Scout the road ahead:
The early-career librarian's guide to using the academic calendar to manage your workload

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New librarians face a variety of stressors when they take on their first professional position, including challenges like adapting to the workplace culture, managing workload, and learning how to navigate a new organizational system; they may also face challenges related to relocation or to their personal lives that affect their work lives (Larrivee, 2014). Shupe and Pung (2011) highlight three kinds of challenges:

1. Role ambiguity, when new librarians are "unclear about their specific responsibilities or the boundaries of their jobs";
2. Role overload, where new librarians are overwhelmed by the amount and kind of work they have to do; and
3. Role conflict, where employees have other responsibilities, such as caregiving, that interfere with their work lives (p. 410).

Transition Challenges

Several studies in the library literature suggest that challenges related to learning the job, managing workload, and managing other responsibilities do affect new librarians' stress levels. Oud's (2008) study found that new librarians may struggle to adjust to their changing professional lives and that few feel successful when they first begin a new job. In a similar study of supports for librarians on the tenure track, Vilz and Poremski (2015) found that many new librarians felt underprepared to do key parts of their jobs. For instance, 84% of survey respondents are required to publish for tenure, but only 19% said that their library school degree prepared them to do this (Vilz and Poremski, 2015, 160). In addition, many librarians are feeling a time crunch. In a study of academic librarians, Bronstein (2011) found that many struggled to balance multiple duties successfully and have taken on more work over time due to budget cuts in libraries. As a result of these and other challenges, new librarians may struggle with feeling overloaded and uncertain of how to manage their responsibilities effectively.

Burnout

Over time, these challenges may lead to disillusionment or burnout, a state characterized by a sense of emotional exhaustion, a reduced sense of satisfaction at work, and negative feelings toward the population one serves (Sheesley, 2001, p. 448). Sheesley (2001) notes that some of the factors that lead to burnout might include
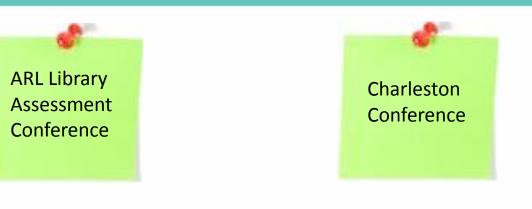
1. Repetitive library instruction
2. Students who are ambivalent about research
3. Reduced staff
4. Role ambiguity
5. Lack of positive feedback
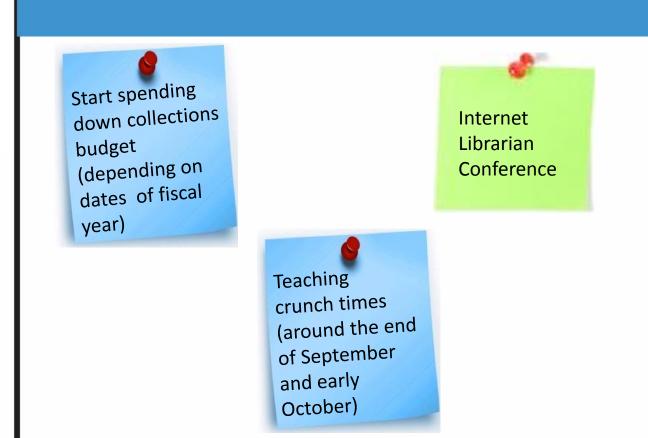6. Isolation from other faculty (p. 448).

Even among librarians who are not burned out, stress at work can lead to lower morale and productivity, or to symptoms such as depression or fatigue (Shupe and Pung, 2011).

However, Mazzola, Schonfeld and Spector (2011) note that people can manage stress through coping strategies, or "specific efforts, both behavioural and psychological, that people employ to master, tolerate, eliminate or minimize stressful events" (103). One effective strategy for new librarians and those who support them is working together at the beginning of the year to chart which times of year are likely to be busy and why. This activity can reduce role ambiguity by reassuring the new librarian that he or she has thought through his or her responsibilities. Planning based on the academic calendar can also reduce role overload by helping new librarians gauge when they may be particularly busy during the year.

References

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January
- Professional development
- ALA Midwinter
- Information literacy curriculum development
- Performance Review and/or Annual Goal Setting

February
- Volunteer for ACRL and ALCTS committees
- IMLS Grants Laura Bush/ National Leadership Grants

March
- Start preparing for endowment requests
- Plan for teaching crunch times, like the two weeks before Spring Break
- Review job ads if you are looking (peak times are March through May)

December
- Volunteer for campus and community committees
- Applications for ACRL Immersion Program and Teacher Track
- Grading

November
- ARL Library Assessment Conference
- Charleston Conference

October
- Start spending down collections budget (depending on dates of fiscal year)
- Internet Librarian Conference
- Teaching crunch times (around the end of September and early October)

April
- Volunteer for RUSA committees
- Start spending down collections budget (depending on dates of fiscal year)
- Grading
- LSTA Grants (usually February through April)
- Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) Conference (Biannual)

May
- Performance Review (depending on college cycle)
- Volunteer for campus or community committees
- ALA Annual Call for Proposals (for next year)
- MLA Annual Meeting
- Plan for faculty outreach in fall
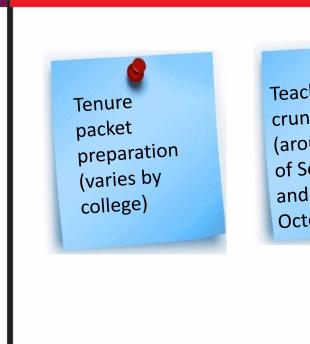- LOEX Annual Conference
- Volunteer for NMRT committees

June
- ALA Annual Conference
- SLA Annual Conference
- Student orientation outreach activities
- Institute for Research Design in Librarianship
- Collection management projects

July
- Minnesota Institute for Early Career Librarians (Biannual)
- ACRL Immersion Program and Teacher Tracks
- Student orientation outreach activities

August
- Faculty outreach for the fall
- IFLA Annual Conference
- Collection management projects
- Information literacy curriculum development
- Student welcome week orientation activities

September
- Tenure packet preparation (varies by college)
- Teaching crunch times (around the end of September and early October)
- IMLS Grants Laura Bush/ National Leadership Grants

- Grants
- Service
- Librarianship
- Conferences and Institutes