Thanks to the call organizers, particularly Allison, for the invitation to join you. Also, thanks to April Hathcock for invoking the idea of Slow Scholarship and the Mountz et al. article in a talk she gave here at KU a few years ago.

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For the specifics of any conversation or writing that we do, it’s important that what happens in the discussion stay there. Feel free to share anything that I talk about, but not the contents of our RiseUp pad.

We are focusing on written discussion and keeping it anonymous because it’s important for everyone to feel safe participating in the call. Please respect others’ anonymity in the discussions.

You can re-color your typing in RiseUp by switching to a different browser or opening an Incognito or Private tab and using RiseUp there.
You have already made time and space for yourself to join this call. We’re going to start with an exercise to come fully into this time together.

This writing is for yourself, not for the shared document or for RiseUp and will take 1 minute. You will need a pen and paper or a place to type.

Title your page with the classic academic excuse for everything, “I should be…”

Now take 1 minute and make a list of all the things your busy brain says you “should” be doing instead of this call. I will keep time and give you a 15 second heads up before time.

At the end of the minute, delete the document or put your list away – maybe in a drawer, or the trash can.
I should be...
Here. Now.

Welcome!
It’s astounding. 
Time is fleeting. 
Madness takes its toll.

“Time Warp”
The Rocky Horror Show
Richard O’Brien

To frame the topic of Slow – in scholarship and librarianship, I thought we’d start with a quote that, to me, invokes how it feels to be working in academia, nevermind how this combines with being care-full as a parent, a partner, a friend, and myself.

I really think Riff-Raff put it best.
Defining our terms

Fast
“busy, controlling, aggressive, hurried, analytical, stressed, superficial, impatient, active, quantity-over-quality”

Slow
“calm, careful, receptive, still, intuitive, unhurried, patient, reflective, quality-over-quantity”

(Honoré, 2004, p. 14)

For our purposes, and more broadly for discussions about Slow as a quasi-political act of resistance, the terms Fast and Slow (capitalized) mean something slightly different than pace.

Carl Honoré, in his 2004 book *In Praise of Slowness*, does a good job of describing the historical contexts out of which arguments for Slow originate.

These are his definitions of Fast and Slow, and they are as good as any for grounding our conversation today.
In response to the sense that “time is fleeting,” communities around the globe have been responding with various movements to slow down. Many of these take their cues from one of the oldest and best documented advocates for slowing down, Slow Food, begun in Italy by a culinary writer named Carlo Petrini. We’ll come back to what we can learn from Slow Food.

In terms of Slow Scholarship, the idea has been kicking around for a while, but the first use of the term in a publication arguing for it, that I could find, occurred in 2012. I suggested the Mountz et al article (which dates from 2015) as pre-reading, though, because I think the authors do a really good job of laying out the issues in a relatable way. The article itself lives out these issues at a meta level in how the co-authors created it.
Why is Slow relevant to Librarianship?

In responding, I am thinking of a Tweet I saw from a recent data librarian conference (which is my specialty and my current professional community) – “When are we done with Data Management?”

For that community, the answer is pretty clearly “never” or close to “never”. But I suspect that’s the same for almost every other specialty a librarian engages with (and by “librarian” I mean “people who work in libraries”)

When are we done with Open?
When are we done with organizing and providing access to information?
When are we done with – fill in your own blank.

If “never”, we need to find ways to work that are sustainable for ourselves and our colleagues and communities over the very long term. Fast is not the way to do this.

And to pull in the reading from Mountz, et al, many of us in academic libraries are expected to be scholars in the sense of publishing, possibly teaching, service work, and negotiating promotion and tenure processes. Our discipline should have a
framework in place for us to be scholars in ways that produce work that makes a difference rather than producing work for audit (Mountz et al, 2015, p. 1241).
Writing Prompt 2

In RiseUp:

Describe a time when work was pleasurable for you.

What was pleasurable about the experience?

Link to the RiseUp pad should be in the Google Doc.

Let’s do a bit of anonymous writing as discussion. I’m going to paste this prompt into RiseUp for you to respond to publicly and anonymously.

If you prefer not to respond to the prompt in RiseUp, feel free to do so for yourself alone.

Take 2 minutes to respond to the two sentences. I will keep time and give you a 30 second heads up before time.

