Surveys for Saturday 15 January 2011

Uid 11

Spent some of today working ahead of the start of teaching next week - lots of time sorting out resources into more accessible from (one of those value added jobs that does not appear on workload management documents!) and sorted out student registrations (or lack of them) for group project upcoming. Should have been day off...

Uid 13

May I cheat?

I spent my day Saturday taking my daughter to the Urgent Care clinic (third day of a severe sore throat, and we'd just learned she'd been exposed to strep the previous weekend), and then going to play practice all day. I did, however, have a teaching-related insight that day, on which I blogged. May I just paste in my blog post?

Other than these two events, I danced, I sang, I made dinner, and I watched "Doctor Who" with my kids in the evening while answering email. Boring Saturday.

---- paste after this ----

I’ve been taking a piece of advice from Seymour Papert over the last couple weeks (and for the next couple months). While I was never a student at MIT nor part of any of their Logo programs, I got some time with Seymour when we were both at the all-weekend design meetings for Logo Microworlds, back when I was a graduate student. (One of my all-time most scary and intellectually challenging dinners was sitting next to Seymour and defending my thesis to him.) One of his in-passing pieces of advice was that education researchers should regularly learn something new, to continually be reminded of what it’s like to be a learner.

I’m “Baron Elberfeld” in our church’s production of “Sound of Music.” My wife (“Frau Schmidt”) and daughter (“Brigitta”) are also in the production. All of the rest of my family have been in plays, and my wife and son have been in many. This is my first play ever. Not even in high school was I ever even working on the set. This is totally new for me.

One of my first observations: I don’t know the severity of my mistakes. I’m the eager-to-please newbie, and I make mistakes. Are they “okay” mistakes? Did I just make a serious faux pas? I make some of each, but I can’t tell at the time. I figure it out 5, 10, 15 minutes later, judged in terms of later response to me.

Yesterday, we were at rehearsal all day long. Since I only have two lines and am in only one scene (but have to dance two dances, and sing the final “Goodbye” with all the other party guests), I spent much of the time yesterday trying to help out with the set. One of the people in charge gave me a task to do, which I worked at diligently. Someone else came along and thanked me for doing it — it needed doing, and he was worried that nobody was doing it. I went out to get more supplies.

When I came back, somebody else more senior (everybody is more senior to me) was doing my job. As I walked up and he saw the supplies in my hand (more of what I’d already been using), he told me, “No, those are completely wrong. You should never be using those.” He explained why. Then he pointed out the tools I was using, and told me how his tools were much more appropriate for the task. He then turned away from me and went back to work, on the job that had been mine.

I felt humiliated. I felt like I must have screwed things up, working for over an hour with the wrong supplies and wrong tools. I strongly suspect that he felt that he reached out to me in a “teachable moment” — he explained to me how I was mistaken, and how his approach was much better. He probably felt that he did me a favor. I felt like quitting. I packed up all the stuff I was using and put it away, then went and sat down until it was time for my scene.

Back when OOPLSA was in Atlanta, in 1997, I got to have lunch with Adele Goldberg. At that time, she was working on a Smalltalk programming environment to be used in the UK Open University‘s introductory course. She told me that the greatest benefit of distance education was for supporting working professionals in learning something new. The issue wasn’t finding time in a day. It was humiliation. ”You work in a field for 10, 20 years, and you get recognized for your expertise. Now go into a classroom, and raise your hand to admit that you don’t know something. It’s really hard!” On the Internet, nobody can see you blush.

Seymour’s right — it is a good thing to be in these situations, to be reminded of what it’s like for our students. I’m sure that our students may also feel that they’re losing face when met with a “teachable moment.” It’s a real challenge for us to teach it in a way that avoid humiliation, that allows the student to see the lesson but feel encouraged to keep going, to keep engaged.

Uid 14

Slept in until around 7:30. This is odd, since the recently-turned-on-year-old is almost always up at 6:30. In a sense it was nice to sleep in, but I would have rather been up early to enjoy not having to rush off to work.

Had breakfast with the family. Nothing fancy, just cereal, but it was still nice to not have to think about rushing off.

Played computer games for bit to relax. Still have a big backlog of purchases from the Steam Holiday Sale. It's fun, and it's a good discussion topic for bonding with students.

The family went to the Winter Market, an indoor version of the Farmer's Market. I bought freshly-roasted coffee beans from my supplier, and it was good to see him and his wife. Ended up picking up a limequat, which I didn't know existed, and Jerusalem artichokes, which I vaguely remember having as a 10-year-old and hadn't seen since. Turns out they're not really exciting, except that their starch is held in a form that is not turned into sugar by the digestive system. Neat!

The afternoon was spent relaxing with the family, playing Kinder Bunnies with my wife and nearly-four-year-old, and tinkering on the computer. Several times during the day I think that I probably should be getting work done, but I decide against it. The world did not stop, which is good. However, I also did not make progress on course planning or my book chapter, and that stress still looms.

In the evening, my wife and I watched the PBS American Masters on The Doors and were sorely disappointed. It was yet another personality study / hero worship of Jim Morrison, who I just can't take very seriously as an artist. The real disappointment, though, was the indifference with which they treated the rest of the band, who were amazing musicians, especially the keyboardist. The documentary ends with Morrison's death, as if nothing happened to The Doors after that, as if they all ceased to be. It's a whole different level of tragic.

Uid 17

Daily Activity Log

Saturday 15 January 2011

Today is a Saturday. While it's not a traditional work day (in the sense that no work obligations are scheduled), a teacher's work is never done.

I do get to follow my preferred morning routine, however: Read the newspaper with a cup of tea and some light breakfast, in this case pickled herring.

Before the rest of the household wakes up, I process through some Email:

-- One of my duties as chair of the systemwide faculty senate undergraduate education committee is to recruit, from the membership of my committee, volunteers to sit on various subcommittees. We have one such subcommittee that provides the governance for our university residential/academic program in Washington, DC. I'd recruited a volunteer for this, but the post requires a two-year commitment and the volunteer is going on sabbatical next year. Personally, I think he should have stuck it out for a year, but I was asked to find a replacement. Happily I did get a volunteer who's not due for a leave and who doesn't have another subcommittee post. I think I've been much more effective than my predecessors in finding subcommittee volunteers; I hope it's appreciated.

-- I communicate with my TA about her scheduling some lab hours for the next week's assignment.

-- I complete and submit my two-page CV for our upcoming accreditation review.

-- Since everyone in my carpool is an academic, our schedules are irregular; we all have travel obligations, early or late metings, and child-care commitments (although at present half of us are childless and the other half are empty-nesters). Thus we work out a custom schedule each week. I have taken on the role of the scheduler, collecting everyone's timing preferences and working out the best fit I can. This morning, as usual each Friday or Saturday, I send a request to my carpool partners for their next week's commuting schedules.

-- I check in with a grad student I'm mentoring as he teaches his first full course (he was nominated at the last minute when the scheduled instructor resigned).

-- I'm acting as the client for a team in our one-term software project course; their project is to build a visualization of the process for assigning instructors to courses (which is now done rather clumsily on spreadsheets). This morning I respond to a request to schedule a team meeting.

Tonight we plan to have my local family (father, his wife, sister, and two old family friends) over for dinner. My sister is having surgery on Monday [late update: it was successful]. My daughter, who is still home from college on winter break, and I are in charge of the menu planning and preparation. She and I go shopping: to the local farmer's market for vegetables (kale, onions, and garlic, plus berries for a pie) and to the Asian market for large fish fillets (labeled in the case as "turbot/halibut") to grill. We run various other errands and return home to cook.

Uid 21

I forgot to keep a time log today, so I'll try to reconstruct the day

as best I can.

6:45 a.m. alarm went off, because I forgot to turn it off for the weekend.

8:00 a.m. got up, had breakfast, read e-mail and blogs.

11 read grad application files

12-1 had lunch, showered and got dressed

1-2 read grad application files

2-3 grocery shopping, went to library for books for my son

3-5 graded senior thesis drafts. Very, very painful. The writing is

below what would be acceptable in 7th grade, at all levels from

punctuation, through grammar, paragraph structure, section

organization, and choice of material.

5-6 looked for parts for underwater remotely-operated vehicle for the

Robotics Club my son and I are starting at his high school.

6-6:30 ate dinner

6:30-7 read grad application files

7-8 taught son how to use oscilloscope for his science fair project

8-8:30 read grad applications

8:45-9:30 watched Mythbusters DVD with family

9:30-9:40 ate ice cream for dessert

9:40-10 read grad applications.

I have another 10 application files to read and 4 more senior theses,

but I'm on track for getting all my teaching and grad-director work

done by the end of the long weekend (Monday is Martin Luther King Day,

so there are no classes).

10-10:30 Played a few rounds of MadLibs with the family. Tried doing

a molecule design for EteRNA.cmu.edu

Uid 22

Not much did happen today ... for which I'm grateful.

I slept in and didn't get up until 9am. Then I had a very slow day, washed some clothes, fiddled around at home, took a photo of a tomato :D, made dinner for the family ... in short a relaxing saturday.

Uid 23

Today I planned to get on with my research project write-up, but only managed to snatch an hour or so. Just long enough to start to get interested but not long enough to do more than a few paragraphs...

So - did the weekly shop, collected post, talked to my family, and went out for dinner with friends.

Son off back to University tomorrow, so trying to encourage but not nag - failing miserably, I'm sure! All this going out with friends most evenings (here and there) can't help. Should I have been 'a Chinese mother' (as all in the press at the moment) and pushed/controlled more? Too late now! And why do unis have such different schedules nowadays? I know there's the complication of terms vs semesters, but he has friends at different unis who are going ski-ing next week having just finished their exams; what schedule are they on?

Heigh-ho - my terms starts on Monday. Worried about Tuesday's new BA module, but not enough to go into work and do anything about the handouts that need finalising and printing out. So Monday's going to be a long day! Fair enough - today was relaxing...

Uid 24

Saturday the 15th started early - I got up at 5:50 to get my daughter to school for 6:30, so she could catch the school bus to a track meet. Then I went home and crawled back into bed.

I spent time finishing up my syllabi and web sites for my courses this semester (classes start on the 18th; my first class is the 19th). I am teaching CS2 and compilers, the latter for the first time. I also spent some time cleaning the house.

Around 5:00 I picked my daughter up. She's having fun with track, which is cool. The whole family ran a 5K this past fall, and she in particular seems to have gotten the running bug - she loves to keep fit. I need to get back to exercising too - I stubbed my toe quite badly during the holiday, and my doctor told me no running for 6 to 8 weeks :-(

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Uid 26

Today is the end of a very long week. This week was to be the start of classes. However, 7+ inches of snow fell in my decidedly Southern city (5 million people and 10 snow plows for the city) to be followed by freezing temperatures for the entire week. Campus was closed until 11 am on Friday. So today I have been scrambling to rework the syllabi for my two courses to recover from a lost week. We have received word from the VPAA that we are "to make up the lost time" by extending the class period a few minutes each day or by assigning extra out of class work. I'm wondering how that works for intro programming.

Besides that, my children have been home all week (no school for them either) and everyone has a touch of cabin fever and we need to separate. So son is off with a friend, daughter is hiding downstairs with the xbox, husband is out shoveling the driveway, and I spent the rest of the day working on a jigsaw puzzle and grocery shopping. We'll see how the rest of the semester goes now...

Uid 28

January 15th 2011

I had a leisurely start to the day as it was Saturday but I still had to go into work for an Open Day. It was mainly aimed at undergraduates but I did have a postgraduate student booked in. My plan was to do some lecture preparation in my office if it was quiet and ask one of my colleagues to bring any interested people up to my office.

When I arrived, the prospective students were in a talk and other lecturers were sitting around the main hall chatting. It is quite a good time to catch up with people as there can be a lot of hanging around. Today I had a chat with people in my department who were playing with the latest iPad technology and discussing how they were incorporating it into their multimedia lectures. I then headed off to my room and checked my emails.

I had an email from a student who was not happy with the form of an assessment. This was an ongoing saga and the lecturer concerned did not appear to think there was an issue. No one else had complained but it did not stop this student being very persistent. There was a request for input to a grant proposal that I am involved with, so I spent a couple of hours working on that. I also decided that I would brush the dust off my regrading application – I have been meaning to submit this for three years but something more pressing always intervenes.

I got a bit carried away with all this and it was mid-afternoon before I remembered the Open Day. It had all but finished so I headed for home without having spoken to a single prospective student but having done some useful work. The house was a bit like the Marie Celeste when I arrived home with evidence of half-complete bread-making and everything left out in the kitchen.

My husband got home shortly after me, looking very windswept, and explained everything. It turned out he had run out of time before going to a lunch connected with our transition town movement. We now had to get a move on because our friends were coming round for an early evening drink and we wanted to prepare snacks as well as make the bread. This process was slowed down by calls from our children who both live away. My son is in the US and we communicate by Skype. My daughter is in Edinburgh and she always phones on her mobile when she is travelling somewhere – time and motion. They have both completed their studies but are in quite precarious jobs and are looking for new ones. If it’s not bad enough looking for a job in today’s economic climate, they have the added complication of having partners in similar situations to consider too. Life is not easy for young people!

We had the pizza, pitta and hummus ready in time (just). I discovered that orange juice is not a suitable substitute for lemon juice when making hummus – use something sharper. We had an inspiring evening. Our friends are very community minded and are looking for a new community related project. My husband is very committed to combating climate change, so there was much discussion about setting up a local community transition group and how to do this effectively. I was very conscious that the demands of working in my university at the moment mean there is very little spare energy for such activities, vitally important though they are. I reflected again that perhaps I should go and do something else, or, with changes in funding and the precarious financial state of the university, the decision may be taken out of my hands.

Uid 32

It's Saturday. The last "free" weekend before classes start. I say free in quotes because we all know that is not really true.

Today had three major projects, none of them very interesting to the rest of my family.

I started writing lecture notes for a new class. This class forms the completion of the arch of the student's education at my school. Therefore, the class discussions need to fill in all the gaps. Yesterday's project was to go through the students' plan of study and see what the gaps are. Wow. Quite a few. I think we as a department need to talk about filling some of these holes at an at least introductory level before they get to the final course. Not sure how that will fly, but it needs to be addressed. I have collected the stack of books that will form the knowledge base and started to write.

The second big project is to look at all our partner schools in the region and see who we can form articulation agreements with. It turns out that everyone has programs we can dovetail into, the big question will be - do they want us as partners? The discussion with a local partner took years, I hope that doesn't happen again. Look folks - we want our students to go to your school. I know you think you will lose 2 years tuition if they transfer in, but how much will you lose if they don't come at all? Think of it as gaining two years tuition - they will come in as juniors and stay. They are good kids and want to study - why won't you let them?

The third project took the rest of the day. I was developing an application to demo as a class project. It was just so much fun to be coding again that I missed dinner. It's doing this that leaves me puzzled when my advanced students tell me how much they hate doing the lab assignments. Why are you here? If you hate it, change majors. Really. It's ok. This profession is too all-encompassing to have that large of a chunk of your life be something you hate. Relish the creative forces and go play.

Well. for a Saturday we did a lot. I am hoping that there is a Saturday in the very near future where I can curl up on the couch and read a for-fun book. Someday :)

Uid 33

Saturday 15th January

Extremely tired after an industrial visit to a student yesterday in Reading. However a good visit to a successful student. Rather a wet day, but I managed to avoid the worst of the rain.

Saturday is a day that I do sometimes spend in the office, mainly because its quiet without the frequent disturbances that occur during Mon-Fri. But this Saturday I caught up with my sleep, since I'd had a few disturbed nights with my mind racing over all the things that could go wrong with the previous weeks activities.

Last week was a little stressful, was off campus doing Industrial Placement visits twice during the week (the first one to Slough, another successful student), and a large scale teaching/assessment simulation running on Thursday. Technically this was the first exam week, but my department decided to schedule all the exams in the last two weeks of the assessment period, for which I'm very grateful.

Probably about half a days prep for the simulation, finding a last minute replacement for one of the key roles, finding out from the Business School Technicians how the built in video recording kit works, and packing everything to take over to the court room.

The simulation, for digital forensics students, involves using the mock court room that belongs to the School of Law, and getting each student to present their findings from the digital evidence we provided them for their assessment (it took about 4 hours). They will be providing a court report. Unfortunately the simulation was originally set for the second assessment week, and yet was booked for the first assessment week, so I had to ask students to provide a draft version of their assessment (court report) earlier so we could use it in reference during the presentation of evidence. This caused some problems as the VLE couldn't handle changes in the handin process, so the final coursework handin on Friday was not as elegant as it could have been. VLEs often don't seem to have been designed to operate in the same universe as other 'human' systems.

The two unit lecturers acted as defense and prosecution council, and as the students could opt for giving evidence for either side, both lecturers got a chance to cross-exam (which is probably the most enjoyable part - for the staff if not the students!). Another member of staff played the judge, and I drafted in my wife to act as usher. These are the main roles we need, the Jury is 'virtual' and the accused merely a two dimensional stereotype :-)

All went well, all students found the experience appropriately intense, but also 'safe', and I was generally happy with all the performances by all students (although some much better than others). ...all the staff involved seemed to enjoy the experience too. Its all been videoed, and we shall endeavor to use parts of the video for feedback and (with students permission) to illustrate approaches to giving evidence as an expert witness. This is the third time we have run the simulation, each time using a higher level of fidelity.

Strangest experience was seeing all the staff wearing suits, and even more seeing all the students dressed 'respectably' :-)

...and then on thursday afternoon to the dentist, as I have finally found an NHS dentist in my city, and one that is a short walk from the University campus (and one that seems to actually do a reasonable job). I was pretty exhausted by the end of the day.

A busy week. Next week another big event, on Thursday as the University decided it would be helpful if we change the size of our units and revalidate all our courses. We have a lot of work to do to get all the stuff that worked in one format into another format, and of course to try and make the usual annual improvements as well. The event on Thursday is an internal meeting where I hope we'll all be able to get the framework for the PG courses worked out, and some of the many forms completed.

Uid 34

15 January 2011

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00:00-01:15 Skype call and editing with London (Ontario) discussing joint paper, due 23:59 PST Sunday.

08:30-09:10 Wake up (late), call hospital can I call back later? Breakfast & E-mail

09:10-09:30 The three S's (s\*\*t, shave, shampoo)

09:30-11:45 The hospital do want a recovering alcoholic to talk to a patient in A&E Obervation. An 18-year old girl, so I definitely need a female colleague, but my assigned one isn't answering. Find a colleague, go to hospital, and talk to (very sick) patient. It's her fourth visit to A&E that week!

11:45-13:15 Lunchtime AA meeting

13:15-13:45 go to University

13:45-17:00 work on paper, including salad lunch in campus parade bar, with laptop & wifi.

17:00-18:00 Skype with London (Ontario) about paper

18:00-18:15 E-mails with new lecturer at Kent discussing workshop

18:15-18:30 More paper

18:30-19:00 Go down to town by bus with Reader in AI, discusing conferences and attribution of papers joint with students. Continue discussions in pub (lime & lemonade for me!)

19:00-21:22 Speaker for Saturday evening's AA has turn up: meet him (also text from Treasurer, who wants to resign), chair meeting.

21:22-22:00 Dinner at home

22:00-23:00 Edit paper

23:00-24:00 Skype call and editing with London (Ontario). Next call 13:00 Sunday

Uid 38

Saturday, and football takes priority over any thoughts of work today.

