Surveys for Monday 15 November 2010

Uid 11

Recovering from an operation on my back to relieve pressure on the sciatic nerve in my right leg. The symptoms for this had got so that I could not stand for more than 10 - 20 minutes without being in pain, which has made lectures a bit of a challenge!

Still working on email from home, mind you - but I need to watch when I do that, as the strong painkillers affect my cognitive capacity! I \*\*should\*\* have 4-5 weeks completely off work, but my courses would completely fall to bits if I did, and the student experience that the Management go on about so much would be severely compromised. Luckily, I have managed to get decent cover arranged (by paying willing and able, very competent part-timers - but they may not be here in future, as the University seeks to cut costs, and gain "efficiencies"), so I can do marking and module leader role remotely - but it is quite tiring, so need to pace myself.

Finding this survey useful already - I have got out of dreading Fridays, but it does seem a drastic solution! Next term, I hope to be interviewed for a new post to stay on the same salary grade, but that - along with increasing workloads and increasing demands - is another obstacle the Management are putting in the way of improving the staff experience and morale......

Another 5 years of this shit to come. I must admit I am within sight of retirement, as I reckon I have at most a decade's worth of fight against these barbaric inanities left within me.

Uid 12

Once again playing catch up on the diary. Missed that it was the 15th yesterday altogether. Seemed to be rushing all day- getting dog to vet in the morning, sorting out plumbers (who chose probably the worst week to decide they could replace the bathroom - but since we have waited 4 months for them to be free, we didn't want to turn them down!), corporate meetings representing line manager (late!), sorting out staffing changes because of funding cuts, then home to more plumbing. Spent the evening "relaxing" writing my Professional Review forms as I haven't had a chance to do that at all and the discussion with my boss is on wednesday. Teaching? None yesterday. But the corporate meeting was all about student experience - what we need to do to improve NSS scores. Interesting that as far as I could tell there were no "teaching" academics round the table and only one student rep. Lots of action planning and statistics. But will it make a genuine difference to the student experience? And how practical are the proposals for academics? Perhaps these discussions are going on at Faculty level but still left with a feeling that those who are perhaps most able to influence NSS results in either direction - teachers - are missing from the conversation.

Uid 13

I started out the day sitting in on parts of two colleague's classes. I'm teaching an elective CS2 for non-CS majors, so I made a pitch in each of the CS1 sections for non-majors, to encourage them to take the second class. It was fun to sit in on another teacher's class for a bit (until my pitch-time was up). It was interesting to see what techniques he used for encouraging student discussions, and I enjoyed discussing with the second teacher what she had planned for the day. We do that very little, discussing our teaching plans and strategies.

I got back to my office in time to do a little email before a faculty meeting. Government funding is decreasing (again), and research centers are being coalesced to deal with it.

Another 30 minute email break, then a conference call to discuss CSed Week. I'm on the Steering Committee, so we discussed the website and the "pledge" system. I tried the pledge system, and broke it. I spent some time in the afternoon helping the technical staff figure out what went wrong.

I met with an undergraduate who wanted to work with me. She's a first semester Computational Media students who wants to do Web design -- but she's never designed a website, so had no portfolio to review. I told her I might call her later.

Never finished the email load before I had to head home to feed and transport children. I got another 40 email done that night before bed.

Uid 14

Awakened a few minutes before my 6:45 alarm by my 3-year-old. Reminded him that he's not supposed to get out of his room until 7. Alarm went off, snooze once, then up.

Regular morning routine: email, Google Reader, Facebook, and my daily Web comics.

7:20: My 10-month-old awakes, but my wife is still in bed. I pick him up out of his crib and find that he is warm and moist through a diaper and two layers of pajamas. At least it's warm, so it's fresh. I take him to the bathroom and set him on the training toilet and send my 3-year-old to ask my wife it putting the smaller one right in the tub is the right idea. He returns with positive confirmation and tells me he wants to join in, so rather than getting myself physically and mentally ready for work, I'm watching two boys in the tub. It is fun, though.

On campus at 8:00am. Ran into a colleague from Maths in the stairwell, give him some ribbing about lack of a winter jacket and a full beard. (It was the first seasonably cold morning here after a warm spell.) We discuss the "preview day" we both attended on Saturday---an event for prospective students---and the new format that Admissions adopted for this one. We agreed that having 8-10 professors in one room with a group of students in an open-format Q&A was probably a mistake. He didn't seem to see it as quite the waste of time that I did, however, but by that point we had gotten to our floor and parted ways.

8:30-10:00 College Curriculum Committee, of which I am the chair. We look at my department's revisions as well as two others. Everything passes, with just some minor edits required. I don't mind this committee: I feel like curricular structures are something I understand, and the associate dean hand-picks the membership, so we all get along. I give an update about the university-wide task force I am on, and one of the faculty on the curriculum committee tells me that she feels better about any committee knowing that I am on it. I deflect this a little, as I generally don't take well to public praise. I think I said, "I really just focus on two things: drinking my coffee and approving things by acclimation." She repeated what she said again, and emphasized that she really meant it, so I thanked her. I'm a junior faculty member, and it makes me a little nervous to think that I might be doomed to administration. I posted this on Facebook, and one of my graduates from last year commented that it was "the curse of competence."

10-11. Work on a flier for a regional conference for which I am publicity chair. This is another thing I don't really mind doing, but it feels like busy work. \*Someone\* has to do it, though, and it's for the good of the community. I did it last year too, so this year is mostly just editing --- not redesign, like last year. However, as I type this now, I am reflecting on how this is significantly different from the college curriculum committee. On that committee, I feel like I am applying my scholarly knowledge for the betterment of the university. As publicity chair for a regional conference, I'm just a guy trying to help the event happen, but it has nothing to do with my particular expertise.

11:00. Research meeting starts. The team comprises an English faculty member, two CS undergraduates, and me. We spend about 35 minutes discussing the project, intermixed with my colleague's adventure at a very nice restaurant that my wife and I happen to like, as well as a little discussion about what "digital humanities" means.

11:35. I did not pack a lunch and we have research meetings until 2, so I ask the guys if they want to order out or go get a quick lunch. Neither has brought a lunch, and one says, "I always enjoy our lunch adventures, so let's go out." This is nice, because it shows that we have a real camaraderie, that they are comfortable working with me --- which I knew anyway, but it is still good to hear. We get a quick lunch on campus, where we talk some work and some play. A little bit of complaining about things outside our control, too: one of the guys is really disappointed with his on-campus job, mostly because of the co-workers, and he's considering going back to his other position, which is completely unrelated to his major but where he likes the people and doesn't feel like he's leeching unearned money.

12:10, back in the research meeting room, and we get to work. Collaboratively we find a Javascript error in a JSP page that should have been obvious, but wasn't. Worse, the way way found it should have been the first thing we checked, but we all acknowledged the oversight.

We break into working on individual tasks after some more collaboration. I need a little break so I jump onto Reader to see what's new, and I find Matt Welsh's blog post (volatile and decentralized) about how he's leaving Harvard for a fulltime position at Google. I don't know Welsh from Adam, but I got hooked on his blog many months ago, and I had gotten too look at him as a kindred spirit: a young faculty member, excited to do research and work with students, and to build systems. He observes, in his post, that working fulltime at Google allows him to follow his primary passion---building systems---well beyond what he could do in the confines of academia. This chews at the back of my brain all day. I keep asking myself if I would be happier in industry, where I don't have to deal with some of the stupidity of higher education, where I could really hone my system-building skills, and I could still potentially give conference talks, training sessions, work with new hires, etc.? I try not to think about it too much, but that almost just makes it worse.

2:00 Game Programming Class. I love this 2-3pm block. My students show up in one of two rooms, and I alternate where I show up. Regardless of where I am, they have their Scrum-style "daily" stand-up meetings. I listen in but don't intervene. Then they get back to work on the project, and usually someone comes and gets me because he or she needs some advice. Today, it was a mundane Eclipse problem. This is a great project-oriented experience, and we're doing a project that should see statewide release when it's done. I feel like a real "guide on the side," and I think most of the students really dig it. My only doubt about the class came from my very recent reading of "How People Learn," and I do wonder about how much doing-with-understanding is happening. I am not quite done with the book yet, but I look forward to reading my past writings about the class in the context of the book's ideas and seeing where it falls. I may ask the students to write essays after the end of the semester about what they learned, as an assessment of the class, but I won't ask them to do it for credit. One of the agreements we all had at the start of the semester was what they would get graded on, and it's all project performance and team commitment.

2:50-3:12. A little down time. Catch up on mail, reader, facebook, buzz. Find the "growing changing learning creating" blog from my colleague in English via either Reader or Buzz, I don't remember which. It's right in line with the work I'm doing now for the Task Force on the Future of Education, so I leave it unread for later exploration. I send the link to the other Task Force members, too.

3:12-4. Polish up the flier and send it to the conference planning committee for their review. Design handouts for a workshop on learning that I'm giving for Student Affairs tomorrow.

4pm. Watch Unskippable as a break, then go back to Welsh's blog post again, reading the comments on his post. They were interesting, and they made me acknowledge to myself that I need to define for myself what makes me happy. I think I am happy here. I do like working with my students, but I don't like working with many of my colleagues, and I do wish I could trade a lot of the wasted time for time to practice building things. Even as I am thinking this, I wonder if I am deluding myself.

4:10 or so. I try to print the handouts for tomorrow, but the printer is out of toner. Administrative coordinator is gone for the day, and student worker doesn't have a clue what to do. I go down to the undergraduate lab to print it there, then realize I don't have the PDF accessible there. Back to my office, upload the file to google docs. Back to the lab, and when I open Google Docs, it's just not there. Frustrated, I remember that there's an ssh client on these windows boxes, so I ssh to my Linux workstation and copy the file here. Open it up with Acrobat Reader, and it turns out I cannot send the job to the printer. When they configured the room originally, faculty could not even log in due to oversight. I bet they forgot to give faculty print permissions when they updated the configuration. I email a request to the chair and sysadmin that this be remedied someday, then send the PDF to Student Affairs, asking them to print it for me.

4:35. Back in the office, hoping to come home. Contract faculty member comes by, kvetches about another faculty member. This person is also chair of a curriculum committee on which I serve, and we discuss recent events along these lines. The committee hasn't met face-to-face, but we're slowly getting our work done.

4:50. Back to trying to wrap things up and go home. Department chair comes in to talk, mostly business. I am surprised to hear him acknowledge that his GA is using better teaching methods than he is, and that he is now, in a sense, shamed into having to adopt some better practices. The GA had been tracking performance due to his own sense of inadequacy, but he found students in his section were doing significantly better than the chair's. The chair is going to incorporate more small-group discussion and active learning methods as a result. Win! I hope that my influence on this GA's undergraduate years is at least partially a factor, because this would imply that I can have cultural impact just by doing an honest good job --- something I hope is true both for my professional and my spiritual life, for what that's worth.

5:10. The chair leaves and I'm hoping to head out, but I remember --- seeing a note I left for myself this afternoon --- that I need to email my Tuesday class and design an assignment for them. I decide to ask them to write a reflection, due Thursday, on the code reviews we're going to do tomorrow. This will be something new for all of us, and I write the assignment to be explicitly metacognitive with respect to students' evaluating the aspects in which they were confident and in which they felt nervous or ignorant. This is influenced by my reading of "How People Learn" and considering how I will reorganize this class next semester. (New class, never offered before, rather open-ended syllabus.)

5:25 or so. Heading home. Bump into ex-neighbor and chair of a communications department on the way out. We share stories about being overwhelmed with service work. He suggests a single assessment method for everything on campus --- I quip that it should just be, "In your opinion, did it work?"

Around 6:30. Check email on mobile device, see question from a student that I cannot answer without a real workstation, so I boot up and handle it.

8:00. The boys are in bed. I forward an email to the speaker chair for the regional conference planning committee regarding an speaking invitation sent to a colleague. Colleague? Maybe --- we've talked a few times. It's a funny word.

Read the "growing changing learning creating" in a bit more detail. It makes me think that I should get to work prototyping ideas for my Future of Education Task Force, but I'm just too tired to commit to that now.

I get an email from a student with several questions whose answers should be perfectly clear. I answer somewhat snarkily. I'm tired, but moreso, I'm peeved at this student group. This is all about material they were supposed to turn in last Thursday. Their previous request for clarification was answered by sending them a link to the forum where the question had been answered last Tuesday. This new email starts by telling me that they had not checked their email so did not see that. I guess it's possible, but this is the same group that ignores direct commands. Making the matter worse, their a team of all foreign students, non-native English speakers. I'm tired of cutting them any slack for that, though. Yes, we need to be culturally sensitive, and I know I talk fast, but not checking email or the class forum at least once a day when you know assignments and clarifications are sent that way? Not knowing the difference between a repository and Google Docs when we spent a week on distributed version control, had past assignments on it, and they were supposed to have set it up for their projects four weeks ago? This is the kind of crap that gets me riled up and makes me think I should follow Welsh out to Google.

Watch some awful TV for about an hour. I wish comedies were funnier. Some shows I feel like I have an obligation to watch since I've watched them for so long, and some episodes are absolutely hilarious. However, more often than not, when I watch TV, I just feel like I wasted time. At the same time, I'm too tired at the end of the day to do anything significant. I make so many mistakes it feels like it's not worth trying.

But, as I said on Facebook earlier today, if the worst thing that happens is that I'm inconvenienced by printer configurations, then my life is pretty good.

Uid 17

Daily Activity Log

Monday 15 November 2010

Our programs are only now beginning to recover from the decade-long enrollment slump since the dot-com bust. We have been scrambling in various ways for the last decade to build up our enrollments. We have created non-major courses and new majors, we have had outreach events, we have done most every conceivable thing to address students at every point in the pipeline. This is particularly important to us because our campus allocation of TAships (and also faculty positions) depends on our enrollment levels, and at present the Provost thinks we're not pulling our weight.

Our campus has a well-developed program for undecided/undeclared majors. While we're not like smaller schools where students are forbidden to declare a major for a year or two, we do encourage students to participate in our undecided/undeclared program, which provides them with glimpses into the many disciplines and programs on campus. One event is a "major fair," at which students can chat in very small groups with faculty representing programs from across campus in a format rather like speed dating. This event is tonight, from 5:15 to 6:45. That's later than any of my carpool partners wish to stay, so I had to drive by myself; this means that I got up at 4:30 a.m. to leave around 5:00 so I could avoid heavy traffic. As a morning person, I enjoy doing this on occasion. It makes me feel virtuous and it gives me the chance to get some work done in my office when it's quiet and nobody's around.

I stopped for a medium-sized nonfat latte (my coffee-house drink, when I don't make my own tea at home); I stopped by my carpool partner's house to drop off the parking permit for her to use later in the day (we're provided with a handful of one-day permits to use on days that carpooling doesn't work out). Then I drove to campus. (I've gone back to listening to books on tape, because the news has gotten depressing again.)

At the office, I worked through my recent Email and my RSS feeds on technical and political/news subjects. I also started writing out a detailed solution to a lab problem that my class had difficulty with. My intention was to pass it out in class the next day, so they could study how it was done. As it worked out, I also used it as the basis for a quiz question. Talk about code reuse!

Since I had to be on campus today, a day when I don't have recurring scheduled events because I need to keep it free for my systemwide committee meetings, I decided to offer my students an all-day office hour. They rarely show up to my scheduled hours (which I attribute neither to their comfort with the course material nor to my appearing unwelcoming; I think it's because they see me in class on Tuesday/Thursday and they see the TA and lab tutors on Monday/Wednesday/Friday, so they're never more than a few hours from contact with the course). But still, I have the sense that some people in the class are struggling, so I thought it would be helpful to make myself available, 9:00 to 5:00.

About a dozen people (out of 45 enrolled) showed up. They wanted to hear about binary search trees, machine-level programming, how to navigate multipage programs, local definitions, and high-order functions. One group of two overlapped with another group of three; otherwise people came individually. They seemed to leave satisfied.

At 5:15, a colleague and I drove across campus to the student center, the venue of the major fair. In about four 15-minute sessions, we talked one-on-one or two-on-two about our six different computing majors with a total of five students (and, in one session, just to each other). We weren't the worst wallflowers---faculty from other disciplines were alone for even more sessions. Again, it was good to talk individually to students, although I wouldn't say this was the most effective use of faculty time. I spoke with one student who could barely articulate any questions; we spoke with another who said major was English, she wasn't feeling challenged, and she looked forward enthusiastically to taking CS 1 next quarter. That was a delightful surprise.

After the event, I drove my colleague home. Like many of my colleagues, he lives in the faculty enclave across the street from campus. (Real estate prices are so high near campus that the university bought acres of land for this purpose. The deal is that faculty can buy houses there at an affordable price, but they must sell back to the university when they leave---though not when they retire---for a price determined by the change in consumer price index. It provides convenient, affordable housing at the cost of losing out on the appreciation in value of one's real estate. That used to be a more serious consideration than it is today.) He gave me a slice of chocolate pecan pie he had baked.

Then I drove home and started to write the weekly quiz for my class the next morning. I got it planned out, but I decided to go to sleep and finish writing it out in the morning.

