Surveys for Tuesday 15 February 2011

Uid 11

In to work for 10 am. Met with tutors in class session on Moving Image Technology module to discuss student progress, and to discuss possible implications of my decision to apply for voluntary severance package on the module and on HPL employment prospects for next academic year.

Admin and further meetings with colleagues.

Coffee

Lecture at midday on social history aspects to be found in fiction films, using "The Smallest Show on Earth" as an exemplar for that. I, and co-tutor on module of a certain age, enjoyed it. The small number of students who attended (about 15 out of a cohort of 110) seemed disinclined to give much response , even when pressed for opinions. Interesting that they will express opinions about good and bad films they have seen each week, but not pass opinion on lectures face to face..

If we had an exam on module, attendance would probably be higher but probably not more than 30-40 % on a Level 2 Module. Could be depressing if I had not decided that this will be my last year of Full-Time university lecturing. Let somebody else worry about budget cuts and quality - I have had enough of that for my health to weather over the years.

Lunch at my desk in front of emails and RSS feeds to catch up with, then some more work on assignment planning before tutorial session 3 - 5 for attendance was again pretty thin. Mind you, students are out filming for assessed assignment , so some absences are acceptable.

Left at 5.30, and home not long after 6 pm, which was great. Thought about doing some more work, but thought better of it. Tomorrow's another day - where we have a UCU meeting to discuss the effect of last week's strike on University management - will they have seen sense and started to talk properly to us about their ramshackle and draconian "restructuring" (i.e. cuts)?

Uid 13

Today started with office hours. A student was waiting for me before I arrived. He is a student in my Senior Design class, and wanted feedback on the grades I had just provided for their first Sprint. (We are using a Scrum development process.) Turns out that he hadn't found the detailed grade sheets that I had already posted to their project page, so we simply reviewed those.

Soon after he left, one of my Data Structures students arrived to take her midterm. She's an athlete who will be at a track meet on Friday, and she opted to take it before she left (rather than after.)

While she worked, another Senior Design team arrived. They'd found the grading sheets, but disagreed with them. They explained that, since their project is very complex (controlling a Unity-3D scene through an Android app), they felt that they should jump immediately into programming--without planning their sprints or designing their system. I tried to explain why I'd fire them if they were working for me. I hope I explained to them why it's important for them to do planning and design first--a lesson I didn't think I'd have to explain to a team of four seniors.

At 11, I had an HCI faculty meeting. I'm the HCI area coordinator this year, so it was my meeting to run. First, we planned for the qualifying examinations for the semester. Next, we talked through a teaching issue that has arisen because one of our faculty is taking medical leave next year. Finally (saving for last, since it could go on forever), we discussed yesterday's announcement that we are launching a search for a new School Chair, and we generated a list of possible candidates.

I had an hour for email over lunch.

One of my PhD students is ill, so during her slot, I had another of my data structures students stop by. She had pneumonia two weeks ago (serious enough to warrant an ambulance trip to the hospital), and is still behind on homework. I helped her finish her homework assignment, talked a bit about "Dr. Who" (a fellow fan), and discussed which classes she should drop from her schedule after her illness.

I then met with my other PhD student. We talked through his latest analyses, details on his transcription costs and processes, and about some job search plans.

I had to leave early, because I'm in the last week of a play and had rehearsal. I picked up kids, fed everyone, then headed to rehearsal. During rehearsal, I finished my slides for tomorrow's data structures lecture. I had the lecture slides already, but I'm using Beth Simon's Ubiquitous Presenter and peer instruction, so I needed to generate the questions for students to respond to.

And now it's 2120, and I'm writing up my diary for you.

Uid 14

Woke up at 6:30, normal for this semester due to teaching 8am T/Th.

Around 7, I emailed the Advanced Curriculum Committee about changing the prerequisite for our 300-level networking class. We implemented a curriculum change this year which included an alteration to the course's prerequisite, and now students can get into networking without having studied graph algorithms at all. The instructor noted that this caused students trouble with routing algorithms. The instructor is not on the committee, which I chair, so he sent the request to me. There are only four faculty on the committee---three of whom have administrative release time---and yet there are no times this semester we are all free. (At least, according to Exchange.) So I sent the message about this over email and got reasonable responses during the day, though of course not consensus.

7:15 I go downstairs and wolf down some cheerios. My 4yo son asks me to get him some breakfast, but I tell him to wait for his mother to awaken and to ask her, since I am in a rush to get to campus for my 8am class. He takes it well, and it's true, but I feel bad.

8:00 Advanced Programming class. This is only the second time the course has been offered, and it's a curricular experiment. It's a 200-level course on techniques of professional practice, a sort of "software engineering light" that is also peppered with tools and principles.

The students had an assignment due to create an immutable vector implementation, and so I picked two students randomly to display their solutions. Neither was very good, and so one more student volunteered his work for demonstration. Looking at these three was a good experience for the students, I think, and I got the feeling that they saw some different ways they could have gone. I had only budgeted about 15 minutes for the exercise, but by the time all was done---including several interesting and pertinent questions from the class---we had used 55 of our 75 minutes.

Then I introduced our next case study. I had been thinking about an example that would incorporate model-view separation, immutable objects, and a modicum of artificial intelligence. (It turns out that our curriculum does not include the ACM/IEEE CS2008 minimum recommendation for AI, which I know since I did the study last Summer. We have not yet determined how to ameliorate this, so I am experimenting with covering it in this course.) I explained the situation and goals to the students and told them we would use tic-tac-toe. Many students exchanged knowing glances with each other, and so I asked if in fact they had used tic-tac-toe as an example in the previous class, our CS2 class, which in fact they had. This gave me the opportunity to explain why I chose tic-tac-toe, and I quickly ran through some alternatives, including oware, a personal favorite. However, the students said they preferred to do tic-tac-toe again, saying they didn't do it well last year, and they would like to see how to do it "right." (Meaning, with intentional design, reflection, and validation, I assume.) This was surprising but interesting, and I'm still not sure exactly what it means about student perspectives. We then went through some user stories, prioritization, and division into tasks before time ran out.

Back to my office and I grade their vector implementations. Very few are perfect, but most have reasonable mistakes. Unfortunately many have build path errors due to students failing to include dependent libraries within projects and instead referencing files on their own machines. This is frustrating, but I suspect it's second-order ignorance: students think of their machine as the computing world and have yet to experience the need for and beauty of version control systems and intelligent file organization systems.

10:50 finished grading, so I do my chair evaluation before heading home to focus on my book chapter. I make a stop at the university library to drop off Road to Oz and pick up Emerald City of Oz, as I've been reading these books with my son and he was eager for the next one.

I am home by 11:20 and head towards the stairs. I mention to my wife that I'm ready for lunch any time, and I immediately feel guilty for the implicit demand for food preparation. I process a few emails in my home office then come downstairs to make lunch. Tuna melts and tomato soup. I feel good about preparing the meal for my wife and sons, even though it takes much more time than I generally allocate for lunch (which approximates zero).

12:21 and I'm back in the home office to work on my book chapter. We've had one formal extension, and my coauthor and I asked for another week as well, which we got. I had been very excited to document some of this work, but I have found it to be very hard to articulate what I want to say. I think this is because the writing has been put off and low priority, and the thinking hasn't happened at all. That is, I'm thinking as I write, but I want to be more deliberate. I don't have the time or energy to be deliberate, so I feel like this is not the work it should be. It satisfices, but I wanted it to be glorious.

At the beginning of Fall, I had an idea of how the year would go, and it looked good. In Fall I would teach Advanced Programming and Game Programming, serve as undergraduate program director, departmental assessment coordinator, and chair of the college curriculum committee. In Spring, just Advanced Programming due to a research buyout and, along with the three standing service obligations, I would be productive. A few weeks into Fall, I was appointed to the Future of Education Task Force, who are literally defining the future structure of undergraduate education at my institution. Long story short, it's a big deal. This task force is producing a document that will provide guidance to the Strategic Planning Task Force, the granddaddy of all task forces. A few weeks ago, I was appointed to that task force too. These are /really important things/ that cannot afford to be low priority. As a result, all the things that actually wanted to do for my personal and professional growth are now low priority, as I look instead at how to build a community in which I want to spend, potentially, the next 35 years of my career. I want to be clear that I am honored to be on these task forces and I believe that I can do a good job --- and many of my colleagues have said explicitly that they are glad I am there to represent the interests of learning. However, these are both \*extra\* things into an already full semester, and that just reeks of mismanagement and disrespect.

I take a break at 1:50 to make another cup of coffee. I try to only have one a day, but these 8am classes make it worse than usual. I also had no tea today, which sometimes I use to keep me going. I sometimes have trouble sleeping, which I attribute in part to caffeine intake and part to stress. It hasn't been quite so bad this academic year as I have tried explicitly to work no more than 9 hours a day: eight in the office and one doing email processing. I've had time to spend with my family and to pursue some old interests, and it's good knowing that my department sent out my positive tenure review letter---decision is made by administration end of this year. Of course, that's on the back of a much less reasonable preceding five years. Recently, though, I read on a blog that if you're working more than 50 hours per week, your boss thinks you're a sucker, and that really struck home with me.

3:11 I'm beat and my younger boy is napping. Elder boy's birthday was Sunday and we got him some new games that he's been dying to play. I decide to take a break and try out Flea Circus, which is not as fun as I had hoped but still a good distraction, and it's good to have a little time with Elder Boy and Wife.

4:20 Back to work on the book chapter, on this until 5:10 or so when we go out for dinner with expired gift certificates.

6:30 Back home, play Lego Star Wars (another birthday gift) with my son, then we get him ready for bed and read the first chapter of Emerald City of Oz. He goes to sleep, and I believe the rest of the evening goes on without incident. Play a little Fallout New Vegas alone and Dominion with the wife, have a glass of Krupnik. My wife watches Watson trounce humans on Jeopardy and invites me to join, but I am doing my own thing---which now that I think about it, includes reading the report from the Online Education Task Force. She is astounded at how amazing Watson is and mystified by how it works and how I didn't care to watch it. I briefly explain that I think about these issues all the time, and that I understand fundamentally how they did it. Knowing that they had it going up against people, I expected it to win. She mentions being inspired and perhaps scared by the IBMers statement that there is more information now than people can internalize, e.g. in medicine, and that expert systems (my term not hers) will become more and more necessary. I smile and nod and explain that I've been teaching this idea for years. Oh well---I suppose you can be married for years and try to talk about what you do, and the other person may not really get it until it's on TV. Or something.

Uid 17

Daily Activity Log

Tuesday 15 February 2011

Today at 9:30 I teach my class for non-majors, a broad introduction to computers and computing. I go over the midterm they took last week, emphasizing that nobody's grade in the class is doomed by a low midterm score. (According to the syllabus, the midterm is worth 20% of the grade and the final exam, 35%. The way I put it to the class, since I don't want to make hard-and-fast numeric commitments, is that we'll look at their score on the final, and if they do better than they did on the midterm, we'll pay more attention to their final exam score. In practice, I may just have a column on my spreadsheet that flags people in that situation, so if they're on a borderline I can give them the higher grade; a more systematic alternative would be to take the students who did better on the final and split the difference, using for their midterm score a number halfway between their original midterm score and their score on the final.)

After going over the midterm, I talk about redundancy: How it exists in the physical world, how it exists in natural language, and how it exists in digital data. Of course this is a lead-in to a discussion of data compression.

After class, I dealt with a variety of tasks:

-- I submitted my expenses for yesterday's distinguished visitor, someone I had invited to inform the department's upcoming deliberations about how to reorganize the first-year curriculum. I also submitted expenses for my travel to university headquarters for systemwide committee meetings.

-- I met with a senior grad student who's teaching our CS 2 this term; he was a last-minute stand-in for a much-beloved instructor who left to seek his fortune. (Even after taking on full-time employment in addition to his full-time teaching assignment---both of which he performed excellently---he decided that he wasn't going to become financially secure teaching in the university.) This grad student is a talented teacher. He has decided that he wants an academic career with a greater emphasis on teaching than on research; it will be rewarding to mentor him through this job search. He told yesterday's visitor that he didn't like doing research, and got embarrassed when the visitor fed that back to his advisor. Both of them should have kept their mouths shut; the student was impolitic in revealing so much of himself to someone he didn't know, and the visitor should have respected the confidence. The visitor tried to convince the student to change his dissertation topic to something related to CS education, but the student felt he was far enough along that he should just grit his teeth and finish with his straight-CS topic.

-- I edited a web blurb for our new minor called "Digital Information Systems," which is aimed at students who want some technology background but don't want to do programming. We expect it to be popular, and we hope it will increase enrollment in some of our courses. This is critical for us, because our "student-credit-hours," the number of students we teach, are low compared to the rest of the campus; this means the provost doesn't give us as many TAs or new faculty slots as we want.

-- I corresponded with the staff support person for the systemwide faculty senate committee I chair, setting agenda items for our March meeting:

\* How different funding models will affect the number of students each campus will enroll

\* How we can streamline the transfer path for community college students

\* A policy for the public sharing of assessment data, which may include samples of student work, while preserving the privacy of the students who did the work

-- I arranged to participate in evaluating proposals for a new web-based system for advising community college transfer students. I got tagged for this as the only computer scientist on the committee of Faculty Senate leaders from the various segments of the state higher education system (community colleges, state colleges, and state university). I don't mind doing it, but I worry that there will be time conflicts with my other commitments.

-- I corresponded with one of our graduate counselors about finalizing a memo to allow a PhD student to complete some courses and leave with a master's degree. Originally the student had his course requirements waived, but when he decided the PhD wasn't for him, he needed actually to take those courses to qualify for the MS degree, and that required permission from the graduate dean's office.

-- I made plane reservations for next week's two back-to-back meetings at university headquarters.

-- I corresponded with the people who support the audio and screen capture system available in our classrooms. I've had a hell of a time getting this system to work reliably; there's a long sequence of steps to set it up and shut it down, and apparently if you miss one, your recording disappears.

-- I sent a reference letter for one of our new PhD students, whom I've known since he was a freshman; he's applying for faculty jobs.

-- I corresponded with a computer science teacher at an independent (private) high school. He visited yesterday to see our distinguished visitor, whose curriculum he follows. This high school teacher does impressive things with his young students. We talked about my visiting his school to do some outreach.

-- I took a nap. When I moved into this office four or five years ago, I got to specify my furniture, and I specified an eight-foot couch. Primarily I did that so I could accommodate six or seven people in my office for meetings, but it's also handy for naps.

After returning home, I corresponded with another grad student who's teaching another one of my departed colleague's classes next quarter. I arranged to meet with him on Thursday to help him set up his course.

Uid 21

I did not keep a contemporaneous time log today. I've been surviving

on about 4 hours sleep a night for the past week, and not functioning

at my best.

This morning I got up at my usual time (6:45 a.m.), though I had

already been awake and reading for a while. I had a meeting this

morning with my son's 9th-grade English teacher. My son has been

having some trouble with writer's block (it runs in the family on both

sides), and we were looking for advice on ways to get him around the

block. The teacher did not have much useful advice, but she did allow

him to use a laptop for in-class writing (which may help), and I hope

we convinced her that he was genuinely trying, not being rude and

simply refusing to try.

After the meeting, I graded homework and caught up on my e-mail (I get

about 150 messages a day, and it takes up a lot of my time). I also

managed to get a little programming done on a new research project,

but only fairly trivial input parsing and some simple statistics---the

next step involves learning to use someone else's python package for

hidden Markov models, and I was not alert enough this morning to read

the documentation carefully. Instead I read a bunch of education

blogs (mainly by math teachers), which is far less mentally strenuous.

At lunchtime, I went to my son's high school to mentor the Robotics

Club, who are designing a remotely operated underwater vehicle for a

contest. This is the first engineering most of them have done, and

they are still a bit scattered in their thinking. I also brought my

son his laptop, to use in English class.

After lunch I did a little more programming and a lot more e-mail

catchup, including responding to some comments on my blog (no new blog

post today though). Eventually, I gave up on today as a bad job and

went back to bed to try to catch up a little on my sleep debt. I read

some fantasy and managed to nap for a little over an hour, before

responding to another pile of e-mail and typing up this summary of the

day.

After supper, I was a bit more alert, and managed to do 2-3 hours of

programming on a research project, as well as playing three rounds of

Racko with my family and finishing the fantasy book I'd been reading.

Uid 22

06:00 - Time to get up

06:15 - Time to wake up

06:30 - Finally getting up, -31° outside

06:35 - Breakfast

08:00 - At work

08:05 - Starts the day by filing some bug reports for a yet to be released version of very nice program

08:30 - Reading news and emails that have come in during the night

08:37 - Looks like father in law needs some computer support again, adding to todo-list

08:41 - Considering switching to multimarkdown for my writing, waiting for the release of v3

08:42 - Quick stat, email the last 24 hours approx 150 real emails and 300 spam. Very grateful for SpamSieve who catches approx 99.9% of all spam without false hits.

09:02 - Answered email about thesis work

09:05 - Shutting down email

09:07 - Shutting down twitter, facebook

09:14 - Starting to read papers

09:32 - Reading papers by the author “Pancake” makes me hungry

09:49 - My new, very very very expensive, glasses can be picked up. Sigh, I hadn’t expected that getting old would cost me money in this way.

10:40 - Launched email, now answering email again

10:50 - Shutting down email again

12:17 - Checking email again

12:28 - Shutting down email again

13:41 - Starting to think that I might possible have misunderstood how the word “visualize” is used in research papers. Checking with some native English speakers.

16:35 - Time to go home

17:10 - Home

17:20 - Away I go again, this time I need to drive the daughter and her friend for their music lesson. That was 10 minutes at home

18:00 - Sitting at the music school, time for some work on my photos

19:30 - Nice, 1.5 hours of uninterrupted photo work, needed that.

20:20 - Leaving music school with daughter and her friend, now I need to pick up my son from his jutsu session and then back home

20:50 - Home again

21:00 - House on TV

22:10 - Bed

Uid 23

Busy day. Four hours of teaching: two MA and two BA. Such different worlds: MAs are all highly committed, hard- working fellow professionals from different countries (Japan, Korea, Spain, Greece in this class). Always interesting discussion and they have always done the preparation. Ages late 20s to 50s. In the BA class everyone is British, apart from one Erasmus student from Germany and a Greek lass on the BA. There are two mature students but otherwise they are the age of my kids - which makes me love them, but I do feel I can't rely on them having done the preparation I require - or rather, having understood it as I hoped. And I have to keep 'em entertained! They are coming out of their shells, however, and volunteering comments/ideas. I make a point of learning their names and I'm sure that helps.

Being observed in the BA class by a young, new colleague (first job - and she is not from Britain, plus has never studied here, so steep learning curve) whom I am mentoring. Good system of briefing and de-briefing and I wish I'd had the opportunity to observe more experienced colleagues when I started out. Good comments from her, as requested, on aspects of what I did - great to have feedback from a fresh pair of eyes...

Stayed on campus doing 2nd marking and ghastly e-mails (am up to 2,500 in my inbox - all read etc but not yet filed!)until the film theatre began screening at 8. It was 'Of God and Men' - grim, true story (French monks murdered in Algeria), but stunning filming. Came home feeling rough and woke up in the night with a splitting headache and a stomach bug. Agghhh - there is no time to be ill in Week 5 of this term!

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Uid 24

The main things on my to-do list are:

- Prepare for final outreach/afterschool visit to a local public school.

- Finish preparing CS2 lecture for tomorrow.

- Finish preparing Compiler course lecture for tomorrow.

- Finish JUnit testing for CS2 HW3.

- Start putting together CS2 HW4.

- Start putting together first CS2 in-class exam.

- Write recommendation letters (currently need letters for one student going to graduate school, and for two students applying to several summer REUs).

- Do background reading for conference workshop.

- Review four conference papers.

- Get back to writing chapters for CS1 textbook.

- Watch Watson on Jeopardy tonight!

So far this morning I have gotten through e-mail, though I still have 40-odd mails sitting that I need to respond to.

Finished up early at the after-school outreach program. Robots are finnicky! Motors, sensors, batteries...ick.

Am going to do up a stir-fry for dinner. Will watch the 2nd day of the Watson Jeopary match with the girls tonight.

Uid 28

February 15th Share Project diary

My working day began by peeling off all my waterproofs after a very wet cycle ride. Luckily, after a change of shoes, there were no soggy after effects. My plan for the day was to catch up on my emails as I did not need to teach until mid-afternoon.

My first email was to do with monitoring an international postgraduate student. Our University is very nervous about the possibility of bogus students being here under our licence and we have stringent monitoring procedures that take up a lot of administrative time and energy. The consequences of losing our licence and ability to recruit international students could be devastating for the University. However, I resent acting as an unpaid police force for the UKBA and abhor the way that international students are treated with such suspicion.

I made an appointment to see a new PhD student and answered a query from a deaf final year student. He is one of the best students of his year, despite his disability. He is hard work because he questions everything he does not understand. However, I don’t mind this at all. Sometimes in class it can help other students who did not understand the point but were too shy to say so.

I sent the feedback from a rejected JISC grant bid to the others involved in our proposal. It is disappointing to get rejected after all the hard work that goes into preparing a bid. However, the feedback was clear and showed us where we had not explained ourselves well enough. We still want to do the research so must now find time without any support. I hope we will be able to build up some momentum once teaching has finished.

I finally got round to organising a seminar session for the research students in our department. It is difficult to foster a research atmosphere here because many of the students are not based on campus and only travel here occasionally. I hope they will make the effort to come here for the seminar; otherwise we will have more supervisors than students, which has happened in the past.

I felt that I made quite a bit of progress today. I managed to secure two student representatives for the MSc taught course – which I have been trying to do since the start of the course in September. I sorted out some application queries. I met with the Associate Dean to tidy up some loose ends concerning students’ MSc awards. The students had been emailing and phoning daily as they wanted to apply for a post study work visa. It was gratifying to be able to give them some good news that their awards would go through the current award board and they would not have to wait until June (which would mean their visas would expire and they would have to go home, a costly undertaking, especially if they are here with their families).

I was a little late for my programming lab after my appointment with the Associate Dean but the students were getting on with their work and were welcoming when I arrived. They have weekly exercises and most seem to understand the concepts and complete the exercises. One or two students do not attend at all, despite several emails. Given the cost of higher education it is surprising that they have this attitude. It will be interesting to see whether things change when the fees rise (if I’m still in a job and we still have a university then).

Uid 30

8 AM Today is Spring primary day in Wisconsin: voted on local officials and the State Supreme Court before commuting an hour to work.

9:15 AM Our weekly department meeting centered around determining the schedule for the Fall 2011 semester.

10:10 AM and 1:05 PM Taught CS1 and Data Structures and Algorithms.

2:15 PM Listened to senior seminar practice talks by two of my senior majors. In the past, our department has learned that the quality of the final talks really do improve! In between those duties, I prepped for classes for the next day.

On the personal side, I attended our college's weekly soup lunch provided by other faculty; attended a piano lesson at 5 PM and a yoga class at 6:30 PM.

Around 8 PM At home, dinner, watched day 2 of the Jeopardy IBM challenge. Today was half IBM commercial, half Jeopardy game. Some other recreational TV and reading, then bed around 10:30 PM

Uid 31

6:45 Up and at 'em. Wake up thinking about my context statement due

for my tenure review this October. While folding yesterday's clothes,

ponder how to frame a change in research direction and realize I have

made significant progress in teaching several if not all of my classes.

7:57 Decide to drink a second cup of tea and do the Sudoku.

8:30 Arrive at the office. Feel guilty about the tea and Sudoku.

Ponder next steps. Realize that in the rush of Monday (I barely had time

to breathe) I left a lot of things undone that need to be done either

before our department meeting at noon, or ASAP. I probably should

have worked yesterday evening to catch up on all this despite already

having worked 11 hours straight, or else gotten up earlier and skipped

the Sudoku. So much for scholarship time this morning. So what do I

need to do?

\* Ponder a colleague's suggested departmental response to a nasty

email I received yesterday morning, right before class, from the

parent of a student in my intro class

\* Ponder class times for next year and the difficulty of

accomodating my preferences, students' likely preferences, and

conflicts with other courses

\* Print out a special topic course proposal for departmental

review

\* Review a colleague's draft learning goals for our upper-level

Algorithms course, to be reviewed at the department meeting

\* Answer a knock on the door from my department chair, who

wants to ask my permission to share the nasty email from a

with other members of the department (fine) and apologizes

for obliterating my scholarship time

\* Field half a question from a colleague (on leave) who is working

through a lab exercise from my Operating Systems class last fall

\* Start writing this - which is rather cathartic

\* Prepare for my intro class - finally something routine!

\* Enter scores received from my grader. I am having students

grade for my intro class for the first time this semester, and

it is a wonderful time saver (plus, I hope, a good experience

for the grader)

9:54 Across the hall to teach my intro class.

10:55 I manage to talk for only about ten minutes and give students

40 minutes to work on the lab exercises. Some students nearly finish;

it was a challenge to keep an eye on the students who barely got started.

The student from my 8 a.m. class arrives for his office hours appointment.

He brought his small child to class both Friday and Monday. It's unusual

for students at my institution to have children; they are all

traditional-age college students. He explains that he and his partner had

planned to trade off days of child care, but his partner's employer has

been assigning her to work on his class days. Of course, a day care

center is too expensive for them to afford. So this is not an emergency

but a systemic problem. He's very concerned about disturbing the other

students - I'm more concerned that he is missing too much class when his

son gets fussy. He explains that he is meeting with the head of Student

Affairs later this week, and also with the staff in Financial Aid.

I ask him to let me know what happens, and also send me a quick email

in advance if he knows he is going to need to bring his son to class. I'm

not sure concretely how that will help, but it would be nice not to be

surprised.

11:15 A student from my intro class arrives to discuss the take home

exam she has due tomorrow. We work through one problem together and

briefly discuss another. From this meeting and her performance on the

last two weekly quizzes, it's clear she's missed some important ideas -

we agree that she would benefit from individual tutoring, before she

gets too much more lost.

11:45 Another student from my class arrives to ask a clarification

question and to discuss the same problem I worked through with the other

student. That problem is harder than I thought. This student is not so

lost, though.

noon Department meeting over lunch. Reheat mystery leftovers from the

freezer - turns out they are dal over rice, yum. Review upcoming events.

Work through next year's course schedule - difficult since three faculty

are going on leave. Discuss special topic proposal. Discuss response to

angry parent, which my chair will revise and send. We are all exhausted

by the end.

12:45 Answer colleague's question about the lab exercise.

12:50 Go home to play Wii games rather than walk outside in the puddles.

