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Megan Lowe Profile

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Academic Incivility — What *Would Miss Manners* Say?

A colleague of mine sent me an article from the *Chronicle of Higher Education* from March 13, 2016, entitled “Halting Academic Incivility (That’s the Nice Word for It)” by **Patrick M. Scanlon**. Scanlon opens his article with a reference to a report published in 2015 in the *Journal of Applied Psychology* regarding incivility and ties it to “the regular calls for an end to faculty incivility — the rudeness, abusive language, bullying, and general meanness that seem to characterize many of our interactions.”¹¹ He points out that academic incivility and solutions for it are frequently topics of discussion but appear to “have a hard time gaining traction” and “are subsumed under the broader and softer term ‘collegiality,’ the professional relationships that unite us in a common purpose.”¹² Such discussions appear to primarily take the form of questioning if collegiality should be added “as a fourth faculty-evaluation criterion, along with teaching, research, and service.”¹³ Scanlon offers several recommendations for how to deal with academic incivility including calling out such behavior in a non-confrontational manner (i.e., not singling out guilty parties but addressing the impropriety of such behavior); fostering the importance of academic *civility* by making *incivility* a topic of discussion; “establish[ing] written ground rules for conduct in meetings and remind attendees of them beforehand,” which requires an effective moderator; and reminding leaders and supervisors of their responsibility for checking such behavior.¹⁴ Scanlon concludes his piece by stating that “we shouldn’t wink at obnoxious behavior among our colleagues in the name of academic freedom.”¹⁵ Considering how demoralized my colleagues and I have been by the incivility of PP, winking at her obnoxious behavior and simply accepting it clearly are not and never should have been viable options for dealing with her.

I have been asked why I have not yet filed formal complaints against PP with the university’s Human Resources department. One reason is that “While it may be immoral and unprofessional, it is not universally illegal in the United States for managers to threaten, insult, humiliate, ignore or mock employees.”¹⁶ Of course, PP is not my manager, but she is a colleague who engaged in some of the “immoral and unprofessional” behaviors represented in this list. In other words, it may well be debatable whether I have a leg to stand on for a formal complaint. But I bring up these behaviors because these and others are more problematic than simple incivility. They represent bullying behaviors which are unacceptable in any context. Bullies engage in a variety of behaviors: they “**make personal insults, invade another’s personal space, make uninvited physical contact, make both verbal and nonverbal threats and intimidation, make sarcastic jokes and tease, write withering emails, engage in public shaming, make rude interruptions,**

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against the grain people profile

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BORN AND LIVED: Jackson, MS, in 1979; lived most of my life in Jackson until moving to Hattiesburg, MS, to attend the **University of Southern Mississippi (USM)** to obtain my MLIS. Lived and worked briefly in Missouri before moving to Monroe, LA. Have been in Monroe and at ULM since 2003.

EARLY LIFE: Lived in Jackson most of my life. My mother was a school teacher until the early 1990s, when she became a school counselor. My dad worked for my hometown newspaper, *The Clarion Ledger*. They’re both retired now and live in Raymond, MS. I attended **Mississippi College (MC)** following high school; I obtained a Bachelor’s in English from **MC** and worked in the campus library the whole time I attended **MC**. I began working on a Master’s in English at **MS** before transferring to **USM**. My parents have run their church library for many years, and I still volunteer in that library (which still uses a card catalog!). In 2008 I obtained a second Master’s degree (in English) from **ULM**.

PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND ACTIVITIES: I started at **ULM** in 2003 as a tenure-track reference/instructional librarian. Since then, I have obtained tenure and have been promoted to the rank of **Associate Professor**. In 2012 I became the Coordinator of Public Services. In 2010 I founded *Codex: The Journal of the Louisiana Chapter of the ACRL*, an open access, peer-reviewed journal focus on academic librarianship; I still serve as the editor. I have published several articles on various topics. I co-authored a book chapter on my state’s consortium. I frequently present at conferences on a variety of topics. I’m a huge supporter of information literacy, open access, digital textbooks, institutional repositories, and digital humanities. I hope to move into library administration in the next few years.

FAMILY: I’m married to **Eric**; we’ll celebrate 14 years of marriage in October. We have several cats with definitive (and sometimes infuriating) personalities. We have two goddaughters and three nieces, with another niece and a nephew on the way in July! My parents and **Eric’s** mom still live in MS, as do my brother and sister and their families. **Eric’s** brother lives in Lake Charles, LA, with his family.

IN MY SPARE TIME: What spare time? Just kidding! I read, write poetry, freelance edit, and enjoy several hobbies including making jewelry, making soap, making candles, putting together puzzles, and playing videogames. I particularly enjoy traveling, especially to attend heavy metal concerts. I am also a huge letter writer and enjoy sending letters and cards to family and friends all over the world.

FAVORITE BOOKS: *Pattern Recognition, Necromancer, and Count Zero* by **William Gibson**; *The Witches of Eastwick* by **John Updike**; *The Infernal Desire Machines of Dr. Hoffmann* by **Angela Carter**; *Dune* by **Frank Herbert**; *Pride & Prejudice* by **Jane Austen**; *The Mothman Prophecies* by **John Keel**; *The Witching Hour, Cry to Heaven, and Blackwood Farm* by **Anne Rice**; and *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* by **Philip K. Dick**.

PET PEEVES: Whistling (especially in the library); people who don’t respect personal space; people who eat with their mouths open; people who wait until the last minute to get their research and then get mad at me because I can’t work miracles; discourtesy/rudeness; and presumption.

PHILOSOPHY: Love is the best thing we have, and it’s the best thing we can give others. Love has many forms, many shapes and shades. Compassion is too often overlooked and is perhaps one of the most important forms of love we can show.

MOST MEMORABLE CAREER ACHIEVEMENT: Being made the Interim Assistant Dean of the library just four short years after becoming the Coordinator of Public Services — and achieving both of those things before the age of 40.

GOAL I HOPE TO ACHIEVE FIVE YEARS FROM NOW: To have some significant experience as the Assistant Dean under my belt and hopefully become an Assistant Dean at another library. I also hope to achieve the rank of Full Professor.

HOW/WHERE DO I SEE THE INDUSTRY IN FIVE YEARS: More and more focused on digital resources and assisting our communities (whether that’s a campus community, a school, or a neighborhood) in the creation of digital products — I think the traditional research paper/project is going to morph into something more multidimensional as people gain more and more access to digital resources and tools. I think librarians will still be relevant and needed to guide people in the use and application of these resources and tools. Librarianship is not slow to change, but people are slow to accept change in libraries and library resources. I think some of the changes that libraries are undergoing at this time (going from temples to books to more social spaces that facilitate collaboration) will see fruition in five years, but not on as wide a scale as I would hope. 🌱

