Surveys for Monday 15 August 2011

Uid 13

Busy day! Especially for a Monday!

I got up at 6:30 am and went for a five mile run. My kids and I are running a half marathon in October, and I'm working on my mileage.

After walking the dog, breakfasting, and showering, I was at work by 8 am. It took me about an hour to clear out the email pile and do a blog post.

My first important task of the day was preparing my slides for 3 minute madness. This week is graduate student orientation. On Thursday, all the faculty who wish can introduce them to the students in 3 minute segments. Three hours are set aside for this, which isn't enough for the 100+ faculty in the College, but not everyone wants to participate. Everyone has to prepare Powerpoint slides (if they want any visuals to go with the talk), and we all had to be submitting on the 15th. I updated my slides from last year, and sent them on.

Much of the day (probably 3 hours) was spent editing a SIGCSE submission. I had an MS student conduct a study over the last year to understand why Atlanta area African-American students were not taking CS in any greater numbers than when we started with "Georgia Computes!" five years ago. We've made gains with women and Hispanic students, but no change (even decreases in the last two years) with A-A students. However, this student can't write. Her analysis of the transcripts is reasonable, but she can't make the argument. So, I cut her 10 page paper down to six, and tried to improve the text.

Next, I had to get my invites out to Deans and School chairs for an event we're hosting Sept. 8. Richard Ladner, an expert on helping disabled students to study computing, is coming to my school, and we're organizing his schedule. While it's still plenty of time to invite most people, it's already past time to get Chairs and Deans to come to an executive session with him. I had my list to invite, to match my partner's in Electrical Engineering, so I sent out about 20 personalized emails.

By that time it was dinner time, and the girls got home. We helped them with their homework (reviewing a book report on Malcolm Gladwell's "Blink," and helping find information on "The Golden Age of Broadway," like "What year was 'Guys and Dolls' set in?").

Then, Australia started waking up. My wife and I are visiting Melbourne, Adelaide, and Sydney to give three sets of talks in November, and we're working out schedule, costs, and plans. We sent a half dozen planning emails between 7 and 10, and checked out several itineraries.

Just before bed, we booked flights for California. A PhD student I work with (I'm on her committee) is getting married in October. This student has also worked for us as a babysitter for our children when we've gone on trips. Our daughters \*desperately\* wanted to go to the wedding. By combining frequent flier miles and free companion certificates, we got the price down to something that would fit in our budget, so we booked the flights, room, and rental car last night.

10:20 pm -- I headed to bed.

Uid 14

August 15th was one week from the first day of classes and so was my

first day back on the job. I decided to celebrate by taking the day

off and spending it with my family. It seemed only fair after how much

work I did while I was /not/ getting paid instead of spending that

time with my family.

I did some business email in the morning, wrote a blog post reviewing

Academically Adrift, and tweaked an invited blog post about a

recently-completed project. When my wife and kids came back from a

doctor's appointment, we piled in the car and went to the city. We

lunched at a Chinese/Vietnamese restaurant that was on the way that

the GPS found, spent all afternoon at the Children's Museum, and dined

at one of our favorite locally-owned restaurants which we had not

visited in over a year. The boys stayed up, the elder one engaging us

in conversation for the hour's drive. They went to bed, I played some

games and did some work emails, and then my wife and I enjoyed

watching The Venture Brothers before bed.

The trip to the Children's Museum was not entirely work-free. It was

on my list of "things to do this Summer," mostly because I found out

that an acquaintance of mine got a contract to do some educational

games for a new exhibit there. I have been doing educational games for

the last few years and was planning on approaching the Museum about a

collaboration, but now I needed to see what they currently had in

order to contrast it with what my students and I can offer. Turns out

the interactives were not actually installed in the Museum: they are

all online and I could have checked them from home. I did take many

pictures on my phone of the kinds of digital interactive kiosks

present in the museum so that I can reference them as I think about

how I might position similar work.

Uid 21

0:33 I guess I might as well start this log early, since it is now

technically Aug 15. My sleep cycle has been very disrupted

lately, with my not getting to sleep until 1:00 a.m. most

nights, but still waking up at dawn. On the 14th, I ended up

going back to bed at 8:00 a.m. and sleeping until after noon.

This helped me recover some of the sleep debt, but did not

rotate my sleeping hours to a more normal schedule.

6:30 Woke up some time around 6:30 to 6:40 and read science fiction

until 6:50. The book is an old Asimov story and not very

gripping---I've been using it to help put myself to sleep at

night. It did not help me get back to sleep this morning,

though.

6:50 Got up and move a load of towels from the washing machine to

the dryer. I should have done that yesterday, after the

towels had finished washing, but forgot to.

6:50-7:50 Worked on my son's theater web page, creating thumbnails for

72 photos that I had previously cropped and tweaked, uploading

them, and putting them in an HTML page. When my son wakes up

and has had breakfast, I'll have him help me caption all the pictures.

I realized when putting up the pictures that I had never

selected, cropped, and put up the pictures from his previous show!

So it looks like I have another couple of day's work to do there.

7:50-8:02 read and responded to e-mail.

8:02-8:41 Emptied the dishwasher, reloaded it with last night's supper

things, and started running it. Hand washed a number of pots

and pans. Made tea and had cereal for breakfast. Debugged the

family computer---my wife thought that the batteries were dead

in the wireless keyboard, and I broke my water-softened

thumbnail changing the batteries for her. But the real

problem was that my son had turned on "mouse keys" so that

when my wife typed in her password one of the letters was

being interpreted as a mouse movement instead of a letter. I

would not have thought of that as the problem, except that I

saw my son playing with the Universal Access options on his

account last night.

8:42-8:50 Folded and put away towels.

8:50-8:55 read and responded to e-mail. One of the papers I was a

co-author on was rejected (with the suggestion to shrink it to

3 pages) by Molecular Systems Biology, because it had too much

about methods in it. I suggested submitting to PLoS

Computational Biology, rather than shrinking the paper, as the

results are solid and the paper is likely to be highly cited.

I suspect that PLoS Computational Biology is a better home for

it in any case, as more people are likely to see it there.

8:55-9:03 Read a few of the top stories in the local newspaper on line.

9:03-9:26 Showered, trimmed all my fingernails and toenails extra

short to keep from breaking any more today, got dressed.

9:26-9:44 Read the AP biology e-mail (which I separate from other

e-mail). Responded to a complaint about the price of

potassium bitartrate (cream of tartar) with suggestions for

how to get it fairly cheaply (about $16 a pound with

shipping).

9:45-9:46 Checked my blog status and removed some spam.

9:46-10:40 Read other people's blogs (mostly math and science teacher

blogs) until the Internet connection failed.

10:40-10:43 rebooted router and modem, fiddled with Ethernet cables

until connection was restored.

10:43-10:46 read and responded to e-mail.

10:46-11:00 read more blogs.

11:00-11:24 talked with contractor who is working on our living room.

11:24-11:30 finally caught up on all the blogs I usually read.

11:30-11:36 Tried to get my son out of bed.

11:36-13:28 My son and I added captions to the pictures for the

theater web page. A few required looking up act and scene

numbers or correcting sonnet numbers that had been incorrect

in the program.

13:30-13:43 read e-mail, responded to it, took a survey sent to me by e-mail.

13:43-13:50 mailed out announcements of the new theater web page.

13:50-14:07 made a blog post about the new theater web page.

14:07-14:11 read and responded to e-mail

14:11-15:30 made lunch for my son and me, emptied dishwasher and

started reloading.

15:30-15:36 Called NiteRider to get replacement HID bulb for my

bicycle headlight. (It turns out that their website is so

badly implemented that the "shop" link is dropped from their

main page, or I could have found the bulb without needing to

make a tech support call.)

15:40-17:00 went grocery shopping with my son on our bicycles to get

milk, juice, lamb, cucumbers, grapes, pasta, flour, breakfast

cereal, soy milk, ... On the way, we stopped at the used

bookstore to see if we could get an appointment with the book

buyer to sell back some of my son's books that he'd recently

weeded out of his bookshelves. Unfortunately they were booked

up for the next 10 days solid, so we will try getting to the

other bookstore that regularly buys used books very early in

the morning on Wednesday (they do first-come first-served,

rather than appointments, and you have to line up about half

an hour before the store opens). Any leftover books we'll try

to sell at our garage sale on Saturday. Our last garage sale

was 10-15 years ago, so we've accumulated a lot of stuff to

get rid of.

17:00-18:45 My son and I prepared dough for naan and put together a

lamb curry, neither of which we had done before. (oops, not

quite true, I had made the naan once before when my wife was

sick.) The curry probably won't be done until about 21:00.

18:45-19:00 Updated this log and checked my e-mail.

19:00-19:45 Browsed some on-line electronics catalogs for stuff I need

for coaching the high-school robotics club. Haven't committed

to buying anything yet.

19:45-19:55 Chatted with my son about GIMP (the freeware replacement

for Photoshop) and about the possibility of putting an

electronic compass in the high-school underwater vehicle to

provide automatic yaw control (in addition to the

accelerometers planned to be used for pitch control and the

pressure sensor for depth control).

19:55-20:00 browsed the electronics catalog some more.

20:00-20:20 added potatoes to the lamb curry, peeled and sliced

cucumbers for the salad. My son and I made a cucumber, grape,

and yogurt salad, but we agreed that the grapes were a bit too

big and we should have cut them in half before adding them.

20:20-20:25 checked e-mail

20:25-21:05 baked the naan one at a time in a large cast-iron pan.

21:05-21:35 ate dinner. The lamb curry was very good, with very tender

lamb and nicely spiced sauce, but the sauce was a bit thinner

than I like---it would have been a good curry to serve over

rice, but was a bit too thin to scoop with the naan.

The naan came out well---none were scorched and none underdone.

I checked the fry pan with my infrared thermometer (my new

toy) and found that the temperature was far from uniform (no

surprise there with cast iron), but that a 400-degree

Fahrenheit pan seemed about the right temperature for naan.

The cucumber, grape, and yogurt salad was good, but would have

been better with champagne grapes (or the red flame grapes cut

in half).

21:35-21:50 cleared the table, loaded the dishwasher, and refrigerated

the leftovers.

21:50-21:57 updated this log.

22:00-22:42 watched an episode of Mythbusters with my family on DVD.

22:45-22:49 did sit ups and leg lifts with my son.

22:50-23:30 re-set-up shopping cart which the electronics company had

discarded. I logged in to the site this time, and will see if

they retain the shopping cart until the morning.

23:30-23:55 browsed Freescale Semiconductor for absolute pressure

gauges, but they are not providing samples for any of the

parts that may be useful for the high school robotics club.

I'll either have to contact them and ask for parts, or just

pay for them myself from a distributor.

23:55-0:09 Had the shopping cart disappear on me again, but this time

it was because the site had logged me out, and logging back in

recovered the shopping cart. I sent some e-mail to the

company complaining about the time-outs causing me to lose the

shopping cart. I hope that they'll fix their

customer-unfriendly web programming soon

!0:09-0:17 brushed teeth and went to bed

Uid 22

First day at the office after vacation and a 15 day trip to the US. And I had of course arranged for a checkup of the car at 7:15 in the morning (sometimes I wonder why I do these things, I should know better). So I had to get up at 5:30, drive the wife to the university and then take car to the garage. Sat there waiting until they had checked the car and actually got some work done thanks to my iPad.

When I bought the iPad I considered it to be a toy but in these few months it has become a VERY useful tool, both privately and at work.

Back to work and did some emails, then I had to read a master thesis and comment on it. Horrible english, I mean I'm not that good at english but this was not good - I don't understand why some students want to write in english when it's obvious that they don't master the language. Sometimes it was kind of funny because the student used words that he must have looked up in some online dictionary, unfortunately they didn't mean what he thought they meant so the end result was kind of confusing :D

Then back to reading a paper that I need to comment on in my thesis.

At 16:30 my wife said she needed to go downtown since she need to get some Koruna for her trip to Czech Republic tomorrow. Then back home and dinner, went to sleep in front of the TV but woke up and saw that I got some emails from the ICER people ... which means that I can spend some time tomorrow editing photos at work.

Bedtime

Uid 23

Last Share Project entry. This has been an extraordinary year to be conducting this project in in the UK. So many changes in Universities looming - esp re funding. And, at the local level, a particularly traumatic year for my section, with a Departmental merger, staff reductions/changes and the illness of a senior colleague.

On a personal level, I'm just back (yesterday) from an amazing 3-week holiday travelling in South America with a friend. We back-packed independently so had no time to think about work at all (except when we met a former MA student on the last day). Have returned feeling exhausted but completely refreshed. A bit jet-lagged, especially after two consecutive over-night flights, so slept in until noon today.

Then catching up on e-mails and checking with admin staff what needs doing re PG and UG Admissions this week. I am the only member of academic staff around, but there is not a lot to do on this front; it is probably too late now for international PG students to get visas for October, and we won't be going to Clearing on Thursday.

Called in on my dear friend and colleague who has been having cancer treatment while I've been away. He is looking wan and clearly unwell, but is making progress. Such a relief to hear he has responded well to treatment.

Got on with the literature review for my research project write-up. Good to come back to it with a fresher mind.

So - that's it!! Writing this has been cathartic, and it has been fascinating to see the year unfold as I re-read my entries...

Uid 31

Monday was the third day of Grinnell Science Project (GSP) - a

pre-orientation program designed to help students from underrepresented

minorities and first-generation college students feel at home in the

sciences. I am one of the co-directors. Planning for this year's

program started in the spring; our student assistants (SAs) arrived

on Thursday to start preparing for the program; and students (and some

of their families) arrived on Saturday. So although it's Monday, I've

worked for the last seven days straight.

The workday begins with a breakfast meeting in the dining hall at 8 with

the SAs and the other co-directors. I find myself wishing I'd stayed home

and finished reading the newspaper, as my colleagues spend 20 minutes

in the waffle line. Once we get started at 8:20, we talk about how

things are going, concerns about particular students, and the game plan

for today.

At 9 a.m., I'm with the Puzzles and Problems group down in the workshop

physics lab. I have some errands to run related to today's scavenger

hunt, but otherwise things are pretty uneventful. I get a few questions

from students, but not many. We realize at the end of the session that

one student never arrived. Fortunately, another student has her phone

number and learns that she went to the other morning session by mistake.

We all trek over to the athletic center for a session about social

justice. This turns out to be remarkable - I have a good conversation

with one of our SAs who has been a bit of an enigma, and I learn some

things about myself and our group. I hope that this will become a

permanent addition to our program, because it seems very relevant to what

we are trying to accomplish with GSP.

Next is lunch. I should sit with GSP students. But I run into a couple

of returning students I really want to talk with - a senior who I've known

since he was a first-year, and a rising second-year who I just taught

in my intro class and is likely to declare the major. Both work at the

information technology help desk -- the older mentored the younger. So I

succomb to temptation and have a good conversation with the two of them.

After lunch I am with the librarian and half the students for the session

on "Starting Your Independent Project". I'm not quite sure why I am here.

I wish I'd brought some work to do (since I have no unscheduled time

today.)

I get to the break afterwards at 2:30 and panic when I realize I haven't

made photocopies for the scavenger hunt at 3 yet. I run to do that, then

run to the room where the scavenger hunt ends. When no one but an SA

comes, I check the schedule and realize we are starting in a different

room. I run there and feel very embarrassed, but no one but the two of us

seems to have realized we wer in the wrong place. I get the students

started on the scavenger hunt and then head back downstairs. Students

gradually return and the usual chaos ensues.

At the end of my day, I have "individual interviews" with three of the

students. I have a preset list of questions to ask, but some freedom to

rearrange them or ask them in different ways. Each of the students is

enthusiastic and enjoyable to talk with, but I hear about some tough

situations. I can't solve their problems, but I can remind them that they

are not alone and support is available. I close my office door feeling

exhausted, but pretty positive. I make the mistake of saying goodbye to

my colleague with the office next to mine and end up talking with him for

another 15 minutes before going home.

I am exhausted and starving at 6 p.m., and so grateful my husband is

cooking dinner. I get to finish reading the paper from this morning and

read my online comics and blogs while he cooks. We go for a walk after

dinner, and that is pretty much the day.

Uid 32

Last entry in this project. I hope you are finding these useful, although I am amused that the newsletter entries all seem to come from the UK. There are non-UK folk participating, right? Or we are all boring over here? :)

The 15th has seemed to fall in to 3 separate patterns: a pretty mundane grading/teaching/admin day, too exhausted to write anything even remotely interesting (or even at all!), or on holiday.

Finally, today, a break in the pattern. I am taking a class. It is for fun, for me, for enjoyment. There is no pressure as it is an adult learning course ( I did take the graduate credit option, but still a pretty low pressure situation). Lasts all week.. and zero relationship to what I teach during the year. It's such a pleasant thing to be the student again. I can sit back and watch someone else take on the administrative headaches.

There were several occasions where work intervened and I had to check my emails and complete some task. Much of it was yes/no/perhaps answers to emails, or forwarding on an email that I couldn't answer, or "Wow that was harsh. Next time start with thank you for starting the project and then offer constructive advice. Telling me it stinks is not how to win friends."

Being a student took most of the day. I got home around supper time, caught up on the reading the newspaper and the mail, answered a family phone call, and ate supper. No work here!

Time to get brave. We flip on the computer and... only 2 email messages. Hooray!! Those are quickly dispatched.

