The preface of *The Slow Professor: Challenging the Culture of Speed in the Academy* by Maggie Berg and Barbara K. Seeber begins with a quote that I suspect is convicting for some in higher education today. The authors quote from Robert Boice’s *First-Order Principles for College Teachers*, “Western civilization teaches us that displays of busyness are useful and impressive” (qtd. in Berg and Seeber vii). Indeed, many of us have accepted Western tales that equate busyness with value or importance. I see symptoms of this acceptance in our disciplinary literature, in conversations around my office, and in social media with dear colleagues. We perform our dedication to our students through sleepless nights we have devoted to responding to their writing. We sheepishly admit to taking an evening or even a weekend off from the deluge of email we receive. We turn down opportunities to commune with colleagues because, although it would be lovely to share more of our ideas, who, really, has the time?

What if there was another way? What if we challenged the cult of busy and searched for a new normal? I chose to read *The Slow Professor* because I was suffering greatly at the cost of my own devotion to productivity and was trying to revise my pace as a teacher, scholar, and administrator. I found kindred spirits in Berg and Seeber. Their strategies for overcoming busyness drew from concepts presented by the Slow movement, which has challenged the value of speed in other areas of life, from food to industry to fitness to sex. Berg and Seeber realized that no book had yet brought these concepts to the academy. And so, they did.

The text contains four major chapters, which are bookended by an introduction and conclusion. The introduction frames the argument that the Slow movement is needed by the academy. They explain that their driving question changed from “‘what is wrong with us?’ to ‘what is wrong with the academic system?’” (2). They trace the ways in which external portrayals of faculty as the “leisured class” along with the corporatization of the academy have pushed us into a culture wherein we feel the pressure to be busy and productive to justify our positions to outsiders and to administrative bodies. Additionally, the authors indicate that the flexibility of the academic job also contributes to a culture of overwork: because we can often work any time, the result is that we work all the time.

The first chapter challenges notions of time management that are prevalent in academic and business culture alike. It traces time management strategies outlined in numerous self-help-styled books that emphasize making the most of time and doing more in less time. The
authors contend that these strategies only contribute to the root cause of our troubles: time sickness. This illness, termed by Larry Dossey, results from the panic and even physical symptoms that emerge as we perceive time slipping away from us. The next three chapters offer strategies for academics to combat time sickness in three specific domains: teaching, research, and collegiality. In each of these chapters, the authors provide concrete recommendations for escaping—or at least adjusting—our tendency toward time sickness.

The pedagogy chapter, titled “Pedagogy and Pleasure,” suggests that “it seems obvious that when one teaches well, one enjoys it, but perhaps the reverse is actually more accurate: that when one enjoys teaching, one does it well” (34). They provide insight on how to consciously transition into teaching time and remind faculty to laugh and listen in the classroom. Berg and Seeber’s next chapter, “Research and Understanding,” which might seem to be most suited to university faculty, has reminders appropriate for all academic paths. They encourage faculty to accept their “shadow CV,” which highlights abandoned paths and failings, and to stop undercutting time spent “just reading” as unproductive. This reminder that important aspects of our work are often unseen or, at the very least, unobservable is particularly timely. Increasingly more college and university faculty face pressures from administrative bodies to prove their productivity or to defend themselves against remarks made by administrators that call faculty productivity into question. Though the authors do not offer direct solutions to these pressures, they do remind us that the nature of our work is not strictly algorithmic and cannot, therefore, be easily measured in the way that work in other industries might. Finally, in the chapter on “Collegiality and Community,” the authors remind faculty that the affective domain does not only impact our classrooms, but our work and our perceptions of job satisfaction as well. Therefore, they encourage colleagues to be present and candid with one another, since a supportive environment can help reduce the perceptions and effects of stress.