Took my son to his football training session in the morning, and then we went to see Kilmarnock vs St Johnstone in the afternoon. It was, as they say, a "game of two halves". Kilmarnock scored early on through a clinical finish from Conor "The Fish" Sammon from a clever free kick from on-loan Finnish international Alexei Eremenko (you are probably thinking "too much detail", but these were the main events of my day, so that's what you're getting), and should have had the game wrapped up before half-time by taking any of a number of good chances. However, the usual slick passing game failed to click in the second half and St Johnstone's pressure paid off with an equaliser four minutes from time - we were, as they say, "gutted". Presumably The Fish was also "gutted", although not literally.

I will need to think about work on Sunday, though, as trimester 2 teaching starts on Monday...

Uid 40

Written in retrospect on a busy Tuesday.

Got up around 9.30, had a long shower and then spent ages getting

the kids ready for a swimming lesson.

Tuesday is a big deadline for 3 EU grants I'm involved in and I'm actively

not trying to think about anything work related as I need some downtime.

Read a chapter on ancient Rome - dense stuff but interesting

I'm cramming in all my teaching into this semester so there's little

margin for error at the moment. Last week went well but I have some of

the hardest material to get across next week. We ran out of seats in

the lecture theatre so the delivery must be ok.

After swimming the boys were still restless so we took them on a long walk

despite the pouring ran. After half an hour madness in a field they seemed

to calm and after the museum cafe they were positively chilled.

Managed to wangle a baby-sitter so we're out tonight.

After the first beer hit, feeling pretty good. Really great to spend

even just a short time with my wife away from the little darlings.

Retired home and mission accomplished - almost no time spent thinking about

work. However. tomorrow I'll be back in working on the proposals....

Uid 41

Started the day early, picking drunk other half up from the train station at quarter past midnight (and spending some hours in the morning supplying cups of tea and toast to aid recovery). Sifted through email accumulated overnight then off to tesco for the weekly shop. Bought "Resident Evil: Afterlife" blu-ray, which, compared to the appalling earlier sequels, wasn't too bad! Back from shopping, couple of hours doing the housework (and making the shower cubicle windows transparent once again!) before settling down to some proper work -- mostly preparing lecture slides for the coming term, tidying up after a project meeting in York the previous week and generating taught masters programme project suggestions. They're after 8 person's worth of suggestions from each academic this time around; trying hard to avoid numb projects such as a better organization strategy for my DVD collection (classic bin-packing problem). Finished off the day watching some snooker highlights before tucking into bed.

Uid 45

This is a Saturday, but I'm in the office anyway, as I am every Saturday. It's the best time to prepare for Monday morning.

We have had one week of class in the new term, and I am still in the "eager, early stage" of the semester.

This Monday is a school holiday; however, I am conducting training sessions for high school teachers on Monday, so it's not a holiday for me. And next Tuesday is a training day for me for something else. So today, I am preparing for next Wednesday!

I am applying for tenure this year. At this school, tenure applications must pass 6 levels of approval. I found out my application has passed the first 3 so far. I should find out the final decision in April.

Uid 46

Saturdays belong to my wife. The long hours spent during the week, and the inevitable "catch up" on Sunday, means that I simply have to reserve Saturdays for home things.

We just returned from visiting our family in the US over the holidays. Such a return usually entails substantial "nesting" on the part of my wife to make up for missing family, especially our younger son and his wife.

Spent most of the day moving portable bookshelves (how did we ever live without IKEA?) between rooms. Also finished emptying suitcases from the trip, sorting clothes, taking our cleaning to the cleaners. Spent over 6 hours in this type of domestic effort.

Spent the afternoon cooking a Provencal chicken fricasee with green olives, capers, and fresh tomatoes. Settled down to watch a couple of movies that we have recorded, then turned in early. Spent a couple of hours reading "Innocents Abroad"; need to finish this over the next couple of days so that my wife can read it during the week. The book group meets on the 21st to discuss.

Uid 47

15 January 2011

8:00 Ah, the bliss of sleeping in. My body is on 2-hour delay.

9:30 Kids are fed, schedule for my daughter getting homework done is set and off with me. The glories of shuffle on the ipod for the walk in, mixing Coldplay, Brenda Lee, Sonya Kitchell, Alannis Morrissete and the Peter Gabriel Genesis. Not something you'd think of on your own, that's for sure.

10:30 Administrative crap brushed aside for awhile. Turning to the grant work portion of the day. The main part of the grant is in biology; I'm the computational infrastructure, data management, and informatics person.

1:30 Grant brain turning to mush, time for lunch.

2:30 How do they find me on a Saturday afternoon? Got trapped in a conversation with another faculty member on my way to get lunch. sigh. On to reading promotion packets.

5:15 Starting to get brain fried on promotion packets as well, but I want to get one more done before taking a break from them.

5:45 Time to stop and go home. (The evening lottery: will I have to cook?)

6:30 home to the chaos of kids and the dog. The working day may be over (plans were made while I was out).

11:00 pm Yes, the working day was definitely over.

Uid 49

Though my general (90%) habit is to not work on weekends at all, I actually had some work I really wanted to get to, and even though the weather is really fabulous, I’ve have some shoulder pain (too much time hunched over computer) this week, so getting out bicycling (normal activity) isn’t too exciting. So, for maybe 1.5 hours this morning, I did some analysis on what has happened with students in my non-majors computing class last term. Even though it was a non-majors class, we advised some majors (32 by end of term) to start there as we thought they were at risk of failing our fast-paced course for majors “with no prior computing experience”. It should be called “with no prior computing experience, who can afford to spend 20 hours a week on the course, are very organized and not procrastinators”. At first I was concerned that of the 32, 11 were not in the “follow on” course. However, further exploration found that 7 of them were students past their first year in CS! That is majors, taking our lowest offered class. Looking at their records, you can guess they wanted to try to increase their GPAs… but they apparently didn’t read the fine print, as after you have taken our CS1, you can get credit for taking CS0, but it doesn’t contribute to your GPA average… :) Of the rest, 4 “declared” freshmen computing majors are not seemingly continuing on in CSE. One got a D in the class (there were extenuating circumstances), one is already switched to psychology (perhaps her parents made her select computing). The 2 others? I don’t know. However, there are also 16 other students (non-majors0 from the class (out of >500) who are taking CS1 this term… Not all are freshmen, but many are. We’ll see what happens! That was all I was interested in, and after that I successfully shut off from doing any work all weekend, including missing the date to report this :) Out to enjoy the 75F + weather!

Uid 50

Yes, it's a Saturday, but I've been working for most of the day since our classes begin on Tuesday for the spring semester. Gotta keep this one brief...

I've been scrambling to pull together my syllabi and teaching materials for two different courses: CS1 (I'm teaching two large sections) and the programming languages course. Not much new in CS1, though I'm going to be trying to work in some changes in advance of our curriculum overhaul. (I've mentioned in previous entries that we're in the middle of a comprehensive review. We'll be shifting some material from CS1 to CS2 in the new version, and I'm going to experiment a bit with reducing or omitting coverage of a couple of topics.)

The bigger issue has been with the programming languages course. I used to use two textbooks -- one on Haskell and one on Prolog. The last time I taught the course I dropped the Prolog text and used an online tutorial instead. (Someone else's -- not something I'd written.) It worked pretty well, so this time around I decided to replace the Haskell text with an online tutorial as well. I discovered (quite recently) that the order of the topics in the new resource, and the way the introduce some of the material, is quite different than what I've done in the past. I'm having to rearrange my materials quite a bit to accommodate.

I'm also furiously trying to wrap up a document describing our new curriculum. I promised back in my November entry that I was going to get it done, but it's still hanging over me. I've written about 10 pages so far this weekend, and need to write a couple more before I can call it a draft and circulate it to colleagues.

It's been an awkward weekend to have to cram all of this in. My in-laws are here to visit (from 1500 miles away), today is their last day with us, and I've been hiding the in bedroom in front of my laptop all day.

Uid 52

I have a rule about not working at weekends. I am happy to work a few nights in the week if necessary for urgent work at busy times, but weekends are sacrosanct and are mine for spending time with my husband and doing what I want to do. However, I broke the rule this Saturday, and I have to confess I have broken it on a couple of occasions over the years. You will be relieved that it is not related to feeling any pressure at writing an entry for the SHARE project! I am trying to apply for promotion and the only time I could find to work on finalising the draft of my application for promotion was Saturday. I thought I would spend a couple of hours on it, but in the end it took me until nearly 4pm. I spent a huge amount of that time trying to cut the words down to get it to fit within the maximum length of application. This is not a new phenomenon, I am always amazed at how much time it takes to lose 500 words from a journal article draft that I am relatively happy with.

The rest of the day was spent tidying up the house as we have visitors arriving next week. I then cooked a lovely stew from a new recipe and because the weather was very stormy, I settled down with a novel for quite a bit of the evening followed by some knitting while we watched a video.

Uid 60

Since it was a Saturday, my entire day was devoted to non-work affairs. This meant catching up with my mother and son who live in other countries. It was also a day for surfing Facebook to catch up with the happenings in the lives of my friends and extended family. I spent part of the afternoon reading a novel. My husband and I went out for dinner with friends.

I have made a resolution for 2011 to allocate the weekends to “me time”. The previous year was a period of high stress at work and home. I took a good hard look at my lifestyle and realised that I am the cause of my health problems. Now I have resolved to be kinder to myself.

Uid 65

Having got back from a week of overseas fieldwork in Malta on Thursday night, I am still recovering. It was good week, spoiled only by the appalling behaviour of a minority of students in the early hours – on several occasions. I had a late start this morning, not being really ready for the day until gone 10am. Fortunately, I was able to get some wifi access while away and was able to manage my email - so I don’t have a huge email backlog to deal with. However, I do have a few assignment drafts from students to look at. Since the submission date is Monday 17th, I need to look at these today and provide some general feedback. I offered all of my group (33 students) the opportunity to have feedback on their first draft, but only five have taken up the offer – incredible! Still, saves me work.

Not many of my colleagues do this, but I feel strongly that a big part of my job is to educate people. I’m not always convinced that providing feedback on a summative assignment is really effective – however it is done. Whereas, providing feedback before submission is much more likely to hit home, to make a difference, be acted upon. Learning takes place! I’ve previously worked in local and regional government and in private practice. In each of those settings I never submitted a final report without receiving feedback on it first from a colleague or manager. As an academic, I receive lots of constructive (usually!) feedback on papers I submit for publication. MSc and PhD students receive feedback prior to submission of their theses and dissertations. So why is it that when it comes to undergraduate students – arguably the very people who need that feedback the most – we expect them to get it right first time?!

1030h I read several assignment drafts and provide email feedback to help them improve. I’m not sure how effective this will be since they only have 48 hours to do anything – but we will see when I mark the final submissions.

1230h Check and pare down my inbox so I don’t have more of a backlog on Monday.

1330h Have lunch. Spend the rest of the day relaxing: Reading (Jeffery Archer), going to the cinema (The King’s Speech), and watching TV (Casualty).

Uid 71

I only work at the weekends if it is completely unavoidable - which is actually very rarely. Nonetheless, as I teach a course on criminal justice in modern Britain, and since we cover the news each week in class, reading the newspaper is pretty much essential.

My colleague suggested we include this in the course since so much has been changing at rapid pace. Essays last term were mixed but some were really insightful: for example, using the student protests as a focus for discussion on the history of policing. Aside from that, it's nice to be able to change your job to allow you to do the things you like and class it as work!

Uid 72

Visting my parents in the midlands. My mother has just come out from hospital after having taking ill over Christmas, so I am looking after her at home, and also my father who is showing increasingly dramatic signs of dementia. Spend most of the day on domestic tasks: cooking, cleaning and shopping. Spend an hour or so in the evening reading a book that I have volunteered to review, and then spend a couple of hours watching television after my parents have gone to bed. Trying to work out how I'll manage to organise all of this once term starts - at least for the last four weeks I've been able to stay up in for all but an occasional day.

Uid 75

I woke this morning and wrote my usual journal entry reflecting on the previous day. Yesterday had ended with me feeling a little frustrated. I wrote:

"I feel like today was a day of frustration. I did make some progress on preparing a lesson on version control and it looks like K has found a guest speaker for agile practices for TJ. But the thing that really coloured my day was the drawn out session with B on ICW. I don't understand why he wants to assume the students have no knowledge of Java servlets of JSP when this is what they have finished last term working with. Instead of building on that learning and reinforcing it, we go back to a procedural command line application. Half way through this term's work they will switch to using Spring and an MVC style architecture without these ideas built from their previous learning. There has or is a complete disconnect. The technologies are dominating rather than the thought processes and design or problem solving principles. This seems to be the approach to what is being done here."

Since writing that entry, my day has been spent assembling a desk as a sewing desk for my wife. Have just looked at a couple of academic positions. I may apply for one although they say they want a senior lecturer. In NZ, that is probably the status I would have if they hadn't closed the department at the end of 2007. Now, we float in uncertainty waiting to see what happens next.

Uid 77

Share report

15th Jan

Saturday! So at least the means that the alarm doesn’t wake me at 6.30! After the luxury of a lie in though, it is the weekend ‘job’ of wife and mother that takes over. And I only have one of each! While the croissants are baking, my husband requires me to take his photograph for his US visa application; its called multitasking I guess.

The main job this morning is to be a ‘study buddy’ to my 17 year old, severely dyslexic daughter. A2 exams are in 10 days time. We have been systematically going through her work since the Christmas holidays, and in theory at least, today is the last day; it is mostly biology she needs the help with, she can manage the maths and physics more successfully on her own. But biology needs more help with reading the textbook. It is interesting to review and renew my knowledge (and if I am honest actually learn stuff that I never new). It also helps with my tutoring of students, as I can confidently say “you must have learned that at A level” when they claim they don’t understand something! Another aspect of having an 18 year old is, as an admission tutor, seeing UCAS from ‘the other side’. For reasons neither of us understands, she has had one interview and now 5 rejections. And the only feedback she received, from the interview, was so destructive and contradictory of the advice given at the open day that a more vulnerable teenager could well have been damaged by it. It also didn’t help matters that in the same post as the feedback letter came the letter from the disability support unit of the same university, giving advice as to what to do if she accepted a place at the University! Hopefully this experience will help me with feedback to our unsuccessful applicants.

Both husband and daughter are very excited by the suggestion that I may be going to a conference in Las Vegas later in the year; they both want to come, but neither is particularly keen that the other comes! Maybe I’ll just go on my own, if I get to go!

So after nearly 4 hours study buddy activity I am checking out my emails. In the main, I am keeping to my intentions of not spending weekend, family time doing work-related tasks, and indeed I have a hair appointment this afternoon! But it doesn’t stop me checking my emails. Compared with my previous job, I do get far fewer work related emails over the weekend, mostly, I think, because I get fewer emails from students, which in turn relates to the fact I am more managerial and less hands on teaching; I only meet personally my own tutees and students with difficulties these days. Today the in box activity is a bit different, with an email relating to the overseas admission trip that starts in a couple of weeks, and other emails relating to a paper currently in preparation. Fortunately neither needs me to do very much. Over the weekend too, I need to sort through the post that has come in during the week that needs attention: bills to pay, and more particularly I need to start looking at the forms for the children we are taking to France at Easter for a Pilgrimage holiday. As regional medic, I have to review the 100 or so forms to ensure as far as possible that the kid will be OK, if necessary getting further information from carers or consultants.

So what else do I do on a Saturday? Well posted 3 items I sold on ebay, paid a tax bill, sorted out the washing. You will notice that housework comes very low down on the list; and I will have to do the food shopping tomorrow after church. There isn’t really enough time in the weekend to do everything! Add travel agent to the list of Saturday tasks! Been sorting out the details of our half term and Easter hols. Renewing EHIC, registering for flights, sorting out parking, transport to airport etc etc etc. Still enjoyed the hairdressers: but managed to spend most of the time thinking about work! Oh well. Need a nice supper and a glass of wine to relax.

Uid 78

It's Saturday today. I had a full and tiring week and pushed myself yesterday to finish something. So today has been a day off. I've had a really joyful musical day. Filling in my diary entry now because I can't afford to get behind on anything!

Uid 81

The thaw is in full swing and the rain is pleting down. Localised flooding and potholes. Bit of a metaphor for academic employment.

Headed to the rural retreat. Took ideas for a paper for a conference I help organise (deadline in 6 days time), all the slides for next 12 Mondays' classes, determined to balance them better (last year first few are too light, last few are overloaded. Better the other way round!) I have several Hons and MSc supervisions for whom English is not first language, and each one has got some major challenges to overcome if they are to pass. And I packed a few national consultations on both HE and my subject area.

Spent an hour going over one MSc project and have sent the student several pages of suggestions. And that was it. Didn't even open any of the rest of the work I'd taken with me. We went shopping instead (back to nearest local city). Sales are still on, bought stuff we've been meaning to for ages, just as final reductions appeared. Thought a little about those other issues, but as Lennon sang "I just had to let it go". No submission to my conference, more busking it in the classroom, continued fretting over supervisions.

Trying to be the compleat academic is becoming a forlorn aspiration. The AND statements are becoming OR statements. Research OR Industry. Professional Bodies OR Scholarship.

Uid 90

Travelling down to London a day in advance of presenting a lecture at St Mary's college. On the 2 hour train journey managed to read a few chapters from an academic book regarding building up an idea to research for my EdD and also read through my lecture notes. Also continued this during my coffee breaks when browsing shops in Twickenham.

I find these mini bite size readings and thought really productive as long as I remember to take notes of my thoughts at the time.

Uid 95

Because "survey day" is a Saturday there will be no activities for the delivery of teaching.

Reflecting on the weeks since we returned to work, it's been a funny (=odd) time. In the first week there was the Learning and Teaching conference on the Friday (mainly internal to our local institution). This year it was combined with the Student Support Conference to save money so it had a mixed group of attendess. Eventually our internal services for students will be more integrated: there is a major project on-going with the ultimate aim of improving the "Student Experience" and with an eye to the £9000 that the rumours say we shall be charging our students. Of course they will expect a premier service. I gave a short paper at the conference entitled "It's Who you Know, Not What You Know". A light hearted look at "Employability". My message was that the university should explore all ways to engage employers with students (or should it be vice versa?) and that a good degree "is taken as read". Not surprisingly the Careers Service people said they did lots of things but the ties need to be at School Level as well. I had planned to follow up the contacts made the following week but it then became a job for sorting the follow-up out on 15th Jan.

The week leading to 15th Jan had been full of checking coursework marks and sorting the physical work. Because I teach "skills" there were 150+ PDP folders and 5 x 150+ drawings, not to mention the 5 x 150 electronic files for IT. Normally we would use PG helpers but the financial cuts mean I am having to DO It Myself (not cost effective). I felt under control and had planned to come into work on 15th to spend a couple of hours with no students, finishing the job. Unfortunately on Thursday 13th I tried to sort out some timetabling issues for labs. that had been scheduled by our local admin. person with "the centre" on the Student electronic system. Hit rock bottom when I discovered major errors, including labs. scheduled for May Day and after the end of teaching. When I complained the responding email accused me of being obstructive so I went home in tears (if they had talked to me and used my 10 years of experince, all the hassle could have been avoided). On Friday 14th I had lost enthusiasm and by Saturday decided I would not go into work (but did sneak the USB into my bag so I could work at home).

As it happened, events over-took me: a family problem left a small child in hospital and I was literally left holding a baby while mother was away. So Saturday 15th Jan 2011 put things into perspective: family are much more important than work, vindictive colleagues should be ignored, life at uni. will go on regardless of what I do (but students DO matter and are what makes work tolerable, so I DID answer a small number of emails from them).