Uid 21

6:20 a.m. woke up andread science fiction in bed

6:40 a.m. alarm went off, got out of bed, ate breakfast while reading

Popular Science

7:10 a.m. showered, got dressed

7:30 a.m. drank tea and read more Popular Science

8:00 a.m. approved comments on blog, read e-mail

8:15 a.m.-9:10 a.m. updated software on laptop (very slow download: whose idea

was it that updates should involve downloading 632.9 Mbytes?)

8:15 a.m. folded and put away towels

8:20 a.m. started new load of laundry

8:25 a.m. plungered toilet

8:30 a.m.-8:45 a.m. replied to blog comments

8:45-8:55 a.m. read e-mail

8:55-9 a.m. packed bike panniers for work

9:10-9:21 a.m. backed up laptop and read e-mail

9:21-9:30 a.m. partial update of profile for Round Table Group

9:30-9:35 a.m. rearranged paint cans in garage for easier access to bike

9:35-10:07 a.m. bike commute to work (somewhat faster than usual, as I

was feeling the need to gain some time and get some exercise.

I did not do as much musing as I usually do, but did think

about some blog posts I could do about bike planning and

policy on campus.

10:07-10:18 a.m. checked e-mail (only 2 messages in half an hour!),

wiped off excess sweat from bike commute, washed out tea mug,

checked department cork board for new, expired, or

inappropriate messages (a couple of marginal ones that will

expire in a couple of days, but nothing that needed to be

cleaned off today), made tea, updated Share Project time log

10:18-10:38 a.m. responding to student who was injured in a car

accident, trying to reschedule her class presentation.

Unfortunately, a later presentation depends on her

presentation, so we can't just reschedule, but need to swap

topics with another student, if we can find one willing to

present on short notice.

Took interrupt by a grad student who needs to turn in a short

proposal for his oral exam.

10:38-10:46 Caught up with the TAGFAM and TAGPDQ mailing lists (which

I separate out from the rest of my e-mail)

10:46-11:01 discussed the new oral exam with another member of the

grad committee, trying to reach consensus on who the examiners

were, who was responsible for scheduling, and so forth

11:01-11:11 started setting neural net training for a computational

experiment in protein design. Got as far as choosing 3 sets

of data for inputs, and found Makefile that needs to be modified.

11:11-11:42 interupt, 1st year grad student seeking advice on lab

rotations and choice of tracks within the grad program

11:42-12:06 setting up neural net training for computational experiment

12:06 file server for file system where neural net files are goes down

for scheduled maintenance (which I forgot about). I can't

start new processes, read e-mail, or eidit files, but I still

have my browser open, so I can read blogs 12:06-12:20

12:20-12:30 walk to class, buying a bag of peanut M&Ms from vending

machine on the way.

12:30-1:42 senior design project class, runs 2 minutes over

Arrange for swapped presentation for student who was hit by a car.

First half of class is presentation by 2 students, second half

is explanation of team-charter assignment (due next Monday).

1:42-1:54 talk in hall with one project group that is concerned about the

scope of their project

1:54-2:01 walk to next class, buying a bagel and topping up teacup on

the way.

2:01-3:15 teach class: deriving global and local alignment algorithms

for affine gap costs. This is the core material for the

course, so I try to get the students really involved in

understanding where the recurrence relations come from and how

the initial conditions can be determined. Even though class

runs five minutes over, I don't get to the traceback

algorithm, which is the trickiest part and which students get

wrong most often in the programming assignments. That will be

the first half of Wednesday's lecture.

3:15-3:20 answer questions after class for students

3:20-3:30 fill out time log and eat bagel.

3:30-3:50 update alignment algorithm assignment for this year and put

on web

3:50-5:20 lab group meeting (together with a colleague: results of MS

thesis work for one of her students---went over how to present

results and some computational experiments to redo to get a

cleaner final analysis)

5:20-5:28 short meeting with grad student, reporting timing results on

a computational geometry algorithm

5:28-5:30 given proposal for oral exam by grad student.

5:30-6:20 reading and responding to e-mail

6:20-6:38 taling with colleague about curriculum leave plans for next year

6:38-6:50 looking for (and not finding) how much sabbatical leave

credit I've accumulated

6:50-6:52 catching up on ap-bio mailing list

6:52-7:00 sent e-mail proposing specific examining committees for the

oral exams

7:00-7:10 turned off lights and closed doors for grad student labs,

packed up and put on jacket, helmet, and gloves

7:10-7:21 rode bike home (yes, it is 3 times faster than the ride to

work---it's a 4% grade on average for 3 miles)

7:21-7:22 transferred laundry to dryer

7:22-7:27 updated share project time log

7:27-7:29 checked e-mail

7:29-7:31 set up job to redo failed portion of weekly cron job

reported in e-mail

7:31-7:50 eat dinner

7:50-8:11 load dishwasher, wash some pots by hand, clean countertops,

8:11-8:18 replied to e-mail about composition of oral exam committees

8:18-8:30 wrote a blog post and scheduled it for release

8:30-8:35 read on-line comics (Doonesbury, xkcd, PhD comics,

Doonesbury) The PhD comics today

(http://www.phdcomics.com/comics/archive/phd111210s.gif)

seemed particularly apropos---I'm afraid I identify a

lot with Prof. Smith (I even look a bit like him) and

the last panel "You get e-mails from him at 2am, 4am,

and 6am, which means he never sleeps. (this one is

probably true)" certainly rang a bell.

8:35-8:54 read newspaper on-line

8:55-9:17 watched "Whose Line is it Anyway?" with family

9:17-9:27 situps, take pills, remove laundry from dryer, update

Share Project time log, read several e-mail messages

about oral exams

9:27-9:54 watched another "Whose Line is it Anyway?" with family

9:54-10:08 cleaned frying pan, changed sheets on son's bed,

folded and put away laundry from dryer

10:08-10:10 read more email about oral exam committees

10:10-11:50 finished editing Makefiles to set up job for training

neural net, started training

11:50-11:55 read and replied to email from students about senior design project

11:55-midnight updated schedules on class web pages, updated

Share Project time log

12-12:35am read a few blogs and left a few comments

12:35-12:40 read 4 or 5 more e-mail messages from students

12:40-12:45 brushed teeth and went to bed

12:45-1 am read science fiction

Uid 22

- Woke up several times during the night, the coughing isn’t as bad as before but it still wakes me up 3-4 times during the night

6:00 Alarm went off, celebrating my 5th week of being sick today. Hopefully I’m getting better now - stopped taking that medicine that prevented me from driving the car

6:30 Time for the kids to get up

7:10 Actually managed to make lunch for myself and take it with me

7:39 Off we go

7:57 Unusually long queues today, took perhaps 10 minutes to pass something that usually takes less than a minute

8:20 At the office

8:25 First cup of tea, checking the email. Father-in-law happy for the pictures of the grandkids otherwise just boring emails

8:46 Fiddled around with a script

9:07 Time to prepare tomorrows lecture - Programming Languages

9:37 Slightly depressed, I have a ju-jutsu session tonight but I can’t participate ... once again ... it has now been 5 weeks since the last time and this is getting really depressing - my normal “dose” is 3-4 times/week.

11:15 Set up syncing of text documents between my Mac and my iPhone

11:30 Lunch

11:50 More preparations

14:07 Asked former teacher of the course for some info

16:05 Drove down to the Dojo to give daughter her Gi

16:15 Was asked to manipulate a picture I’ve taken to get better colors and a cleaner background, will be used for ads for our club

17:45 On my way home with daughter and wife

18:25 Helping out in preparing dinner

18:45 Dinner

19:30 Watching the news

20:45 Preparing lecture

21:00 Watching the news and preparing lecture

22:15 Played with a new program for my iPhone

23:30 Sigh, tomorrows lecture isn’t going to be as good as I would like (are they ever) but I need some sleep

Uid 23

Monday of Week 6. A new intake of distance study MA students starts today, so I've been busy up-loading welcome messages on Blackboard and contacting new personal tutees.

Faculty exam board this morning - we have several 'problem' students,including one with major health issues, poor kid. I have been trying to work out what is in her best interestes - being kicked out so she can get on with her life (and not clock up more debt), or being allowed to start the 2nd year again on another programme she probably isn't interested in either? Her parents are the people e-mailing about this, not her - what does she really want, I wonder?

In touch with several PhD students today - checking reports of supervisions, and a revised up-grade proposal (with new research tools) and Ethics Committee forms for one student working abroad. Have e-mailed her my comments, but it is so much easier to discuss these things face-to-face...

Received an e-mail from a Higher Up saying our Departmental response to a major Programme Review is not appropriate - too much whingeing about lack of staff, it seems, in a public forum. But where else can we say these things?? Sigh - I shall neutralise it...

Getting rather fed up of having things done to us, but with no outlet for our reactions - no one ever comes to talk to us about changes, but we have to implement them. The latest was finding out on Friday that we have to offer 'the opportunity of work placments to all undergraduate students' in credit- bearing modules and also embed Career work in other modules, also for credit. I think we can do it in our discipline, but what about less applied ones? Is this a raising of the skills of academic staff or a denial of them? Why did no one consult academic staff on this major change(have asked around and it's a surprise to everyone I've spoken to on the academic staff).

Getting on with my research project inbetween thinking about other people's careers! Wish grounded theory were less messy!!

Uid 24

Monday, November 15, 2010 --- A day in the life of a CS faculty

It's Monday, but I was still up too late last night getting things

ready for the week. I got to bed at 12:40 AM, and had a hard time

falling asleep - too many thoughts were still whirling around my head.

Nonetheless, I woke up this morning around 6:50 feeling OK. I shaved and

showered, and after a quick breakfast I settled in to have my first

cup of coffee while reviewing peer evaluations for a group project. I

was happy to finish that before needing to head out at around 8:20.

My 9:00 AM CS1 lecture went OK, but not quite as smoothly as I had

planned it out. Throughout this week we're discussing primitive types

(just int and boolean to start), operators on those types, and control

structures.

Once I got back to our building I chatted a bit with a colleague who

just lost his elderly mother. He was doing well. She had been ill

for some time, so her passing was not unexpected.

My 11:00-noon office hour lasted until 12:45, when I scarfed down a

quick lunch before running off to teach by CS2 class. The CS2 class

was fairly lively today - how fun! We were discussing removal from a

binary search tree, and they were answering questions readily and, for

the most part, correctly. They were a little stumped when I asked

them how they could prove that the node that contains the smallest

value in a BST has an empty left child. With a little prompting they

suggested that this could be proved by contradiction; we then together

constructed (informally) a proof. That made my day :-)

After class I met with a student who had some questions about the

current CS1 lab. We reviewed (again) parameters and arguments, and

the role of a Proxy in the lab. By the end of the session I think we

made progress, but I don't know that she will retain it all in the

long term. I expect she will return with more questions - which is

fine: that's how learning works!

I felt the presentation in my 3:00 PM CS1 ran a bit more smoothly than

in the 9:00 AM CS1, but my morning class was more interactive and

lively (odd, given that it was at 9:00 on a Monday morning).

After class I met with some students from our local ACM chapter to

help with an outreach project. We are taking robots into a local

middle school, and we had to finalize what we were going to have the

kids do. They are learning how to program the robots (in Java) to

navigate an obstacle course. This week they learn how to use some

infrared range sensors. We had been planning on using sonar sensors,

but one of them appears to be broken, so we did some quick

reprogramming.

The outreach meeting ran 45 minutes late, but I made it home to eat

with the family. We shifted piano lessons for everyone to Monday,

because I have a local CSTA chapter meeting to attend tomorrow night.

After practicing a bit more, I took my youngest daughter for our two

lessons at 8:00 PM. While she had her lesson I worked on finalizing

the description of the next lab for CS1 - my TAs had given me some

good feedback on an earlier draft.

After getting home at 9:45 PM, I continued working on the lab

description. For some reason when saving it as HTML not all the

images appeared. After trying to figure that glitch out, I posted the

lab as PDF and went to sleep at 12:45 AM, having already falled asleep

at the keyboard once.

Uid 25

Hectic times. Full-on teaching,which I enjoy enormously, and observing my tutees (who are fulltime early career academics and graduate teaching assistants) grow in confidence is a real privilege. Browne implications for this work rumble on. I have misgivings about making such programmes compulsory;this was done in my institution in 2000 by the then VC (before my time),causing immense resentment which it took a lot of work to row back from.

I am buoyed by the exit evaluations from the cohort which has just completed, which are glowing,and by the fact that more experienced staff increasingly call on us for support,advice,guidance. Off to Chester this afternoon for a two-day conference I have helped organise and which (incredibly,because the all-in fee wsas quite expencsive) appears to have broken even.

Not buoyed at all by the weakest member of our team, who still has not caught on to the fact that being research-active means actually getting stuff published, not having a string of rejected articles. This problem is exacerbated by the fact that this colleague's approach irritates the hell out of the rest of the team and the head of unit,who line-manages all of us,simply does not do anything about it. Heigh ho.

Uid 26

Monday, November 15th Diary

Awoke at 6 am to a sick child. Quickly shuffle the schedule with the husband, then it's off to work at 6:45. Unfortunately the weather is awful, so traffic is dreadful. What is normally a 45 minute drive took 1 hour and 45 minutes today. Which means I missed my 8 o'clock class...the students have long since departed by the time I arrive on campus. And this class, beginning programming, cannot afford another missed class. They took the second test which covers selection, repetition, and simple class writing and the class average was a 58. So I went over the test and gave them a retest. Average on the retest was a 53. These are students who cannot trace or write a very simplified if statement or loop. I obviously cannot pass them on to programming 2, but I don't think I can fail 2/3 of the class either. Now what? And why is this class so different than the rest? The answer may lie with the closed labs...this semester to make workload hours workout, the chair gave me the lecture section but assigned the labs to another instructor. I gave a "schedule" of labs to be taught to the other instructor, but according to the students that's not what he's been doing, he chose a different set of labs that are not well coordinated with what I'm teaching. The students are not getting the reinforcement of the basics in this other set of labs and I believe it's showing up in their test grades. But the real question is what to do now? Do I just ignore the rest of the topics in this course (advanced class writing and arrays) to get them to the basics or just blindly continue forward knowing that 2/3 of the class will fail? And what about the 1/3 of the class who is mastering the material? Don't they deserve the remaining material? If I were someone who didn't care about the students I'd just march forward, but I can't bring myself to do that. Well, I have a couple of days to figure it out...

Of course, the bright side is I have an extra hour of time to accomplish some other things...

So now it's 10:35. I've spent the last 2 hours answer emails and processing change of major forms. Now it's on to grading assignments...

Finished grading one set. Lunch from 12 -1 in my office reading papers.

1 pm assessment meeting. Need to figure out how to tell faculty the granularity needed for assessing course and program outcomes at the next department meeting.

2 pm - meeting with student for advisement.

2:15 - back to grading papers.

4:15 - now sort the papers into piles to return on Wednesday

4:30 - time to leave and pick up carpool

9:00 - log in to process emails and read a paper. Done for the day.

Uid 31

5:10 a.m. Wake up thinking about research projects for next summer.

Get up, use the bathroom, get back into bed and snuggle

with my husband to try to go back to sleep.

5:40 a.m. Husband's alarm clock goes off. He is leaving on his

fifth business trip in 6 weeks. Pick up my bedtime

reading (a light novel) and read while he is in the

bathroom. Chat while he dresses. He remembers

to get the snow shovels down out of the garage rafters,

but forgets to kiss me goodbye.

6:00 a.m. Breakfast, newspaper.

6:45 a.m. Start preparing for 8 a.m. class. I normally prepare the

night before, but put it off today so I could spend more

of the evening with my husband before he left.

7:50 a.m. Walk to campus.

7:57 a.m. Arrive in the classroom and teach class. Almost, but not

quite, make it to the end of the material I had planned.

8:52 a.m. While I am erasing the chalkboard, reflect that if I had

cut off some discussion earlier, I would have had a bit

more time at the end and could have better engaged

students with this last bit of important material. Notice

that a student who had posted a question about this later

material is still packing up; talk with her about the

answer to her question, noting that I will also post a

response on the discussion board for others who might

be interested.

8:57 a.m. Return to my office to check email and prepare for the

next class. Delete spam. Pencil in appointments on my

public calendar. Start writing this document.

9:34 a.m. Finish class prep and decide to spend 15 minutes grading

an assignment I hope to hand back in my 1:15 lab section.

9:55 a.m. To intro class.

10:55 a.m. Return from intro class. Quickly look at email; print an

article; resume grading.

11:38 a.m. Papers to hand back at 1:15 are graded. Make some notes

for revising the assignment next time I give it---it was

a brand new assignment, and could have been a bit more

challenging. Enter the grades online using Blackboard.

11:45 a.m. Walk home for lunch.

1:05 p.m. Back in time for 1:15 lab session. Decide to chat with

groups one-on-one rather than having a whole-class

discussion.

2:10 p.m. Back from lab. Read email and leave for afternoon walk.

