

Contemplative Librarians: A Brief Introduction

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As librarians, universities, and our society itself continue to work within a neoliberal value system, it can be difficult to see that there are other perspectives available to us. Evaluating, or finding value in, our work as librarians does not come about exclusively from the metrics and “measures of excellence” that we are often expected to use to communicate our worth. Informed by other systems of thought, we can frame our work in different ways in order to create and communicate meaning in it. We will briefly introduce ancient contemplative teachings – mindfulness, equanimity, and compassion – and look at their application in the academic library, as well as in our own practice of librarianship. In recent years, there has been a revival of interest in contemplative teachings. There is a growing contemplative pedagogy movement, ACRL is offering a “Mindfulness in Libraries” course, Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction has grown into a well-respected, evidence-based program, and even Google offers intensive meditation courses to its employees. Is this a genuine shift that can benefit librarians and others in their work and lives? Are these tools that we can use to communicate more kindly and build a more authentic community in our workplaces? As a different set of values, do they offer an alternative to the way that we do our work within our educational institutions?