

## Editor's Column: Boredom, Burnout, and Renewal

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I LOVE the fall semester. It's a second start to the year for me, a second new year's. The summer semester is always too quiet for my tastes (I hate to be bored), and the spring semester is always a weird mix of feast and famine. But the fall semester – that's a smorgasbord of busyness and challenges, new opportunities and – dare I say it, dare I be cheesy? – shiny new possibilities. I look forward to the fall semester every year, without reservation, and with Frankfurterian *antici.....pation*.

However, the last two years saw the fall semester sneak up on me; I didn't take my usual delight in the double-dip of new year-ness. I felt frantic and unprepared; instead of fascinated and excited by shiny new possibilities, I was blinded by the headlights of oncoming job traffic. The challenges weren't simply hurdles I could clear with little effort; they became walls with moats on the other side, moats of which I was unaware. I emerged from last year's fall semester bewildered and bedraggled; I anticipate feeling the same way at the end of this one.

Perhaps most disconcerting about these two harried autumns has been that I've felt *bored*. Despite the busyness, I didn't feel particularly stimulated; no new *real* challenges, no new trials confronted me. It was all the same old things: same requests for instruction, same committee work, same papers to proof, same liaison queries, same complaints...in short, as Jane Austen wrote in *Mansfield Park*, work life seemed "but a quick succession of *busy nothings*."

I'm mature enough to realize that it's not the responsibility of my employer to challenge me, to keep things exciting. That responsibility falls on my shoulders. I'm

responsible for my career path, for keeping myself challenged. But let's face it – sometimes, one just lacks the motivation to seek out challenges, to look for those things which will mix things up and restore the novelty to one's career.

Another career hazard I've encountered in these two recent fall semesters that sometimes goes hand-in-hand with boredom is *burnout*. Usually I suffer a yearly bout of burnout in the spring, at the end of the academic year, but these two strange semesters have resulted in an autumnal burnout. I won't bore you, dear reader, with an exhaustive (and exhausting) literature review of librarian burnout. Without a doubt, you've experienced it first-hand, whether you're in your first job as a librarian, or you're a 25-year veteran. You've undoubtedly read the literature yourself at some point; you know the symptoms, you know the etiology, you know the recommended cures and therapies. And I won't whine to you, as I have about the boredom, about the burnout. Like the boredom, it's not my employer's job to rectify these feelings; that responsibility falls firmly on my shoulders. I must seek out novelty and renewal; I must evaluate the source of that feeling and find a solution.

I wish I could say there was a solution that works for everybody, universal and affordable, reasonable and practical. Alas, such a solution does not exist. The literature may have many good recommendations for overcoming these feelings, but when one is burned out (or bored), who wants to read the literature? And anyway, we all work different types of library jobs; we suffer boredom and burnout for different reasons and in different ways. We overcome and recover from these states in different ways.

Since my usual yearly burnout happens in the spring, I usually take a trip in May, after the end of the spring semester. I go to Baltimore, to visit my college roommate, who

is also a librarian. She's an archival/special collections librarian, not a reference and instructional librarian like me, but since we both work at public universities, we are able to commiserate in so many ways. Without fail, we spend a significant amount of time commiserating – venting, ranting, crying on each other's shoulders, knocking back a drink or two, and shaking our heads in deep empathy for one another's woes. By the end of the visit, we've restored each other's faith in our own abilities, gathered food for professional thought, and been refreshed and renewed, personally and professionally. I invariably come back with some new idea for research or new perspective on an ongoing issue that can help me deal with it in a more effective way.

The change of scenery doesn't hurt, either – getting out of the library (heck, out of the state) helps me see things in a new light. We often pop in to my friend's library, to view her collections and displays, and being in another library also helps me see things in a new light. And that new light clarifies *perspective*, and, for me, that makes all the difference in dealing with boredom and burnout.

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So, my personal experiences have contributed to this particular editor's column. But it wasn't until I started doing layout for this issue that I really appreciated how appropriate this column was, in the context of this issue's content.

This issue contains a great article by SELU librarians Penny Hecker and Lori Smith on tenure and promotion in the state of Louisiana – and considering how much pressure comes along with tenure and promotion activities, burnout is often inevitable following those experiences! And speaking of tenure and promotion activities, Susan Montgomery describes the usefulness of workshops in staying up-to-date in and

interested about the profession and one's skills, which can help alleviate boredom and avoid burnout. Tocarra Porter discusses games that can be used to renew our interests, refresh our skills, and stay connected to our colleagues, all while having a good time – also good ways of avoiding boredom and burnout. Rebecca Arzola's annotated bibliography covers how librarians can help student veterans transition from military to civilian higher education life, and I think this article is a great reminder of how we ought to keep things in perspective: sure, we might get a little bored with the day-to-day activities of our jobs, but it's a far cry from avoiding the trauma of war and struggling with PTSD and getting reacquainted with civilian life.

I hope these articles help you as professionals avoid boredom and burnout, and I hope they can renew and inspire you as professionals. It's easy to get discouraged in this time of budget cuts and articles like "12 Jobs on the Brink: Will They Evolve or Go Extinct?"<sup>1</sup> (which has made the rounds on at least two of the professional list-servs I follow and on Facebook). And when boredom and burnout begin to descend, it's even easier to get discouraged and depressed and lose perspective. But through deliberate steps – either through changes of scenery, commiseration, or just connecting with our co-workers for some silly fun – we can find renewal and beat the professional blahs and blues.

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<sup>1</sup> Heather Dugan, "12 Jobs on the Brink: Will They Evolve or Go Extinct?" *Salary.com*, 2012, <http://www.salary.com/12-jobs-on-the-brink-will-they-evolve-or-go-extinct/>.