3:10 p.m. Arrive back in time for office hours. 3:15 student is

early. Discuss his independent study proposal, which is

due today---I am excited about the independent study,

but the proposal is lousy. Give him feedback for

improvements, though my hopes are not too high. He left

this too close to the last minute.

3:25 p.m. Meet with a pair of 2nd-year women who are taking my

TEC 154 class in the spring and want to know more about

the Technology Studies concentration.

3:40 p.m. A colleague drops by to discuss an agenda item for

this afternoon's faculty meeting.

3:55 p.m. Former advisee, who is working full-time at the college

since he hasn't been able to find a job in computing,

comes by my office. We chat for about 15 minutes about

his prospects for applying to teaching certification

programs with his low GPA, and discussing this with an

education professor. I try to be encouraging without

being unrealistically so; point out my ignorance re: K-12

teaching certification.

4:12 p.m. Independent study student needs his paperwork signed.

Feel bad about rushing former advisee off. Sigh inwardly

as I suggest a few further changes to the special topic

proposal, and sign it anyway.

4:17 p.m. Arrive late to faculty meeting. Make tea anyway.

5:20 p.m. Faculty meeting adjourned. Run into education prof in the

hall; ask him to invite my former advisee to office hours.

Discuss advisee's situation. Run into another colleague

who teaches in Gender, Women's, and Sexuality Studies;

discuss advising loads and students we've had in common.

Discuss points from faculty meeting with her and a few

others passing by.

5:45 p.m. Decide to go back to office to get stuff and go home.

6:00 p.m. Home. Cook dinner for myself.

7:15 p.m. Done with dinner. Decide to clean up thoroughly and go to

bed early, leaving remainder of grading to early tomorrow

morning.

9:10 p.m. Lights out.

Uid 32

It's Monday. The day starts at 4:30AM. All of the emails that collected over the weekend need to be answered. Why is it that an email sent at 5:00 on Saturday afternoon demands an immediate answer whereas an assignment due at noon Wednesday can be submitted at 11:59:59 and that's OK?

Ah well. The email awaits. We start with the first. An assignment is 4 weeks late, can it be submitted now without penalty? Sorry, no. The next - a family emergency may affect work that is not due for 2 days. Excellent. That one is easy, too. Sorry to hear about the emergency, let me know when things calm down and you are ready to submit.. no penalty if turned in in the next 5 days. Student is thrilled. The rest, happily, are listserv emails and can wait.

All the other things that have piled up while I enjoyed the weekend now call.... 2 letters of recommendation (at the end of the day, still not done. maybe tomorrow.. the deadline looms... they are due Weds AM!!), an exam to write (almost done.. and another Weds deadline)... So what did I do?

The summer schedule was finished. Honchoing that many faculty with that many classes and sections and trying to get everyone finished and happy and done on time.. whew! I'm glad I only have my department. After printing out the schedule, I head over to the dean's office to drop it off. Why don't we do this electronically? It could save days of processing time! Not my concern - I wasn't asked and "because we've always done it that way" gets old... A chat with the dean...

.. leads to a grade dispute being handed over. Sigh. A quick read shows the students wants a higher grade, but didn't really say to what. No, you can't go from a "D" to an "A". Too big a leap. The student admits to having mis-read the assignment page and not bothering to do some of the work. This is now my fault. Again. Time to find a happy medium so it appears the vent has been read without sacrificing any classroom mojo. I need to get some facts together, so that can wait until Thursday.

We also talk about some on-campus ceremonies and arts on campus. I'm involved in both, and it's nice to hear that someone is paying attention. I'm trying to make my programs more cross-disciplinary so getting involved with the arts serves two masters.. my right brain and my dean. Both good things.

The advantage to working at a college is I can take classes. I head off to my next class... fortunate in that I can observe a colleague deal with difficult students and a difficult topic. I'm trying hard to be a student in this class, so any reflection on dealing with students like me while only come after the class ends. For now, we soak it in, learn, and try and get better.

Off to grab some lunch. I meet up with my faculty mentor where we talk for an hour or so on the vagaries of college committees. I'm happy to hear that my feelings on the workings of one of the committees is not "newness" speaking.. but my senior mentor feels the same way. Whew! I might be getting a handle on this stuff. Having a mentor outside my department has helped so much.. I learn incredible amounts just sitting and talking with him an hour or two each week.. how to deal with certain types of students, what else can be learned that it isn't just what technical stuff I am working on that day, how to deal with administration & staff and other faculty, etc. Such a blessing. I wish I had this years ago, but it does work so much better having found and nurtured it on my own, without intervention.

After lunch, we work on grading for several hours. It's not very exciting.. the students seem to be getting almost everything. The ones that don't haven't asked any questions (yet) so I need to spend some time on deciding how to reach the quiet ones. What is the best way to get a student to ask questions if they don't yet know they don't understand?

Finally, it's dinner time. I head off to meet with a large group of professionals in my field. We talk a little bit about reaching students earlier (say ... middle school or sooner!) but mostly we simply enjoy each others company and the food.

Time to call it a night.

Uid 34

07:05-08:00 Breakfast and read e-mail: catch up NYT article about Alexandria University in Egypt's rise in THES rankings (basicaly citation rings), and collaborative EPSRC proposal.

08:00-08:20 The three S's (s\*\*t, shave, shampoo)

08:20-08:35 Bus into University

08:35-09:30 Misc admin: post, e-mail tutees etc.

09:30-09:40 Personal Tutee (needed a sense of reality after he'd trashed his own file store - he's only a first year)

09:40-10:30 Preparing first-year lecture course (260) - answers to problems and coursework.

10:30-11:23 Acting HoD work - HoD recruiting in China

11:23-11:30 Final year students' queries

11:30-12:45 First year course - discussion with other lecturer

12:45-13:45 Lunch with MSc external examiner

13:45-14:00 E-mail to potential new lecturer

14:00-14:15 First year course

14:15-14:30 Admin (Equality complaint, UCU Pensions' officer business)

14:30-15:15 Chair MSc Board of Examiners

15:15-16:07 Coffee with colleagues, follow up MSc Board, write note to real HoD

16:07-17:07 Final year lecture

17:17-18:22 First year lecture

18:22-18:30 Acting HoD work - negotiating start dates for a new lecturer round the disastrous changes proposed to USS - he's slowly realising how bad they are

18:30-18:45 Adminstration

18:45-19:00 Arranging tours of campus facilities for another lecturer's course

19:00-22:15 Visit colleague's house, cook & eat dinner, pack computer for repair etc.

22:15-23:15 UCU business as Pensions Officer for the LA

Uid 35

I did not want to get up this morning. I've had almost enough sleep since Friday. But the situation with Bill is really draining me. Bill is my best friend, apart from my wife. And he is dying of cancer. It was only diagnosed about a month ago, and it's all through his body. There's not much hope. The local hospital has not helped; in fact, I'm convinced they have contributed in killing him due to their lack of treatment for the bowel problem he came in to the emergency room for, and their failure to provide him with nourishment for at least two days. A doctor only came to see him once a day, late at night, after seeing about 100 other patients. He hadn't even looked at Bill's chart. I can't believe care is so bad.

I taught my first class at 8. During class I got a call from the wife of a retired colleague. She wanted me to put in a good word for her husband with our department chair. Her husband is volunteering to cover Bill's classes for the remainder of the year. I'm delighted. This retired colleague is a fantastic teacher. And it would do him good to get back in the classroom. He's kind of bored now in his retirement. I have the second section of my class in a few minutes, and then a meeting with a student who has stopped attending. I hope, for her sake, she is dropping. I hope she is not expecting me to teach her several weeks of material in an hour. I'm planning to head to the hospital to visit Bill as soon as I can.

Well, it's now the future, relative to the previous 2 paragraphs. That student is not dropping, but wasn't quite expecting me to teach her everything in an hour. But then I learned that Bill was going into hospice that afternoon. That pretty much finished the day for me. I rode with him in the ambulance, and spent a lot of time with him and his wife.

Uid 38

Met with an Erasmus exchange visitor from Finland who is here for a week and will be doing a guest lecture for my programming class while he is here. We corresponded previously by email to find a topic which would fit in with the teaching plan for the module, and spent some time today finalising the details and discussing the Finnish manager and star midfielder at Kilmarnock football club.

Teaching today consisted of tutorials for my intro to databases module. I've done this module several times, so most of the activities are tried and tested, but this is a new one aimed at scaffolding the use of Peerwise witin the module. This is part of an HE Academy project and I gathered some datat which will be evaluated later. It seemed to go pretty well on the day. My late afternoon tutorial with one of the groups which do this module was a repeat of last week's - no-one turned up at all last week, and the content of this tutorial is pretty important for an assessment this week. I'm probably too soft and should have just let them do the assessment without this preparation since they chose not to attend!

Spent the time in between and most of the evening at home preparing demo material on ASP.NET for a MSc evening class tomorrow. This is not part of my normal workload model, and I get paid per hour for delivering the class in the evening. The amount of preparation which is involved means the real hourly rate is probably not worth the bother. It's at quite a high level and is interesting stuff to teach, though, so it probably is worth it.

Too busy today to think about the implications of the pending reorganisation of the university's structure...

Uid 40

Frosty start with November low sun on the cycle in.

Arrive 9.07

Dropped off the lecturership application forms with the hod..

There were over 90 and I regret volunteering to help shortlist.

After a vain attempt to buy rugby tickets, decided to resist

temptation to catch up on email and focus on sketching out the

argument for my invited journal paper. It is an area close to my heart

and a prestigious opportunity - I want to get it right. After coffee a

change of scene and an hour I think I've cracked it. I have no teaching this

semester,cramming it all in Jan- March, so got to make the most of the time.

Had a good hour of writing but now juices are drying up, so time for a

coffee and a change of activity. Scheduled a couple of meetings the

afternoon to sort out our group's admin/finance structure and to

discuss data for a talk I'll be giving in Munich next week. Feeling a

little tired. Not completely over the jetlag and late nights yet.

Sorted out the odds and end from the PC meeting last week and had a

quick meeting with one of the PhDs. Looks like we're in the end game

with writing up at last. Could not resist a couple of emails to move

our EU bid along.

Went to the gym and after 30 mins rowing my heart rate and watt output

was fine. 5 mins for a sandwich and then a meeting to sort out

admin allocation that went surprisingly well.

Started on the expense claim for my latest trip. Determined not to rack up

credit card interest due to lack of time.

Had a short meeting with another PhD talking over the data for a new

paper. He tells me I have to write yet another letter to go through

the hoops of hiring him as a postdoc. It's crazy the amount of effort

we have to expend to hire overseas people. This guy is outstanding yet

he's treated with suspicion at every step.

Winding down for the day and hope to get things moving on the finance

side tomorrow. We seem to swing between feast and famine and I want a

more long-term view from our finance manager.

As always a feeling I could have squeezed more out of the day balanced

by the fact that there's always tomorrow.

Uid 41

A largely uneventful day, writing off as holiday. Got up (late), went food shopping, unpacked and put away, did some hoovering and other boring housework things before having a nice fry-up to celebrate. Finished the day off with tea, some DVDs and an early night.

Uid 45

Three classes today, and a student coming in to make up a test. Today, I must decide how the student evaluations will be done for my classes. Before, it was always an on-line survey that the students might or might not do (usually did not) but this term we are given the option of a human-administered survey which every student in attendance that day will fill out. This will obviously be a better instrument. But, do I really want that much information funnelled up the ladder to my bosses?

I didn't have to work yesterday (Sunday) as I am caught up with my grading! Yesterday was the first day I actually did not work in the last 3 weeks! I felt positively slothful. Four more weeks of class before Christmas break. Not that I'm counting (hah!)

Uid 46

Up at 4:30 this morning, as I have to complete the first draft of the School's 4-year corporate plan for delivery today. Thought I would get to it over the weekend, but the entire weekend was spent marking the 1st assessed exercise of the course I am teaching.

Brisk morning, about 0C (a little frost on the autos parked in front of my house). Walked the 2 miles to work in the clear, clean air, great way to start what will most likely be a very busy day.

After the usual 60 minutes spent looking over the email that arrived over the weekend and handling the one or two minor letter bombs that arrived via that channel, I turned off my email client and set to work on the Corporate Plan.

As usual, insufficient information provided by my minders above with regards to semantics of the material requested, the centrally held data from which we are to set our key performance indicator targets is woefully incorrect, etc. Spent 4 solid hours attempting to construct a logically-sound Corporate Plan.

Monday afternoons are devoted to supervisory meetings with final year project students and PhD students.

1. M's project to install sensors throughout our building, collect the readings, and provide sophisticated web access capabilities is making good progress; he is not only doing the appropriate reading of related work, but also prototyping bits of code on the sensors and the collectors to form an existence proof that the lowest level can be done. We spent most of the meeting discussing how to achieve time synchronization amongst the collector nodes, and I pointed him at some software that could be easily exploited for pushing the data from the collectors to the system with a RAID array upon which the web server will run.

2. Y's project to design and implement a complex event processing system suitable for the H Project is making slow progress; she seems to have difficulty abstracting from the papers that she has read to an actual implementation. I encouraged her to begin to prototype an extremely simple language (I don't care which one) to start to feel some confidence in her work.

3. S's project, again to design and implement a complex event processing systems suitable for the H Project, is also making slow progress, but for different reasons. Since S did a summer internship with me working on the H Project, he is having difficulty abstracting the CEP system away from the details of the H Project. He, too, has not started prototyping any code, so the same encouragement here.

4. Had my first meeting with M as his 2nd PhD supervisor. The work he did as an undergraduate in the US was outstanding, and I am excited about his prospects here. He is currently spending all of his time reading related literature, and attempting to choose between to general themes for his PhD research. I provided him some literature pointers for one of the themes, and gave him the opportunity to articulate the good/bad points of each theme, at least as he currently understands them.

My weekly meeting with the School Administrator was next. Since we had received a substantial increase in our non-pay budget this year (the Head of College used a very transparent formula based upon research and overall contribution; it makes me wonder why we received so little before the restructuring, when we generated even more contribution; it appears that the faculty dean was forcing us to prop up the rest of the faculty without telling us.), these meetings are substantially easier, since I have money to throw at problems. We are currently attempting to expedite the hiring of two admins, as we are very understaffed in that category.

Packaged the Corporate Plan, as it is, together with a plea to discuss some of the semantic-free concepts to which it refers, and sent it to the Head of College before walking home. Poured myself a large glass of Lirac, sat down to a meal with my wife and shared the events of the day, matched my wits with the students on University Challenge, and turned in early to make up for the early start.

Uid 47

1:00 am Just arrived home after a hectic visit to relatives in the north for a weekend wedding. Grading? Class Prep? Oh well. Better get some sleep.

7:30 am Life was easier when the only person I had to worry about waking up was myself. Now the morning is a rush of trying to wake up three other people, get them fed, make sure they have all their stuff for school together and madly scrambling to get everyone out the door on time. That leaves little time to get my own head together regarding my tasks for the day.

7:55 am Calm before the storm. The house is quiet and I can check my schedule. One class and one meeting on the schedule. So deceptive-looking. That one meeting is on top of another, I haven't prepped the class, haven't graded for tomorrow's courses and will also need to deal with an onslaught of students begging to be added to closed courses.

8:30 am kids are at school, time to start on students trying to get into closed courses…

Okay, best news of the day so far: pulled up the schedule to see how many students were in courses and see the most students in CS II that we've had in several years.

10:00 am finished dealing with the immediate student-into-courses issues and snuck a few minutes to read reviews of our CHI submission. It's a new community for us and I found the reviews really informative. (It's also nice to be at a point in my career where I can care more about the information in the reviews than about whether or not the paper gets accepted.) It's nice to think about research, even if only for a few minutes in the day.

11:00 am Gah. Dean says nobody should give course evaluations before last week, if not last day of course. Some of us point out Peter Seldin's research suggests that it is better to do it no later than 2 weeks before the end of the course. She says she would enjoy seeing that research and wouldn't be surprised but not being consistent will negatively impact some more than others. So we default to the case that will yield the less-relevant and more negative evaluations? Why bother sending us to those chairs workshops if we don't improve practice as a result?

Oh well, managed to prep class while wading through that email burst.

11:30 Getting material ready so I can discuss a draft of an alumni survey with statisticians.

12:25 Just had a relatively quiet hour of advising students and the computer science club, getting updates from faculty on various things going on, and of course getting started on some grading. Now off to class.

3:15 Wow, time flies. Taught class, then directly to a meeting, then answered yet more questions about courses, and wrapped up this thrilling time interval learning from my department secretary why sending a plain white postcard to alumni would not be acceptable (they would simply throw it away she says). I am grateful to people with common sense. The meeting discussed the alumni survey for our program self-study. It was informative and helpful, now I just need time to implement these suggestions so we can get the survey out.

Despite this being a Monday on which I'm tired and hungry, it's actually going pretty well (or at least extremely quickly).

4:15 Working on multiple things at once: student make-up quiz, certifying a graduation, email discussion with research colleagues, event organizing with department secretary. Just gave the student the wrong quiz. Twice. I'm glad she noticed!

