

**Taking Your Time: *The Slow Professor*
by Maggie Berg and Barbara K. Seeber**

Timarie Franco



**Taking Your Time: *The Slow Professor*
by Maggie Berg and Barbara K. Seeber**

As an educator and advisor, the amount of times that I have thought “There is just not enough time to get everything done!” are innumerable. Between grading, curriculum planning, personal research, and meeting student needs, it feels as if the work is never finished. Add in administrative duties, attending meetings, serving on committees...it’s no wonder that instructors and professors report lack of time, and related issues such as burnout and increasing workload, to be one of the top issues affecting job satisfaction (Flaherty, 2022). In response, some may be tempted to turn to one of the many time management books on the market. Suggestions vary from accounting for every moment of your day using an hourly calendar, combining similar tasks, or standing up when people come to your office so you can politely usher them out before they overstay their welcome. While I’m certain these suggestions come from those with the best intentions, they are not always achievable or sustainable for the average faculty member. With that, how do professors meet all the expectations placed on them while keeping their sanity?

In their book *The Slow Professor* (2016), Berg and Seeber suggest these so-called time management strategies are a Bandaid: a short-term solution to a symptom of a larger issue. They propose the constant pressure felt by faculty to meet unending deadlines can be attributed to a larger problem present across the academy; the corporatization of higher education has led to extreme pressure on faculty and staff to be more productive, more effi-

cient, and more competitive. In turn, faculty are experiencing the burden of too many tasks and not enough time to complete them. Berg and Seeber assert this burden affects all other aspects of faculty life including teaching, research, and professional development. They propose the solution may lie in the slow professor approach. Inspired by the slow food movement, which was developed to counter the rising issues of prioritizing speed over quality in food production in the 1980’s, *The Slow Professor* seeks to challenge the push for faculty to sacrifice their professional ethics and wellbeing for the benefit of corporate academia.

Each chapter of *The Slow Professor* discusses how the parameters placed on professors and instructors have negatively impacted their work as educators and proposes possible solutions to alleviate the burden they experience. Chapter One focuses on time management, suggesting that current methods often presented for improving time management fall short. It goes on to propose that professors acknowledge the systemic issues that stem from prioritizing speed over quality, and suggests several ways to disrupt the system. Chapter Two explores how pressure to overperform affects pedagogy, demonstrating the connection between professor stress and student dissatisfaction. Berg proposes specific suggestions for professors to address their emotions and get back to enjoying teaching by employing the tenets of the slow professor movement. Chapter Three delves into how professors are expected to conduct research in a culture that prioritizes studies that guarantee the most funding and produce the most “useful” re-

This article is brought to you for free and open access by the North Carolina Community College Faculty Association @NCCCS. It has been accepted for inclusion *North Carolina Community College Journal of Teaching Innovation* by an authorized editor of NCCFA. For more information, please contact editor@nccfa.org.

sults. Seeber proposes ways professors could fight back against this push and engage in a combination of self-care and thoughtful, deliberate research practices. Chapter Four closes out the book by observing how this corporatized culture has affected collegiality within higher education, and highlights that there is often an air of competition between colleagues as opposed to collaboration. The advice is light in this chapter, as creating community requires more than personal effort, but the authors provide some food for thought related to the slow professor tenets. The authors conclude with a demonstration of how they used said tenets in the creation of the book as a joint venture, and provide a hopeful endnote for those looking to embrace the slow professor movement.

While the authors do openly criticize the unattainable expectations placed on faculty through the corporatization of higher education, the experiences of marginalized faculty members are glaringly absent. Berg and Seeber do touch on the perceived benefits of tenured staff, indicating they experience benefits that others do not, as well as the gendered biases present within research and collegiality. While Berg and Seeber discuss the issues with exploiting non-tenured faculty, staff, and graduate students, they stop short of critiquing the inequity experienced by professors of color, professors who identify as women, and professors who belong to the LGBTQIA+ community. These populations often carry the invisible burden of expectations from their departments and superiors that they will engage in diversity-based work such as special committees and student mentoring (Social Sciences Feminist Network Research Interest Group, 2017), adding to the already inflated workload. Should there be future editions, I believe it would be beneficial to explore the experiences of marginalized faculty more thoroughly. This would provide a full picture of how corporatization affects members of the academic community and suggest ways in which the system can be adjusted to better serve everyone, not just those who have the power and privilege to challenge it without fear of repercussion.

While this book is seven years old, its arguments are still pertinent to modern faculty. With the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic still looming, many faculty members report significantly reduced work-life balance and increased dissatisfaction with their performance in the workplace (McClure et al., 2023). The authors' comments regarding difficulties in pedagogy, including the move to online education and

virtual classrooms, are even more relevant today than they were at the time of the book's publication. With that being said, this quick read of just 90 pages may not propose failsafe methods of raging against the corporatized academic machine but it does provide a spark of hope. Challenging the systems we live and work in is intimidating, and often feels overwhelming or fruitless. It feels unlikely that we can change the capitalist drive to produce the best product (in this case education) with the least amount of time and resources, but *The Slow Professor* suggests that system-wide change is more possible if we engage in personal change. We may not always have the ability to decline a project or extend a deadline, but we can "...shift our thinking from 'what is wrong with us?' to 'what is wrong with the system?'" (p. 2), leading to the prioritization of ourselves, our practice, and our students.

References

- Berg, M., & Seeber, B. K. (2016). *The slow professor: Challenging the culture of speed in the academy*. University of Toronto Press.
- Flaherty, C. (2022). Calling it quits. Inside *Higher Ed*. <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2022/07/05/professors-are-leaving-academe-during-great-resignation>
- McClure, K. R., Salle, M.W., Ford, J., Gonzales, L.D., Griffin, K., Jenkins, T., Marquez Kiyama, J., Martinez, M. Martínez-Alemán, A.M., Miao, S., Perez, R.J., & Porter, C.J. (2023). The Impact of COVID-19 on Faculty, Staff, and Students: Using Research to Help Higher Education Heal through the Pandemic and Beyond. *Association for the Study of Higher Education*.
- Social Sciences Feminist Network Research Interest Group. (2017). The Burden of Invisible Work in Academia: Social Inequalities and Time Use in Five University Departments. *Humboldt Journal of Social Relations*, 39, 228–245. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/90007882>

Author's Note

The author has no known conflicts of interest to disclose. Correspondence concerning this article may be addressed to Timarie Franco, Central Carolina Community College, 1105 Kelly Drive. Sanford, NC 27330. Email: tfran108@cccc.edu