The effects of stress and overwork are physical, real, and dangerous. The cautions presented in this book are important and timely. However, the text does seem to assume its audience occupies or aspires to a traditional tenure-track role within a four-year university and privileges face-to-face instruction quite emphatically. The authors, for example, are noticeably skeptical, almost to the point of adversarial, toward online education and the use of technology within the classroom, which could alienate an important and growing demographic in our field. Additionally, it should be noted that the authors’ cautions emphasize work stress without fully acknowledging the reality of working conditions in higher education today. While they acknowledge that increases in workload and contingent labor are a direct and unfortunate result of the corporatization of the academy (73) and stress that “[t]hose of us in contractual positions are particularly vulnerable to isolation” (73), they do not speak directly to the professionals in these positions or offer advice directed at these particular realities. Instead, the authors indicate that
they believe those in “tenured positions, given the protection [they] enjoy, have an obligation to try to improve in [their] own way the working climate for all of us” (ix); yet they do not present specific recommendations for how those in these privileged positions might use slow principles to seek better working conditions for those who are without full-time contracts, without benefits, and without the protections of tenure. Instead, the authors write largely from and about their own experiences in university-level positions. This vantage point is not without drawbacks. One of my own colleagues mentioned that she didn’t consider herself the audience for the book because it’s written to “professors” while she’s an “instructor” at a community college. Berg and Seeber briefly address this concern, stating that they believe their approach is “relevant across the spectrum of academic positions” (ix). However, readers are left to bridge the connections between their own positions and the experiences of the authors.

While it is true and even perhaps frustrating that these authors provide an insular portrayal of academic work, I hope the limitations of Berg and Seeber’s own experiences will not overshadow the importance of their message. The corporatization of the academy is impacting the working conditions of all faculty, and it is time we question the normalized conceptions of busyness and productivity within our own contexts. When I first became a two-year college faculty member, I was bolstered by the call made by Frank Madden for two-year faculty to position themselves as teacher-scholars. While I still believe in the importance of this charge, we must consider the fact that this reframing of our identity holds within it a tacit agreement to expand our workload. Today, as we in two-year settings are called upon to be teacher-scholar-activists (Sullivan), it is important that we examine the expectations upon our time and negotiate the ways in which we balance each component of the important work we do. Further understanding the academy’s corporatization and time sickness, as presented by Berg and Seeber, will help us prepare for this self-exploration.

As importantly, however, I hope that those of us in contingent and adjunct roles will heed the warnings within this text. In 2008, I published a short essay in *Forum: Newsletter of the Committee on Contingent, Adjunct, and Part-Time Faculty* that began this way: “Last year, I became an expert at consuming coffee, multitasking, and living without sleep” (Spiegel A13). These were the words I elected to use to begin my explanation of the process through which I earned my place on the full-time faculty at my college after one year as an adjunct. In my desperate attempts to stand out and find full-time work to support my family’s needs, I started down a path of maintaining unreasonable expectations for myself. I developed a sense that if I was always the hardest working person in the room, then surely I would be worthy of some position in the field. As I served as the English adjunct coordinator for my campus over the last five and a half years, I have seen myself in many ambitious adjuncts who work above and beyond with the hope of standing out and earning a full-time position. Unfortunately, many of my most passionate and talented colleagues...
have not been as lucky as I was. In reading *The Slow Professor*, I came to realize that there may be no population in the academy who suffers more from the cult of productivity. Berg and Seeber offer no tangible solutions to adjunct labor concerns, but I do believe we can use their text to help us reframe our perceptions of contingent productivity. We can and must do more to acknowledge the ways in which our culture’s time sickness exploits these professionals.

Though with limitations, Berg and Seeber provide a starting place for imaging how slow principles might be used as a productive lens through which to see our work in the academy. We are left to imagine how we might realize their principles within our contexts. As the authors indicate, “academic work by its very nature is never done,” (3) so we must “advocate deliberation over acceleration” (x). What does the deliberate teacher-scholar-activist look like? How about the deliberate adjunct professor? We all can benefit from questioning the notions of productivity we have come to accept as normal, desirable to “get ahead,” or even necessary to consider ourselves “good enough.” Within this text are useful reminders to be savored, especially the point that we can and should find enjoyment in our teaching, even in these times wherein efficiency and accountability are becoming the resounding songs of administration. What’s most important, perhaps, is the reminder that education and the processes involved in teaching and learning, researching and writing, are not always efficient. We do well to remember that it is okay, perhaps even productive, to slow down and allow ourselves space to question our beliefs about efficiency and time management.

**Works Cited**


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Teaching Composition at the Two-Year College: Background Readings

For those who have taught at the two-year college, the differences between what we learn in our graduate programs regarding teaching writing and the reality of the classroom practice can seem stark, sometimes even shocking. In this collection, we have a view of what teaching in the two-year college is like for those preparing to enter, as well as practical guides for managing teach-