And dealing with student schedules. A student just asked to be allowed into a full section at 1 pm. I noted that the 8:30 am section worked for her. She told me she, "doesn't do well with 8:30." When did education and faculty become so little-valued that it is assumed we will accommodate preferred sleeping patterns? (And actually, we would be happy to -- except there are not enough rooms for everyone to teach between 10 am and 2 pm!)

4:35 My children arrive in a rush, settle in to play with some toys. I'm continuing to deal with student schedule issues while also trying to grade.

5:05 Time to get the kids home and ready for their evening sports…

8:20 Sports are done, made supper while the kids showered and now they're eating and then off to bed so they can be up early for their Spanish class before school. Grading and class prep loom for me.

10:20 One set of quizzes graded. Two more homework sets to go…

6:00 am -- fell asleep grading. Woke up at 5:30 and finished the set. That happens more often than I'd like.

Uid 48

Busy day today. Left home 8.00. Degree Ceremony this afternoon and also the start of employability week - an full week of activities to try and get our students to think more about employment.

Spent the morning looking at developing a new support system for students as ours is outdated and is being maintained by technicians using 5 year old technology and does not interface to central systems. This is a 3 year project but will provide some case studies for teaching as well as a new system.

I never seem to do anything just for one reason any more - it has to benefit me in more than one way (ideally 3) before I really want to do it.

Started writing a European bid (due in Feb 2011) with colleagues over lunch time. Lunch is always sandwiches whilst working.

2.00 lecture on widening horizons - try and get the students to think beyond their narrow degree pathway.

Degree Ceremony 3.30 onwards - inspiring speech by VC - hard times ahead but not total doom and gloom.

Good meeting with Assistant Dean 5.30 - 6.30, started to plan ahead instead of fire fighting.

Home by 7.30 - resisted the urge to switch on PC and deal with email backlog.

Fell asleep in front of TV.

Uid 50

While I usually work a \*lot\* over the weekend on course-related issues, I left most of it behind this weekend. I have two toddlers at home, and they've begun having more anxiety about my absence, so it was good to spend some time with the family. (The kids ask me not to go to work these days. It's very sad.)

I did spend some time editing documents and writing up notes as part of a comprehensive overhaul of our curriculum that I'm leading. (We started at the beginning of the summer, and have continued to meet and hash out the details.) The basic shape of the new curriculum has emerged, and we've sorted out staffing issues and frequency of offerings, etc. The bulk of my energies this weekend went into writing up a summary of the changes that can be circulated ahead of a meeting with the full department. (We're a combined Math/CS department, but only the CS faculty have been meeting to discuss changes in the CS curriculum.) We need to make sure the entire department is on board with the revised curriculum, and discuss some issues that will impact the full department like increasing the total number of required courses in CS, and changing some of the math prereq details.

My remaining time this weekend went into assembling some intelligence from across campus about teaching loads in departments that teach labs. We currently get a .5 unit teaching reduction for teaching certain upper-level courses -- a remnant of the early days in the department when math faculty retrained to teach these courses. In practice, our load is 5 courses a year instead of 6, but there are rumblings that the model will disappear soon. This will cause at least two and likely all three of our full-time CS faculty to leave. (We have a fixed pay scale across disciplines that results in \*very\* low salaries for CS. An increased teaching load will be the final straw -- especially since two of the three of us have been here less than two years and can easily find more accommodating departments.) We're considering increasing the length of our labs and trying to "qualify" for the same treatment that lab sciences get: 1.5 teaching units for a course with a lab. Even that isn't keeping some CS faculty happy though.

Finally, we had yet another failure of web services over the weekend. The situation has gotten bad enough that it's really starting to impact our ability to deliver courses, but we're having trouble making that point. This morning there's been lots of discussions and finger pointing about what happened and who was responsible, and a greater sense than usual that we need to push our point until the situation is improved or resolved.

Uid 51

Busy time of year. The students are tired, the staff is tired, and I'm tired. But in 10 days, we get the (American) Thanksgiving holiday, and by this time next month, I'll be grading finals and entering final grades. Then to start the routine all over again by prepping next semesters courses.

Why is it that 10% of your students take up 90% of your time? I have a student that I've tried to reach out to several times as he hasn't appeared in my class for 6-7 weeks and is failing miserably. Of course, I heard from him an hour before the exam on Friday saying he was horribly prepared and wanted to take the exam at another time. He's blown off several meetings with me and has blown off another one today. Why do I keep trying to help students who just won't be helped? Time to concentrate on the 90% of students who care.

On the plus side, I continue to love my freshman seminar class. The students in that class come to class everyday and are enthusiastic about the material and computer science. I'm not sure how I got such a wonderful group, but I'll take it. They actually celebrate when they learn how to program something really cool. It makes me even more enthusiastic about teaching them and I'm willing to put even more effort into prepping for their class.

I was also really pleased with my CS0, non-majors class's test results from last Friday. I can tell they really studied and worked for the (relatively) high grades they received. They still don't understand the difference between "return" and "print" statements through. That's the curse of teaching in an interpreted language like Python.

Uid 52

The day started with a catch up on emails which have got a bit out of hand over the last week. It was a deadline today for staff to submit formatively assessed work to me on the Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice. However, there were not many submissions in my email inbox. This may be as a result of us not having sent a reminder out about the submission deadline, although there are plenty of reminders of the deadline in the Moodle area and we did remind everyone less than a month ago. As someone that does not subscribe to the deficit view of students, I suspect this is simply a sign of how busy our academic staff are…they also have until midnight to submit their work. I shall need to speak to the Programme co-ordinator to ensure we send another reminder to all participants.

Having tried to ‘tame the email beast’ I moved onto writing some new draft documentation for our redesigned MEd in Academic Programme. These documents will need to be ready soon for consultation with previous participants, potential future participants, colleagues and others. Why do the deadlines we work to always seem so unrealistic?!

Work was interrupted this morning to have coffee and cake to celebrate an administrator colleague’s 40th birthday. It was good to take a short time to relax and socialise with colleagues – something we don’t always take the time to do.

Back to the desk and I continued with creating new draft programme documentation, as well as downloading some information from the HEA website about accreditation information. I want to ensure we articulate the links between our MEd in Academic Practice and the Professional Standards Framework, so I want to ensure I have the most up to date information to do this. However in the back of my mind, I am aware of the shock news this week that the HEA subject centres are to wind up by summer 2012. I know I am not alone in worrying that the HEA will continue to have credibility across the sector and that those of us who already have fellowship of the HEA and all those we have supported to gain their FHEA will not be left with fellowship of an organisation in crisis.

I then went off to a working lunch with one of my colleagues to discuss a paper we are co-writing. We have also had an idea for a new book and spent some time discussing early ideas for a book proposal too. A very productive and pleasant meeting – it does help to stop for a proper lunch sometimes! Sometimes as close colleagues we don’t get a chance to sit down together often enough to discuss key working issues, so consequently as well as discussing our collaborative research, we each had a ‘shopping list’ of questions for each other about day to day course and other queries.

Back to the office and I spent some time collating some sample pieces of work that have been requested by staff on the PG Certificate in Academic Practice. Unfortunately some of these samples pre-date electronic submission of work and I will need to scan them. This will have to happen at home as since we got a new photocopier/printer/scanner, we only have a small number of scanning licences and I don’t have one of them…the frustrations of cutting edge technology that doesn’t help you do your work in practice. So I am planning to do some scanning tonight, but I hope it won’t take too long as I have had remission of RSI this week after not having it for about 5 years. I am blaming the time I spent last week editing a Camtasia recording of a PowerPoint presentation for one of our distance courses. It needed so much mouse work and took a few hours. Amazing how old RSI can return so fast. I shall need to avoid mouse work for a few weeks if I can.

My colleague kindly offered to go to the University library earlier to collect some relevant books for our joint research. So she has just returned with her arms full of interesting books likely to be very relevant to our work. So we have just divided these up and now have to find time to read them, something I find harder since I moved house and I no longer spend 4 hours a day commuting. I wouldn’t go back to the constant tiredness of that length of commute, but at least I kept up with reading. Now I have a better quality of life, shorter commute and huge pile of unread reading!

I spent some more time on the MEd documentation and then finished a report about the current cohort of participants on the MEd in Academic Practice for our next teaching committee. I then pulled together the draft agenda and papers for a Teaching Development Group meeting and circulated these to colleagues.

Time to head home now. Tonight, I will need to finish my Spanish Level 1 written assessment. I am doing a night class and I love it. It is so good to be a student learning something brand new that is totally unrelated to my job during the day. I realise the importance of being motivated to learn. Having had lots of Spanish holidays I know I will use the Spanish I learn. We are already planning ahead to make sure we have a Spanish holiday next year so I can use my new language skills.

Uid 59

Four hour train journey, should be able to get some work done. But the first hour-and-half turns out to be standing-room only. Read and respond to students' online contributions, and to several anxious emails about the presentations they are to give later this week. Firm up arrangements for industry research liaison officer's visit. In office, locate and mark a missing script. Schedule various meetings through the week. Return overdue library books. One stubbornly refuses to be returned - the kiosk says it has "Status BO". Rush home for a meeting about neighbourhood parking controls, after which I download a lot more emails, which I resolve to process quickly and efficiently - tomorrow?

Uid 60

Nov 15

This was a non-teaching day. So, I spent the day grading, preparing for the next day’s class and meeting colleagues.

Morning: It would be nice to have more time to grade. However, the students need feedback before they can start their next assignment. Already, a couple of them have enquired about their grade. If only more students were motivated by the love of the subject, rather than an interest in finding out about their grades! The assignment seems to have been handled satisfactorily by most students. There is only one girl in the class. She has done well. I wonder: Where are the girls in computing? Why aren’t more girls signing up for majors in technology related subjects?

Lunch with a colleague: We talk about funding for projects. There are limited sources for funding, too many proposals, and low approval rates. I get an idea about how to go about the business and come away with plans for the next year.

Afternoon: Prep time for the next day’s class. A 9 a.m. class necessitates that I have everything ready the day before. The student tutor drops by to discuss issues with students. Language continues to be the biggest handicap for some students. A colleague invites me for tea. We discuss plans for the revised Masters’ program. It seems our programs need constant revision to keep up with industry expectations. Falling enrolment numbers are a clear indication that it is time to rethink the focus of the program.

Evening: I left work early. The annual food festival is on, and it was a nice way to end the day.

Uid 64

Leave for work very early - feeling very behind, with too many things to do, maybe an early start will work?

Spend the first couple of hours catching up: ruthlessly prune inbox, Make a plan for the week. Answer two requests to run staff development sessions in June 2011 - for one of which I am unbelievably already booked. Do a hasty skim through an MA dissertation plan which one of my tutees has just asked for feedback on. It looks ok so shouldn't need too much feedback, so I spend 40 minutes going through it properly and making suggestions about structure and references.

Deputised for my line manager at a senior staff meeting, which seemed to an outsider to be going round in circles. It lasted nearly four hours, as well. Thank goodness I don't usually have to do this.

Went straight to a programme team meeting, planning for next year and working out how we will do more with less. Or at least, the same with less. This also took a long time. What can we put online to compensate for fewer face to face sessions, and how will we find time to prepare it? How should we schedule the assignment hand-ins to improve on previous experiences?

Then, back to dealing with small things until it was time to get the train. I usually work on the train but I couldn't summon up the energy today.

Uid 65

0700h: Started work. It’s early and very cold, but encouraging to see others out and about and knowing I’m not the only one! That said, most of the ‘others’ are cleaning staff and customer services people – not academics. It’s so cold in the office I am disobeying the Dean’s stricture and plugging in my fan heater (they are on his ‘banned’ list). The temperature never seems to be right in the building – the heating is left on far too late in the summer and then once switched off it takes until the winter is well set in before they put it back on again. I expect they have turned the thermostat down a degree or two to save money! Checked my emails and got my newly expanded inbox down to 10% full – a sight for sore eyes. Spent some time uploading teaching materials onto our VLE – a teaching activity that is never factored in to workloads but which actually takes quite a lot of time each week.

0815h: Marked some progress reports from my dissertation students and provided quite detailed feedback. The literature reviews are fairly woeful and not one has a single diagram – they seem to think a literature review should be text only! On the whole they are not too bad but one is particularly disappointing – I thought she was my best student but her work only merited a measly 54%........

1000h: Had a meeting to advise a colleague on how to prepare a revised programme specification. Our institution is going through the EQAL process (Enhancing Quality and Assessment for Learning). It’s a multi-stranded, University-wide overhaul of our ICT systems, student databases, quality assurance processes and curriculum structure and design. For the latter we are having to revise all of our programme documentation and the deadlines are very tight. The aim is to increase efficiency, reduce student assessment workloads and free up staff time to engage in other income-generating activities. Ho hum.

1100h: Had a meeting with one of my dissertation students followed by a proper lunch break for once - and then another meeting with a dissertation student. The meetings are relatively long because detailed feedback at this stage is really important.

1400h: At this point I was supposed to attend a two-hour meeting to discuss the implementation of a new staff e-mail system in January. However, I’m just too busy to set aside two hours for that when I can probably get most of the information from the web and assimilate it in a few minutes - Just in Time Teaching principles should apply to us too! Completed marking progress reports and then spent some time e-mailing students to set up further meetings. Spent more than half an hour trying to photocopy progress reports. It took so long because three out of four photocopiers in our building are broken – and this isn’t always obvious until you’ve spent five minutes trying to get it to work - hence the wasted time. Feeling a bit frustrated now.

1500h: Did a review of some Prezi presentations to get ideas for some presentations I have to develop soon. Also took ten minutes out to renew my motorcycle insurance. Attempted to sign up for a training course for the new email system but was thwarted by incorrect information in an email and then an error on a web page. Again wasted 15 minutes e-mailing and telephoning to try and get somewhere. Spent some more valuable time trying to sort out a problem about a student whose name is incorrectly appearing on the database.

1600h: I was going to get on with some more marking but a few ‘urgent’ emails from others meant I spent the next 45 minutes dealing with problems over a student who has failed to submitted an assignment for a unit that I run. He has asked for an extension – something we are not allowed to give – on the basis that he was unable to do the assignment because of various failings by us. This led to several carefully worded e-mails and a couple of telephone calls. Funny how unexpected things like this divert me away from what I intend to do - so often.

1645h: Finally got around to doing the marking that has to be returned to students on Thursday. It was third year work and was actually quite enjoyable to read. Having completed the marking and associated marks entry and other admin, I finally leave for home at 1945h.

Uid 67

I missed the last one of these. This was because it was a relatively distressing time. With further government and university-wide cuts being announced, we had just learned that our sister programme would be closed down. This puts my programme in a very vulnerable position as we share not just an ideology and pedagogy, but also several modules. My initial response was anger followed by tears followed by an aborted job application to a university in Newcastle. We are still in a recovery mode with everyone trying to come up with new ideas for response and retaliation. All of this has led to increased stress and a prolonged flu that never got bad enough to miss work, but not quite good enough to accomplish anything outside of work.

As a 34 year-old unmarried woman with no children, this potential ‘hiccup’ scares me considerably. I have a partner of 8 years, a joint mortgage and a ticking biological clock. I am the breadwinner and incredibly motivated in my career. I am also a programme leader of a programme that is newly under threat – a brand new programme that hasn’t even had the chance to recruit more than once or run over 4 years! Finding out that I need to work especially hard over the next few years to ensure my programme doesn’t get axed at a time where I really need to think seriously about procreating, has been both devastating and terrifying. I live and work in a place where there are no other viable teaching opportunities, so getting a new job would mean relocating. It’s no wonder I’m having nightmares I’m interviewing for design jobs again!

But, how does this affect today. Well, my eye has been twitching all day due to stress. I have been soldiering on distractedly finding it difficult to focus on any one task. Today’s tasks included trying to arrange an exchange for a student to Japan, writing a design history test, preparing for a design history lecture, researching international opportunities for postgraduate programmes, deciphering our confused meeting schedule, figuring out where my long-awaited Macs are going to go and trying to keep my legs warm after the window was left open all weekend. My eyes hurt, my back hurts and I feel this day has defeated me. (Did I mention we have no water in the water cooler and there wasn't any milk in the staff room fridge for my tea?!)

I have, however, made it to question 23 out of 50 in the test although I am no closer to knowing what I’m going to say in my lecture on Wednesday. I am participating in a research project tomorrow that requires me to roll up my trousers, so I will lose the morning to the promise of new orthoses and a student who missed class last Friday requesting feedback (funny, he was one of three missing class but the only one to get in touch!). And, with the threat of a visit home to see friends and family in less than one month’s time, I am determined to visit the gym every night this week, so off I amble towards what promises to be a rather embarrassing attempt at Body Step!

Uid 69

Monday 15th in London, because I was at a conference 16th/17th made it cost effective to combine.

I was in London visiting students who are on placement with various companies and differing levels of engagement due to the wide spectrum on offer.

In every case, in the four companies, with some nine students, the students had not prepared for the visit by alerting their line managers I was visiting, doing any of the paperwork we ask for, simple stuff really ~ a diary/log book,evidence based, a company report, their basic role and responsibilities.

Very frustrating.

Went over the requirements again and again. Our central system is a shambles though.