My husband has a cold and plans to quit work for the day after one last

meeting. I rescue his lunch from burning in the oven while he is on the

phone. Before I leave, we touch base on dinner. He might be up to cooking

after an afternoon of napping - if not, I'll make soup or get takeout.

2:25 Back to the office. Read some email - the letter to the angry

parent has been sent. Update this report.

2:40 Get to work on the recommendation letter that is due today for

a student's summer research application.

3:55 Finish the letter. Feel really good about it. The advice I got

from our Director of Social Commitment last fall, to tell stories about

the student, is spot on. Main task for this afternoon: done.

4:10 After a short break and a bit of thought about what else I need to

do today, revise the special topic course form for next year and send it

to my department chair.

4:30 Student visits my office to tell me she decided to take an

on-campus research position and I didn't need to write her a letter. She

apologizes for not letting me know earlier. I smile and wait until after she

has left my office to roll my eyes.

4:45 Meet with three more intro students who have questions about the

take-home exam. One thought her code had a bug, but it worked fine when

I was watching. That seems to happen on a fairly regular basis. I try

not to think about her father's bad behavior---it's not her fault.

5:10 Remembered a minor committee assignment and hastened to add it

to my annual Faculty Activity Report, due in July, before I forgot again.

Also added a conference presentation which was recently accepted.

5:25 Meet with a student who was confused about the time for his

appointment. More take-home exam questions.

5:30 Review the work done by my grader for the intro class, and enter

the grades, making one adjustment. It is my first semester having a

grader for the intro class, and I love it so far!

5:40 Realize I need to deal with my colleague's plea to figure out the

next homework assignment for the intro class. Look over the possibities

he suggests; rule out two of the three possibilities and develop a new one.

6:08 Do I finally get to go home? Yes, but I'm taking work with me.

Realize I am probably going to have to take care of my sick husband even

though, in my heart of hearts, what I really want right now is to be taken

care of.

7:30 Just finished dinner, which I planned and cooked in less

than an hour. Feel proud of my mad menu-planning skillz, but also

exhausted. Grateful that my husband saw that I am also not feeling great.

He is cleaning up. Also grateful that I have a guest lecturer in my

8 a.m. tomorrow. I heat up the warm packs in the microwave for my

shoulders, pour a cool drink, and settle down to read my light fluffy

scifi novel for half an hour.

8:11 OK, I'd better read for tomorrow's classes.

8:37 That was quick. Maybe I can do a little easy grading.

9:01 Enough. I don't trust myself to comment on research paper topics

right now.

9:19 Done reviewing my email. Expressed profound gratitude to the

colleague who I am teaching the intro class with for writing up the next

homework assignment. Agreed(?) to be interviewed for my alma mater's

alumni magazine - an article on innovative approaches to teaching.

Chocolate, bath, and bed, then back at it tomorrow.

10:58 ... Actually read 100 pages of damnyouautocorrect.com. Oh well,

laughter is the best medicine, right? To bed now, really.

Uid 32

Thanks for keeping this open. What a week. Even while it was happening, I couldn't tell you one discrete event that occurred.

This week is exam number one week for 2 of my classes. The first exam I think is the most stressful day of any student's semester - what is the exam like? how does the professor write exams? How do they grade exams? How many questions? What kind of questions?

Much of today was fielding these questions. The exam is like the homeworks. I grade like I graded the homeworks. The exam is some mix of question types. There will be enough questions to insure I know you know the material. But if you don't know the concepts, none of this matters.

Oh well. What do you do?

Uid 33

Tuesday 15th February.

Yesterday I went to visit a placement student working in a company south of Bedford. Quite a pleasant day travelling by train and bike, nice weather. Good to see a successful student, and an interesting placement company. Industrial placement visits are just so good at reminding me what its like in the working world. Its also good that most employers seem to be very pleased with our students, and most students enjoy the experience too. I managed to do a good few hours work on the train, but was extremely tired by the time I got home. I was away from home for about 10 hours. Had breathing problems again cycling (quite hard work cycling into the wind), and so today I visited my Doctor in the morning. A 10 minute appointment turned into a two hour visit with an ECG test (fortunately I was able to phone/email from the surgery and re-arrange my appointments), and a hospital appointment tomorrow in the early morning. Back to work for a lecture in this afternoon. Wednesday will be a bit busier, chairing a Boards of Studies in the afternoon, however I should have time for a visit to the hospital in the morning, with a bit of meeting rescheduling...

(As it turned out, the following day I was admitted to hospital and had to undergo angioplasty, I must have had a mild silent heart attack the previous week... Off work for a fortnight, and lots of nice emails from students.)

Uid 34

15 February 2011

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07:45-08:55 Breakfast and e-mail. A fascinating mathematics archive preprint is "completing an investigation begun by Vi\`ete in 1591." Various e-mails about the moves of two AA groups, which I seem to have ended up coordinating.

08:55-09:15 The three S: s\*\*t, shave, shampoo

09:15-09:30 Bus to University, buy paper (at student price!) and sandwiches

09:30-10:05 prepare e-learning materials for large Maths course, and discuss issues of the e-learning system with the Maths e-learning officer.

10:05-10:15 Get coffee and go to Exam Board

10:15-11:10 Exam Board, and discussions with newly-appointed adminstrator of the new Graduate School, who was sitting in as these are the first exam boards under the new system.

11:10-11:20 Discussion with Director of Teaching about undergraduate courses.

11:20-11:40 Fill in form from Centre about what grants I've applied for. Of course, different parts of the Centre already know all this information, but it's much easier to make academics fill in the information again.

11:40-11:50 Misc admin, including correcting the minutes of previous Dept. meeting item "approval of minutes of previous meeting" to record that I had been present at the previous meeting, and had had the minutes corrected!

11:50-12:15 Review automated marking scripts with senior TA on my Maths course.

12:15-13:10 Omnibus - the University staff society committeee

13:10-13:45 Supervise the first programming lab of the new semester. My instructions on "what to do this week" aren't visibleon the projector, so download to Word (hate) and blow up to 16pt).

13:45-14:05 Misc. admin. including proof sheets of new business cards: since I have a cross-department appointment, I need them to read "Departments of Mathematical Sciences and Computer Science", not "Department".

14:05-14:20 Maths student with perverse, but ALMOST working solution to last coursework came to explain it to me. Zero marks for commenting!

14:20-14:45 Misc. admin, including arranging taxis for external examiner for a thesis next month.

14:45-15:10 Conference referee management and organising.

16:10-16:40 Security seminar - fascinating guest speaker

16:40-17:10 Misc. admin.

17:10-17:30 Supervise the first programming lab of the new semester (again, but differnet students and different tutors)

17:30-17:50 Bus into town

17:50-18:05 Work on exercises for the Maths class to be handed out on Thursday, and therefore to be given to my colleague for checking on Wednesday.

18:05-19:20 AA Meeting

19:20-21:30 Shop & cook dinner for a colleague, interspersed with Programme Committee duties, looking up picttures on the web for her lectures on Russian literature and updating last year's version of the next Maths exercise

21:30-23:20 Return home, via shopping, and do some personal adminstration.

23:20-00:12 More e-mail: tutors for the Maths course, more Programme Committee duties

Uid 35

This is the day I have no classes. Amazing how I can have several hours pass and accomplish so little. I have an exam to grade, and each time I grade one student's single page, I want to stop and do something else. They are not doing well.

Department meeting in a few minutes. We're trying to hire a few people (math positions; we are a combined department), and we've had a few turn down our offers already. But the big "fun" item is the self-study that was dumped on us a few weeks ago that has to be finished by the end of February. So we're working in teams of two on different parts of it. I'm lucky -- I got "Curriculum", which is relatively easy, I think. I'm supposed to be spending time working on major revisions to the CS offerings, and coordinating with Engineering and many other departments on campus. But that hasn't really started rolling yet because of all this writing we're doing.

I'm doing "Scholarship Day Interviews" in a few days. This is where faculty interview admitted students. I have about half a dozen to do. Just found out the only CS student I had canceled; the remaining interviewees are all Actuarial Science.

Uid 38

A brief postscript to my previous entry - still getting over the shock of "The Fish" being poached by Wigan Athletic. And what is my son going to do now with that "Torres" Liverpool shirt?

This was a very different day from the previous diary day, with work and commuting leaving no time at all for anything else. The first class of the day started at 9am (some gentle first year programming), the last finished at 9pm (a not-so gentle MSc lecture on advanced C# programming to some very motivated and knowledgeable part-time students who are already employed as programmers and studying for an advanced qualification). Got home after 11 due to the peculiarities of the evening bus timetable.

Several meetings were arranged with students for today. A group of 3rd year (pre-honours year in Scotland) students working on their software development project appeared to have forgotten everything they had ever been taught about requirements capture, or perhaps didn't think that it might be relevant to developing a web application. Another group of 3rd year students are working on a collaborative project with students at a university in Finland, and they seem to be a bit more switched on. Finally, a final year project student who seemed to have forgotten everything he had been reminded of about requirements capture during his 3rd year project the year before.

No time at all today to think about the issues floating around the university - restructuring, newly appointed deans, "rationalisation" of programmes and modules, the REF, etc. Probably just as well...

Uid 41

Another typically busy Tuesday. Up early and drive to work before all sensible parking spaces are taken. Aside from a research group meeting and a lecture spent most of the day working on a pretty departmental history poster to occupy some wall in our new entrance space (extended efforts to make a 1968 concrete ugly into something more aesthetic). Also put some hardware time in to make some old MEiKO Transputer boards flash their lights (although it required unsoldering the existing lights, putting in new ones, cutting tracks and extensive wire-wrap reconstructive surgery). Now sitting prettily in the display-case we got (also to improve the appearance). Seems to be having the right impact though, our students seem to like it, plus evokes entertaining stories from those who were around when it was (and long before I was!). Finished off the day with food, couple of hours of bell-ringing and assembling the hutch for our imminent guinea-pigs.

Uid 45

Only one class today, so most of the day will be grading, grading, grading, and preparing tests for two of my classes this Friday. A treat later tonight, as I am taking a short course in water color art techniques, and it meets on Tuesday evenings.

Our school is busy discussing the new faculty sick leave policy, as we never had one before! There is much argument back and forth, but I am trying to keep out of it as much as possible. There seem to be more than enough people engaged in this discussion already. I have enough to think about.

Uid 46

Tuesdays are wonderful, as my PA and I manage to keep the day unbooked so that real work can be done. Other than one rescheduled 1-1 meeting with a PhD student, it was clear.

Spent a couple of hours focused on preparations for the two Postdoctoral Fellow positions for which we are accepting applications. Completed the formation of the interview committees, booking the interview dates (how did we ever survive without Doodle?), and finalizing the short listing dates and procedures. Now let's just hope that there are a sufficient number of good applicants for each post to make the process enjoyable.

I finally had a chance to rework the model solution for the virtual memory lab exercise in the OS course. The code I inherited, while it works, was not the epitome of good design and implementation. With a couple of hours of effort, I was able to specify a cleaner design, and implement several versions (1 physical frame, max number of physical frames, with physical cache, virtual cache, TLB). The students should now be in a much better position to learn from the model solutions when they are presented to them.

My new laptop has been delivered, and I started the long process of installing essential software. A full Cygwin installation was done, as without this I cannot do anything of use, while still maintaining my umbilical linkage to Outlook. I started installing a few other packages. I hope to be able to move over to the new Windows 7 system from my current Vista system within a couple of weeks.

Uid 47

15 February 2011

6:00 Not sure Simon & Garfunkel is the greatest wake up song. Pondered the existence of my computer science program as I did dishes this morning. The large state university in my town announced yesterday that they will no longer be accepting undergraduate computer science majors as of 2012. They have a thriving engineering program and it appears they expect this to be the place computer science is done. It was shocking because I thought programs ensconced in engineering schools were the safe programs and now I find I'm the only pure computer science program left in town (the others closed down long ago).

All that to think about but it doesn't get me out of making school lunches for my kids. :-)

8:00 Got the kids to school and made it to work. 90 minutes to get something done until meetings hit me. Our department is working on its self study and things are going pretty well. I need to pull out data on numbers of students and also need to pull down the data from our alumni survey that was just completed. The good news about having taught everyone on the alumni list is that you get over 70% response.

Oh but first I have to remember to pay my mortgage.

9:00 Did I think I would get to work on the self study? No, it's really much more interesting to spend the time trying to reconfigure the fall schedule so people with <insert problem here> don't have to teach at <time they don't want to teach>. I guess it makes me old, but I just taught at the time they scheduled my class.

11:00 Just spent 90 minutes meeting with a company about internships and jobs for mathematics and computer science majors. Critical thinking is such a great job skill.

12:15 Spent an hour with students, discussing tomorrow's exam and doing advising.

1:00 More students, this time about summer opportunities. Time for some quick lunch before the next meeting.

3:00 I was actually able to do some work on our self study (but not much). The alumni responses are fun to browse but it's clear I'll need to do a bit more clever analysis to get more than a little information out of it since the students go back fifteen years.

Our computer science group started discussing the future of the program. We somewhat agree on topics that will be important (multi-core, multi-and-parallel processing, ubiquitous computing, large data sets, communication and security, interfaces) but I may have pushed to hard when I revealed some questions I'd written to myself (which basically asked why our courses weren't already naturally incorporating these topics). I realized that we've let exactly what I feared happen. In a nutshell, we're old -- tenured faculty, not necessarily using all the new whiz-bang tech ourselves -- so we aren't naturally incorporating them into our courses. It's time we step up. I look at all the efforts to invigorate computer science education and I think the bottom line is to program the cool tech to solve the cool problems just as we did when the {mainframe, personal} computer was the cool tech. Interesting problems will follow and the real computer science will be necessary. Of course, now I need to find the time to walk the walk.

4:15 Data gathering for the self study, with small detour to pass on some job openings to 2010 math grad still looking. Getting ready for the next student meeting about tomorrow's exam.

5:00 Student didn't show up -- solid time on the data. Now time to get everyone to their evening activitiesâ€¦

5-8:30 Kids to music, purchase crickets, wait for kids to finish lessons while going over survey data, make supper, eat supper, send kids to bed.

And then more (slow) working through of data so I can start pulling out actual information soon. It's more fun to read the parts of the survey where the alumni tell us what they are doing now. Starting to separate things out by 5-year eras.

And now at 10:30, I'm falling asleep.

Uid 50

Whoops -- missed this one by a day.

Yesterday I was inundated by students, and didn't have a spare moment to eat, think, or work. It continued long after I got home (though it's easy to argue that it's my own fault for continuing to answer E-mails). Many of the students chasing me were from my intro course, asking for advice on homework or how to prepare better for our exam next week. Most were from my programming language paradigms course. They had an assignment due last night and were in a bit of a panic. I give them challenging tasks to complete, but the point is to expose them to some new technique or process that I want them to master. I \*want\* them to succeed. Giving up in frustration isn't the point. Hence the long hours I spent trying to coach students through it in person and via E-mail.

Other things on my mind yesterday: I lead a subgroup of the curriculum committee, and I needed to schedule a meeting and set its agenda. I was also trying to finish up a survey to administer to CS departments at peer institutions to learn more about their teaching loads -- it's much harder than I'd thought it was going to be. I have several advisees in academic difficulty and I'm trying to stay on top of it. Finally, I had to spend time giving feedback to the graders for my CS1 sections and coaching them on how to grade the latest assignment. (This is only the second time I've used graders for CS1, but I have about 50 students and give weekly assignments, so I thought I'd give it a try. So far, the results have been less than stellar).

Uid 52

The morning started with catching up on some emails followed by a cup of coffee that was interrupted by a fire alarm. It wasn’t the right time for our normal fire alarm test so we all trundled outside, where it was -4 degrees and I realised I hadn’t brought a coat with me. However, after the false alarm and being allowed back in the building I realised that a short blast of very cold air doesn’t half wake you up early in the morning. I spent a bit of time booking some train tickets for a meeting at the Higher Education Academy in York in March. It is such a pain, they are starting the meeting so early that there is no possible way of me getting there entirely on public transport. I phoned and asked for a change of time, but they were not for moving. So it means either a £30 taxi from my home to a mainline railway station at 05:00 or getting my husband up at that time to ask him to drive me to the main railway station at that time. Hmm, I’m slightly grumpy about the HEA being inflexible about this and the extra time it has taken me to sort this out.

I moved on to making some changes and additions to the VLE for a new programme we are running soon. I think some of the technology we have access to now can be so beneficial to learning, although I often feel some people are still pushing technology for the sake of it. However, I love when you use technology and you realise that there are additional benefits that perhaps weren’t the original intention of the designers. In this programme, there are three of us co-designing the curriculum and we are based in different buildings. It is so useful for us to be able to develop the programme within the VLE and be able to see the shaping of the planned curriculum processes and content. We can also store and share so many materials there. The biggest benefit will be that many of the programme participants are overseas and they will soon be able to access all of these materials and we will be able to have some group conversations before we meet in person.

I then bumped into my line manager in the corridor and she was able to respond to a number of queries that I had about pieces of work awaiting decisions. So often it is a serendipitous meeting that moves work forwards. I am sure this isn’t the best management practice in the world…there are times it leads me to loiter in corridors when I need decisions!

We had a departmental meeting this morning in a lovely coffee shop/café to discuss prioritising the work that we do. We keep losing staff in our unit but gaining more work and it is becoming unsustainable. It is a miracle no one has gone off sick in the last year. So we spent some time going through our workload model and trying to view all the activities we do in the light of relative priorities to our team and to the University. We plan to then reassess some of the activities that have been placed at the bottom of the priority scale. We stayed on for some lunch together before heading back for an exam board meeting this afternoon.

Our external examiner was sick and so had sent in a written report, but we were able to formally approve marks and discuss the external examiner’s comments. The board was very affirming of our good feedback practice, as well as suggesting some areas in which we may need to support students better. One tricky area is helping students to develop their abilities in making links between the literature and their own beliefs and then articulating these ideas clearly on paper.

I spent the rest of the afternoon working on programme approval documents for the new version of our distance MEd programme. This included several phone calls to college level administrators to clarify regulations. It is exciting to be at a stage where we are nearly ready for another round of consultations with existing MEd students, potential new students and examiners. I am looking forward to hearing their views on our programme design and trying to be creative in responding to their needs.

As usual, I didn’t get as far as I wanted with the MEd approval documents before the clock caught up with me. I had Spanish night class tonight. I am in my second semester of level 1 Spanish and loving it. It is great being a student again, and when I was at school I was good at languages but didn’t pursue them to A level. So this has been my first time learning a language again in a formal setting since school. The teacher certainly goes a lot faster than the school teachers – I realise this is University level Spanish. We get lots of practise at speaking Spanish and the teacher provides good feedback on our progress. I am so motivated to learn this language – I think because we have been on many holidays in Spain and I would like to progress beyond the ‘Spanglish’ I have learned from phrase books. So we have booked a holiday in June to Madrid and this is really helping me to keep up my motivation. It is such a range of students in the class – University staff and students but many people from the local community as well. I am particularly impressed at a student from the University who is studying engineering, but who wants to learn a language on top of his degree to help him to become more employable at the end of his time at University – very commendable. I am also impressed at one of my peers from Slovenia, who is learning Spanish through the medium of English. I can’t imagine ever speaking a second language well enough to learn another language through that medium. It also reminds me of the added value of the classroom experience when the learners are so diverse – we all benefit from the different perspectives in the room. I managed to run for the train and was home at 21:00, which justified no further work tonight other than writing my diary entry.

Uid 60

I forgot to upload the diary on Feb 15th. That’s how busy I was!

Semester 2 started on Feb 14th and the crazy beginning-of-semester-chaos set in. Let me list all the things I dealt with on Tuesday, the 15th. I had to meet with disgruntled students who could not add or drop modules to their liking – yes, we have perquisites. I had to identify students who were eligible for supplementary exams – an excruciating process of wading through Excel sheets. I had to patiently explain to visiting faculty the mysterious ways of our IT systems. With no official “term break” I was still lagging behind in preparing for a module that I was going to teach for the first time. In between, I checked to make sure I was ready for the next day’s class, coordinated with another faculty member about a workshop she was conducting on cooperative learning, and answered endless emails.

I prefer days when I am teaching. Then, my day flows in an organised way and I have a sense of achievement at the end of the day. My non-teaching days are typically chaotic and exhausting. I am seriously thinking of checking emails only once every hour, instead of watching them bounce into my inbox every minute. No matter how I plan my non-teaching day (catch up with grading, work on a paper for submission, read professional articles), the day ends up disorganised.

I just “crashed” when I came home in the evening and switched off all thinking faculties!

Uid 64

Meetings and marking. Reflect that the assignment has not gone quite according to plan, as the quality is not what I was hoping for and it takes ages to mark each submission. Not much to lift the soul there.

However, I have a secret evening project which is much more fun, which is the creation of a game for use in staff development. I am discovering that there is a real art to doing the scoring system and I am quite enjoying the permutations. The aim of the game is entirely serious but it is intended as an alternative to me explaining a whole set of quality rules and enhancement strategies using an endless series of powerpoint slides (guilty as charged).

Then I remember that I need to set up a series of tutorials. Just as I finish my last email at 10:30pm, one of my children asks for me to read through their AS coursework to proofread it. I'm not allowed to comment on content but it still takes a while. Dumbing down of A levels? Not from where I'm sitting - I couldn't possibly have produced anything so well reasoned at that age.

Uid 65

Share Project 15.02.11

0900h A rare visit to my GP. I was asked if my complaint could possibly be the result of stress….

1000h Worked at home marking some third year reports. The first few are quite good and this makes me buoyant…. and then I start on some very weak submissions which leaves me full of despair. Why do students simply not take the basic advice they are given? They are paying for it – we have the expertise – why do they choose to ignore it and risk getting poor marks in the final year of their degree?

1200h Too distracted by my husband and our new kitten at home so decide to go to work earlier than I had intended to get some peace and quiet – a rare occurrence.

1300h Arrive at work and continue marking for a bit. Then remember a couple of urgent jobs I had shelved a few days ago that are now long overdue. By the time these are done and out of the way I am struggling for time to prepare for a meeting and don’t get any further marking done.

1530h I chair a meeting which I had anticipated to be a difficult one. It turns out that everyone is in compromising mood so we make some good progress. We are trying to fit a quart into a pint pot. Two huge networks, two different tutorial regimes, six field courses (one of which doesn’t actually go anywhere…. no, I don’t understand it either), and a host of ancillary activities and progress meetings. All to be fit into one mega 30-credit unit. Only two assignments though – that’s all we’re allowed. Without any exams it is going to be challenging designing an aligned curriculum that positively motivates student attendance and engagement.

1730h The main meeting is over but a few of us lag behind addressing a whole range of extra issues and problems that no-one else has thought of. Then I go to a colleague’s office to show them how to use the ‘page layout’ function in the 2007 version of PowerPoint. I’ve only just switched to this version of MS Office from the 2000 version myself, but it’s all fairly logical and I manage to sort it out within a couple of minutes.

1800h I bump into a colleague on the way back to my office who says that yesterday, when we had the fire alarm, he took his only day off sick from the University since he started working here in 1986. Hence, his surprise, when first thing this morning (still suffering the after effects of a brief tummy bug from a Valentine’s Day scallop meal), he was summoned to a meeting to review procedures following the fire alarm. It was a real one (alarm, that is) arising from spontaneous combustion of some chemical waste in one of our labs. A little damage done but no-one injured thankfully. Just imagine what could have happened had it occurred in the evening or weekend?

1810h I pack up to go home. Looking forward to spending some time with our new kitten – a real live wire. However, I hope he has a little less energy tonight so I can actually get some sleep – I’ve been really dozy all day. He thought it amusing last night to try and suffocate me in the early hours of the morning by sitting on my face…..

Uid 67

I keep starting to write these and then get distracted with other, more pressing work. It’s amazing how difficult it is to find 10 extra minutes in the day. I swear most of my time is spent doing admin. I understand why colleagues run when asked to be programme leader!

The day after Valentine’s Day is not always a good one for students especially when you teach a 9am class. I teach to two different programme groups of students – all first years – and while nearly all of my programme’s students were in attendance, the other group was only 20% there. What that says about their love lives, I’m not sure.

Every Monday I promise myself I’ll come up with a simple lesson for the following Tuesday’s seminar, yet always end up in the office at 7pm finishing up a set of slides and an in-class exercise. This Tuesday it was a particularly dull material – copyright and image resolution. It felt cruel to tell the students who had spent hours downloading images off the internet that they probably wouldn’t be able to use most of the images, but it was necessary. They took it well and several decided to take their own photos instead – now that’s a response I like to see!

This Tuesday, I started teaching on an Honours year module I haven’t taught on all year. It was fun to meet new students and see them engage with exciting new project briefs. I must admit I was a bit shocked to find that my co-tutor (a marketing expert, allegedly) wasn’t familiar with the ‘Guardian reader’ type. Despite having lived and worked in the UK for 12 years (I've been here less than 10), he seemingly never picked up a newspaper and assumed no one else did either. One of the briefs described a target market that matched the Guardian reader steretype, yet I seemed to be the only one in the room aware of what this meant. I may not expect this of students, but of a colleague – especially someone who worked in marketing! Eek.

Unfortunately, disappointments like these are relatively common at my workplace. It makes it all the more frustrating to be a programme leader trying her best to give the students the best possible experience and education.

So what did I do on Tuesday, well, I taught a lot. I bored first years with image resolution rules and tried to explain to fourth years that high-end paper companies sell to designers, not high street shops. It was an exhausting day of trying to keep my energies up and motivate a group of shockingly sheltered students. Although there’s something amusing about watching students explain a brand strategy only in terms of Scotland as though the rest of the UK doesn’t exist rather than the other way around.

In the short space of time I had between classes, a second year visited to discuss Erasmus exchange possibilities and the tattoo a classmate’s boyfriend got of said classmate’s lips. Hmm. My second years seem to miss me this semester since I don’t teach them, so it’s nice they still come in for a chat. And, at the end of the day, that’s why I’m here. Disappointing, frustrating or other, spending time with the students always gives me a buzz. My colleague got an email from a formerly switched-off third year genuinely thanking him for his research class that day. It completely made his day. So all in all, it was a good day for teaching, if only the executive and the government agreed that this was the most important aspect of HE - not simply bringing in money and accolades.

Uid 70

Well this was a good day attending the ELI education conference in Washington DC USA. This was day two of the conference and yesterday I attended a range of interesting papers on using technology in teaching but also learning analytics which is now a big issue in USA. There are many thoughts about how there is a range of data not being collected or analysed which can support future planning of teaching but also can be used to enhance student support when they do not appear engaged.