Now to think about prepping one particularly challenging course. It is an intro course, but there are no texts for the material. (The texts that are out there are 3 to 5 grade levels above my students) So..... I need to spend time searching for readings. I have previously divided the class in to subtopic, now to divide each subtopic in to some assessable unit (something I can quiz and give homework on). Doing all the reading, coming up with my own study guides, quizzes, homeworks.. eek. This may take longer than I thought. The administrative part is complete: syllabus, schedule (of sorts), the "hello how are you ?" quiz, policies, procedures, etcetc. The reading list for topic one is collected. I feel pretty happy about that. I have finished a general sketch of the assignment, but now will need to spend a day or two making it less hard. This is, after all, an intro class. Need to think about what I have read.. can't do that tonight. It is getting late.

I will be interested to see what comes of this project. I hope you will let everyone know where/when the papers are published. I guess I wasn't all that detailed for you.. but so much of what i do is that constant chatter between items.. a little here, and some other stuff over there. Over the course of a day, the peaks & valleys even out and sometime it even appears to the gentle reader that nothing occurred here. But, dear reader, plenty did. But much of it was started on the 15th and completed on some other day., this week or later the next. it all gets done, eventually...

Uid 34

15 September 2011

06:30 up, breakfast, make sandwiches for lunch etc.

07:20 start reading e-mail. Exchange with a Belgian friend on the subject of "Nauseating Notation" (we both collect it). Also with a research student who is desperate to submit.

07:35 finish getting dressed.

07:50 to station. I'm doing some off-site consultancy (with university approval). One side-effect is the 45 minutes of "brisk walking" I get every day, rather than the usual "amble to bus stop".

08:08-08:30 referee a paper on the train.

08:45 in the office until 18:30, less 1.5 hours going to/from (more brisk walking) /at an AA meeting.

18:30 Walk back to station

18:50-19:07 more refereeing.

19:07-21:50 by bus to a colleague's house, where I cook dinner and we make final preparations for our holiday tomorrow. Confirm rental car, install her vacation message, and check on state of the Department's UCAS. Then home (bus and more walking!)

21:50-22:30 Fill in more of this, 3/8 hour being on a Conference PC (disagreements among referees), and (1/8) chasing potential research students' references.

22:30-23:10 packing

23:10-23:25 memo to Dean about an admissons task force I am chairing.

23:25-23:45 Research student e-mail (see 07:20)

23:45-00:00 despatch the refereeing etc.

Uid 41

A pretty full day, up early, pets fed and into work to guarantee a sensible parking space. One of my module's resit exams in the morning, so popped in there to leave contact details (thankfully no one did). Spent the middle of the day marking resit coursework, having lunch and chatting with colleagues. Why we allow the current system of resits is beyond me -- people who fail multiple choice quiz coursework really didn't try, bother or even care; why we should then waste time preparing resit coursework and marking schemes, only to have them (in the majority) just fail again, is a joke. Worst still, they have weeks to do the coursework and whatever resources they can get hold of, so those that do fail again must either not care whatsoever about their degrees (and therefore don't deserve one), or are so stupid that we shouldn't have accepted them in the first place. And I see in recent news that UK A-level results are "up" again for the Nth year in a row -- like the stock-market and .com bubble, is a crash inevitable? (hoping so, and back to normality). After lunch, pick up the morning's exam scripts and sort; at least all the resit exam candidates knew their exam numbers and could distinguish the exam ingredients in sections, questions and parts thereof (apparently a challenge for some in the main exam). Sort scripts into piles and start looking through them -- once again, most don't know or care anything about the subject (with the exception of one candidate who must have missed the main exam due to some legitimate reason, as their answers weren't complete garbage). Gave up on resit coursework and exams and went back to upgrading Linux on the desktop PC, replacing crappy new ATI card for a decent old NVidia card (ATI drivers had a problem that when one of the screens went to sleep it never woke up again..), went 'ooh' at Linux making it to kernel version 3.x, realised I needed a different power cable to drive the GPU in graphics modes (new desktop has no Molex/LP4 PSU connectors; all SATA newness), went home. Did some washing up, fed animals, went to visit a potential wedding reception venue (generally positive, however the place we really wanted was already taken for the target weekend -- booking over a year in advance seems excessive but hey-ho) then off bell-ringing for an hour or so, home, tea and bed.

Uid 45

This is my last day of summer "vacation". Meetings and semi-required social events start tomorrow. I have completed much of my summer "to do" list, but not all of it. Our campus is currently undergoing something of a scandal, and that has people edgy. But, the students I have talked to seem oblivious to it, and that's good.

The scandal will probably result in some administrative shake-up, but that may be a good thing, and should not affect ordinary faculty (like me) directly.

I teach computer science. Today will be spent trying to learn a programming language that I may be called on to teach in the future. Won't spend a lot of time on it, but I should get started. A few months ago, I started wondering just how many programming languages I have used, or at least studied in my 40 years in the field. It was 14. After 14 languages, number 15 won't be hard, I think.

Uid 47

15 August 2011

12:55 am Good morning. :-( My new server mysteriously went down just before midnight. It's a brand new virtual server and I have not yet been able to figure out why the host machine rebooted. Unfortunately the university systems people have access to the machine so it could be they decided to reboot it, but the log does not include a reboot so that suggests the power was cut off and then turned on -- an event that should not be likely and either means campus power went off (but here I sit in a lit room so it was very brief) or someone came into the server room and turned something off. The latter appears difficult since other than security and physical plant, I'm the only one with a key to this room.

In any case, it led me to discover the server is not set for automatic boot, an error I've now corrected. I decided I should take a snapshot of the machine while I'm at it and have also discovered my image is too big, whatever the heck that means. More digging in manual pages is mostly what it means, I suspect. Hopefully I'll get to go home and get some sleep soon.

1:45 pm Hectic day so far.

I was back up at 6:30 to get the kids up and going in time to get us out the door and over to Karate camp. Then it was a trip to the knee doctor with my wife, followed by a trip to the kids' school to drop off beginning-of-the-year forms. The highlight of the day was a break for a nice Thai lunch. I made it to work by noon, stopping in the lab to make sure the server was still okay. Then I dealt with the department printer not working (not sure why this is my job) and a scheduling issue for a student. That brought me to the task of moving furniture in a faculty member's office. The furniture moving unearthed materials from the person in the office two moves and over five years ago so I recycled those. And now here I am, hoping to get a chance to think about what I'll tell Admissions at 3:30 pm to convince them they can recruit more Computer Science majors.

2:45 Helped two new adjuncts find their books and calculators. Introduced one to his mentor. Discussed an installation issue on the new server with a faculty member. Discussed theft-prevention methods with another faculty member. Dealt with another scheduling issue. Passed on resume from third adjunct to department secretary. Eventful hour, but I am no closer to the task I started with last hour.

4:10 wheeeeew. I managed to put together a document that I think will help admissions tell a story about our computer science program and then spent a half hour meeting with them about computer science as well as our new actuarial science program. It was nice to see that some of them appreciate that these are difficult majors and that some of the students out there want to find these difficult majors. All in all, I wish I would have had more time to devote to preparing for the meeting, but I think what happened was good. I feel a bit mentally exhausted now.

Of course, as I write that another advising question calls me up. No rest for the weary as school starts. (And while that's true, I still feel a strong temptation to call my family and see if they want to go to a movie tonight instead of working.)

Following up on system administration issues now. The new server has a new host key which is causing problems for several people because their systems are rejecting the new key.

5:50 time to head home. Solved the sys admin problem, solved another advising problem, maybe even figured out where tomorrow's meeting is located. And made the terrifying to-do list. Not quite sure how to get this all done, but now I have to get home and make some supper.

9:50 Kids are off to bed, wife's PT is done and she's got ice on the knee, time to get to work. PHP configuration is still not quite correct on the server so I need to fix it before I can do the real work. Dang. I'm not sure why PHP has been so tough to get working on this install.

12:25 am Finished a draft of a new course/instructor evaluation form. The Dean is now requiring seven particular statements on a 5-point Likert scale. I get the honor (horror) of presenting this new reality to my department so I figured I might as well re-do the whole form while I'm at it, and move it online too.

Today captures much of the diversity of my life and job. I flip between system administrator, department chair, faculty, father, spouse roles repeatedly throughout the day. The accomplishments range from the small -- a schedule fixed, to the large -- promotion materials for the program, a new course evaluation. There remains too little time for research and teaching prep but somehow it all keeps rolling along.

Time for bed

!Uid 52

I spent most of today marking the work submitted by staff on our Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice. Although it is marking and therefore time-consuming and sometimes a task that feels a bit of a chore, because it needs to be done along with so many other things, actually I really enjoy marking these pieces of work. It is great to see some members of staff having engaged meaningfully in critiquing their own and others’ teaching practices, and describing the changes they have been making in their approach to learning and teaching. It’s true that some pieces of work are fairly average and this reminds me of the huge pressures on staff to fit this part time programme around their other work and home commitments. With the current financial climate in the institution and the loss of many staff in rounds of redundancies, the workload pressures for some staff are very heavy and some have done well to survive their first couple of years as an academic (and to still have a job) and to have submitted a piece of work on time that will pass.

However, there are those pieces of assessed work that make your heart sing…those who have a very reflective approach to their practice and those open to seeing things in new ways. I have just finished reading one submission from a philosophy lecturer who has questioned a number of key concepts that we take for granted in learning and teaching circles. He has questioned these in an articulate and amusing way that creates a coherent argument and accompanying rationale for his views. Some of these arguments have challenged my own ways of thinking about these concepts. This is what learning and teaching are about – the student as teacher and the teacher as student – a realisation that we can learn a great deal from each other.

After completing my marking which has taken me the best part of 4 days, I have moved into slight panic mode at the realisation we have some students arriving on Monday from Singapore for a new programme we are running. Along with my colleagues, I need to finalise some of the teaching plans and areas of the virtual learning environment. It doesn’t seem to matter how organised you are, there is always a bit of a mad panic as actual teaching approaches. This is the earliest we have started our teaching and it means we are starting to encroach into the summer. The summer is not the idyllic holiday and research dream I have every year, but instead is a constant catch up on big projects that we have had no time to do at any other point in the year. This summer has felt particularly pressured and I am nowhere near finishing my list of things to do.

I finished the day by starting to write a summary introduction to course design principles for students coming on one of our programmes. There are masses books and articles out there, but I wanted to draw together some of the key readings, ideas and principles in one short handout that we can use for a tutorial discussion and stimulus for students to do further reading in the areas they are most interested in. Actually, this was a really pleasant task, and it was good for me to go back to some of the key readings that I don’t get to revisit as frequently as I would like.

Uid 53

Gah - once again, I'm writing way after the event. And this time, I actually opened up a window to record what I was doing on that day.

One reason for that was the University picked the week 15/19th August for me to do my "Time Allocation Survey".

How strong the contrast: with one half of my brain, I'm reflecting on what is of value in my day; with the other, I'm noting down the number of minutes spent of different activities. How typical that it takes something external to the institution to get me thinking in really useful ways.

I made bread this morning for the first time for literally years. My wife of a similar number of years is wheat intolerant, and my usually very successful bread recipe requires granary flour - and I've found no non-modern wheat equivalent, and past attempts with spelt flour have failed unpleasantly. But not this morning, I'm glad to say - really nice light fluffy loaf.

Sneaky trick - make dough the night before, put in fridge. Still rises ok. Early morning, put in microwave on defrost for 10 minutes just to wake the yeast up, knock back, add goodies, then prove and cook. Much faster morning, great bread, and still get into work at a decent time.

With recent young children, and a consequent restriction on when and for how long I can do work things, I'm becoming increasingly petrified of the impending term. Only mid August, but in a month, we'll be back in the whirl. I keep telling myself I must become more ruthless, shut the door more, focus on what must be done. But, God, I'm so bad at it. I just find it so difficult not to be sociable. This morning, as I walked into the department, I spoke to Helen the secretary whom I've know since I first came here 16 years ago, and for some reason we ended up talking about cancer of all things (a favourite colleague's wife has it); then it was Pete, the head of IT in the dept, and we had a blether about machinery; then it was Patrick in the next office who had his leg amputated a while back, and we fell into a deeper conversation about the effect of the lost leg than I've had before - and somehow juxtaposed, discussed what a beautiful week it was. These "make" my work environment for me - necessary oil. But my head shrieks "no time, no time!"

I was "collared" by colleagues who are teaching a course this year that I've taught for many years, in order to get me to do a guest slot. Oh oh, I really should follow their model more - they're organised and ahead of the game, and making their life during term-time easier. I see I've written in my notes for the day "Why can I never do this?" Note of despair?! Well, come on, how hard can it be to be organised ahead of the game? I guess I don't know, I don't think I've ever managed it!!

Today was a tussle between dealing with students and writing a paper. This is at the root of my difficulties with organisation: I'll firefight or respond to immediate external queries rather than putting them aside until I've made a plan, allocated time etc. And even when I've made a plan, allocated time etc., I still let myself get distracted by the same stuff - firefighting and external requests. Gaah.

Oddly, I think I may have started the year writing a diary entry much like this!

Anyway, thanks for enabling me to have the experience of this exercise. I don't think I've ever actually written on the day of the diary, but there's something immensely forgiving about the process. I missed a few months, but I've always been drawn to get there in the end if I can - and oddly, it's become increasingly my choice to write each month rather than the result of an external driver telling me I should. This sparks me to consider another huge challenge delivered by the ludicrous flexibility of the Higher Education environment: doing exactly what I want to do vs. professionally, doing what needs to be done.

Uid 60

I have moved to another university to take up a researcher/lecturer position.

It does not help to be jetlagged and to cope with new systems, expectations, and procedures. The good news is that I do not teach until next month. The bad news is that I have a number of deadlines for submission of papers and a book chapter, in addition to preparing for my forthcoming classes. I am grateful for the friendship and support offered by the close knitted CSEd community that I am now a part of.

I cannot help comparing the institutions. It seems to me that we have similar problems with administration, with finding funding, and with striking a balance between our professional and personal lives. Having said that, I do find working at a large university exhilarating. I can see how stimulating the interactions with a large faculty can be. I hope I can maintain the close rapport with students that I have in my own much smaller university.

Uid 64

On holiday! A week in Provence - the weather is glorious and it seems a long way from the office. It's a bank holiday in France, so we just potter about the local market and then have lunch in a cafe - chosen when we see the village policeman, who's spent the morning collecting licences from the market stallholders, leaving looking pleasantly red-faced and well-fed. Afterwards, a short siesta followed by a meal with friends holidaying nearby. Nothing for the Share Project here, I think...

Uid 65

Today was the day before I set off for Norway for two weeks on geomorphology field research. It's the first time I have been for three years - the longest it has ever been between trips - testament to the continual encroachment of admin and management on my workload. Not that I don't enjoy some of the management stuff, it's just that I object when it begins to crowd out the very things about my job that I love the most - teaching and research.

I spend much of the day packing and sorting - there are so many things to think of. In addition to the usual clothes and personal gear to be packed, I also have to think of my field kit and endless paperwork. Much of the heavy stuff has already gone out with my husband in the car - a journey of three days, taking in Newcastle, Amsterdam, Hamburg and Hirtshals (Denmark) along the way! On top of everything else, we have three cats who are going to be looked after for the two weeks by relatives who are coming to stay in our house. That means getting the house 'ready' for our visitors; thinking about food, bedding, instructions in case the pipes should burst, how to give our older cat his medication etc!

It makes me laugh when I think of some of my colleagues (who do not do fieldwork) who regard overseas field research as some sort of 'jolly'. They frequently say 'Have a nice holiday...oh, I mean field trip' - ha ha. Very funny, not. In fact it's very hard work with very long hours involved. I enjoy it, don't get me wrong, but it requires a level of endurance and stickability that I suspect some of the non-fieldwork-doers simply don't have.

Anyway, once finally prepared and ready to go, I then spend a couple of hours trying to synchronise my iPhone so I have some music to listen to on the journey. Why do simple things always take the longest?

!Uid 67

The final day of this diary? It doesn't seem possible.

I wasn't feeling well today, so I accomplished little. I came in and locked myself in my office to avoid the need to be pleasant (or coherent) to colleagues. I've been doing a lot of reading and so I got a ways through a book I'm hoping to use next semester in my teaching. I find it's a relief to have read the book before you've assigned it! I've even been scribbling down ideas for small exercises to go along with chapters in the book. How productive am I?!

I've had several knocks on my door...shhh...I'm not here. I ate my lunch on my comfy chair while reading until I dropped half the contents on the floor. Tuna and salad on an ancient industrial carpet - that will smell lovely the next time the sun comes out (which could be never).

I had a meeting at 2pm in the staff coffee room. We've altered our programme to include new modules yet no one told the teachers on those modules. I'm meeting with one of them to discuss. She's not there...I'm sitting sipping a cup of tea...she's still not here. A colleague who seems to spend half her life in this room has arrived...I've given her a hard time for not doing a minor task that would make the lives of programme leaders easier...I'd rather not discuss it further...it's quarter past, I'll go back downstairs. The meeting happens 20 minutes later in my office. It's such a relief to speak to someone who really wants to make a module work. She seems excited to take on the new students and I'm just pleased they're a good group. Hurrah.

Feeling really awful now, I'll do five more things - including arguing over email with a first year who skipped all her resits but didn't bother to tell anyone she wasn't submitting – and quickly figure out which library has a book I might want to read in it (fun read - fiction)...cycle there on the way home to then snuggle up on the couch. It's 4.30pm and I'm on my way out the door. I'll spend another hour on the couch at home reading the aforementioned non-fun text under two blankets with a cat on my shoulder.

Uid 71

Working at home on a book contract. The hard work of imagining is over. Now down to the slog of getting it on paper.

Next on the do-before-the-end-of-summer list is a grant application. ESRC future leaders. They are keen on knowlegde transfer and stakeholder involvement. I meet with a charity working in my area and ask them what kind of research they would like. They have no idea what research is apparently. Also they shy away from any sort of campaigning on the issue (don't want to be political) so it's hard to see what research I can do that would help them do their job better. Also, its frustrating to know that they ask me if I could do research on things which have been done (which I send them as soon as I get home). Perhaps its not in the format they would most like but it exists at least!