Uid 96

Day surveys, I’m glad that you know not to exclude weekends from an academic’s working life. These little acknowledgements of how much we work do make a difference.

I set my alarm for 7:30, got up and listened to the radio during breakfast. I like to make some little concession to the fact that it’s the weekend, so I watched about an hour of stuff on BBC i-player while drinking tea, before getting down to work at about 9.30 or 10am. I treated myself to a simple, undemanding, rewarding task – I looked up lots of reusable learning objects I’d found on the web and bookmarked, and I put them into webCT for my third year module. I made up all the module registers for modules that started this week. (introductory/welcome lectures and ‘non-curricular activities’ happened last week and teaching proper starts on Monday 17th). I make a list of things I want to do this weekend, work and non-work, and I score things off the list as I do them (whether they are work or non-work). SOmetimes I write things on just for the satisfaction of scoring them off. I'm working saturday because I'm behind where I need/want to be, so I use these little techniques for not feeling like a failure. I savour achievement and appreciation where I find it.

I stopped for lunch but then returned to work. I started preparing Tuesday afternoon’s lecture because Monday will be solid teaching. It’s a subject area that’s new to me so I started out by finding useful reading, compiling my ‘recommended reading list’ for that session, and reading it.

It must have been about 5 or 6pm when I gave up on that. Food shopping and batch cooking (for the rest of the week) have been postponed until Sunday. So has most of the actual writing of Tuesday’s 2h lecture (but in the end it was all done by end of Sunday). I had an evening off, phoning an old friend and watching science documentaries on i-player.

I don’t object to working on weekends, in principle. I’m in this job because I love it, it’s my hobby and obsession as well as a job. If I had infinite holiday, I’d gravitate back to science and teaching within a few weeks. What I do object to is not being able to choose what I’ll do at the weekend. Saturdays should be science for leisure – reading what I want to read, pottering about in the botany by my local river, visiting museums, thinking and writing about what happens to grab my curiosity today. Time for being curious. It’s not like that. I work weekends because otherwise I’ll not get enough sleep during the week (I’ve experienced the extremely deleterious effects of that on my mental health), or I’d have to stand up in front of a class not having anything prepared to say.

It’s not good for us to work every weekend, but if small treats and concessions are incorporated, if there is some sort of difference between weekend days and weekdays, that’s a bit better. If I get a feeling of ‘weekend’, I feel better. When I used to do research (now it’s all teaching), Saturdays in the lab had an entirely different feel. Something virtuous and smug about it, true, but also the feeling that everyone is on holiday today is comforting, even if I’m at work. It’s nice to know that weekends exist, at least in theory.

Uid 98

Woke up 300km from home, staying overnight in London, on way to airport. Part of a long journey to develop a new venture, joint syllabus and delivery mechanism in India. Waiting periods permitted some study time but the direct flight was more movies than work. By midnight (British time), in Hyderabad airport, waiting for baggage and 7750km from home.

Uid 99

My two sisters were visiting for the weekend, which was great - we don't get the chance to meet up together very often minus children, husbands, etc. My long-suffering husband was here, but kept as low a profile as possible.

A good day, with our Mum also joining us for dinner, so it was all very sociable. I also managed to squeeze in a wee bit of time catching up with emails that I had been too busy to get to on Thursday and Friday.

It's great to see my sisters, but at the same time, I have an underlying anxiety that I have already missed a marking deadline (Friday), and am pushing my luck to make the revised one (Monday at 9am). However, a bit of a lateral thinking, and I have come up with a solution. I will just give marks, without taking the time to write feedback. This will half my marking time, and with a bit of luck, I will get it all done. I will of course then have to go back and do feedback, which will mean skim reading the reports again. So, it will be more time-consuming in the long run, but will enable me to meet my deadline.

Uid 101

was supposed to be going for a 10 mile run first thing, but had to abandon after 2 miles due to an groin injury which refuses to clear up. Have not really done any running since the start of December and I have two marathons scheduled in the spring. Time is getting short . . . .

Then pottered around the house doing bits of this and that, including 40 minutes or so clearing emails out of my work inbox that had not been cleared in the week.

After hitting the supermarket for the weekly shop sat down for three hours marking first year programming courseworks that had been submitted before xmas and had to be returned on Monday. Nothing too remarkable, some very good, some not so good but the students had tried and one which was too good. That student had only turned up about three times and did not have a clue or any apparent motivation, yet the coursework was very good. It is possible, but most unlikely, that he had settled down and cracked it! Our regs say that I have to mark what is in front of me (and those who 'know best' are threatening anonymous coursework marking soon . . . ). Gave it the lowest mark I could for the standard presented and felt sorry the students who had worked really hard and got a lower mark. Consoled with the thought that sooner or later he would slip up while cheating and get caught and/or fail exams . . .

Then cooked dinner for me and my partner (who had been out shopping all day!) before slumping in front of the telly for the evening and successfully resisting the temptation to open a bottle of red!

Uid 102

Saturday morning and for once I am in student mode. I have signed up as a student to learn to make jewellery with beads and wires. I am in a college I have not attended before with people I have not met before learning a set of skills that are new to me. I think it does me good to be in the position of a newby. I have a sense of what some of my own students go through.

The teaching was superb – structured, progressive and differentiated as well as fantastic fun. What is more I came away with ten pieces of completed jewellery!! Teaching and learning at its best. The tutor was inspired and inspiring. However we also had a small tutor group – only four students with one tutor, masses of tools, beads and other materials, there was no assessment either formal or informal and the setting and food etc were fantastic.

Is this something to learn from in terms of my day job? Could I give up my day job and make jewellery for a living?

We worked away after our evening meal and did not leave the workshop until 10 pm. By then I was only fit for a brief drink in the bar and bed. So many of my students juggle a full time job, a family and their studies. I wish they had a chance to study for whole days with out interruption or deviation once in a while. I have signed up for the next course in Oct. Not best timing but then the weekends are officially mine to do with as I wish. Roll on Oct.

Uid 105

Since it was a Saturday, the only thing related to work was the typical checking of work e-mail to make sure that there were no urgent messages from students. That's it.

Uid 108

It is revision week and time for all academics to catch up on marking. Exams will start soon and there is an air of nervousness whenever I encounter students in labs and classrooms - always an anxious time, the anticipation, preparation, perspiration and tiredness that always ensues.

The student protests have ended but the exact amount of fees have not been decided yet. People are worried about losing their jobs and what the changes will mean for their discipline. Will we be able to recruit and retain students? Will people want to enter HE now that it is due to get MORE expensive? Can we compete and sustain our courses? etc.

A new term will start soon so preparing notes, assignments, exams and attending meetings on strategy are all part of the work for the next few weeks.

I got some good feedback for my first semester courses but there are changes to be made if I teach these modules again next year. I want to improve my lectures and make them more relevant. Time is a factor in all of the ideas and plans for the future, making time, sticking to deadlines and avoiding meaningless meetings and time-wasting. New Year's resolutions.

Saturday is Open day where we interview all potential students to the School. I like doing this as you get to meet future tutees and tell potential students about the School and the work we do, their course etc. It helps to convey our sense of excitement about the subject and learn what students want from our courses. Parents are anxious about fees and about the job prospects of their children on completion of the course. I wish I could guarantee my students a job on graduation, but we have never been able to do that. Ah well, onwards and upwards.

Uid 114

Although it is Saturday, I am working today. We have a staff development event for new lecturers so I am here to meet a new engineer and fill his brain with more information than he can possibly remember!

Although I'm not keen on working on a Saturday, it is a really nice day, full of enthusiasm and injects a great sense of energy. Sadly it is rare at the moment to have such positive vibes in the buliding as we are being restructured and people are understandabally nervous about job security.

I also do some work which is still outstanding from the past week. Most of our courses start in February so we are busy allocating tutors to students, and in some cases still interviewing for possible new appointments. It is an understatement to say we are working close to the wire!

In some ways it is actually nice to work on a saturday - it is very quiet in my office so I can methodically work through my "TO DO" list without interuption. Alsas I don't get to the bottom of it though, I'm not sure I ever will!

Another nice thing about working on a Saturday is that everyone is a little more relaxed and takes the time to stop for a chat. I have a good discussion with the Head of Unit about life the universe and the excitement of the increasing number of Engineering students. I also got laughed at for arriving at lunch with a selection of tupperware boxes - they always over cater and I hate to see it go to waste :-)

I have to slope off at 4pm so leave my colleagues to finish off the workshops whilst I head home, 10 mins to change and collect my partner before heading off to watch Ice Hockey. Unexpectedly the game is very tight... we had a goal disallowed, unfairly in my opion, .... finally in overtime we get the WIN!!!!

All in all a day of hard work, but also great pleasure. I only week days could be like this!

Uid 116

8am: Up early for me on a Saturday, but I've been getting up at 5am to teach an 8am class this term so the extra 3 hours felt great. The past week was frantic and I still have a journal paper to review and a team project assignment to write for my CS1 class this weekend. Still, I should have some time for myself today. Probably better use some of that time to take down the Christmas tree.

Was very pleased yesterday to find that the Institute's budget for next academic year includes funds for my sabbatical. I'm still waiting for the Dean's recommendation but have had very positive feedback from the Leaves Review committee, so I'm optimistic. That means I need to start figuring out what to do about leasing/selling our current home and planning a 14 month move to Seattle. I've lined up a job working with a small software firm there doing Mac and iOS development. I'm really excited about the chance to make software for real people and see the current state of industrial practice.

9am: It was nice to have a leisurely breakfast and read the newspaper for a bit. I say "newspaper" but I'm actually reading the NY Times app on my iPad. It's nice for reading articles, but doesn't have the same convenience in moving between them as a real paper. There's a subtle lag in the navigation that breaks the spell. On the other hand, it's cheaper, cleaner, and doesn't fill our recycling bin.

noon: I spent the rest of the morning at a local coffee shop reading. It had been a couple of weeks since I took any significant amount of waking time for "not work". I'm still trying to digest the shootings in Tucson and what it means about the state of our democracy. The shootings seem to have been the work of an untreated schizophrenic without proper medical care. Still, it troubles me that so much of the political debate is mere tribalism devoid of true reason. Maybe that's just human nature, but I'd hope we could rise above it.

1:30pm: Fixed a batch of pork fajitas for lunch. Pork chops rubbed with chili powder, then grilled. Sautéed onions and peppers, then sliced and heated the pork in a skillet with salsa, lime juice, and Worcestershire sauce. Threw it all together with some fresh diced tomatoes. Yummy. And the leftovers will feed me for another three meals. I really enjoy cooking, but I seem to always make a production of it. Nice to take the time to do it.

2:15pm: Video chatted with my wife who is away at grad. school. She is starting her job search. Her focus is on Seattle, but we may end up spending another year in separate households. Hopefully that won't be the case.

4:30pm: Met a friend/colleague to do some planning for a party a couple of weeks hence. We're going to try to organize a Scotch Whisky tasting. Hopefully this won't end badly!

6:30pm: Spent a couple of hours digging out my inbox at home and going over my projects to make sure nothing is slipping through the cracks. To stay sane I have to maintain a discipline of reviewing all my projects on a regular basis. It's amazing how helpful it is to stop "doing" and just reflect occasionally.

8:50pm: Took inordinately long making some pasta for supper, then starting reviewing a journal paper. So far it seems intellectually interesting and merciful well written, two features that so rarely come together. I really detest the process of reviewing papers, but recognize that with the present publishing arrangements we all have a duty to the community to do our share. I find that I'm becoming less effective at reviewing as my dissertation retreats into the past and my heavy teaching load demands most of my time. I'm probably nearly at the point where I'm no longer of use as a reviewer.

9:00pm: Spent 10 minutes exchanging emails with a colleagues about prep for Monday. We're team teaching the course and (roughly) alternating session preps. It's his first time teaching the course, so he's reasonable reticent about making executive decisions. In truth I'm also probably too much of a perfectionist about how the pieces of the course fit together.

11:30pm: The journal paper I was reading started well, but then fell off a cliff in the last half. The paper had three authors but switched to first person singular voice in the last third. I suspect the first author pasted in a couple of sections of his master's thesis and the other two authors never actually read the submitted paper. It's extremely aggravating that authors would expect a volunteer reviewer to do more work than they are willing to do themselves.

12:30am: And sleep.

Uid 119

I was amused by your second e-mail dated Thursday, 13 January, in which you wrote:

"Even though Saturday is (for most) not a 'regular' working day, we'd still be glad to receive your diary entry - whether you do anything or think about anything that's connected with work or not."

I do things and think about things connected with work every day of the year. This job is never finished, and the experiences I have as a professor infuse my entire life, not just the hours that I spend at the university.

As I write this I am sitting on a plane, on my home from teaching a one-week workshop on web programming to 280 second year students at K.L. University in Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh, India. It was an intense experience. I was there with three teaching assistants, two of them undergraduate students in my classes back home and the third an Indian graduate student in our program who looked after us and helped us with the culture.

The students loved us, but there were many fallacies in what we were told before we came to India. I fear that some of the Indian professors were threatened by our presence, as they were clearly defensive and grossly exaggerated what their students knew.

We had been told that all of the students would have completed two weeks of training on HTML and CSS before we got there. In the very first lab sessions on the first morning, however, it quickly became apparent that they really had no practical knowledge about how to use HTML and CSS to put a web page together. We knew that Indian professors stressed theory and that Indian courses lacked hands-on experience, but the total lack of such experience was rather shocking. Students couldn't even grasp the importance of indenting code to show its hierarchical structure despite the many examples we showed and the stress we put on this in our lectures. It was especially puzzling why one of the professors who had taught these students kept telling us "not to worry about that." He, too, was unable to grasp the importance of practical application of theoretical knowledge.

Despite the many difficulties we had with equipment and network connectivity and even just keeping the electricity flowing -- it went out on us a couple of times a day -- we adapted and the students seemed to love us. We had set up a Google group for discussions and SurveyMonkey surveys that the students responded to at the end of each day, and their posts overflowed with thanks to the teaching assistants and to me. It seems that they had never before had a professor work with them one-on-one in the lab. They were amazed that I would actually sit with individual students or small groups and personally tutor them for hours.

I changed lecture plans on the fly. I shortened my presentations to allow more time in the lab. I removed advanced material and spent more time presenting examples. I met with the teaching assistants each night to learn their perceptions of the students' problems and misunderstandings and started the next morning by addressing those issues head on.

The students progressed. They took delight in showing us their work. They thanked us profusely, in person, in the Google group, and in the daily SurveyMonkey surveys. It was satisfying to see them not only develop successively complex web pages, but also to see their obvious excitement in doing so.

Despite the small successes that we feel we had with the students, the sad thing about our experience in India was to see that the professors all taught in the "sage on the stage" tradition and had little direct interaction with the students themselves. We learned from one of the professors who was particularly attentive to the workshop and to us that the Vice Chancellor had addressed the full faculty in a meeting that happened to take place halfway through our workshop, after he had received feedback from special students who were "planted" to keep him informed about the workshop. It seems that the Vice Chancellor chastised the faculty for not "teaching like the visitors."

As satisfying as all this feedback was, I was personally disappointed that I don't think we had any influence on the professors who teach at that university, despite that being one of the reasons we had been sent to India. We did our best for the five days we taught the students, but I fear that there will be no real lasting effect on their education when they return to their Indian classrooms. I hope I am wrong.

Uid 120

Well, I did do some work over Christmas - I read two of the sixteen novels I am teaching this term (though I know ten of them very well, so it was two out of six), and I got quite a bit of admin and other teaching preparation done. I marked 35 out of 50 essays and the other 15 are sitting on my desk glaring at me as I write this. I still have that article to write this term, and the index, picture permissions, and revisions of my book to do.

Nonetheless, the 15th is a Saturday. Term begins on Monday 17th and I am gripped with the usual pre-term terror that I haven't prepared enough, that the students will finally realise I am an in fact an idiot and have nothing to tell them, and that I will not keep up with the demand. I am telling myself that Monday will come, all will go as planned, and I'll remember that I can actually do this. I don't work on Saturdays, though, so I am driving to Kent to celebrate my sister-in-law's birthday. I'll be driving back on Sunday and, as I'm pregnant and can't drink, this at least means I'll have time to prepare, or panic, on Sunday afternoon. My reading lists are a big shoddy mess at the moment, so they could do with some work. Otherwise, it's a work-free day for me and I'm going to enjoy it!

Uid 123

9.00 wake up and get out of bed and dressed

9.45 help my daughter finish her packing

10.30 drive daughter and luggage to uni

1.30 arrive in Canterbury park and unload

2.30 late lunch

3.30 leave for Oxford

6.15 arrive Oxford

6.30 make dinner and chat to son

8.00 try to check emails but server down, watch TV

9.00-10.30 in bed reading a potential core text for new module

Tomorrow (Sunday) I will work all day on a new module. Such developments are not resourced. I took a week off over Christmas to be with friends and family and I now feel under pressure and stressed for the new term - already. Designing teaching and assessment takes time, nobody likes doing things badly, so you become your 'own worst enemy' and take the time from home and family. I just wish that senior management would sometimes applaud, thank, show gratitude. Currently all we get is exhortations to do 'better with less', but my life is disappearing.

I work every weekend during semesters, some weekends more than others, but every weekend and I think that is true for my colleagues.

We are to have our 'Christmas party' next week. No time before Christmas as exams take place right up to and including December 23rd. (This year, of course, they were disrupted by snow, only a few students managing to get in, so we are all writing new exams for alternative sittings.) So, the 'Christmas party' is in mid-January and consist of a morning of talks about restructuring, accreditations, etc., followed by a quiz in the afternoon. It is called 'New Year - New Faculty'. We are plagued by constant internal change with little time ever for consolidation or reflection. All this 'busyness', is it helpful?

Uid 126

Saturday January 15th 2011

I have had an unusual and very satisfying Saturday. My Saturday routine usually includes quite a lot of radio listening, paper reading, farmers’ marketing, house tidying and, generally, a modicum of work. Today, I dragged myself out of bed at 5.30 to dress, breakfast and see to the dog before taking an early train to London. Great, two assignments marked on the train; and another as I took the Circle Line in the wrong direction. I was heading for a writing group that emerged from a writing workshop that a colleague and I ran at a conference a couple of years ago. People so liked writing together that they wanted to continue and my colleague helped them set up a group that meets monthly. One of the great things about London is that there are so many free [at the moment] and inspirational places to gather to write. Previous meetings have been at the British Museum, Tate Britain, St Pancras Station and Regent’s Park, amongst other places. The group is organised now by two London teachers and is one of a growing number of Writing Teachers groups around the country. I wanted to go today because an ex-student of mine was intending to be there and I just wanted to be a familiar face.

In fact, I caught up with her as we both pounded along the subway to the V&A, believing we were both late. People were gathering in the main entrance and there were soon fifteen of us. We began by walking to the cafe, eavesdropping along the way. The meetings begin with a quick warm up exercise that usually engenders a lot of talk and puts words in the air. After a strong coffee we went our different ways to find inspiration and to write. We gather again and read something of what we have written –it is usually short, there is not much time to write, and the sharing and talking, laughter and admiration are full of energy and generosity. We talked about how museums seem to engender the writing of lists, how the writing rarely focuses on one object but incorporates texts from the museum and the presence of visitors. The variety of writing was, as ever, great. As we talked, we were saying how rich these spaces and museums in London are and one of the group said that she thought Time Out should write an article about all the things to do in London, before they are cut or no longer free. A good idea. Then people disappeared to take up their Saturday lives. I was able, briefly, to hear something of what my one time student is doing with her Year 2 class in Bermondsey and then, she, too, went off to meet friends.