However very pleased that except for one student they are really busy and are valuable members of team, not treated like cheap labour etc.

Poor preparation for this year long experience/interview but I try and do 'catch up' with them.

Evening (still on duty!) arranged a 6 p.m.networking event for past graduates from last 10+ years and it was a great success. All were gathered together using Facebook rather than a clumsy alumni tool. Past grads are now recruiting. The most recent cohorts made some good contacts and maybe some new friends?

Uid 70

Well after many busy days and weeks today looked quite nice. I had a few meetings and then was travelling late afternoon to the SEDA conference.

The first meeting that day was with two colleagues to look at some criteria for awards we were planning to offer in the spring term for innovative use of Moodle in their modules/programmes and how it enhanced the student learning. This was really good to try to tease out what it was we wanted to say was good and could enhance student learning.

Following this I was leading our academic staff team meeting and we were looking at the planning for a team day out forthe whole dpeartment and what the academic team might say about their work. We discussed for the first time in ours our philosophy for our work but also how our activities fitted this. WE also were aware that we need to find some way to develop our scholarly cativity and so we have developed a plan from January. This was great it was the first time in ages we had been able to spend time thinking about how to develop us and our roles.

I then met a colleagues from a professional team with whom I am planning a workshop for all our new external examiners. This too was good in terms of looking at what we wanted them to know about the University and what they might need to help them undertake their role.

I then set off on my travels to Chester where I was going for the SEDA two day conference. This was good time on the train to reflect on the day and to look forward to spending more time with those who also work in other Centres across the country.

All in all a good development day yipee

Uid 71

Sleep in. I have to commute to work so get on the next train at 10 and arrive at work at midday. not a problem as lecture does not start til 1. sit and read on the train - not wasted time afterall. Some of my best reading happens on a train (in fact almost all of my reading gets done on trains).

Check e mails and do some menial tasks like replying to students requests over the weekend.

2 hour lecture and seminar with graduate students goes OK. Last year I did it for the 1st time and had the 'edge'. This year for the second time around it seems rather flat and boring at times. Luckily the second part is a discussion seminar analysing an interview transcript from my own research. it is packed with drama (it's about drug mules) and students seem pretty interested. Leave feeling not too bad about the session.

meet with mentor who does very little mentoring.

next, meet with students who can't make my usual office hours. by 5 I am knackered so potter around doing photocopying and worrying about the next lecture I have to write. Mondays usually feel like a chance to get my foot in the door and get a head start on the week but not this one.

Uid 72

Travelling back from a research visit to Japan Advanced Institute for Science and Technology. Got up early (5am) and went to airport, got on a plane to Hong Kong, did a bit of shopping and then went to my hotel and went to sleep very early.

Uid 73

Monday, a day to work from home. This is where the flexibility of the job wins for me. Filled out a survey for the employer about what I thought of the facilities - interesting the question about whether I wished to work from home more. The ability to work from home is a double edged sword. Yes I get more work into the day because I am not traveling for two hours to get to and from work, yet I cannot really get away from it all and take time out. Another good thing I have found as a working mother, I can take fifteen minutes coffee break and get to know some of the other mums who live nearby - be part of the local community whilst still holding down the full time job!

Managed to get some of the research work completed. It is a struggle to balance the good teaching with good research - yet I'm expected to do both of these. As you give more and more to the students, they expect more and more and quickly too. Given the amount they have to pay it isn't surprising. There is concern in the organisation about the effects of the spending review, the raise in fees and the loss of funding. Worrying times and we just watch and wait.

Uid 75

7:45am While waiting to be able to deliver the car for its MOT check, I have updated my job application log. Yesterday, I submitted two job applications for lecturing positions (UofB (UK), UofA (NZ)). The strain of being on short term contracts is beginning to show. It is difficult when students ask about doing further study with you or when you are trying to raise funding for research. UofB would mean staying put here in the UK while UofA would mean a return to NZ but a return to NZ would prove costly since the NZ dollar has increased nearly 25% in value since we left in June 2009.

9:30am Over an hour to deliver the car for an MOT check and travel by bus to the university. On the bike, it would have been 15 minutes. Now to write some reminder notes for the 11am lecture before heading to a meeting with the tutors. Need to encourage students to look at alternatives and not simply write a solution that works.

12:15pm Tutors meeting went well although we are now getting indications of struggling students coming through. Still fewer than I might have expected. Having a Teaching Instructor managing the tutors does make it a little easier but I am concerned that it is easy to become distanced from the issues that students are struggling with because primarily, I am delivering the lectures but unless the students come to my office hours or are in my academic advisory group, I don't get to talk with them. I know some lectures like to be able to keep this distance but I find it frustrating.

The lecture at 11am seemed to go across well with some good questions being asked. I really don't like having to explain class methods and variables but I am hoping that coming to it from the perspective of factory methods will help clarify the reason for their existence although it doesn't do away with explaining access restrictions.

Now, to prepare the lecture recording for the web site and let the academic advisers and PASS leaders know what is being covered this week. Also need to follow up a project student to see whether he is coming in for a meeting this afternoon. I haven't seen him for three weeks although he did email.

1:30pm Lecture recording reading to pass to TI for loading to the website. Email sent to academic advisers, PASS leaders, tutors, and demonstrators. Copied lecture to USB stick and passed it on. One task completed.

Also met with a project student who is on target with his project plan but was concerned about the possibility of having plagiarised his own previous work. Had to reassure him that as long as he cited his previous work, it would not be regarded as plagiarism.

2pm Started work on the next phase of a coding example but was interrupted by students looking for NB who is on paternity leave but shares my office. Now, I need to find out whether someone is stepping in to do his academic advisory meetings since the students are looking for work back. I will offer to take them if no one else has.

3:45pm No interruptions for a while so managed to complete some example code for batch processing temperatures. A second project student didn't come for the scheduled meeting and he hasn't responded to the email. I need to check up how he fits into the new attendance reporting process. Being an MSc student who was approved an extension for the project, I am not sure what rules apply.

It is time now time to pack up and go and collect the car. Just checked and it seems that it hasn't been done yet. Will work on for a while.

4:20pm Completed and action listener adapter and number verifier while waiting for garage to ring back. I will now pack up and head off regardless.

This code will do a number of things that I won't expect the students to understand but it will show the interaction between objects that will give flexibility in object-oriented coding. When we talk about forms design, I will show the stages that led to the style of thinking reflected in this example.

7:00pm What level of interaction should we include in code? The code that I am working on implements a model view separation but the controller is that built in to the standard Java Swing framework. Agile design suggests being able to test from just behind the form. My code structure means that this is possible. My model contains the state of the relevant controls and the actions all work on the model and never the view. The view redraws itself when changed. In this implementation, I am not implementing the observer pattern. Instead the actions will tell the form to refresh at the end of the command.

I like using things like input verifiers to handle data validation. In this example, if the data is valid, I am storing the valid data into a field in the model. The action buttons then simply use the validated data. Makes for a nice code structure.

I will spend part of this evening getting it closer to completion. Tomorrow morning, I will prepare lecture slides for discussing polymorphism and then illustrate it with my code base.

8:10pm NetBeans is playing up again. Over the last while, it has been consuming a lot of processor time and running extremely slowly. Now, it wouldn't allow me to open one of the source files after changing the package of the source file. I should do this development in Eclipse or IntelliJ Idea but they have their problems as well.

9:30pm I thought I was getting out of practice with my programming but having created most of the model and back end processing code, it was easy to create the action listeners and verifiers to make it all work. Reasonable progress after a slow start.

Uid 77

17.30

Well it has been such a busy day that this is the first time I've had chance to jot down my thoughs. Also my 3 month aniversary here.

Nice crisp cool morning:it was easier to take the bike to an 8.30 meeting than scrape the ice off the car! A sure sign that I am settling in is that I understand the curriculum here enought now to make (I hope) useful contributions, and don't have to stop myself from saying " when I was at\*\*\*...". 2 hours later I return to the main space occupying activity at the moment: selection. I've a box of over 150 UCAS forms to review, this batch is from overseas applicants. And i've to do them by the end of the week. So every spare minute.... Next week I will have to moderate the reviewing of the other 1400 applications! And being fair and even handed I think is so important. It is interesting that my daughter is also applying to University this time around. Her UCAS form went in a couple of weeks ago, and she has already had 3 rejections. It is hard, not knowing why she is being rejected, but also knowing the job the admission tutor faces.

3 hours of teaching this afternoon, with my PBL tutorial group. It is quite tiring, keeping track of what is going on, trying to get them to follow the PBL process properly, although it is quite gratifying when they seem to realise that actually doing it 'properly' is actually more useful than taking a short cut (well at least most of them seem to!) Although we have been together as a group now for several weeks, a new lad joined us a couple of weeks ago (returning to the programme after some time out). And rather frustratingly, he keeps trying to engauge me in one to one conversation, often whilst the rest of the group is discussion something else. He was the scribe today, and really didn't do a very good job, filtering what he wrote up. At one point one of the other student's pointed out he had missed something, but that didn't really help. The group as a whole need to be a bit more self critical; I've to see them individually over the next week or so to give them feedback; so I think I might get them to reflect on how they feel the group is going.

Well, need to get on my bike and go home now. I enjoy the ride as it gives me some time to think and I certainly have something to think about tonight: the Dean wants me to consider taking on the subdean for admissions role; not sure I am realy to take on a faculty level position, but as my father once said "if you don't you daren't"!

Uid 78

The 15th November was taken up largely by a meeting of the University's Academic Conduct Officers (ACO). I am the Faculty ACO and therefore a formal disciplinary authority for our courses. Because my university is so large it's important that all ACOs follow the same procedures. The regular meetings have been the place where we've developed those procedures. I quite enjoy this work and like the contact with representatives from other faculties. Someone has to deal with students who plagiarise and it might as well be me. The downside today was that I was away from home for over 12 hours and still had preparation to do for a day of interviewing tomorrow - I'm chairing a panel. Emails also had to be checked as I won't be in my office until Wednesday. Considerably cheered this evening to find an email from an old colleague in my Inbox. He's after work and I hope I can give him some. Whatever the frustrations of this job (and there are many) I hope I'll never stop being grateful about working with interesting and intelligent people.

Uid 80

Very small entry this time. I managed to create enough space to catch up with a number of projects, and felt very upbeat at the end of the day rather than being overwhelmed by the long list of things still to do.

Uid 81

Now this was an unusual day - my first ever trip to the Houses of Parliament - the Strangers Dining Room. My involvement with the professional body led to me being one of the few to help host a set of awards for MPs' activities related to our field. Quite an honour and doubtless useful as an impact factor, but of course not part of my workload. Luckily the professional body was funding my travel expenses, for we'd have no budget otherwise. However no bags allowed past Wesrtminster security so travel light!

I kept my travel time to the bare minimum, allowing me to work until lunchtime, partly at home partly on public transport to the airport. But a bit of a fright when the plane was about to load - "heathrow has freezing fog and our arrival will be delayed by 90m" (any longer and I'd struggle to catch the return flight never mind attend the event). I'd read all the paper documents stashed in my pockets, and we sat in the plane, doors closed, with instructions not to use our smartphones. Arghh - dead time!

I've been working every work night until 9pm for almost two weeks, as I have a life on Saturdays and Sunday mornings. So now it looked as though I had a couple of empty hours. Luckily the fog cleared and we were only half an hour late. London is so spoiled with public transport that I was inside parliament within 55m of landing at Heathrow, gawping at camera crews and politicos and lobbyists acting out on a familiar movie-set.

Usually when I see an MP they're the only one in the room, they come in, speak briefly, give generously of their time for 20m and then leave for the next appointment. Funny at our event to now see MPs in clusters in a crowded room, their native habitat, almost giggly schoolboys (noted only one female MP in the 20 or so present), all 15 years younger than me. When did I get to be a senior citizen, still so many years from retirement?

I did some good professional body networking activity - I'm still a bit backwards at coming forwards, but getting better. I didn't talk to any MPs - not really my role on the day and none of them familiar as decision makers in education anyway.

But for just a few minutes in the day, you feel like you have some influence on the world outside, some "impact". KT Tunstall rattled through my mind "Suddenly I See" - just for a while the clouds cleared and you could see clearly what needs to be done, how to really lobby next time, what we should actually be telling our students about professionalism in our field in industry, and so on. Fun!

Dashed for the last plane, more delays but caught up on most of the day's emails in the departure lounge and got home by 11pm

Uid 82

Monday, Monday...

Monday is usually a teaching prep day for me. I find it helps to sit down and blitz it in one go. So today was began with reviewing and editing lecture slides, with setting questions on seminar readings and some other bits and pieces. One of the things I do on Mondays is to go through my students' online learning journals (not unlike this, ha ha!). I really enjoy this exercise, it is one of the most rewarding things that I do as a lecturer, as it gives me an opportunity to engage with my students on a different level. I like being able to engage with each and everyone of them on the things they found difficult or exciting, to nudge them in particular directions, to give them different perspectives. Also, it gives me a real sense of the peer group and how they are coping with things, if we need to tweak the lectures to make sure we are challenging them appropriately, or if there are myths going around that need busting! I like reading and discussing their interpretations of things, too. It's a very creative part of my week, I find. Most of them are very receptive to this kind of activity, and enjoy having the comments back.

Poor me - I also had to watch a film today, in order to prep one of my lectures. That hurt...

I worked at home today - I often do on Mondays, unless the teaching prep involves voluminous photocopying.

Uid 90

Today is a day where I have space to complete some admin work but as it’s a Monday got snowed down by emails and reacting to them. Combination of trying to organise my clinical colleagues within various hospitals and myself to write questions for 2011 exams but ending up only organising my colleagues and so I will need to do my own contribution another time. We cover a PBL curriculum and I needed to complete 10 students PBL formative reports. Feedback to them this afternoon went well. My own professional development of improving my skills on giving constructive criticism is paying off. Ended the day with nothing ticked off my ‘to do’ list which was very frustrating the only consolation was that I didn’t add to the list!

Uid 95

Monday 15 November

The day starts as always around 6 am. The first important task is the ten minutes walk with the dog: he’s busy doing what dogs do and I can think about what lies ahead during the day.

We (husband is works in IT in another School – it’s a recipe for high stress levels) drive into work (at least car-sharing is good) and park. Once reason for the early arrival is that parking is a premium and it’s good to arrive and not have to search for a space. The more important reason for the early start is that at this time of year I need a couple of hours to get the academic chores done before the students start knocking on the door. We have a much-praised “open Door” policy and as a Year Tutor who does not do research in the academic subject it leads to an endless procession of students with queries who tell me that they cannot find their personal tutor.

The admin. is endless and I am only just keeping up. There are activity timetables (excluding lectures) to check, attendance sheets from labs. to enter into the database, and the ubiquitous attendance information to look through. With no Border Agency on the one hand and responsible students on the other, this chore would be much reduced. In parallel to the electronic filing, I am checking emails to match absences with excuses.

Around 8.30 I go down to the lecture theatre to check that our visiting lecturer has arrived for his 9 am drawing lecture. It’s great having industrial input but he is only here for one hour per week. He drives about 30 miles and with freezing fog this morning I was ready for the possibility of a cancellation. We discuss the current worksheet and I pass on some feedback from the students about the lectures. We have a laugh about the effort it is taking to pay prize money to two students who won drawing prizes in 2009-2010 academic year: while appreciating that audit trails are important we joke that sometimes going to the bank for cash is a much easier option. The students will have to wait another week before they can spend the money.

Still catching up on emails and I realise we are approaching 10 am. Two groups (16 students) are due to go on a site visit. They assemble in the foyer and are checked for safety boots, long trousers and long sleeves (requirements of the contractors before they can go on-site). The sign a register (all prepared by myself), collect more PPE and head off, chaperoned by our chief technician today (and he is equally busy with staff off sick and one on maternity leave). Fortunately the “site” is on-camp[us and the local team of contractors are very helpful. The site manager has a depth of knowledge and the students have been advised to ask lots of questions}.

I grab a quick coffee on the way back to my desk, come across a colleague who has been on research matters last week so ask about his work. The same person is also the Director of Teaching QA so we discuss action to be taken about missing student problem sheets (give them the class average mark). Another colleague appears and I check that all went well with some visiting lecturers who spoke to Level 2 students on Friday: he did the “meet and greet while I was involved with Level 1 presentations. External liaison is important for our School and even the smallest effort usually has big rewards for the students.

Soon it is 10 am and the start of 2x2 hours of drawing practicals. Fortunately I am not front line on these i.e. I am not doing the teaching. I have two good demonstrates who are PhD students within the School. Often my demontsrators are teaching staff at their own (overseas institution) and when time permits we often exchange ideas: if we are lucky and they have a celebration the local curry house gets visit. Back to the present: last year we had four helpers for each session, the budget is such that we are now down to two. They work hard for four hours, supporting a class of nearly sixty students. I do more admin. and then mediate in discussions about why students have submitted earlier drawings a few days late. Fortunately we have good policies and procedures to reply upon.