Myself and a colleague also were doing a poster presentation for the afternoon which was focused on data we had collected from students and staff about future use of technology and how lecturers needed preparing for this. It was a good sessionwith a lot of interest in our work especially our Student Voice award.

It was great to have this time to freflect on work and what we might wish t take forward for the next year as well as share some of our work

Uid 71

Tuesday is my big teaching day this term. I have moved house so am now commutig which means I try to do whole days of teaching and admin and whole days for writing.

Get the train at 8.40 arrive at campus at 10. Finish marking on the train. Brief time to check e mails n shuffle papers before meeting a colleague for coffee at 10. He is covering a lecture so take him for coffee to thank him. Take him to the lecture hall, make sure everything works then a meeting wi a phd student I'm co-supervising. Have a long chat about her thesis. She's at the beginning stages but seems to really get it.

Lunch with colleagues.

Confirm marks with colleagues.

Make a lesson plan for seminars that afternoon on prostiution.

Get to class-very few students have turned up. We jettison the groupwork and have a small group discussion-about 10 students in all after several are late... We have a great session. Students talk about research they have read preparing for their essays and we have a great debate. The rest of the seminars on the same topic follow the same theme.

I really enjoy teaching. This is a great course-a different lecturer and topic each week which keeps it really interesting. Students are really fun sometimes too. This is a second year class which is a turning point in thei learning - I teach them for the whole year which is kind of rewarding at times.

Uid 75

My waking thoughts this morning were about the marking of an assignment for a master's paper. The code produced by the students seems to be primarily following the template of the example. Some show an ability to adapt the template for new requirements. Others simply copied and failed to satisfy the new requirements.

During the marking session, one of the markers complained about the poor quality of the code. In general, I agree but if the example code they were given used good engineering techniques (I think it should) then what happens to the assessment. Simply because they copy the code or code structure doesn't mean that they have learnt to think as good software engineers.

In effect, the course isn't set up to teach software engineering practice. It is centred around technologies and being able to write code using those technologies.

The lecture, lab exercise, and assessment technique of teaching doesn't force people to think or learn. In many ways, it promotes plagiarism. Problem-based learning or enquiry-based learning may present greater possibilities.

The problem is that in this institution and many others that I have worked, fostering learning is secondary to achieving research outputs. Lecturers don't have the time to spend thinking about how to teach and how to produce good learning materials. The focus becomes a knowledge dump with the result that many students know how to copy solutions but not how to reason about solutions. Certainly creativity and innovation are not encouraged because often a single solution is shown and exercises and assessments revolve around duplicating that solution.

The end result is crap in and crap out.

I was going to work at home for the morning but the house being cold and the need to deliver a document to the solicitor for a house purchase meant that I was too distracted so I headed to work via the solicitors.

The remainder of my morning was spent drafting an exam. The style of exams here is different to what I was used to in NZ. The questions seem to be made up of more compound parts. The result is that it is taking longer than I want to write but it needs to be written by the end of the week.

I have a meeting with the TJ demonstrators at midday and I need to talk with them about how we will mark a unit testing exercise. So exam writing goes on hold while I print off the marking schedule.

The afternoon has been a bit of a blur. After the TJ meeting, there were a number of students that I had to email and a general email to get across the message that individual marks are dependant on the effort that each student puts into the team work. Some seem to think that as long as they do some small part, they will pass the course. It gets frustrating having to keep telling them that they aren't doing enough work. At the half way point and some really need a kick in the back end.

The guest speaker for TJ arrived and KS took him for a coffee. I was about to go and join them when AS came to see me about what we taught in first year programming so he wasn't repeating it in software engineering. Reinforcement of some topics would help but he had some good ideas of what needed covered.

I did get to talk with the guest speaker before heading over to the lecture. Interesting to get a different perspective on the games industry. His lecture was good and reinforced team work ideas as well as needing to know low level technical details.

Back to my office to try and finish off the exam but not really making enough progress. Now my wife has texted to say she is on the bus home so I need to pack up and get out of here. 6:30pm isn't too bad. If I had been going to the spin class at the gym, I would have stayed another half hour.

I probably won't feel like doing anything else tonight but I see I have a request to look at a sample solution for ICW and try to improve the code. I am not sure I have time for that.

Dam, just realised that I didn't take the TJ mid semester questionnaire to the lecture and hand it out. It will have to wait until Thursday or maybe next week. Not really sure of the value of these. The questions are so vague that it is difficult to understand what the student feedback is really saying. Still it is a requirement so I have to do it.

Uid 77

Share Project Feb 15th

Good Morning. This month’s contribution is a little different. I am currently away from the University on a recruitment/selection trip. Each medical School has a small but important allocation of spaces for overseas students. I and two colleagues (a professor and a member of the admin support) left home just over a week ago, visiting first Malaysia and currently Canada. Our aim is not only to select suitable overseas students, but has also involved meeting with the senior doctors and administrators in Malaysia in order to get our degree approved. Having crossed so many time zones in 8 days, (including two nights in transit, and a night on an airport floor) my body clock battery has gone flat! Given that each recruited overseas student nets the university about £100,000 over 5 years, I am wondering whether the university could have been a bit more generous, like business class rather than economy travel?

So it is currently 4am local time, and I am drinking coffee and nibbling nuts. Thank goodness today is our last day, and we return home tomorrow. I have already sorted out the paperwork for our interviews today (7, each taking about 40 minutes). We are using the club lounge on the 43rd floor to conduct the interviews, while Carole (our admin support) meets and greets our candidates, checks their ID and paperwork on the ground floor. In Malaysia this was quite straight forward, but here in Toronto the Hotel is also hosting an event for Canadian teenagers, and there are 6,000 of them here The fact the 2,000 of the 6,000 are also staying in the hotel is making using the lifts a slow process too. Of course in between the interviews and meetings with official, the internet and my trusty ‘net book’ keeps me in touch with base. .. Email can be a bind, but it is helpful to be able to sort out most email while away, so there isn’t 300 waiting for me when I get home.So my next task is to standard set the end of year exam paper.

OK, so I’ve standard set the main paper, and part way through the resit paper, Am going to take a break now and go to the gym for 30 mins or so, then off to meet my colleagues for breakfast. I hope they have sorted the heating out in the breakfast lounge; it was very chilly yesterday, and we will be holding our interviews up there too

So we have interviewed 4 potential students this morning, and at least two of them would be great additions to the school. Interestingly many of the students have contacts in Norwich, which is why they have applied to study there. But it isn’t easy doing the interviews. We had arranged with the hotel to do the interviews in the club lounge, and did so yesterday. But this morning we are told that we couldn’t use the lounge as there was to be a memorial service being held there today. So after some negotiation they have given us another room in the far corner of the hotel to use.

However we have had a nice lunch today; we’ve 3 more applicants to interview this afternoon, then finished! Off home tomorrow. We do have a bottle of wine to celebrate completion, courtesy of the hotel; small compensation for the challenge of coping with 6,000 teenagers! Back to work....

It’s now 5.30pm local time, and we have finally finished. It’s been a long day. Time for a brief walk outside to get some fresh air after two days in the air conditioned atmosphere. Then clear the rest of the emails, pack my suitcase, and bed. I am too tired to finish the standard setting tonight, probably do it when I wake in the morning.

Uid 78

Another jam packed day of meetings. The first of the morning was about scheduling and the institutional course approvals system. One of this University's greatest strengths is its equal opportunity and widening participation agenda. I don't know whether in order to ensure that that agenda is reflected in our courses it is necessary, literally, to tick lots of boxes on forms, but that is what we are required to do, with a certain amount of additional narrative, by mid May. There will be more behind our form than ticked boxes but I may not be able to give this exercise the time that the inventors of the form think it deserves.

Meeting number two was with a colleague J who is on a fixed term research contract. In order to enhance J's chances of getting a 'proper' job he needs to develop his teaching experience. We can give him the experience. The challenge is to find a way to do that without exploiting him. The end of his full time research contract is 31/7. I can't get him payment for additional work while he is on a full contract. The Faculty has money that must be spent by 31/7. So although J could do the work in August and September we might not be able to pay him for it. I'm not yet sure how to get round that.

The afternoon was taken up with a Department meeting. The best thing about Department meetings is that departmental colleagues get to go to lunch together. This is always a pleasure. We don't see each other enough. The meeting was productive in so far as it could be but there are so many uncertainties at the moment. We were all dumbstruck by the discovery that a module that has recently been pulled by the Faculty has been singled out, at the most senior level of University management, as having earning potential. This is an appalling case of non communication from University management to Faculty level. We constantly make claims about the marketability of our departmental modules but because they are not marketed the University doesn't benefit from their potential. I hesitate to be optimistic about the latest development because nothing may come of it. I really worry about out marketing department. I don't think they quite understand about education.

Off to spend the evening with my son and daughter in law. It will be refreshing to talkk about the frustrations of the retail industry.

Uid 81

Completing this after the event.

Tuesday diary entry shows only 2 appointments - an honours project student and an MSc dissertation student, neither of whom turned up again, neither of whom sent apologies...again. Helpful concerned email sent to each...again

My outbox gives a good sense of what I spent the day doing and it looks like it's not the day job! Most of it seems to be either work I am doing with the professional body, reading consultation documents on government policy, working with the trade association to establish a national strategy for our sector, trying to bring businesspeople into our classrooms, trying to set up links between our local research pool and the professional body - since I seem to be the only person with a foot in both camps. All worthy but apart from a notional allowance related to research impact and scholarship, not justifiable.

Between 4 and 6pm however I seem to get down to preparing the following day's two hour class for postgrads. In this at least I am keeping to resource allocation model - one hour prep for each hour's contact. But I do feel I am going into the class underprepared.

Menwhile I trying not to think of absolutely huge piles of work that need doing across multiple fields both internal and external. Spouse is out of the country on a business trip for two weeks so have additional share of housework to do, but the family is coping. Quite tired though and spend the evening half asleep in front of TV instead of working through one of the things I ought to be doing. Ah next month it's the Ides of March!

Uid 82

Today, like 15 Jan and 15 Mar, is a sabbatical day for me, so I'm only doing one thing that is directly related to teaching, namely reading through one of my PhD student's work. Gloating over.

What I am doing today is working at home, trying to chop a conference paper down to size after I've done said reading whilst wrapped up like Scott of the Antarctic waiting for a plumber to finish disembowelling our delinquent boiler. My wearing of several layers and the need for the boiler to be fixed is related to teaching... I would also say the conference paper is, too, but I'll come back to that.

The boiler is a victim of teaching, and before that, magazine editing. My landlord, a magazine editor, works crazy hours and hadn't given it the love and attention (and proper servicing!) it needed when he lived here before us; I only noticed its delinquent tendencies because I happened to be on study leave this term and heard funny noises... There's nothing quite like extended periods of writing at home to make you realise that things aren't what they should be...! It's a cousin of procrastination, in that as the person who is 'off' work, you end up being the person who sits in making plumbers cups of tea, which means you end up writing diary entries because you can't concentrate on your paper properly ;-) As my example suggests, it's not just lecturers who get busy, but we do have these periods of extreme busyness, in which you can only focus on what you need to do work-wise, as you are charging around teaching, going to meetings, evening seminars etc. I suspect I would have had a more seriously broken boiler and a much greater stress episode had this happened in term time. But it's not the only thing that gets left to one side, hence why I'm sorely tempted to get a cleaner... and a personal assistant wouldn't go amiss, either.

My sabbatical is being spent on writing up things, mainly, putting the final touches on journal articles and funding proposals. It literally is a concentrated period of time for me to do the things that I find difficult (but not impossible) in term time. It's the starting things, only to have to put them down, or worse, making the mistake of checking your email when the writing going is getting slow... and discovering a whole tranche of urgent (or seemingly urgent) emails. I have found that I need to do what I used to do when I had a part-time job at a charity Tues-Thurs, which is to have an out-of-office informing people I'd respond to them when I was next in. I should do this with research days, and assiduously avoid the temptation just to see what's there... after all, I wouldn't check emails whilst teaching or sitting in a meeting, so why shouldn't the same discipline apply?

What is true of today and all other days of my sabbatical is the realisation that teaching at university really does need research to happen. I've found this to be such an enriching time in terms of my getting to step back and reflect on things, to read or re-read key stuff in my field, to be enhancing my own knowledge through the act of writing or giving papers. Unlike school and FE teachers, we are the textbooks - so we need our time and space to catch up with what's going on in our field, and to make sure we are contributing to that, a point often lost in the heated debates around the future of HE in this country.

Uid 95

As usual I am at my desk soon after 7 am. I clear the admin. and I am ready for 4 hours of Level 2 IT practicals. Because of numbers I have to repeat the one hour session four times. As usual the first sessions are less busy as the students have a lie in. We have a quick test (paper - I really don't have time to put it on the VLE). Then it's spreadhseets with a civilengineering slant. Excel will never be ideal, especially the graphs but it's cheap and cheerful. I am still concerned that a few overseas students have never used a spreadsheet before, despite being admitted directly into Level 2. We plod one wit one PG helper for 40 students. The helper is doing their teaching cerrtificate so has a go at presenting the worked example and is very good at this.

At lunch time I closed down the computer, leave opened-mouthed students trying to talk to me as I lock the office, and dash to the car park. It's complicated but involves collecting grandson from the nearby hospital (he's fit and well) so his mum can concentrate on his sister for the afternoon. We have an operation for the pick up that invovles military precision and daughter-in-law is at the right place in time so I don't have to park up. Bundle is passed over and I speed off. Grandson is "crabby" and despite trying Meat Loaf on the CD player, he yells for most of the ten minutes to home. A nap is called for and fortunately this does the trick. We watch "Most Dangerous Animals" and find time to relax before grandson's dad arrives. I go to help with tea and bath time and work seems a million miles away.

My diary has said "working at home" this afternoon so after a quick tea, with the house to myself, I can catch up. Feel exhausted by work and family tension and end up staring at TV but not really taking in any of the dialogue.

Uid 99

Working from home today - piles of marking to do, and it's the only way to get through it. There are far too many distractions at work. Of course, I also spend half my time dealing with emails... Technology has a lot to answer for - there's no peace to be had from the various people making demands on my time.

The marking that I'm doing is from our overseas programmes. They run to a slightly different calendar from our home programmes, so it sometimes feels as if there is never a lull in the marking process.

I'm just back from a two-week teaching trip to India, and still playing catch-up with everything that I missed. I picked up food-poisoning while I was away, which didn't really help much - still suffering the after effects a week after my return!

Uid 101

Something that felt like an honest day’s labour for a change! Spent five hours in classrooms and lectures.

Arrived at work at about 8:15 and settled down to clearing emails. Then reviewed material I had been supplied with for a tutorial 11 -> 1 before going and taking the class. This was only the second time I had seen the students and I felt the class went well with lots of questions and activity.

The class overrun and I got back to my office at 1:30 eating some lunch as I reviewed the lecture slides for the guest lecture I was giving from 2 -> 4 on academic integrity & academic misconduct to the collected MSc students. The lecture went well but it was very hard work getting the students to contribute and keeping them contributing. I have the impression that many of my MSc tutors (sorry lecturers) still see a ‘lecture’ as exactly that and talk at them rather than with them. I had planned to finish at about 3:30 but there were many questions at the end (good!) and it ran onto about 3:45.

I had an unsatisfactory meeting with one of my staff at 4. He had produced a unit guide using an obsolete template and this had been picked up in routine monitoring. But he had also done exactly the same thing the previous year, and this was the only unit he had responsibility for, and I had had to see him about the standard of an exam paper he had produced in the first semester. . . . For most of my career heads of department have had the option of being able to sideline people who do not contribute sufficiently as student numbers and budgets were growing. Unfortunately for the time I have been a head of department numbers and budgets have been shrinking. I have lost staff through retirement and movement and also made several redundant. I now have very little spare capacity and one staff member underperforming increases someone else’s workload and hits morale. He agreed reluctantly to revise the unit guide and complained about ‘management’ not managing but only berating good honest workers like him.

Then I toured the tutorial rooms where the MSc students were discussing academic integrity scenarios and deciding what the outcome and the penalty should be. The scenarios were based upon real incidents and the tutor notes included the actual outcome and penalty that was given. The report I got from the tutors the next day was that in general the students thought that the University was being too lenient!!

Another hour in my office clearing emails and seeing colleagues about routine matters. A check of the diary for tomorrow to make sure I had ready what I needed for the morning. Away at about 6:30 for a chat with my partner a bit of supper, an hour or two of telly and aware that the next day’s labour would be nothing like as honest!!

Uid 105

Very basic day. No classes today, so I'm taking the time to prepare the classes for the rest of the week, including a mini-exam (first of a group of four taken during the semester) for the Algorithms and Data Structures course.

Uid 108

This week I have been giving students back their exam results. My first year tutees all managed to pass their first set of exams with flying colours - no resits. I felt like their mum and was so proud. I gave them all a sweet to celebrate. Cheesy - but they seemed to appreciate it.

I am thinking about grant proposals and working with others at the moment - planning work we could do and writing draft proposals. I am also writing a book chapter with some colleagues elsewhere in Europe and trying to sort out all the literature for that. But at the moment the real hot topic is the fact that we are deciding fees. I am not party to the discussions but I get to hear the rumours. It is worrying and I suppose everyone is nervous of the impact higher fees might have on recruitment in the near future. I am hoping it will all mean high quality teaching is given equal consideration to research in terms of real importance in the strategy and for promotion purposes. We shall have to wait and see though. There are also mutterings about the REF but generally everyone seems quite happy - it is almost Spring after all. I've got some guest lectures to organise and marking to do - as usual. Another thing I am thinking about for students is the fact that they need to be T-shaped when they leave - specialist and deep for the majority in their own discipline (vertical) but also broad on the horizontal with some knowledge and skills relating to other disciplines. Therefore, we need more multi-disciplinary projects and schemes for undergraduate programs in the sciences - I feel this is the way to go and the only real way that Computing Science might survive long term. Students need to be able work in multi-disciplinary teams and to realise that software is not always developed in isolation from the rest of a system. I'll keep working on writing proposals.

Some of my project students seem to have developed flu this week and are missing their meetings with me but they performed well in the first semester. I had it for 6 weeks last term and it was awful, so I understand how they feel. I can't help getting nervous when they don't show up though and I keep hoping they keep up the good work for the second semester.

Uid 114

I've been waiting for this day - 3 weeks leave starts today and I'm off to America.

The only way to truely excape work is to be in a different time zone, turn off your phone and have limited email access.

I'm sure they will still mail me and call me and I will pick up some of the messages - leave is not quite an excuse to stop work... but you can at least choose to ignore some stuff which will hopefully go away before you get back.

It will be great to have a break :-)

Uid 116

5am: Up and at 'em. Today is a recovery day. I was gone yesterday traveling back from my parents 50th anniversary party. A colleague kindly covered my one course that met yesterday, but today I have two courses spanning 4 hours to prepare. I did much of the prep last night, but need to get into the office for some final prep before the 8am class.

6:30am: In the office. This is a great time for "maker" work. No colleagues or students to interrupt, so I can get into a flow and get a lot done.

10am: I completely missed my marks in my morning class. I covered less than half of the material I had hoped to cover. Then an on-line survey for a colleagues research project was not accessible to the students, so I'll have to ask them to do it tonight. That's going to destroy his response rate.

I went for a run after class. I'm training for a half marathon in May. That goal has helped me to make exercise a priority. Often I let work supplant exercise. I'm not letting that happen this spring. Normally I'd run in the afternoon or early evening, but I have work obligations 4:30-5:30 and 7:00-11:00 tonight. That later obligations are pleasant anyway: dinner with undergraduates who completed independent study projects this term, followed by our once-per-quarter "Cold Drinks with Cool Profs". This is a great tradition that we've been observing for the last 4 years or so. In the last week of each term, the professors in the department meet the juniors and seniors for drinks and conversation at a local pub. It's fun to get to know the students better and also helps them transition to the role of supportive alumni of the department. As a private school the support of our alumni is crucial to our financial viability.

11:45am: Spent 10 minutes briefing my colleague who teaches the other section of my morning course on the things that went wrong and our plan for the next class meeting on Thursday.

12:25pm: Back from lunch in the faculty dining room. I like to eat there when I can make the time. It's a great chance to chat with colleagues in other departments. Those connections are often useful when new projects or ideas come along.

2:30pm: Back from two hours of CS1. We're experimenting with an inverted classroom for the last three weeks of this course. The students are watching videos on C programming, both conceptual videos and example problem solving. During class time they work on programming assignments of various sizes (starting small and growing to 300-400 LOC for the final project). This seems to be working well, as we can provide immediate help when students have difficulty with the tools or debugging in C.

3:30pm: Catching up on my journal for the day. Chatted with a colleague about the challenges we're having integrating a large number of Chinese students into our student body. English as a second language is proving difficult for many. Also met with three different students this period with questions about assignments and about the upcoming final exam. (Next week is exam week.)

4:30pm: Caught up on email and worked to reschedule six student presentations. My school closed because of an ice storm a couple of weeks ago and we've been juggling schedules ever since.

5:30pm: Just released from "Innovation Hour". This is a monthly meeting organized by our President and our Interim Vice Pres. of Academic Affairs (think "provost") at which one staff group and one academic department give a short presentation about what they do, then answer questions from the faculty and staff in attendance. The series started poorly with some really poor presentations, but people have warmed up to it a bit and the last couple have actually been interesting. Today's presentations were from Residence Life and Civil Engineering.

6:30pm: Home. Reviewing my TODO list. This is usually a first-thing-in-the-morning task, but I've been dousing fires all day. Nice to get a few minutes to reflect. The grading pile looms large, but there are very few assignments left to come in, so the pile seems surmountable.

9:00pm: Back home again after dinner, I managed to carve out 15 minutes to talk to my wife via iChat. We haven't seen in each except by video since the second week of January. I'm really looking forward to visiting her next week.

9:30pm: Showed our house to three students who are considering renting it next year. I'm going on sabbatical in Seattle. I really hope to find good renters so we aren't making payments on two places at once. After the showing I'm headed to the pub.

11:30pm: Back from Cold Drinks. We had a huge crowd tonight. Always fun to hear what our students plans are after graduation. The job market is amazingly strong for software engineering. With 4.5 months until graduation nearly all of our seniors have jobs already and most of our strong juniors have internships. We spent some time discussing curriculum. I enjoy using the seniors as sounding boards for ideas on curricular change.

Uid 119

Our university's connection to the Internet has been down since about 10:00 PM last night, which is both a blessing and a curse. It's a blessing because I don't have a flood of e-mail in my inbox this morning, but it's a curse because there will be an even bigger than normal flood when the Internet finally comes back, which I expect to be sometime later today.

It actually pretty funny how completely access to the Internet pervades our lives now as compared to just 20 years ago. My colleague and I teach our interdisciplinary computer+music class in a few minutes and we've had to change our lecture notes on the fly because we can't get to YouTube to play the music we want to use in class this morning. This would be unheard of earlier in my career.

My wife even called this morning to ask why she can't get to my website. That's an interesting statement on technology, too: to know where I am and what I'm doing during the work day, my wife typically doesn't bother asking me, she just goes to my website to access my online calendar.

All of this is made even more interesting by the appearance of two articles on Ken Olsen, the founder of Digital Equipment Corporation who passed away last week, in this morning's Boston Globe. My first job in the computer field was at Digital in 1974, and I loved working there. I had even met and talked to Ken a few times in a variety of circumstances. He was a highly moral man and a legend in his own time. His "fall" left many of us feeling especially bad for him. Ken's passing therefore left a bit of a hole in many of our collective hearts. The many articles appearing in the press about his passing and his legacy bring back those feelings and sadden me to know that DEC is hardly even remembered anymore. It surely shows that nothing lasts forever.

Uid 120

Crazy day. 21 weeks pregnant now and the baby is kicking furiously, which is pretty offputting when you're supposed to be discussing literary theory with your students! Up at 6.30, left home at 7, dropped husband off at the bus stop for work and got to campus at 8.45, just in time to print off my notes for my 9 o'clock seminar. I spent two hours with my first year students discussing George Eliot's Daniel Deronda in the light of the structuralist and poststructuralist literary theories we have been looking at this term. I had asked them to come to class having picked out passages and analysed the positions of the narrator/author/character/reader in those passages in the light of this theory. 3 out of 7 had done it, and they were even less confident about their capacities for such work than they were before they started. The more opportunity I give them to practise, the more they shy away. This is a bit of a problem, and not one I'm dealing with very well. Hopefully perseverance will get us all over the line! (I don't know what the hell they're going to think when we move on to Judith Butler's Gender Trouble in the second part of term.)

At 11 I left the seminar and went back to my office and did a bit of sneaky house-hunting on the internet, in between assessing (and approving) a PhD application, setting some coursework essays and writing two reading lists for dissertation students. I also exchanged a series of emails with a colleague with whom I am running an outreach project, and tried to rope several other colleagues into attending a conference I'm organising (with not much success) in May. A student who had missed my Nineteenth-Century Writing class came to see me and we went over the key points in a half an hour chat.

Then I had to go to a 3 hour induction as a STEMnet ambassador, which is weird since I do not teach a STEM subject. But my research is on literature and the earth sciences and I'm involved in a schools project combining geologists and literary specialists, and STEMnet give a free CRB check to anyone who joins. So it was three hours usefully spent, if only because it saved money! It was disheartening to hear a lot of the other participants bashing the arts and humanities, bashing traditional subjects, and bashing schools for doing a poor job. All these things are dear to me and seem like easy targets. Still, that's the point of outreach work, I suppose - to bring the subject I love out into the world and give people a better understanding of what we do at university.

Then I attended a lecture from 4-5pm. The lectures support the nineteenth-century course I teach on. The lecturer is an old 68er and a Marxist. He told the students he had interviewed Iranian men after they had been tortured, and that he himself had been tortured ('lightly, the kind of comical torture you might get in a Pinter play') by the Czechoslovakian government. The lecture was on Jane Eyre, and I am looking forward to seeing what my students made of it.

Then I drove home, had tinned macaroni cheese with cherry tomatoes in it for dinner because that's all I had time for, and sat down to work on the final details of my manuscript. It needs some editing, and I need permission to publish all 60 of my images, so I made a list of all the images and all the places I could find them at the cheapest cost. Then I cried - how on earth I'm going to do everything by the time I go on maternity leave (in 15 weeks!) I just don't know. Not by writing this diary entry, that's for sure!

Uid 123

Arrive at work 9.15 a.m.