I decided to stay in the museum, remembering how much I love the V&A. I did not look at many more objects, but did visit the Camera-less Photography exhibition, Shadow Catchers which I very much liked. I especially liked the photograms and luminograms; the shadow of a person who has been sitting on the chair that is still there –the photogram is on the floor, a real chair stands in position. It is called ‘Back in a Moment’; the baby placed briefly on photographic paper which is under water, the mark of the child and the movement of water; Susan Derges’ images from t he River Yare, exposed to moonlight and torchlight. These images are often about loss, memory, absence. I had been thinking, in the morning, about the very solid presence of the saints and angels, carved from wood and gilded for the huge altar pieces of Europe, their certainties and presence. “In the photogram, Man is not depicted, but the picture of him comes into being by an act of imagination.” Floris Neususs. And “What is seen has never been in the camera. Life itself is the image. Viewers sense it. They feel the difference.” I am hoping that I will write about this somehow. I had begun the morning by seeing another photographic image using mirrors and a specially designed camera. Maybe I will try for a series of very short, fleeting pieces.

I resisted the urge to buy books. I found several and replaced them on the shelves. I am not finding enough time to read as it is. Though there was one by Declan D about acting which was tempting. I am wanting to be ready for the drama course I shall be teaching at the end of March. I also resisted the urge to plunge into London to squeeze the last drop out of the metropolitan experience and so was glad to catch a train back home that meant it was still just a little light as I returned. Cup of tea and the making of a list. A second cup of tea and sitting here to write this –soon will be able to cross this off my list. Have quite a long list of things to do either tonight or tomorrow. Rather a lot of marking still; a person spec to write for a new post, some more paragraphs to write for a chapter i am writing with a colleague, and the writing up of notes from a wonderful field visit yesterday. There is rather a lot to write, all in all, but I see that it is tea time, and time to sit for a little and to reflect. The photograms have made me yearn for my dark room –have not had one for years, and to remember work that a student of mine did years ago when he became obsessed with drawing in light on photographic paper. I think he would have loved some of the work in the exhibition. He went off to do photography and I am unable to recall his surname. All those children, all those students, to whom we once felt so close. A strange feeling.

Uid 127

Share Project

Saturday 15th January, 2011

I am writing this so late, because things have just been crazy these last few weeks. I just didn’t stop running until the students left just before Christmas, and then, big surprise, as soon as I took a break and slowed down I got hit with full blown ‘flu. Being a microbiologist, I don’t really like people using the term ‘flu, but this really was. Two weeks of fever, aching limbs, shivers, cough and so on left me in no doubt that I really had succumbed. So Christmas, lovely as it was with small children, was a little bit more subdued than I had hoped, and definitely less than a break. Well, strictly, I had an amazing break, because I couldn’t do \*anything\*, but of course this had not been in my plan to get myself organised. And then term actually started, and with it came a whole mess of completely unexpected situations that demanded immediate and complete attention.

With a 5-year old and a 2-year old, there is very little I can do on a Saturday except play with them, and as this is exactly what I should be doing, this is exactly what I did do. But throughout the entire day, in the back of my mind, there was this little niggle. All the marking that I failed to do over Christmas because I was so ill was sitting there, on my desk at home. All those emails that I hadn’t answered because I was firefighting at work the week before were sitting there unanswered. I will admit, last weekend was not a good time for me. The realisation that I was losing precious time with my children really struck me hard. The fact that I was feeling guilty because I had been seriously ill and therefore not able to work on my holiday really made me stop and think. I starting thinking through the possibilities of finding other jobs; the sorts of job that you start at 8am, leave at 5pm, work Monday to Friday and then the rest of your life is your own. I know I couldn’t really do it, but it did give me a harsh reality check.

The children went to bed, I helped my husband tidy the house, and then I sat down to tackle some marking. Starting at 9.30pm, working through to 1.30pm I managed to get through 14 scripts. I anticipate working 3 or 4 hours a night for the next month or so to clear the backlog.

Although this sounds a little doom and gloom, there have been some benefits of me not managing to complete this diary entry on the correct date. I had my appraisal last week with a wonderful member of the senior management team in my School. She is totally understanding and sympathetic, and while there is nothing she, nor anyone, can really do right now, just the chance to moan at her started me thinking about how I organise my time. It’s just possible it’s given me the insight to figure out how I can balance everything to make my life happier, healthier and actually more productive and effective. I shall let you know how it goes in February!

Uid 128

No plans at the start of the day to do anything related to work. First task is to hit the supermarket for the weekly shop, and this time I manage it without bumping into any students

Should have known it wouldn't last! Loads of texts today from one student who had a particularly difficult experience during the formative element of a practical assessment. There have been problems with the lecturer involved before, but no-one has ever put anything in writing so the problems have persisted. This student is seriously considering putting a formal complaint in, but is concerned for the possible consequnces for him. Reassured about thesupport available to him he sends the e-mail and copies it to me - a well written and very professional account of the incident.

Fortunately the rest of the day turns out to be mine - no student contact so loads of chores completed.

Uid 136

I get up early and have a peaceful breakfast reading my current novel, then get my son up in time to be ready for his piano lesson (preparing for grade 3 exam in March, so the teacher tends to arrive early and leave late!). My husband who has been off work this week with a bad back gets up but can hardly move; he usually goes shopping while I do University work, but today I go shopping. Our son comes too - as well as food we are looking for some new school trousers for him - and suggests we buy dad some flowers and a get well card. By the time we get home there is just time to have a quick lunch and drink while watching the latest episode of Edwardian Farm before gathering swimming kit together and getting son to his club. His session is an hour - I drop him off then dash back to the shops for something we failed to buy this morning; get back to swimming in time to play 'proud mum' as son is asked to do some stroke demonstrations to younger children, and then dives to the bottom of the deep end to retrieve lost goggles from a small child. Meanwhile manage to read and make notes on one research paper without getting too many splashes on it....

Back home, decide to check work e mails over a cup of tea before I embark on cooking the evening meal; amongst the messages from students about missed exams due to flu etc and from quality staff about our current programme review, find one from the Dean concerning the sudden death of one of my colleagues. Dazed, I just stare at the message.

Uid 138

I am sending this in on Thursday 13th because I won't actually have many hours of Saturday: I leave the UK at noon on Friday the 14th and arrive in Perth at 8pm on Saturday 15th - the time difference means that most hours of the 15th will be stolen from me (and those that I do have will be in the air or in Dubai airport!)

I am off to the Australasian Computer Science Week conference in Perth, followed by a week visiting family in Auckland. I will take a short diversion to Brisbane (where I used to live) - it will be distressing to see places that I love devastated by floods.

I feel a little guilty at taking time out at this time of year, after a wonderful Christmas/New Year break, and at a time when my colleagues are settling into a hard semester of teaching ahead. Having satisfied all my departmental teaching requirements in semester 1, I have no scheduled teaching this semester. So all I need to do before June is submit at least one grant, supervise six student projects and write a book: easy! :-)

Uid 139

This is supposed to be a non-work day. I almost managed that.

It wasn’t really a housework day either, as we’d planned a Church walk on the Northern half of the Wandle Trail. We took longer on this than planned and got back home at about 4pm.

I was doing the normal weekly task of getting back-ups done on the various home computers and the laptop was on a serious go slow. So although there was no work meant to be done I had to get a panic-feeling email off to try and sort out a piece of software so I could complete a conference paper.

But with a conference paper deadline having been moved back (how kind) I felt I had to do a bit more thinking about the document that was supposed to have been finished for Friday. Well, it had almost been. It was in the right format, but in the process it had got a little smaller than the allotted maximum size for the paper, so I had a couple of sides I could add if I wanted.

So while walking and being relatively silent the brain was ticking over and I was think about which bits could do with boosting up a bit. I decided that an extra section could well be added dealing with historical periods and TRIZ. Or perhaps some different graphs could be put in looking at a few more parameters, provided I could get the software up and running on Monday.

And got back home to the ironing…

You never really switch off from the job, do you?

Uid 140

15th was a Saturday. In the morning I took my son to Liverpool for the youth orchestra and filled in time in Liverpool 1. Afternoon did a little shoppping. Listened to Tranmere on the car radio. Cooked a vegetarian roast and watched a tribute to Pete Postlethwaite on TV. Not a productive day but I needed to unwind

Uid 141

Not a lot of work done today despite the massive marking backlog I have (about 37 hours to be done in the next two weeks in amongst full term with teaching and everything else...)

Up at 8-ish. A positive lie-in but with a new born and four year old that was really very good. Took my daughter to ballet. One of the best bits of my week because I get to sit in a coffee shop next door to the dance studio and read my book. I am reading the History of the World in 100 Objects and it is absolutely enthralling. And my daughter has a lovely time too.

Then back home. My bike gear cable had broken on the way back from work on Friday afternoon and is it's my main form of transport, I needed to get it mended. So I walked the bike and the dog to the bike shop and the dog back home again which took us up to lunch time.

Lunch altogether just about though the new baby needed a feed also just as we were finishing so lunch dissolved from sitting at the table into just generally getting food into us somehow!

Then we all went to collect my bike (except dog who was having a nap) and stopped in at a supermarket cafe on the way home for a cup of tea and a bun. It was really nice just to be doing stuff altogether.

Then into the evening routine for my daughter - bath, supper, bed for her. And amazingly bed for the little one as well albeit it at 8:30ish. Wife and I grabbed some supper afterwards and then she had a nap while I actually did some work. Not the necessary marking but other stuff that I could feasibly do whilst underslept: my performance review forms which are due and some applications for the MSc that I look after.

11:30, wake up wife to feed the baby who has now woken up and I collapse into bed to grab a few more precious hours of sleep. The marking still needed doing but I've found marking when sleepy to be nigh on impossible...

Uid 142

A totally different day!

This was the first saturday in term time (including the 18th Dec when I should have been on a plane - cancelled due to snow, so did a few things that I'd not done before term ended on the 17th) that I'd not actually worked!

Partly, that was due to the fact my teaching load is much less this semester than last - but also due to the fact I'd decided to do a yoga weekend, as a taster for doing a years' foundation course in it (most on the course were thinking of doing a foundation course & then being a yoga teacher, not sure that's for me, yet. Stick to the day job for a bit longer).

However, it was a wonderful day - lovely people - only the barest thoughts of work/students/marking; mostly time for me! Bliss.

In the evening, relaxed with Brokeback Mountain that's been sitting in the to watch pile for ages!

A wonderful change from the normal - and I decided to sign up for the whole course during the day, without waiting for tomorrow's session. :)

Uid 149

Today is Saturday so there is an opportunity to catch up on some of the things I have not been able to do during the week as a result of work commitments. I am pushing along a solid snowdrift of emails that have been accumulating which need responses, as well as papers to referee, proposals from my host institution to review and comment on, a pile of moderating to do, a proposal for funding that needs working on as the deadline is fast approaching, and an internally funded project to make progress on. Oh, and if I have half an hour spare, I might be able to do a bit more work on my book which I am trying to finish by the end of the month. Yesterday (Friday) was spent with colleagues from another institution where I’m sniffing around in the hope of a job, so I got back rather late. Thus, it takes me ‘til about lunchtime to reply to a few emails, read and respond to the paper I’ve been asked to referee for a journal and open a few envelopes which arrived in my pigeon hole this week. Some contain paperwork that can be signed and put back in the internal post, so they go straight back in my bag to go back to work on Monday. A quick pit-stop to clear the cat’s rich aromatic produce from his litter tray and refill the coffee jug and I can start looking at one of the internal ethics proposals I’ve been sent to referee. I make some comments and remind myself to email it back in shortly. Now it’s time to apply for some money. My colleagues and I have already circulated the case for support and got it pretty much like we want it, and on logging onto the research councils' JES system I see they’ve already been hard at work filling in the boxes where you have to convince them to give you money in 4000 characters or less. We want to apply for as many grants as we can because the ESRC looks like it’s going to start rationing the number of applications we can make shortly, and judging by the proposals it has made, we in the post 1992 sector will fare very badly. After a bit of fiddling I exchange emails with one of my fellow applicants who’s in Hong Kong and he sends me some documents to upload to the proposal. I update the references on some of them and add them to the proposal and log out so other people on the team can edit the proposal. Now I know what it looks like, I commence filling in my own institution's paperwork which we’ve got to fill in in order to be allowed to apply for external funding, and provide an account of how it fits in with the university’s vision and strategy. I re-use and re-edit some of the text I used last time I applied for something similar. They don’t use anti-plagiarism software on us yet, thank goodness, so once one has found the magic words which open the portals and satisfy committees they can be recirculated. In the meantime my girlfriend has kindly baked a loaf of bread, so that constitutes my evening meal. By now it’s nearly midnight. Tomorrow brings the excitement of moderating a pile of master’s degree coursework, reviewing another ethics proposal for the university ethics committee and completing one of my own for my own project. Pretty much the entire weekend is devoted to filling in forms of one sort or another. Meanwhile my students are emailing me asking for appointments urgently for Monday as their personal problems and dyslexias increase to fever pitch in synergy with some impending coursework deadlines this coming week.

Uid 151

After a manic week at work I was really looking forward to the weekend. I decided to leave anything to do with my day to day work at Uni but decided to bring home my own personal study to review. I find it increasingly difficult to balance working across two programmes, undertaking my own study with that of being a mother. My four daughters are understanding as this is all they have known. I have been studying and working since 2001 so what may appear chaotic to some families is a norm in the Hussain household. I woke up later than usual and proceeded to review my own studies making an action plan of what i need to do/ next steps. I am studying a post graduate certificate in higher education alongside working towards the HEA accreditation.

Living with teenagers i am used to the day starting late when not at Uni / college or school. We had brunch together and then proceeded to plan our day. We are having a redistribution of bedrooms so my daughters wanted to go shopping to look at new beds. It was a great afternoon spending time away from work based issues however in the back of my mind I was aware of assignments that require marking as well as my own studies that need to be done. I always have a tension between doing my personal work with the students and allowing myself time to study. Usually its the student that come's first. I reflected throughout the day how to meet both needs and decided to dedicate the coming week to marking and the week after take study time.

Once the shopping was complete myself and my husband walked the dog. We have recently bought a new (to us) car and the dog now has a dedicated space in the back. Previously he used to take up the middle block of seats in a people carrier. He has not taken too kindly to the back so we are familiarising him to the this. Quite often with my husband running his own businesses we do not have time to ourselves and we used this time to catch up and plan for the coming week.

We decided on a take away dinner and our daughters and their friends planned what they would like to eat.

After a quiet evening I planned an early night so that i could get up early and get on with my studies. I usually care for my nephew and niece as their mother is ill and cannot care for them but this did not happen this weekend. I thought this time could be used for my studies.

I retired to bed at an early 11pm hoping to be ready to start my studies on the Sunday for 10 am if things go to plan.

Uid 152

Well this 15th was a Saturday, so not a working day. The day centred around looking after my two small children and a poorly husband, so it was not very exciting!

I did do a little work (via email & facebook)after I had got the children to bed. This was all related to trying to get clinical staff to help us with our forthcoming interview dates. We always use clinical staff in the process, as there is a shared responsibility between Radiology departments & the University in educating Radiography students. However, sometimes this can be difficult, especially when departments are so short staffed and as under pressure as they are now.

Uid 154

The first thing I did when I woke this morning was check the clock. I’m on day 6 of a 3 week, 3 country overseas teaching trip and, as usual, my bio-rhythms are all over the place. That it was as late as 5.25 meant that I’d had the longest period of uninterrupted sleep since I left the UK last Sunday. Fantastic – maybe I wouldn’t start to flag at around 5 in the afternoon as had happened every day so far.

5.25 here, 9.25 at home so it was straight onto Skype to speak firstly to my son who I saw was on line because he’d made an early start on revision for exams next week, then I rang my husband who was about to make a coffee. I’ve been working overseas for around 8 weeks a year now for the past decade. The advent of Skype has saved me hundreds and hundreds of pounds. I really wish it had been available when the kids were younger and I had to go away because I craved sight of them and phone calls weren’t ever satisfactory. The university did give us an allowance of one call home a day but it was never enough and I used to have to deal with (and then pay for) upset calls to my mobile when something had upset one or other of them. After one trip my bill came to £600. Skype has also, of course, revolutionised contact with students - but that’s a whole other area.

Phone calls made and emails exchanged with my daughter I then listened to yesterday’s Archers programme. Iplayer has been a boon in this week leading up to Nigel Pargeter’s funeral. I would hate to have missed out.

There was time then for catching up with emails and for reading a draft assignment then a shower, quick breakfast and off for an 8.30 teaching start.

The day was pretty full on with five x hour and a half sessions. Today I was able to sit back for a couple of these because two graduates of the doctoral programme I lead and teach here came and did presentations on their work. This was really rewarding. The old clichéd teacherly stuff about the delight in seeing one’s students’ success all comes into play at such times and I enjoyed it.

In between sessions I saw students about various issues and queries they had. It was actually hard to get even enough space to go to the loo but, because we are with these people for such a relatively short period of time (2 weeks each year), I feel I have to be totally accessible. As I said, Skype has made an enormous difference but being with someone in the flesh is preferable and this seems to be the opinion of the students as well.

I should perhaps add the programmes I’m working on overseas have all been requested by local people and have now been running for over 20 years. I’d have some problems were I to be involved in a venture that was all about making money. In fact, these programmes run at a rate which just about breaks even. There’s a long story to this which involves VCs who have seen this work as part of the university’s social mission. I don’t know what the future and the consequences of Browne will be – but I worry. Even though we do things on the cheap (and have stayed in the inevitable brothel by mistake) subsidised work of this kind doesn’t easily fit in to the current climate.

We finish the day at 6. Our team of 4 take a brisk walk round a local park and then its back to the hotel for a shower then out for dinner at the home of one of our local colleagues’ house. We’re back at the hotel by 10.30 and I am straight to bed – to bee ready for more of the same tomorrow.

I’ve been really vague in this piece because for a number of reasons I don’t want to give too much identifying information. Our programme is unique and very special. It’s also extremely hard work. For the 3 weeks we are out here every day follows a similar pattern with teaching, meetings, tutorials, collaborative research related activities which are to do with the whole capacity building agenda. The only time we have off is on the 2 days when we travel to different countries to do it all again. Beaches and cocktails by the pool do not get a look in.

Uid 155

January is mad at this time of year, and so weekends are working days; the only difference is that I wear my pjs for a lot longer. Thankfully I have a supportive partner who is also in education, so it is not a problem; it is just the nature of the job. Got up at 7 to get a head start on my marking: I have marked a hundred essays in the last ten days, and have sixty more to do in the next four. As Monday and Tuesday are full of meetings, I need to get most of them done this weekend. And so, Saturday was spent marking, and marking, and marking. Escaped briefly to go food shopping, and did cook a nice stew to give my poor hand a break (I'm not used to writing so much!). Finished marking for the day at 9pm: twenty five done (reflecting how much I had to write on some of them). The battle continues tomorrow ...

Uid 157

Term starts on Monday and there's no way I'm going to be ready in time. Where does the time go during the four week vacation? I took some time off to be with my family as in the run up to the end of last semester it felt like I hardly saw or spoke with them. Other than that one week off, I was marking, preparing material for this coming semester and catching up on some of the admin tasks that get forgotten at other times.