As the class goes on until 2 pm, lunch is taken at the desk. I remember to make a personal phone call to check on a sick family member and for a while my concentrate on academic work fades. The news is good so I flip back into teaching mode. At 2 pm I have to check that students got the message that the afternoon site visit had been cancelled (the site manager had been called away). There are five Level 2 labs. this afternoon (I and also level 2 Year tutor). All appears in order and I look forward to more attendance sheets arriving in due course.

I then turn to my IT lecture and practical classes for Wednesday. I need to hit a printing deadline for the handouts which I have to check. As always there is a new version of the software and some of the detailed wording in the handout has to be changed. The software is subject specific and, as I don’t use it myself on a regular basis, I get tied in knots with the worked examples. It is the “low point” of the afternoon after all. A cup of tea, short break and bad to the computer. It all works out well. I send the files directly to the large printer and we are done. The slides from last year need a similar update but no major changes: the rules of physics are, fortunately immutable.

Throughout the day I have had some marking of over 150 reports and spreadsheets in the back of my mind. I am late finishing the marking and since the School gets low scores on feedback, I am determined to hand the work back on Wednesday. As well as paper copies, I mark the electronic files and have the mouse clicks to a fine art. What takes the time is writing up the feedback sheets: even adept cutting and pasting takes for ever. I am not convinced that the students will read their feedback but hopefully, some will have to do this as they will be required to attend extra IT classes. My colleagues think that schools teach spreadsheets such that our students can use them for scientific data: I have been told not to check that they can use Excel. The current coursework indicates otherwise.

All too soon it is time to go. A student comments that I am “leaving early”. I bite my tongue as 7.30 to 4.30 without a break seems like a full day. I have taken the marking home but first have to turn my attention to domestic and family matters. Around 8 pm I start another round of marking. In previous years I would have had help from PhD students. This year we have no money and in any case, the Head of School is one of those colleagues who is convinced students are IT experts! Rounc 10 pm it’s time for sleep and looking forward to more of the same on Tuesday.

Uid 96

7:30: “F\*\*\* off Monday! I’ve had enough! I fell asleep exhausted for most of Saturday, worked the rest of it and worked in a stupor most of Sunday, it cannot possibly be time to climb back on the treadmill again. I don’t want to deal with Angry Student who is angry about everything and Blaming, Back-Covering Programme Leader who will do everything in her power to make sure that Angry Student is angry at me, not her. These will be my first appointments of the day, oh joy, what a treat to get out of bed for.”

My first thoughts on waking. I’m usually a morning person but there comes a point in every term where I’ve used up my morning good-will. Lovely boyfriend brought me tea. He lectures too, so he understands.

At work around 9ish, re-read Angry Student’s research proposal and my comments and second marker’s comments and plan how to give feedback and plan her next steps.

11am. Now I’ve seen the aforementioned student I feel rather guilty for having described her as Angry Student. She has been at times but today (and on the whole) she is very reasonable and dealing with a stressful fourth year. I’m the supervisor for her fourth year project and the second marker is Back-Covering Programme Leader (BCPL). We are the two markers for her project and proposal. I marked 9.5 marks higher than BCPL, even after taking 3 marks off to bring us within 10 marks of each other. BCPL is angry with me for exposing her to having to justify to the student why she marked lower than I did. Perhaps rightly so, I know this does leave her rather exposed, we have an agreement that things will be third-marked if there is more than a 10-mark discrepancy and this is only just within. I mark all of the fourth year projects and discrepancies between me and BCPL are always the ones that give rise to difficulties every year. Sometimes because I mark lower than her, this time because I’ve marked higher. Last time (by marking lower) I exposed her to the accusation that she had missed something in marking the project or supervising the student (nobody made such accusations but I’m sure she felt them anyway). This time it exposes her to the wrath of the student. Our relations are a little delicate at the best of times and double-marking the same project always worsens them. I am able to have quite robust debates with other markers when we disagree, always educational and often fun, and so far have always reached some sort of accord. Discussing things with BCPL has quite unpredictable outcomes – I think she feels I’m attacking her and digs her heels in further. I go into these negotiations carefully, as if treading on eggshells, but still come out with egg on my face and a yet-frostier relationship with Programme Leader. I can only conclude I’ve not yet learned how to handle these situations with this particular person. Although I’m not sure I want more practice at it.

It can be hard work protecting students from these sorts of difficulties between staff. On this occasion I feel I’ve failed at it. Student got 5% less on her proposal than I felt she deserved because we averaged our marks. As supervisor, I’ve given guidance as to how she should proceed, incorporating the comments of both markers, but as she points out, “that’s all very well, but you obviously can’t predict what the second marker will say on the final project”.

The other negotiation of the morning (also before 11am) was in relation to a new programme I’m developing (this time I’m the Programme Leader). My challenge was to persuade a module leader (let’s call him ML) to work with me in developing his module to take international students (level 9 direct entry) whose subject background is different to the home students. A re-wording of learning outcomes; a broadening of module content to incorporate different backgrounds; different set reading to stretch the students who have already covered some of the principles before. I’m not entirely sure how to do this myself – although I’m to lead this new programme I’ve never taught online before, or led a module with large numbers of direct entrants.

I’m trying to bridge the chasm that exists in all universities between management and academics. Management say, “lead this programme. It uses existing modules and enrols international students ££££££££” (£££££££ is pronounced silently but is nonetheless very clear). Academics say, “hang on, the existing modules aren’t the ideal modules for this student group, it would be better to tailor something especially for them.” Yes, I know it would be better. But modules have to have lots of students on them to be profitable and they have to be profitable to run at all. Our modules have to run profitably for us to have a job and to get to broaden any eager young minds at all. The programme I taught on when I first started here (the one BCPL leads) is now being phased out for financial reasons, in large part due to a failure to share modules with other programmes. I have been at the sharp end of unprofitable modules and it was rather stressful.

ML is easy to work with. He listens and takes on board what I have to say and he makes it clear, civilly, where he disagrees with me and why. He argues only for the sake of academic scruples and for nothing else. He seems to understand the position of Devil’s Broker I am in.

I sent him my suggestions for a compromise on the existing module and we’ll see where we get to. I’ll take the set of modules to the Quality Committee, Head of School and Associate Dean. I don’t want to compromise ML’s module/learning environment/ideals any further than is ABSOLUTELY necessary but of course I’m guessing as to how many unique modules QC, HS and AD will allow me to get through as part of this new programme. Their original idea was “none”; module leaders are fairly keen on “all” and I’m pitching my gamble at 1.5. Choosing my fights carefully. I hope my guess is lucky. It’s not all that informed a guess.

Now to prepare for biochemistry tutorial (2-3pm). It’s my first time teaching on this module so it’s been a lot of de novo synthesis of lectures. I confess that at this stage in the term, my short- and medium-term memory are a little unreliable and I can’t exactly remember what I’ve taught them over the past two weeks. I’d better take some notes into the tutorial. My teaching on this module has fallen short of my ideals. I’ve never felt like an unpopular teacher before but I’ve given them some lectures that have been too long or pitched at not-quite-the-right-level for this group and they don’t like it. I’m sorry students, I’ll do better next time around, but that’s no good to you. Not looking forward to the feedback. Try not to go into tutorial wearing a hunted look; instead simplify the material to make sure they see the overall framework of it and it feels within their grasp. Encourage them that they will succeed in the end of term exam, using optimism and a bright manner.

Tutorial went fine, although getting the students to speak up is a bit like pulling teeth. They have the questions to work on in advance and I give them 10 min in small groups to confer and compare answers before regrouping as a full class of 20-odd to discuss the answers. Maybe they still feel threatened? Maybe they’re bored stiff? I dread the feedback from this module but I also need it, in some respects I can’t see how to progress otherwise.

Finished tutorial at 3pm and cycled home to write tomorrow’s class. First thing I see is an email: Student B has been to see her personal tutor because she feels she is getting mixed messages from her two project markers. Oh no, another one. Mind you, ‘mixed messages’ is putting it mildly. I’ve supervised this project, it’s been given ethical approval, during discussion of which I specifically raised BCPL’s comment that the project was biased and the ethics sub-committee said “no it isn’t”. BCPL said to my student “your whole project is totally biased, you shouldn’t have been allowed to get to this stage”. Cheers for totally undermining me, BCPL.

This must be half my fault though, disagreements are always half-and-half, aren’t they? It’s true that I don’t have a whole lot of respect for BCPL’s comments sometimes. It’s true that perhaps we don’t discuss our disagreements as fully as we could (I think because I’m treading on eggshells trying not to offend or threaten). I’ve tried to tread the middle way and say to student B “these comments are valid, so you’ll need to make sure that your aims/introduction make it clear what you are trying to answer and what you are not addressing, and that your discussion recognises limitations of the scope of this study” etc etc. Poor student. The three of us will meet together. I don’t relish the prospect, I have to admit, but have sent BCPL an email explaining what I’ve told the student already and reminding that ethical approval has been granted. If I don’t spring things on her she won’t feel threatened and we can have a reasonable discussion that ensures the student incorporates her feedback, BCPL can see that her feedback has been incorporated, student can stop fearing that her final project will be badly marked down by second-marker, everything will be hunky-dory. I hope.

Have just seen that the next email is from the chair of the Quality Committee about revised module descriptors sent in last week. I don’t know what to expect in this email and it’s potentially stressful/critical/informing me of a massive chunk of work I need to do/should have done and haven’t… dare I open it now?

I did. It is critical, but it gives me a way to improve the descriptors before they get to faculty. I’m glad of some criticism and this isn’t ripping me to shreds. I’ve got some work to do on it this evening though, and I’ll have to see the associate dean about advice she gave me that seems to contradict this – she can maybe give me some arguments to defend the descriptors the way we wrote them. Or help me find a better way, whichever.

Today’s journal contribution seems to be all about the trials and tribulations of feedback. Everybody needs it, nobody likes it.

There are some days when I feel like I’m doing a good job and managing well. This is not one of them.

Four or six module descriptors to re-write and tomorrow’s lecture to prepare. It’s now 5:15. Could be a long night. Lovely boyfriend is tired too, and under lots of pressure this week. He fed me last week when I had the original descriptor deadline and no time to cook/eat, and this week he’s under more pressure than me so it’s my turn to cook. These are unspoken rules in the academic relationship. Probably why so many academics have relationships with academics. If it’s week 11 of term and we still eat meals (as opposed to eggs on toast twice a day), we’re doing well.

In actual fact I worked on the new programme until 8.30 or so then Lovely Boyfriend phoned to say that his Charming Son is home and has offered to cook us all dinner, would I like to come over. We eat very well (if late), sleep, start again the next day. Start with the lecture I didn’t get around to preparing today.

Uid 98

0810 Happened to be in early (well, the next appointment with the Dean has me on edge). Telephone message suggesting involvement in Wind Parks. Carried on with emails

0845 (too early, obviously still on edge) to the Dean's office for discussions over course development for delivery in India and Saudi Arabia (so why am I worried about that?).

0930 discussions over a colleague's (a rival's?) development of distance-learning provision of a course in my specialist area

1000 Emails

1045 walk to Ug lecture room, where ...

1100 ... introduced a PhD student who would deliver the topic. She gets paid out of my research funds (earned from short course delivery) so is this a benefit to me or not? However, I get an hour and a half for ...

1130 ... working on lectures for tomorrow and Thursday

1250 Managed to have a lunch-time today - about 20 minutes in the cafe doswnstairs. Took a journal to read.

1310 Hoping to go home early to finish a case study for a chapter I've already furninshed to the editor. Not quite there yet as I'm still working on these lectures.

1700 Well that's the afternoon gone then. No work tonight as I'm out to my French conversation group.

Uid 99

Not a great start to the day today. First frost of the winter, which resulted in several accidents on the road. I was held up for 30 minutes by the first one, then passed another before I got to work. Neither of them were serious, but they doubled my travel time. As I spend two hours a day in my car, I can do without the extra. Fortunately, I didn't have anything in my diary for the morning, so it was irritating rather than annoying.

I spent the morning working through emails. I was teaching overseas for ten days, and am still trying to clear the backlog a week after arriving back. I'm feeling a bit inundated at the moment, with new dissertation students to supervise, lots of coursework to mark, and PhD deadlines looming. I'm also responsible for supporting our dyslexic students, and had a raft of issues to deal with here as well - students who have missed the deadline for special exam arrangements,or who need scribes arranged, or who think their lecturers have marked them unfairly. Work just seems to be coming at me from all directions, and I'm merely firefighting.

I had an hour's teaching in the afternoon. I haven't taught this class for the past 5 weeks, so it was nice to reconnect with them. They had quite a few questions about the assessment after the class. This made me late for the research seminar I was supposed to be attending straight afterwards, and so I decided not to go.

I then met up with a programme leader to discuss two of her students whose progress I was concerned about. She was pleased that I flagged it up to her, so that she could investigate what was going on with them. These students have apparently already been threatened with being put off the programme because of non-engagement, but they don't seem to be learning their lesson!

It was then back to my PC till 7.30pm, when I headed home. It was a nice clear road, and my dinner was ready for me when I got in, so all's well that ends well!

Uid 101

The day stared with a 9 to 11 ‘lecture’ session. At least that is what it is called on the timetable but the activity is more of a directed, interactive seminar. I had not found the chance to update the slides from the previous year the previous week and so had left that to the weekend. My home broadband went down on Saturday morning just as I was about to look up new material I was aware of and cast a search for any other new material I should be aware of. The broadband did not come up until about midday on Sunday, so most of the weekend was given over to concern about the slides.

It is week 8 of the semester and the final year students finally seem to have got the message that they should be there at 9am (ish). By about 9:15 the data projector was up and ready and all of the students who were going to attend were present. The session went really well with many voluntary and solicited contributions from the students. Several had been on the demonstration last week and issues from that came into the discussions.

Most of the rest of the day was not so engaging or encouraging. An hour spent trying to clear the emails from the previous week which had yet to be cleared. An attempt to have a chat with the dean thwarted as they are working off-site (ie at home) again (I often wish I could manage that much time working at home!). Several hours spent marking up draft examination papers for January; and wondering why staff seem unable to do relatively simple things such as stick to a published template. Before wondering further about issues do with plain English in exam papers, simple direct verbs so the students know what to do, minimising the amount of reading in the paper (one paper for a 2 hour exam was 11 pages long!), ensuring an appropriate balance of tasks and activities wrt Blooms taxonomy.

The TES blog at the weekend had had a thread about ‘professionalism’ and ‘licence to practice University teaching’. The dinosaurs had yet again pontificated about how if only the trappings of QAA etc were removed and they were allowed to ‘be professional’ standards would magically improve. From that state of the exam papers produced by my dinosaurs this would translate into obtuse tasks, inconsistently expressed with many, many hidden assumptions about what was required. They are also the ones who are most likely to ignore my red ink and later insist that the external examiners are incompetent.

The only other thing I attempted was to complete the semester 2 timetable. I have lost several staff, for various reasons, since last session and the recruitment freeze has prevented any replacements. However we have a bulging first year with more tutorial groups than in recent memory. I am trying to fill a quart jug from a pint pot and having to schedule everyone for as many hours as I am allowed to still leaves me with a shortfall.

I arrived at work at about 8am and left at about 6pm, worked at my desk over the lunch hour and will probably be doing the same all week. . . . But my cycle to and from work was a joy as my old bike had finally succumbed to old age and uneconomic repairs. I had forgotten what smooth gear changes and efficient mechanics felt like. . .

Uid 103

Woke up really early (5AM) to correct the slides for today's lecture. As usual, a lot of corrections were necessary. My colleagues keep making random changes to the agreed way of presenting the material... Sigh... Could not make all the corrections in time. Went through half of the slides only.

Lecture from 8 till 9:20 AM. Was not feeling 100%, but it went OK. As I expected, there was way too much material for today's lecture. Since I decided to show the students how Java classes actually work, so that they can grasp the whole idea of class and the relation between classes and objects, I slowly implemented a Point class using BlueJ, thus abandoning most of the presentation. The students responded positively. I think most of them grasped the idea. Other classes will solidify the idea further. The number of students halfway through the semester is going down. My problem, or a general problem? Hard to know.

Lost about two hours fetching my keys from where I lost them over the weekend.

About an hour going through new emails.

Solved a few problems related to the latest introductory programming quiz. A student entered the course in the middle of the semester (an overreaching state, stupid laws, and heavy burocracy lead to this, year after year...) and she's having a hard time keeping up. Scheduled a tutorial session with her.

Uid 105

Unfortunately, today I had to stay at home with my son because he was ill. And since taking care of a feverish two-year old that is still able to run around the house breaking stuff is quite the hogging experience, I practically hadn't had the time to work. The only thing I was actually able to prepare was the 3rd test of the series of 4 written tests for the semester. Perhaps, next month I'll have a more interesting entry.

Uid 106

A preparation day - I suppose as I am not officially working today, I am doing unpaid overtime. And also on Wednesday, for the study club which is my responsibility. Should I being doing work on what are technically my days off? I guess I have no particular problems with the idea - if you've been self employed for most of your working life, working hours are very flexible. However, others are, I feel, not quite so flexible and speak of 'time off in lieu' etc. Should I be more militant and ask for more non-contact time? I suspect the answer would be 'no'.