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Read through responses and pull out elements of Slow for the next part. – guesses – exploratory, taking time, deeply collaborating, experimenting with something new

You may have found my use of the words “pleasure” and “work” together somewhat jarring.

I used that word deliberately. I could have used “satisfying,” but this implies a reaction to the outcome, not necessarily to or with the process.
What is Slow, riffing a bit on Honoré’s definition?

We can look to Slow Food and to other writers, including our preliminary reading, to contextualize what we wrote about in the prompt – why those experiences were pleasurable, even though they were “work.”

The Mountz article describes acts of scholarship as pleasurable when they take time, are deeply reflective, and involve generous collaboration – basically, giving and receiving care with our colleagues and community.

Adam Savage, who you may remember from the long-running television show MythBusters, devotes a chapter of his new book about making to slowing down and embracing the process of making, not focusing solely on the final product. He offers the example of the culinary practice of *mise en place* to remind us that a deliberative and systematic PROCESS is what makes the final PRODUCT possible.

So yeah, we’re back to food. We may as well go there.
Specifically, Slow is the pie that I made on Saturday afternoon when I was supposed to be working on these slides.

This strawberry rhubarb crumb-top pie made with local strawberries, rhubarb, and pecans and a from-scratch buttermilk pie crust.

I don’t know how many of you bake; you may already know that you can’t make a pie from scratch in a rush and get a pie worth eating.

Pie dough has to rest in the refrigerator twice — once when you make it and once after you roll it out. Prepping raw fruit is not instant, and allowing it to generate some juice once you sugar it takes time, too.

A pie bakes at its own pace. Too little time in the oven will result in a mess of gummy crust and raw fruit. Cranking the temperature to speed up the bake will burn the outside and leave the inside raw.

Basically, this pie is extravagantly slow. And that is both worthwhile in itself and worthy of critique.
That pie is absolutely all the positive things that we said about Slow, and at the same time it embodies a whole bunch of criticism that has been leveled, specifically at Slow Food, over the years – that it is exclusionary, expensive, elitist, and only feasible for the privileged.

Regarding Slow Food, it’s easy to see how the organization’s emphasis on local, seasonal ingredients and traditional preparation methods reeks of privilege and elitism.

Honoré, while he mentions this in his chapter on Slow Food, is annoyingly hand-wavy about it. Let’s look at the critique in the context of that pie.
It is an expensive pie in both the local ingredients I bought to make it and the time I chose to use in making it.

It is a privileged pie in that I am able to buy the local ingredients at my Farmer’s Market because I can get to the Farmer’s Market. I can buy the rest of the ingredients, too, without worrying about how these purchases will impact my family’s food budget for the week or the month. Local, seasonal food, for all the pleasure it brings, is often more expensive and is sold in smaller outlets with limited hours – so those factors alone make this kind of food exclusionary.

It is also a privileged pie in that I am able to choose to spend time making it – I can rely on my partner to occupy my young child and I can take time elsewhere out of my weekend (and I do have a weekend) to do other things.

It is an elitist pie in that I’m of the opinion that this pie is worth the time it takes to make, but only when local strawberries and rhubarb coincide. I don’t make it at any other time of the year.

Do I think this is the only kind of pie one should make? No. But I do view a pie as an indulgence that should be as local and seasonal as possible.
This pie is not accessible or equitable. For a pie, this may not be much of a problem. But it provides us with a framework to think about the intersection of Slow practices and privileges that the Mountz article addresses more thoroughly. For a workplace, lack of access to something as important as a sustainable working environment is a huge problem.

This is why Mountz et al’s critique of the workplace that is the neoliberal university is structural and requires a collective act of resistance. Slow must not be reserved for privilege.

Image Copyright Jamene Brooks-Kieffer, 2019
Let’s make a list of personal strategies for slowing down. These might be things you’ve heard about, things you’ve used, things you like, things you find ridiculous or impossible.

I’m going to paste this prompt into RiseUp for you to respond to publicly and anonymously.

If you prefer not to respond to the prompt in RiseUp, feel free to do so for yourself alone.

Take 1 minutes to make the list. I will keep time and give you a 15 second heads up before time.