Bit frustrating but I enjoy meeting with non academics...

Yoga in the evening: writing and working at home means I have to do something in the evening to get out!

Uid 72

Check emails from around 10:00-11:00, then attend some interesting research seminars from around 11:00-15:00, spend a little time talking to the speaker, then a bit of a break and dinner until about 20:00, when I go to the "Skeptics in the pub" meeting for a discussion about psychology and visual illusions.

Uid 75

9:00 am - I am in my office looking at another day of working through preparation for teaching at a new institution. I had a good weekend in which I managed to test the limitations of the recumbent trike. With the sun shining and little breeze outside, I know that I would prefer to be somewhere else today but there is no leave to take so here I am preparing for the next academic year and hoping I might get a chance to work on another research paper.

A quick catchup on Facebook tells me that New Zealand has snow from top to bottom. That is really unusual. Auckland hardly ever sees snow.

9:30am - Fetched a cup of hot chocolate and filled my water bottle. Now to look at the drafting of a research paper. The paper draft that I have has a lot of material in it but no real flow. Maybe some thought away from the computer is required.

10:30am - Was expecting an MSc student to come for his weekly meeting. I know he is struggling and been depressed. I may need to contact him and check where he is at.

11:00 am - Just discovered the student came while I was collecting print out and talking with the head of department. Rescheduled now for Wednesday. One less problem to worry about today.

1:00 pm - I seem to have lost some time. I have been looking at the design of the course for next year. How much of it do I change? I am not comfortable with the way that it currently works but if I start from scratch, I have to build examples, lectures, lab worksheets, Blackboard resources, tutorial sheets, ... Sounds like a lot of work. Do I really want to lumber myself with so much work. Will it help the students learn the material better? I would like to argue yes but where is my evidence? What evidence can I gather to see whether the changes I make will make a difference? It is a big task even though I have materials from last year although in a different context and aimed at a different student group.

At least, a university machine has now been ordered for me so hopefully it will arrive this week (next week, I hope at the latest). I like my own laptop but you don't get much support to link it up to university systems so it will be nice to have a university machine and get a little more support. There is some resistance however to Macs so I may still find I have to do most of my own set up.

There are more people around today so I had a talk with the other person teaching introductory Java. He will be using a much more problem-based, inquiry-based learning approach to me. He will be teaching the new intake of Computer Science students where my course is aimed at non-CS majors including business and maths students. I am thinking of a guided exercises closely linked with lectures and tutorial worksheets but will attempt to include some advanced material that will require the student to do some of their own research. From my perspective, there is what the students need to learn in order to pass the module and then there is the learning that I hope they are inspired to go on and do.

4:00pm - After a lot struggling with a lack of motivation, I finally settled in to planning my teaching schedule. I now know the sequence in which I want to approach the teaching. The next step is to work through the learning resources. A good afternoons work after a very slow start.

Now to head for home. Overcast now so won't be quite as nice for riding but I will still enjoy the relaxation.

Uid 77

Share project, 15th Aug 2011

Well today is my first anniversary of my employment at this university. And an early start it has been too. The A level results came in to the University yesterday, so we are now in the middle of sorting out how many of the students to whom we made offers have got the necessary grades. And as Admission tutor, this is my problem to resolve, and as Associate Dean for the faculty, I also have an over view of the other programmes. And since almost all our courses are professionally based, we have strict quotas, and get penalised for both going over and under on our recruitment, so it is a very thin line. My daughter’s A level results are also due on Thursday (the day student’s get to find out their results), and although she isn’t planning on going to University this year (and doesn’t therefore have a place riding on them), I still found myself waking up at 4 am this morning, worrying about the news that Thursday might bring for her.

For me, we are about where we had expected to be; currently about 35 under (for 155 ‘home’ places) but with a pile of ‘just missed the grade’ and a ‘waiting list’ I am hopeful, we will get there. Main meeting to agree our strategy is this afternoon. We also have 13 ‘overseas’ places which are profitable for the university, so I am under pressure to ensure I bring these in too. On current figures, we are at least 1 place short, so this morning have had a video-conference/interview with a potential applicant, currently in Malaysia. It was planned for a 7.30am start. Getting in for 7.30am, while a stretch, isn’t really a problem, except that this morning, both the University and the city council have just started to dig up almost every road within a 100yd radius of the campus, with road closures, and misleading ‘diversion’ signs on all approach roads, and temporary traffic lights in the campus itself! The upshot was that, by the time we had sorted out the technology, it was well past 8am before we actually started the interview. We’ve another set up for lunch time, and a third later in the week.

Personal and family concerns are hard to leave at home at the moment. With all these road works, my husband (who also works at the same university) announced he was going to cycle the 9km to work today; something he has never done before! At least it is sunny and dry. He has made it, only getting lost once, and hasn’t yet asked if I can put him and the bike in the car for the return journey! In addition, we moved house a couple of weeks ago, so as well as all the work-related tasks, I am also still trying to sort out the house; one task today is to arrange curtain rails installation! And hope my daughter’s first job interview goes OK this afternoon.

As it is the middle of summer, many staff are still on holiday, and although several rungs of the ladder down from the most senior member of staff in the school, I am currently the most senior not on holiday. So I get to meet and explain to the student whose exam mark was (due to an administrative mistake) erroneously reported as a pass. The administrative staff have had a major rejigging, mostly as a cost saving measure (although with all the new building that this has entailed it is difficult to see where the savings have been made), Given the stress and unhappiness this has caused, actually if this is the only error, we’ve been quite lucky, but it still leaves us in a difficult situation.

Student pleasant enough given the circumstances. We had a useful discussion, and will meet again on Wednesday. And we have now carried out a second video conference interview; probably one further one later in the week. And in the middle of all this, I get a phone call from my daughter wanting to know where the iron is! (In the first place she had looked but hiding behind something else!).

Most disturbing this morning is the feedback from my tutorial group. I spent 24 3-hour weekly sessions with them over the year, and although a bit upset by some of their comments (I was described as ‘mean’, ‘aggressive’, makes ‘negative remarks’, ‘picks on people’). I am also concerned that I didn’t pick up on any of this during the year. And previous experience of 15 years doing similar tutorials hasn’t ever produced such comments. Yes, they may not like the way I facilitate, in terms of doing it by the book rather than take the short cuts they would prefer (I can cope with those sorts of comments!) And I do know I am not the best tutor in the world, recognising one or two of the comments as recurrent from previous groups, and know them to be my weaknesses, but taken as a whole, this bunch of feedback makes me feel that I am worthless as a tutor, and upset not just at the comments, but that my students actually feel that I am like that, because I certainly don’t intend to be.

Back to worrying about the A level results: A long round table meeting this afternoon to work out which of the students to whom we made offers have actually met them, who have ‘just missed’ but we are happy to take, and who have missed their grades by too large a margin to consider. We are still waiting on about a dozen results. But currently, even using up all our waiting list applicants, we will have at least one space, (and probably more since it seems unlikely that all 13 with outstanding results will make their grades). So plan C will be put into operation, and we will interview suitably qualified people who applied to us, but who we initially didn’t invite to interview. Given that the selection for interview process is mainly a ranking process, and subsequent analysis of the selection process showed that the score based on the application form (which resulted in selection for interview) in no way correlated with the interview scores or anything else, this seems justified, and for some students, lady luck may be shining on them on Thursday. Seems some sort of poetic justice somehow; I got into medical school over 30 years ago from a waiting list and a phone call ‘out of the blue’ when I had almost given up hope, it is nice to be able to do something similar to the next generation.

Now about to leave for home (5.30pm) to pick up the pieces of home life. The sun is out, so I think a cup of tea sitting on the deck, listening to the birds (and watching the weeds grow!) is in order: still a novelty in my new home! Then supper and an hour in front of the TV before bed.

Uid 78

A good day on the whole. I spent it in the office dealing with lots of different aspects of my job. There were a couple of students needing extensions to deadlines and a bit of reassurance. Only one of my academic conduct cases needed attention. For most of them I'm waiting for students to explain themselves. The case in hand today was for a student who probably didn't set out to cheat. It's more likely that she doesn't have the confidence or the skills to write in her own words so I organised some extra help instead of imposing a disciplinary penalty.

This is a busy time for us as we prepare for teaching to start in October. Students are signing up for modules and we can start to see how many tutors we'll need to teach them. Tomorrow we interview for a history module. There are five candidates for a part-time role. I find I have to shelter in a rather cold objectivity not just for fairness but in order to cope with the process; there are so many good or potentially good HE teachers looking for work and the majority won't find it in our sector. I re-read the applications this evening and checked that our questions will illicit the information we need to make the right decision. We also shortlisted today for a Creative Writing vacancy. There are fewer Creative Writers than there are historians but more creative writing students than history students so not so many CW tutors to choose among

A close colleague was back at work after a two week family holiday. We spent time catching up with events in the office, including who said what about the impending new HE environment, the novels she'd read on holiday in preparation for teaching a new literature module in October, the opera I saw last week, the insecurity of the admin assistants, the progress of a new junior colleague, the impossibility of getting enough thinking time, how cats resent it when we leave them. It's good to have her back.

Uid 82

First thought: yea gods, has it \*really\* been a year since I started doing these entries?

Today has been spent working on an opinion piece and transcribing a research interview, as well as indulging in my new working-at-home habit of reading articles on the exercise bike. It's a great way of assuaging guilt about taking time away from research or teaching prep in the middle of the working day, whilst also assuaging anxieties about having a sedentary job... more positively, I have found that it's usually when I have my best ideas (swimming has exactly the same function). My guilt derives from a growing engagement with a 'normal' adult life, as opposed to the extended adolescent postgrads can enjoy: when I was a newbie lecturer, work slipping into the weekends and evenings was not necessarily a problem. There was no-one to complain and it passed the time. A few years on, there is someone to complain and I would rather spend evenings and wekends with them. It's not always easy to keep academic work to the day time - my partner understands this - but, much as I love my job, it is still a j.o.b. and the off-switch needs to go on. I suspect I have become more effective since doing this, but it's hard to measure.

Has much changed for me since I began writing these diaries? I will return to teach the same undergrad modules; I have some different admin duties; new postgrad students. But it's like a ring on a tree. I've had a further year's experience in teaching, in research, in the world generally and it all adds up, even if it's just having a better example to give in a lecture. It all adds up: you learn things, you pass them on, things come back to you.

Uid 95

Entry added in October!!

Here I am, two weeks into retirement and still adjusting. It still seems like I am on holiday. My elderly mother has been ill so I have been busy. Plus my husband is still working at the uni. so I am in touch with the action, as they say.

So my day has started with a long walk with the dog, sorting papers about pensions, and preparing for a meeting about my diploma work. Later I'll visit my mother who really does not understand what a big change is happening to my daily routine.

So looking back, some comments:

1. I really enjoyed lecturing, interacting with students and being part of a great institution.

2. I had started to dislike the new style of management which pushed through changes and overloaded staff with admin.

3. I believe that university's are trying to use a retail model (students as consumers) that is inappropriate. What ever happened to individuality and academic freedom?

4. The students themselves have changed enormously: many see a degree as a right without effort on their part; most have little initiative and want "spoon-feeding"; their school experience makes it very difficult for them when they arrive at uni.

5. I feel that my own degree (achieved in the sixties) has been devalued.

6. I feel that newer colleagues are less committed to their jobs (yes, a better work-life balance) and most are really working 9 to 5, only working to their job descriptions, and as a result, a lot of the ethos of the university has been lost.

7. I sincerely hope that universities will come full-circle and a few will be allowed to maintain the true spirit of ehat a university is about (and the rest will revert to institutions teaching vocational subjects or training for apprenticeships).

Note: although some entries have been submitted later, I have tried to reflect my feelings over the year, albeit coloured by the fact that it was my last year. Good luck with the project and I look forward to seeing a summary of your findings.

Uid 96

I’ve had some annual leave lately (just stayed at home, was a tourist in my own city and had a friend visiting) so I’m out of my usual routine. I know I can’t cope with work unless I start early, getting up at 6; and I know I can’t cope with life if I have late nights. I’m not emotionally robust where late nights are concerned. So it’s time to get out of holiday mode and back into my usual asleep-at-9.30-awake-at-6am routine. I did in fact wake slightly before my alarm at 6. I booked myself a half day of annual leave today, thinking I might have been away over the weekend and need an easy day. In actual fact I didn’t go away, but I have Friday off this week and I want to leave early on Thurs so maybe I’ll just work all day today.

Getting up early is just for the sake of restoring routine. I have to stay at home until 8am to phone and see if I can get a doctor’s appointment for a sore foot. Then I’ll cycle to a different campus from usual, to collect my certificate for a PgCert Teaching and Learning in Higher Education. I have to get this to my usual campus several miles away, this morning, so it can be sent to international partners for whom I have just begun to teach. This is the last little bit of admin (for now) for an international trip in October: travel application, passport photo, visa application, updated CV, copies of all certificates. Maybe now I’ve ticked off the admin I can spend some time preparing the module I’ve got to deliver. Maybe if I stay at home, going to the campus seldom helps.

Between 6 and 8 I’m using my time productively. Breakfast in bed, with laptop on lap. Emails:

“Can I have a past paper?” [no, because most of it is going to be in your exam, I was too lazy to write new questions since it’s only you sitting this exam and this is the last time this module will ever run. However, I’ll have a serious problem if you fail so I’ll make a mock paper out of the few recycled questions you won’t see in the exam tomorrow, give you the best chance.]

Another question from a student who is taking extra long to complete his honours project over the summer, due to illness. I have explained so many times what a systematic and critical review of the literature is, and most of my replies to most emails reiterate the same in some way, including this one. I don’t know if he’s ever going to produce a passable literature review. Thank heaven it’s not a practical project, glad I steered him off that. Good luck chap, hope you pass eventually [not least so I can stop supervising you]. By return email “can I come see you on Wed?” [oh NO, not again!] “yes, 3pm is fine” [sob].

Start of term is looming. I’m in denial. One module leader has sent the teaching timetable for a module I contribute to. I wrote the dates in my diary. I don’t know yet if it clashes, I don’t know what new modules I’ll be teaching starting in three weeks time. I should try to see my line manager today and see what he has in store for me. He’s just back from three weeks’ leave so I’m sure our whole group will be chasing him for the same, poor chap. This time last year I would have been super-stressed about this kind of uncertainty, now I’m used to it. “Surprise! Take on this new stuff that you don’t know anything about” has become routine. I’ve coped so far, I’m sure I will again. It’ll be interesting, varied. Besides, I can’t be bothered to get stressed, uses too much energy. I’m clinging on to low-stress-summer as long as I possibly can. Usually for a couple of weeks at the start of term I sleep very badly and have anxiety dreams about turning up late for lectures or standing up to speak and forgetting what subject it’s supposed to be. Not ready for those to start yet.

I haven’t finished my summer work. I haven’t finished ANY of the three major projects I had for my summer. Two are maybe halfway done, or not quite that. One barely started. I’ve been working hard all summer, no slacking (except for annual leave), no reclaiming the hours of evening and weekend I’m due after last semester. Still I can’t keep up. Masters students, honours projects hanging over, resits in the half-dozen modules I lead, a couple of my modules occurring exceptionally over the summer for three students (‘distance learning’, luckily). Maybe I shouldn’t be astonished that it’s been so hard to get on with writing things. Still, it’s annoying.

“No! Go away term, I’m not ready!”

Just after 8am I left home, fetched my certificate and cycle couriered myself to the office. My boss is back after 5wks off so I try to catch him to find out what I’m teaching next semester. He looks confused. We’ll speak on Thursday by which time he may have had a chance to plan for our group. Don’t envy his role.

Resit module boards. Not many students, doesn’t take long. Don’t think much about it. That's the reason I couldn't take the whole day off work though.

I mark an honours thesis (not at all bad, well done) and leave at 1.30. Cycle to GP appointment for 2.30 but doc is late so I’m not home til 3.30. Back to work, and I work on writing this new module for our international partners. There is a core text that will be available to students online, and I’m adding what is (probably) the last section to unit one. I enjoy this, I like explaining. At around half past seven my friend phones, we talk for a while, I remember I have to go fetch groceries before the supermarket closes so that’s the end of work for the day. I leave computer open, intending to come straight back to this core text at 6am tomorrow before I leave for work.

Uid 98

Well, a 'working at home' day, but it is a mix. Emails in three groups: 0755-1000; 1300 for an hour; 1600 for 20 minutes ... and this at 6pm as I know no more work tonight as I'm off to a French conversation class I organise twice a month - my hobby.

Managed to make some headway on two papers and reading a draft of a PhD. Not a full 8 hour day and I suppose I do feel the need to justify this by saying to myself - saying to you, too - about working last (Sunday) night for two hours.

I've been pleased to join in on this; learned some things myself and SO pleased to be able to contribute to a wider survey of feelings and actions of life in academia. Have really enjoyed the reviews - well done. Do let us all know how to read results and conclusions at some point in the future. Best wishes to you.

Uid 99

I spent much of today on a plane, travelling across India as part of a teaching trip. We have several collaborative partners in India, and it is my turn to come over and do some teaching. It's hard work, with a heavy teaching load, in sometimes less than perfect facilities. You have to be prepared to go with the flow, and make adaptations to your schedule as required.

It's not all bad - we stay in nice hotels, and our academic partners are very hospitable, and take good care of us. The students are responsive (sometimes to the point of being unruly!), and are ultimately rewarding to teach.