Today was a mixed day - taking my 7 year old swimming. He swam his first ever 25m length today! So proud of him. He's going to be so much better than I am, and quite soon I think. Also had to go to the supermarket as we'd run out of essentials but forgotten to book a delivery in time. Now I remember why we try to have our groceries delivered to us.

The rest of the day was taken up with marking and lecture preparation. One of the time consuming bits is the writing the detailed feedback for the students. I feel that it is very important to do this part of marking properly. I hope that the students appreciate the time and effort I'm putting in to this.

Uid 168

A Saturday. Saturday’s in my life are generally a mix of sport and guilt about not getting enough work done. On this occasion I woke early (due to a cough) and found myself reading through UCAS forms whilst watching a re-run of The Professionals on ITV4 (it hasn’t aged well). I then worked through some notes written for me by my research assistant about her project.

The day’s first instalment of sport involved watching my younger son’s rugby match. He played well and his team won narrowly but the result was controversial – in high winds the ball fell off the kicking tee whilst the opponent’s kicker was on his way towards it and the ref declined to let him take it again. Correct by the letter of the law, but possibly not in the right spirit for their age group. Their coach called him a "cheat" after the game.

I spent a middle section of the day working on a book chapter. A colleague and I must submit a completed manuscript before September this year. It’s great to work in conjunction with someone else. In much the same way that it’s easier to stick at physical training when you have someone else to keep you motivated, it is easier to knuckle down to writing when you know you have a responsibility to someone else not just yourself.

Second round of sport – this time a hockey match for me and my elder son. We were always going to be under the kosh against these opponents, but it wasn’t until the last hit of the first half that they scored. In the second half the flood gates did rather open and we ended up losing 6 or 7 – nil. My lad had a good game, but I got a foot injury inflicted by one of my own team and sat out most of the match.

Home for third instalment of sport – a Heineken cup rugby match on the TV. We are season ticket holders at one of the premiership clubs and our team had a televised away fixture today. Fortunately it went our way and there’s a hope of qualification for the quarter finals if we win next week’s last pool match.

In the evening we also watched a very moving documentary about actor Pete Postlethwaite who died recently. He was a very talented man who performed some excellent roles. The documentary captured this, and the great regard in which he was held by former colleagues.

Finally I did another stint of book-writing before bed.

Uid 171

It was a family day. We had a lazy morning, then ventured out for lunch at Pret. I parted ways from daughter and partner so that I could retrieve my scarf from a cabaret bar where I'd given a talk on Thursday night. They'd told me on the phone that they were not open in the day on Sunday, which led me to believe that the were open on Saturday days...but I was led to believe wrongly and had to arrange for a friend in the neighbourhood to retrieve it for me in the evening.

Did a couple of errands, then ended up back with the family at the museum, one of my three-year-old's favourite places. Home for dinner, which I didn't have to cook (though I supposedly cook on the weekends) because I could guilt my partner into doing it, since I'd been a 'lone parent' the second half of the week.

Did a little work after her bedtime, keeping on top of email and doing a little preparation for working more solidly on Sunday. I've an overdue paper, so partner & toddler are having a special father-daughter day so that I can spend an afternoon writing--as it just doesn't fit into the weekday schedule. Watched Episodes on iPlayer (interested for vaguely academic reasons!), and went to bed too late as usual...

Uid 172

Although a Sat still did some work.

Reviewed a journal article - not very coherent or well written.

Reviewed draft MA dissertation - also not very coherient or well written.

More hope for the latter than the former.

Made a feta and leek ravioli (home made pasta) and chilli and lime flavoured truffles - lovely.

Uid 179

Saturday, 15 January 2011

Came down to Devon last evening (via the University and picking up yet another pile of marking to be done) for a delayed Christmas visit due to the snow and then getting a bug.

A pleasant walk along the estuary of the River Exe with my sister and her husband. Chatting over lunch then off to Bristol to see a colleague with whom I have been collaborating on a research project. Home about 9.30 pm. Back to marking tomorrow.

Uid 182

I had brought a year-group mountain of essays in the hope I'd get two thirds marked over the weekend but I've only marked 12 so far today. In between doing food shopping and doing some laundry, I spent approx 40 mins remotely accessing electronic journals for two conference papers I'm planning. I had an approx 30 minute phonecall with a colleague about a course we're planning to co-teach next year. I drove a friend who doesn't drive to a meeting and while waiting in the car for her to return, I finally started a collection of essays I've been meaning to read for the last year and read approx 70 pages so I was happy about that! I also got through most of the various newspapers that have accumulated unread due to time reasons over the last week.

Uid 184

We're in winter holiday break. A nice breather of four weeks to regroup, recharge, and rework courses.

Classes begin in just over a week. This coming week is our in-service week consisting of meetings and the final rush to get the online courses set up, copies made, and calendars posted.

I spent the day working on various school-related projects, including:

Resetting the Moodle courses;

Creating student accounts on the Linux server;

Writing scripts to maintain the accounts.

You see, since only a few of us use the Linux server, it's up to me to set up the accounts and maintain them throughout the semester. When the server goes down, it's me that gets up in the middle of the night to go reboot it. No one else wants the job.

This semester I'm going to try to get our Linux server hosted on a VMWare server so rebooting it will consist of clicking a button on a web page rather than physically going to campus to push a real button.

The governor announced proposals to massively cut the higher education budget this year. I'm sure we'll learn more this coming week.

Otherwise, I'm starting to stress about my to-do list to get everything prepped.

Uid 185

Usually Saturday is a very fertile workday for me. My "break" is on Friday. Saturday is the day I sit quietly and write alone or with a colleague I collaborate a lot. This Saturday, however, I devoted only about three hours to work. I was too busy during the day b/c of my family.

Of course, like every day I checked my mail every few hours and respond if I can.

In the evening, My colleague and I sat over a cup of coffee to discuss a big project we work on (7pm -9:30pm).

Later I worked one more hour at home --I am editing a special issue and I re-read my decision letter to see it was not too harsh.

Uid 186

I didn't do any work today. Or does reading the Guardian count as work?

Our University Union branch has voted for strike action over redundancies unless the Uni management agree to no compulsory redundancies. I found that out from the BBC web site. :-)

My partner's programme is under threat, and so while not working today, the future of education has not been far from my mind.

It is one of the things about an academic job (with an academic partner) that work has no beginning and no end. She (partner) complains that I would work 24 hours a day if she wasn't around. I couldn't deny it!

Uid 187

6:45 AM - Woke up after a good night's sleep; a bit longer than I've had for a few weeks. Snuggled w/ my wife - something we've not had/taken the luxuary of time to do for way too long. Looking forward to a 3-day weekend. Hope to finally get caught up!

7:45 - Got up and dressed, checked email/facebook and ate breakfast.

8:45 - Researched fundraising oportunities for the Boy Scout troop I'm involved with.

9:30 - Email/facebook and visiting with my wife.

10:00 - Boxed up Christmas decorations (Been too busy to get to it before now!)

11:45 - Lunch

12:45 PM - Reviewed interview notes and decided which undergraduates to hire as Lab Assistants for my Introduction to Comuters courses. Established work schedules. Set up Lab Assistants to have access to courses in Blackboard (course management system). Sent messages to those hired and not hired.

3:30 - Email/facebook

4:30 - Graded submitted work for a student taking an online course

4:45 - Email/resolved a student's problem with Blackboard

5:00 - Set up wikis in Blackboard for Intro to Computers course

5:45 - Left for dinner at my Son's and Daughter-in-Law-to-be's house

9:00 - Back home from dinner. Continued setting up wikis for Intro to Computers course.

10:30 - Created and loaded lab materials into Blackboard for Intro to Computers course. Sent material to Lab Assistants.

12:45 AM - Resolved a student's problem with Blackboard

1:00 - Researched i>clicker issues and responded to students

1:45 - Bed time; I hope to be more productive tomorrow.

Uid 189

rested at home...tired

Uid 191

Saturday - I am doomed! I am doomed - or at least my marking is.

Monday, I went into the office to mark in the evening while my partner went out to dinner. Blackboard had some kind of bug after its latest release and I couldnt download the programs. I also couldnt go home so spent 4 hours waiting to be picked up.

Thursday I spent 10 hours marking and then deleted my spreadsheet and couldnt get it back.

Today I was supposed to start again and I couldnt face it. Had a lovely day but felt guilty whenever I thought about the amount of work I had to do. Students appear to be very understanding (put me in perspective really).

The gaps between what happens and what is supposed to? We are not perfect - we make mistakes but feel guilty when we do. IS this the same in every job?

Uid 204

Over the summer break I've been working on a student's PhD thesis, and it's hard going. Just as with undergraduate students, I find myself muttering exasperatedly "But we've discussed this several times!" He has no idea of how to present data so that it's informative. In a table with several independent variables and some dependent values, he tends to simply list all the dependent variables in adjacent columns, cycling their values down the column. He's on holiday at present, so I've been designing the new tables myself, as well as fixing the rather poor English. This is probably more than I should do, but I plead lack of time - it's a great deal faster to fix it than to tell him what to do, let him try - and then fix it anyway. Spent a little over three hours on this today, then emailed him and stopped, because I found a place where there was some missing data, and I need him to provide it before I can continue.

Leaving first thing tomorrow for a week away at a education-related conference, I spent much of the day putting together the things I'll need to take, and making sure I'm more or less ready for the two papers I'll be presenting.

In the gaps I also did an hour of academic administration for the courses we run in Singapore. These offerings of the courses, in three trimesters a year, are so out of phase with our own two semesters that we really get no break at all throughout the year, even though there are times when we pretend to be on leave. Just as well we can do so much of the work from home, or we might become strangers to our own families.

So yes, it's Saturday, but I've still spent 11 hours working - on postgrad teaching, teaching-related research, and teaching administration. A teacher's job is never done.

Uid 206

Aaah, weekend...a lay in...time spent with my husband...breakfast reading the Times Higher (he was watching breakfast TV).

Then we were off to a boat yard to see whether or not we want to keep the boat there in the future. The verdict? Not sure.

After that it was down to the boat, just a quick check & discover that the new canopy has been delivered, and then into the yacht chandlers' for some more varnish. That was followed by birthday present shopping (for friends & family) in the town centre, with coffee & cake in our favourite cafe.

Throughout the day I sneak the odd look at the BlackBerry, mostly just deleting automatic emails (e.g. journal contents alerts), but there were one or two arrive from 'real' people. I don't reply to them; that can wait until Monday. The BlackBerry can be a bad habit, I know, but as there's usually work stuff in the back of my mind any way, I figure it makes no difference.

Out for a meal in the evening, just the two of us, and a taxi home at the end of the day.

Uid 213

Saturday, but I get up at almost the same time as usual to go to Oxford for my nephew's birthday. Pizza Express teems with children on a Saturday in Oxford. The downstairs was a buggy park.

On the train, I wrote a conference proposal and then played Scrabble on my iPad with my husband. This has become a new addiction - the best 4 quid app I've ever bought. I'm not sure a word game should be so relaxing when that's mostly I do anyway!

I met a major (self-imposed) deadline on 31 December, but because I hand write all of my creative work, I now face the task of typing it up and editing it before I can send it out. I have a stack of marking, but working on my novel feels so much more appealing. I figured working on a conference proposal on the train counted as work, so I didn't take any marking with me.

I found out this week that I'm teaching all the first years taking my subject and supervising all the third year projects in semester B. This puts my workload up 0.4 above the high end of the target for all staff. I also have two substantive admin roles and some extra hours added for a semester B project. How is it possible that this heavy of a teaching load (12 hours per week) is normal? My husband gives two lectures a week and has TAs to help with the seminars. But he's at a Russell Group and I'm at a post-92. I like the semester B teaching - they are my favourite modules - but it's a lot to carry. And the marking will be atrocious.

In the evening, I went to another birthday party for a friend, this time in a pub. He's a lawyer, but he also plays rugby for fun. Someone was there who sustained a head injury in the match and then went on to drink 11 pints. It horrified me - how can people who rely on their brains to function and perform their jobs do such violent things for fun?

Conference proposal accepted, but now I need to see if the University will fund my travel abroad! I'm not sure this is the best time to be asking, but I haven't been to an international conference in a while, so I'll see!

One thing from earlier in the week - on Wednesday I held an open mic for all the Creative Writing students. I usually struggle to get attendance and people to read, but this time I required it for the last class of the modules. I also deliberately didn't open it to anyone outside our discipline for the first time. I told the students that every person in the room wrote and worried about sharing their work, so not to feel nervous. I had record numbers read from on the stage, and lots of first years. I was so proud of them! I might try this trick in the future, although it would have been nice to have some other staff there to see how great the students are.

Uid 214

An unusual Saturday this - I did not do much work. So many Saturdays get lost to conferences, seminars and other events, to writing and research, or simply to chores like responding to miscellaneous emails that I did not have time for in the working week. Instead, apart from quickly checking email and responding to the most urgent new messages, I very briefly did one small bit of work on a grant application that is pending, but otherwise spent the day with family and friends. A brief tally in my diary though reveals, however, that even with this luxurious Saturday 'off' I still managed to work a solid 60+ hours last week (so over 12 hours work each week day). This is probably the reason that I feel so tired this early in term...

Uid 217

I was amused by the reminder e-mail you sent around that apologised for Diary Day being a Saturday - that not being a working day and all - and asked us to put anything down that was relevant. This was amusing only in a wry sort of a way, I should note, since it makes no difference to me whether it's a Saturday or a Sunday or any other day of the week: there is an impossible pile of work to get through (and always some bureaucrat thinks up another blasted form that needs filling), and unless someone visits or I have specific plans I inevitably work seven days a week. This does not make for a good work/life balance, to say the least, but the weekdays simply aren't enough to do all that is needed. One element of the problem is the new centralised timetabling system that my glorious institution had set up: its criteria are a) 'efficiency' (defined as using all the rooms all the hours of the day) and b) student convenience; there is no criterion of efficiency for the academic, and so I will be going in to the dept (which involves, as I've noted before, nearly two hours' travel time) four out of five days this week, two of them for one hour's teaching only, and therefore I will end up being interrupted and distracted all day and by the time Friday comes I will be horrifically behind, as always.

Anyway, yesterday was Saturday and I got up, watched a bit of the cricket, and then (from about 10am) marked essays - with short breaks for lunch and dinner and a couple of brief coffee breaks - till roughly 8.30pm, when I was too tired to mark effectively any more. Not an interesting day for a diary, but there we are. The essays - from a very perky group of forty students in a second-year module I convene - were generally rather disappointing and I find myself becoming a Telegraph-reading harrumphing Colonel when it comes to the near-total failure of these (straight A\*) students' schools to teach them anything about spelling, syntax, clarity or punctuation (including, most frustratingly, the dreaded semi-colon). It's frustrating to be trying to read essays for imaginative criticism and being repeatedly bogged down by the need to correct the prose.

Anyway, that's it. I hope the next one's more fun!

Uid 221

Saturday, and did not do any academic work that day.

Uid 224

The good thing about being in New Zealand is that a Friday deadline for a paper submission gives you most of Saturday to get it in due to the time zone differences. This is also a bad thing about living in NZ - doing final edits to papers seems to come up on Saturday mornings quite often!

I spent the morning editing a paper coauthored with colleagues in Europe and the US. The deadline translated to 11pm on Saturday for me, and I got it submitted by about 2pm.

I then took some time off for the rest of the day, although made a few last-minute changes in the evening as my overseas colleagues woke up and made last minute suggestions.

Uid 226

Saturday is my day off. I slept late, went hiking along the Potomac River, then attended an open house. Managed to do some yoga and meditation and read a book. A very nice day.

I almost never work on Saturdays since I am usually worn out mentally by the end of the week. Saturday is my day off.

Uid 227

Well it is the weekend, and term has not started yet so it is pretty quiet. Actually after a semester before Christmas which was hectic and very few weekends off, this semester seems to be much less busy and I am quiet looking forward to it. Also helping another member of staff with a new module, which means quite a bit of reading but should be good.

Uid 231

Well is was Saturday, and summer and most people are still enjoying holidays, so I slept in until 9.30am and then read all the Saturday papers - all the floods - until 11am. Then read and corrected the work of two research students until 4pm when I went for a two walk in a large local bush reserve. My aim for this year is to do a touch of exercise as I have been on my backside in front of a computer since 2006, my last holiday and exercise. Although I fully intended to return home and finish my email to the second research student, by the time I had walked and then visited the supermarket, there was only a bit of time to eat before a movie came on TV that I wanted to watch - and after all - it was a summer Saturday.

Uid 232

I try to avoid working on Saturdays so no work tasks today apart from dealing with a few emails.

Uid 234

Being a Saturday I didn't really do any work.

However at 21:40 on Friday night my programme director sent out an email regarding our admissions policy. She wants a fundamental change, I am one of the people arguing for sticking with the status quo.

Her email made a serious point but it was dressed it up in a light-hearted fashion. The only work I did on Saturday was to respond to her email. I tried to politely/ warmly point out the folly of her thinking.

Just because we could change the way we do things doesn't necessarily mean that change would improve things.

Uid 237

Diary entry 5

Saturday 15th January 2011

Context:

This week just gone was the first week back at Institution B (Institution A has exams for two weeks). I have loads of marking to do for Institution A, but had lectures and a research seminar to deliver at Institution B so decided to channel my efforts until the research seminar was done. I knew this would mean working all weekend, but what's new?!

Content:

Today I got up at a reasonable time (8am), and had planned to spend the day working first on a job application (for a permanent Lectureship), then some work on an article revise, and then finish the day off with some marking, and spend the whole of tomorrow (Sunday) marking. It is now approaching midnight, and I have managed, somehow, to spend the whole day on the job application, and still haven't finished it. How can this be? I haven't had any distractions, other than the usual email responses (which let's face it, I could have left given that it's a Saturday), and it means that I will no doubt go to bed having achieved not even one of the tasks on my to-do list. It is times like this when I wonder whether I'm in the right job - I need to learn to allocate a certain number of hours to tasks, and then get the task achieved in the time frame I've allocated for it. I end up chasing my tail all the time because I don't stick to the deadlines I set myself. I know I am not alone in this, but still...

Uid 239

How bad is this-couldn't do this on the day. Since the last entry I've had an accident that has left me in a bit of a difficult physical state but I'm trying to convince myself it's not going to interfere with work and everything will be as normal, which of course it isn't really. Typically cramming loads in on this Saturday including the 3 hours each way trip to see Dad in his dementia care home. Had to get up at 6 to send some emails, get some washing in and out, and clean the house, all of which take twice as long and are managed half as well due to accident, before getting the train. Bag full of marking for the train journey. Train, London Underground, bus, don't exactly synchronise today but I've known worse!. Dad is in an agitated state today so doesn't sit down at all and wants to keep opening and closing the door. Something logical going on in his mind that needs working out but I can't enter into the inner fragmented workings of his mind which I can almost see and feel struggling to make sense but I feel useless in helping him stitch it together.

Marking on the train journey home flags somewhat as I start dozing and seek brain stimulation in the newspaper rather than what feels like a grind to face the next essay.

Need to wake self up and sort house out, finish slowed-down version of cleaning, look at emails and aim to mark at least ten more scripts plus update strategic plan when I get home. The accident is proving more of a nuisance than I'd thought.

Uid 241

School was supposed to start on Thursday the 13th, but classes were cancelled Thursday and Friday, and there is no class on Monday because of Dr. Martin Luther King Day, so the first day of classes is on Tuesday the 18th. This is unprecedented. I just have an independent study student to meet on Tuesday, so my first day of lectures is on Wednesday the 19th. My classes this semester are smaller than last semester's classes. I am getting my tablet laptop set up so that I can use it in class if needed.

