How to Keep One’s Scholarly Life Going After Grad School

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1. Join a professional association that has the sort of meetings you want to attend annually. It’s a way of recreating the “intellectual community” you had in grad school, in the days when there was free time to chat with one’s fellows over coffee. Go the meeting every year.

2. You need to have contacts not at your school. You don’t always want to be talking about the particulars of life in your dept and you can often learn a lot by finding out how other departments handle things—and you discover how much worse most other schools and jobs are!

3. Find an email list of like-minded professionals, and participate regularly in the conversation. Don’t join too many lists, however.

4. Regularly read a professional journal or something that will keep you in touch with developments (or “gossip”) in your field.

5. Start with small projects that come with a deadline: for example, send proposals to conferences, volunteer to do book reviews, sign up when calls come around to write entries in reference books. Collect the flyers left on tables at conferences and respond to them.

6. If you have a larger project, you need to set regular deadlines for various stages of the project—and then stick to them. Treat yourself when you finish each deadline.

7. Set aside a specific time every day that you work on the specified project: it is easy for teaching to swallow up everything. And do not check Facebook or email during that time block.

8. Colette’s Rule (actually, Professor Oliver’s Rule): 30 minutes a day, no matter what, you work on your own stuff—not committees, not teaching, not grading. Write the time in your appointment book—you do HAVE an appointment book, don’t you?—and don’t break your date with your project. Learn to say “NO.”

9. ABC. It’s awfully easy to collapse in front of the television or play with your gerbils. At least collapse for your 30 minutes in front of your computer or your notebook instead. Find something to do on your project for 30 minutes, even if it means typing up your handwritten notes. ABC: Apply Bottom to Chair.

10. Don’t let the summer slip away from you. It’s best to hit a project within 48 hours of graduation—take a vacation later in the summer. It’s easy to discover it’s suddenly July and you’ve done nothing but fool around with wallpaper samples.

11. Train your partner/spouse not to undermine your resolve and not to tempt you.

12. If you value your mind and health, “Simplify, simplify,” to quote Thoreau. It helps if you decide NOT to adopt triplets, buy and renovate a Victorian fixer-upper, and start a hospice center for abandoned cats in the same year you want to write your first book.

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