Of course, everything is still going on as usual back at work, but it's possible to mostly keep things ticking over by email. And I'm lucky to have a partner who actively encourages me in my career, and is happy to take care of the domestic responsibilities.

In conclusion, I guess it's time to reflect on the whole process of keeping this diary. It's been hugely interesting, both to keep and to look back on. I've enjoyed being part of this huge project, and reading each month about the lives of my fellow academics. I look forward to seeing the fruits of your labours in due course

!Uid 114

Several times I have started my entry stating that I should be on leave.... this time I really am and enjoying solo kayaking round lake windermere. It is so beautiful, peaceful and relaxing.

This is a busy time of year for us as we are coming to the end of one presentation, preparing for the start of the next two and trying to do other work at the same time. It is so nice to get a break away from course writing and trying to juggle students numbers at the same time as being restructured and reorganised.

I'm hoping that a week will be long enough to recharge the batteries before returning to the mad house.

Whilst I'm away I do spend some time thinking about work - I'm trying to take stock and decide what I want to be doing and which direction to head in. Shortly after returning I will be having dinner with my line manager. I was summonsed to this dinner date and am aprehensive about it. When I asked if there was an agenda for our discussion I was told it was to "ensure I was getting access to work oppertunities" I have no idea if I am about to be offered a role on a new project, or about to be told I'm not productive enough, or advised to look for oppertunity elsewhere.

I'm trying to keep an open mind about it but also aware that it might be an oppertunity to request something... if only I knew what I want to do when I grow up.....

I've prepared my CV, as it needed updating anyway and it helps me remember what I've done.

This is the last blog entry so I'm afraid you'll never find out what happens!

Uid 116

11:34 AM: Spent most of the morning reading. My reading is a bit different now that I'm working in industry on my sabbatical. This morning's reading included several analyst pieces on Google's acquisition of Motorola and the possible implications in the Android market and smartphones in general.

I also participated in a discussion about plans for the next version of one of our products. A group of us did a bunch of triage work on bugs and feature requests Friday. All of the items were marked as "engineering triage" in our database, and so a group of engineers assigned them to categories. Our project manager seems to be a bit miffed by that.

Lurking in the back of my mind today are my colleagues’ preparations to start a new academic year. I have a few administrative odds and ends from the spring at which I've been chipping away. The sheer amount of administrative BS that we put up with as academics is even more staggering from an industry perspective, at least compared to the very flat hierarchy at my sabbatical employer.

3:02 PM: I've felt unproductive for the past week. I'm switching to a project that's new to me, and that is a Mac application instead of iOS. That means there's a giant pile of information that I have to digest before I can contribute.

So much of the work of a practicing software engineer seems to be filling your head with information so that you can make the connections necessary to accomplish a task. All the theoretical underpinnings that we teach make the task of gathering, categorizing, and communicating that information tractable. However, the actual practice feels like a craft rather than a science. It's a craft of extraordinary complexity, but a craft nonetheless. I wonder how the complexities of software development compare with other intricate crafts.

5:57 PM: Continued reading code and taking notes for the rest of the afternoon. I'm close to understanding the overall architecture and some implementation details of the application. I should be able to start wiring some of our mostly-done model into our very-rough user interface within the next day or so.

We have a very talented group of user experience people here working on information architecture and design mock-ups. One of the things I've most enjoyed about my sabbatical so far is working with the user experience designers, support, and marketing people. It's been helpful to see how they approach software and to get a sense for the mechanisms through which teams with a variety of skills and perspectives create better results. Leadership here is explicit about include the viewpoints of everyone on the product team. By exhibiting respect for engineering, design, testing, support, and marketing, our executives help everyone avoid the tendency to discount others work.

Uid 119

Hey, it's still summertime! And I'm supposed to be on sabbatical! So why am I at the university today?!?

Well, the answer is: for two important meetings. One is with another professor who is introducing me to some new software, and the other is with an undergraduate who is helping us with our research.

As Gilda Radner used to say, "It's always something..."

Two good meetings today, both designed to teach me, and so they did. One was a personal tutoring session from a music prof teaching me about MaxMSP, and the other was a report from a student helping us with research. Man, good students are worth their weight in gold! :)

And the financial markets are recovering, so maybe I really can retire someday...

Uid 123

Has this been a year... it has been hectic, turbulent and, at times, scary. At least no one in HE will look back at this time as being one of boredom and 'same old, same old.

I arrived at work at 10.00 a.m. on Monday, one of the lovely elements of working in the summer is that you can always get a parking space whenever you pitch up. By October I am getting up at 6.00 a.m. to arrive early enough to secure a parking space.

I had two meetings scheduled today, both cancelled last week, so I am focused on completing a literature review for a paper I am writing. The phrase 'publish or perish' has real meaning for me now. I must keep my publications up to support a 'research and teaching' timetable. This means that I write during August and only take a short holiday. I find I don't start new writing projects between September and March - I am just too busy with other things, teaching certainly, but also administrative processes. Consequently, the summer is the time that I try to ensure that I bring a paper to first draft stage - ready for discussion and amendment within a writing circle later in the year.

10.30 A research assistant comes into my office in tears. However, the news is good for her, she has been offered a permanent job at another institution. But for me, it means more pressure, the data collection, analysis etc that she was doing will now fall to me. It took long enough to recruit her, and now we have a hiring freeze. We sit down to plan the priorities before she leaves.

12.00 I am writing and having lunch at my desk, so that I can keep going.

3.00 A colleague comes in to discuss assessment, she wants to enhance authenticity. Interesting conversation. Is it here that I waste my time? Academics like to talk and discuss, I am no exception.

4.00 Back to the paper.

6.30 Home

Uid 126

Monday August 15th 2011

I feel rather sad that this is the last diary day of the year. I have enjoyed writing and thinking about these days, and then getting a taste of others’ days. I am going to try and keep a more regular journal of my working and thinking life but, since i did try and start that a month or so ago with very few entries, I am not sanguine about its success.

My mother has been staying with me and so I have slowed right down which was exactly what I needed to do, I need still more slow time but will be back interviewing and putting the final touches to next year’s student handbook tomorrow. However, today has been a slow day. I woke quite early, up in my study bedroom while mother is here, to a blue sky and sunshine and the last unravelling pages of a Sarah Paretsky, read the plot, don’t think, novel.

Breakfast: the paper, good coffee, seeded bread, honey. And then a meander to Lavenham to enjoy the Suffolk countryside and the Tudor buildings and to see whether there were cardigans by a local designer that suited my mother. Nothing doing but we meandered about and visited the Guildhall and ate enormous sausage rolls and meandered back. Then I drove to the station and saw my partially sighted mother on to the train. I thought about her navigating the underground stations and about my daughter, still airborne to New York, and the challenge of finding her hotel in Brooklyn.

I steadfastly refuse to think, to read anything serious, and head for the sunny garden with tea and the crosswords –quick and cryptic. I put my feet up. Not working requires concentration. I solve clues and daydream. I make a list that includes washing and ironing. I think about the writing I will do at the weekend. I read the Saturday Review –a collection of short pieces by writers on the writers they are looking forward to hearing at the Edinburgh Book festival and from there I look at the book festival website and read the short piece by Alberto Manguel. I am intrigued by it and daydream some more and wonder whether I will use the Odyssey as the focus for my drama project in the coming year and realise that I must finish reading his History of Reading. I see that Per Petterson has two more novels in translation, one out now and one to be published later this year. Perhaps I will order them. I look to see what there is by Jackie Kay in the university library. I will hear her read next week, I know her poetry but have not read Trumpet or The Red Road. My serious house tidying has made me feel somewhat better about being in the house, but here is still the study to be tackled.

The study is a serious job because I must start writing in earnest soon and I am going to have to fit this around teaching and administration. No wonder I am so exhausted. I have a very pleasing photograph of Piaget in his study, surrounded by toppling piles of files and papers. He writes: ‘as you know, Bergson pointed out that there is no such thing as disorder, but rather two sorts of order, geometric and living. Mine is clearly living.’ Mine is certainly living, but, since the entire floor is covered and there is a mixture of papers and drama resources –costumes, props, fabric....- I think that it is rampant –just like my garden which has been almost completely covered in ground elder and bindweed. These two spaces are the living embodiment of my life –no time to keep a lid on things. However, I shall tidy slowly and use no weed killer.

It is half past eight and the combine harvesters are still rumbling across the fields. They may be out with floodlights on this hot dry night. I have put on two loads of washing and moved back into my bedroom. I have taken out the recycling bin ready for tomorrow and listened to The Archers. I have had a lovely long soak in the bath and now potatoes are boiling ready to accompany the remains of yesterday’s ratatouille.

I’m going to watch television –this programme about buildings –there is the Festival Hall and the amazing Pompidou Centre and perhaps the films of street sports. Playful architecture. Rather annoying presenter.

I shall have some supper and probably go to bed quite soon. I have to hold on to the space.

Thank you for the chance to do this.

Uid 127

Share Project

Monday 15th August, 2011

So here we are at the end of the diary year – it seems to have flown by and yet, when I look at the entries, I realise how much has changed since I started writing 11 months ago. One thing I had promised to myself and my family though, even all that time ago, was that I would take August off work and we would spend some time together, firstly sorting some things out in the house, and then having a proper two-week break somewhere else.

I started my annual leave on Monday 1st August, and I had a meeting on the same day, an exam board on the 3rd, another meeting on the 8th, and I spent all day in work on the 12th marking resit exam scripts. A strange definition of annual leave, it has to be said, but that just seems part of the job within the University sector. Still, I did manage to get everything done that I needed to, which left me wonderfully clear to walk away from my office on the 12th, pack the bags, and head off to a sunny British seaside town for two weeks.

And here I am, on the 15th, on the laptop, working once again! I can’t really say that it counts though, because this entry has taken me all of 10 minutes while the children are watching some TV after a wonderful day spent on the beach, building sandcastles and paddling in the sea. I’ve also managed to hand over any and all clearing responsibilities, so I really do have nothing to think about for the next two weeks. I am a little bit worried about how it will all go. Sometimes I think I’ve actually forgotten how to relax, how to let time pass without worrying about work, how to just sit quietly, and let my children set the pace.

Regardless, the life of a University lecturer is still the life I want for myself. I have the option of applying for voluntary severance at the moment, because of the restructuring, and although I seriously considered it for a while, I won’t be filling out the form. There were a few events before the end of July that made me realise that I’m on the right path in this job. I spent some time helping one of my tutees with their resit exam revision, I spent a couple of hours talking to a potential applicant about University and their future in science which they were so grateful for, and I wrote a glowing reference for one of my past students who is going for an absolutely amazing job. I have helped, am helping, and will continue to help these people for years to come, and the thrill of doing so still massively outweighs the loss of a few hours of personal freedom. Let’s be honest – an evening on the sofa watching EastEnders hardly provides the same level of satisfaction

!Uid 136

First day back at work after three weeks leave. Pleased to find pinned to my door a ‘thank you’ card from one of this summer’s graduates. Good to be reminded that we do have some satisfied customers!!

I anticipated coming back to a pile of e mails (>500 in fact) and referral exams to invigilate and mark, but was not expecting that at 8.30 today I would have to quickly review and make an emergency decision to allow a student to defer her exams. Chasing the paperwork for this (submitted last week and logged into the system, but not received by the department) took three senior academic staff half the morning…

First lot of e mail; amongst the junk mail and circulars, quickly scanned and deleted, and the inevitable pleas for assistance from students in a panic about their exams, was a welcome message from a professional body, informing me that changes to our course for next year have been accepted without the need for a formal visit and review. Praise God for smoothing that particular path; I had been concerned as I felt I had rushed the final paperwork just before my holiday. Still waiting on the other professional body but they are unlikely to cause any problems.

Interruption from another student; he has to hand in a portfolio but the member of staff isn’t in her office……Yes I take it off him, give him a receipt, and, as he is one of my personal tutees, we chat for a few minutes. He finishes his work placement next week but rather than have a holiday, has decided to take the tests for graduate entry to medical school in a few weeks time, so will spend his time ‘off’ practicing those.

Just getting back to the e mails when a colleague pops in to compare holiday notes and discuss our respective teenagers, and then talk about some work we are doing together on some of the new modules. As she leaves another appears to collect the portfolio and have a similar conversation about holidays, and as she leaves a third appears with some coursework for me to mark. Brief breathing space where I eat my lunch and do the Sudoku in the local paper I picked up on the train this morning. Notice an article by a graduate from last year who has not found a job yet; luckily not my course but brings to the fore the worries over recruitment and future employment opportunities.

Back to the e mails as another, relatively new, colleague pops in to tell me he caught one of my students cheating in an exam this morning, and to ask about the procedure to be followed. Notice in my e mails one from this student but it is not about the incident, thank goodness, but relates to an assessment of learning needs. I do wonder though if these are connected – this was a fairly high stakes assessment for the student who has struggled for some time and only recently decided to have the needs assessment.

Check and confirm the exams I am to invigilate - tomorrow and Thursday – which means I can’t be involved with Clearing on Thursday morning. We will dip into Clearing briefly to see if we can recruit any high scoring students, though we do not really need any extra numbers at this stage. It is often possible to get students who failed to achieve a place on a medical programme and are looking for something related. Take a phone call from an anxious student who wishes to be considered for transfer from another HEI into our final year, but resist the pressure to make a decision on the phone and promise to look at his paperwork over the next few days.

I collect several items sent to the printer as I have gone through e mails, including some teaching resources, documents to read with a professional eye, induction schedules for the start of term and my Workload allocation report for the summer to sign and return. This reminds me also to sign a card in the office for a colleague who is leaving, and while there I check my leave sheet. I have 13.5 days to use before the end of the academic year (end of August) so I look at my calendar and identify 5 days I can take. I won’t be on leave of course, I shall be writing course documents or papers, but I won’t feel so bad about sneaking the occasional long lunch or early finish in exchange next year. I will, as always, carry 5 days forward and lose the rest of the entitlement.

I realise I need to stop this and go to catch the train. I was intending to write a philosophical report for this last entry, but haven’t got time. Maybe I will come back to it this evening……

Otherwise, farewell and thank you. I look forward to reading your review report and research papers in due course.

Uid 138

A full and frustrating day. I have moved office and been given a new computer - I can't print, the computer is doing strange things, and I can't find anything. I couldn't access any of the FOUR university admin systems that I wanted to use so as to get small irritating things off my desk while I am having an itty-bitty day: two are down and two don't recognise me anymore (because we are all, of course, only recognised by the computer we are using!)

Despite this, I spent three focussed hours on my book (this is my routine: I work on my book from 8-11, and the department can have me after that!), planned a course with a colleague, met with two students, and spent a couple of hours getting data into a reasonable enough form that I can pass it on to two summer student research assistants. They will be looking at the outcomes of three previous student projects: I wish I could remember that ALL students, no matter how good they are, will pass their materials onto me in a mess, and I WILL have to tidy them up. If I remembered this at the time, I would fix the materials while the student is still around - doing it a year or so later is difficult and error-prone.

Very excited at the possibility of doing a project with a clinical professor who wants some software to visualise clinical data - hope that I can get a good enough student to take it on so that he is not disappointed.

Filled in my time-sheet from last week (as we are required to do once a quarter) - I worked 43 hours last week, of which 31 were "institution-funded research". Oh, that all weeks were like that!

I feel semester creeping on. Sigh.

Uid 141

Looking back through the entries, I seem mostly to have been on holiday. And so I was again!

This time it was the middle of a two week holiday so almost no thoughts of work whatsoever.

Before hols, I was worrying about getting all my teaching prep done. Since coming back I am simply ploughing through emails but this middle day was a work void.

Uid 149

It’s Monday, and although it is the vacation period, there’s still a lot to do. The early morning email check enables me to see when the resit exams are on the modules that I’m teaching – not ‘til next week, thankfully. I also scan the messages nervously to see whether anyone is calling me in to do clearing anytime soon. I could do without a few days on the phones in a noisy call centre environment which the university insists we work in, listening to tearful applicants with wavery, quavery voices telling me tearfully about their Ds and Us. Not that we don’t need students, but since my promotion to a personal chair last month I’ve got to get busy applying for money (deadline at the end of the month for one funding agency) and books published (a publisher’s deadline, also at the end of the month). So no holiday for me. No, no-one’s asked me to do clearing yet, thank goodness. This morning;s email also brings me 37 pages of closely spaced 10 point type from a PhD student who I am due to see at 10.00 this morning. There’s just time to glance through it before leaving to meet the said student. Both she and my co-supervisor have been moved to some newly refurbished offices which have a pleasant smell, rather like a carpet shop. It’s all very fresh and jolly. The piece of writing was a very long screed about why she’s using qualitative methods for her PhD, which cranks laboriously through the differences between positivism and interpretivism, and outlines a variety of research methods, including several she’s not using. It reads rather like an extended version of the kind of coursework one might set in an introductory research methods class, where students are asked to compare and contrast different research methods. I try to explain to her that this is not quite what examiners will be looking for and what’s really needed is a more thoroughgoing critical discussion of what she’s actually done. In fact the last few times I’ve encountered this sort of thing as an examiner, my fellow examiners have asked the student to take it out as part of their amendments. Predictably, the student, who is also a colleague, is very much offended. People don’t seem to like being told they’ve got to do something grown up for a PhD, especially if they already work in a university, which seems to be taken as if it were a ‘get out of jail free’ card. After that, I have a slightly more hopeful meeting with a recent graduate from our institution who wants to do some sort of postgraduate work but is unsure what. She has a variety of interests but needs help turning them into a research proposal, or at least researchable questions. We talk about tis a bit and I promise to send her a few examples of research proposals I’ve done so she can see what they look like. Then it’s back to the office to answer some email and to have a quick look through my post. I have another message from a keen final year student who wants to start her project early, but she can’t come in to see me ‘til tomorrow. I’m contacted by a publisher who asks me to referee a book proposal. Strangely enough, the author of the proposal is a personal friend. Funny – he never told me about this. But it should be interesting anyway. Then I take the opportunity to work at home for the afternoon and evening. Still no messages asking me to do clearing. I snap the laptop shut, and pop off, on my way home passing the excavations which will turn into a new university sports hall. It looks so much fun to be pouring concrete and driving excavators. I haven’t done any building work myself for several years and I really miss it. There are occasional bits of work for friends, but sadly no serious projects. I have a section of another student’s PhD to read when I get home, and I t to make some helpful comments in little coloured comments boxes along the margins. I have several postgraduates trying to complete just now, so there’s a lot of this. One of them is handing in this week, so the weekend was spent reading her final draft and getting rid of the greengrocer’s apostrophes, peculiar use of the spacebar and trying to harmonise the cornucopia of different fonts she favours. Got that done last night, but there’s no end to the process. Hey ho, we’re adding intellectual capital. Or that’s the idea anyway. Also at home, I have a look at the comments on the proposal I drafted at the end of last week from various colleagues who’ve read it. OK, I think I can incorporate these, but not tonight. After all, we’ve got until the end of the month for this one. That’s quite a long lead time by my standards. I’ve got to be a lean mean fundraising machine. Before I go to bed I allow myself the luxury of half an hour looking at Land Rovers for sale on Ebay. I’ve wanted one for a while now, and sometimes the yearning becomes so intense it’s almost palpable. Maybe I’ll make some headway with my book tomorrow. Maybe.