Uid 245

Got up late ... and found it difficult to concentrate on work. Fiddled with various unimportant admin tasks. Replied to emails. Thought about dissertation topic ideas. Sent out some emails to keep research collaboration ideas ticking over.

Went for a run after 1pm and then took the bus to visit a photo exhibition in the city art gallery, then we came home had fish & chips and watched four episodes of Sex & the City (season 5).

Uid 246

The spring semester starts up again on Tuesday. I've been at the office all this week preparing for my Web Science course, and although I did not get as much accomplished as I wanted to, I'm at least prepared for the first week. I'm far enough ahead that I will not be coming into the office today... I want to spend time with my boys and wife and spend as little time worrying about the upcoming semester as possible.

I look forward to starting the semester although I have to admit that I've gotten quite comfortable with my laid-back schedule, and it will be hard to say goodbye to it.

Uid 250

Ah, Saturday.

I like to sleep a little later. My wife likes to get up and get things done... though I see the value in her agenda, I usually have other things I'd rather be doing (like napping).

I agreed to spend an hour with her cleaning up in the garage. So, we did. The result: a full recycle bin, a full rubbish bin, a little more room to walk around, and a commitment to do another hour's cleaning next week.

It's been cold. We've been utilizing the fireplace for warmth.

The rest of the day was spent with this and that around the house. There is a list of projects partially completed needing attention.

No matter what household task has my immediate attention, there are spurious thoughts concerning my Software Engineering course. Though it is the only course I have this term, I fear I will sink too much time in it.

The first week of the term is completed. Enrollment is up in almost all CS courses. The enrollment in my course doubled from what it was in December. Curious.

Thoughts turn to research projects as well. Two rejections yesterday (not unexpected). A paper due this evening - the second author is polishing it up for submission.

Nothing substantial was done around the house. (Time doesn't slow to match my pace.)

This evening we spend time with friends at a wine-tasting club meeting. A few bottles of Petite Sirah will entertain about 20 adults for two hours. Good juice, somewhat pricey.

Then about 10 of us will go to a restaurant for conversation, food, and more wine.

Spent 20 to 30 minutes standing outside the restaurant on the phone with my daughter. Shopping with grandma wasn't any fun. No dress was found and the dance is a week away. Too noisy inside, too cold outside -- not a great conversation.

During dinner, biographies I find on the net with my 'smart' phone become fuel for discussions of deceased entertainers.

Email from the paper-writing colleague: The submission deadline was really yesterday. Time and effort on three papers and no publications?

Fortunately, an early version had been submitted and this conference allows for responses to reviews. Perhaps the revised version of the paper will be useful in a month.

Uid 252

Our semester normally starts the third week in January, which would normally be next Tuesday, but for some reason it's starting the following week this year. So the last-minute pressure to get ready for the first day of classes has not yet begun. Still have the leisure to work on longer projects (or relax).

Put in a couple of hours today on email, largely about (1) a conference I'm organizing (2) a scholarship program I'm directing (one of the students has been dropped due to low grades, and we're all hoping she can bring her grades up this semester and get re-admitted, trying to arrange tutoring for her, etc.) (3) my honors student who is doing a very interesting thesis about which he's been reading a lot, but, alarmingly, not doing much coding ...

Another couple of hours on the report for our accrediting agency. Like nearly all US colleges and universities, we are accredited, that is, given a stamp of approval by a regional nonprofit organization. Part of gaining and keeping this accreditation is having a team of volunteers, usually colleagues from other colleges and universities, visit once every ten years. Before the visit, it's necessary to prepare a report, strictly limited to 100 pages, covering all aspects of the college, including organizational structure, finances, academic programs offered, how assessment is done, student support services, etc. Accreditation is important symbolically, but also in very concrete ways: for example, students at non-accredited institutions cannot qualify for certain types of loans.

We've been working on this report for over a year now, and the visit is scheduled for October 2011. 21 committees have each submitted drafts of portions of the report. I'm co-chairing the writing of the report with a colleague from another department, and much of this winter break has been taken up with revising and editing these drafts and trying to get them down to the page limit. The next step is to combine the individual chapters into a single document. Sadly, it all has to be done in Microsoft Word, since that's what everyone knows. Which means that tomorrow is going to be spent attempting to format a 100-page document in Word. Just opening a document of that length and saving it takes seconds every time, and the templates are much harder to work with (and less effective) than I could have imagined. Why does this software have the reputation of being usable?

Getting back to education: why are the software tools we use so flawed, and why do people tolerate such flawed software, when it could easily be better?

Uid 256

Share Diary 15th January 2011

07.10-07.20: Up after stormy and noisy night. Checked e-mails (nothing much). Ran Registry Mechanic. Opened new diary record.

07.20-08.20 Made breakfast. Took it back to bed. Read paper. Spend some time just lying there, thinking about this foreword which the editor wants to be a chapter, with marginal comments which are giving me problems. After a spell of ten days in which I have put four drafts in for review, and spent two days on being ac critical friend for two South Africans writing for a journal with which I have no connection, and commenting on 43 Taiwanese critical thinking postings, and two Scottish pg WBL reports, I feel written out. But this is not a blog, and I must concentrate on today, and press on.

08.20-09.40: Amending foreword – on file. Interesting that this old stager, who finds it difficult to prepare for a review of a paper submitted to a journal without having it on hard copy, is finding it difficult to edit his own draft and has gone this morning from hard copy to file. But I shall then print out, and edit.

Meantime, breaking off to go into e-mail and find and respond to return comments from Taiwanese students.

Later, two thirds complete on file, time to shave, shower and dress!

10.05-11.00 : Resume. 15 minute break for coffee along the way. Now it’s done. Print out, edit, and revise next.

11.00-11.35: Break to help my wife set up the January “Marmalade making” factory.

11.35-12.55: Carefully editing on hard copy, hopefully for the last time – well, meantime. Phew, complete and ready to transcribe

Lunch

13.40-14.55: Done. What a tedious job!

14.55 – 15.20: Went on e-mail. Attachments for my wife. Didn’t notice they were zipped. Opening them plays havoc with my laptop, 35-40 empty Internet Explorers, and then hangs. Difficult to restart for a technologically disadvantaged old guy like me.

15.20-16.30: Walk in rain for exercise and to buy a birthday card for a neighbour older and more infirm than me.

16.30-17.15: Football results on TV

Eating and clearing up after evening meal.

Watching TV

20.00- 21.10: Check e-mails. Just a couple needing replies.

First stab at the last of my presently outstanding writing commitments. Not making good progress. Trying to define, rather than express in draft, precisely what I want to mean by interaction, and move on to when and why it is desirable or effective in HE.

21.20: Better take a break. Have a bash at the Scotsman Weekend Crossword. Did not badly.

22.35-22.45: Quick revisit to what written so far. Made two small changes. Time for bed.

Uid 257

I tend to be relatively exhausted after a normal week at the University, so take the weekend relatively easy at home, although I have work to get on with and fit some in if I can and when I have the energy. Today, I lie in until 10am, a leisurely brunch, some housework, a late afternoon session in the gym and sauna at the leisure club where I am a member, a meal out at an Indian restaurant with partner, ending the evening watching television (on a Saturday normally including Match of the Day). I fit in a couple of hours in the early afternoon and an hour in the evening dealing with teaching work, preparing a new module I authored which is starting this term (still much to do), and correspondence with students and other members of the programme team about other modules, and booking train tickets online for work travel.

Uid 258

In pre-child days, a quiet, wet Saturday in January might have been spent catching up on a bit of work or doing some reading. However, when you try to combine work, childcare and maintaining interests that don't involve either, academic or administrative work ends up being squashed into odd free half hour here and there.

So Saturday was spent going out cycling for 90 minutes, cleaning and servicing my bike, spending time with daughter and husband, doing housework and, while my daughter had a nap in the afternoon, catching up on a few work-related emails - mostly involving responding to student requests for meetings and explaining to students that yes, documents on ATHENS are avaialble online and yes, they do have access to them.

Uid 260

I arise bright and early to take my dogs out for an extended walk - I need to be early because our walk traverses a game shoot and today the shoot and beaters will be out by 9:30am. My dogs (Weimaraners) are ballistic since they have not had a walk since Tuesday.

I return home refreshed to find my wife still slumbering on. I review the day's e-mails. I received an invitation to participate in a training weekend where I am to speak on a specialist topic. I consult Dr Bluestocking and inquire whether she would like to attend with me - Dr B asks who else will be there other than the clutch of young barristers. I reply that there should be a number of QCs and Circuit judges and she decides that their conversation might be entertaining - so she says she will come. I finalise the agenda for an upcoming meeting of our Research Centre. I make some arrangements for a PhD viva with an external examiner who wishes to conduct the viva by video-conference link.

I listen to a little music while I drink a couple of coffees before the day's work begins. I have been slowly working through the old Charlie Gillett best of year picks on his old playlists from The Sound of the World. My wife has no interest in music at all that you would know of - years ago we were subscribers to the Opera North series of operas staged at The Grand Theatre in Leeds and would see a dozen a year but my wife's interest was in the staging and costumes. She owns no CDs and never plays any of mine or listens to any music stations. In contrast I have very wide musical tastes and own a substantial number of CDs - probably 600-700 ranging from Lady Gaga to Philip Glass and from Javanese gamelan music to New Orleans jazz. My latest finds (courtesy of Charlie Gillett deceased) are Orchestra Baobab and Souad Massi. I put on the Souad Massi CD and listen to her lovely mix of Algerian and French styles - I am particularly taken with the song Manensa Asli (Miwawa) which I listen to 3 times before buckling down to work.

Yesterday I met with the three students who are to help me build a legal expert system to help American attorneys decide whether their death-sentenced clients are eligible to apply for federal habeas corpus relief. I told them this would eventually be a production rules/case-based reasoning hybrid expert system but that first we would build a production rules system whose knowledge domain would be the relevant chapter of the United States Code Title 28 dealing with restrictions on habeas corpus. It would be unfair to say that they were like deer trapped in the headlights but it was clear that they had no idea what the "production rules" would actually look like and how users would interact with the system. I told them that I would produce a further briefing document for them. I set about this task and - after 3 hours labour - mount the briefing on Moodle and e-mail the students to tell them it is ready for their inspection. I also add that I want them to survey the relevant chapters of Title 28 USC and let me have their ideas by next Friday of what the "master rule" for the expert system would look like.

I cook our evening meal (a seafood bake) and then my wife and I watch 3 episodes of Studio 60 on the Sunset Strip on DVD. I retire to my library where I read about a third of Tony Judt's The Memory Chalet. Judt, who died last autumn, was almost an exact contemporary of mine so I delight in the precision of his memories of 1950s and 1960s England. This is not a book to be rushed but rather one to be slowly savoured - I find it difficult to imagine what it must be like to be mentally fully engaged but trapped in an almost totally paralysed body knowing that you were slowly and inexorably inching towards your own death. Judt's prose is pared down and spare but the necessary economy of words imposed on him by his problem of sharing those words with the outside world have brought a luminous precision to his reflections. I don't read many books twice but I know that this will be one of those books I will reread.

Uid 261

Very much looking forward to a relaxing day after a manic week at work: teaching, marking, seeing students and finishing off a funding application.

9:00 drop eldest son off at a county cross country running championship event.

9:45 husband leaves for football training.

10:15 take middle child to drama club.

10:45 take youngest daughter to a birthday party.

11:15 go to get my haircut - welcome opportunity to sit down.

12:00 back home - eldest son already waiting outside with friend's father - apologise for being late.

12:30 husband and middle child arrive back home.

Eat a sandwich whilst tidying house.

12:45 pick up daughter from birthday party.

1:15 everyone back home - supervise boys' homework.

1:45 eldest son leaves for chess club.

2:00 take middle child to a birthday party in a restaurant the other side of town.

2:15 on the way home stop off at the supermarket and collect groceries for friends coming round in the evening.

3:30 back home, quick cup of tea.

3:45 send husband to pick son up from chess club.

Tidy house and prepare food for friends coming over.

4:45 send husband to pick up middle son from birthday party.

more tidying and cooking. Quick read of The Times. Article on how to relax in ten minutes makes me laugh. I wish I had ten minutes!

5:30 friends arrive. Children all play together, mainly on the wii but also facepaints, scrabble and generally charging about the place.

Nice to have a glass of wine and catch up with friends - very hard to find the time. Admire friend's impressive home made pavlova - maybe I'd do things like that if I didn't work full time?

10:30 friends leave, get my children into bed.

10:45 scrub carpet trying to remove trodden in facepaint.

11:15 collapse exhausted. Can barely make it upstairs to bed.

Uid 264

Today I hardly did any teaching work. It is Saturday and although I often work quite a bit on Saturdays, I only put in an hour or so today. I checked my email and my course discussion board only to find that the link I had provided to the reading for my next class didn't work for the students. Well, it worked but it

depended on them having access to the ACM digital library and invited them to subscribe. They don't need to do that since they can access the journal for free through the University library. But I should have realized that and discussed it in class.

I spent the morning shoveling the driveway and then going to the gym because there was too much snow to run here.

In the afternoon, I cooked some, cleaned some and spent an hour on the computer.

Later in the afternoon I started playing taxi service driving teenagers to hockey

games and practices. I've one more shuttle to do but I'm home for another 30 minutes and was quickly checking if any other students have discovered the problem with the paper link but not discovered the discussion board message and then sent mail. Then I remembered that it was diary day! After I write this

I must go actually change the link itself -- should have done that a few hours

ago. What was I thinking??

There are a handful of things that I really could be doing to prepare for Monday, but I'm trying to be more disciplined this term about not working ridiculous extra hours. Those things can just wait and then if I have to drop some lower-priority items later, so be it.

Actually, short of fixing the problem link, my highest priority is to shovel again or my minivan is not going to get back in the garage for the night. There is at least 30 minutes of hard work waiting for me out there! Uugh!

Uid 266

Wake up around 7.30, in the dark, and go through my mental list of things that help me get through the winter days - sunset now half an hour later than its earliest, day length creeps over 8 hours this weekend, Australian Open tennis starts on Monday, then once that's over it's the 6 Nations, and by the time that's done, the daffs will have been out, it'll nearly be clock changing time... and I will be wondering why I've got so little done in the first quarter of the year.

All of us (self, wife, 2 daughters 10 & 8) gradualy emerge out of slumber (me slower than them) and we make it downstairs in time to have breakfast all together, before the girls get ready to go off to their dance classes. Wife goes to shop, leaving me free indulge in a favourite activity: sitting on the sofa, staring out of the window, doing absolutely nothing.

Morning passes in a haze of tidying up, morning ablutions, and drinking coffee. Disappointingly, Christian O'Connell has replaced Alan Davies as Danny Baker's filler-in on the 5 live 9-11 slot, so keep radio off. Go to get girls from dancing at 11.30, and get 10 minutes of Fighting Talk (never as good as I think it's going to be) on the way. Go to drop their friend off on the way home, but then it transpires that she's going to come and play at ours, so go in for a coffee while she gets changed. Friend's mum has tickets for 6 Nations matches at Murrayfield so is very excited. Manage to get all 3 girls to lift their heads from the DS Super Mario game long enough to get them in the car, then head home.

Help make bacon and egg sandwiches for lunch. Persistent rain, so no gardening today. The pattern of weekends is that for my girls, they are taken up with dance, gym, swimming, seeing friends, occasional birthday parties and a little light homework, and for my wife they are taken up with washing, ironing (I try to help out, but usually (a) take about 5 times longer; and (b) do the collars all wrong, so am worse than useless), exercise bike and keeping the financial stuff sorted on the web. Unless we've got a trip or something planned, I try to do a bit of gardening, go for a good run, or at least a walk, and otherwise do house chores/drop off and pick up and generally mooch around. I try to avoid work work (particularly emails) at the weekend unless it's unavoidable.

In the afternoon, I "do" a mix of reading the paper, various little jobs here and there, listening to football on the radio, and sitting on the sofa staring out of the window. As one of my favourite quotes says, I prefer "being" to "doing".

Early tea, because 8 year old is doing night 3 of 4 of her gym display, and we are going to watch this evening. Leave at 5.15ish, picking up a neighbouring mum/friend, who is also a teaching assistant in 8 year old's class at school. As adults always seem to do to each other, she asks me how work is going and whether I'm very busy. As always, I try to non-answer the question with a vague "oh, you know, it's work, you go there, then you come home again". Never feel very comfortable talking about work, if I do try to I always feel I come across either smug and boastful or over humble and rather pathetic.

Daughter has small part in the 2 hour show of sometimes jaw-dropping gymnastics - but she still unfailingly gives me a lump in my throat when I see her appear on the performance area. The classes range from teenies to people who have competed in national finals and the Commonwealth games. Amazing what you can see in a converted shed in the middle of a (flooded) field in deepest rural Lancashire.

Home, girls to bed, double helping of Prison Break on DVD for Lucy and me. As it's the weekend, I stay up and watch a bit of footy, then do my usual flicking around channels until, even in my near-midnight state, it's just not worth watching any longer. Dishwasher, cat, doors, lights, check girls OK. Bed.

Uid 267

I try not to do anything work related on a Saturday - you have to try and keep at least one day a week free. At peak times, I do work round the clock as most academics but if it was really like that all the time, I think i would have to give up the job. And with the way things seem to be going (a prominent item on the agenda for our forthcoming departmental meeting is 'meeting the post 2012 aganda: providing more student contact') I'm not sure I'm going to carry on to retirement. Not that I mind seeing students, but a couple of years ago we had to really stamp our foots down to fight off a rule that we should reply to all student emails within 36 hours including at weekends. which would have meant having in effect to check inboxes seven days a week (given students' propensity to email at 3am etc). Anyway my point is that I DON'T WORK ON SATURDAYS ACCEPT IN EXTREME EMERGENCIES AND THAT I'D QUIT RATHER THAN ALLOW THAT TO CHANGE.

Uid 268

Belfast, waking after a night full of strange mechanical noises echoing down corridors, to catch a flight back home. I took the module descriptions that A had kindly shared with me, to read on the flight. However, I couldn't focus on it well, given my need, while airborne, to dwell on the reasons why flying can be both safe and worth it, to imagine a dark blue diamond and to sip water, all control mechanisms to keep me calm. They work, but require attention.

Instead I read them on the train, once I got back to the UK. Really interesting to see how someone else addresses modules that are similar to my own in some respects. Indeed, the conference was helpful in many ways, and there was some inspiring informal discussion. Both module descriptions and conference prompted some new ideas for tying two of our undergraduate modules together, to the mutual benefit of each, I hope.

I pondered to what extent to try to publish my paper from the conference, or at least, to put it online. It discusses work with current students and I don't think this should be made public quite yet. I decided I could post the first, more general section as an extract, on the blog site. I don't have big aims for it, in terms of journals, just someone said they wanted to use it.

When I got home, I was met by Lola and Soren Lorenson (see Charlie and Lola, not their real names), and we went for lunch. We did not discuss teaching. I didn't think about it either.

Found my copy of the Times Higher waiting for me at home and did spend some time browsing through it. There seemed to be a lot about California in it, which sparked nothing more profound than memories of seeing two old colleagues on Skype, on Friday, in radiant Californian sunshine.