9.15-10.30 respond to emails, very behind with emails as I was teaching and preparing teaching materials all day yesterday and haven't dealt with emails since the weekend. So many external requests for input into projects, reviews, documents these days. Also lots of emails from students asking for advice on an assessment I set on a large module. I feel my workload has spiralled out of control.

10.30-12.30 my 'office hours', thankfully (!) only one student shows up to discuss module options, but it takes me until 1.00 p.m. to catch up with student references. These days, quite understandably, students apply for more jobs and/or postgraduate programmes - no wonder our PG conversion rates appear to be decreasing - possibly nothing to do with our marketing and just to do with students doing 10 applications online rather than the 2 hardcopy applications they did 10 years ago. But, the references still have to be done... and all the forms are different.

1.00 p.m. Lunch and catch-up with colleagues. We are facing re-accreditation of one of our programmes next week and a group of us are brainstorming possible issues.

1.45 p.m. prepare for chairing an interview panel by re-reading applications and CVs of candidates.

2.30-4.30 Chairing interview panel

4.30-5.30 Selection discussion - will phone candidates tomorrow.

5.30-7.45 Back to office, more emails mixed in with some lesson preparation. I am running a new course and it takes a very long time to prepare all the materials from scratch. This is late for me, but I usually go home just before or after 7.00 p.m.

Uid 125

Strange bitty day so far, met with a group of final year students just back from their elective placement in the Far East, needless to say they had a fantastic time but interestingly came back far more appreciatve of the NHS despite it's many faults: H&S red tape, moving and handling issues etc etc. The students said how much they valued the breadth of our curriculum and the fact that they are able to problem solve, question and think for themselves and it wasn't just about the equipment and facilities(good job really as they are not far off qualification now!!) they could actually see what a difference it makes to patient care. This fills me with a little ray of hope - I think they might have got it!!

On the other hand I have been having a nightmare with timetabling!! aaargh! We are a practical course so why we are put in lecture theatres is beyond me - if I could ban all lecture theatres I would tomorrow. For a particular session I wanted the students to move around and work in groups on the floor (what no chairs and tables I hear you cry!)and another to practice interview technique but for some reason the whole module has been put in a lecture room which to me is the quickest way to stifle any creativity, interest and interaction. My job title might have lecturer in it but I do not 'lecture' at anybody!! Bring on autoscheduling - let's hope we can actually get the teaching space that is right for our sessions and students!!

Uid 126

Tuesday 15th February.

I was all set to do this. How can things go so wrong? However, this is the day I receive my new laptop, screen, docking station, oh so quick. After the computer woes I have had since December, I feel like a new person.

Arrive at desk by eight o’clock. E-mails have flooded in overnight. Because I cannot access e-mail at home at the moment everything is in a log jam. I realise how much I do in the evening and how that allows me to keep the e-mails under control. The mailbox keeps becoming full and so I can’t send and then I remove messages with attachments [hard because there is a lot going on] and I almost inevitably remove something vital in my desperation to respond quickly to some messages.

I have done a lot of paper work today. A flurry of references have come in and they need doing quickly. Why do they take so long to write, even with a completed template? Lots of e-mails and student issues to sort out today. A meeting with my colleague; very civilised, over coffee but it was just about lists of things to do and trying to find dates to meet further about writing. Almost impossible. Really ridiculous.

Then a lunchtime meeting with two colleagues in preparation for tomorrow’s team meeting. They have created a very clear action plan. It may still be a struggle to get through the meeting without too much trouble. Everyone must have their say. Mind you, if you do allow people to say their bit, they often just accept the majority view... it is just so wearisome.

Now look at me, I sound like a moaning Minnie – just like all those people quoted on the last diary day. Good grief, so we work at the weekend –so much of what we do is what we love to do. So back to today. More reference writing, photocopying for tomorrow, a description of the option I will offer in April –‘A bit of a performance.’ I send it off and then find that all the other option titles are long and serious. Oh well, the students can choose what suits them. Afternoon interrupted by arrival of new computer. Absolutely cannot complain. I am utterly embarrassed by the piles of paper on my desk that I must move to make room for the docking station etc –and the pile of dust beneath the old printer and keyboard. I am shamed into tidying somewhat as programs run.

This has been a day of bits and pieces; extensions and authorised absences to grant, those references, the agenda for tomorrow’s meeting, worries about student numbers, conversations about students and about school placements, concerns over colleagues. Perhaps the meeting with my colleague was fruitful. I always feel that we never get to the most interesting thing.

Home by eight. I bake a gluten free chocolate cake; team meeting’s seem to go a little more smoothly with cake.

Uid 127

Share Project

Tuesday 15th February, 2011

So last month’s diary entry was a little bit miserable, with me spending all my time marking with a seemingly endless pile of scripts. Of course, there was an end, and since then I have given myself a few nights of forgetting about work and relaxing, and I feel much better for it. I am, however, doing a little bit of work on most evenings, as I figure if I do an hour or so every night, I will be able to progress forward without too much of a strain on any one day.

Tuesday was no exception. I actually started my Tuesday working, as I had a little bit of marking that took me through until 12.30am until I crawled to bed. I gave myself a bit of a lie in to counteract the effect of the later night, knowing that I needed to be properly on the ball during the working day, as I had a constant stream of students coming to see me.

My first student appointment arrived at 11am, which had given me some time to clear a few of the emails beforehand and feel like I was properly awake! She wants to go onto further study in Medicine after finishing her degree, and had asked me a while ago to look through her personal statement. I had a really productive and interesting meeting with her, talking through how she should tackle the written statement, suggestions about the interviews, work experience and so forth. I really enjoy sessions like this, where there is no particular requirement or outcome, just a chance to share my knowledge and enthusiasm, and help a student with their future career. It is times like this when I really feel that I may be creating a relationship with a student that they will remember for the rest of their life, and that makes me so thrilled, that I can help somebody.

The second appointment, unfortunately, was not so exciting. She had come to talk to me about her final year project, which I will be supervising next academic year, and it was very clear that she had done absolutely no prior reading. I’m convinced she was so nervous that she was physically shaking, and I could get practically nothing out of her at all. I had to send her away with some pretty specific requests, and I will see her again in a month, when hopefully she will have done some reading. I suspect she chose one of my projects because she thought I was a ‘soft touch’ – she won’t think that now!!

I was then to have 5 successive one-on-one meetings with my first-year tutees regarding their progress so far, given that we have just compiled their marks for the end of Semester A. I managed the first three, and got some good information from them about how they were working, how they felt about the course, things they weren’t happy with and so on. It was a very informative few sessions, and gave me a chance to get to know them much better. Unfortunately, just as the fourth student turned up, my phone rang, with a call from my son’s nursery, requesting that I come pick him up as he had a high fever. I scrambled my stuff together, sent profuse apologies to the two students whom I couldn’t see as allocated, and ran out of the door. By the time I got him home, my son was absolutely fine, full of beans, smiles and giggles, and ran off to play as soon as we got in the door. As my husband works from home, he generously agreed to look after him and my daughter as I crept upstairs to sit in bed and start reading a PhD thesis, wanting to make the most of the time allocated to my working day.

After dinner, bath and bed for the two little ones, the PhD thesis came out again, and I curled up on the sofa with a hot drink and a packet of biscuits. I treated myself that evening, and stopped working at 11pm, and then actually got into bed before midnight. One of these days I might actually catch up on the sleep I have lost over the past 5 years…

Uid 128

Took ages to get to work today - had my car stolen over the weekend and have a very old borrowed 'tank' lent by my brother-in-law. Roadworks on the way to work resulted in a 35 minute journey taking over an hour and a half.

As usual, try to get through the e-mails on arrival in the office, but this time it's colleagues who interrupt, not students. A PL wants to talk to me about a situation reported to us yesterday where a student was assaulted, by another student, in the Halls of Residence and another situation where a student has obtained some medication somehow and been giving them to other, very vulnerable students. Both are going to initial hearing stage so evidence needs to be gathered. It is really worrying to think that these individuals are undertaking a course leading to entry to a professional register .....

Finally get through the e-mails, nothing particularly urgent. Time to check through the presentation for my teaching session at 11am. I will be introducing student support strategies to the students who started the course yesterday. They represent the end of an era in nurse training - the governing body has decided (and rightly so) that nursing should become a graduate entry profession so these students are the last group of DipHE students that we will train as our BSc programme is awaiting validation for a September 11 start.

10am - undertake an exit interview for a first year student who is leaving us. The condition of her 6 year old son, who has special needs, has deterirated and she cannot commit to the studies required for the course at this pont in time. A great shame - she has the potential to be an excellent children's nurse, but her son's needs must take priority

11am-12.30 - teaching the new group. A good session I think. Loads of questions - many of them baout money and financial support as quite a few of these students have left jobs to come and do the training and the bursaryu does not go anywhere near replacing their salary. They have heard that the new BSc programmes will have a means-tested bursary (not like the current one where each student gets a fixed amount) and are concerned that they will be means tested fromn September - fortunately this is not the case so I can reassure them.

Lunch at the desk - never a good idea because I always get disturbed by students and staff. After lunch I see a 3rd year student who makes me realise why I like to spend a lot of time with 1st years - she comes from French North Africa and the first piece of work I looked at (over 2 years ago) was written in English but using French grammar (very confusing!). This assignment is fluent and extremely well-written and I feel justified in the hours I spent with her getting it right.

2.30 - telephone interview with my insurance company about the car. They are now trying to tell me that my policy is invalid because I didn't tell them about some points I acquired on my licence, despite the fact that my schedule outlines the extra payments grrrrrrrrrrrrr!!!!

3.15 - 2nd year personal student struggling with an assignment that carries a huge fear factor. The module leader has a reputaion amongst the students and I have seen her behaving in an inappropriate manner towards them - shouting at them, tearing up their work(!) etc. I do not understand why someone with such little regard for students as human beings would choose this career pathway! Now she is on annual leave for 4 weeks at the end of the semesterand has failed to make arriangements for academic supervision while she is away. To make matters worse, a colleague,realising how high the stress levels were amongst the students, put on an additional session for them with regard to key elements of the assignment, but appears to have contradicted information given to them earlier in the semester and has only succeeded in raising tress even higher.

Suggested that it might be good for this student to speak to a 3rd year who had got a good grade for this assignment and has helped me and other students out with queries in the past. While she was prepared to do this, she would not listen to what he was telling her - she asked for help and said she didn't understand, but when he explained what is required she told him that she knew she was right with what she had done and that his way must be wrong! In the end I could see he had given up trying to explain, very patiently and articulately, and he just walked away. I tried really hard to explain the principles required to do this work, but, like she did when talking to the 3rd year, she would say in one breath she didn't know what she was doing, but in the next that everything I was saying was wrong and she was doing it right! There really is no mileage in continuing that sort of tutorial so she went on her way back to the library!

3.20 - police have rung to say they have found my car and arrested the people in it, but thay can't tell me what condition my car is in..... A detective is on the way to my home to take a statement so off home to do that.

Lot of interesting discussion (by text of course!) this evening with a 3rd year student applying for the Physicians Assistant programme next year. His science background and HCA / nursing experience make him a really good prospect for this and I really hope he gets a place.

Last work-related activity of the day - a student just going into 2nd year with whom I have a lot of contact. She separated from her abusive partner in August but is dealing with the emotional aftermath of years of emotional, physical and sexual abuse. This afternoon a close friend of hers sent me a text (with her permission) outlining the extent of the debt her partner has left her saddled with. Discussed with her the implications of the way she has chosen to deal with this matter and once again tried to persuade her to go to the ploice with all of this.

Definitley time for bed

Uid 131

My priority today was to have final year dissertation meetings. I've been lucky this year - I have some good students who are interested in what they are doing, and they are working hard.

The problem I have this year is that we've just moved into a new building. And, like most new university buildings I see, it has been designed for everything except academic work. The doors are glass, with no frosting, and I have an internal window as well which looks over the stairs. Students walk by my office all the time. So I'm sitting talking with a student about their work, and I see their eyes glaze over, distracted by a friend walking past behind me. I know there's going to be debates and discussions about this, because I'm not the only one who is not happy, but I wonder, yet again, why the offices were designed without any thought for how academic work happens.

I have one seminar, which is fine. Not great, not dreadful - just fine. We all seem to be going through the motions, really.

As always, lots of emails. Some about a programme we're dropping. A lot of Admissions hard cases, which I feel anxious about. I imagine, on the one hand, the student failing to cope in my seminar; on the other hand, the invective coming from the press and politicians if I "exclude" people. It feels like a lot of responsibility for one person.

Some correspondence with a student who is fascinated by the study of the French ban on the veil, but uncomprehending that he might need to read French in order to access the primary materials...

And some hyper-efficient ticking off of things on my to-do list.

A bit blah really. One of those days when nothing dreadful happens. Go home on time, play computer games to distract me, eat, sleep. Such is life

Uid 136

Today my Outlook calendar had only one entry - 'student appointments' from 1 til 3pm. Within this time I have seen 4 students - three of my first year personal tutees for PDP sessions and a final year part time student with questions about registereing for a project next year. The tutees have all done well in their January exams but have a variety of issues - a mature student who is not native to the UK, studying in his third language for a career change from engineering to Biomedical Science and also bringing up a small child, is finding it hard to integrate with the school leavers, but reports improvements in study and language skills; a school-leaver confesses she has never had a job or a CV and doesn't know where to start when producing one so i sent her to the internet to look for exemplars; I suspect the third may have a kind of ADHD from his reports of inability to concentrate in lectures and laboratory classes and his inability to organise his CV etc for something he really wants, work experience abroad, and I send him off to ask for advice from student support. Common to all though is my feeling of inadequcy as I try to find encouragement about career prospects in two years time - the decision by the DoH on whether to go ahead with Modernising Scientific Careers will be made in March but it seems inevitable and I am seriously concerned that one effect of this may be to make our current vocational course students unemployable as they will leave Uni just as the new regulations kick in. Even this yera the number of places available was significantly down on recent years - usually we send out about 12-15 students but this year only had 7 places offered to us, 4 of them with just one employer.

As it was a fairly quiet day,spent some time clearing e mails and organising external speakers for course, planned half term (when will I be at work and when on leave?)and continued unpacking from the office move. I think I have emptied about half my boxes now, might get the office tidy by the end of this year of diary entries.

Amongst more mundane emails, one informing me that our new VC has been appointed, to start in September when the curent one retires. I had half forgotten this, VCs don't impinge much on my day-today activity, but this may explain the recent flurry of urgent demands for various bits of info as the outgoing VC wants to tidy up loose ends and close projects to clear the decks. I beleive the new VC may in for the old Chinese curse of 'living in interesting times'......

Suddently recall that I promised a colleage I would look at a paper draft by today and hunt for the e mail. We have submitted this before and had rather ambiguous feedback from reviewers, so have had to reword it carefully. I think my colelage has done a wonderful job, so send it back to her suggesting it is ready to resubmit; sit back and cross fingers....

Uid 138

Oh dear, things are fraught here. I live in fear of having my head bitten off whenever I want to ask one of my colleages for a simple bit of information. A request for hours spent on a departmental task yesterday afternoon resulted in a response of four long ranting emails - one sent at 10.30pm. We are all tiptoe-ing to ensure that things don't fall apart.

The problem is that we are all overworked and stressed. And if this weren't enough, we are continually being told that we just have to 'do more with less'. Our admin support has been reduced to a quarter of what it was, and we are told that submitting research grants must be our highest priority. Morale is very low. And everyone is snapping at everyone else.

I have spent my day mostly on the high-priority task: preparing a research grant. Last time I applied, my proposal was ranked bottom of the panel's list. I can only propose projects on topics I know about, and on research that I want to do - and I know that these topics are most unlikely to be funded. So it seems such a waste of time for me to put in a grant proposal at all. I do it because it is part of my job and because it was written under 'objectives for the next year' on my P&DR form last year. Like the lottery, the chances of my winning by entering are only marginally greater than if I don't enter at all!

What I find most galling is the fact that, despite having had no grants for several years, I still have a very good publication record in international journals and conferences. Am I congratulated for doing all this research without the additional resources that a grant would have given me? Oh no, I am simply berated for not having any grants. So: this is how it goes - the university does not want me to get grants so that I can get support for my own research (as I have proven that I don't need it): they want me to get grants so that the institution can gets its 'top-slice' so as to fill the gap left by reduced government funding. I will spend at least three weeks preparing a grant proposal that I am most unlikely to get - surely the university has better things to do with my time?

Today I have met with four eager, enthusiastic and competent project students - reminding me why I do this job.

Uid 140

My PC closed Internet Explorer so we start again.

At last the 15th falls on a typical today.

A morning laboratory class on Sterility Testing. After lunch it is down to Admin. Sort out timetabling the results readings for this week's labs. Then update my module on Module Catalogue in Student Information System, a particularly loathesome piece of software. It is not rocket science that if its predecessor was crap this is unlikey to be any better. I have promised several colleagues that I will help them.

I wish our Employer would not use us as gunea pigs for inadequate software. Most of us have yet to recover from the trauma of online assessment with student feedback still somewhere in the ether.

At least there is the pleasure of being able to look forward to watching Tranmere play Sheffield Wednesday this evening

Uid 141

Not a good day today. I've been sick for the last four days (of course during the weekend!) with a chest infection and whilst feeling better today, still not right. Still, I thought I'd better battle in - the backlog would just get worse if I took another day off. So I planned for a slow day...

Alarm went off at 7am but felt groggy and finally got up at 7:30 and it's getting daughter ready. She was getting her haircut this morning (she's on half term) and with wife looking after the new baby, I take on most of the responsibilities of getting E sorted out. To be fair, she's pretty good - it's just a case of steering her in the right direction most of the time.

So by 9am, E and I were both ready, the baby was fed, and wife was almost ready. Pretty good really. So I washed and changed the baby and finally felt up to facing some work. No cycling in today though - I've learned my lesson after cycling through last term when I was similarly poorly.

Get to work shortly before ten and started on the email backlog. Lots of odds and sods to sort out. A colleague popped in at 10:30 and we discussed our assessments and changing them to reduce the killer marking load that we've both suffered up till now this term.

Then on with tackling the biggest backlog problem - a special journal issue which I am co-editing. The reviewers are dragging their heels and with it being a special issue the deadline is real. So I chased up all the emails I'd let slip to do with that and fired off some new ones myself to nag dawdling reviewers. Seems to be less of a crisis now but it's taken a fair bit of time to sort out today.

A student came for a meeting at 11:15. She was late but actually that was a blessing as I could finish off the first lot of editing problems before seeing her. We then had a good long chat about a project she might do with me this summer. Time well spent - getting a good student can be a real boon and turn a decent project into a decent research paper. We all win! I think she'll do a good job. Here's hoping!

Then quickly out to buy lunch but no time to eat as a current project student came to see me. He's doing a great job of producing software that I could use in my future research. And he's going to try an experiment with it as well so that's brilliant. Very pleased with him.

Then it's eating my lunch while back thinking about the journal reviewers and wrestling with the publishers' review management system. Finally won!

Ten minutes break and then at 2pm start preparing a lecture on a stats class I am co-teaching to all first year PhD students in the dept. Fun to do but better if it had been done last week not this. Still, that's what happens when you're poorly - nobody else prepares your classes for you.

By 3pm, I'm done in. So time to go back home. Sounds like a short day but it felt a lot longer. My Mam and Dad have been visiting to take E out for the day so I got to see them for a cup of tea. Very restorative. Then doing jigsaws with E whilst the baby has a feed before we all take the dog out for a walk. Can't say it was the best day - rather damp to say the least but we all had a decent walk and it's a chance to talk and hang out together.

Bathed E, cooked the supper, did some email whilst we watched a bit of telly before bedtime and again while the baby had his final feed before bed. At least he's in something of a routine now and we are getting some decent wadges of sleep through the night. And here I am finishing the day with a couple more emails. The backlog is looking less dreadful - nearly down to the last 30 in my inbox which is something of a milestone. I try to keep below twenty but that's been impossible this term with the marking load.

Anyway, time to sign off and go to bed. I'll be up in four hours! Still, at least I am feeling better.

Uid 142

The main drawback with having a long weekend \*and\* not checking your email while away is that the inbox takes a long time to sort out; just getting towards the end of it - fortified by some University Coffee.

I'd planned to finish getting all the feedback back to students (via the VLE - slower for me, but more convenient for them) - but had forgotten that I'd booked to attend a seminar about Social Networking & integrating it with a VLE. Well worth it; even if that did mean I had to spend some time in the evening attaching the right feedback to the right student (marks have to be done by student #), but the VLE works by student loginID / name.

Uid 149

The day begins with the usual flurry of email which has accumulated overnight. There are students requesting appointments to discuss final year undergraduate projects for next year, a section of a draft PhD thesis from a postgraduate and some proposals or a new course for accident investigators from a colleague in another university. The latter can wait until this evening when I have time to think about it. The student’s emails are quickly dispatched and I can prepare for a lecture I am delivering this afternoon on domestic violence. Fortunately the major part of the text is in place from last year, and I just need to transfer some key points to Powerpoint to accompany the lecture. This, plus a little updating and the inclusion of some 2010 references takes me ‘til late morning, whereupon it is time to go into the office to see some students. The first student is quick – I just need to sign a form nominating me as a supervisor for her final year project next year – something about transsexualism. Then I see another student who wants to discuss next year’s final year project, in this case on her peers’ experience of long distance romantic relationships. Then another, who’s not sure what she wants to do but is very friendly. She ultimately wants to do something about kids and memory, neither of which I know very much about, but we talk about the possibilities and I suggest she talks to colleagues who are developmental psychologists, but she wants me. Time’s pressing on, and I’m aware that I need to finish my Powerpoint thingy for teaching later this afternoon and upload a few more files to accompany the session to the university’s electronic content management system. Eventually she is satisfied and then a colleague comes in to discuss some moderating on a course we have been teaching. Despite the university’s requirement that we moderate 10% of the work, in practice it is moderated to within an inch of its life, because if a student queries their mark, the university will uphold their challenge, unless it can be shown that it has been moderated and seen by the external examiner. So there’s a lot of defensive moderation going on in practice. Time for a quick visit to the post pigeon holes and the loo, and a moment to collect my thoughts, before doing a lecture. As usual, there is a tense few minutes whilst the projector system decides whether or not to display the Powerpoint projection. Eventually it does and off we go. Prior to embarking on the academic content though, I have to deliver a short speech on the importance of the students filling in the National Student Survey. When the results come out, tiny fractions of a Likert scale point are used to determine the relative standing of courses and institutions, differences which would surely never achieve statistical significance. Indeed, the results seem relatively intractable in the face of anything we might do with the students. Inasmuch as the variance in the results means anything, the best ratings come from young women of middle class parentage studying humanities subjects in traditional universities. So an inner city post ’92 outfit serving a largely stay-at-home clientele of south Asian parentage has an uphill task, no matter how much we coach them about the importance of the NSS or how fulsome and effusive our “feedback”. That done, we commence with my talk on domestic violence. In addition talking about the nature and extent of the issue, and the consequences for sufferers, I try to get the students to think critically about the assumptions that are embedded in a lot of the research, and how the idea of victimhood in domestic violence research has been constructed. Surprisingly for a class timetabled at 4.00 to 5.00 in the afternoon, it seems to be a reasonably full house. Lovely. Then it’s back to the office for a meeting with another student. After waiting a few minutes I see an email arrive from her telling me she’s not coming. I reply ‘OK, I‘ll go home then’ and do so. Once at home I commiserate with my partner over our latest domestic unhappiness, a much loved tabby cat who disappeared three days ago and has not been seen since. He was very companionable and we miss him. Then it’s back to the computer for the evening’s work. As well as emails to reply to, I try to get ahead on teaching preparation for next week and do a few updates on a lecture for Monday and upload the text to the university’s content management system and put a few items of supplementary material on my website too. Then I construct a reply to my colleague who is keen to jointly develop an accident analysis course and respond to another colleague with whom I am constructing a bid for external funding concerned with surgical site infections. Also of note is a message from a collaborator in Wales forwarding referees reports on a book proposal we submitted last year to a small university press. The comments are glowing and make a few useful suggestions so it looks like we’ll have a contract before too long. The publications have got to be kept pumping out! There are a few more messages from students seeking appointments next week to dispatch, and then it’s bedtime. I shall to the comments on the PhD thesis section tomorrow. I was going to have a half hour blast on an exercise bike this evening in an increasingly futile attempt to retain some cardiovascular fitness. But it’s too late now. Far, far too late. I go to bed and become acutely aware of the empty place where the cat used to sleep.

Uid 151

Today began with a trip to the doctors which resulted in me being diagnosed with labyrinthitus. Not a suprise as I have had vertigo before so am used to balance issues following viruses. After the GPs it was straight into Uni where I arrived to be greeted with back to back meetings. Disappointingly the EYPS steering committee was poorly attended probably due to the uncertainty in the workforce sector at present. Although the day was filled with meetings I am currently under an avalanche of marking which is like a snowball gaining more assignments as the week rolls on. I will not leave the University on Friday until all my assignment are marked. This entry is rather short reflecting the lack of time i have at present to undertake these activities.

Uid 152

6.30-8am Getting everyone up, dressed & fed, so we can leave at 8am is not an easy feat with 2 little ones, but we made it!

8-8.45am Dropped off children at childminders & travelled into Uni

8.45-9am Did urgent emails

9-10.30am Preparation for interview day tomorrow, we are interviewing approx 70 candidates for entry in Sept 11

10.30-11am Examiner in resit OSCE for a student

11-12 Sorting out feedback from assignments I have just marked and returning them to the appropriate tutors for return to students (this was an Inter-professional module so lots of the marking I did was for students on different programmes)

12-12.30pm lunch at desk whilst doing a few more emails

12.30-2.30pm Finish sorting out the paperwork and making the final arrangements for tomorrow

2.30-4.30pm Checking emails, uploading materials onto Blackboard, checking over teaching materials for next week

4.30-5.15pm Pick up children & go home

5.15-6pm Quick play with children & chat to husband

6-7pm Bath & bedtime for kids

7-8.45pm Yoga class - great relaxation :)

8.45-10pm Watch TV

10pm Bed

Uid 152

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10pm Bed

Uid 154

The taxi came at 7 to take me to the station for a 5 hour cross country journey to go and do a doctoral viva. This was one of the two that I’d had to cancel because of the snows in mid December. At the time I’d cunningly arranged two vivas on consecutive days in relatively close universities but all my plans came to nought when I couldn’t even get out of my street even had the trains been running. I felt really bad for the students who both had hoped to get their vivas out of the way by Christmas but instead had to wait another couple of months because I was working overseas throughout January.