Uid 155

First day back after a three weeks leave. This was the first year since I started this job where I have not checked my emails while on leave (in part becuase I was having too much fun!) so I had an absolute mountain to work through. A real mix of the crucial, the frustrating, the banal, and the 'why did they think I would want to know this'? After three hours I now have 142 to follow up, all of which need earnest consideration.

Had a couple of student tutorials - masters dissertations still need to be completed, and students supported. A few of the undergraduates called by too for information and a chat - many of them are bored and want lectures to start again. Had really good news from the NSS survey which was celebrated over a long lunch; catching up with colleagues is one of the nicer parts of returning to work. Have that sinking feeling, though, that all the madness and hard work is about to start again in absolute earnest. I have resolved to enjoy the rest of August as much as I can as I think next year is going to be a very busy one: even more intense than last year

!Uid 157

The first day back after a two week break - and I have an early morning meeting and then I have to deal with the e-mail inbox afterwards! Fortunately the meeting was interesting and went very well, but generated a number of 'to do' tasks. Going through all the e-mails however has taken the rest of the day, and that's just to really priotise what needs urgent attention (and more meetings...), what can be left for another few days and what can be deleted. Before I went away a colleague was telling me about someone he knew who just deleted all the e-mails in his inbox whenever he returned from being away. The idea being that if the e-mails were that important then the person wanting an answer or action would send a new message. Having spent all day going through my e-mails I can certainly see the attraction of this approach.

It's my wedding anniversary today so I'm going home a little early to spend a nice quiet eveing with my husband over a quiet meal and a nice glass of wine.

Uid 158

I returned to work today from three weeks away. One week of annual leave and two weeks working. Unfortunately there was only sporadic email access so there were over 500 in my inbox to digest.

Not only that but I am heavily involved in admissions for my faculty so we are starting to get an idea of the position for the faculty and institution as a whole for next year. It is a juggling act regarding all the different pressures, accommodation, student numbers and financial.

I wasn't too late out of work today... there is no telling what the rest of the week will bring

!Uid 168

15th August

A late entry, but I wanted to see the project completed. The delay arises from the fact I was on holiday in France from the weekend before the 15th through until today (Tues 30th). Having had to take a serious look at my work-life balance I had promised my spouse that I'd do nothing work related during the holiday. I kept to this (almost - having bought 120 mins of wifi time at the campsite to keep up with UK news, I did have the odd quick scan of emails).

Monday 15th was in fact spent on Kerou beach in Brittany. The day primarily consisted of bodyboarding. A passion since I was a child on holidays in Cornwall, we purchased some new-style boards last year which are wider than previous incarnations and feature a slick plastic underside. Following stormy weather over the weekend the tide was pretty reasonable. I was a bit rusty, but timed a few good runs into the beach.

I also played some beach cricket with second child. This has got less enjoyable in the last couple of years, since he takes the sport seriously and is fearsome difficult to get out (until he wilfully spoons me a catch) and spins a tennis ball so far off the sandy surface that I am left swinging at thin air as my stumps take a tumble. The other child has no interest in cricket, but happily entertains himself using a skim-board.

After the beach we returned to our campsite, a facility run by ex-pat Brits. We have hired a static caravan from them. Unfortunately it is positioned under an oak tree and with the acorns starting to fall we were bombarded 24/7 which - on a flat roof - makes for a disturbed night.

The evening was spent sampling some ridiculously-good-for-the-money supermarket red wine and reading. I took an ecclectic mix of books on holiday, trying to catch up with extra-curricular reading which has been somethat lacking this year.

Monday saw me completing Martin Pistorius's amazing biography "Ghost Boy" about his years living with "locked-in" syndrome, before moving on to Mark Radcliffe's "Reelin' in the Years". Ghost Boy was a thought provoking and shocking book, though I wished he'd elected to omit 3 pages overly graphic pages about (sexual) abuse he experienced during his illness before people realised he was aware of his surroundings. Without these pages I'd be much happier to recommend it to friends and family to read. Radcliffe's book is an interesting idea - loosely structured around one record from every year of his life. I enjoy his radio show, but the book turned out to be a disappointment for me.

Anyhow - here endeth my accounts of the 15th of every month during the year. I've enjoyed participating, hope it's useful (it's certainly a truer picture of my life than the fatuous formal reviews we complete one week each year).

Uid 171

Though I was on holiday, visiting my family, I spent about 2 hours late at night catching up on my work email. But I'm not going to spend more of my holiday writing about it, so I'll leave it at that

!Uid 172

It is strange how there still seems to be work to be done even whilst the university is a 'ghost town'. Emails are reduced but when they arrive they seem to be more pressing.

AM worked through another section of a student's MA that I am marking. Can only do it in small sections as the English is quite poor. I seem to actually spend most of my time counting and recounting the number of pages I still have to mark.

PM worked on a journal review. I always wonder if this is work in the sense of my employer seeing it as work. I find the discipline of a review deadline aids in procrastination reduction, yet I still look around the room and see vacuumming to be done.

Late PM, looked over a draft of the university's teaching and learning strategy. Emailed a response about some of the terms used. Holiday already seems like a long time ago.

Uid 179

Monday 15 August 2011

Back to work after a week's holiday at PGL activity camp in Torquay. The boys enjoyed it tremendously, were busy and active all day long, learning new skills - rafting, canoeing, skiing, fencing and more - and making new friends. We tried quite a few as well. I took a day out to visit a student in Dartmouth to discuss his dissertation and afterwards he showed me around the college on a gloriously hot day.

This morning started with deal with emails from students (the results of my weekend 'How's it going?' message). Then started on coding the latest round of interviews. Just pausing now (1.30 pm) to check emails and a light lunch.

Another couple of hours' worth and then out briefly to go to the Co-op and pick up the boys from tennis, then back for some more.

Five o'clock, getting drowsy: time for a walk. I'll take one of the audios with me to listen to while I'm walking.

Back again. Dinner, more emails, preparing a brief book review. Soon it will be time for bath/bedtime stories. There are some insightful chunks on the second audio so I'll start on transcribing that later or tomorrow.

I feel quite good about today. Oh, and I did get an email at the weekend accepting an abstract I'd put in for a conference.

Uid 185

I'm on vacation , with my husband in France. I only read emails but do not DO any work

Uid 187

6:30 AM - Alarm tried to awake me, not too successfully.

7:00 - Finally got out of bed, dressed and ate my usual cinnamon and raisin bagel. Classes do not start until next Monday, but this week is starting to fill up with a variety of meetings. This afternoon I have a meeting to start the budgeting process for a 2-3 week trip to Ireland and England that I'm organizing for Computer Science majors next May. I believe it will be the first international trip for students for the department in a long time, or maybe ever.

7:20 - Checked Facebook and email.

7:35 - Reviewed work turned in overnight from one my Independent Learning (online) students. Her time runs out today at 11:59 PM. It's always interesting how productive students get when their time is about to run out. Unfortunately, there is a lot this student isn't getting, so it's been a lot of emails back and forth. Taking this course on campus may have been a better approach for this student; it would have been easier/quicker to work through the challenges she was having in person, rather than via email. Oh well, I think we're going to make it.

8:00 - Headed into my office.

8:15 - When I arrived I discovered that a fellow faculty member had officially left the building - at least that is what his missing office name plate would seem to indicate. He provided much guidance, support and humor to me as I worked my way through grad school and then as an instructor this last year. I'm going to miss having him as a neighbor, but wish him well in his retirement.

8:20 - Email and checked department snail mail box.

8:45 – 2010-2011 Research data analysis and summarization.

9:00 - Worked with a student that had questions about course work.

11:15 - Research data analysis and summarization.

Noon - email

12:15 PM - Lunch

1:15 - Headed to a meeting to start the budgeting process for a 2-3 week trip to Ireland and England that I'm organizing for Computer Science majors next May.

2:30 - Done with meeting. Waiting for next meeting to start. Checked email and had another email from the online student that is struggling. Responded.

2:50 - Headed to a meeting for freshmen common reader small group discussion leaders. I've not led one of these groups before, but decided to give it a try.

3:45 - Back in my office waiting for a student to arrive so I can answer more questions for him.

5:15 - Online course grading.

6:30 - Headed home

6:45 - email

7:15 - Dinner, visiting with my wife, talking about possibilities for the international trip next May, relaxing.

9:30 - Checked email and found a pair of messages from my struggling online student. She still is not getting it! I don't know how I can be any more specific in my responses to her without actually telling her the exact lines of code she needs to write. I'm trying to resist the temptation to wish midnight was here and I'd not have to worry about responding to further questions from her since today is the end of her allotted time to complete the course. I respond to her, hoping it sinks in this time.

10:00 - Graded online work & further email exchanges with struggling online student.

12:15 AM - Caught up on Facebook.

12:45 - Headed to bed – a bit early for me, but that struggling online student wore me out today!

Uid 204

A 9am lecture, so I was in the office by 8 to make sure I was ready for it. An hour of preparation, two hours of lecture, two hours of tutorial. It's a small class, but a good one.

After lunch my time was divided among three tasks: a student discipline case; some major revision of a course that's taught at an overseas campus under my coordination; and some more data analysis for a teaching-related paper I'm hoping to submit to a conference with a frighteningly close deadline.

At 5pm, one of my calming moments of the week - singing with the campus choir. It's a lovely break from work.

At home, after dinner, I spent a couple of hours working on the agenda for a department meeting, doing some more on a student discipline case, and backing up my files.

All in all, a fairly typical day.

Uid 206

Monday 15th August, the start of a week working on my research at home.

6.40am, switch the computer on. Having had a whole week off work completely,my BlackBerry had been telling me that there were 160-odd emails waiting for me. I sieved through, deleting the mailing list emails that I didn't need, and responding to a handful of emails - just the most pressing ones for now.

Next was the joint editorial with a colleague from another university to finalise, for a special issue of a journal. A couple of email exchanges between us got that finished & sent off.

Then...ahhh, bliss...the rest of the day to read, think and write. As is often the case, it turns out to be a sobering reminder of how students feel; I kind of know what I want to say, the ideas are in there somewhere, but they just won't come out on the page coherently. I move away from the computer, lay on the bed with paper and pen and try to work out a logical order for this bit of the paper. Return to the computer, and spend time trying to construct something around the new plan, to flesh it out, to see the details that are needed. Go and practice the latest song on my guitar - it always helps, somehow. A colleague tells me it's to do with using a different part of my brain. I don't know, but it feels as if stopping thinking consciously about the work can allow the ideas to figure themselves out. Progress, however small, is often made after a tune. Back to the computer for some more wrestling with words that don't want to string together. I'm glad I don't have a deadline looming for this.

Such was my day. I sometimes think that if I wasn't married, I probably wouldn't have much of a life outside of work, as I wouldn't have any reason to stop. Cooking tea, hearing about a day's work in a completely different sector, watching TV together - the mundane stuff makes a difference. I suspect most academics probably have a slightly obsessive streak (you kind of need it to ever get through a PhD), and for me at least, it's probably only kept in check by other people. Bed time, and my brain vaguely returns to research-related thoughts, but in that falling asleep, dreamy kind of way (and I have been known to wake up in the early hours, think, "I'm doing that wrong, it should be this!" and return to sleep). Tomorrow is another day. Progress, however small, will be made.

Uid 213

I'm going to be very sorry to see the Share project go - it's been wonderful to take the time to reflect and record once a month. Reading the report has made me feel much less alone at times!

This 15th I was on holiday in Shropshire, a lovely way to end the year of recording. I went into Ludlow with my husband, and had a not particularly nice lunch at a pub - Ludlow overall seemed a bit disappointing on the food front after all I'd heard about it. We pottered around a bit, and then we had some truly spectacular organic ice cream - apple and cinnamon for me - from a local dairy.

After Ludlow, we drove up to Stokesay Castle. Yes, I feel there is a bit of a cliche of academics who work in heritage going to a English Heritage property on holiday. It was lovely though - very well managed and maintained. Free audio tour too, which I dipped in and out of rather than listening straight through. It was good to see a lot of kids playing around the castle.

Back to our holiday cottage, where we read for a while and relaxed. Then we walked out onto the farm's land and fed their donkeys pieces of apple. Certainly not a usual Share entry for me! A lovely dinner of local cheeses and a sound night's sleep without any of the usual London noises of buses and sirens. I need this type of break before we plunge back into term, and it's something to remember and hold onto on the wet winter days walking onto campus

!Uid 214

This last Share diary date I spent on holiday in a little cottage hidden down a country lane in the Shropshire/Herefordshire borders. My wife (also an academic) and I live in central London so every year we try to escape off for at least a week in the country to get some fresh air and quiet; we also take the opportunity to hire a car and get out and about and see things that are not normally accessible to us by public transport (we don't own a car because of the expense and hassle of running a car in central London). The cottage was on an old farm, and the contrast from our normal lives was profound: donkeys gently braying in the background and chickens pecking outside the front door (which we left unlocked throughout our stay!) are just not part of our normal lives in London. So on this 15th we got up late, ate a breakfast of beautiful local food from a farm shop, climbed into our shiny hire car (nicknamed the 'cider bus' on account of the number of cider makers we managed to visit and buy from on route - the final drive back home was with a rattling boot laden with over 10 litres of cider and nearly as much local cheese), drove into the local market town and wandered about (nothing quite like a Monday that you're taking off when others are working - it always feels to illicit), and then rolled on to visit an lovely semi-ruined castle (in which I tried not to think about work and instead reminisced annoyingly to my wife about visiting the same castle twenty years ago when I was a child). Then we toddled off home via the farm shop to sit in the sun outside our cottage and eat more local cider and cheese. For the entire week we did not check email, facebook or twitter (nor miss any of these), barely heard any news or saw any media, watched no TV (a few DVDs in the evening hardly count), but rather read a lot, ate a lot, slept a lot, walked a bit, and chatted to friendly local people, dogs, cats, chickens, donkeys and sheep.

Uid 217

Something of a fragmented day, today, but I'd like to be a little more reflective for the last of these diary entries. I realise, looking back at them, that the various 15ths haven't been days when teaching practice was very prominent in my thinking. I suppose that might be just happenstance, but it also shows that the lives we lead are sufficiently crowded with other things - excessive pointless admin, research pressures, meetings with students on personal rather than pedagogical matters, various (usually intrusive) pressures from the hierarchy - that the teaching tends to be done in survival mode most of the time, and not reflected on in the way we would prefer, many of us. Of course, CPD events ought to offer opportunities for such reflection, but I have pretty much - despite ongoing willingness over the years - given up on attending events organised by learning-and-teaching units. They were crap at my first institution, and they are crap at my current one - often simply because the arts-and-humanities academic present in the room is usually the only one, and the scientists' or medics' engagement with their students is so wildly different from ours (their practice often sounds so primitive or detached to us, for want of more generous words), and the conversation so rarely addresses, with the precision needed, the issues that face us. Also, sadly, the learning-and-teaching people seem so clueless about the conditions in which we teach: the chronic lack of time to prepare, the windowless lousiness of the teaching rooms, the inevitable failure of the AV equipment (and the standard student assumption that the problem is the incompetence of the academic), the actual time it takes to prepare a good, informative, structured-yet-spacious seminar or write a good lecture that addresses a subject properly. I've never got the process of writing a new lecture below three full days, despite the glorious advice I got as a beginning lecturer at my previous institution - this from a professor of education who later served on a government panel about curricula - that a good lecture could be done in half a day because all you had to do was brainstorm, organise your thoughts, and write it. This statement, wholly ignorant as it appeared to be of the work required to give an adequate and informative lecture in the various fields of the new lecturers present at the time, was received with the contempt it deserved by the entire room. So much for CPD. Pity, because it ought, were it done differently, to be of real value.

Nor do we as colleagues have time or space to reflect much on these things. Far too much of our time is taken up defending ourselves from management or negotiating whatever departmental politics and position-taking is on the go at a given moment. More to the point, perhaps, we have no staff common room in my department, nowhere to put a kettle on in a communal space and have a few minutes to talk. Nobody has lunch these days, other than a sandwich eaten alone in front of the screen of e-mail. So we don't tend to discuss practice in informal ways.

