

Editor's Column: How Do We Get It All Done, Ever?

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This is not the column I had planned for this issue of *Codex*. The column I had planned discusses notions of faculty-librarians relationships in the specific context of deselection projects. My library is currently going through a two-year MASSIVE weeding project; we'll be reducing a four-floor collection to a two-floor collection. It has not been easy on most fronts, but we continue to power through, despite faculty problems, health problems, and budget problems. I still plan to write that column, but it will be for another day. No, this column – written after a week-long absence due to the flu – will be briefer and much less angsty.

I came back to a pile of emails, as one might expect; amongst the pile was an inquiry from a colleague at another institution about the volume of instruction conducted at my library and how it was distributed. Did I, like him, find that one librarian conducts more instruction than the others? (Yes, and that librarian is me.) He related that he feels that he spends most of his fall and spring semesters conducting bibliographic sessions with a small reprieve in the summers for planning instruction for the main semesters and doing a little research. Incidentally, this colleague also peer reviews for *Codex* when he can. He expressed concern about being able to balance his instructional load with the requirements for tenure at his university.

I empathize with him: when I began at this library, there were only three full-time reference librarians, if you included the department head. We handled all the desk shifts and all the instructional sessions. Attending conferences was tricky though we always made it work. Actually, everything was tricky, though we always made it work. However, it often meant working many nights and weekends, so I found myself working 21 days straight once which was

not fun. Coming back to work after a week-long absence means doubling up to make sure I stay on schedule – that is, playing catch-up while staying on top of things. And, as a department head, staying on top of things often means facing several small unexpected fires every week which were not planned for and often cannot be planned for.

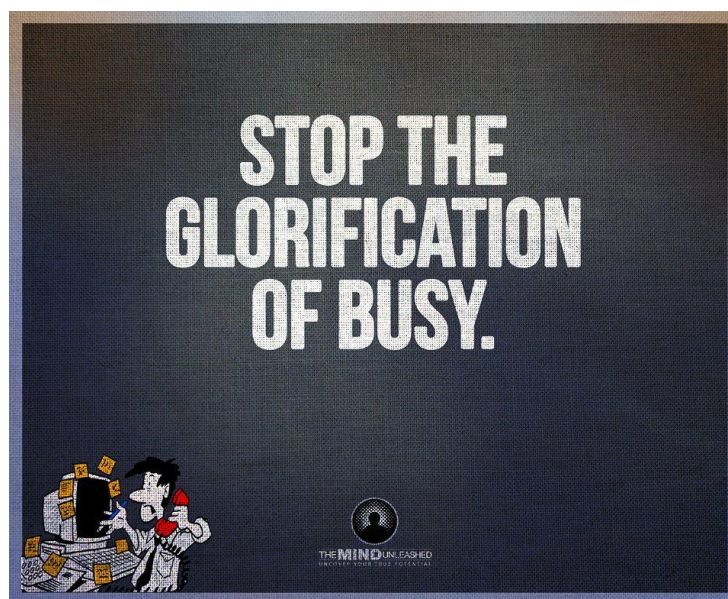
In considering the volume of work I've already put in this morning *alone* addressing emails, answering questions, answering phone calls, and dealing with the everyday duties in the context of what remains to be done the rest of the day and the rest of the week (scheduled instructional sessions and meetings, doing layout for *Codex*, and a dozen other things), all in the context of my colleague's queries about instruction and tenure and the frequent complaints of my colleagues on Facebook about trying to find the time to get it all done, I have to wonder: how do we get it all done, ever?

This is almost a rhetorical question. The practical answer is that we simply do, between time management, staying at work late, taking work home, multitasking, and simply shouldering the load. This seems a timely topic, given the New Year; after all, don't a lot of us make New Year's resolutions to better time manage and stay on top of our to-do lists? I feel like we do – the volume of "Keep your New Year's resolutions!" articles coming across my social media feeds suggests that we do. I don't necessarily have a lot of faith in these articles; it seems that the best way to keep one's resolutions – just as the best way to manage one's time and to-do list – is the desire and discipline to do so.

But that's not the point of this column. The point is: it seems that my colleagues and I *do* get it all done, somehow. My question is: at what cost? My colleague seems overworked. I know my colleagues at my library and I are overworked. My colleagues out of state are overworked. I suspect even you, dear reader, may be overworked. Maybe your overworked state is exacerbated

by a lot of responsibilities quite apart from work. Maybe budget cuts have left your library understaffed (that's certainly the case at mine, though we're not as understaffed as we were when I started here several years ago). Regardless of the reason, it appears to be an epidemic: the overworked librarian. But it seems to be part of a larger social phenomenon that transcends career fields: the glorification of busy. It seems that our self-worth has begun to be tied up in how many activities we can engage in and how much work we do. While holding down a steady job (or jobs) and making valuable contributions to society, as well as offering one's children opportunities to have experiences, are unquestionably worthy activities, it seems that quiet free time is no longer valued; we cram our days with activities; we cram our evenings and weekends with stuff.

While it is inevitable that those of us in libraries will remain overworked as long as budget cuts result in huge swaths of resources being taken from libraries, let me challenge you to find time to **NOT** be busy. It is important to say *no*; learn to say *no* instead of saying *yes* to everything. Learn to find a space in your day in which you are just breathing and being. And by all means, ***STOP THE GLORIFICATION OF BUSY.***



Via [The Mind Unleashed](#)

Even if we aren't easily able to change the circumstances which have brought us to our overworked and overstimulated state, we can most certainly change our attitudes about it. Being busy does not impart any inherent value to a person or their actions. Until we can change the budget circumstances and get more people on the job; until we can adjust notions of tenure for librarians (change them, not do away with them); until we can get legislators and campus communities alike to appreciate how much work and time and effort and heart go into running a library; until we can accomplish these things, I think it is important to change our attitudes about filling every possible moment of the day with activity and begin to value those quiet moments which restore our minds and our bodies and help us feel *human* again. We may be librarians, where "librarians" also equals "superheroes" and "awesome" and "multi-talented," but we're also just people with lives outside of the library.