The first train was dreadfully crowded and I had to ask someone to get out of my reserved seat. I then created a kerfuffle by trying to fit into the airline seat with my computer, the thesis I was examining and which I needed to go over again given the timelag since I’d first read it, and a bag of marking. That part of the journey passed in some frustration because the internet reception via my dongle kept failing and rather than simply giving up on trying to do emails I kept fiddling with it in between reading. I don’t know why I bother because I never get reception when I’m going across the country (up and down is ok) but there is some mad compulsion – and I am resisting the blackberry/iphone route because I know that if I had one I would never ever get any break. Having around 100 overseas students as I do definitely adds to the email traffic and the time lag means that there is no real quiet time.

My train stopped outside the mega station where I had to change and when I finally got in it was a bit of a mad dash to get to the platform just as the connection pulled in. But this train was practically empty and much more comfortable so I was able to spread out for the next couple of hours and get on with the reading and marking.

Arriving at my destination I had half an hour to spare before the time I’d said I’d meet the internal and I shamelessly spent it in looking in the shops round the University. I’ve started using my examiner’s fee for little treats for me or more usually my kids. Today there were still sales on and whilst the beautiful leather jacket, reduced by £250 to a within fee budget of £120 didn’t fit, the £129 blouse down to £35 did. I also got a pair of halfprice Hush Puppy shoes for £25! I’ve got a friend at work who is a beautiful dresser and who has encouraged me in this fee spending lark. She always does it and so do loads of us now ‘because we’re worth it’. This might seem very frivolous but an interest in clothes is something I’ve come to late in life and I’m amazed at how very senior (VERY senior) women academics often do do the clothes talk before they get down to work. We had a leading person in her field come to do a presentation at our place the other week and before she started she sought out my mate to talk about purchases from special little shops they both frequent.

However, shopping time ended I went to the internal’s room and we discussed the thesis which, although extremely good in places, presented us with some serious problems which we talked through these for the next hour and a half. Suddenly realised we had 20 minutes before the viva started we rushed out and picked up a sandwich which we quickly ate whilst continuing to discuss strategy.

My view is that vivas should be engaged, critical conversations and with its unique problem areas this one certainly was that. We went on for around an hour and a half and then the candidate and supervisor retired. The fairly radical solution we had considered earlier seemed to be the most appropriate way forward (I can’t be more precise for reasons of anonymity) and we presented this to the candidate under a ‘minor amendments’ heading. This was seen as acceptable and I suspect that the supervisor breathed a sigh of relief because one could tell that this had been a student who ploughed their own furrow and who maybe had not taken advice which would have avoided the dilemma we believed we faced. I’ll check that one out when I next see the supervisor.

As Minor Amendments is more or less there, the champagne came out and I was able to have a glass before getting the taxi to the station for the journey home. Once again there was a crowded and train and there was more juggling with computer and scripts and more frustration with the internet. When I changed trains the next time there was a very drunk guy very close to me who was celebrating his apparent from prison with a box of Carlsberg lager and continuous telephone conversations with friends and family in which every other word was an obscenity. I thought about the contrast between his day and mine.

I got home at 10.

Uid 155

Tuesdays this semester are always long days. I teach in the evenings: a standard undergraduate module, which is selected by mainly full time students. It is in the evening simply because there is no space to room it during the day. It is better for some students, who find they can fit other things around it more easily, and some staff prefer it too. However, I am a morning person, and late nights don't suit me. I naturally wake up at 6, and I get my best work done first thing, so I either ignore my natural strengths, or endure 13 hour days.

This Tuesday was worse than normal as I had a morning meeting. As I didn't have chance to read the paperwork beforehand I left the house at 730 to go to the office. My morning meeting ran back to back with a lunch time meeting, which ran back to back with an early afternoon meeting which ran back to back to an assessment meeting. So from 10-4 I worked non-stop (none of these were 'day dream' meetings, full engagement was required). From 4-5 I ate an early tea and got ready for the class. Thankfully, this module is on my research area and the students are really hardworking so it is great fun to teach. After the 3 hour class I have the normal post lecture tidying, so I don't get home until 845, over 13 hours after I left the house in the morning: that would not be that unusual if I had a long commute, but I live less than 15 minutes away from my university.

Uid 157

What a busy day. It started bright and early with a discussion with a group of lovely engaged 2nd year biology students about the science of cloning as portrayed in various films. We had dinosaurs running rampant and human clones escaping facilities! This was followed (after a quickly grabbed coffee) by joining my final year project students in the laboratory. So far they have not completed an experiment since they have managed to kill the cancer cell cultures every time with bacterial contamination - if only curing cancer was that easy. A short lunch 'break' followed whilst answering e-mails and dealing with students appearing at the office door. The afternoon was filled with a second year cell biology practical that I was taking on behalf of a colleague who was unavailable. It was quite satisfying to come into a two day practical half way through and see most of the students obtain the expected results. As well as supervising these 2nd years, during a break in their experimental protocol I was also helping my project students finish off their experiments - this time with success; for the first time the cell cultures were not contaminated and they got their first results. Finally.

And then it was a rush home (on my (too large for me) husband's bicycle as a broken spoke was being repaired on my bicycle) to take on the role of 'responsible parent' - the 2nd job I have - as my partner went off to his school governor's meeting. After the bed time routine had been completed and I had eaten, it was down to a little bit of marking before turning into bed far too late.

Uid 158

This semester Tuesday is a gem - it is a day without regular structure. Every so often there is a 9:00 meeting (and today is one of those days). Finally I have a chance to sit and concentrate on one of my pet teaching projects. I can ignore email, turn off the phone and concentrate on programming Excel to produce a bank of multiple choice questions with targeted feedback.

There were a few interruptions from students seeking help and advice. These usually provide a welcome distraction from the problems with which I am usually wrestling.

After tea with colleagues I was able to continue until deep into the evening.

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Didn't manage to get last month's entry in on time. Saturday which is not a Visit Day means the day spent at my desk. More editing of question bank questions, screencasts of lectures, catching up with emails and generally chipping away at the to-do list. The day ends around 17:00 with a trip to the gym.

Uid 168

15th February is an interesting day to be recording my activities for this project since it also happens to be a day that falls within my annual monitoring week (And I have put on record in my Sept entry what a nonsense I feel the latter is!)

The first activity of the day was to welcome the decorator to our home – a good sign as it shows a major building project is nearing completion. He’s done several jobs for us before so we know he’s reliable.

Semester 1 results were out the previous day, so several appointments were held with personal tutees to discuss their progress.

I also had an emergency meeting with several senior colleagues to discuss the impact of breaking news that a major player in our teaching activities has been accepted for the Universities early retirement package. This is a disaster! It is probably the first tangible example we’ve had of the recession starting to bite locally since I’m sure that they wouldn’t have been offered it a couple of years ago. Sadly I don’t think it will be the last announcement of this kind.

With another key “teaching-active” colleague due for retirement in the summer there is a very serious danger than I will get drowned by the administrative burden. I was a little alarmed at the end of the previous week when the Head of Dept gave the impression that the “research stars” would need protecting in the run up to REF so I was heartened when this meeting did seem to be proposing a realistic spread of additional duties.

Straight from that meeting into our monthly pedagogic research meeting. The meeting is mostly for people within my subject discipline, but is attended by several interested parties from elsewhere in the university. This is often a very valuable gathering and so it proved here. A colleague was presenting about their project looking at students’ perceptions of feedback and this led into fruitful discussions.

Much of the evening was spent writing material for a book I am authoring with another colleague. It is great to be working with someone else on this – if I wasn’t then the task would perpetually get shunted down my “to do” list. The shared responsibility serves to keep me on track (much the same way that going jogging regularly with a friend would make it a reality rather than a pipe dream!)

Uid 170

Exhausting day. Marked an essay on the train on the way in. Prepped class, with some care. Have discovered that my emphasis on story/treatment in earlier Script Workshop classes doesn't cut the mustard; students end up writing sensationally in 20 minute scripts. Went back to Noel Greig, whom I loved and miss - went to his book, that is - to find ways of provoking the writing of subtext. Talked to the group - only 16 today - almost manageable - about last week's session where we'd listened to 12 pitches one after the other - so tiring, so hard to concentrate. The class is too big for anyone to enjoy it, and two of the brightest, most able are particularly hard to handle; they talk all the way through, exactly as I would do, if I were that able and in a University class that is too big to serve my talent, ability and speed of thinking. I consider how unfair it is that I went to Oxford, paid nothing, and and had one to one tuition for three years, and these students, many of them as talented and as widely read as me, and all with better A level results than I had thirty years ago - are struggling to get attention in a class of 24 in their second year, and paying £3,000 for the privelege. It's wrong for all of them. How much more unjust when they have to pay the equivalent of the cost of a small first house, in this city.

Good class though; I came out feeling that at least I can teach.

But I wish I was writing. When can I do my creative work?

An afternoon of tutorials; detailed, demanding. One after the other with no break from 2 till 6. One student weeping with terror of her course. She has to read her creative work out loud in class; she went once and hasn't been back in. She only got two ds and a c at A level and she's too terrified to join in. I'm thinking of moving her off the course, if the other staff will let me.

Explained the moderation process to a diligent and interested student who is on course for a first; but I felt a fraud, because our process is a shadow of what it was only a couple of years ago. No time to second mark everything now; colleagues will only sample mark. It's a reduction in quality. Not to be shared with students, particularly now we're privatised and from next year will be putting out for paying customers.

The new acting HoD is persisting in asking critical colleagues to supervise creative dissertation, for which they are not in the least qualified, despite the risks to student achievement and satisfaction, and despite all my tactful and persuasive arguments, because one novelist has resigned - MMU is not a good place for writers, he said - and he's right - though what Post 92 Uni is right now? - and three other writers are off on sabbatical or maternity leave. We simply don't have the staff to cover the work. The Acting HoD is on trial, in effect, for the job, and cannot spend the money and hope to make his position permanent. The management have done this deliberately, I am sure. I'd have done it. So next year looks worse for m personal workload... it looks insane, unhealthy, terrifyingly boring. And I can't leave because I have to support my kids with their awful fees.

Uid 171

Not a very interesting day, as I'd been downed by a stomach bug the day before--it's really taken a lot out of me. Tuesdays are usually my 'flexitime day', when I spend time with my toddler and make up hours elsewhere in the week (especially the evenings). Instead, I stayed in bed most of the day and made weak requests to my working-at-home partner for flat, watered-down ginger ale, the American cure for all ills.

The thing about being sick during term time, though, is that I go to work when I really shouldn't, because to miss a lecture or seminar is to completely screw up the term. So, I dragged myself up in the evening to prepare Wednesday morning's lecture and catch up on Moodle and email. (I gave the lecture in the end--had to sit through most of it. Recovered in my office for a bit and went home to bed.) So, even on my sick day, I ended up working for a few hours...

Uid 172

As a teacher educator part of my role is the observation of the student teachers. For this task we are allocated as a part of our time allocation two hours per observation. Today I had three, although one cancelled, at one location. So the day began with a one hour observation, after a hour long drive, of the cooling system in a motor vehicle. Learnt some interesting stuff about how the expansion tank works and why the system is under pressure (to increase the boiling point of the coolant). However, the session was rather teacher-centred and student passive. At the end I had about twenty minutes with the teacher during which we discussed ways that the session could be more student-centred and interactive. So by 11am I had finished one and had three hours until the next (the slot in which the cancellend one would have fitted).

Found a computer in the learning resources centred and checked my emails. Having some trouble finding an external examiner for a particular programme and checked out one possibility. May be possible if the internal pannel with overlook the regulation about prior experience. Not sure what to do if they are sticklers.

With a further two hours to the next obs I found a canal side cafe and had an omlette and tea. To keep myself company I read Clarence Clemons (E-Street band saxophonist)memoirs. Great story about how he and Bruce Springsteen gave a lift to a Japanese major league baseball player who did not speak to them at all during the trip.

(Hideki, the baseball star is wearing a T-shirt that says 'God is in controll'.)

"His T-Shirt is cool," said Bruce.

"Control is misspelled," said Clarence.

"I think that's irony," said Bruce. "If it isn't, it is anyway."

Returned for the second observation, a good session utilising de Bono's thinking hats. Very interesting to watch the students (FE level 2) struggle with the concept of thinking about thinking. However, a very neatly structure session illustrative of the thought behind it. Slightly less time giving feedback for this one.

Whole day out, obs conducted - two, time taken - about six hours, time allocated four!

Uid 179

Teaching today, but still not quite finished marking so took an MSc dissertation for second marking to read on the train.

A quick conversation with S, our course administrator, then photocopying, then into a two hour shared lecture with a colleague which went pretty well. A short break and another couple of swift meetings then two one-hour seminars back to back. Finished up with some admin. Fell asleep on the train on the way home (as usual).

Decided to take the evening off - apart from reading a book to the youngest boy in the bath and now finishing off a few emails from students. 11.30 - early finish tonight!

Uid 180

On teaching leave this term - which means I am still involved in admin, but otherwise freeer to do research. However the aftermath of last term's teaching seems to have dragged on for so long that this is the first day I have had to sit down and fully focus on an article that should have been finished months ago. Collaborating with a colleague from another discipline is both fascinating and frustrating as we have very different styles of writing and working - we are getting there, but it has taken a long time with family events intervening for both of us. Spent part of the morning looking at previous articles from the journal to make sure we both have our head in the right place and am now content that we are on the right lines. After some difficult times with anxiety recently - triggered by my parents' illness, I suspect - I am trying to focus on what is doable on any particular day and not the whole project - which so far seems to be working as a strategy.

Stopped work at 4 to take children to dentist, make dinner, go to parents' evening, keyboard and swimming lessons - which makes me sound like the Tiger Mother but leaves me exhausted that they want to do so much. Then back to deal with some emails, read a revised introduction to a PhD thesis I externalled just before Christmas, and plan for some meetings tomorrow before trying to tackle some of the mountain of ironing that is sitting in the corner of our living room. Motherhood and academia seem to me to be similar in that both have no boundaries - each role seems to spread through the rest of life if you let them. That has always been the case with research, since the PhD days when you didn't really ever take a proper holiday/were reading for your research when you did, but the internet and email mean that teaching and admin seem to spread their tentacles through the rest of my time too now. However, looking around me at the rest of the country, and the ever increasing announcements of job losses to come, I am grateful to feel relatively secure.

Uid 182

Tuesdays are very busy this year with 5 lectures, scheduled consultation times and regular meetings of two committees where I'm respectively the chair and minute taker. Tuesdays always seem to race by unproductively outside of lectures and the only people I get to talk with are students and not colleagues etc which can be rather isolating.... Today, however, I deliberately slowed down to take a longer than usual (20 minute) coffee break at 11am to catch up with a colleague who is having problems with their PhD as I've been too busy since the start of term to go into the common room during breaks. I got an unexepected email from a former student working in China who needs a very specific kind of reference asap so I've just finished working on that. I've been eating my lunch at my computer all this month due to juggling lots of tasks and my office is a mess! Between classes this afternoon and by 5.30pm, I'm optimistically going to try to accomplish all of the following: a phonecall with a part-time lecturer re: the essay questions for a new module; a search of a journal database for 2ndary reading for a new postgrad module; a phonecall with the subject librarian re: new books for that postgrad module; finishing writing up an academic book review; restacking some of my journal issues alphabetically. I have a society meeting in the city centre at 6pm and then a preview of a film that I'm thinking of writing a paper on.

Uid 185

The semester started this Sunday but this is not a teaching day. I woke up at 7am , prepared for work, talking a bit with my son during the preparations. I walked the dog. I stayed at home and answered emails till 9am. I went to visit my mom (b/c I was in Rome in the weekend ) . At 11am I met with one of my doctoral students. We discussed the final decisions about the data collection she is about to start. We then had lunch together. I spent all my afternoon reviewing an especially horrible a paper for a journal. Then I went home. I talked with my son, we had dinner together. At \*pm my linguistic editor sent me back the draft of my review of a grant proposal that the Israel Science Foundation asked me to do. I finalized it and submitted it.

Uid 186

I have a new computer on my desk. We have a 5 year rolling plan, and my 5 years is up. It is nice and fast. It also removes the word "I" from every email I send. Not sure if I should ask for it to be fixed, or if that will take 5 years.

Uid 187

6:45 AM - Woke up after a decent night's sleep. Got up, dressed and ate breakfast.

7:30 - Headed to campus.

7:45 - In my classroom getting ready...

8:00 - Teaching CS 104 - Intro to Computers.

8:55 - In my office. Email/Facebook.

9:15 - In lab for CS 104.

11:00 - Back in office. Email. Arranged with GA to proctor an early exam for a student athlete that will be traveling when the exam is administered.

11:45 - Headed to classroom to teach another section of CS 104.

12:55 PM - Stopped by the CS 104 lab after class to make sure Lab Assistants were present and doing OK with student questions.

1:10 - Lunch

1:25 - Visited with a past student that dropped by my office. It's nice when students come back and report that they were able to use something you helped them learn semesters earlier!

1:40 - email...

2:00 - Observed another prof teaching a course I might be teaching in future semesters. Never a bad idea to know how someone else introduces new concepts!

3:15 - Grading - various classes.

4:30 - Department chair dropped by to let me know that a retiring tenured prof is going to be replaced (for the short term) by a new contract facutly position. Implication for me: I'll no longer be low-man-on-the-totem-pole. Yea!

4:55 - Grading - projects for CS 0.

5:15 - Exercise - Haven't gotten in as much as I'd like to have done for the last week, so I'm making time for it today, even though I know it's going to be a late night.

7:00 - Back in office; email and packing up to head home.

7:10 - Headed home.

7:25 - Arrived home. Visited with my wife and ate dinner.

8:00 - email.

8:30 - Bill paying.

9:30 - Preparing and loading lab info, project info and a chapter reading assesment into Blackboard for CS 0.

11:30 - email

Midnight - finalize CS 104 exam 1

12:15 AM - back to (hopefully) finish up CS 0 project grading.

3:00 - Grading done - now to record it in Blackboard.

4:15 - Prep for tomorrow's 9:00 AM class.

4:45 AM - To bed.

Uid 189

attended the Primary Strategies Regional Network Meeting for Maths ITT Tutors in Leeds all day

Uid 191

Quite entertaining to look back on the last entry. This is actually one of the things I like about academia. One way or the other things get done. I did finish my marking. It was awful. It is over. Some students did quite poorly in my Intro programming module and I felt my usual guilt and then we had exam boards and the same students did poorly everywhere. Closure.

This was a busy day. I had 2 lectures in Software development. We have a new theory that lectures should be recorded. In the first one the mike didnt work and in the second one I forgot to upload the recording before I logged out. This may be a freudian slip kind of thing. I feel like it interferes with my spontaneity - probably an overrated feature but still .... 'I wanna be me'

In between lectures had 2 project students. One is designing his project to death - very unusual problem. The other's is going very well. Also lots of advising queries as students try to leave the 'mobile and wearable' module. My colleague who teaches it has told them they may have to make minor changes to some C code and the non-programmers are panicing (how do you spell that) - back to the conundrum of computing students who dont want to go near any code - why why why.

Tonight off to see the King's speech and dinner. I'm always happier the first few weeks of term.

Went back and looked at previous entries. I started with a '9-10 did this' kind of approach - although it is probably better to just write, the advantage of the other is that I see where the hours went. Reading the above it looks like I had 2 lectures, talked to students for about 30 minutes and so where did the rest of the day go?

9-10 drink coffee, deal with email and final prep lecture

10-11 give lecture

11-11:30 and 12-12:30 project students, in between gobble sandwich at desk and get next lecture finished

1-2 give lecture

2-2:30 tea and chocolate in coffee room

2:30-5 prep lectures for later in week. Refine assignment to hand out on Thursday. Get interrupted (at one point the interruptions were 3 deep).

5-5:30 write this :)

Uid 200

Nothing exciting happened at home this morning - the usual morning routine.

Got to work and begin going through emails. Prepared for a TA meeting for 10:00am with the TAs for my programming for non-majors course. We need to discuss this week's lab assignment and the grading of the exam that was administered on Monday.

Have to turn in another set of grade change forms that were apparently lost. The entire system of changing grades after the fact at our institution is totally frustrating. Not only is it paper-based, but the faculty member never is informed that the change has been made. So, if a diligent student hadn't followed up with the office of records and registration, I would have never known there was a problem. There are 6 grade changes missing. Luckily, most of the changes did go through.

Then, I worked on finishing up the JUnit tests for this week's assignment for programming for non-majors.

After my meeting with the TAs, I spent some time discussing various issues with one of my colleagues Professor A. We discussed implementing "worksheets" in our lectures this semesters. "Worksheets" as I am calling them are ways to keep the students following along during the lectures when we are developing code. It was an idea I piloted last semester, but now this semester, I roped Professor A into doing it in his courses as well. We both believe it to be a good idea, but would really like to be able to encourage students how to use the worksheets as a way to learn how to take proper notes on their own without the scaffolding, but that is a goal we will work towards.

Then, I came back to my office to work on my notes for upcoming lectures. I briefly met with a student who took a course with me last spring. He is taking the follow-on course this semester and needed help getting some of his code to run with the JUnit tests they are working on this semester. I find it nice when a student who is not currently taking a course with you feels comfortable enough to still seek out your advice and help. It was an easy problem to help him solve.

I went back to working on my lecture notes for this week and then had a little lunch (microwave Thai noodles) for lunch. Spent a little time meeting with another student (graduate student) who worked as a TA for me. He has recently struggled with the grad program and it looks like this semester will be his final semester (because he will finish his MS degree) and he is looking to go find a job. He stopped by to give me an update on how things are going for him so far this semester. Seems to be going well and I am glad.

After completing more worksheets, lecture notes, and power point slides, I moved on to wrestling with the ACM listservs for the workshop mailing lists for SIGCSE, which we actually seemed to get working - yeah!

We had our faculty meeting at 3:30. I had to present changes to our department's combined BS/MS program because I am the coordinator for that program. The discussion was lively (as always). I sometimes feel that there is at least a small contingent of our faculty who feel the need to fight everything that is ever brought up "just because". In the end, the changes we proposed were accepted and the meeting ended on a quiet note.

I retired back to my office to finish up some more lecture prep and then needed to leave a little after five. The babysitter needs to leave a little early tonight so I need to get home. After I put the kids to bed, I'll be looking more at the ACM listserv stuff to try to get those set up ASAP.

Uid 204

Whoops - so busy this week that I forgot to write this entry until the project kindly sent me a reminder. My wife's away for a couple of weeks, and I'm remembering once again why I so admire single parents. Apart from the washing, cooking, etc, over four weeknights we (I) drive children to and from dance (twice), guides (twice), music (once), acrobatics (once), and scouts (once) - and three of those activities fell on the 15th.

The working day began at 7.15 with a one-hour drive to the main campus for a meeting of academic conduct officers. There's one of us in each school, and we're charged with encouraging good academic conduct and dealing with academic misconduct (plagiarism and other forms of cheating) across the school. There was an interesting discussion on the range of penalties that we generally apply. The default penalty in my school is that students get no marks for the assessment item; this is seen as quite harsh by many of the other academic conduct officers.

As soon as that meeting finished I had a 90-minute drive past my home campus to a local high school, where I was interviewing students for entry into an offering of our first-year programming course for gifted high school students. I think it's funny: the point of offering such courses is to attract these good students to our uni by giving them a head start on some first-year courses; but they will inevitably (and who can blame them?) go to a more prestigious uni - which will of course give them credit for these courses if they apply for it. Fortunately, I teach them because I enjoy teaching a class who's much more motivated, capable, and involved than my own first-years, and if they choose to go to another uni it will be with my blessing.

It wasn't worth going to the office after that, so I went home and continued working from there, putting out email fires and working on the administration of the high school course, interspersed with meal preparation and trips to and from my own children's evening activities.

I'm having trouble at present with my external hard drive. This is very scary, as I use it both for backup and for transferring files between my work desktop and my home laptop. A new one should arrive soon - I hope it fixes the problems.

Uid 206

Rush rush rush rush rush. Term 2 is always a pressure point in the year for me. Too much to do, too little time.

The day starts with a bleary-eyed breakfast, then off for a swim. Coffee at the PC, deal with emails that came in overnight. Finalise preparation for tomorrow morning's teaching - today's is sorted, and then concentrate on prep for tomorrow lunch time's staff development session. Teaching today scheduled 12-2, but we've finished early. It was entirely a 'student-led' session: in groups, they had a week to prepare something to present today. I was pleasantly surprised by the effort that the students present had put in. But there were a dozen missing, hence we only used an hour (I'd expected the session to last 90mins plus). At the moment, though, the bonus hour to catch up with things is welcome.

Plans for this afternoon: catch up on some teaching-related admin, re-read some notes for tomorrow morning's session (OK, so I didn't quite 'finalise' preparation earlier!), then reading papers for tomorrow afternoon's committee meeting. Then there's that stuff I need to put on the website, the emails flagged for follow-up that I need to catch up on, the 200-odd emails that need filing or deleting because I've just glanced at them in a rush. Mustn't forget to pick up my photocopying as well. And I can't be late home tonight as we're due out at 7.

So it's rush rush rush, all the time feeling more and more angry at this bastard government rushing to change everything without a thought for the consequences. Read the Observer on Sunday. Mr Cameron wants to creat a 'community university'? So why is he butchering the universities he's got? Any way, no time to dwell on it right now.

Uid 213

Yesterday two events highlighted the situation in academia for me. A friend who has an hourly teaching contract at a university emailed to say her pay had been messed up again, and she was considering quitting. She has two MAs and a PhD, and she can make more money for less work freelancing as an editor. She loves teaching, but she puts so much into her students that it cuts into her writing and research time, which as an hourly paid lecturer, she doesn't get financial support from her university to do. I say 'her' university, but aside from giving her an ID card and an email address, little is done to make her or any other hourly paid lecturer feel included in any institution as far as I can tell.

In the evening, I went to the launch of The Public Value of the Humanities at the Tate Modern - on Valentines day. The audience, primarily middle aged or older white men, was about a fifth of the size of the auditorium. I think I saw two or three ethnic minorities, apart from the wait staff and coat check staff. The women were all white and the same age as the men.

I wasn't meant to be invited. My husband is a trustee for an organisation that was invited, so he asked if I could come along as well. We were the youngest people in the audience, and I would bet I had the youngest PhD in the room (July 2010).

A nearly empty room was not the best visual for David Willetts, nor was the misspelling in his title on the backing slide. He argued that funding in real terms was not being cut for the Humanities, and invited our questions. Then he left before the question period.