Presumably the Tory acquisition of 'the student experience' from the US right wing will mean that there will be a new shift in the way we are ordered about. I assume that what I am about to experience this autumn - a blessed semester's normal departmental rotational research leave - will soon be a thing of the past, that the only research leave we get will be when we achieve something from the diminishing pot of external funding. This will be very problematic, because (as every research-and-teaching-active academic knows) a semester's leave isn't just essential for catching up with the chronic backlog of research activity, it's also valuable for your teaching practice, because you come back refreshed, and there is some teaching you haven't done for two years when you next come to do it, and you adjust and change things accordingly with that little more perspective. I must say that I have long had a utopian wish that someone would give me a semester's leave with the strict instruction that I'm not allowed to do any research for once, but that I must completely reinvent my modules, write new sets of lectures, rethink my seminars: that would be bliss. But it will never happen, since it could only work if it were in place of a semester's normal teaching and admin - it could never take the place of research time - and nobody is ever going to offer that as an option.

OK, enough rambling. Today was a bitty one, really. I spent it at the British Library, a rare treat (I realised, noting that my card needed renewing, that it had been nearly a year, which is partly to do with the nature of my current research but also partly to do with the murderously pressured teaching/admin year (see the second-semester entries in particular). I was working on the Australian-funded research project I've mentioned previously, with the aim of meeting my RA on Wednesday to see what she has been discovering. It has been a good day of catching up with the 'essential reading' lists she has been giving me, though it was interrupted by slightly too many coffees with professional friends and acquaintances to discuss research seminars and so forth (also just to catch up with people I've not seen for months). Lovely day, too, so we could have coffee outside.

My problematic PhD student owed me a piece of writing, which finally arrived - it is messy, underconfident, vague, evasive and brief, which isn't exactly uplifting. I'm worried and frustrated about this: the person has AHRC funding, but I am not at all clear that the thesis will get written by the four-year cut-off point - and obviously this is a major problem for the supervisor as well as for the student. Later in the week, we will have what will inevitably be a difficult meeting as I try to be good and bad cop all at once, trying gently to explain what's needed while also pointing out that not finishing within the statutory four years simply isn't an option.

I bumped into a colleague who had just had a supervision with one of her own two PhD students (she is a beginning lecturer, so these are her first two): the one she had just seen is the dream student - hardworking, cheerful, engaged, extremely clever - but she was fretting about the other one, who had great marks from her previous (American) institution but who, it turned out, didn't appear to know how to write sentences, what semi-colons were for, etc. I tried to reassure her that this is normal and that good PhD students eventually find their way, so she shouldn't fret unduly, but I wonder how frank I was being. (I've mentioned the issue of student writing skills, of the lack of them, before, I know, but it is clearly a problem we all face pretty much all the time now.)

I heard today that I have been fortunate with two research-funding applications: one month of my upcoming leave will be spent, generously funded, at a German university with a relevant archive; and a networking grant application for which I am CI has been successful: oddly, I feel more anxious than excited about the latter, since it will involve me in a considerable amount of work over the next two years, and I am already grimly overloaded with various projects - above all the large edition I've mentioned previously. But it would be churlish, to say the least, not to be grateful and relieved at research-funding success, since whatever the impact of the 'student experience' on academics' lives over the next few years, it is clear that careers lacking external funding success will be brief ones.

I happened to see my head of department across the library floor, so went over to tell her about the AHRC success. 'Oh good', she said, not the slightest bit interested: 'look', she added, anxiously, pointing at the latest e-mail on her screen, 'the NSS results are in'.

That encounter seems a representative place with which to stop. I hope these diary entries have been of use to your project. Good luck with it. I'll be very interested indeed to see the outcomes - and I'll rather miss the regular writing of these entries, I realise....

Uid 221

On leave, staying on a farm in Devon.

Uid 224

In my city it almost never snows. Today we had a "one in 50 year event", and our university was closed because of the snow. Of course, this meant I could get on with some overdue work without having interuptions!

6:30am A friend woke me up and invited me to go for a walk in the snow, followed by coffee. A great start to the day!

8:30am Checking emails and making sure that people know what is happening with cancellations.

10am Instead of meeting with tutors about upcoming labs, I emailed them instructions.

10:30am Time to start working on two papers that are due at the end of the month.

1pm I get to have lunch at home with my family for a change. Then the neighbours drop by to borrow snow shovelling gear, and it becomes and extended lunch hour.

2:30pm Back to work, mainly doing research for one of the papers, but also fending off emails inbetween.

6:30pm Dinner time, and a friend drops by to celebrate the "day off" with us.

8pm Back to work, clearing emails and making some headway on the paper.

11:30pm Enough work for one day. Hopefully it will snow again tomorrow and I can have another productive clear day!

Reflecting on the last year, almost all of my diary entries have begun by saying that this particular day is unusual. It has indeed been an unusual 12 months, with three severe earthquakes and two closures due to snow (for the first time in decades), but this is the joy of academic life: it's not routine, and I wouldn't swap it for any other job

!Uid 226

Went to the beach over the weekend. We stayed over Sunday night so as to avoid the traffic and drove back to the city this morning, arriving late at work. Today is Spend Out day - the last day people at my level can spend money for this fiscal year. Since I'm done with my spending I'm just filling in time today, being available in case of unexpected occurrences. Of course there is the endless email to deal with as well as a conference deadline looming for which I plan to submit a paper and a panel proposal, as well as organizing an affiliated event so there is plenty to do. But there is a certain sense of relaxation among those who have completed their work. Coincidentally (or perhaps not so coincidentally), my next batch of 35 proposals to review landed in my inbox this noon. The sense of completion was fleeting.

Spent a bit of time inviting people to a workshop and chasing down those who have not responded. Took my annual privacy and security training (online) and more email. That's it for today.

Uid 227

Well - now on maternity leave as junior turned up early..... very strange trying to stay away from emails and work...... starting to feel slightly distanced from work for the first time in years. The students have been brilliant though - very supportive and lots of well wishes. Just some collegues still emailing with requests for help......

Uid 231

Started at around 8am by going through the Turnitin reports for a research student ready to submit, all was fine, very fine in fact, thank goodness as I hadn't looked before. Then spent two hours going through the the Chapter Three of her dissertation for the third time, still picking up minor mistakes and thinking of new angles for the discussion. As this is an Asian student, who is very good, but I am really torn about the English editing bit, how much should I polish, I really can't help myself but am I helping her? On the other hand I received a request along with an abstract to examine a PhD thesis tonight and my first thought was, I do hope this is edited before I read it because the language was tortuous and the idea of 100,000 words of torture was not appealing - dilemma dilemma....

Anyway by 11am I was into my research transcripts - wonderful, rivetting stuff. I am doing research on the world of casual/ sessional/part-time (depending on which country you are in) academics and I spent time today continuing the coding transcipts from course coordinators who manage tutors. Having spent yesterday, Sunday, doing the transcripts of the Heads of Discipline and Heads of School, all of whom had the power but no knowledge of sessional academics, I was so excited to read how much the course coordinators, those who work directly with sessionals, know about and care for sessionals. Every second line was a potential quotation for publication. In terms of a way of passing time, this has to be among the best times for an academic, going through your data and being excited by it.

Anyway, this went on until about 6pm when I stopped and looked at email - lots of annoying problems and distractions for an hour or two, including the invitation to examine the thesis.

By 7.30pm, I was geared up to sit down and write a one page summary of four separate research projects about the one research problem, postgraduate accounting students. I continued with the report until about 10am. It was hard but worthwhile condensing four major projects into one page as I had to once again go through the results and it brought back thoughts and ideas for that particular project. Have to use it for a workshop on Thursday as a backdrop to turn on accounting lectures to making their teaching and assessments more attuned to higher order cognitive and behavioural skills, in sum to be exciting and relevant. Am really looking forward to the workshop but so much work and thinking to do beforehand. And meanwhile have to get prepared for tomorrow for three unrelated meetings and fixing up my computer problems - I hate computer problems, they make me cry and feel helpless - nothing else makes me cry - have I gone over the top? I mean if only computer problems make me cry and not world problems?

So that was August 15, will sign off at 11pm, watch the late news, clean the kitchen, do some sudokos and pass out. Still in my pyjamas from getting out of bed this morning

!Uid 237

Diary entry 12

Monday 15th August

Context:

The last two weeks have been rather leisurely in a lot of ways, I visited my family for a week during which time I got an essay written (only a short one, but still), and I have relaxed and even had the time to read a novel (The Book Thief, I recommend it highly!) rather than academic papers and chapters...

This week though it's time to get back to analysing some data and writing publications.

Content:

Today started at 12am in my office at work (yes, I was actually in work on a Sunday evening - without any specific deadline; when there's no-one around, I can have the music I want on at a decent volume and get into flow). I left work at around 7am and went home for some sleep, and started working again at 11am. I was about to get on with my own stuff when I realised I had forgotten to feedback on a Masters dissertation (which I'd promised for this morning), cue an hour or so doing that (using comment mode in Word), and then I was exhausted again, so I went back to bed for a few hours. Got up, ate, and started working again at 5ish, by which time I was just feeling plain tired. Staying up all night is not the best method of writing academic papers - I will learn one day. :)

General feedback

I have enjoyed taking part in this study. I think the research is important in bringing to light some of the demands of academia, and I would be very interested in hearing about the results. I liked the monthly write-up in particular; I found solace in the experiences of others, which is great as a junior lecturer finding my way. Thanks.

Uid 239

A lot at stake today in terms of checking our student numbers. Glad to be in and showing willing as some others not here! A few, but difficult, students appeals to deal with. I follow my instincts this time. I'll have to see what other staff think about that!

Lots to think about in terms of future plans which lay heavy on the mind. Big decisions to make which can have big impact on the future and my own future is caught up in it somewhere.

Aware of the dangers of taking big steps in one direction to deal with smaller things which lay in another direction. The day and the mood reminds me of Hamlet.

"And thus the native hue of resolution

Is sicklied o'e with the pale cast of thought..."

Uid 244

This was the first day of real official work after the summer vacation, and straight back into work with a bang.

9am drop kids at daycare, since school does not start until Wednesday

10am first meeting of the term, talking to an international MSc student about the letter he needs for the migration office for a VISA extension, and then about how to apply for a thesis project.

11am meeting on developing a strategic model for educational excellence of the faculty of technology and natural sciences. The idea is to convince the Faculty Board that subject didactics/educational research is an important component of a long term strategy for staff and educational development. The administrative director of the technical arm of the Uni was there and very positive to the idea, so this might actually get some traction higher up.

12am continuation of discussion on how to link educational development, staff development and encourage innovative teaching and learning practice in the Faculty over lunch. Seemed positive, we are making progress towards a quite unique model of renewable innovative practice and scholarly teaching and learning activity if we can get this off the ground.

13:15 meeting to discuss the development of new educational quality assurance proceses for the IT department. Some good progress here also.

14:15 a meeting on enhancing the democratic imput from international students into the running of the University. We are a group of programme coordinators who are working on this with the financial support of the faculty and also the student unions. Quite exciting.

15:00 back in my ofice trying to write some more on the proposed Faculty model for sustainable educational excellence.

16:30 opps running late to get the kids at school.

23:05 realise that I am really late with my reviews of papers for the next conference I promised to review for, they are due tonight. Drat, five papers to review, I guess I might be up for a few more hours.

Uid 245

I worked at home in the morning, writing up a summary of recent reading. Took the bus in to town and got a hair cut. Met two students about their dissertations and talked to a PhD student about when she can hand in. Ran home - was pretty stiff and it felt hard.

Uid 246

Our fall semester starts one week from today. I should be panicked considering all that needs to be done between now and then, but I've gone through this process so many times now that I really don't worry about it much. As long as I'm ready for day 1, it will all be OK.

Today was mainly about getting the office clean, planning my daily fall schedule, writing my syllabi, wrapping up loose ends on a research project, and playing basketball with friends I hadn't seen all summer. After being in Greece all summer, it feels good to get back to a more normal schedule.

Uid 256

Diary August 15th 2011

A truly dreary day, for a part-time, retired academic.

I began somewhat unmotivated, with a long lie. Up, ablutions complete and in action by 0.9.40.

40 mins. First of all, struggling to make suggestions for the net bid to the National Research Council in Taiwan. The three-way tension here is between what is acceptable for funding in Taiwan, what can contribute to the promotion prospects of my collaborator, and what is likely to prove attractive and rewarding for me.

30 mins. Now laundering a second marking of project work which for me was no way SCQF level 10, but where my module leader and first marker/supervisor, felt she saw signs of what was needed, between the lines. Eventually I have been coerced to sign up to a Pass, provided I make my judgement of the weakness and omissions quite clear in the report which goes to the Exam Board. A difficult time getting tactful wording which allows me to retain my integrity.

90 mins. Take time to transfer files from laptop, which is getting jammed up, to my secondary desktop upstairs. Sort them out into folders - partly – at the same time. Feel a lot safer, but not yet fully organised in being tidy in file arrangement. Must get on with second marking.

30 mins. Now second marking a delightful postgraduate project, same supervisor and first marker. No doubt in either of our minds that it’s a Pass. But it takes her three pages of text to provide feedback and explain judgement. It looks as if I should follow suit. Yet I was brought up with Jack Dowie, who insisted on no more than 6-7 pieces of explained feedback/feedforward per assignment, to ensure that they would be read. I’m not inclined to engage further over this one, so soon after the last.

Lunch

40 mins. Then writing up this blessed second marking. A long and tedious job to be as full as the first marker. I’m not at all convinced of this. I believe in full feedback, preferably formatively when the student has the opportunity to profit from it. But this work has been completed for almost two months now. It is not to be followed by a similar project for more than a year. I feel I am obliged by the system, and my wish to continue to be employed (at a pittance)to produce feedback which will not be read and won’t be acted upon. It’s a bit dispiriting. And takes 40 minutes!

45 mins. I allow myself a walk along to the bank, for fresh air, and to clock up those steps per day that the medics insist I record on my pedometer.

35 mins. Clear up today’s e-mails to date. Tempting call for papers for an online journal.

20 mins. Explore that, then see that there’s a fee to be paid to publish. Not on for a part-timer.

40 mins. Surprise and welcome visit from grandchildren.

Then early evening meal, with grand-daughter going to dancing class.

Watched TV news, and then searched for a flight to Toronto for a recently bereaved neighbour who wants to go to a family wedding and fly direct.

20 mins. Then write up this diary to date, for today.

35 mins. E-mails again. Almost cleared and up to date.

And now I grow weary, lack motivation, and decide at 19.50 to allow myself to read my library book. I should be starting back on the overdue handbook on Tools of Enquiry for the Business School. Tomorrow I will be beginning to panic. But the system has overcome the workaholic in me. Too high a proportion of what has to be done nowadays is dreary bureaucracy; too little is rewarding in terms of directly serving student learning. The problem gets worse in July/August, when contact with real students who need real facilitation to achieve exciting and self-satisfying learning is minimal if not, as in my case at the moment, non-existent. And it’s a good library book. Time to sign off. Maybe time to sign off permanently?

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And now I grow weary, lack motivation, and decide at 19.50 to allow myself to read my library book. I should be starting back on the overdue handbook on Tools of Enquiry for the Business School. Tomorrow I will be beginning to panic. But the system has overcome the workaholic in me. Too high a proportion of what has to be done nowadays is dreary bureaucracy; too little is rewarding in terms of directly serving student learning. The problem gets worse in July/August, when contact with real students who need real facilitation to achieve exciting and self-satisfying learning is minimal if not, as in my case at the moment, non-existent. And it’s a good library book. Time to sign off. Maybe time to sign off permanently?

Uid 257

I am half way through a couple of weeks of proper holiday this month. I say ‘proper’, since I am in another country, although this serves also as a family visit. My wife’s sister went over to the States and married a local guy. They are based in north Delaware. He is a strange combination of being quite an anglophile but also a bit of an effervescent armchair (although he did venture out of the area recently and join an anti-Obama demo in DC) ‘Tea-Partier’, so we have some interesting debating points from the time to time one of us couples visits the other, although they do not get very far down into depth of analysis (he did not go to university), sometimes quickly becoming an alcohol-fuelled shouting match (at least we have common ground on the cultural value of british ale and pubs and the contribution of the successful micro-brewery industry in the US). Today we are all travelling up north-west to the Poconos, higher ground more inland in Pennsylvania. One of the frequent violent and heavy thunderstorms of our two-week stay kicks off as we depart early pm. It is so bad that Rush Limbaugh’s syndicated network TalkRadio show is interrupted by an official klaxon-heralded government warning about flash-flooding and for people in the region to avoid going out on roads awash in water. Limbaugh not broadcasting locally would be blissfully unaware and his continuous rant about Big Government and spending tax dollars carried on before and after the interruption without us missing much. It is quite impressive that he can go on and on about the same subject on a three-hour show a number of times a week, week after week - indeed, it sounded the same when we visited the US two years ago - but it was probably not crucial that we did not catch all of the show: the almost continuous crackling on the broadcast from lightning discharges also made it unlistenable and we switched over. After a two-hour drive, we arrived at the holiday home, a delightful house with lawn adjoining a small lake, equipped with a rowing boat, pedallo, but also a flock of Canada geese who liked the lawn, a hot tub and a big fridge and freezer for storing cocktail ingredients. It is as humid here as nearer the Atlantic coast but not as hot, only getting into the lower 80’s Fahrenheit in the day. The higher ground inland here is also not ridden with the ‘insurgent’ tiger mosquito, which plagues us all back nearer the coast. Unlike indigenous mosquitoes and, for instance, ones we find in the UK, which are fairly plodding, the tiger ones are very quick, persistent, voracious and deliver a nastier bite, coming out in the open well before the sun goes down and all day lurking in the shelter of the plentiful wooded areas surrounding suburbia here. Recent reports suggest that the tiger mosquito has been working its way further into Europe and is in Belgium now - see http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-14613140 . The only downside of the location of the holiday within the holiday is (apart from the goose poop) reports of the indigenous black bears becoming more proactively aggressive, dampening our enthusiasm for setting out hiking in the State parks in the area.

