



Slow Professor: Challenging the Culture of Speed in the Academy

Berg, Maggie and Seeber, Barbara
University of Toronto Press, 2016

Book Review

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The Slow Professor takes its cue from the slow food movement (<http://www.slowfoodusa.org>). Borrowing the words of Carlo Petrini, author of *Slow Food Nation*, Maggie Berg and Barbara K. Seeber define slowness as “not so much a question of duration as of an ability to distinguish and evaluate, with the propensity to cultivate pleasure, knowledge, and quality” (89-90). Slowness, in their thinking, is less about speed than it is about intentionality. They raise this point in a number of contexts.

On the slim volume’s opening page, Berg and Seeber identify the popular and academic discourses they engage in their exploration of time management and timelessness; pedagogy and pleasure; research and understanding; and collegiality and community. They intersperse expert opinions from a variety of fields, including other research on teaching and learning, to support their stance that slowness is a productive stance for academics.

Each chapter builds a case for slowness that culminates in practical suggestions, many of which seem like the kind of advice a reader with this book in hand may have considered already. I found value, however, in Berg, Seeber, and their chorus of sources confirming my suspicion that in the face of pressure to work constantly, I have a right to health, a life with my family, and enjoyable hobbies (16). Still, their advice tends to focus on what individual readers can do on a daily basis rather than on how institutional change might occur. For example, the first chapter, “Time Management and Timeliness,” ends with elaborations on these recommendations: “We need to get off line;” “We need to do less;” “We need regular sessions of timeless time;” “We need time to do nothing;” and “We need to change the way we talk about time all the time” (29-32). I am all for these, and I wholeheartedly agree that “if you

want an event to be joyless, make it mandatory,” a takeaway from the end of “Collegiality and Community” (83). Still, the pressure of knowing that I have five years to publish another book, mere months to submit my next article, or a few weeks to finish a book review (*ahem*) gives me pause when I weigh walking the dog against writing. Institutional pressures directly affect individuals, but change in an individual’s perspective on time – especially that of a junior or contingent faculty member, for instance – does not lead directly to institutional change.

Berg and Seeber acknowledge that “academic culture celebrates overwork” but, they argue, “it is imperative that we question the value of busyness” (21). Herein lies their contribution: in questioning busyness, they advocate learning from slowness so that the work we do is planned, thoughtful, deliberate, and energizing rather than scattered, scatter-brained, hurried, and draining. The latter leads to diminishing returns hidden behind the familiar, “I’d love to, but I’m busy.” The former can yield Csikszentmihalyian flow in reading, writing, and teaching.

https://www.wabashcenter.wabash.edu/resources/book_reviews/slow-professor-challenging-the-culture-of-speed-in-the-academy/