I enjoy the prep time for these seminars - but struggle a bit with the Tuesday clinical ones. Having been through the basics of what they need to know, the students are now all at different levels and stages and I am unsure about how to manage them. And this week I have to start doing assessments for them - hopefully there will be a bit more induction than anything else at that place.

As the new project settles into a rhythm, I begin to remember students names and they begin to develop some characteristics - the slow ones, the unsure ones, the slapdash, the late. I had to mildly admonish one on Friday - the clinic staff had had a moan about him too, on Thursday. Certainly one to keep an eye on.

And all the time, this sense of insecurity - am I good enough to be teaching these students? Next year they will out in practice - have I got it right - the stress on total care, not acquiring numbers? Am I up to date enough? But then I remember I teach them 2 days a month in one year of a five year course. Others teach are in contact with them for more time. I am a very small cog in a very large machine.

Uid 109

Busy day yesterday. A meeting for the editorial team of the journal - main item for discussion was the papers I need to finish preparing (today!) for the meeting of the full editorial board. So the context for this was not teaching, as such - and yet the concerns remain the same. The two main discussion papers are relating to funding for the journal (and if we get no more funding, how to find the time to do the work) and what changes we can make to the journal website to make it more 'interactive' and engage more readers.

On the teaching front, spent the rest of my time yesterday trying to set-up telephone tutorials with learners based in prisons. Two different prisons, so two education officers to liaise with. This is one of the areas of 'Offender Learning' where it is difficult to summarise guidance in a handy form for tutors. So much depends on the rules that are in place in the prison, which differ considerably, and the way the education officer approaches their work. When you see offender learning being discussed in the popular media it often seems to reflect ideas that basic literacy and numeracy skills are important and training for work, but degree level study seems to be viewed more as a 'perk'. I suppose it is a little ironic that both of the students I am dealing with are studying the MA in Social Policy and Criminology!

Uid 111

Catch up day. Spent 1 week at Open Ed 10 conference in Barcelona followed by a week of unexpected flu resulting on the overwhelmingly depressing duties of the day consisting of bottoming the 2 week-old inbox. Found myself contemplating '1001 ways to stop email reaching my inbox while I'm away from the office' - by the time it reaches 'Out of Office' its just too late.

9-11am

scanned the 437 new emails for:

a) junk (delete)

b)events with a 'past' date (delete)

c) urgent jobs to do

11-12

Very bored of email sifting so I've moved onto catching up on a few necessary essentials:

attempted to collate my conference expense claim but realised I'd left half the receipts neatly in a wallet at home.

Dropped in to see Admin Team to pick up a sickness absence form and got bombarded from all sides on the important topics of a)'insisting' I volunteer to participate in Secret Santa; b)select a date for the office Christmas Meal; c) pay my dues for everyone that has left due to budget shortfalls in the 2 weeks I was away (3 people, grim times).

12-12.30

decided to take a short lunch break and quickly nipped over to the local sandwich shop. Discovered I hadn't got any english money as my purse was still full of euro's from the week before I was ill. Hiked into town to get some cash and settled for a Greggs pasty instead of something healthy.

12.30-3

trying to concentrate on the emails and make a list of tasks to do in order of importance. Running out of steam as the afternoon wears on. Realised that I deleted some this morning that actually weren't junk and still needed my action - feel like I should have just pressed 'Delete All' (but I'm not brave or stupid enough to really contemplate that!).

3-4

Going bog-eyed and slightly brain-dead now but I'm quite pleased I got through the emails and have a neat list of jobs to do ready for tomorrow. Heading for home.

Sticky, busy, germ-laden, commuter-packed train home - at least it was on time and I got a seat.

Arrived home to find husband has come down with the flu now - I guess the bonus for him is that I won't dismiss his as man-flu now I know how I felt last week. Not much point cooking tea for one so I settled for a nice meditteranean platter of houmous and chunky salad to accompany the large bottle of Metatone Tonic I picked up from the supermarket on the way home to ward off the train germs.

Attempted to join in with University Challenge - was gutted that I couldn't retrieve the final bit of Maslovs Hierarchy of .......... it just wouldn't surface, doh!

Early night, new day tomorrow!

Uid 114

Winter is definately hear and it is rather chilly this morning. Of course the first negative numbers on the weather forecast is like an instruction to the boiler to stop working and the house is freezing!

Equally annoying is that I arrive at the office to find the heating turned up so high that I can barely think. Our building is in desparate need of refurbishment as the heating system just doesn't work - whilst I am sweltering from being in sauna like conditions other people elsewhere in the building are shivering.

Anyway, todays first task is to get together everything I need for exam project marking. I've got a list of scripts which need to be third marked. I've just recieved the paperwork which indicates they need to be returned by yesterday!

It should be a simple task to print 20 scripts ready for me to mark them. However the combination of access problems, printer errors, network issues and incorrect file formats means it takes me most of the day.

However, whilst waiting for the electrons to travel the three meters from my desk to the printer, I at least have a chance to start looking at the 300 emails which have arrived in the past week when I was on leave.

Having filtered out the spare sandwiches, lost property and micelanious messages of no relevance I have about 200 messages left. How did the world work before email? I can't help feeling that there was a better system, like people just made decisions and got on with things without feeling that they need to consult the whole world all the time.

Amongst all the dross there are some good messages though. I was presenting at a conference on Saturday and the feedback is very positive. This is one of the moments when I feel aprechiated and that my hard work pays off :-)

I've been copied into a number of messages regarding the provision of special software to assist me because I am dyslexic. Two months on from when I requested the software there is still ongoing discussion as to whether occuptional health have approved it. The It department say it needs to be signed off by OH, OH say it is not within their remit as it is a condition not a disease. I'm starting to think it would be easier just to go and buy it myself!

I have an interesting discussion with a colleague around recruiting some new teaching staff. This is a really positive conversation both as it is about recruitment but also we are working closely together to combine resources to improve conditions for both our staff and students. I wish we could do more of this type of colaboration. I had approached another colleague looking to do a similar thing and got a response basically saying they couldn't be bothered.

I head home at 5ish and then make a start on marking those exam scripts. I only have chance to put in about an our before I have to stop and change hats to become a student. I have an online tutorial this evening. I've used the tutorial software many times before so leave it till quite late before loggin on.... my PC gives me the blue screen of death, on rebooting I manage to get windows to load but it won't run the tutorial software. I grab my partners laptop and boot it up... discover the tutorial software won't run in firefox and he hasn't got explorer installed. With about 5 minns to go I wipe the dust off my old laptop andboot it up, it is looking good till I discover I need to update my version of java... I eventually manage to get on to the system about 5 mins late. I find it quite scary that it has been so difficult to get onto the system - how do new students cope?

This is obviously the first online tutorial my tutor has given. The audio keeps dropping out and one of the other students dissappears every five minutes or so. The technology is very definately in the way of engaging wiht the learning. I'm quite surprised that even though I have used the system as a tutor, once I have my student hat on I am very nervous about speaking and feel uncomfortable in that environment. It is made worse by knowing that the sessions will be recorded - what if I say something stupid? I do my best to join in a contribute verbally a few times but I think I am doing this more because I feel sorry for the tutor who is struggling then because that is what I want to do as a student!

My partner sticks his head round the door and hands me a plate of dinner and a fork - he has cut it all up into bite size pieces as that I can eat it one handed whilst still in the online tutorial!

Tutorial done I consider returning to my marking but think better of it and take a couple of hours off before bedtime - it's going to be a long week!

I spend that "off time" reading papers for the school governors meeting I'll be chairing tomorrow evening. Glutton for punishment is the phrase that comes to mind.

I'm so looking forward to getting on top of things and then I'll be able to spend time on some exciting new projects I want to take on. I am hoping to get a partnership together with some new contacts, but it never makes it to the top of the priority list - tomorrow I will action it, just as soon as I have finished marking, and responding to e-mail, and whatever else people think needs my urgent attention!

Uid 116

8:05 It's final exam week and my classes this term were upper-division undergrad, project-based. So, no exams for me to give or grade. I'm staying with my wife at her grad school for the next two weeks—finals plus Thanksgiving break. (I'm in the States.) This will be our longest stretch of time together since she started school in mid-August.

I started my morning by catching up on email. My students have a final essay due today, so those have been rolling in. They also have to complete their team evaluations. I need to grab some breakfast, then see if any of my students need another reminder to complete their evaluations. I hate that they need multiple reminders, but the team evaluations are an important part of how I distribute project points. So, I treat those who dally like they're 4 year olds. (Or faculty members?)

10:15 Scanned through the latest issue of the Chronicle of Higher Ed. Not much news of import, but it seems important to stay connected to the wider academic community.

More email. Depressing news that we'll exhaust our funds for graders well before the end of the academic year. Department funds for that were steady this year after a couple of years of cuts, but federal support for students in the form of work study money was cut well after local budgets were set. I'm now starting to consider how to minimize the academic harm while reducing the amount of graded work. Since I'm a firm believer in learning by doing, it isn't clear how to do that. Perhaps I can find a way to motivate their doing without detailed critique of every bit of their output.

Time for a run. Perhaps a few miles and some fresh air will inspire some ideas.

2:14 PM My run was good. Always feel like I can think more clearly after exercising. Post-run, I popped over to a sandwich shop for lunch and some reading, then to the hardware store to get parts to repair the yard-sale humidifier that my wife bought for her apartment. Probably a penny-wise, pound-foolish investment on her part, but I'm going to a be a good husband and let it slide. Now I'm back at the apartment and ready to start tackling the end-of-term grading and start-of-term prep.

5:30 PM Spent three hours rearranging the planned schedule for my CS2 course winter term. I'm leading the department in a process to incorporate concurrency and parallelism throughout our curriculum. We've settled on program outcomes for our CS and SE degree programs and are beginning the process of deciding how to change individual courses. A colleague and I are team teaching CS2 this winter (in Java) and want to spend some time on fork-join parallelism, parallel arrays, and basic multithreading. We're going to have to compress some intro. material, but our classes are small enough that we can do that by providing extra individual attention to the students who struggle.

10 PM Enjoyed dinner with my wife, then turned to grading to wrap up the fall term. All the team evaluations came in. It's always an ordeal to process those. I usually have a reasonable notion of how team mechanics are working out. However, there always seems to be a team or two that was really struggling on teamwork issues, but thought it best to hide that from me instead of getting help. Anyway, I put off that pain for tomorrow and graded their final programming assignment. I like to make the final assignment in this course a "nerd sniping" problem [http://xkcd.com/356/]. I'm up front that I'm doing that and am always pleased when they respond. About 15% of the class solved the whole problem, and more than half the class solved at least half of the problem. (The problem this time was to model Trono's Santa Claus Problem [John A. Trono. 1994. A new exercise in concurrency. SIGCSE Bull. 26, 3 (September 1994), 8-10. DOI=10.1145/187387.187391 http://doi.acm.org/10.1145/187387.187391] using the Go programming language's channels and goroutines [golang.org].) Still waiting on final reflective essays over the Go language, due tonight. But I'm looking forward to wrapping up the term tomorrow. It always seems like the grading is easier at the very end of the term.

Uid 118

A day of frustration and confusion that started with a burst of energy and ended with tiredness and irritation. Half the day was spent in meetings - some research planning and some planning teaching. I had planned to spend the afternoon looking through and updating some slides for Tuesday. I gave in to a request from a colleague to do some teaching at short notice and found myslef planning that as well. So I stayed up late getting my head ariund this new teaching, whilst managing some of the admin and planning for the two research projects that I'm involved in and responding to the little requests for information that cme via email on a regular basis.

Uid 119

Monday, November 15, 2010

Another busy day. We're in the middle of the official university advising period for next semester, and as undergraduate coordinator of my department many students are seeing me not only for normal advising, but also for clearance of Declaration of Intent to Graduate (DIG) forms. Those are time-consuming, as we have to check every course the student has taken and get them on the right lines of the form and make sure that the student has satisfied all university and departmental requirements. It's rather exhausting to do multiple ones in a row, but it's also very satisfying, too, to review students' academic careers with one semester to go before graduation and chat with them as they look forward to the next chapter in their lives.

The differences between students really are amazing. One would expect seniors to be more mature than freshman, but this isn't always the case, at least not when it comes to simple responsibility. The advising period lasts for two weeks. Some students are on the ball and, at the beginning of the period, while others not only leave things until the last minute, but miss the opportunity to meet with a faculty advisor altogether. When they do that, they \*sometimes\* apologize profusely and beg me to meet with them and lift their advising hold flags. At other times, they exhibit amazingly unapologetic attitudes and simply expect me to accommodate them. As implied at the beginning of this paragraph, one might expect these differences to be predictable by the student,s class, but they're not.

Another amazing thing is that I post message after message on our electronic bulletin board pertaining to advising procedures, deadlines, and who to see about what. These messages are automatically sent to all students' CS e-mail addresses. Students are free to forward their CS e-mail to their personal e-mail, but many seldom do. Therefore, I get literally scores of messages from students asking me the same questions over and over. It is frustrating and exhausting, not only due to the repetition, but do to the poor quality of students' communication skills.

Our students are required to take two semesters of College Writing and a special course entitled "Oral and Written Communication for CS Majors," but I often wonder if they learn anything in these classes. Even if what they write is grammatically correct, many, even upperclassman, have no clue with respect to how to write a professional e-mail. It is very disheartening. I have to tell them that they should not address faculty members as Mr. or Ms. I remind them that they are no longer in high school. I tell them to always use Prof. or Dr. One would think that they would know that by now.

On top of this, they don't read a thing. As with all universities, everything I know about our program is posted on the web. They don't spend any effort at all in searching for answers. And when they do stumble across a page with the information they're looking for, they don't read it carefully. Many times I reply that they should reread the page that they are asking me about.

I try to think back to the time when I was in college. Was I as irresponsible as these students? I really don't think so. I remember laying out my program on graph paper so that all the courses lined up properly and I knew exactly what I had to take. Today students come to my office with no paper, no pencil, and no clue as to how to complete the course of studies in their own major. It really is very sad. But as I said in the first paragraph, when the student does come to see me who is clearly focused and has done his or her homework and simply needs to discuss a few fine points before making final course selections for the next semester, is a real pleasure.

I often think of one of the scenes in my favorite movie, "Scent of a Woman." In that scene, Chris O'Donnell 's character, Charlie Simms, a high school boy, returns unexpectedly to the hotel room he is sharing with Al Pacino's character, Lt. Col. Frank Slade, a retired, blind, Marine veteran whom he is helping out on a visit to New York City over Thanksgiving weekend. Lt. Col. Slade is exasperated because even though a friend of Charlie's has put him in a pickle, he would betray his friend. The scene is too complex to describe in detail, but at one point Lt. Col. Slade says, "Charlie, how are you ever going to survive in this world without me?" He respects Charlie's integrity, but he shudders at his naïveté. At the end of the scene, Lt. Col. Slade says to Charlie, "I don't know whether to shoot you or adopt you." Sometimes I feel exactly the same way about my students.

Uid 120

Today is a difficult day. I have been unwell all weekend but know that there is nobody else to take over my classes and that the students have put a lot of work in. I didn't want to let them down so I came in anyway.

I had two classes today, on George Eliot's Adam Bede. We discussed literary realism, the difficulties and contradictions of the argument that fiction should generate and foster sympathetic relations between human beings, the ways in which female bodies are made to speak in the text and in which female speech is proscribed or circumvented, and the students were generally good. I have a couple of students who simply don't turn up when they haven't read the texts and today was no different, meaning that somebody who was supposed to do a presentation didn't turn up. I am not very good at dealing with these things and err on the side of sympathy myself. So I will probably let it go, as usual.

I also gave mid-term essays back and tried to persuade them that marks in the 50s were good. The very few who achieved a mark above 65 were very pleased but all the others looked dejected no matter how much I tried to encourage them to feel pleased. These were their first essays at university level and I don't want them to feel disheartened. I gave them much too much written feedback - a typed A4 side for each student. As I have had 50 essays to mark in the last week this has meant spending anything between half an hour and an hour on each one and has been far too time-consuming. But I really want to make sure students know what is good about their work and how to build on it in their next essay.

I still have 10 of the 50 essays to mark, and I have to do it before I meet the second marker in a couple of hours. This is patently not enough time. I also have to read the novel New Grub Street by tomorrow - I started it over the weekend but did not finish it. It would be useful if I could spend a couple of hours reading journal articles/book chapters on the novel to get a clearer sense of the issues at stake, but this is a luxury I can't afford.

I have a list of other things I need to do today: emails from students are clogging up my inbox. I have not been filling in my online registers properly, which apparently doesn't matter as the information goes 'into the ether' and nobody is ever able to access it again - some problem with the online system that has been set up by an American consultancy firm that is the subject of much disdain across campus. I did not realise that I was supposed to be filling in registers by hand as well as online, either, so have thrown away all my paper copies for the entire term and fear trouble is on the horizon. I need to sort this problem out.