One audience member questioned what will happen to the 'future' of postgraduate research, who will be willing to take on postgraduate loans after high undergraduate loans. I wanted to ask, but didn't quite have the nerve, what he thought the current newly minted PhDs would do now that they finished their degrees. What impact the reduction of teaching subsidy would do to their job chances? Why did an event on the public value of the Humanities only include people who had jobs in the Humanities? Why not invite early carer researchers, the immediate future?

Afterwards at the reception, I spoke to a professor, one of the best examples of an aware, caring senior academic. He's leaving for a job in the US, the brain drain in actuality. A far more pompous professor said the University wouldn't replace professor A at his level. Again, i wanted to ask why that was a problem. Take the professorial salary, employ two ECRs who could be professors in 25 years and continue to do what universities profess to do - educate and research. I didn't quite have the nerve to say that either.

I don't know why. I'm one of the extremely lucky ones - i did hourly paid teaching during the beginning of my PhD at another university, and before I finished my degree I was hired on a permanent fractional contract. I've since managed to get that fraction increased, although I am not yet full time. I have far more security than most of my friends. I don't think that academics twenty years ago questioned not the ethics, not the desire to have children, but the simple question of whether or not they could practically, really, truly afford them, as almost everyone I know is. This isn't a question of fairness for me. It is, as they keep telling us, an age of austerity. It's a question of what steps the previous generation are taking to say publicly that PhDs were promised one thing, and the university system has singularly failing to provide it.

Tuesday is not my normal day to be on campus, but I was in for three meetings. One, for a potential community project with a school. Two, a module board. I wonder about the origin of these meetings, why we have to read each student's name aloud. There is rarely any debate about marks. It is interesting to see how my students do in English literature modules as opposed to Creative Writing modules (we have a joint board). Usually they do better in Creative Writing. My colleagues seem to regard this suspiciously, but I know from talking to the students they put more into their CW work - it feels more personal to them and they edit it more. My third meeting was with my head of school, and it went very well. I left feeling very cheery about my future and the future of my subject at the school, despite the economy and the government. I rushed back to London to go to my pilates class. My husband and I have kept this up now for seven months, and it is wonderful. I feel better, my posture is better and I love having an hour a week when I have to concentrate on something so totally different to every day life. For that hour, no thoughts of students, funding, publications or departmental issues intrude. I always sleep better after it.

Uid 214

Today - indeed, the whole of this week - was a prime example of the 'curse of the part-time academic'. Like many (a distressingly growing band), I cannot find full-time work in academia. I am luckier than some: my other 'part-time' job is at least in my discipline, well paid and relatively secure, it is just working for the government not a university. But still - while it pays the bills and fills the stomach juggling two jobs does little for the soul. Moreover, the biggest two problems of this dual life were experienced today - time and technology. Both jobs technically are 'part-time'; but in reality, both are full time, so I just work incredibly long hours (a 60-70 hour week is perfectly normal). Technology exists that could help me balance this better - web-based computer systems, lightweight laptops and tablet computers, videoconferencing, etc. - both both jobs don't want me to use 'their' technology on the other employers work, and even if they were ok with this the software wouldn't mesh. Meanwhile, neither employer will buy the sorts of technology I'd like (the laptops I am offered in particular are giant dinosaurs twice the weight of 'on the street' laptops, clearly purchased in bulk years ago by computer techs who don't commute by train and know that weight is everything). So as a result a lot of my time is spent shuttling papers, files and so on back and forth... as is the example today.

Today was spent entirely in the other job - well, I say 'entirely', except for that fact that I checked the university email before I left home (at 0645), read some stuff on the train that is relevant to both jobs, and am now writing this in at my desk in the university - after a full days work at the other job - having dropped by on the way home just to do a few errands. Once home, I'll also do more university work. Thus, total hours at work today will be an easy 13 split between the two employers, and the rest of the week will be the same, some even longer (both jobs + essential industry reception tomorrow will easily = out at 7am and home at 10pm).

This sounds like a whine and I guess it is. But the thing is, yes, I love my job[s] and am privileged to do these, but I've also worked in credibly hard to get here and work even harder now I'm here to meet all the demands expected of me and more. When I was a lowly grad student I had this image in my mind that a time would come when things would be, if not easier, then at least 'levelled out'; I cannot foresee any such levelling in my near future. Even more despairingly, I'm incredibly, ludicrously lucky - I have plenty of friends who'd kill for either of my two jobs, and am even more worried for my PhD students who in this climate frankly don't stand a damn chance of getting a job in the discipline at all.

The reality for my generation of young academics, and for those still in grad school, is that frankly we were lied to. There was and still is an implicit suggestion among senior staff that jobs and opportunities, akin to those already enjoyed by the staff in post, would be and are there for us, and this \*was not true\*. Senior people kept in the past and keep on now recruiting PhD students for whom there is blatantly only a tiny chance of work at the end. The old guard have done very nicely, and will be soon to retire on the last decent pensions after careers that were, frankly, in many cases mediocre, and which certainly entailed much less effort than these same 'leaders' expect of my and the next generation of academics. But the new guard? I'm not sure where we'll be.

Uid 217

Not an uplifting day. It is our (alleged) 'reading week', mid-semester, and I had planned by today to have begun to tackle the research backlog (which is truly grim). No chance, as it turns out, because I have spent the last three days (Saturday, Sunday, Monday) and now today also doing nothing but read either UCAS (undergraduate application) forms or Leverhulme (postdoctoral fellowship) forms, mainly the former. Approx 150 of them, in fact, hour after hour. This is in part due to the complete screw-up that is my institution's 'admissions portal': because the portal has refused to work for a couple of months (and so the applications have just sat there), we now have to work like crazy to get through them. So the day simply consisted of getting up, having breakfast, reading UCAS forms, having the occasional coffee, reading more UCAS forms, etc etc. Having had dinner and having at last finished the UCAS forms, I turned in a grimly overdue way to my MA applications, also online. The screwed-up portal has stuffed me here, too, since three of the applications - which I'm reading mid-Feb - were sent in \*November\* and they wanted to apply for AHRC funding but the deadline is now past. So I have had to e-mail them to apologise when in fact what I'd like to be doing is severing the head of the bureaucrat who thought up the portal idea and popping it in the internal mail to the head of this beloved institution. Or sticking it under his pillow like the horse's head in Godfather.

The UCAS forms are an odd experience. We are fortunate enough to get 1500 or so applications for 100 or so places, so we have to be fairly fierce with them. Presumably these figures mean that in the new fees regime this dept will grow and grow and we will be doubling or tripling our numbers (and, I hope, our staff numbers) - though presumably also the overall number of applicants will drop as the prospect of £27K post-university debt puts people off. It's hard, of course, to predict. Anyway, the difficulty for us is not simply to accept the first hundred articulate public-school applicants with neatly hothoused personal statements but to try to have a degree of diversity. But it's very difficult when you are faced with a choice between an applicant from a fancy school with perfect results and one from a distinctly unfancy school with less-than-perfect results yet who has clearly had to fight much harder to get those results. It's a problem and we do our best, but the inequalities of the school system make it a bit late in the day to be trying.

Anyway, that's about it. I stopped work at 10pm. Not the kind of day I dreamed of when I became an academic.

Uid 221

9.00-10.00 email

10.00-11.45 meeting to plan online user group meeting following week. I will have to run it as two colleagues taking leave for half term.

11.45-12.45 lunch at cafe with friend. Disturbing phone call about family.

12.45 - 4.00 Working with colleague planning a staff development event for next month. Discussed various possibilities, tried out activities for timing, etc.

4.00-5.15 Meeting with 7 colleagues about Teaching and learning strategy within the university.

Uid 223

Bother. I wrote an entry and then accidentally deleted it before uploading. Summary: no teaching because I don't teach on Tuesdays, but as it's the first week of a semester I dealt with grade queries from last semester, and things for the beginning of semester, like a diagnostic writing for new students to do; setting up my hours in the writing support centre, ... Also finalizing the new issue of our online journal for publication this week.

Uid 224

7am I wake up in someone else's house, and quietly poke around getting ready for the day trying not to wake up their kids. I'm visiting another university for some meetings to discuss research, and mutual hospitality is a great way for academics to encourage such visits, and get the most from informal chats. Their kids have been a delight, but I think their daughter will be pleased to have her bedroom back tonight.

7:30am Catch up on email. Being away means that the email really backs up, and term starts next week, so there are urgent questions to be answered.

8am Joining in the household morning routine provides random opportunities to talk about work, mixed with playing games with kids.

9:15am Arrive at university and spend time talking about my colleague's research projects.

10am Go to a meeting that turns out to be postponed, so use the time to review some papers for a conference.

11am Meeting with a colleague to discuss possible joint work.

12noon Lunch with a few colleagues who I have worked with in the past, mainly with the purpose of discussing a planned future paper.

1pm Meeting with my colleague's PhD student to discuss a project of mutual interest.

2:30pm Time has slipped by - time for quick farewells and arrangements for our next step with our plans.

3pm off to the airport... looking forward to seeing the family after being away for 5 days, BUT first…

6pm drop by university and review a seminar for tomorrow that my student is giving.

7pm Home at last, time to catch up on email!

Uid 226

I was on vacation on Tuesday, February 15. I'm taking huge advantage of my temporary administrative assignment. Vacation is not an option when teaching so this is a special treat. On Tuesday I snorkled in the Caribbean, had a leisurely lunch on the beach and soaked in the ocean. No computer, no email, no work reading. Just a vacation. Sheer bliss.

Uid 227

Well interesting day......

9:15 - only half of class turned up.....

By lunchtime one of the Professors came and yelled at me.... Tried to explain that we could not change the system for one student just because he didn't like it.... he should actually turn up to a departmental meeting once in a while then he would know about the penality system that has been in place for three years......

The took a seminar group for another professor about Medieval masculinity - group of 16 girls and one boy talking about attitudes to sex - most times the word 'intercourse' has been said in one of my seminars before....

Exam board tomorrow - preparing for the usual arguments about the regulations - why can't the rest of the department actually read - they are supposed to be trained academics and they are written in plain English and not difficult to understand.....

Uid 231

No much to say about today. Although I am officially on annual leave, I had a conference paper to submit by midnight, so, already spent my first day of leave working on it, I started again today at 7.30am and finished at 10.45pm without interruption except to make coffee - but I made it. Had a large gin and went to bed.

Uid 234

Today was the final day of a 28 day teaching marathon - whatever happened today nothing could dampen my mood.

So, what have I done today?

When I have written these entries before usually the first thing that I have done is check my email at about 6 in the morning. My ipod touch is slightly broken & it's now a phaff to check my emails. I don't check my emails until 8 now. And do you know what? It hasn't made the slightest bit of difference.

My first job was to sort out some paper work after I had my exams returned from internal moderation, a few marks needed to be altered. I met an ex student for a chat who was thinking about doing the Research Masters. I taught from 11 till 12 - the 1st years. They are a curious bunch. The whole time when you are teaching there is always a small amount of background chatter. No matter how often you say, "Could I have some quiet, please?" there is always someone talking in a whisper.

I managed to have a lunchbreak, well a modern lunchbreak - sitting in front of the computor eating and looking at Facebook/ The Guardian.

I taught the 1st years again 1 till 3, they are a happy, talkative group but still that constant murmur.

To be honest, & I know this makes me sound lazy, but after the second lot of teaching & by the time I had walked back to my office across campus, sorted out adminny stuff in relation to the exam scripts above, answered a few emails, had a discussion with my office mate about the virtues of getting an education overseas and the logistics of transporting 8 live chickens in a mini it was time to go home.

The first six weeks of the calender year are always my busiest of the academic year. I am glad to have had a day working at a leisurely pace. And what's better both Wednesday & Friday this week I can dedicate to my own research!

Uid 237

Diary entry 6

Tuesday 15th February 2011

Context

Last week I was told that my contract has been extended at Institution A (Russell group) for 6 months, which means I have definite employment as a lecturer until February 2012. This was good news, obviously, although I did take the opportunity to express my frustration at not being able to do the things that I could do on a permanent contract (supervise PhD students, write research grant as a Co-I instead of writing in a post-doc position for myself, and so on). I think he (Deputy Head of School) appreciated what I was saying. So that was positive and set this week (w/c 14th) off to a fairly good start.

Content

I say 'fairly' because I am currently stressing about an article revise which is due in two weeks (major revisions, and no movement on the deadline itself). And this was the content of Tuesday. I wasn't teaching at either Institution so had a day at home. I spent it getting on with the article revise, and made some slow but steady progress (fending off 'I'm a crap researcher, why is this taking so long' thoughts along the way). I went into work at 4pm because I had an orchestra rehearsal and then decided to stay in work working until the early hours of the morning, during which time I prepared the skeletal outline for two 2hr lectures that I am to deliver this week. What happened, between the hours of 12 and 3am, is that I flitted between various tasks (article revise, lectures, emails) and ended up feeling like I wasn't achieving anyhing, so left work and went home to sleep. Tomorrow is another day, which hopefully will be full of inspiration regarding the re-write of my results section; and definitely involve teaching preparation.

Uid 239

A strange day. Cold, wet, gloomy and the board meeting in the morning. In work at 7 to run over the notes for my presentation. These meetings are stressful and one always feels as if we are expected to compete with one another some how. Meeting is nearly fully attended. Get through it OK and actually sounding quite upbeat. A stack of meetings lined up to squeeze between 11.0 am and the early afternoon. Meetings interrupted by student who is finding the course work difficult to fit in with his way of understanding the world! Peculiar existential shifts one goes through in a day's work. The afternoon attending a funeral. The rain pouring through the trees, forming a light dancing cloud of raindrops is beautiful.

Uid 241

The semester is rolling along quickly, as usual. I gave tests on Friday and Monday. The students taking a test on Monday were given a homework assignment to practice solving recurrence relations. Over the weekend, I had to go out of town to a training workshop to prepare for giving a summer workshop for teachers. Fortunately there was no snow, so I did not get stuck. When I got back, I was able to grade the Friday tests. However, I could not return them to the students because one student had an excused absence and needed to make up the test. The class did well overall, although there were some failing grades. Today I have not been able to get to the grading for Monday's tests because I had two meetings this morning and students have been asking for help on the lab this afternoon. Hopefully I will be able to do that grading because one student has asked if the tests will be returned the next day.

Uid 244

Dear Diary....

What a day! Minus 26 centigrade today, not helped by the fact that I am starting to realise that I took on too much (again) this year.

Just now I feel like I just attend meetings and run from one thing to another, masses still to do this week before the school spring break skiing with the family in the northerly parts of Sweden.

Today began with an interview at home with the head of the cleaning firm that cleans our house, a symptom of the times that both of us work so much that we feel that we never have time to clean properly. However, the service is expensive, and we felt that we were not getting value for money, thus an interview with one of the managers of the company. Hope that this results in a better experience.

Rushed out of the house at 09:30 to head into town to teach a class in my project course at 10:15. Arrived on time and had a nice two hour session talking about team roles, team dynamics, communication climate (was able to weave in some of Lecia Barker's work). The final discussion was on decision making in team projects, where I had the students break into small groups and talk about their personal experiences so far in the project course.

After that I went directly to a lunch meeting where teachers and students gathered to discuss this term's and next term's courses in one of the interdisciplinary degree programmes we run. This was a nice example of how teacher student collaboration and open discussion can lead to improvements for the courses and a better educational experience for everyone.

After that at 13:00 a quick meeting on a technical project I am currently working on with one of my students to increase classroom interactivity for Jeliot3 using an android app to provide clicker like feedback (check out http://www.it.uu.se/research/group/upcerg\_new/projects/ICT\_prog :-) ) for more details. Yes I know I just gave up being anonymous ;-)

14:00- 14:30 A discussion with an MSc thesis student on his thesis writeup.

14:30-15:00 Handing out webcams to project students.

15:00-16:00 Planning some pedagogical project kickoff activities with a colleague, and also reading some chapters of a PhD thesis for a colleague who should defend his thesis in April.

16:10-16:40 writing this report, and now home to spend some time with family.

Still have about 700 FIE 2011 abstracts to review before 27th Feb, 3 papers to review, and an expert evaluator report to write before Friday. Might have to spend some time on one or other of those acitvities tonight after dinner ;-)

Uid 245

I am on study leave (it started last week). I spent the whole day reading a book. I realize I have been so busy for the last five years that I haven't really read that much or properly. My usual advice to students to read journal articles now seems wrong!

Went for a run. Went to a meeting of the local history and conservation society in the evening.

Uid 246

This was an incredibly busy day, yet I don't feel like I got just a whole lot accomplished. I finished a review of a paper yesterday for a workshop, and this morning I saw that someone who was much more experienced in the area shot down what I thought was a decent paper. It's a little embarrassing when you don't see the wholes in a paper that someone else does. God is always looking for ways to keep me humble.

After dropping my son off at school, I answered a ton of email, attended chapel, and then busily prepared for my Web Science course. I was going to collect a homework assignment from the class today, but I got an email from one of my students asking for some clarification about the homework. After looking at the assignment for a while, I found a problem with it that I hadn't seen before... I worked on the problem for quite some time before I decided that I'd have to clarify some things for my students in class and give them another few days to work on the problem. I hate to do this to my students, but sometimes stuff like that just happens.

I ended up working through lunch getting ready for my classes, and then I had to sit through a practice seminar with one of my students. His presentation had quite a number of problems, but I didn't have enough time to go over the numerous problems before having to run off to class. I hope he's at least able to correct some of the major deficiencies I noted before I left.

I gave a make-up exam while I taught one of my afternoon classes. The student was sick yesterday, but I didn't have any time today when I could monitor him taking the exam, so I just put him in an empty classroom while I taught and hoped he was not cheating.

After my afternoon classes, we had a campus-wide faculty meeting to discuss whether or not we should allow students to take a maximum load of 20 or 21 hours. It was one of those issues that 99% of us could care less about, so the resolution quickly passed, and the meeting ended up being far shorter than usual. Thank goodness for my Droid which allowed me to reply to a number of emails during the meeting... hope that wasn't too distracting to those sitting around me.

Now I've got just enough time to crank this out before leaving for the day! Looks like my un-read stack of papers and un-graded exams will have to wait until tomorrow.

Uid 250

Tuesday, 15 February.

I don't make a habit of it, but shortly after my wife left the house, I crawled back into bed. A debate was raging in my head: should I make it to class, or should I cancel? I am certain the debate was fueled by the infection in my right middle ear and the drugs for the same.

Eventually the decision was reached to go to campus. But what to do in class? Sure I was a little dizzy, but standing (and driving) wasn't too challenging. However, stringing thoughts together seemed challenging, which is why the debate went on for so long.

I've already canceled a few class meetings due to the snow. So, I have no lack of material to talk about. However, I don't know what to do today. It's too late to cancel, and I'm still having trouble deciding what to lecture on. Eventually, the plan boils down to this: collect homework, and administer a quiz.

At the last minute, I recall an old powerpoint presentation on Capability Maturity Model and the Capability Im-maturity Model. Some of it is a rehash of a reading (reinforcement), and the other part is somewhat humorous. At least is it when it's delivered correctly.

So, I go to class. Say too much - can't seem to stop saying 'clever' things. I collect the homework, administer the quiz. Then I try to lecture. It doesn't go well. Students are writing down the 'funny' parts. Quit early and go sit in my office.

Time passes, and it's soon time for a research meeting. The participants come to my office. I feel like an outside observer, so much so that I announce that I won't be contributing. Some profound things are said (that's how I remember it).

More time passes and it's time for a meeting across campus to talk about how instructional technology might play into the healthcare informatics MS program being developed. An interesting meeting with people who like to talk too much. Eventually, I am tasked with writing a report of the meeting for the Associate Provost. That should be interesting.

Back across campus, there is a student waiting for me to talk about getting a waiver for a course pre-requisite so he can graduate a semester earlier. He was mis-advised. After listening to him for a while, and taking a look at his transcript, I agree to allow the waiver.

After meeting with the student, I attempt to write the meeting report. I seems as though I've forgotten how to type. Each keystroke is slow and I've become error probe (mistyping about 1/3 of the words). I abandon the effort about one paragraph into the work.

At some point, I realize that the ear infection makes decision-making, and typing, much more difficult than normal. Apparently, it also makes me more likely to talk. However, I managed to stay relatively quiet in meetings.

Tonight is the School of Engineering Banquet. The faculty who are willing will assemble at the ballroom on campus for an evening of happy thoughts, handshakes, and polite applause. Engineers don't know how to party. This is especially true when the food and the music for the evening is Turkish, but not good.

A long day ends. It's a day filled with great efforts gone wrong and little accomplished. Time for some much needed rest. Perhaps tomorrow will go better.

Uid 256

Diary February 15th

Oh dear, oh dear, it’s diary day and this old 78-year old slept in until 8 am. Got up, hastily dealt with two work e-mails, made coffee and toast for myself and my wife, and went back to bed with the hard copy of a paper to be reviewed. Allow 20 minutes for breakfasting arrangements, and the 50 minutes till 9.10 for reading what I thought was an intriguing paper. It comes from a Chinese background, I suspect, is well written, deeply insightful, and worth publishing – unlike the bulk of offerings for review. How do I suggest minor textual changes without seeming offensive and school-masterly? Spend 5 minutes after beginning my diary while I ponder on that one.

Big decision. Do I write a positive review for this Chinese paper which is going to include a tediously detailed list of trivial suggestions for enhancement, or do I return to the job left quarter begun last evening, which is to revise my own paper I have been cajoled to write for an e-book based on the keynote to be given in ten days time. I’ll go for the review.

Worked on this until 09/.50. Tedious keying. Now must bite the bullet and try to log in my review, which has had problems recently, which the site owners blame on anyone except themselves.

I struggled for nearly half an hour to get Taylor and Francis to accept a paper review. What is infuriating is that I do exactly the same thing each time, having reviewed more than 100 times successfully over the past couple of years, including yesterday on the previous review, and every time on this occasion I get a different error message. What is even more infuriating is that when I have been reporting this, they don’t read my report to them, offer me advice which overlooks what I have told them, and seem to disregard the evidence that their system is behaving inconsistently, which cannot be something due to me, surely? Maybe I’m just a grumpy old man. I suppose so, but maybe with justification. I cannot bear the waste of precious time.

Five minutes for a moaning diary entry. Another waste of time, T & F.

Rest of the morning (well, I am retired and part-time) spent accompanying my wife to shopping where I wasn’t really needed except as a chum. Still, it let me cool down.

1.20 Resume. Find incoming WBL report, comments needed in a hurry. I’ve had a chasing up e-mail from her just a few hours after the original submission (which I see has been delayed overnight in her server). Better deal with it. That took an hour and 20 minutes, till 14.40. But at least it makes me well prepared to complete the assessment form tomorrow.

35 mins on Taiwan e-mails, setting up discussion board activity for the coming week.

Back now to this keynote, the paper I have been cajoled to produce based upon it, and the deluge of ideas which N keeps sending me and which I cannot keep up with. Completed at 16.10. I quite like it. The ring-fence idea has already been published, but in this paper, it’s somewhat more polished and generic. Now to print out the draft, and edit it, after a cup of tea and a stab at the Scotsman crossword.

16.40 – 17.35: Editing print out of draft. I cannot find all that I want to modify on screen, although I have tried that first. I’ve been editing and reviewing on screen for 10-15 years now, and still haven’t worked out when I need to have hard copy, and why; and when I prefer/need to work on screen. Certainly I am much happier to compose and initially edit on screen. But not final edits, like this one.

17.45: Edit completed. Now just the labour of getting it onto file. Time for evening meal.

18.35: Meal over, I wearily go to e-mails to discover what demands are being made of an old, p-t, teacher which seem sometimes to be in accordance with one-way standards. [I’ve just deleted a succession of moans here!]

It seems to me that being retired and part-time introduces features which are different from those under which full-time staff work in HE. We don’t have as many regular commitments around which our extras have to be fitted in. No more “Sorry, my diary is full already that week.” We are expected, by students and full-time colleagues, to respond to everything by return because we have no job commitments – although we cannot expect that of them.

We part-timers have, in my experience, many more requests for advice, contributions, comments, and so on – usually unpaid, and usually in a hurry, and usually demanding – they can often come back to us demanding major revision, to a totally new specification.

Moan over. Back to e-mails, John, and see what has come in expecting a response tonight. Do they ever imagine that a p-t person might have other demands coming in?

18.35: Not much, so I can have a go at that last edit onto file. This takes me 80 minutes.

Then I watch the football until 21.45.

Now a few e-mails, sending off the paper and the ppt, and preparing for the assessment statement which I’ll do tomorrow morning. 15 minutes.

Tomorrow I will struggle with trying to get this diary uploaded in coherent words. On second thoughts, December and January having foundered, maybe I should try to get February in.

Good night.

Uid 257

I get up at 8.30am and do some clothes washing which is urgent while getting ready. I seem to be developing a bit of a cold, having a sniffle and feeling achy. I walk in to the campus, running over ongoing work issues and read the university magazine. I spot that the pond by the path above Rough Common is now being populated by frogs - this is some two weeks or so earlier than last year, when the pond dried up before many of the tadpoles metamorphosised, despite it being fed by a stream. I am in before the end of the morning and churn through various things in my office for the next 10 hours with just one half-hour break away at 7pm to get some hot dinner (sandwich at my desk at lunch time). I have various email correspondence to sort out and communications and documents regarding: tutees, catalogue browsing for planning the next presentations of my modules, three conferences to attend and present at before Easter (decide not to attend a one-day conference run by the HEA), SRHE network convenors group meeting, PESGB regional seminar planning, dept REF planning, the Kent Innovation & Enterprise Ideas Factory funded project. I head away before 10pm, walking back and rendezvousing with the landlady and dogs in the local for a swift one, getting back just after 1130pm.

Uid 258

Not teaching today - hooray! This might normally have involved a day working from home - with an hour or two for a bike ride or run in the middle - but in this mid-term period, I can't afford such luxury, so I was in work before 9:00am for an amazingly productive day or dealing with admin issues, writing presentations to try to persuade undergraduates to sign up for the MA I run, finishing the following week's lectures and holding endless 'mid term progress meetings' with my MA students.

No lunch, and very little slacking all day. I seemed to spend quite a bit of the day on Facebook and Twitter but that is actually to promote my MA programme. Cuts in university spending mean that such activities (any promotion of PG programmes beyond the basics) are now carried out by academics. In a way I don't mind (it's fun) but essentially I'm doing this work in my spare time or research time and no consideration is made of the seven or so hours I spend a week in a PR role rather than as an academic and programme leader. I actually get an 'allowance' of two hours a week for being a programme leader - so essentially am let off two hours of teaching. In reality, the job takes far more time, such is the pressure to recruit good - and preferably overseas - students.