Uid 276

I’ve not seen the sun or blue sky all week due to the wretched spell of weather we have been having, so I’m now in a really black January mood which matches this awful rainy, windy day. Even my birthday a few days ago didn’t lighten my mood any, as I spent it in a sequence of interminable meetings that achieved very little and could have been done by e-mail. Saturday morning finds me marking first year essays that should have been done before Christmas but then the flu took hold and now I’m in catch up mode. Some good ones in this pile actually, so that’s really pleasing – clearly, the formative feedback made a difference. The rest of the family are all doing things they’d rather not be (homework, cleaning cupboards) and nobody is smiling. I check my University e-mail account but find nothing urgent, so close it down again. Eventually make a flask of tea, remove a slice of xmas cake and go for a solitary drive and a walk to try to blow the cobwebs away. I can’t believe how negative I feel and the year’s only just started!

Uid 282

7:00am

Woke up and texted my very pregnant daughter and asked her if she wanted Starbucks coffee. She said she would get dressed and get her son dressed. I put the car seat in the car for my 2 1/2 year old grandson while my husband finished his morning routine. My husband and I drove to their house (about a 5-10 minute drive) and picked them up to go to Starbucks. This was the toddler's first time there. He saw the apple juice and wanted that. My daughter got her usual decaf latte and a piece of cake she expected to share with her son for second breakfast. My husband got a scone and breakfast sandwich with his hot chocolate. I had oatmeal with my soy latte and was about to put the dried fruit on it (raisins, cranberries, blueberries) except that my grandson loves fruit, so he stopped playing with his Mr. Potato Head and cleared the table in front of him for sharing the dried fruit. I put most of the tiny packet of dried fruit into the upended lid of the oatmeal for a makeshift bowl. He ate every last morsel. It was amazing! He was given the choice of cake and dried fruit with his apple juice and he chose dried fruit.

8:00am

Took a breakfast sandwich and remainder of the cake to my son-in-law, who was now awake and wondering where his wife and son were. He hadn't expected us to stay at Starbucks but it was an adventure for our grandson and all the employees and customers seemed to enjoy hearing him laugh and carry on with us. We sure enjoyed it.

8:45am

After a short visit at their house, we drove to do some errands: turn in recycled plastic bottles and pick up another fire alarm for the house. Yesterday we replaced the current and very old fire alarms in the house and put in a new doorbell for the front door. We realized then that we needed one more fire alarm. So, we drove to the store, purchased the additional fire alarm and then drove home and installed it.

9:45am

The next chore was to remove the remote control unit from the ceiling fan in the bedroom. But while my husband was doing that he saw the dust hanging from the popcorn ceiling and decided that we needed to vaccuum the ceiling before replacing the fan blades. What a job! White residue of the popcorn ceiling all over the entire bedroom! Without him holding the vaccuum cleaner up for me, I wouldn't have been able to do the entire ceiling. Then we had to shake the bedding outside, dust the entire room and vaccuum the entire room to clean up the dust and ceiling bits.

12:45pm

Since my husband is a diabetic, we monitor his blood sugar closely. We went to the new Jack-in-the-Box for a sandwich for lunch and brought it home and ate while watching a movie on Netflix.

2:30pm

Couldn't stand the movie, too violent, so I started working, answering emails from the university (mostly advising new students) and remembered to do this diary. Been here ever since. That's about it.

Uid 289

I almost felt that I ought to at least think about work so that I would have something to put into this entry - and maintain the image of the over-worked academic. However, to be truthful, perhaps some teaching planning thoughts vaguely drifted through my head this Saturday, but those aside, I did nothing work-related on this Saturday. I spent a good portion of the day clearing up the loft.

Uid 291

It is Saturday so any desire to get up is quickly lost. Showing my

age i listen to Sounds of the Sixties before getting "early" morning

drinks.

Over breakfast a Liberal Democrat leafleter appeared -- they have

trouble finding our letter box -- and handed over a circular and a

personal letter from the MP, one for me and one for my wife. Not

sure how he had the nerve to catalog the promises he has kept and

ignored the ones he has not. I did notice that the messenger was very

fast to leave, so was probably embarrassed as well.

Time for the usual reading of overnight (and longer) e-mails.

Received the dates when I am expected to convince 6th formers that we

are the best place to study. I always have trouble with this UCAS

activity, and in the 1990s I was exempted from this on conscience

grounds, an option that seems to have gone. I suspect that I am

totally out of sympathy with modern youth with its Thatcherite views.

The e-mail again brings messages from my MPhil student. She has

submitted and I have arranged examiners, but she seems very anxious to

be finished and to move onto a new career. I also note with amazement

that the discussion/dispute on my main mailing list continues and

broadens to take in all of aesthetics. Where do they find the time?

The next software release is scheduled for Monday so I check the

manual ; well actually fix the manual, and check the latest bug list

to see if anything really matters. Preparing for a release always

generates these small tasks.

It is Saturday so it is time for the weekly dump of the home network's

data to a backup disk. Every time I do this I remember the saying

that r=there are two kinds of people in the world -- those who backup

regularly and those who have never lost a disk.

I have a small collection of 15 courseworks to mark. One of the

students excelled himself (no females on this course) by using HRTF in

his submission, so I need to use headphones. Did an initial review,

and it seemed rather good. This led me to review all the submissions,

the rest being stereo. Yet again I am impressed by the creativity of

science and maths undergraduates

A little time to myself; my father who died a year ago left a large

collection of 35mm slides, and I am reviewing them to see if any

should be kept. Some interesting pictures of USA, family,

France... but few to be kept. Nearly finished the pile.

Time for lunch -- always late by most people's standards, but after

3. As it is Saturday we allow ourselves a glass of cider.

While doing things away from the laptop a student has asked a question

about sampling theory. If I remember correctly that was a Friday

afternoon lecture and he was at a job interview. Quite easy to reply.

I have been teaching myself web/apache in part by supporting a small

music entity with on-line updates etc. And it seems that the new

e-commerce system is not actually working. Spent the afternoon fixing

the PERL, ensuring correct permissions, reading apache logs and

similar. Actually it took all my time until time to cook supper.

Supper is such a nice meal -- a bottle of wine and a chance to talk to

my wife.

Uid 294

Saturday is the one day of the week where I very rarely do any real work. However, the iPhone makes this harder to maintain, so I have kept an eye on (but not actioned or replied to) incoming mail.

The main work related activity has arisen from concern for a student on my programme who has been facing significant personal problems and who it is hard to stop worrying about. Sent her a text to see how she was doing and relieved to get a response.

Uid 296

Marking dissertations at home 3hrs

Uid 301

Saturday was a day of rest - for a change. Usually I am catching up on marking and university administrative tasks at home for several hours, but this weekend my daughter was leaving for Australia for a gap year, so that took priority.

She is generally a very well organized 19 year old, but sorting out last minute issues with currency, passport location, contact numbers, flight details, etc. reminded me that we all only learn to do things for ourselves when we have to. Inevitably this made me reflect on my students behaviours with completing assignments and submitting work. It's a fine balance between guiding/helping and doing everything for them. Ultimately we only learn from doing it ourselves and I made a mental commitment to bias my actions more in that direction with my students and my own children this year.

The morning was therefore a round of last minute packing, sorting out issues and trips to the shops to pick up travel items. A two hour drive to Heathrow and a nervous 'Goodbye' to wave my daughter off on her adventures. A comtemplative journey home with my wife and I discussing how this is the start of our nest emptying.

Home early evening and an hour after dinner preparing some graphs for a conference paper. It seems that even on a rest day I can't get away from university work, but it's my choice, so not a burden.

Uid 305

Day spent writing talk (which should become chapter of new book): although a great deal of time wasted lying in bed (in denial) reading LRB. Particularly enjoyed reading about the political implications of riding my bike courtesy of Iain Sinclair - worse still, veering dangerously towards the same category as Peter Mandelson. But then spend rest of day staring at, though not writing, piece...

Uid 310

Flu. Sniffles sore muscles and sleep

Uid 312

As today was a Saturday it was a fairly light "work" day. Our Spring term starts this coming Wednesday, so this is the last free weekend, so to speak. I spent an hour or so this morning continuing to prepare the syllabi for my spring courses. I've already invested many hours on my syllabi, and I know that students won't really consider them that important. Still, I think being a little meticulous here helps me think through all the things that I care about most and what I can foreshadow for the students about course content and what they can expect. I probably spend more time on this than others because this is my first year teaching and this set of courses is essentially new to me.

I did some digital housekeeping by sorting through (and deleting) work email that had piled up during the Fall in my inbox. I tend to leave messages in my inbox, even after I've read them and replied as necessary. I suppose I like to keep them for historical purposes. Every now and then, though, I go through and delete the old ones which are clearly no longer necessary and sort the others in a more organized manner. However, I found that I was much less consistent during the semester this Fall finding time to do this organization---it's a low priority task.

I also spent some time sorting through the some 20 gigabytes of digital 'stuff' that I accumulated during the Fall pertaining to the 3 courses I taught, and I backed all of it up to remote storage. I want to keep it somewhere handy to refer to when necessary, but don't need it on my local hard drive anymore.

Beyond that, I used the vast majority of the day on projects around the house (e.g., laundry, cleaning, computer maintenance). This is pretty typical for me---I try to reserve Saturdays as my one non-work day of the week. This evening will be a quiet night at home with my wife.

Of course, I have plenty to do---finishing touches on start of term course materials, book chapters to edit, journal articles to review, but those things will wait for tomorrow. On the one hand, it's hard to believe that the winter 'break' is coming to a close, but on the other hand, I'm looking forward to another group of students and a new set of challenges.

Uid 314

woke up 10ish?

11 went for walk up nearby Johnson's hill

12 recovered from walk

14 attempted to review a paper for a conference - impenetrable, gave up.

14 mowed lawns

15 loaded car

16 to load of rubbish to municipal landfill

18 babysitter in, managed to get out

19 dinner out

20 film

23 home to find 9yrold still away, been reading harry potter 6

00 sleep

Uid 319

A three-line whip from the department meant that I had to help at an admissions event today. I resent this immensely. I am very happy to work on Saturdays voluntarily or if it is of benefit to my students (and I frequently do), but I object to being told that I \*have\* to take part in what I regard as an extremely dubious marketing exercise.

Uid 325

On Saturday 15th of January I spent 8.5 hours in the planes travelling to a conference.

Uid 333

I like to think that--atypically for an academic--I observe a fairly strict life-work division, with evenings and weekends dedicated to leisure activities with my familia (sic--this is the non-heteronormative version of a family, meaning just those few people with whom I spend most time and consider closest). However, reviewing what I actually did on Saturday suggests that there is such a thoroughgoing interpenetration of life and work as to make this division more into one between times when I can be contacted by work colleagues and times when I might still be doing work-related activity, but can't be contacted by work.

On Saturday morning I trialled two of my lectures by giving them to a member of my familia who is also an academic in my discipline (we used to work together and share lifts before I took my current job--now we're near neighbours) but knows little about my sub-discipline. I was able to check that my Keynote slides and their sound files and web links were working, and he was able to give me feedback on delivery and suggestions for improving clarify on the slides. It was fun and useful.

After lunch I resolved the issue of who was coming for dinner. I'd invited several priest friends all of whom are responsible for the pastoral care of students, but two of them were involved in the aftermath of a student suicide that had happened earlier in the week (running the memorial service, counselling student friends of the deceased) and didn't feel like coming to a jolly dinner party. While completely sympathetic to this, I'd already done the shopping for dinner and rather than throw a lot of fresh food away (far to much for me to get through before its sell-by) I decided to invite one of my departmental colleagues and his partner for dinner and board games, together with the former colleague and near neighbour who was going to help me cook.

In the afternoon I prepared for Sunday's planned visit to the Canaletto exhibition at the National Gallery by reading the catalogue. Very interesting (although many of the claims in the catalogue about the relative quality of Canaletto and his rivals would only become patent when seeing the very large canvases for real rather than the small reproductions in the book) and not irrelevant to the general field in which I teach.

The rest of the day was taken up with cooking and dinner. Much of the conversation revolved around the nature of our discipline (all four of us round the table were academics in the same discipline) and there was also quite a bit of discussion about the recent staff Away Day in my department, which I thought represented a complete waste of time and a depressing window on the conservatism of my colleagues. It had discussed teaching and syllabus reform, although the outcome was resistance to all change; I find myself at odds with my colleagues who think we are about turning out a particular kind of student product. The colleague who came to dinner was broadly sympathetic to my position but didn't feel that there was enough critical mass to get anything changed.

Uid 334

10:00-11:30

Kate - Obs

13:00-13:30

Ian Obs feedback

14:00-15:00

Elias

16:00-17:00

Heather

17:00-18:00

Sue Hypnotherapist

18:00-20:00

LitDip

19:00-20:00

Emma

December 15 2010 ...not January ... (the entry seems to have closed - I've written it so I'm adding it)

January is is further down.

I’m writing this diary – or at least starting it @ 11.30pm. The SED (Self-evaluation for OfSTED) is due for 2nd draft tomorrow. I am in a panic. I completed the wrong form – a hollowed out template of what was used last year. The new form is – I am almost embarrassed to say – much neater and more focused in its questioning, though the issue remains the same. I have to spin my way through it. I have already failed as HoD 2 OfSTED inspections. It’s taken me years to get over it and realise they were not proof of my professional unworthiness. I’ve been in post last year, how do a shape what happened before my arrival and from the minute I started? I didn’t discover the correct form until about 2 hours ago and now have to re-write everything – all 33 pages of it based on non-existent data. It’s so important to get it right even though in my heart of hearts I really don’t think I believe in this as a measure of my professional worth. Let’s hope the form is good enough to keep OfSTED at bay.

Obs this morning. A community centre and it was the teachers’ 1st class. She’s fantastic. Very inexperienced but with such potential. I hate to grade it as satisfactory but will challenge her to achieve excellent within the year. Its a small community centre with a mentor who is very willing and amazingly supportive of a team of volunteers. But he is not an especially experienced teacher. I have to diplomatically appreciate his genuine spirit but guide her away from some of the advice that he might offer.

Back to University – did some more on the SED (the wrong form!). And have spent the rest of the day in tutorials.

It really has be pointed out: several have said it before. I spend a great deal of time preparing for an event that might or might not happen at the expense of things that need to be done. But then, you are only as good as your next inspection.

This is the final round of tutorial until the course finishes. The University Diploma in teaching literacy. I teach 3 evenings a week and a tutorial feels like a bit of a break. Its intense but a different kind of intense. I’ve been so wound up this year in making sure I had a session – that if they came out on a cold snowy evening – there was a good enough reason for them to be here. That I sometimes realise that I don’t always spend enough time listening to what they have to say – yes we have group discussion – but thinking about what it means for them personally as teachers. How what we cover influences and shapes their practice – happens best in tutorials.

Finally, I had to feedback from an obs. I think the obs really gets pushed aside. I feel like I have so little time that often I do the obs and have to disappear to get back for my class – before even getting a chance to do feedback. I prefer to take my lap top and given my typing is less than perfect – it involves a fair amount of proof reading. I offered this learner feedback via the phone. We spoke for a good length of time. I emailed him the form and discussed it with him. He’s a good teacher. He’s a construction teacher, with a pleasant easy rapport with his learners.

15th January

15th January 2011

This is my second entry. 15th December was closed and I have added it anyway. Wrote it before logging onto the website.

This was a Saturday. I had a suitably slow start to the year. Term officially started last week (from the 5th). I taught one session ( a review of the Module in preparation for their assignment).

I have two weeks for tutorials. This means, I have a few weeks to prepare the next Module. Breathing space.

One course has finished. I have 4 weeks before the next one starts.

And a colleague is teaching a Module of my 3rd course.

So .... marking. We are supposed to mark assignments in 2 weeks but, I can't. Not if they want me to read the work before grading it. I take as long as I need - though I usually give feedback before it's been through all the stages. I like to make detailed and comprehensive notes.

A very slow easy day where I mooch around and mark at a very slow pace. It's a Saturday. The terms hasn't started in earnest and so - I can take it easy.

I like to think that if I work on Saturday - it's is work I want to do. Which usually means reading. I have a research project in mind. I have volunteered to peer review for one journal and edit another. I am still excited by HE. Getting over the shock of Brown and looking on the bright side. If I experience the R word and have to move to London. Good My mother is 88 and it will be great to be close to her. If not - then I stay here and write and study and teach. Everyone's a winner.

I marked a EdD thesis - for the 1st time and today was pent making sure I had made the right notes in response to his viva. This was fantastic. It was a good paper and I liked being able to pass on good news to someone.

I'm reading End of the Party by Andrew Rawnsley. But its all old news if you read hos observer column.

Went for a 20 mins bike ride with my hubby. Haven't been on the bike for months so this is getting me started for the new year: no more petrol head.

Spoke to my mum.

Uid 339

A month on and there seems to be some clarity.

In a turnaround of some magnitude; I have been consulted about the changes to my role - after the event of course.

I am delighted to announce that we now have a new fees structure, and I have been delivering teaching and training to staff, which is what I was emplyed to do - developmental work with the various schools which sit in our institution instead of managing tricky staff. It feels long overdue and I am truly happy to be n=back in the studio and the classroom. Working with other members of the teaching and technical staff is rewarding and stimulating.

I continue to support students with additional skills work and am managing the team of staff we have recruited to embed the work further. This has been aided by the enhanced reporting mechanisms I set up as we can see and understand how the work assists students and where we need to deliver more. We know that the forthcoming changes to the student fee structure will place more demands upon us, so finaly, I seem to be getting somewhere.

Still, I consider that it is difficult to know what the future holds and this level of uncertainty does not make for a very happy or secure work environment. Everyone I talk to is worried and feaful; and the students pick up on it. I consider how those who advocate this have no real investment in it. I am not sure that a person who had no problem in paying for thier education can understand the impact of placing that same HE out of the grasp of the oridnary person. Selfishly, I am grateful I signed up for my doctorate before the fee hike, as I am self funding and the thought of paying 9k per year on a pert time Higher Degree is quite staggering. Clearly, those professionals in academia who are willing to do so at this point will see themselves forced out when the new fee regime is fully implemented - another form of exclusion for the working class academic who has no additional resource - much like myself - single, WP and self funding. It smacks of closing the system to potential talent and preserving the domain of Academia for the inherently privileged classes; not to mention narrowing the field of work.

So, with bated breath I continue. Still working hard, but not as put upon.

I have been focusing on organising the Uni Learning and Teaching Day - lots of work and very engaging. We anticipate receving 180 delegates plus with external and internal attendees. A very enjoyable day,so fingers crossed our 12 hour day tomorrow will be rewarding.

More on that later.

Uid 343

Well, it's a Saturday, but so what? I spend the morning invigilating our first semester exams - our teaching is done in 12 weeks before Christmas then our students come straight back to exams. In the hall there are 240 candidates taking my first year paper and also 61 sitting my third year exam. When the scripts are collected up they fill a large rucksack and a large box and I stagger trying to carry them all. My wife kindly gives me a lift home - attempting my usual bicycle ride back would have certainly resulted in the scripts scattered across the road.

After a hurried lunch, I get cracking on the marking. I start with Beethoven's 1st Symphony on the record player, but I know that by the time I finish I will have got through his 9 symphonies, 5 piano concertos and probably the 32 piano sonatas as well. It's a depressing process - how can so many students be so confused by what I explained with perfect clarity during my lecture course? The lack of precision and logic in many of the mathematical arguments is dire. From time to time there is a good script, and even the odd student who gets virtually full marks, which cheers me no end. After a short break, back to work. I feel tired and am dosing myself with aspirin to hold back a cold that is developing. However, I've got to get this done. I'm still working at midnight, and starting to feel that I'm making some inroad into the vast pile of papers, but it's a long haul yet. At 1am I call it a day (or night) and get up to bed, but I'll be back to continue in a few hours time ...