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If needed, offer suggestions: turn off or don’t respond to email; be unavailable outside of working hours, write by hand rather than type, walk or bike rather than drive, work off campus
While there is nothing wrong with personal strategies for slowing down in one’s work or life, personal strategies aren’t a cultural fix, as Mountz et al discuss.

They put the work of slowing down on the individual and assume that every individual has equitable access to practicing those strategies – which we know is not true.

Personal strategies are like my Slow pie – expensive, privileged, and exclusive of all but those who have the resources to access them.

Most importantly, personal strategies for slowing down don’t address a huge question that Mountz et al raise – who has unquestioned access to their own time for their own purposes?

As they point out, this access has been culturally reserved in gendered, classist, racist, and colonial ways.

To think about it slightly differently, if you aren’t a white man, you will be expected to spend some degree of your time on other peoples’ purposes – the amount of time depends on your privileges.
And if you think about the language some of us use around time in a Fast culture – “making time” or “taking time” – this is not the language of people who have unquestioned access to their own time, since why should I have to either “make” or “take” what is already mine?
This next writing is for yourself, not for the shared document or for RiseUp. You will need a pen and paper or a place to type.

We will use the technique of freewriting, which is timed writing in sentences, for yourself only, to a prompt, without stopping. If you get stuck, write “I have nothing to write. I have nothing to write.” until you can continue responding to the prompt.

Respond to the prompt, “In what ways do I manifest the feeling that I need to justify my time for my own purposes?”

You have five minutes. I will keep time and give you a one minute heads up before time.
We are complicit

- “Working” = at your desk, in the building
- Always-on email or chat
- Contributing to “I’m so busy” conversations
- Not taking “No” as an acceptable answer
- Not rewarding the minimum


Whether we realize it or not, whether we do it intentionally or not, we all are complicit in enforcing our and our colleagues’ feelings that we need to justify the use of our own time.

On the screen you will see some very common ways we enforce Fast cultures in workplaces where we, to a greater or lesser degree depending on our privileges, don’t have unquestioned access to our own time.

Those of us with more privileges set the tone here, that others assume they must follow in order to succeed in the organization. If we the privileged (and I count myself here) are seen to be sending/responding to email at all hours, to be contributing to “I’m so busy” conversations, to not accepting “no” as an answer from our colleagues, then others with fewer or no privileges will believe that those are the required paths to success, or to survival, in that organization.

I highly recommend Fobazi Ettarh’s article on vocational awe if you haven’t already read it. It’s brilliant writing about this piece of library culture and its consequences.
Petrini’s quote about Slow Food is the real essence of Slow – it shows up in Mountz et al and in other scholarship and writing about Slow – that the issue is not about absolute pace, but about the ability to choose one’s pace. To choose when to go slow and when to go fast. And we need to push the issue further using Mountz’s structural critique – acknowledging and embodying that all our colleagues, regardless of employment status, years of experience, race, class, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, or ability have the right to determine their own tempos.

How can Slow manifest in individuals and translate into a more caring culture for all? Our article’s co-authors have some excellent suggestions for individual and collective action. Now it’s your turn.
Let’s discuss your ideas for and examples of culture-shifting strategies. I’m going to paste this prompt into RiseUp for you to respond to publicly and anonymously.

If you prefer not to respond to the prompt in RiseUp, feel free to do so for yourself alone.

Take 2 minutes to make the list. I will keep time and give you a 30 second heads up before time.

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If needed, offer suggestions: holding time and space – for a writing group, study group, discussion group; publicly recognizing care-full work with award nominations, speaking invites, hiring decisions, P&T votes, recommendation or support letters.

Point out that any of these strategies or activities must be voluntary for participants, or they’re no longer Slow.
It takes leadership and care-full work to slow down a culture. In one of my favorite books on communication, the author states, “A leader is anyone willing to help” (Wheatley, 2014, p. 144). So don’t assume that you need to be an administrator to lead or to care.

Following Mountz et al, we must care for ourselves before caring for others, but we must care for others (p. 1251). And the more privileges we have, the more responsible we are for caring and for recognizing care-full work.

To that end, the questions on the screen are for your reflection later, in increasing order of privilege.
We’re going to end the formal part of the discussion on this quote from Adam Savage (read the quote).

I’d argue that care, collegiality, community within librarianship are things worth valuing now and in the future. In order to get and keep them, we need to slow down.
Further discussion

time permitting
Works Consulted


