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REFLECTION ON MY REMOTE WORKSPACE



[IMAGE DESCRIPTION: The photo features a large antique oak rolltop desk with a blue dining chair in front. The desk surface is covered with various items, including a red three-ring binder splayed open and a yellow legal pad. To the right of these is a Dell laptop, perched on a pile of two large books and two book-sized wooden boxes. In front of that stack is an external keyboard and mouse on a blue mousepad. To the right of the stack is an extra large Dunkin Donuts stainless steel tumbler and a cream-colored beer stein containing pens and pencils, emblazoned with "Whitman College," "1985," and the Alpha Chi Omega sorority crest. On top of the back of the desk is a large external monitor, with a grouping of photos to the left and a few small items to the right, beneath a desk lamp. In the far background is a basement wall covered in shiny white plastic sheeting, and 50 feet of orange electrical cord coils from a white plastic drain pipe across the basement ceiling. At far right is visible wooden bookshelves with several books, topped by a sunflower in a vase.]

Since going remote last spring, I've been working in my office on the first floor of our home—a comfortable space right next to the bathroom, with a couch to stretch out on and lots of light. When clean, it looked like a professional office, almost HGTV-worthy. However, anyone who's ever visited any

of my on-campus offices will know that my spaces are never clutter-free. I have piles of paper, toys everywhere, books I'm meaning to read or give away. I'm always putting my feet up on an open desk drawer or digging for snacks.

So, at the start of this semester I decided to move to our unfinished (though very nice and clean and dry) basement, where we had stored a roll-top desk that had originally been my great-grandfather's, where it sat in the office of the Silvana (Washington) Mercantile. My father adopted the desk during my childhood, and it took up significant territory in our small living room. My father, a collector of stories and all of the artifacts that accompany those stories, left his desk piled with all of the flotsam and jetsam of his years of widowerhood—photos and copies of photos, check stubs that told stories of life events, cards and letters and small slips of paper on which he jotted everything from his grocery list to the name of an interesting person he'd met to a quotation from a book he was reading.

This semester finds me—literally—facing the cubbies of this desk, my school-issue laptop perched on a pile of books and wooden boxes to reach the desired ergonomic height, my chair borrowed from the kitchen. The desk is littered with my attempts at doing this new version of my job better (like the extra monitor I rarely use), but also with talismans: a dragonfly wing in a glass block frame, a small bronze Durga given to me by a therapist while I was up for tenure, a photo of my wife and I on the day we married in Provincetown. I have curtains behind me to give the illusion to all I visit via Zoom that I'm in a finished space.

Of course, there's always detritus—kleenex and handwritten to-do lists, and the basement beyond contains tools and painting gear and unfinished projects, 50 feet of electrical cord coiled from the rafters. But most important is that laptop, open to Microsoft Teams, displaying a gif sent by a coworker who knows how to get me moving when I struggle. I may be hidden away in the basement with my inherited tendency toward entropy, but my screen is a portal to members of the IC community and beyond, spread across the globe.