

Navigating Slow Librarianship in the Culture of Urgency of Health Sciences Libraries

Slow Librarianship prioritizes quality over quantity, focusing on intentional use of resources and mindfulness during instruction and engagement. By promoting well-being and sustainability over urgency and a fast-paced, high workload, the Slow Librarianship movement significantly enhances the role of libraries as intentional, supportive, and intellectually rich environments for both librarians and users. Through the implementation of Slow Librarianship principles, librarians can take the time for reflection and cultivate meaningful and impactful collaborations, leading to richer interactions with users, peers, and themselves.

While Slow Librarianship has many benefits, the application of Slow Librarianship values and practices can be challenging for many academic librarians, especially those in the realm of health sciences. Many health sciences librarians, especially those that work in academic medical libraries or hospital libraries, are immersed in the culture of the medicine where urgency is the commonplace; information is required at lightning speeds, and a clear hierarchy of power exists. Timely information can often mean the difference between life and death and that medical culture of exigency extends into academic medicine, and in turn, affects the health sciences libraries that support it. Demanding workloads and fast-paced services in a high-stakes environment are the norm, providing a stark contrast between the intentionality of the Slow Librarianship movement and the fast-paced culture of academic medicine librarianship.

The tensions between Slow Librarianship and the culture of immediacy in health science librarianship are multifaceted; often involving conflicting values, practical challenges, and differing user expectations. Addressing these tensions requires a nuanced approach that respects the need for speed and efficiency in medical settings while advocating for the benefits of reflection, quality, and deep engagement. By exploring integrative strategies, fostering institutional support, and managing user expectations, health science librarians can find a balance that enhances both the quality and responsiveness of library services.

This chapter will explore the discord between the Slow Librarianship movement and the prevailing culture of urgency in health sciences librarianship by highlighting the conflicting values, practical challenges, and differing user expectations that arise. It will focus on practical strategies for integrating a slower, more mindful approach into daily library operations while maintaining the speed and efficiency required in medical library settings. The chapter will culminate in a call to action, urging academic and health sciences librarians to critically reassess their operational practices, service models, and policies to create more resilient, supportive, and intellectually stimulating environments, both for the user and for librarians. By embracing reflective practice, continuous professional development, and a renewed focus on community engagement, librarians can enhance both the quality and responsiveness of their services, ultimately enriching their practice of librarianship and better meeting the evolving needs of their communities.