Uid 344

Saturday 15th january is the first entry I am making after having submitted my thesis and I was about to write that I didn't engage in any academic work whatsoever. However, this is not true at all. There is a submission due for my level 6 students, and my level 4s and level 6s are playing catch up on their regular reflective practice journals which they are supposed to submit regularly.

So, because I felt compelled to help, especially for the level 6 students as it is their fina year, I went into the email system and read and commented on a number of draft assignments. I used to do this regularly as I was always on the computer, night and day every day, writing my thesis, so I used to simply respond to students as a little respite from my research. I can now see that this has become a habit for me and for the students, so I feel there is a 24 hour culture and expectation of contact by both parties! Immediately after my viva a couple of weeks ago I did the same - went straight from the viva to the computers, logged on to the university system, and responded to emails as though this was some sort of higher education emergency response service. In my research analysis I comment critically on this sort of engagement with work, yet here I am doing it.

On the other side, however, I do feel justified in maybe taking an hour or two out of the working day occasioanlly to go to a yoga class or something with health benefits, so I think there is that sort of pay back.

Having now recently completed my doctorate, I am determined that my employer and some of my colleagues do not get the opportunity to share in the 'glory' as they see it. There are various requests to make announcements of my success. Given that I paid for my studies and did it all in my own time, with little support or understanding from colleagues, I have declared that I will sue if something I consider to be my private business is boasted about by the institution.

Uid 347

I'm struggling to stay awake for more than a few hours at a time having succumbed to the flu. I don't have time to be ill and have to accept that I'll never catch up with cancelledcommittments - teaching, research, writing, meetings......!

Uid 348

Spending the weekend with a colleague. We were at a conference during the week and extended our stay. Mostly non-academic activities but I was marking essays in spare moments and - slightly to our husbands' annoyance - we did keep bringing the conversation round to a paper that we are in the early stages of developing for a conference later this year.

Uid 352

Saturday - a busy day with no work (other than middle-of-the-night mulling over admin that needs doing and how to tackle the next research project).

Uid 354

Saturday, January 15, 2011

It is a Saturday, so it should be a day off. That is my theory. And that is how I have led most of my working life. Now, four months into the new career in academia after many years in industry that theory is fractured. This quarter, I am teaching two courses that are new to me, and I did not put in enough time last quarter and over the break to properly prepare myself. While I have inherited the course design, and many of the in class exercises and homework assignments I am not particularly pleased with some of the aspects of the course designs. Furthermore, one of the courses was designed to have a maximum of 36 students, yet this time I have 48 students.

In addition, I am searching for my research paths. For me, successful research requires collaborators. So, since arriving here in September, I have been socializing different areas in which I would be interested in doing research to see which gather energy. The seeds are starting to sprout in several areas, and I need to choose carefully with respect to my long-term tenure path, while managing my capacity.

This is the context for my Saturday.

I awake at 5 AM. Again. Far too early for me. Not enough hours of sleep. Same as yesterday. I am worrying about the classes I’m teaching, and the research opportunity I just declined.

I know I should trust my friend, who knows academia well and knows me well. He tells me that there will be plenty of opportunities, and that's important skill of an academic is to be able to say "No". Saying “No” is the necessary shutting of one door so that I can keep other doors open. Still, I find it difficult to believe him. Intellectually, I believe him. Emotionally, I have my doubts.

I get up. I really want to go for a walk, but it is dark outside and I don’t want to wake up my wife looking for clothes to wear. Instead, I opened my laptop and check out the online peer-reviewed journal "Ubiquity".

I learned about this journal on Wednesday night, after I gave my talk to the bi-monthly meeting of the local professional special interest on software testing group. The organizer of that meeting invited me to give an experience report on teaching the software testing class that I designed and delivered last quarter. The talk went extremely well. He told me that my talk was everything he had hoped for and more. It was insightful. It had real stories of success and failure. It had humor. And so on. According to him, there is only one other place in the United States that teaches anything like this, so this is indeed a chance for my university to be distinguished. That was rewarding to hear.

At the end of the talk, Brian came to talk to me. Brian and I had both trained with Jerry Weinberg and afterwards with Robert Dunham. When I first taught a Software Engineering course back in 2002, Brian was one of six professionals I brought together to help me design the course. This time, I invited him to talk with my class about what it means to be a manager of software testing professionals, which he did. Now, he congratulated me on my talk and gave me a copy of “The Innovator’s Way” by Peter J Denning and Robert Dunham.

Brian also asked me if I wanted to be a contributing editor to the online Journal Ubiquity. I had never looked at Ubiquity, so given that I was up, albeit too early, I thought I might as well check it out and see if it might fit me.

I read a few articles about what “computation” means. They were interesting, but a bit too abstract for me. I did learn about the real number model of computation, and that in some cases it more accurately reflects the complexity of actual computation than the Turing model. Make sense. I also noticed comments from some readers that argued against the need for a new model that was “equivalent” to the Turing model. Inwardly, I sighed. Why do people continue to look for the One model, instead of acknowledging that there is always a range of different models, some of which work better than others for different questions. Arguing for the One model seems so academic. Academic. The place I am now living.

I then perused for articles that might resonate with me. One caught my attention: “Cheating in Computer Science” by William Hugh Murray, http://ubiquitydev.acm.org/article.cfm?id=1865908. In this article he writes that:

“I used to teach programming by teaching a language, vocabulary and grammar, and then saying to the student, write a program that does this, that, or some other thing. I expected the student to compose and required originality. I expected the student to respond to a specification so incomplete that one would never tolerate it outside academia.

“I no longer teach programming by teaching the features of the language and asking the students for original compositions in the language. Instead I give them programs that work and ask them to change their behavior. I give them programs that do not work and ask them to repair them. I give them programs and ask them to decompose them. I give them executables and ask them for source, un-commented source and ask for the comments, description, or specification. I let them learn the language the same way that they learned their first language. All tools, tactics and strategies are legitimate.

“As a teacher, my job is to help students learn, not create artificial barriers to learning in the name of equitable grading. Nice people do not put others in difficult ethical dilemmas. Grading should be a strategy for making learning more satisfying by demonstrating accomplishment.”

This was it! These paragraphs resonated with me. They described some of what I was struggling with in my "Analysis and Design" course. That course had been designed to explicitly not show students exemplars of the types of things they're trying to create. Instead, the students read about what are good and bad qualities of that type of thing, Craig one, in class look over examples of what they and others have created, learn from these examples, and then create another instance of this for their solo project that runs throughout the course. There are some good aspects of this design, but the students are we struggle with not knowing where they are going. I had been advised, by person is taught this course several times before, to not provide exemplars, since students would then create things just like the exemplar.

This design did not seem right to me. Reading William Murray's article reminded me of the programming books to study coming out a few years ago that dove directly into programming, instead of starting with theory. Couldn't we use some of those same techniques here? What if we gave students an example of a part, and have them use the readings to critique it and then to improve it? Does that not seem like a more pragmatic, useful and grounded approach?

Unfortunately, this is the first time I have taught this course so that I do not know what it really means for the students to go to the full course. Nor did I get enough time over the holidays to properly prepare for this course (and the other one I also am teaching for the first time). I am but 2 weeks to a 10 week quarter, so I struggle with the idea of changing the course design. Yet what we are doing seems wrong. It seems artificial. Contrived. Unhelpful.

I think back to my freshman year in university. It was Friday in an English literature course I was taking. The teacher had just returned our papers in which we had analyzed the development of a theme throughout a book we had read. I remember having absolutely no clue about how to write such a paper. When we got the papers back, mine was marked with an F. Ouch. Then, the professor read sections from the best paper she had received. “Oh!” I remember thinking, "so THAT is what she was looking for!” I asked her if I could rewrite the paper. Yes, she said, if I could have it done by Monday. I went home, and quickly reroute the paper weaving the theme and supporting it with quotes in the way illustrated by the exemplar paper. This time, I got an A+. That was a rewarding and useful learning experience.

What were the essential aspects of that learning experience? Did I need to struggle and fail the first time? If I had been presented with an exemplar the first time, would I have learned just as well? I do not know about these two questions, but I do know the absolute importance of seeing that exemplar. Until then, I could not visualize what success meant.

The course I currently am teaching has readings that describe the qualities of what makes a good part, but does not have examples of those parts. It helps provide a rubric, but a rubric is not the same thing as an exemplar. I continue to wonder how to weave exemplars into this course. So that I feel I can teach it well.

8:45 AM. I call my mom, who lives 4 houses away, and invite her over for a cup of tea. She is my best collaborator. For whatever reason, she and I can quickly and fruitfully develop ideas. We have even published papers together. Now, I have need of her, for this last week has been rough on me.

While she is making her way over, and the tea brews, I make notes of the items to talk about:

1) the teaching blog I just read

2) Ubiquity as a forcing function for my writing

3) research and the E-learning offer I turned down

4) my stress

She arrives with a book called "The Art of Choosing" by Sheena Iyengar. I saw the title and thought "How did she know about the struggle I have had with too many choices?" It turns out, she did not. A few days ago, we had talked about "The Art of Possibility" by Rosamund Stone Zander and Benjamin Zander, and she had meant to look at that book, but instead got the Art of Choosing. So much for supernatural connections between us.

As we discussed her notes from this book, one aspect resonated with me when related to items 3 and 4 on my list. As I already knew, having choices is not necessarily good. This is especially true if you have remorse or guilt about the choice you have made. This causes worry. Which causes stress. Which exactly described my current situation: my University had offered me a chance to be an e-fellow on a project exploring how technology can help pedagogy. I liked the ideas of being part of the conversations with people who are trying to innovate here. On the other hand, I was more interested in exploring higher-level issues of innovation in university and less about how to use technology in a classroom.

They needed a decision quickly, if I had a variety of complex questions about the project and what other e-fellows were proposing to do. Unfortunately, the person organizing the project was extremely busy and could only be reached by e-mail. I was feeling very nervous about the commitment, and could not tell if this nervousness was a good nervousness or a bad nervousness. Was this like the first time I signed up to teach a course, and was nervous as ever even though I really wanted to do it and it was a great thing to do? Or was this my body telling me that I did not have the capacity, that this was not the place for me to spend my energy? In the end, it was too difficult to get the answers to my questions, so I declined.

And then I started wondering if I had done the wrong thing. Several times a day. At 5 AM when I should be sleeping. On my bike rides home. Feeling more and more nervous.

Should I try to weasel my way back into the project?

As we talked about this, my mom pointed out a tactic she used when she switched careers after raising children. She was a new family therapist, overwhelmed with the complexities, difficulties and pressures of her job. Working in a sparsely populated western state, in a clinic that had never had a family therapist before but felt it was a good thing to have. Yet they did not know what this family therapy thing was, you're having a very hard time dealing with having a family therapist.

To keep her sanity, each day on her way home should find one success, no matter how small, and brag shamelessly to herself about this one success. Make it unrealistically large. She did this every day for a while, and it helped.

Okay I thought let's try it. I made a list of my successes this week:

- Experience report on my testing course

- Saying "No" to e-fellow offer

- noticed low energy in my class; asked students to fill out 3 x 5 cards of what is or is not working; now have data to act on

- invitation to apply to be contributing editor on a journal

- finding the Journal article on teaching that led me to rethink the use of exemplars in my course

- possible Google internship for a student from my University

- independent study with my student going well

- realize the 9 to 1 problem in my current course design, and came up with a strategy to fix it

- realized a much smaller change could fix it after talking with a student who taken the course before

- implemented that fix

- fixed all links on course website

That felt good! By the end of writing down that list, I felt successful. What a wonderful feeling.

We also talked about what new course or courses I might want to teach next year.

And we talked about specific strategies to deal with some other issues I have with each of the two courses I'm teaching.

And then, two hours later, it was time to end. And for me to go back to sleep and get some rest.

1:30 PM. I woke to a quiet house, the family all out and about. Ate some lunch. Cleaned up around the kitchen. Went to the local plumbing store to fix a leaky faucet. Chatted with my family when they came home. The type of stuff I wanted to do all day.

By five o'clock I was back working on my courses. I did not want to be doing this. I wanted to take the whole day off. But there was too much prep to do for next week. I worked on and off all evening, until my wife told me it is time for bed.

This quarter is being very stressful for me. I am making it stressful. I have high expectations for my teaching, and do not like it when I am not able to reach my expectations. Yet, as several faculty have warned me, this is the type of career that will suck every ounce of my time if I let it. I must, must get better at protecting my weekends, and protecting my stress level, and getting enough exercise, and smiling and laughing enough, and finding time to relax.

Which lead me to my last activity this day. Before going to bed, I sat and meditated. For many years, I have wanted to get into a meditation routine. I have tried at various times, but have never been able to find a pattern that worked. Finally, a few weeks ago my wife suggested I meditate before going to bed. I had never tried it just before going to sleep. Her hope was that it would allow me to sleep better. And it has, usually. Just 10 min., sitting quietly, clearing my mind had made a big difference in my sleep. Now, I sometimes sit for 15 min. or even 20 min. In the afternoons instead of trying to take a nap I sit and clear my mind. It is as refreshing as a nap, and a whole lot easier to arrange to do.

After meditating, I decided I wanted to read some. My mind was still too active. I needed some sort of distraction, something to get me off my work. I wanted a relaxing book to read. Science fiction. That usually does the trick for me. Unfortunately, I could not find a new book to read on. In the end, I pulled down my old copy of the book I have not read for decades: Dune, by Frank Herbert.

I was very much taken by this book when I first read it as a teenager. I even marked up paragraphs that were meaningful to me. It turns out this copy is that copy that I have marked up decades ago. On page 15 was the following paragraph that I had highlighted:

"I must not fear. Fear is the mind-killer. Fear is the little death that brings total obliteration. I will face my fear. I will permit it to pass over me and through me. And when it has gone past I will turn the inner eye to see its path. Where the fear has gone there will be nothing. Only I will remain."

As I read this, all the tension left my body. My mind cleared. It was as if an alien that had been wrapped around my head, smothering my mind was suddenly gone. For the first time in days, my mind felt refreshed. It was remarkable.

I read the passage again, and again.

In the middle of the night, when I woke up thinking about work, I repeated the passage and my mind cleared, and I fell back to sleep.

Wow!

It has been a week since last Saturday, January 15, and this passage continues to clear my mind of worry.

Looking back over the last four months in this new job, I see how it has put me in a chaotic space, especially this quarter. Looking at it from the Tipu Aki leadership model (http://www.tipuake.org.nz/tipu\_life\_cycle.php), I am in the soil, in the undercurrents, in the place of chaos and opportunity where new ideas can germinate, where new possibilities can arise. Over these months I have been consciously using my sensing to explore this space with many experiments. What ideas resonate with others? What grading rubrics do students understand? How do other teachers deal with group work? What do students think of the type of group work that has been done in their courses here? And so on, and so on.

I love this exploration. I love the plethora of ideas, and the chance to experiment with them. I love to focus on teaching, I'm making a difference in people's lives. A providing distinctions and models of action that help students be more effective in their jobs and their lives in general.

Now my goal is to do this with a whole lot less stress. To be active in the present, aware of the past, with concern for the future.

As James Bach so nicely put it in pages 134 and 135 of his book “Secrets of a Buccaneer-Scholar: How-Education and the Pursuit of Passion Can Lead to a Lifetime of Success", it is very important to make sure that your expectations are low, and your aspirations are high. If you do not meet your expectations, you are worried. If you exceed your aspirations, you are bored. The space between your expectations and your aspirations is the place in which you are engaged, with a chance of happiness. So make sure that there is a large space between your expectations and your aspirations.

I came across this concept last September, when James's brother gave me a copy of his book. Now I continually assess my expectations and aspirations. In particular, I need to continually assess my expectations and make sure that they are realistic, for it is far too easy for me to slip my expectations toward my aspirations. Which puts me into my worry space. Which increases my stress beyond the good level.

It is hard to change old habits.

Uid 360

Saturday 15th January

This entry being done on a Saturday reminds me how much teaching we now do on Saturdays. Although I was not teaching this week end I do teach at least one Saturday a month, and for the next two months it will be two a month. We seem to be teaching more on Saturdays now, partly because our post-grad courses have increased, also because students on these courses are finding it difficult to get released from work to attend university, and partly because of the emphasis on using the university buildings efficiently.

Saturday teaching has a disadvantage in that it can mean missing social activities but it has advantages in terms of the quality of the learning and teaching experience. Because it is a week-end I find we all feel more relaxed and tutors and students are all in this context together – giving up social time for a shared purpose. Also because catering facilities are limited it can involve bringing food to share and this can engender a feeling of sharing in a group, a bonding together, a lessening of power differences between staff and students and a ‘comfortable’ environment which can enable a higher level of challenge and risk in learning.

I take more risks and do more exciting activities in my teaching on Saturdays, partly because of the nature of the students who are highly motivated and engaged, and partly because of the environment created in the group. The university does not let staff give food to students on the grounds of health and safety, but members of staff generally agree that wrapped chocolates are not ‘food’ and students can bring everything else. The idea of creating a comfortable learning environment as part of good teaching is something I believe in strongly, but as far as food is concerned there are issues with regulations and systems that seem unrelated to thinking about an environment for our core business of teaching.

This is also the case with our new marking systems – which are very good as systems but are not linked in any depth to learning and teaching. What worries me is that as we enter difficult times we will have more controlling systems and less attention paid to what matters about learning and teaching in relation to what happens in the classroom. A number of members of staff are being told to spend less time on preparing for teaching – the idea that you can prepare a stimulating learning experience for an hour with an hour’s preparation is, of course, bizarre.

Today I read two academic articles on learning and teaching, one of which I will send to a colleague as it relates to an area of interest in her teaching. One of my approaches in L&T is to try to find out what interests people and link them up or send them relevant material. I also started doing some marking today as there is an increasingly short deadline for return of work. I would like to be able to have tutorials with all the students as I return the work but there is no time. I have read a lot on giving appropriate feedback so I worked hard to give explanations of why something was good or how it could be altered. This took about three and a half hours.

I think that L&T in HE can take over your life! Certainly I don’t find it possible to contain it within ‘working hours’ but I do enjoy it. Teaching is where the real excitement and learning is. Learning for me that is – hopefully for the students! We need to hold on to this in these uncertain times. Saturdays give one the time to stand back, prepare, read round the subject - this includes newspapers and often there is something that relates to a topic I am teaching. As far as I am concerned L&T is the most important thing I do.

Uid 361

Marking dissertations 3hrs

Uid 362

As it was a Saturday, I tried not to do too much university related work. I did look through my notes for my Monday's lecture and started to read one of the texts I'm teaching next week but most of the time was spent catching up on the household jobs that I don't have time to do during the rest of the week.

Uid 367

There are two main focal points for today's work:

\* Work on the conference web page for ITiCSE 2011 (http://www.iticse2011.tu-darmstadt.de/)

\* Work on the materials for the CS 1 lecture starting in April

At first glance, it may seem ludicrous to work on the slides for a lecture that starts almost exactly 8 weeks from today. However, given the extent of the slides - about 1,200 in total -, and the amount of minute details that have to be changed to make the slide materials easier to understand, it is really a LOT of work that cannot be started to early. Apart from that, the Moodle course for the semester also has to be set up, which provides additional work - greatly reduced by being able to import last term's course, but still enough work!