instinct is to add something – another meeting, procedure, committee, or project. But sometimes the most powerful solution is removing something instead. By eliminating the non-essential, we create space for deeper work and creative solutions. "We need more time and space for the gradual collection and interpretation of knowledge," Poole (2023) argues. "For the connections to appear, be strengthened and for new meaning to emerge. For meaningful connections with our communities that are not transactional, but are slow, looping, relaxed and geared towards the pleasantness, comfort and dignity" (Poole, 2023).

This shift requires us to reject the constant pressure to produce and instead embrace more reflective practices. By taking time to understand our values and align our work accordingly, "we can offer... services that are deeper, more lasting, and more human" (Glassman, 2017). This isn't about embracing mediocrity – it's about being intentional with our energy and attention so we

can do what we do really well. As Berg and Seeber (2016) note, "Slow Professors advocate deliberation over acceleration. We need time to think, and so do our students. Time for reflection and open-ended inquiry is not a luxury but is crucial to what we do." The same applies to librarians.

By taking time to reflect deeply on our core professional values and eliminate anything that isn't directly in service to them, we reclaim our schedules and the intellectual life of our profession. The goal isn't just to work differently – it's to fundamentally shift how we make decisions, view our contributions, and measure our impact. As we move forward, let's focus not on transactions but on transformations, not on quantity but on quality, not on speed but on significance. And when we can clearly connect those transformations and our quality of work back to our values, it only strengthens and supports the story of our professional impact.

Practical (& Personal) Strategies for Implementing Slow Librarianship: Less is More

So, how do we actually put slow librarianship principles into practice? Let's dive into some practical strategies that have worked for me and others – all in support of the counterintuitive approach of doing less to accomplish more. The secret to making meaningful progress is being intentionally selective with your time and energy.

It's important to note upfront that this requires autonomy and the ability to prioritize your own work. Some of us do not have that and work within different power structures. While not all strategies may apply to you or your situation, I hope you find something that resonates.

Start with Rest: Flipping the Work-Life Balance Script

Here's a radical idea that changed my entire approach to work: schedule rest first, then fit in the work. You might immediately dismiss the idea as impractical, but hear me out. That to-do list? It's never going to be finished - not at work or home. If you're waiting to rest until you've checked off "just one more thing," you'll be waiting forever.

Instead, try this: block time off for sleep, exercise, family dinners, hobbies, or whatever fills your cup and keeps you healthy. Then – and only then – see how much work realistically fits around these essential activities. This approach does two powerful things: it ensures you actually make time for what sustains you and gives you a crystal-clear picture of how much you can actually accomplish in a week.

Try this approach with your work schedule too, by first blocking off time for lunch breaks, professional development time, or time to work on your most important activities or

projects. Mark them as private on your calendar if you can. Schedule this time far into the future to protect more of your time from additional meetings and other scheduled commitments. Then, fit in email and smaller tasks around the most important work priorities and see how much actually fits. Schedule that last-minute meeting months from now, instead of right away, to show the realistic demands on your time and bandwidth, rather than constantly making it work and paying the price later.

The famous principle of Parkinson's Law wisely observes that a task will expand to take the time allotted for it; so let's limit the time our non-essential tasks take to make room for the big things first.

The Power of Three

One of my favorite game-changing strategies I've started using is simple: focus on just three priorities at a time. These could be three main projects, or if you're juggling multiple areas (like scholarship, teaching, and service), choose just one key focus for each area. Limiting yourself to three focal points brings clarity and purpose to your daily work life. Groups of three are also easier to remember. The "at a time" part can change based on your schedule and reality – you could prioritize three things each week, each month, or each semester, according to your timelines. The key is to revisit and re-prioritize regularly, depending on your work rhythm.

For example, if scholarship is one of your three main areas or 'buckets' of work, and you aim to give three presentations this semester, tackle them one at a time, first to last. Then, do your best not to ruminate on the second or third one while working on the first. Focusing on the top three doesn't mean you forget about the rest, but tell yourself the rest can simply wait. It may not work this way for you, but it's like magic for my brain– suddenly, my overwhelming to-do list is reduced to clear next steps.

Weekly Planning & Scheduling Ritual

Consider implementing a weekly planning meeting with yourself to map out the following week ahead. Spend 30 minutes each week to do a brain dump of tasks, identify your top three priorities, schedule time to align with your priorities, and strategize how to handle what doesn't fit into your schedule. The key is to schedule your top priorities first, adding an extra 50% to your time estimates (because it always takes longer than we think!).