Went home. Collected daughter from childminders. Watched a DVD of Peppa Pig. Went out for a run that evening, and fully intended to carry on working but realised that I couldn't be bothered and went to bed with a (non-work related) book

Uid 260

Today is one of my research days and I am at home. I take my dogs out for exercise at 9am and am back home by 10:30am. I review e-mails and deal with requests from students who seem unable to view and download materials I have mounted on Moodle. I review a request for a work placement in America that I received from a graduate of Queen Mary University whom I met on Saturday at a training weekend run. I e-mail her offering to help find her a placement in Arizona and request her CV. I receive an almost instant reply from her with CV - it looks formidable and I'm sure the attorneys in Arizona will be delighted to have the pro bono services of such a strong graduate for 4-5 months. I wish more of my own students were as strong as this student.

At noon I visit my optician for an eye test. I have glaucoma and am pleased to find my eyesight remains basically unchanged.

I spend the afternoon reviewing scripts from a southern university where I am an external examiner. They are unremarkable and I suggest no alteration of grades. I then mark an Masters dissertation which is clearly written by an overseas student who finds English expression something of a struggle - nearly as big a struggle as I find reading the dissertation. It's not very good - largely descriptive and lacking any depth of analysis. I'm glad I am only reading the one dissertation.

I am teaching tomorrow so I do the 110 mile drive down to the flat I use when working at my university. I arrive just in time to watch Newsnight. I conclude the day by looking over some materials for my lectures tomorrow... and so to bed.

Uid 264

Today started way too early. My daughter had to be dropped at school at 6 a.m. for a ski trip. Since her school is 15 minutes from home and right beside the commuter-train that I take to the downtown campus on Tuesdays, I decided to catch the 6:30 train and just get started early.

For the first few hours I read and wrote reviews for ITiCSE papers. Boy were they terrible. I actually meant to decline ITiCSE reviewing this year but forgot to get myself off the list and then didn't want to drop out after I'd been assigned four papers. Only one was decent. A couple were reasonably well-written and pleasant to read but really didn't seem to have enough content to warrant a conference paper. Maybe my standards are just too high? In one of the papers the writing was so terrible that I had to reread almost every sentence trying to ignore the grammatical errors and work out what the author was trying to actually say. I had to write summary points in the margins to keep track of the arguments. There's no way I would have bothered to keep reading if I hadn't felt obligated to finish the whole thing before submitted my review. At one point I actually wondered if I was reading a paper generated by an automatic paper-generating grammar. But no, I'm pretty sure this was for real.

Today we had a great distinguished lecture speaker -- Josh Tenenbaum -- who I very recently sorted out is NOT Josh Tenenberg. I used to think that there was only one Josh TenebXXX who seemed to keep cropping up everywhere! Anyway, Josh Tenenbaum was extremely coherent and inspiring. I briefly regretted not pursuing my machine-learning research interests from my pre-teaching-stream days. But no, I'd rather be teaching 40 hours a week and learning about other's research, than doing my own research and working 60+ hours per week like my research-stream colleagues. Hearing great speakers once a month is definitely one of the perks of my job.

I lectured for an hour today and spent only 30 minutes preparing beforehand and posting lecture notes afterwards. It is a good thing that I have Jennifer's notes and already know reading files in Python upside down and backwards. I'm going to be in big trouble when we get to the two weeks of material at the end that I've never taught before. I know that it isn't hard but I'm just barely keeping up with the day-to-day grind and when something extra comes along (like 4 hours of ITiCSE reviews), something else has to give. I just received the notice that my final exam script is due March 7th. I've no idea how I'm going to find the hours to make up an exam. I'd better start dreaming up questions while I'm doing mindless household things.

Uid 266

Wake around 6.45 from one of those "in an airport, late for a plane, haven't even checked in my luggage yet, departure lounges are separated from check in by 3 fields and a motorway, the only check in desk for the whole airport is a little wooden reception counter" dreams, in Canada for no apparent reason.

It's finally getting light when I first get up, the snowdrops are out, 6 nations is two weekends through, Champions League is back tonight (hurray!), so winter is on the run, which is wonderful.

Usual morning rigmarole, talk to my girls about history of Soviet/Russian space travel over breakfast (eldest, 10, is doing a project on it), get the name of the first dog in space wrong (Leika, not Leila).

Get to work, tutorial with 2nd yr UGs this morning, so make sure I'm prepared enough for that - being observed by a PhD student as part of their teaching training, so more prepared than usual.

Tutorial group of 10 all show up, as does the tea/coffee and biscuits I order from university catering for each (fortnightly) tutorial - on the basis of the assumption that if I treat them like adults then they'll behave like adults, and because it's nice. They're a good bunch, and we've managed to avoid the sessions turning into monologues from me, which is always the danger with tutorials. So we have a good discussion of how things are going in general at the moment, and then do a bit about careers and career-related skills - not my strong point, seeing as I've never set professional foot outside of an educational establishment in my life, but it goes down well enough.

Once that's finished it's time for one the highlights of my week, floorball - indoor hockey, or ice hockey without the ice, played with ice hockey shaped sticks, and one of those hollow, perforated balls used in primary schools, on a basketball sized courts. Apparently its big in Scandanavia, as evidenced by the wholly disproportionate skill with which any visiting Scandanavian researcher who gets invited along plays. A motley assortment of everything from Deans to PhD students run around in a good-natured way, there are no rules, no one keeps score, and everyone ends up sweaty and happy.

Then I meet with my wife for lunch, as we do occasionally. She's had a hectic morning triaging physio patients at the GP surgery, so tells me all about that, and we discuss us, the children, and all our usual things.

Back to my office in the afternoon, for a mix of marking the seemingly endless pile of 2nd year big projects from last term, and trying to make headway with writing a paper on data collected in 2006 and 2008 that I think is going to be quite good, but my co-author, I get the impression, isn't going to be impressed with (I tend to be too loose, he tends to be too anal), but I'll keep going anyway. The REF is looming hugely now, got a meeting with the School's research director tomorrow to assess my progress, about which I'm terrified (actually writing this on the 17th, and that meeting went well, which gave me a big boost - starting to realise that the self-hatred and vicious anger that I've been feeling for the last 6 months and that may have been evident in my previous entries was a result of becoming very scared about the security of my job as a result of the combination of HE cuts and how badly I was worried I was performing in terms of the REF - strange, really, given that all the talk within the school/department has been about recruiting new staff and trying to make the most of the new situation).

Tuesday is the night I always stay late at work - find I can't do much proper thinking as the evening wears on, but it is useful for clearing up the backlog of emails that inevitably piles up through the week and other sort of stuff like that. I have the BBC text commentary on Spurs-Milan on but manage to get enough work done to have made it worth staying in, even manage to avoid my usual trip to the campus Spar for sustenance (possibly something to do with the 2 doughnuts I had this afternoon - the recent price hike on microwaveable smoked sausages has rather damped my enthusiasm for these trips anyway).

Home at around 9pm, pleased to catch Radcliffe and Maconie on the way home - such as shame they're being shifted to digital to make way for that irritating woman from Radio 1. 10 year old is still reading in bed when I get back, so say hello to her, and kiss goodnight my warm and snuggly sleeping 8 year old . Re-heat some macaroni cheese, and make a nice mug of darjeeling. Talk to my wife about the day in between her falling in and out of sleep on the sofa, watch the news (money, blood, anger, suits, London - same as usual) then to bed. Read my book about 14th century life for a little - apparently medicine was done largely by astrology then, so maybe research and education and HE in general is rather more than the bourgeois, self-regarding smuggery that I see it as in my darker moods. Sleep well.

Uid 267

Ironically, I don't actually teach on tuesdays this term, Tuesday 15th March will also be a tuesday and at my institution we finish teaching by Easter. Therefore, I will get through the entirety of this survey without ever reflecting on a day when I actually have taught anything (in class). I frequently impart knowledge and ideas via email to students of course (or try to) and tend to do this at this time of term on a daily basis to one or two or three (amongst the 20-50 emails I get a day, and which eat up between one and two hours every day).

So, on tues 15 March, I spent the morning in the following manner. Dropped 3 yr old off at nursery, and drove with wife to plumbers to pick toilet and basin for the ongoing renovation of our new house, which we may possibly move into at some point. Dropped wife off at her university in time ofr her office hour starting at 10 and drove to garage with car to have 'rear lens cluster' on passenger side replaced. This was because on the way back from the garage after having the driver side 'rear lens cluster' fixed on the previous Friday afternoon, I reversed into a lampost (which I put down to term-time stress). The garage, of course, found this hilarious but not so memorable that they actually managed to make a proper note of the fact that i was coming in on this Tuesday morning. hence, I had to hang around two hours while this was fixed. Luckily, I had brought some work along. Specifically, I managed to finish Agatha Christie's The Murder of Roger Ackroyd, the subject of my first year lecture due to be delivered at 9.00am on Thursday as part of the module 'Popular Fiction'. I had read it as a kid, and most of the lecture would be concerned with generic aspects of detective fiction, Christie's career and the the interwar social and political context, but I wanted to be able to talk about the text in the last 10 minutes or so as a lead-in to the seminars (which I don't take myself). So that was actually quite productive.

By now it was about 12.30. so I drove home (to our undersized rented house), picked up a sandwich on the run (and kicked my unemployed daughter out of bed) and headed on to the storage facility where most of our possessions reside. Here, I (to cut a long story short) laboriously moved studd around until I could get to our dish washer, which I lifted on to a trolley wheeled out to the car and then lifted into the boot, before driving to the new house. The idea being that the builders can stick it straight in as they put in the kitchen rather than leaving a gap. Then discussed various matters with builder and finally got back home at about 2.20.

This gave me two hours to sort out and answer email (several ongoing projects which demand continual exchange - funding bids, publishing negotiations) before heading out to pick teenage son up from his guitar lesson in town, then driving to Argos to meet wife who was buying light fittings which we then took to new house before driving home, so that son could change before being driven to tennis (which as it happened was cancelled) and then taking car on to pick 3 year old up from nursey.

I did manage a couple of hours work in the evening and also carefully sorted out my moblie filing system (a large cardboard box) and some clothes etc and put all of this in the car for Wednesday's 7am start on the 230 mile drive to work. One of the saving graces of my life is that I do actually sleep because I'm always absolutely completely knackered.

So, to summarise, moving to miles away from anywhere else, and trying to deal with the ongoing complications of the move and building work, while your partner starts a new acdemic job and you have three children (at completely different life stages) to deal with, makes a difficult job more difficult. I managed 6 hours work on the day and that isn't enough to keep pace really. So the story of this term is one of continual rear guard action. The week befoe it took me 3 interrupted days to produce my lecture powerpoint on Lord of the Rings for Popular Fiction. This week I eventually finished my Agatha Christie at 8.15am on the Thursday morning, 45 mins before I gave the lecture. And aside from this module, I'm also the module leader for a third year module and two MA modules (although I'm not teaching every week on either of the MAs). So it's definitely hard going at the moment. Still, half way through term more or less!!!! Interesting to see, if I'm still holding it together next month because we are actually going to be moving into the new house before then and that is going to eat up preparation and work time.

Uid 276

In the throes of a full blown cold and I wouldn’t have come in but for a two hour teaching block with my health students. The session was going OK but towards the end of the first hour, I was disturbed by a formidable lecturer with a handful of students. This person stridently claimed that I was in the wrong room and wouldn’t leave, insisting that I called timetabling to find out where the confusion lay. It was clear that my lecture could not continue until I had made this call and thankfully, timetabling confirmed my position and that the other lecturer had made a mistake (phew). What is it they say; possession is 9/10th of the law..?

Spent some time with one of my new staff mentees in the afternoon, who is undertaking the staff development education programme for teaching in HE. It’s been a few years since I was a mentor on this scheme and now I have got two mentees at once, so I needed the refresher workshop to find out what I had agreed to do! Talked about possible teaching observations and invited my mentee to a couple of ‘interesting’ sessions that I’m doing over the next month: I say ‘interesting’ because I take a few risks in them, so let’s hope they pay off..!

Uid 282

8:00am

Started the day attending a collaborative meeting at the local school district. The district is participating professional learning communities and this past fall our College Dean informed us that if we did not attend a minimum of two of the meetings we would be marked down on our evaluations. Nothing like a little arm twisting and threats. Needless to say, it was up to each of us which session we would attend. I chose Lesson Study because in my field of educational leadership, a principal is considered the instructional leader of a campus. These sessions at the district central office usually last about an hour. In this session, we watched a video of a Japanese school demonstrating the Lesson Study process. The entire time I have been attending these presentations, I have felt disconnected to the process, probably because of being forced to attend, but also because I didn't know what I could contribute to principals in the field even though I am also a certified and experienced principal (in another life).

Today I finally realized my role in the process of attending these meetings. The school district sent a group of teachers and administrators to Connecticut to observe a school using Lesson Study practices. Knowing this region the way that I do, I thought these people need to be coming to see our schools too. That led to the idea of conducting research, recording the history of this movement towards Lesson Study and then monitoring it as a case study for others to use to inform practice. When I brought this idea up in the room of practicing administrators, they seemed receptive to the idea, so I think I finally found my role.

9:30am

Spent the remainder of the day until 3:15pm at the computer working, emailing students, responding as Program Chair and responding in the courses I have running this semester online.

3:15pm

Headed to the office to meet with my co-worker. We are in the middle of redesigning our program web page and he has taken the lead on this with ideas and format. He shared that with me and we discussed a variety of documents that needed links to make the enrollment and advising process more effective and efficient for us and the students.

4:15pm

We both walked over to the Fine Arts Building to attend a convocation for endowed professorships. We heard about the various donors who established the endowments and then the recipients were dressed in regalia as part of the event. Very nice. Wine and hors doevres followed, but we left since I had work to do and he drives over an hour to get home and it was getting late.

5:15pm

I went back to my apartment (home away from home) to work, eat dinner, watch tv and work some more before going to bed.

Uid 289

My morning was taken up with various preparation and administration activities, all of which related to teaching. These included:

Exam results from January exams became available. I reviewed my tutees' results – and resolved that I had better speak to them individually.

I dealt with an enquiry about projects, which should not have come to me, really, but it was quicker just to do it.

Continuing email discussion about accommodating the needs of a visually impaired student.

Continuing email discussion and arrangements for treatment of dyslexic students in open assessments. I ended up creating a new web page as an information source for that.

Organizing external lecturers for one module, one for tomorrow and the other coming next week.

I had to adjudicate a project mark. An MSc student had failed her project in October, but had been allowed to re-write and resubmit the report. It had been double-marked and judged to still be a failure. As adjudicator I had to check that a failure was warranted. After much reading and thinking, I confirmed the failure. Very careful to be fair, to justify and document my decision, not only to be fair to the student, but also with the thought in the back of my mind that there might be an appeal.

Lunch in the Common Room, with The Guardian.

In the afternoon I had a web design lab. I normally have 3 Teaching Assistants, but today one is ill, so the rest of us took on his group. In a 2-hour lab it is a bit of a rush to get around them all, to check on progress and talk to each of them. Some are sailing ahead. Some are a bit slower, but most seem to have the right idea.

After the lab, back to my office to follow-up and tidy up, before going home.

Uid 291

As I have an early (for me) meeting I set the alarm for 6am, but

managed to turn it off and sleep for another hour, which rather wasted

the point! The result was that breakfast was rushed, as was

collecting the work papers. A short time into the cycle ride, after

the first of three hills I remembered that I had not picked up the

papers for the 10:15 meeting; suspect I can wing it, but I do not like

doing that. The ride was into a head-wind, so arrive only just in

time to change. Did manage to arrange the next stage in getting

examiners for a research student who has submitted a rather long

thesis. Odd that so many people would rather not examine it!

The 10:15 meeting is what I still think of as the scaling meeting --

checking the overall sanity of examinations. In the outcome it was

basically OK. There were a number of concerns about the difficulty so

many students have in expressing themselves. We suspect that in some

sense they know the answer, but the text they produce is abysmal.

Perhaps it has always been like this but it seems particularly bad

with the current students.

After the meeting my friend and I retire to the common room for

coffee, where the discussion is largely on teaching, what skills they

learn at school and whether we need to have explicit teaching of study

skills. I remark to the friend that before they were appointed we

actually drew up a complete syllabus before it was blocked by higher

authority. The coffee was accompanied by Chinese sweet, donated by a

p/g student who had been home for new year.

The meeting having been shorter than I feared I got round to the

e-mail backlog. It seems to take longer every day, not helped by my

failing eyesight. After a while review a paper as a change -- a job

application review. Not as interesting as I had hoped. Back to

reading e-mail, and eat a banana as lunch. E-mails on the impending

move to the new building lead to considerations of what to throw away,

what to take, what to take home and so on. There will not be enough

room for my current 30yr accumulation of dissertations, books, papers,

lecture notes, meeting minutes.... and I must be firm with myself.

A project undergraduate arrives (expected). He seems very anxious

which is odd as his literature review is good in an area where there

is much to review. It seemed that he had more material than he used

and I am not worried about him at all. We discussed his plans and

aims, which are all good. We also moved into discussions of semester1

examinations. I know they are anonymous, but it became clear that my

suspicion that he was the top student in my examination was correct;

nice to see a student answer an examination question with more than I

taught or even knew. Project students are so often a pleasure to

supervise.

At 14:15 it is time to the next examiners' meeting -- this time an MSc

progress exam. It seemed sufficiently important that the chairman did

not attend, so we appointed a chair, actually someone who was there

but should not have been! The whole meeting was a joke; one student

had failed one exam narrowly so we voted on whether he should be

allowed just to continue, or made to do some compulsory exercise. The

other failures were such that there was no discretion. Seven people

to raise the rubber stamp!

Back to the office and investigate git, and read more e-mails. A

corridor conversation happened on how to make final year students hand

in a literature review for their project. It seems that some have

realised that the only sanction we have is to make them fail 3/10 of

the year, and even I am not that harsh, yet.

A coffee break with many fewer than usual -- our normal gang is 4-7

people, but every one was teaching or busy with meetings so just the

two of us. Actually that worked out well as the colleague has just

heard that they have been short-listed for a (senior) post in a non-UK

university (I have been informed about the application but it is not

public), and so we could discuss privately the plans for a

presentation etc. They deserve the promotion.

I am due to give an extra-mural course tomorrow evening and so after

coffee attempt to make arrangements for rooms and facilities. Did not

get as far as I would have liked but with luck it should be OK. I

also tried to confirm my flight at the end of the month to examine a

PhD, but failed for all the usual reasons -- web access, not knowing

the answers to certain questions etc. Back to reviewing papers....

Tuesday and 6pm and it is time for the three of us to open a bottle of

wine and discuss things. Apart from consideration of the quality of

the wine it was the usual topics, teaching, refereeing of papers,

research applications. No conclusions but a good vent.

Cycle home; strange how it seems that there is still a headwind!

Home and supper. Read e-mail and there is one from a PhD student who

graduated in the mid 90s. And he is getting back to his doctoral

project! Also looked at the aftermath of the switch to git in our

software project. Overall a very mixed day.

Uid 297

After spending the last few weeks setting, marking and moderating exams it was quite nice to do something different.

Unusually for me this was doing some work in the lab, something that I don't get the chance to do very often. Although it was pretty routine stuff it did take me much longer than I expected as I don't seem to know where anything is any more, much to the exasperation of the post-grads and post-docs in the lab!

Had a meeting about teaching with the head of department and a few other colleagues. We are losing three academic members of staff to retirement/early retirement and it looks like we will only get one replacement. As these people do a lot of teaching we spent a lot of time planning who was going to be doing their work. Looks like I will be taking on more lecturing and admin duties!

Had a short exam board meeting to discuss and approve results for 1st/2nd Year medical students. Then spent some time writing exam questions and model answers for the June exams before going home.

Uid 298

Tuesday 15 February

The research bids that have occupied me over the past months are in the system and success is now in the lap of the gods. Time to address the teaching that I have kept ticking over. No long late evening session running into this days diary but briefly [15 minutes] I convert my last couple of lectures to black and white PDF handouts and upload them to the student’s online resources.

[9:00-9:45] Run through and respond to emails before tackling the M25 drive to the campus.

[11:00-13:30] Sit in on the research centres PhD student presentations but I multi-task writing notes for student quizzes and the forthcoming examination paper.

[14:00-15:50] I am one of the directors for a cross-disciplinary research network and I attend a directors meeting. Funding for next year is uncertain and the secretary is leaving – we will just have an agency temp for the next 6 months. We discuss what we might do if the University gives us a running budget for the next year. This is supposed to be a flagship centre for the campus and it is acknowledged as a model for other centres. We have been doing this on one academic post, one admin post and a budget of around £20K, but the University will not make any long-term commitments to keep this a secure core together. This hand to mouth existence is not going to achieve the ambition to be an internationally recognised centre of excellence. It takes about 2 years to establish a good research consortium across Europe with a real chance of winning research funding. How can I work building a working relationship with colleagues in Delft when I don’t know if my own institutions engagement in the area is going to fold in 6 months time?

[16:00-17:30] Back in the department meeting with a group of final year project students. They are working on software projects I have suggested but seem incapable of making any sort of decision about how to solve the problem with out asking me if it is the right idea. If all of the group are to pass it will need something miraculous! One has a problem statement that says “… and present an analysis of the argument in the text.” Asked what he has read in the literature about argument analysis his response – 4 months into the project - is that he hasn’t looked yet.

[17:30-19:30] I go back to working on quiz and examination material.

My resolve to give this week to teaching and ignore research is not working out. Tonight I have a choice: Meet some friends for an evening in the pub (a once a month meeting I have missed for the past two months); or a “TV” dinner and back to writing teaching materials. I choose the pub.

This April I will have had 40 years as an academic and my pension will be fully paid up. Another year and I reach retirement age. Hopefully, I can get some sort of emeritus post and stick with the enjoyable and rewarding part of academic life – but it will be so good to be free of the frustrations!!!

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Saturday 15 January

Although this was not a weekday it was nonetheless a very busy day. So busy that when the dust settled and I could relax at the end of the week I completely forgot about adding to this diary!

Engraved in my mind - Tuesday 18 January 5pm in Brussels – the deadline for submitting project proposals for FP7 call number 7. As I said in December I am leading the P consortium and assisting two colleagues leading two others but added to these I am contributing to a consortium bidding to establish an international research network. Late Friday I work thorough to about 1¾ hours past midnight collating the latest drafts of different sections and noting what still needs to be done. The day is just going to be several desk sessions editing and checking.

[9:35 – 11:05] At the computer again working on the project where I have lead responsibility. There are about 68 pages of detailed material in the proposal that just has to read clearly and not leave loose ends.

Break to cook a good solid brunch and do a few household chores

[13:25 – 20:45] Good solid session on the documents. Lots of coffee and a few breaks in the pattern like: [14:15] Brief conversation with one European partner on Skype. [16:27] Emailed colleague working with me on P thanking them for their input.

About 2 hours of this time is working on budget spread sheets to get out budget tables and a few nice charts for the resources and management section. Every good software engineer knows PERT style planning with dates and deliverables doesn’t work with software projects but we have to jump though these hoops with every major funding agency. Don’t they ever read the research output or the textbooks discussing agile project planning and management!

Break to cook supper and watch an hours lightweight TV

[23:10 – 24:00]

Back on the job. Emailed by the other colleague working with me on P about a potential overlap with another consortium he has identified. They seem to be way behind us in getting their proposal ready.

I have been at the keyboard for about 12 hours of today. A Long hard slog but if we get the 2.9M€ we want that’s another three-year project in the bag.

Uid 300

A day of paperwork and meetings...

First lots of intense work on a submission to a House of Commons Select Committee. It is astonishing how much time I seem to have to spend justifying the existence of my subject - it seems to be far more than I actually spend doing it (my timesheets say otherwise, but I'm sure they are lying). Again, I find myself slipping into the tired, bland phrases of financial justification. The real reason doesn't go down so well: curiosity and the pursuit of knowledge is part of being human - try to put a price on \*that\*.

Still, it is quite an easy case to write, even purely looking at the financial survival of our culture, so not too annoying.

Then a long meeting of the external advisory committee. I find these meetings odd. The majority of the time, when things are basically OK, they seem to serve little purpose, but they are worth it for the excellent advice we get when we really need it. The meeting is oddly relaxed today, given the funding mess that looms on the horizon. However, since there is no information about what form the mess will take, there isn't really anything anyone can do about it at this stage, so advice is superfluous.

Meeting over and it is time for a big session sorting out offer letters for next years students. Applications are up this year, so we can select the very best which is good news. However, I'm having to damp down some of the enthusiasm of my colleagues who are making big plans for the future. It is pretty clear that some - if not all - of the increase is due to fear of the rise in fees from 2012. Nobody without a huge family income is going to take a "gap year" this time - not if it is going to cost them an extra £20K! In some ways, I think that is one of the more insidious effects of the increases. Students who have taken a year out often do much better and get more from their studies, and this year they are - in effect - being denied that opportunity.

With the letters finished, I really should try to get some research done (it has been admin all day today) but I'm far too tired, so I clear up a few emails and head off for a 18:30 train and a big bowl of pasta...

Uid 301

Tuesday starts with a 6am departure from home for the hour and a half journey to the university. I need to get in early to finish off the last minute updates for a three hour lecture at 10am. Although I am re-using lecture materials from last year, I always update them to keep them topical and to make improvements. Somehow this always gets left until the last minute and takes longer than I think it should - usually 1-2 hours per lecture.

A quick breakfast at 9am in the universities excellent new cafeteria sets me up for the day.

The students are engaged in the lecture, but the focus for them is very much on 'What will be in the exam?'. I will be doing a revision session at the end of the course to go over everything they need to know for the exam. This is always the best attended session.

I catch up with e-mails queries for an hour before a supervision meeting with a PhD student at 2pm. Supervision is always a mixed bag. In this case, the student only needs encouragement as they are doing an excellent job.

Another final year project supervision meeting at 3pm. An enthusiastic student, which makes for an invigourating meeting.

Catch up with some marking and admin for a couple of hours before attending a student design presentation in the evening. More excellent work from the students which I wish could get a wider audience.

Get home about 8pm but need to get some marking done for tomorrow. Put this off for a couple of hours to grab some dinner and time with the family. Eventually haul myself to my home office a plough through the marking - Although I recognize the importance of this task, it's the only part of the job I hate doing. This means I procrastinate which makes it even worse. Get finished by 1am and off to bed for another early start tomorrow to a conference in London.