Uid 258

I'm not sure what's happened to this summer. All I seem to have done is work. I had plans for long bike rides in between reading and working on a new project ... but as it is I'm just scrabbling to get a journal article finished after a summer of what colleagues describe as 'admin' but I think that diminishes it. What some describe as admin includes looking after the pastoral needs of students taking resits, ensuring that the MAsters course I run is brilliant and recruits well,carrying out external examiner duties develop course materials, attend meetings ... it would be descibed as 'management' in any other job.

Mind you, today I went to get my hair cut, and rushed round town finding random bits of plastic to put into the goody bags which will be handed out at my daughter's birthday party on Sunday. Then from 12 noon I sat at my desk and answered student and staff questions via phone and email which varied from the moronic ("Is there a minimum number of references which should be in my dissertation"?) to tragic ("due to the burial of my father, can I have an extension?") to the entirely practical ("I plan to work part-time and study for an MA. Could you tell me what the time commitment in terms of lectures will be?"). Several hours later I have dealt with these and other queries and crack on with finishing the journal paper. Which I do, but the super-efficient online submission process foxes me, so that's tomorrow's job (where it took the best part of three hours).

In the evening I go for a run, bump into a friend in the woods and do an inpromptu hillwork session. I'd been looking forward to going for a run all day

Uid 260

I get up early and take my dogs out for a good walk. I return, pack my bag and bid my wife farewell before heading off for a medical appointment. Two hours later I get to my flat, unpack my bag, shopping, and my desktop computer which has had a hard drive transplant. I order a taxi for 11:15 to take me to the Consulting Rooms where I am to have a fluorescein angiogram.

I just have time to reconnect the desktop computer to its myriad cables and peripherals before the taxi arrives. I get to my appointment (11:40) in good time. To my amazement I am called by a nurse at 11:40 bang on the dot - this is definitely a first. I have become so accustomed to the medical profession keeping me waiting that I come equipped with reading materials - today it looks as though I shall not need to read the current issue of Foreign Affairs. The nurse fusses about taking my blood pressure, putting Tropicamide drops in my eye, searching for a vein, inserting a canula in my right arm - only to find that she's not found a good vein before she successfully inserts one in my left arm. She reviews the dilation of my pupil - I tell her that I am on a strong Pilocarpine regime and she will probably need more Tropicamide to dilate my pupil. She puts some more in and sends me off to the waiting area for the drops to take effect and my pupil dilate.

I have just managed the first couple of short pieces in Foreign Affairs before she returns to review the state of dilation. "Nothing's happened!", she says and trots off to get some more Tropicamide. This is repeated at 20 minute intervals until at 12:40 she announces that clearly my pupil is as wide as it's going to get. I go in to see the docotor who is to perform the angiogram. He sucks his teth a bit and says that there is just enough dilation for the camera to take clear pictures. He takes a few photographs of my retina. The nurse injects a big syringeful of fluorescein dye through the canula and the doctor proceeds to take photographs of my retina at 1 minute intervals. He shows me the photos as he takes them and comments on the state of my retina - he observes "leakage" in a couple of places. He tells me that the dye will temporarily make me look a little jaundiced and that I should expect my urine to turn bright yellow for up to 36 hours. He will forward the results to my Consultant for her to review. I am fairly sure this will mean a series of Lucentis injections into my eye but I am not bothered by that - the thought of an intravitreal injection is far more daunting in the prospect than the reality. It's now 1pm and I am done with medics - I summon a taxi and return to my flat.

Back at my flat I discover that I have my battery of eye drops but one is missing - the Pilocarpine. Luckily my wife is working from home today - I phone her and she agrees to post the drops to me. I should be working on the final draft of an article but I have a computer that is but a husk - it's nice new hard disk has nothing on it. I set about installing Windows and all my software from scratch. Installing Vista from disk was not too long but I need to download all the updates and service packs - I swear that these are bigger than the original program. This is a very lengthy process despite my fast broadband connection and the computer has to be restarted innumerable times. Finally, once that is done, I steadily begin with all the other programs I need - this whole process take up the afternoon and evening.

While my computer is busy doing its own thing, I phone Dr Bluestocking. We launched our own journal 10 days ago. British academic publishing in my field involves the traditional process of writing an article, submitting it to a journal and awaiting the result. Not so with American publishing in the field - American academics are encouraged by their Deans to submit their articles to anything up to 100 publications simultaneously. What ensues is a battle between journal editors wanting to fill their journals with papers they wish to publish and academics looking to see if they can get a better offer elsewhere. Journal editors set tight deadlines for acceptance and this prompts authors to request "expedited review" from those journals that have not yet made a decision. This whole bear garden has now been semi-automated by the Berkeley Electronic Press which runs a journal submission system called ExpressO. Authors upload their article to ExpressO and select the journals to which they wish ExpressO to submit it. ExpressO charges authors $2 per journal but makes no charge to the journals receiving articles. The ExpressO system handles all requests for expedition, rejections and acceptances - it's very efficient.

Dr Bluestocking is Editor-in-Chief of our journal and decided that we would use ExpressO. We had no idea how many people would choose to submit their articles to our journal - we are unranked and unknown but have the advantage of being peer-reviewed while most American journals are student edited. August is reckoned to be the doldrums for American journal submissions - March/April is high season. Dr B is unsure whether to be ecstatic or dismayed - we have received 20 submissions in the first week. That doesn't sound too bad until you consider that American journal articles are much longer than British ones - 20,000 words is the average. We are on a steep learning curve - it soon becomes apparent that with many articles we will start receiving requests to expedite our review within 24 hours of their original receipt. We have 5 in-house colleagues and an extended Board (mainly American) of another 15 academics and judges. Dr B's plan was that initial screening should be carried out in-house - if thought interesting then all five in-house members would read before submitting to two referees for peer review. The burden had already fallen heavily on Dr B and me - one colleague is working in Arizona until mid-September and two others are on vacation.

We have no experience of how many offers we need to make to get an acceptance. I have told Dr B that we can afford to be picky - I forecast that we would receive 1,000 submissions in our first year. Top American journals receive as many as 5,000 submissions a year! I emailed a friend at an American University who serves on our editorial board and asked him to inquire of their review what their ratio of offers to acceptances was - his reply was 4 to 1. I impart this intelligence to Dr B, we share our thoughts on the latest submissions and discuss whether we might consider commissioning some articles. Dr B is very excited by an article submitted by a Latina feminist who is also a leading novelist. Her first name is Ixta - we spend five minutes debating how that might be pronounced since Dr B wants to phone her up.

I watch Newsnight and leave my computer installing more updates overnight ... and so to bed.

Uid 266

Today was meant to be one where I did a full, hard shift of data bashing, towards getting a couple of decent papers published for the rapidly upcoming REF deadline. But the children decided, the evening before, that they wanted to camp out overnight with their friends on the grass at the end of our cul de sac. So instead, the day started with me being woken at 4a.m. from my sleeping bag on the sofa bed in the sitting room by my eldest daughter tapping on the window to be let in because she'd had enough of life under canvas. The younger one followed suit at 5.30, disgruntled that the elder had left her behind (even though she'd been fast asleep at 4).

So as it turned out, I finally got up at 10.15 when a couple of Jehovah's Witnesses rang the doorbell (they got short shrift from me). The rest of the morning consisted of dealing with all the stuff they'd slept in (straight in the washing machine), taking down the tent and trying to reduce the amount of mud attached to it. This was followed by lunch, which by this point in the summer holidays I can do without thinking about it - 2 eggs in cups and toast soldiers for the younger daughter, beans on toast for the elder, milk to drink, and whatever I can be bothered to cobble together for myself - during which my wife came home from work.

So in the afternoon I finally got around to going up to the smallest bedroom which we have just turned into a study/office/whatever you call them these days, to continue my crunching of a large data set collected in a flume in the Netherlands last year. I'd figured out an appropriate protocol for processing the data on one set, and was now applying to another to see if it gave consistent results. Of course, it didn't, so them had to do a bit of going back and forth between the data sets, tweaking the approach so that it made sense and was defensible and gave properly comparable outcomes. Then repeated for datasets 3-8, the method finally becoming set in stone by about set 6. Spent much of this time wondering whether I was just climbing further and further up Mount Obscurity with my Uncle Pedantic and Aunty Pointless, but felt I had to carry on now as, like Macbeth, I am "stepp'd in so far that, should I wade no more, returning were as tedious as go o'er". I've also promised myself that once I get the current list of papers and proposals to which I am committed done, I'll try to focus on a list I've been nurturing of things that I would find exciting and worthwhile, because I've been getting a feeling of "what's the point?" a bit too much over the last couple of years, and if I don't have a go at them now I never well. Trouble is, for me, once ideas come out of my head they lose a little bit of their magic (which is probably really just vagueness) but I'll have to put up with that.

Tea time arrived, and I realised that I've grown to enjoy this working from home mularky, but probably only because it feeds the demon of misanthropy that often takes control of me. After a two week holiday, when I didn't touch a computer, still less a mobile phone, I've been experimenting with a two-week email holiday, trying to focus on analysing data and writing papers. But of course, there were some things that needed doing - a PhD student needing final drafts reading before submitting, a grant proposal being prepared with a colleague, a paper I promised someone I'd read and return with comments. So I've been looking at my email inbox as a kind of one-way mirror, dealing with the things I want/need to, but pretending I'm not there for all the other stuff. Next year, I think I'll try and carve out three straight weeks of solid break and stick to it. I read a thing in the paper the other day by some metropolitan media chattering class type, saying have you noticed how no one takes a complete holiday now, we're all constantly checking our blackberries and emails etc. etc. etc. Thank goodness I don't live on the same planet as she does. If I ever partake of a blackberry that doesn't come off a bramble bush, preferably stewed with apples and covered in crumble and custard, could someone please shoot me?

After tea, I went back up to my garrett and continued my playing with numbers. Said good night to the children at around 9, then finished and went downstairs at 10, watched a bit of the news, then to bed.

As this is the last of these, can I just say how much I've enjoyed doing them? It's been so nice to blether on without feeling like I'm boring someone (although no doubt I have been). It's been very therpeutic! Thank you very much for the opportunity and all the best for the rest of this research project - I'd be very interested to see the outcomes. All best wishes.

Uid 268

So this is the last entry of the year. It has been quite a year.

Although I have enjoyed many things, the overwhelming effect is of a harsh environment and one in which things are changing at a desperate pace.

The jovial ho-hum self deprecation of a diary page doesn't quite capture the acute consciousness of being in a university that operates as a global business within a specific and volatile political and economic context. One can't forget it here. It raises constant questions about one's own complicity in that wider context, and while it can be exciting at times, it is also, at times, bitter, a marathon, lacking in joy.

But one lives in hope and holds tight to what matters.

I had just returned from a holiday on Aug 15th and was therefore raring to go. I worked hard on a chapter. The chapter seems to grow and grow as I work on it, requiring ever more reading, but I suppose this is the nature of it, and the fascination with it. I would be very happy to do the reading, if I had eleven or so selves to do it with.

Note to self: is SLEEP really necessary?

(I think I am beginning to sound a little manic. I don't really lurch from super-energy to depression. Or do I? Hm)

I also blitzed an article (co-written) that has just been accepted with only a few changes that I was determined not to let linger. This one's possibly for the REF, even if co-written.

After this frenzy of activity, I had the sad task of reading and commenting on work by a postgraduate student who is clearly not progressing as required. The particularly difficult thing is that there are grains of interest in the work... one feels that something could be done with it, but that this student is unlikely to do it. Or at least, not in this context. Difficult and slightly distressing.

Well, indeed, dear diary, I was quite pleased with Mon 15th August's work, but it was about 11 hours' worth, so one would hope so.

All best, dear researchers. I hope you got what you wanted from it.

Uid 281

Annual leave is a lovely thing. If only I actually got leave (as in no work) rather than just compressed days. Anyway in Norfolk for a short break. As we were out with friends for the day I wasn't driving so managed to read in the car (new inspection copy) and check emails on the new given blackberry (amazing how it arrived just before I went on holiday!). Destination Southwold which gave plenty of time.

Arrived and walked down the pier and also then down the promenade before heading into town. Pretty place and the Adnam's shop was worth the visit. Swam in the sea which was lovely and was mobbed by swarming ladybirds. Back to friends hotel for dinner and then to our B&B where I checked emails and did some marking. I'd love to just be able to have a few days without any work, but it's not going to happen I know.

Uid 282

5:00am Up to say goodbye to my spouse as he headed for the university. Then, slept a few more minutes.

Summer time is when doctor appointments are most convenient, so an appointment for tests with the heart doctor are on the schedule for this morning.

7:45am. Drove to the Cardiologist's office. They were unusually busy today and between lab tests, etc. was not able to leave until noon. Got tired of sitting and reading and the room was too cold. I don't know how those older patients can stand it. I stood in the warmer foyer part of the time to walk and stretch. The irony is the time spent with the cardiologist was less than ten minutes.

12:00 Drove to the coffee shop for my daily coffee, especially since I hadn't eaten (fasting for blood tests). It tasted so good! Then headed to get the car inspected. Last night I intended to replace the old registration sticker on the car with the new one just received in the mail, but accidentally scraped off the inspection sticker instead. This meant I had to pay to get the car inspected even though that sticker had another month on it. When it happened, I took it to my husband and told him not to say a word and I told him what I had done. I only told him because it happened with the car he drives now.

By the time the car maintenance people finished it was 1:30pm. I had a few other errands to run and then home to make dinner etc.

Not the most exciting day, but necessary anyway.

Uid 289

I took a day off. Over the weekend our son was taking part in a martial arts world championships in London. With prize-givings and a celebration on the Sunday night we stayed on for a day and played tourist in London.

With my phone not feeling well and expensive wifi in the hotel, I was off-line for most of the time, until the train home in the evening. Then I did sneak a look at my emails – and regretted it. There was one mail about a problem with the project-marking software I run, but it was not a hard job to fix it remotely. The annoyance was an email about a student on a programme we run jointly with another department. How can I put this? The other department's processes are not as clear and well defined as our's. Consequently we have fallen into a small pit of anomalies.

In the end I compose my response only in my head. I will commit it to keyboard once I have had time to think it over.

Uid 291

Wake early, very early for me at 05:30. Seemed too late to go back top

sleep so up and do some unpacking and scanning of e-mail. Yesterday

was the last day of a week off following a week-long conference and

the luggage is strewn around the house. I was surprised at how little

e-mail there was -- under 1000 after pruning the more obvious spam.

Maybe all the anti-spam software and detailed configuration is

winning.

Take tea to my wife at 07:45 and listen to the news. I need to return

the hire car this morning so we need to start being awake earlier than

usual. Get out as in the time-plan, and refuel the car and sit it

traffic for a while before getting to Hertz. Use my replacement

bus-pass, newly arrived in today's post, to get home.

More e-mail over coffee, but also find my list of things to do after

the holiday, and start some of them, especially ordering new hardware

for the home network. Also contact solicitor selling my parents'

house as today is supposed to be completion and I have not yet signed

the final form, as I was away.

Cycle to the university; always a little shock to be riding after a

two-week break. I arrive in the middle of lunchtime, so the place

seemed particularly quiet. My college in the desk behind me is back

-- we have not seen each other for 5 weeks, but she is hungry and goes

to buy lunch; we will have to catch up on things later. Take the walk

to the lower floor to pick up physical mail. Once this was a major

event, and way back when I had a secretary it was opened and organised

for me. Now there are no secretaries and also almost no mail. I have

a bound copy of my last PhD student's thesis (he graduated this

summer), and an advert for a conference in Dubrovnik; nice photos but

not my subject area at all. I was a little surprised that there was

nothing from the Pensions Office nor USS.

Find a friend who I can ask to witness my signature on the house

document, and we take the opportunity to discuss how our paper went at

the conference. He is a coauthor who wrote the code, but I wrote the

words and made the presentation. After a short exchange about what we

will do next we turn to his current main concern, admissions. He has

the A level results and so can see how many students made our offer,

and the near misses. In the current educational climate this is all

serious and confidential. The department has been given two years to

improve its recruitment (outcome not effort!) so we are all concerned.

Seal the signed document in an envelope and start the long walk to the

main campus where there is a postbox. It take about 12 minutes at my

walking pace. But I also drop into the shop intending to buy a banana

for lunch, but the shop is nearly empty of stock. Make do with a

flapjack. Walk through our old building for nostalgia. My office of

over 30 years is semi-occupied but the rest is empty and quiet. Walk

back to the Far East Building (also known as Siberia to one colleague,

and the East Building to management). Arrange to have coffee in about

30 minutes so settle down to finding a supplier of the correct laptop

battery, mine having failed two days before leaving for the

conference. Due to the demands of a MSc student in the outcome

coffee was delayed somewhat but I did manage to order my battery.

Our coffee machine was fixed while I was away so we can return to our

conventional lifestyle, involving god coffee and discussions. We

(colleague on desk behind me and myself) discuss what we have managed

to do so far this summer and what we need to do. We really need to

find employment for the excessively bright ex-student who will be

without employment in 6 months, but EPSRC is so low-expectation.

Should be involve commercial concerns, but neither of us know that

sector, just the technology. We must take advice for others in the

department.

Our discussions move onto admissions, and I report what I was told

earlier. From there we consider the importance of programming in the

degree programs -- we are both keen on this aspect but some others

think that all programming is outsourced to India and is below

consideration. Also talked about importance of maths in our subject.