Many prefer to do this on Mondays, but I suggest Fridays as a way to reflect on where you spent your time that week and to set your intentions for the next week. This weekly practice

creates clarity and helps manage expectations of what you intend to accomplish in any given day or week.

Schedule for Success

After identifying your main priorities, block off time on your calendar to work on them. Remember to include time for breaks, rejuvenation, and play among your daily tasks. Some people prefer to schedule every minute of their day for specific tasks, which can help them stay on track. For others, this approach leads to feeling behind if their schedule gets delayed, or one task takes longer than expected. Others find success in identifying just one essential task to complete each day, and leaving as much unstructured time as possible. Find what works for you.

Either way, try to block off time for your most important work far into the future to protect more of your time from being filled with meetings, etc. If you can, mark that time as private, and don't compromise when a last-minute request comes in. If that means the next available time to schedule a meeting is two months from now, let that be an indicator of your current bandwidth and workload, and let it wait until you have ample brainpower to dedicate to it.

In conclusion: schedule time to do deep work *before* your calendar gets consumed by minor tasks.

Embrace Imperfection

Slow Librarianship isn't about doing everything perfectly – sometimes it's about having the courage to do things "just okay" when they're not a top priority. Sometimes, “done is better than perfect” (Sandberg, 2013). But we should use this strategy to limit the time spent on our less important tasks, in order to free up valuable time to focus on our main priorities that will have a bigger impact in the end. Because we want to do those most important things really well, let's focus on those and embrace imperfection for the tasks that aren't central to the core mission.

Strategic Delay

For all the things that don't fit, let the power of delay be your secret weapon. Our anxious minds often forget a liberating truth: not everything you intend to do needs to be done right now – or at all. Sometimes, the best decision is to wait and see. If you postpone a decision or project and it naturally fades away, chances are it wasn't essential in the first place.

For example, if you're asked to start a new project and [are in the position to] respond by saying you don't have the capacity to take it on immediately but could consider it in the future, simply wait and see if it still seems important later on. If it gets forgotten, that's valuable information about its true importance.

If those things that seem important but keep getting pushed back each week, there is a reason they keep getting pushed back – they are either a) not actually that important (work to eliminate these) or b) too big and too important that they can't be done in small, distracted chunks of time, which means they never get done in the rat race of it all (consider the advice in this entire chapter about re-prioritizing your work, and making time for the most important work before the trivial tasks). This is slow librarianship in action.

Let's be brave enough to rethink arbitrary timelines and challenge the status quo of constant busyness by letting some things naturally linger or even fade away.

The Art of Saying No

Make "no" your default answer, and only say yes to projects that truly align with your priorities. As Greg McKeown did, you might discover that saying yes builds popularity, but saying no builds respect. When you do need to take on something new, be prepared to de-prioritize something else.

This work is hard. I'm not going to pretend anything different. But with practice and a few starting scripts, it does become easier. Here are some partial responses to help you say no more often:

- Unfortunately [I have a full workload/this is out of my scope] currently, and do not have the capacity to take this on at this time. Thanks for thinking of me though.
- Responding to your boss: What would you like me to de-prioritize to make this happen?
- Let me [look at my schedule/talk to my boss] and I'll get back to you.
- I currently have a full workload and am working on projects/priorities [1, 2, & 3]. Therefore, I do not currently have the capacity to take on this new project unless I delay one of my current projects.
- I could start working on this after I finish [X] project, which would likely not be until [X]. Does that timeline work for you?

Consider ending with something that lets them know you are saying no to uphold a high quality of work:

- I am working to prioritize and limit my projects in order to contribute the highest quality of work in each area.
- I do not have the time to effectively contribute to everything on my list.
- Thanks for your help, I want to make sure I'm focusing on the most important areas of my work.

Personally, I try to say no to anything that I will not write about in my dossier when making my case for tenure. If it isn't important enough to write about for tenure, that tells me something about its relative importance. Don't get the wrong idea; I'm not saying I'm perfect, and I don't always get it right. I definitely still do things that I'm not going to write about for tenure. But using this as a guidepost has been immensely helpful in quickly identifying the most important areas of my work and has helped me say no more often.