A longer day than most, but not unusual in the mix of work.

Uid 309

The day starts with a skills workshop with the second year students. Quite a good session - they have done the preparation, and seem to get something out of it.

A quick coffee, and then tackle email, and some really quite dire MA essays. Office hours at 12: I see a couple of students about their essays, and a dissertation student who is just about getting his act together. Have a quick bite to eat with a couple of colleagues - we have all brought in leftovers from home to microwave. Then back to a flurry of emails trying to arrange a meeting with two other colleagues: the first slot we can find where we are all free is a month away - a sign of how busy we all are.

At 2, see a PhD student (not one of mine) to give her some advice on her CV. Then back to the essays until 4, when I am interrupted by a colleague and friend who is in a tricky situation workwise. We have to break off our conversation at 4.15 to go the research seminar, where one of the professors in the Department is giving a paper. A quick chat to one of my PhD students over crisps and a glass of water afterwards, and then I'm ready to go home.

Absolutely shattered, but I force myself to cook a proper meal, not least so that I'll have some left-overs for lunches for the rest of the week. I can't remember being this tired, especially so early on in the term. Our workloads have increased hugely this year - and from all the noises from management, it is a sign of things to come.

Uid 310

15.2.11

Very early start as I had a practical assessment 70 miles north of here, starting at 8.30am. The news on the radio was the ombudsman’s report on appalling levels of care for our older people in hospital. Drove up the road thinking about the ‘evening shift’ last night. That was an MSc module on practice development and enhancement, for people who are NHS staff, giving up their personal time after shift to study. One would think that this is something to be valued by the NHS, as it enables people to contribute to service development from an informed stance and maybe work towards improving care for elderly people amongst others? But the whole discussion was about cuts. One member had found that this week everyone in her grade (experienced mid-grade practitioners) had been asked to ‘volunteer’ for redundancy. Another had been made redundant since the previous session a week ago, which of course will also compromise his ability to finish the module, as it should have been paid for by his employer.

And these cuts are not going to affect front line services? Aye right! These are nurses working in neonatal care, paediatrics, A&E, learning disability, mental health, and elderly care. If that is not front line, I would like to know what is! Something does not compute here.

The assessment visit was a delight. A setting for young adults with complex needs, a welcoming and inclusive environment and a good student who did a great job. Practical visits always give me a buzz as this is the core of my professional identity: a practising clinician, even after 30+ years in the academy!

After the long drive back, completed the assessment form for yesterday’s clinic visit student, and also for today’s student, second marked a pile of assessment scripts marked by colleagues and agreed marks for one of my own modules with the second marker. Mostly we are pretty close and happily any minor disagreements were settled amicably and I think fairly. Email discussions with 2 MSc and 3 PhD students, plus one with a colleague involved in an EU project, and another with a potential new PhD applicant, then away to visit family.

I spent the evening polishing silver!!! Very therapeutic, and though not my leisure activity of choice, it did please the elderly parent.

Had intended an early night, but found myself watching the Richard Dimbleby lecture. A powerful advocacy for the rights of children to life, liberty and education. What a refreshing idea!

Uid 312

I just now realized I forgot to submit my diary entry yesterday---most likely because my Tuesdays this term are incredibly packed. All three of the courses I teach are on Tuesdays and Thursdays, which generally makes for a very long day.

I arrived on campus around 7am to take care of last minute course preparation details. After putting the finishing touches on various presentation materials, I was off to my first class at 10:30---a basic computer literacy course. For perhaps the first time this term, the students seemed really engaged in the material and were asking great questions. We were discussing software licensing and piracy issues, so I think it was a naturally relevant topic for the non-computing majors enrolled in the course. In fact, they asked so many questions that I wasn't able to get all the way through the material I had planned to present that day---but, as far as I'm concerned, this was a great problem to have.

I quickly grabbed lunch between courses at my desk and prepared for the next course. My early-afternoon course is one of the same courses I taught last semester, so I'm finding it much easier to teach the second time around. Even though I changed some of the course materials, I feel much better prepared and less anxious about each class.

From 4 to 6pm I hold office hours, though I have thus far had few students come in for help. I used the time to catch up on some email and administrative tasks that had piled up throughout the day. My night class is our introductory programming course for computer science majors, and I typically look forward to it throughout the day---I really enjoy the topic. The first few weeks of programming are difficult for many (most?) students, and I have been very excited the last couple classes to see the first 'eureka' moments happening. Things seem to be gelling for the students, finally, and I am beginning to field questions from them that indicate they are picking up on the bigger concepts. (E.g., What exactly is System.out---it's not like the other objects we've been using; Why is it that we don't have to call a constructor for Strings?) After class, I typically polish up code examples produced during class and upload them to the server for the students.

I left my office around 9:00pm (an increasingly typical 14 hour day in the office) for home, where I quickly grabbed dinner and started reviewing materials related to program assessment so that I was prepared for an early morning meeting on the subject Wednesday.

Uid 314

midnight-0.30

- filed email

- wrestled with new freesat receiver, grrr.

- watched music video channel.

7.30-9 up, went for a walk, got daughter up and to school

9-11 teleconference

11-12 get into work

12-1 met with student

13-14 answered email etc

14-14.45 talked to potential industry collaborator

14.14-15.00 go home

15.30-16.30 talk to community health nurse about daughter

16.30-10 had dinner, did family stuff, wrestled with aforementioned freesat receiver, read newspaper, did some emails

10-12.30 worked on emails, advisiory board research presentation

4.15-4.40 am answered emails & conference programme committee work

Uid 319

At home ill. Trying to prepare teaching material, generate work for classes that I am missing and answer student emails, as well as working on some new ideas. Probably should be doing none of these.

Uid 325

Academics are one of the most whiniest groups of people in the work force! All they do is complain, while they have one of the best jobs in the world. Where else people get to decide what they do when other than lecture/meeting times and get to decide what direction to take their research in? I am sick of the newsletter for this survey being full of complaints by people who should probably quit their jobs if they hate them so much!

I had a wonderful day this Tuesday, 15th of February. I came to work around 10:30am after dropping my son at University's staff creche. I did some admin and met my PhD student who did a great job of writing his literature survey. After lunch I met a visitor from a large corporation's research centre to discuss the research in our area and think through some future plans. After doing some reading I picked up my son at 3:30pm and we went to the beach downtown enjoying the wonderful weather and people swimming/getting a sun tan etc. Later one, as my wife finished her 9-to-5 job, we had dinner out and went home. After doing some more reading/writing I went to sleep towards midnight expecting to wake up around 8am the next day.

Where on earth will someone find a job allowing you to stroll gently into your office for 5 hours, spending 2 of them having lunch and coffee with a visitor and going to the beach just because the day is nice??? If I hear any more complaints about how bad their academic job is, I'll probably stop participating in this academic whiners' survey!

Uid 333

Up early and at work soon after 7am reading the extensive documentation for the two scheduled meetings this afternoon.

Answered emails and scheduled various new and additional tasks into the next couple of weeks (mainly graduates requiring references).

Marked undergraduate essay that had come in late and entered the marks and comments on the online reporting system.

Translated 100 lines of a Middle French poem that is currently lacking English translation. The poem's just over 2600 lines long, so I'm chipping away at it (100 lines a week, should take 6 months). Plan to put the translation online when it's done (and checked by a colleague in French).

Took an early lunch break and slipped in a quick real tennis lesson. Much of what I've learned about teaching has come via my engagement with sports coaches (I've learned more from them than from the professional qualifications I've done). The coach for my lesson today was a former world champion and his facility in explaining things at my much lower level of operation offered me further models for explaining things to students.

Suitably invigorated, I grabbed a quick lunch and went into the department for my three-meeting afternoon. First, a meeting with the chair of graduate studies about a graduate student who had fallen out with his supervisor; then the full graduate studies meeting itself with a long discussion of whether to accept the University's wish to raise the graduate fees rather significantly. We're already far more expensive than lots of places, so the committee was unhappy about the proposed rise in fees. However, we were being asked to approve the change, not argue with it. Typical!

The last meeting was of Research committee, a small committee, one of whose three members \_always\_ sends apologies. We decided that most of the committee's remit had been assumed by central research services and that the committee should therefore cease to meet. The two of us on it who actually attend (the Chair and I) are the REF coordinators and we plan to continue to discuss matters by email and in person, but there seems no need to hold termly meetings.

After the meeting I spent half an hour reassuring a colleague who was upset by an email he'd received from another colleague. I actually don't think any harm was meant, but it took a while to press that point sufficiently. The issue is the redesign of the first year course: the first colleague had proposed something that he thought would not be controversial but it had turned out rather controversial indeed at the Dept Away Day in Jan, so he wanted more time to redraft, while the other colleague wanted to send it through other committees to meet its ultimate fate rather quicker. I am now tasked with preventing this at next week's meeting of the UG teaching committee.

This all meant that I missed going to the 5pm seminar that I had hoped to attend. Instead, I went home, spent a further hour reviewing graduate applications and doing email before sharing some chardonnay and a vegetable curry with a friend.

Uid 334

15 February

08:00-16:00

Ghana Living Literacies

18:00-21:00

Yr 2 - PgCE / Cert Ed

I am looking forward to 14th. I have a clear diary. That is I have started to implement a strategy suggested some time ago by a colleague: to block out time in my diary to do things – not just meetings.

I intend to apply for a fund for some research and developmental work in Ghana and have blocked out tomorrow to work on my presentation. I stayed up late last night – tweeting, watching TV and preparing my PowerPoint. I am struggling a little with this Module – but I have one more week of teaching (after this session) and then 2 weeks of student led presentations. Wo-ho.

I spent most of the day reading. It’s not easy to read in small bursts and it took me ages to get into my text – by the time I did – it was time to get to work.

Got to work – my office - at about 3.30 and spent rest of the afternoon on admin – had to take scripts to exams office after printing and noting down grades and feedback. Sent a few emails.

Excited about a conference in Sheffield – it is ‘my conference’ about Literacies organise by a person whose work I admire. There will be a whole network of people for me to conoodle with. I feel a little greedy for this stuff. I have sense that I may have only 1 more year @ Hull. Possibly one more year of HE. I really want to gain as much confidence and experience as I can in being an academic before working out how what I love and believe in – the society people like me want to create and the our purposes for education – how do they persist without a publicly funded university. I have no idea but amidst avoiding the R word at work, it’s a discussion I want to be having.

There is convoluted process of 2nd marking and anonymous marking. I have to pretend I don’t know who my students are when I mark their work. Though of course I know the context that each of them work in and what they teach. So the anonymity is like a little game I have to play with quality. I pretend I can’t tell whose work I’m reading. In my view knowing the person who has written the text enhance the quality of my feedback. It gives me a context and wider perspective to understand what they have said and helps me tune in the feedback. I can refer to conversations we’ve had or other assignments that link to the current text being assessed. All the work – teacher education – is about practice and I can grasp why a comment is made sometimes if I can appreciate their situation. Anyway, I think the University has had this conversation with academics over an extended period of time and this system is the outcome. So its numbers instead of names when recording things, and a process that takes much longer then it should.

My lesson was mainly prepared but I had to photocopy – print out & collate work for handouts. I work 3 evenings and don’t often pass colleagues as I am mainly there as others are leaving.

Taught from 6.15 – 8.30.

Not a very successful class. Something for me to work on. I get quite excited by the possibilities of ICT. I managed to avoid being evangelical – but could see the room was full of stony faces. The week before ½ term. Maybe we were all tired. Worst session so far. But I am reassured. It is not typical and sometimes it’s the mood of the group. I know they appreciate me (feedback is almost all always positive. Some directly thanking me for my support) and when the session ended – at 8.30 it’s a long day for most of them – they seemed to linger a little longer than usual. Of course it’s just a policy fantasy that I can be excellent all of the time. Some of the time – maybe. A lot of the time – possible. All of the time. Huh!

Home by 9.00pm. Soup TV & twitter. Email. Reading – at least – lining up another book to read. Though I’ve not even started this one. But that’s ok.

Uid 343

It's a sad anniversary - exactly 40 years since 'D-day', the day that Britain changed from good old pounds, shillings and pence to decimal currency. I remember that day well and the confusion as people started to think of a penny being worth 2.4 pence in old money. I am sure that the change had a detrimental effect on arithmetic ability of our youngsters - brains used to be much more agile when they had to deal with 4 farthings to the penny, 12 pence to the shilling, and 20 shillings to the pound, rather than just working to base 10 which is all modern currency requires.

I start the day with my first year lecture on complex numbers - it goes quite well until the end when I make the mistake of trying to cram too much into the last five minutes with the result that I'll have to repeat some of it next time. Then a tutorial - it's the first time I've taken this group of five, and they are quite a lively crowd - much more interaction than I often get. To end the morning I give a lecture to a final year class - on the whole they are attentive and interested, even though I'm still doing the dull introductory stuff that has to be covered before getting to the meat of the course.

I eat my lunchtime sandwiches in front of my computer trying to catch up with my email - more requests for reviewing papers (which I send back with suggestions for other referees) and people wanting references (which I suppose I'm going to have to write sometime). Then I take a class in the computer laboratory - for a change all the machines seem to be working, all the students manage to log on and download the project, and I don't have to send an SOS to the computer officer.

Later in the afternoon, I go to a seminar by a new lecturer in the department - highly technical stuff but pretty impressive. However, he flouts the most basic rule of lecturing by continuing for half an hour beyond the standard one hour. Afterwards I go to the local pub with my research group, before cycling home.

In the evening I watch an episode of 'Yes, Prime Minister' on a DVD that I was given for Christmas. The programme, which was first broadcast in 1988, satirised the sorry state of education in Britain - very little seems to have changed over the past 23 years.

Uid 347

Feeling overwhelmed - my inbox is full and I can't even send replies. The email traffic just seems to get faster/heavier - there must be an effective way of managing all this information - if only I had the time to set one up! I resort to deleting loads of stuff and hope I won't regret it!

The NSS is creating new pressures - a renewed focus on teaching and learning is emerging(and welcomed)but what makes a satisfied student?! It seems to me that student demands are insatiable and what the student wants might not be what we can reasonably deliver with the time and resources we have...but if we don't we won't be here much longer...as individuals or as programmes/departments/HEIs. Maybe I need to start thinking seriously about an exit plan? I used to be so passionate about the transformative power of higher education and the potential to address social injustice but all my energy is drained out of me in trying to respond to the increasingly mystifying demands of the organisation!

Uid 348

7.00 In Costa coffee shop near school I'm visiting. Check my diary for the next few days and start to look at sample of essays for the SCITT I moderate.

8.00 School meeting with class teacher and student to review progress of school practice. Student is very conscientious and has done all the preliminary work necessary. It still takes us an hour to go through the QTS Standards and set targets.

9.00 - 9.30 Observation of student.

9.30 - 10.00 Feedback

10.00 - 10.30 Drive back to University

Coffee!

10.45 - 11.30 Meeting with TDA representative and schools partnership manager to discuss links with LEA.

11.30 - 2.00 Constant stream of Year 1 students coming to collect failed essays. Some tears and disappointment, others resigned and philosophical. Also MA tutorial with PG student - long and interesting discussion about complexities of teaching sentences to young children. A personal tutee also comes to discuss personal issues. I try to eat lunh between 12.30 and 2.00 but it is a much interrupted bagel! Maybe I should close my door...

2.00 - 3.00 Year 1 students continue to turn up. Plan a group tutorial for them all with our Academic Learning Adviser. Also - as ever - trying to deal with steady stream of emails that never stop. My aim is never to have more than a screen full - so my folders are, well, rather full!

Phone new colleague to discuss support issues for students and other issues.

3.00 - 4.00 Discuss course sessions with new colleague and run through queries about assignment briefing for Foundation course with another. More emails (goes without saying!). Starting to plan Year 1 session for later this week.

4,00 - 6.00 Sorting out essays. Our unversity restructuring has left us starved of adminstrative support. Three days of admin work has to be taken on by the team. An interesting expansion of our 'academic role' (the rationale given for the restructuring). More emails. Staff queries. More students for failed essays. Sort out evaluation forms for this term's modules.

6.00 - 7.00 What goes round comes around - back to the essays I started moderating 12 hours ago!

Uid 352

Today is travel day: 6 hours of train to get from Strasbourg to London, for a meeting with partners concerning a student exchange, dual degree programme. I will also meet with students on the programme on 3 separate sites, thereby involving travel as far as Scotland. So, before leaving several e-mails to students to organise the meetings with them.

Catching up on some admin and a bit of research reading on the trains, but if I look at what I actually accomplished, not a lot. The simplest organisation seems to consume so much time...

Uid 354

Tuesday, 15 February 2011

10:15 AM. Another day of teaching. Last night's class went quite well, so I'm feeling good. And I have a pretty good idea what to do for today's class. I would like to do some more reading on a related topic, in order to give students a different perspective. We will see if I get time.

Bike to bus, put my bike on bus, and take the bus the rest of the way to work. Taking the bus partway has been a new routine this quarter. I was looking forward to effective reading time. Unfortunately, the bouncy bus makes it too difficult to underline, so I am not getting much out of these bus rides. Pity.

Got into the office to find that the morning meetings were canceled. Try to concentrate on my class preparation, and couldn't. Had to spend an hour cleaning up desk, filing papers, getting rid of mess before I could concentrate.

Faculty meeting today. As a university, we continue to do well financially. Our administration budgets below our actual enrollment, and we’ve been able to increase enrollment to offset budget cuts from the state. It is odd that we feel almost embarrassed that we are so lucky compared to our sister state schools. Thank goodness our administration and luck.

The issue of larger class sizes came up in the faculty meeting. Our enrollment is up substantially over the last few years, during which we have only added a few faculty and almost no staff. Across campus, the current average class size is 20 students, though most of the classes in our program are larger. At the moment I am teaching two classes of 45 and 46. This is problematic in two respects: one class was designed for 36 students, max; and at this point in my career I should not be teaching two new courses with such high enrollments. Well, that explains why I have felt so overwhelmed this quarter! In any case, perhaps we’ve been spoiled, and need to learn how to do well (enough) with larger class sizes. They are coming.

After the faculty meeting, I met with two colleagues to discuss the history and future of the software engineering curriculum. We have a distinct and conscious emphasis on comparative approach to teaching, where we expose the students to the variety of ways to approach a particular situation, instead of focusing on one. This approach makes some sense, yet it makes me nervous. For instance, in software testing, is our role to teach students all of the different approaches that you could take to suffer testing, or give them experience with some very effective ways? It is such a difficult question, since what is effective is so very context-sensitive.

I also am somewhat nervous that we do not have our students build much. Much of our curriculum is about analysis of items, rather than construction. We need both. Not sure what to do there. Still feeling my way in this new career.

Met with Director to discuss a self-supporting workshop that a colleague from industry and I are planning to do under the university auspices. The U can do all of the planning and admin, while we focus on teaching. And getting paid some extra money and hopefully earning some for the program. Looks like this could come together.

Scrambled to put together some material I had forgotten I needed for class. At least I’ve avoided another day of panic – just a little rush before class.

I let my students go 10 min. before the end of class, because the next exercise would have taken at least 30 minutes and I did not have anything to fill in for 10 minutes. It felt strange. Experiential teaching is different from lecturing/seminar. Still, I would like to have a set of short topics or exercises that we could cover in such situations.

Packed up. Took the 45-minute bus ride, and then the half hour bike ride to home. Got home around 9:45 PM. Another day at work.

This quarter has been very tiring for me. I'm looking forward to a lighter load next quarter, so I can get back to my research.

Uid 360

This day was a day i was working at home. This happens about every two weeks and it means that i can get thinking work done. It is not possible to mark or prepare sessions in the office as i share it with 6 other people. I can do admin there and work with colleagues but it is nice to have a bit of space for thinking.

Today i spent about 4 hours marking what may be the final draft of a doctoral dissertation. marking is a hard part of teaching. I like reading students' work but it is hard sometimes to give the right feedback. It is easy to pick on the bits that need improving and forget to mention the good parts. Also it is easy to give surface features a lot of attention and not give the overall structure the priority it needs. This is particularly the case when makring on-line i think.

I was reading this in hard copy which was good and there is lots i need to say to this student. It is hard when you have a student who wants to 'get it finished' but who needs to do a lot more work as you have to avoid telling them what to do - even though that is what they want. i have lots of suggestions but i mustn't be directive.

Then i spent about 4 hours planning some new teaching sessions for a module that i have taught before but i really want to think about in a different way with the focus on the student learning and not me telling. This is taking a lot more time in preparation but i think it will go a lot better. A manageer said that they don't know why people keep trying to develop thier teaching as the subject doesn't change much! However your view of it - the way you understand learning both develop. I love planning new sessions and i am really looking forward to trying this out later in the week and getting feedback from the students.

Uid 361

In at 7am, more or less an admin day, opened up computer and started dealing with e-mails.

8am coffee with colleagues and discussions about work issues

8:30 back to admin (student references x2, review module log info for completion, start collating information from team regarding portfolio issue for students)

10am see student for portfolio review and discussion about her progress (coffee with student)

11am continue admin. Check and answer emails.

11:15am Discuss the weeks teaching with colleage I am supporting.

12:15pm Review own teaching for the week. Look at info for skills teaching tomorrow and Thursday.

1pm lunch with colleagues (some work discussion)

1:30pm Continue with collating information from team regarding portfolio issue.

3pm Module log work on computer

4pm Home

Uid 362

Tuesday is not normally one of my days to go into university but today I observed a colleague as part of my Post Graduate Certificate in Academic Practice. It was very interesting to watch a colleague teach a text with which I am not familiar and who has a very different teaching style to mine. The rest of the day was spent marking some first year work. (Why does this always take much longer than you think it will - the marking is relatively straightforward but the feedback takes a long time - hopefully the time I spend on this will help the students to perform better in their next assignment but that assumes, of course, that they read my comments and then act on them!)

Uid 367

Today is a day centered on redrafting learning materials, improving the conference web page, and administrative meetings. I have planned on spending up to three hours on refining the lecture materials for the forthcoming summer term. Additionally, the ITICSE 2011 web conference web page has to be adapted with some additional contents. Finally, I have several meetings with students writing their Bachelor Thesis under my supervision, a research training group of upcoming Ph.D. candidates, and two Ph.D.s I directly supervise.

That, together with my regular email traffic and maintenance work for the learning portal for CS (based on Moodle) that I administrate should keep me busy...

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Uid 368

So far today, I’ve had a meeting with disability and dyslexia colleagues to discuss running an event for academic staff around neurodiversity (contested term, but they were using it to cover spectrum of overlapping issues ranging from dyslexia and dyspreaxia through ADD to Aspergers and other conditions on the autistic spectrum). With reduced funding and constraints on staff time we need to be sure that events presented by our unit are very clearly focussed on learning/teaching practices, and it soon became clear that what they had in mind was actually aimed at other disability professionals. So instead we’ve agreed that they;ll run this themselves, but we’ll contribute a session at the end help the specialist staff draw out key implications for teaching staff, and then provide a space at our L&T conference in July to highlight these. Meanwhile I’m continuing to develop a user-friendly format for an online integrated curriculum planning toolkit, which will eventually incorporate all such guidance into a more manageable set of resources for staff. After that, answering emails, and writing feedback on some late portfolios for our PgCert, and preparing resources to take to this afternoon meeting – about a HEFCE funded project on embedding Sustainable Development into insitutional QA processes. All these overlap – and hopefully will eventually contribute to improved learning experiences for students – but it would be very nice to have a whole day to get on with one thing at a time!

Uid 369

0830-1030 email clearing and doing feedback on draft dissertations for 8/10 of my final year UG supervises. Email is the thing I hate most. A mega drain on enthusiasm and psychological energy, with inane, paper-pushing and downright rude being the order of the day.

1030-1050 walk to university

1059-1100 prep for meeting

1100-1200 meeting #6 about the kinds of generic skills training we provide for our grad students, across the college

1200-1330 progress review tutorials with my first year personal tutees.

1330-1400 catch up on email eating sandwich over computer. Uni refuses to buy macs so am stuck with slow and crashy pc. That's why I try to work seriously at home, where possible. Sadly it's not even always possible only research day. So real intellectual work typically shifts to the weekend.

1400-1600 mind rotting College L&T meeting. These College mtgs are populated by bores who are happy to spend 3 hours as often as possible holding meetings from which there is no direct outcome. I have to attend ex officio, but leave at 1600 at which point the relevant agenda items still have not been reached.

1600-1800 more email clearing and dissertation draft feeding back

1800-1830 prep for regular 0900 Wednesday ops mtg.

1830-1855 walk home

1855-1930 feed and walk dog

1930-2000 cook dinner

2000-2200 slump in front of tv with food and alcohol

2200 bed

Uid 370

1 hour lecture - first year class, 1 hour pre-lecture prep, about 30 mins afterwards editing lecture recording.

1 hour to proofread a big grant (been working on it for a year) for final submission, then submission of grant. Frustrating process because co-applicant has not participated as much in writing/editing/proofing process. Unusual to spend this much time on one day on research activities - usually 10 minutes here and there talking to PhD students rather than fighting for grant writing time.

1 hour student staff liaison committee meeting - most problems easily dealt with on the spot, a couple of things to take to the staff meeting later in the week, momentary frustration when an academic colleague spent half the meeting checking email on a mobile device. I'm staff chair of the SSLC and have made many changes - seem to be working quite well.

30 mins with student discussing previous semesters marks, ended in tear so traumatic for all concerned. 30 mins in project lab with final year students followed by 30 mins with students who had just got their exam results and wanted to discuss various aspects.

2 hours prepping for lecture marathon on 16th (9 - 12noon) and photocopying handouts.

Spent some time in evening battling inbox down to below 15 messages.

Uid 375

15.02.11

An early start - up at 7am and to the gym. Got home and replied to numerous emails and checked in on social networking sites, then walked the dog before settling down to read a book I'm meant to be reviewing. That took me to lunchtime, when I remembered a diversity event I'd agreed to run the next day. The afternoon was, then, taken up with creating a PowerPoint presentation and handout. I had little idea of how many people to expect so made 30 handouts to be on the safe side. Sinking feeling that very few people in the university knew or cared about the fact that I was spending my time doing this. At 6pm I went to a community Arts' organisation meeting at - another activity which goes ignored by my line manager but which I think is important anyway. Finished there at 7.30pm so home and then to pub to watch my team play football on the TV and then the pub quiz. Collapsed, exhausted, into my bed at about midnight.