Eventually joined by my other close friend, and drift into questions

of MSc teaching. All this is "academic" for me as I retire in 16

days, but I still do not know if the department will allow me a role.

The university centre is passing that to the Dean of Faculty who

passes it to Department Head, who is not really available. Sometimes

I am concerned about the department in the future, and sometime it

seems that now is a good time to get out.

Back to clearing e-mail, but about 6 another conversation relating to

admissions starts, this time including HoD as well as Admissions

Officer and the usual suspects. Much the same topics, but widens to

the effect of £9k fees, performance of students previously recruited

from clearing and other topics. As the group breaks up I get to see

the near-misses' paperwork. Many are one point down, but some others

are way adrift of our offer, their prediction, and even lower that the

school's. It is such a strange game recruitment. Not only are we in

competition with other universities in our subject, but in competition

with departments in our own institution for numbers. But we cannot

even speak at the decision meetings, but rely on the Dean of Science

to represent our interests -- and he has a history of behaviour

related to computing.

Think it must be time to go home as I almost promised to be on time

tonight. Just one more item, as our German student visitor is

finishing her thesis, and I am appealed to relating to the weak

conclusion. Suggest a very small change that removes the tentative

element, and promise to look at it more tomorrow. It is not my area

but I have supervised and examined a fair number by now.

As I leave the rain or drizzle starts but I do not get very wet. I

cook supper at a respectable time for a change, and after supper

finish the first pass through e-mail before going to bed.

Uid 296

Had a slight Monday morning feeling today.

Teaching 9-10am today, but in at 7am and finalising session. This is a group that I haven't done much with, so meeting them will be interesting. Into the classroom by 8.45am, and I'm pleased that I was early as the computer equipment was playing up. Eventually managed to get it working propery by the time most of the students had arrived at 9.05am. Thought that I might need to interview for one of our MSc courses with the course director, but another colleague was able to do it so I could deal with e-mails and admin. The new cohort is starting in September, and there are a lot of things to check and re-check...room bookings being one of them. It seems to me that we have less administrators to do the increasing amount of admin required and that lecturers end up doing more and more. The monitoring and admin required seems to grow "like Topsy".

Interview with a student at 12md regarding a reassessment and her progress, which needed quite a bit of time (until 1pm) and a further tutorial was booked. Lunch with coleagues and we talked about work. checked e-mails and teching for tomorrow.

2pm tutorial with student for feedback on some dissertation work. Two of her colleagues also arrived with her and I was told of one of their friends who is seriuosly ill. The issue of a short extension was raised and the appropriate forms completed.

Caught up on some paperwork! home about 4.30pm

Uid 301

Worked from home today to try to catch up on writing papers which are overdue and preparations for next teaching semester. I always enter the summer with grand plans about what can be achieved and then fall into the trap of coasting a little 'because it's the holidays' and so not getting as much done as I want to and feeling guilty about it.

I got five good hours of work done interspersed with another three hours of rather unproductive reading i.e. I flicked through some papers I've been meaning to read for a while, but afterwards couldn’t recall anything of what I'd read - perhaps I'm just getting old.

I miss the contact with colleagues and students over the summer, but it’s also nice to be able to have a concentrated period with minimal distractions, for research and course preparation – now if only I could fix that little procrastination problem I have…..

Uid 310

15.8.11

This is the first summer ever where I have not only planned what I was going to do, but been focussed/ disciplined/ unhassled/ selfish enough to get on and do it. The building is almost silent, the emails at record low levels and all in all summer work has a lot to recommend it.

The result is papers written, conference presentations accepted, and the blood pressure is at an acceptable level even for my GP! Long may it continue.

Uid 314

0400 talk to wife for 90mins about her work problems

0800 get up. attempted to get daughter out the door to school for 9am

0900 daughter not out. put on running gear. notice overnight snowstorm

0915 walk daughter to school

0920 do 40minute run in about 50mins. that comes of putting on 5kgs on last overseas trip. have to run faster to lose weight. additional weight ensures I run slower.

1010 walk home enjoying sunlight and blue sky

1100 drive into work. notice snowfalls. curse for not getting in earlier

1115 talk to grad student on skype on colleague's iPhone. Grad student not dumb enough to drive into work

1130 read email. read web news. do admin. or waste time.

1230 talk to colleague

1300 go to lecture

1420 return from lecture. talk to another colleague about them doing a presentation for an internal conference on IT use in the university

1500 email from admin advises staff to leave due to snowstorm. drive into to wifes office in town

1520 drive hope, stop to pick up daughter early from childcare.

1540 stop to buy essential supplies in case snowed in

1600 get home. happy families!

1601 discover broadband has failed

1602-2130 fail to get anything useful done. Didn't even cook dinner

2130 daughter not asleep but at least in bed

2200-2300 edit one page "summer scholarship" application. fail to upload it as broadband still not working

Uid 319

Back from holiday. Having a hard time getting motivated to do the stuff that needs doing as always (but I felt like that before the holiday as well). Too much pressure to do too many things, so nothing gets done well if it gets done at all. Teaching not properly sorted out. Timetable not sorted out.

It never gets any better does it?

Uid 325

Today is a typical August weather - the worst snow storm since 1976 or since records began. Nothing compared to my February 2011 entry where I could sneak to the beach with my son - I spent the entire day at home, working, but getting emails from work telling all staff to go home "while they still can". They even hit the lowest temperature record up in Auckland - that's like having freezing temperatures in Melbourne or Sydney, mind you! So forgive me for not being as productive while making a snow man and watching out for power cuts as the entire city's infrastructure seemed to crumble...

Uid 333

Spent the entire morning working on a publication that I'm going to make available directly, via my blog. The idea is that rather than submit it to the peer review of 1-4 anonymous readers chosen by a journal only to then appear in a subscription-only publication (if published), it will be published online in open access with peer review--crowd review--available via the blog comments. This is also enable me to correct any errors and add clarifications in response to the readers. This will be the first time I've done this--at present my blog has links to downloads of my published work (where the publishers have allowed this, which is in far from every case), together with conference reviews and reports of funded projects. To make this new venture even newer, I'm learning LaTeX for the purpose; it's quite slow going but the finished file that reader will download will look much nicer than any Word document.

My plan this week is to spend mornings on the blogpost article and afternoons viewing a book manuscript that a major University Press have sent to me for my comments, so after a quick lunch I started on the book MS.

Sadly the book MS is a mess--a prime example of an academic trying to write accessible, fun prose and producing instead low-register, embarrassingly trite, periodically confessional drivel. To say it sounds like verbatim lecture notes would be to suggest that its author's lectures are for primary-school children. The pervasive use of the collusive 'we' soon started driving me completely mad as I recoiled from the author's inclusion of me-as-a-reader in yet another unsupported sweeping statement.

I was hoping that it would be merely a case of stylistic problems (it is the author's first book and writing a book is a sharp learning curve), but the manuscript's content is equally disappointing: seriously under-referenced and under-researched, it doesn't go beyond the author's thesis from ten years ago, ignoring the huge amount of research on the subject that's happened in the interim (except, in footnotes, to slag off that research for not citing the author's thesis).

Sigh. Trouble is, I know that the author needs this book contract to get tenure. It's the final tenure review. So I'm forced to choose between honesty to scholarship and human sympathy.

A former colleague is back in town from a lengthy research trip abroad and the day ended with dinner with him and his new partner, someone he's met in the country that where his research materials are based. Again, principle and human sympathy were in conflict for me. As a feminist I dislike partnerships based on such an uneven power dynamic: as a man from the rich West, nearly twice her age and already successful within his field, he's so clearly calling all the shots. But they're both very nice people. Maybe it will work out.

Uid 343

The department is very quiet today with most staff away. I arrive early intending to get on with some uninterrupted research but, as happens rather too often, things crop up to distract me.

I'm asked to draft detailed criteria for grading final year undergraduate dissertations - an external examiner has requested that we be more objective about this. Putting together such a document is far from trivial given the diversity of project topics and styles and, more delicately, it has to satisfy a range of factions across the department. After a lot of crossing out (or rather use of 'Control x') I produce a draft that I'm vaguely satisfied with and circulate it for perusal, knowing perfectly well that the comments that come back will be mutually irreconcilable. I also know that once the document is finalised, staff will ignore it and continue just as before and that it will be filed away and forgotten until the next teaching review when it will be produced to demonstrate our responsiveness to our external examiners.

There is some hilarity amongst the few of us that gather in the common room at morning coffee time. We have just been provided with a new 'energy efficient' water boiler which is beyond our collective intelligence to operate - my attempt causes a minor flood whereas a colleague ends up with coffee made with cold water. We are also entertained by our Head of Department's trepidation about a meeting he is about to attend with the Director of Registry, who just happens to be his wife – he is expecting a reprimand for having forgotten to bring a tie to wear at the meeting.

I look at the emails that have arrived over the weekend. After deleting some 40 spam messages and glancing at a few that are just for information, I'm left with half a dozen or so needing a reply, if only out of politeness. For instance, a student from Iowa has been reading a book that I wrote several years ago and has sent a list of questions on the text. It is obvious that my words of wisdom have gone right over his head but I try to compose a helpful response. Then there is a request from an Indian student wanting to do a PhD with me or, to be more precise, wanting a studentship; however, his qualifications in road maintenance engineering are hardly a suitable preparation for research in pure mathematics. There is a manuscript from a Chinese woman claiming to answer a major unsolved mathematical problem. It is the third version that she has sent me and, like its predecessors, is littered with errors and completely lacks any logical structure. I compose a rather more pointed message than my two previous replies suggesting that she abandons the problem which has defeated a number of the world's top mathematicians. Whilst I feel a moral obligation to respond to such enquiries I do get frustrated spending time on what I neither want to do nor am I paid to do.

Finally, by mid-afternoon, I get down to my research, and make some progress, although nothing like as much as I had hoped when I arrived in the morning.

My wife is away, and when I get home in the evening I cook myself a creditable toad in the hole. After dinner, I sit down to continue my research, but after half an hour or so I am nodding off over my papers. I give up and watch a Jeeves and Wooster video which cheers me up a bit. Oh well, perhaps my research breakthrough will come tomorrow ... .

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May I say that I've enjoyed writing these monthly diaries and will miss doing so in the future. Looking back over my contributions, they provide an interesting slant on my activities, though teaching and research do not seem to have the prominence that one might hope or expect!

I hope that you will circulate any summaries or reports that result from all this input. Also, perhaps you can think of another way of keeping us amused in the coming year as you have done for the past twelve months. In any case, thanks very much for setting it all up!

Uid 348

Back from a week's leave to a barrage of emails. I'd checked them whilst away but was determined not to answer any! The day passes in a welter of catch up and I don't seem to get to any of the big jobs (writing new module for one) that are part of this summer's list. But it is much quieter on campus and the email traffic has quietened down so I'm optimistic that the rest of the week will be better.

Still so much to sort before next academic year.

Uid 352

On holiday, but starting to feel guilty about not working. Lots of class prep to do still before the semester begins, but lots of family obligations to keep me away from that. Met with potential partner university while abroad on holiday - have follow-up to do for that. Otherwise the university is still a far-away concept...

Uid 354

I was on vacation today, nearing the end of a six week trip with my 16-year-old son in Spain and Portugal, and gave absolutely no thought to anything dealing with research, teaching or my job. No Internet. No phone. Bliss.

Uid 355

On holiday today with family today, just a short 2 days off as a real 'holiday' isn't going to happen this year. On a plus side, I'm two weeks into my 2nd week in a new job at another university. As a result, what should have been another stressful summer of marking, designing new courses, leading new projects and being bombarded by email while squeezing research into evenings and weekends is now blissfully quieter as I only have to focus on my new courses I am taking on at the moment. Things will get busier soon, but a change is definitely as good as a rest

!Uid 360

This is the first day of my leave. i am hoping to do some writing as i have lots of data from projects i have done in learning and teaching and would like to write them up. finding a time to do this is difficult so i aim to use a week of leave to do this. unfortunately i feel unwell - exhustion i think, so the writing won't get started today! also i had a stressed student on the email - she needs to redo aspects of her doctoral dissertation. i will need to get back to her with ideas of how she could do this. they will need to be clear and manageable so that she can get on with them until we meet. i really like my job but it is so difficult to take a break from it

!Uid 362

What have I done today?

- I've thought about the interview on Friday for the job I've been doing for the last two years and hoping that I can persuade the panel that I'm the right person for the post

- I've emailed a possible dissertation student about her work on vampire fiction

- I've thought about my own research - a paper to be completed by the end of September, a possible submission, new avenues to be explored but, all the while, basking in the knowledge that I'm about to sign a book contract with a publisher

- I've thought about the courses I might be teaching next year, how they can be improved, the handbooks and lectures that need writing before the beginning of term

But the overwhelming train of thought has to be the interview on Friday - will I be able to continue in a job that I love, a job that I've come to late in life (well, in my mid-40s), a job that isn't really a job but more a way of life? I hope so.

Uid 369

Got up at the usual ‘vacation’ time (about 7am - I like to have a fairly late start, relatively speaking, out of term time. During term I’m usually up and actually working by 7am). Today was an Anniversary, and we’d planned to take the middle of the day off to celebrate.

First, as usual, the dog needed a walk; we did a fairly substantial one (about 1.5 miles) to make sure he would be happy with a less lengthy one later, giving us some slack time.

Next, a couple of hours of correspondence. Email is more manageable during the vac. but it’s enraging to have ‘cheery’ emails from students wanting info. that could be googled, or that is clearly something that only the Departmental admin. team would logically know, and signing off with something like ‘hope you’re enjoying all that free time!’. Absolutely unbelievable. How do they think that books/articles get written? By magic?

With REF looming, we’re deep in prep mode, so I’m also having to factor in reading and advising on colleagues’ work, which is actually very valuable to me, and helps me to hone my own ideas, but it’s time-consuming if done right.

After reading and feeding-back on draft papers, and answering many emails (some written by people who clearly have no concept of waiting, pausing, before typing an irate missive and pressing ‘reply all’ or creating an inappropriate distribution list) I realised that a morning had gone by without any time spent on trying to knock out a good draft of book chapter 1. That’s dispiriting, but at 1145 we broke for some ‘celebration’ time.

We went into town, bought me a new scooter helmet, had a lovely lunch, and pootled home. I had hoped to do something creative with the rest of the day (i.e. work on the book) but while away from email a whole slew of ‘problems’ had cropped up (most of my colleagues are problem-generators, not problem-solvers) which embroiled me in a set of phone-calls, emails, and stock-taking on a troublesome project to try to remedy a mini-crisis. I \*thought\* about the book, but by the time I’d fought the fires it was 1900, and I was tired.

Takeaway for dinner - too exhausted to think sensibly about cooking.

When I realised that the final day-survey would be in August - traditionally a month when one can hope to focus on research - I was tickled to think that I’d fill in one of these accounts of a day, and it would be all about research. I think it’s dispiritingly reflective of the current state of academic life that even that aspiration (actual time to focus on writing something that might be important and might just move the discipline on a little) is becoming more and more unlikely to work out in practice.

Uid 370

After a weekend at a conference, I took today off and went sea kayaking. The advantages of conferences in interesting locations - perfect opportunity to tag on a few days to explore and enjoy not being in the office.

Uid 375

15.08.11

The weather has been so cold and Novembery that it hasn’t felt like August at all. This has been good for the writing. The book is really beginning to take shape now and an area in it which was outside my field of expertise is now, after 8 weeks of almost solid work on it, finally being tamed. Still, however, I feel nervy and panicky because time is moving so fast; the first departmental meeting of the new academic year is already in my diary – in ink, so that means it has to happen – and is only 5 weeks away. By then I need to have courses planned and handbooks written and VLE sites updated. And all I want to do is finish this project. So, to focus on today. My partner is still away and so I’m mother, housekeeper, cook, driver, shopper, washer, carer … and writer. I managed to work for a few hours this morning (writing this increasingly exciting but unwieldy chapter) before going to the gym for a Pilates class. There I mix with wonderful women of all backgrounds (it’s not a ‘snobby’ gym at all – rather tatty and lovely and informal, in fact), and that made me feel grounded and less isolated. After lunch I had (metaphorically) to tie myself to my desk chair to make myself write: this section of the book is so close now that I can almost smell it: it’s a question of having the stamina to maintain the writing and not burning out. I suspect I might have to ‘give in’ and take a few days in September where, once my partner’s back, we do \*nothing\*. What is it about academia that makes this feel like a failure? What is this fluttering in my chest when I sit down to read the papers or deadhead the geraniums or go to a hair salon or have a cup of tea with an old friend? Is this an internal drive, or externally imposed? I thought the latter but since the REF census deadline has been shifted to December 2013 – a year later than I’d been anticipating, that should have taken off the pressure. But it hasn’t, because of the uncertainty generated by my Line Manager’s peculiarly punitive style of management – already I’m anxious about what teaching is going to be landed on me for 2012-13! All this looking forward; all this never pausing. There’s never going to come a day when I’m on my deathbed thinking ‘I wish I’d looked forward and agonised and strategized a little more’. Is this burn out? Do I have \*time\* to burn out?

!Uid 396

Just gone through induction week. Missed it last year as I was in Australia so it was nice to be involved again. Occupying students for 3 hours is too much, too much information for them to take in at once!

I'm personal tutor for 10 new first years as well as the 30 other tutees. How I will keep them all happy I do not know.

No teaching this semester but still stacks of admin that will keep me away from research. Hosted a teaching seminar today. Im deep into innovative methods and would like to share it with colleagues. Podcasting, evideos, prezi, Camtasia etc etc. Have to do something to keep students engaged