Deep Work Before Email

Let's tackle everyone's favorite time-sink: email. Instead of letting your inbox dictate your day, try checking email just once or twice daily, preferably not first thing in the morning. I like to check email in the afternoon and save my morning energy for working on projects before getting distracted. When I follow this schedule, I still reply to most emails within the same 24-hour timeframe as when I check email in the morning, and often even quicker because I am responding to emails sent earlier that morning rather than the day before. And if someone sends an email at the end of the day, they often don't expect a reply until the following day.

Mark Twain wisely noted, "If it's your job to eat a frog, you best eat it first thing in the morning." In other words, tackle your most important task first, before your day [and email] gets away from you.

Make use of Small Gaps of Time

One of my favorite strategies from the Greg McKeown Podcast (2024) is the 10 minutes-10 years reflection: "What can you spend 10 minutes on today that your future self will thank you for in 10 years?"

This question helps cut through the noise and identify what truly matters within a 10-minute timeframe. My answers often involve exercise, connecting with loved ones, and sleep – rarely does work come to mind if I am really thinking about my future self in 10 years.

However, this is still a good exercise that can be applied at work. For example, I'm currently in a tenure-track position, and I hope in 10 years to have achieved the rank of tenure. I also know that I must produce a substantial record of scholarship to meet tenure requirements. So, if I'm working on an article for publication, while I can't write much in 10 minutes, I can read an article as part of a literature review, quickly search for potential journals to submit my publication to, or start formatting according to author guidelines.

Therefore, instead of wasting small gaps of time or filling them with less important tasks, consider using even these small chunks of time to amplify progress in the areas where you will have the biggest impact.

Embracing the Challenges

In reality, implementing these changes isn't going to be smooth sailing. When I started blocking off time for priority work and marking it as "private," I felt a sense of guilt. When I began saying "no" to additional commitments, I worried about letting people down or how it would impact my reputation as a collaborative and helpful colleague. I still wonder if people notice and judge. Sometimes, I know they do, having heard comments about never turning down an opportunity for X-Y-Z while on the tenure path or something similar.

But I've learned that maintaining boundaries isn't just about protecting your time – it's about ensuring the quality of your most important work. I've found that as I've made room to produce high-quality work and said "no" more often, my professional reputation has been rewarded and spoken for itself in the long term.

The journey to Slow Librarianship is exactly that – a journey. Some weeks, you will nail it, and others, you will struggle. But with each intentional choice to do less, to focus on what truly matters, you're building a more sustainable and meaningful practice. And isn't that worth a few uncomfortable "no's" along the way?

Conclusion

I will be honest – writing this chapter has been more emotionally challenging than other academic writing. When sharing personal opinions about a topic you've thought deeply about, there's a vulnerability that comes with hoping others understand your intentions and perspective. But as Berg and Seeber (2016) write: "one of the many valuable recommendations... is that we academics should, collectively, talk to each other more about how we actually spend our time, with all the anxieties, displacements, and failures that involves, rather than presenting ourselves

as the overachieving writing robots whom most systems of assessment seem designed to reward” (p. xi). So that’s what I’m trying to do.

Throughout this chapter, we've explored what slow librarianship means at its core: a fundamental reimagining of our relationship with work. We've outlined how slow librarianship offers an alternative to burnout culture and the constant pressure for growth in academic libraries. We've examined the need to reimagine academic library culture to protect our health and well-being. We've discussed the need to align our work with our fundamental values and how taking time to reflect deeply on where we can make the most significant impact helps us direct our energy more purposefully. Finally, we considered some practical approaches to reduce our workload while focusing on what truly matters. This isn't just about slowing down or doing less; it's about being intentional with our time and effort to drive meaningful change in our profession.

This transformation won't happen overnight. It's an ongoing practice that will continue to be challenging for most of us. Some days, you'll feel like you're swimming upstream. On other days, you'll find yourself slipping back into old habits. That's okay. The key is to keep returning to these principles: focus on what matters most, let go of what doesn't, and trust that by doing less, you might actually accomplish more. One of my favorite quotes from Lao Tzu reminds us, "Nature does not hurry, yet everything is accomplished." We can apply this wisdom to our professional lives, creating space for reflection, creativity, and meaningful impact.

I hope this chapter helps you consider one approach to slow librarianship and determine what will have the biggest impact in your context. As you leave with new ideas, I encourage you to find room for joy, sleep, creativity, and play. These aren't luxuries but rather essential ingredients for sustainable, impactful work.

As we navigate the future of academic librarianship, let us challenge the status quo of constant busyness. We can build a more sustainable and impactful profession through intentional prioritization and values alignment – one thoughtful decision at a time. We can create a healthier culture while still maximizing our impact in ways that align with our values.

The question isn't whether we can afford to slow down. Given the importance of our work and its potential impact, the real question is: can we afford not to? Let's be brave enough to embrace the slow movement in academic librarianship, trusting that by doing less, we might actually accomplish more – and find more joy in the process.

References

- ALA, (2024). Keeping Up With... Slow Librarianship.
https://www.ala.org/acrl/publications/keeping_up_with/slow_librarianship
- Becker, J. (n.d.). *Minimalism Introduces Us to Intentionality*. becomingminimalist.
<https://www.becomingminimalist.com/minimalism-introduces-intentionality/>
- Berg, M., & Seeber, B. K. (2016). *The slow professor : challenging the culture of speed in the academy*. University of Toronto Press.
- Farkas, M. (2021 a). *Slow life, slow librarianship*. Information Wants To Be Free.
<https://meredith.wolfwater.com/wordpress/2021/09/08/slow-life-slow-librarianship/>
- Farkas, M. (2021 b). *What is slow librarianship*. Information Wants To Be Free.
<https://meredith.wolfwater.com/wordpress/2021/10/18/what-is-slow-librarianship/>
- Farkas, M. (2022). *Stop normalizing overwork*. Information Wants To Be Free.
<https://meredith.wolfwater.com/wordpress/2022/10/23/stop-normalizing-overwork/>
- Glassman, J. (2017). The Innovation Fetish and Slow Librarianship: What Librarians Can Learn From the Juicero. *In the Library with the Lead Pipe*.
<https://www.inthelibrarywiththeleadpipe.org/2017/the-innovation-fetish-and-slow-librarianship-what-librarians-can-learn-from-the-juicero/>
- Gmelch, W. H., Lovrich, N. P., & Wilke, P. K. (1984). Sources of stress in academe: A national perspective. *Research in higher education*, 20, 477-490.
- Headlee, C. A. (2020). *Do nothing : how to break away from overworking, overdoing, and underliving* (First edition). [Audiobook] Harmony Books.
- Honoré, C. (2004). *In Praise of Slowness: How a Worldwide Movement is Challenging the Cult of Speed*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco.
- Juarez, A. H. (2022). *Slow Librarianship with Meredith Farkas*. Library Leadership Podcast.
<https://libraryleadershippodcast.com/110-slow-librarianship-with-meredith-farkas/>
- Kendrick, K. D. (2017). The Low Morale Experience of Academic Librarians: A Phenomenological Study. *Journal of Library Administration*, 57(8), 846–878.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/01930826.2017.1368325>
- Kramer, L. A. (1984). Increased productivity: Work simplification and its heirs. In J. F. Harvey & P. Spyers-Duran (Eds.), *Austerity Management in Academic Libraries* (pp. 269–276). Scarecrow Press.
- Maxwell, J. C. (1993). *Developing the leader within you*. Thomas Nelson Inc.
- McKeown, G. (n.d.) *Essentialism*. Greg McKeown.
<https://gregmckeown.com/books/essentialism/>
- McKeown, G. (2014). *Essentialism: The disciplined pursuit of less*. Crown Currency.

- McKeown, G. (Host). (2024, April 25). Mastering Personal Productivity: Lessons from an Executive Advisor at Google with Laura Martin (Part 1) [Audio podcast episode]. In *The Greg McKeown Podcast*. Apple Podcasts. <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/293-mastering-personal-productivity-lessons-from-an/id1513285647?i=1000653549514>
- Ongaro, A. (n.d.). *What Is Minimalism? A Practical Guide to a Minimalist Lifestyle*. Break the Twitch. <https://www.breakthetwitch.com/minimalism/>
- Poole, N. (2023). *In Praise of Slow Librarianship*. Medium. <https://nick-poole.medium.com/in-praise-of-slow-librarianship-93eedfc83df6>
- Sandberg, S., & Scovell, N. (2013). *Lean in: women, work, and the will to lead* (First edition.). Alfred A. Knopf.