I also need to finish the proposal for an outreach project I am running jointly with Environmental Sciences. There has been some problem with it, mainly caused by my inability to deal with confrontation. The scientists on the team have little conception of what happens in an English Literature department - one of them thought I was a creative writer and expressed astonishment that literary study is not the same thing as creative writing. So my ideas have occasionally been misunderstood. Then there was a little fracas when I suggested that geological work of the kind we are expecting school students to do might be imaginative and it was assumed that by 'imaginative' I meant 'made up'. The assumption that humanities scholars think all science is a big chimerical fiction is a flashpoint for some people in the sciences and it took explanations and apologies all round to clear the matter up. I need to make sure my claims are suitably qualified in the proposal so that misunderstandings do not arise again. But I also need to make sure that my standpoint - which arises from detailed, verifiable research and not from some wishy-washy 'creative' perspective - doesn't get lost in the process.

I need to read two chapters of a colleague's new book for a research seminar on Wednesday, and am attending some sort of teaching course (I forget what exactly it is) on the same day. There is not really time for either. I have done no research since the beginning of term. I am also likely to be going on leave in June for six months, though nobody here knows about it yet, and need to squeeze in a lot of research between now and then to make sure everything is tied up before I go. I have no idea how I am going to do it. When I think about it, there just isn't time.

My one saving grace is that my husband is going away tomorrow for five days. I will miss him like mad but at least it means that I can use every waking minute to catch up on the backlog.

Uid 121

I have tried something 'radical' this week by actually asking students their opinion of our strategy for personal tutoring!!! A teaching colleague reflected on my approach; "...we should have asked this years ago, rather than kow-towing to all of the right-on rhetoric about personal tutoring" supplied from the central University strategy boards.

Spurred-on by such supportive statements and the agenda of actually listening to the students we are supposed to be servicing (especailly given the potential increases in demand and expectations when student fees go up in 2012), I applied to be an academic representative at central University Committee level but was unfortunately rejected as I am already a member on another Committee (and might therefore be hogging the floor!).

I might just give up and revert to only providing personal tutor support to those students who can be "bovverred" to call me when they are desperate.

Uid 123

8.30 arrive at work, clear emails for one hour

9.30-1.00 Work in the Learning Resource Centre on an online course for first year students. Requires modification of self-test questions and the creation of a course requirement test so that they align with their current assignment.

1.00-3.30 Meeting with colleagues and 'Thrift' a creative agency to review short films they have created for us for students.

3.30-5.00 Working in the Learning Resource Centre again to complete modifications on the online course and open to students. Need to get this done today and before the Learning Technologist leaves at 5.00 p.m. Finish but feel it has been a bit rushed... hope there are no major errors.

5.00-6.15 p.m. Back to Thrift meeting for further discussion. Dislike this chopping and changing from one project to another but life is getting very busy.

6.15-7.00 p.m. Back on email

7.00 p.m. - 9.00 p.m. travel home and cook supper and talk to son.

9.00 p.m.-11.00 p.m. working on presentation on learning and teaching to the faculty. I am very behind, finished marking 50 student assignments over the weekend and I have a lot of work piling up.

Uid 125

Complete change of plan today as ended up taking out cat to the vets at 8am for urgent blood tests after a routine visit over the weekend.

So working at home for the rest of the day - I have mixed feelings about working at home perhaps it is just me that is easily distracted by anything and everything when I am at home and can I honestly say I get more done at home - sometimes yes I suppose.

As a course leader I rarely have a minute to myself - sometimes our office is like BT connect (luckily I only share with 1 other person - at the moment)but trying to mark or concentrate on something complicated is impossible. I like to be available to my students and have an open door policy (literally) I also have the advantage that our students are in nearly every day and my office is right next to the main practical rooms they use so we do really get to know them well - however this means that trying to find 30mins to ones self during a day can be a challenge!

However today whilst sat on my sofa with the sunshine streaming in through our lounge window I have managed to managed to mark a late submission MSc dissertation, plan weds morning session for our first year students on - 'young people and their health' but I can't deny the temptation to flick onto facebook or to watch some time sapping daytime TV keeps popping it's head up. The surroundings I can't deny are better than my usual view of grey university tower blocks (framed by drizzle more often than not)

Lunch today is lovely - for once I am sat down away from the iphone/lap top (yes I am using both, a bit sad but hey why not)I am having a hot pasta lunch and I might even have a pudding to treat myself if I can dare to move the rather sorry looking, shaved in patches, cat sat next to me.

This afternoon I think I will have a look at updating my practical session on friday 'physio in the ICU' as I haven't reviewed this since last year and I am sure changes will need to be made. That is the challenge of teaching healthcare subjects - things move quickly and need updating every time. The balance is how much detal to go into sometimes it can be massive new information overload. I don't want to just get them through the module assessment though, I want them to be prepared and ready for the placement coming in Feb but many students just can't see past the exams and I am already getting panicked emails now about what the practical exams will entail. I think it may well be time to do a mini exam prep session on Friday to calm them all down a little!!

Uid 126

November 15th 2010

Midnight – it has been a very long day and unexpectedly so. I had spent the weekend catching up on small jobs both domestic and work orientated. Students are out on placement for two weeks and none of them wishes to be observed on their first day. I walked the dog a little later than usual and the morning was bright, frosty and beautifully coloured –bright sky, some yellow leaves still on the branches and a wonderful pearly grey, pink, bluishness to the distant slope of the field and hedgerow. I catch the broadcast about Teach First before I leave the house. A brave Teach First student is recorded teaching a less than inspiring lesson, but we know that Michael Gove is very taken with these bright graduates who swoop in to schools in challenging areas and do good. I just can’t tell. Some will stay the course and some, like K who has inspired and is developing First Story see opportunities for good which arise from the experience. I had hoped to visit a First Story event this afternoon, but the opportunity passed. I like the fact that the writers stay with one school over the course of a year. They are clearly making a difference and the writing that is published is often engaging and surprising. Writers in schools – a theme for the day to top and tail it.

Later leaving home means a slower drive as I tangle with the school traffic. As I approach the university there is another item about the forthcoming White paper and Teach First pops up again. It is a relief to hear that they don’t seem about to impose this on primary schools, but one can never be too sure. We are told that the primary TF teachers are modern linguists who are ‘pushing forward’ the move to Modern Languages in primary schools. I think about the bright, committed, creative students on the course I teach, especially those specialising in languages and wonder what makes the difference between them and these ‘top class graduates’. There is a real lack of understanding about the nature and complexities of teaching.

I arrive at the university. Only two of us in from the team. We catch up about a conference my colleague is organising and discuss arrangements for a party for our course secretary who is retiring at Christmas. I can’t bear the thought of her going. She loves her job and has a real feel for the students and what they need. She is often the first to spot a potential difficulty and looks out for us on the team also. I think she would prefer not to go, but her husband will be glad to have her home.

I sit at the desk with my list of jobs – a phone call to a head teacher; an invoice to authorise and another to pay; visiting speakers to thank and sort paperwork for; minutes and papers to read in preparation for the afternoon’s meeting; an appointment to be made with the head of school –her secretary and I discuss vegetables and recipes for leeks for a while. I attend to a number of e-mails and speak to the technician about the dead battery in my laptop. No post today. A reference to write and some supervisions to arrange. I arrange to attend a morning conference on poetry and film. The second supervisor for a Masters by research calls in. She has read the dissertation and thinks it is OK. I do too, and am glad she is positive. It is autobiographical/ narrative in nature so it is hard to find the right external examiner –all those pitfalls where there are examiners who feel they have something to prove or an axe to grind. It is important to find someone sympathetic to the approach. It is a very readable engaging dissertation about growing into being a teacher. We agree in needs a little more grit in it. Though, as my colleague observes, it is not often that teachers are so positive.

I write to the student to arrange a meeting. Another colleague arrives and it is soon lunch time. I keep writing but then join people for a hot lunch because I discover I have to stay late tonight. We talk about the forthcoming White paper and students and finding examiners. The editor of the book which my colleague and I are now well past the deadline for joins us. She does not mention our chapter! To the post office for stamps and the newsagents for a paper. Then back to the office to meet with my English colleague. I had hoped to get to the library today. I always seriously underestimate how long things will take. I avoid one or two jobs that really must be done soon.

My colleague and I discuss the work on early reading we will do with a number of schools. I update her on a visit I made to see year 1 writing and we write to the three teachers who are going to be on our working party. She gives me her opinion on a book proposal I am writing. It is hard, I find, to sell myself. We arrange sign up sheets for tutorials and discuss tea and baking arrangements for the Writing Teachers group that will meet on Wednesday. A colleague drops by to let off steam and another to tell us she feels better and that her course on Saturday had been good. I read through an article on invented spelling and it is time for the executive meeting.

The agenda is quite long but we are finished by five. Our new head of school is getting things moving. There are new systems for disciplinary procedures. I shall have to make sense of these. I run up to my office and gather my papers. I am going to try and crack the writing tomorrow. My colleague has not written for publication before though I know she will write well and I have not helped by being slow myself. It is not a book that we are that keen on. But we will meet on Wednesday to compare notes. She won’t find time to write before the weekend…. I check e-mails, one teacher has replied, yes she will be part of the working party, and then a second message comes zinging in. that is two of t he three we invited. Hurray. A colleague comes in to tell me that he thinks that a maths text book we have been sent as an example of the kind of thing a publisher is developing is very good and he is pleased to be able to keep it. I think I like the concept of the books and should stop worrying about what I think is the unpleasant colour scheme!

I finally leave the building. Because I was later than usual this morning, I am parked in some far flung outpost. A brisk walk in the frosty dark. I negotiate the drive into the city, past the cathedral and up the narrow cobbled street to where we are to attend a session for poets who are going to work with teachers. A colleague and I ran a session for the group two weeks ago which was supposed to consider pedagogy and poetry. This week a Well-known Poet was running the session. He raised the question whether poetry should be taught in schools or was it perhaps a subversive and private pleasure. I privately thought ‘No’ and ‘Yes’ so we could all go home, but the evening wore on and talk spiralled around without us having any sense of what we were talking about. I tire of artists regarding themselves as the saviours of schools and the repeated cry that teachers fear poetry. The project may be interesting. I am not sure that it will generate anything especially new.

My colleague and I stood outside with a poet friend of mine, trying to make sense of the evening and the project until it was too cold to stay still and then I drove my poet friend to where his car was parked and talked about poetry and poets until far too late. So here I am, in bed, writing this, because tomorrow is my writing day and I just must not get distracted.

Uid 126

November 15th 2010

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My colleague and I discuss the work on early reading we will do with a number of schools. I update her on a visit I made to see year 1 writing and we write to the three teachers who are going to be on our working party. She gives me her opinion on a book proposal I am writing. It is hard, I find, to sell myself. We arrange sign up sheets for tutorials and discuss tea and baking arrangements for the Writing Teachers group that will meet on Wednesday. A colleague drops by to let off steam and another to tell us she feels better and that her course on Saturday had been good. I read through an article on invented spelling and it is time for the executive meeting.

The agenda is quite long but we are finished by five. Our new head of school is getting things moving. There are new systems for disciplinary procedures. I shall have to make sense of these. I run up to my office and gather my papers. I am going to try and crack the writing tomorrow. My colleague has not written for publication before though I know she will write well and I have not helped by being slow myself. It is not a book that we are that keen on. But we will meet on Wednesday to compare notes. She won’t find time to write before the weekend…. I check e-mails, one teacher has replied, yes she will be part of the working party, and then a second message comes zinging in. that is two of t he three we invited. Hurray. A colleague comes in to tell me that he thinks that a maths text book we have been sent as an example of the kind of thing a publisher is developing is very good and he is pleased to be able to keep it. I think I like the concept of the books and should stop worrying about what I think is the unpleasant colour scheme!

I finally leave the building. Because I was later than usual this morning, I am parked in some far flung outpost. A brisk walk in the frosty dark. I negotiate the drive into the city, past the cathedral and up the narrow cobbled street to where we are to attend a session for poets who are going to work with teachers. A colleague and I ran a session for the group two weeks ago which was supposed to consider pedagogy and poetry. This week a Well-known Poet was running the session. He raised the question whether poetry should be taught in schools or was it perhaps a subversive and private pleasure. I privately thought ‘No’ and ‘Yes’ so we could all go home, but the evening wore on and talk spiralled around without us having any sense of what we were talking about. I tire of artists regarding themselves as the saviours of schools and the repeated cry that teachers fear poetry. The project may be interesting. I am not sure that it will generate anything especially new.

My colleague and I stood outside with a poet friend of mine, trying to make sense of the evening and the project until it was too cold to stay still and then I drove my poet friend to where his car was parked and talked bout poetry and poets until far too late. So here I am, in bed, writing this, because tomorrow is my writing day and I just must not get distracted.

Uid 127

Share Project

Monday 15th November, 2010

I woke up this morning with a sense of trepidation for the forthcoming week. It’s probably the hardest week in my academic year, where I have at least 30 hours of contact time, running practicals in the lab. I have already put on my out of office assistant, so hopefully people won’t start shouting at me when I don’t respond to my emails as quickly as I normally do. It’s an interesting situation I’m in, teaching this particular 6-hour practical. I am well aware that I’m breaking contract by teaching this many hours in a week. However, I am also aware that when you have 120 students in a cohort, there is little choice but to run a practical 5 times, and I, for one, prefer to get them out of the way in one go, rather than have it drag on for several weeks. I know I’m not popular for my opinion though, and certainly not with those heavily involved with the Union.

Unfortunately, I wasn’t even able to have a slightly quieter start to the day, going in a little late and having a peaceful coffee before the practical kicked off at 10am. No, this morning I had to have a meeting to inform a student she was going to be withdrawn from her course for providing misleading information on her application form. Thankfully, my Dean of Faculty agreed to run the meeting, as long as I was in attendance, and I’m so grateful. She remained, externally at least, as calm as a cucumber, while I sat there shaking, feeling totally overwhelmed that one of my students could have done something so outrageous. I wasn’t really angry, just so very disappointed. There will undoubtedly be fallout from this though; it seems to me that there’s always some sort of appeal when a student is prevented from doing what they wanted to do, even if they were totally in the wrong. In a way I appreciate the fact that students are no longer told what to do and expect to put up with it at University. Especially now that the cost of going to University is so high, they do deserve good quality. However, I hate the blame culture that has crept into this country, where nobody wants to be held responsible for their own actions.

The practical went well, and I even managed to get a little bit of work done in advance for the rest of the week as I had help today in the form of another lecturer. I think the students appreciated it as well, although I managed to mess up a couple of times, not able to answer the most simple of questions. My son has had a filthy cold over the weekend – I think it’s finally caught up with me and reduced my brainpower somewhat. I always manage to get a cold during this academic week, just when I really need to be on top form. I’ll definitely be sticking the kettle on for a Lemsip later.

One thing I didn’t manage to do over the course of the day was write a lecture for 9am tomorrow morning. And it’s just not going to happen now, because I’m going out tonight. It’s rehearsal night for the band I play in, whose members happen to be a few of my fellow lecturers and technicians. There is no chance I’ll be in the mood for writing a PowerPoint when I get home at around 11.30, so I’ll just have to busk the lecture. At least I know the subject inside out, and in fact I’ll turn it to my advantage by using it as a chance to find out what the students know, and where I can help them and provide more information in areas that they’re struggling with.

I’ll just try not to think too hard about the 35 emails that have gone unanswered today, or the pile of 80 practical scripts that should have been marked by the start of this week. I’ll pretend that ‘to do’ list that is currently 5 sides of A4 long doesn’t really exist, seeing as it’s tucked away in my bag and therefore I can’t see it. And I’ll try not to think about that fact that I’ve barely seen my family for days, running like mad to try and make sure I at least stand still against the oncoming tsunami of work.

Uid 128

Early start - cold and frosty so the car needs to be de-iced for the first time this year. Traffic was absolutely awful and, as usual, no apparent reason for it.

Teaching Care Around the Time of Death today to first year nursing students - 4th time I've taught this session this year. Last time was during the week when it would have been my father's 88th birthday, this week it would have been my mum's 99th on 18th!

Thankfully a colleague has set the room up for me - gives me time to get that all important first cup of coffee of the working day. The lecturer I am working with knows the group well so he will be the supportive person in the room, particularly since there are 2 students whose fathers have died within the last year. Only problem is that I have laryngitis so just hope the voice holds out! Time to get through some e-mails and address some issues of classroom discipline with the Course Director before going into class

Started the session at 9.30 - very quiet group, quite young and only 2 people have ever cared for someone who is dying. Hard work as well because they don't know me and it is not a safe subject to talk about. One student left the class very distressed when the subject of sudden death came up - that is why it is so important to have 2 lecturers in the class when we do this session. She managed to return shortly before the coffee break but we will be demonstrating last offices later (wrapping the body after death) so not sure how she will manage that.

11.50 Rest of the session went well - they did begin to respond more freely after coffee. A difficult session, but one I feel is very important. And my voice held out (just!!).

12.00 Return to the office to find 2 students waiting to see me - one has just had a run-in with an adult branch lecturer colleague who does not always demonstrate the caring aspect of being a nurse. Sometimes we just need to have ears that listen and actually hear what some of our students are going through. Hopefully I have reassured her enough for her to go home and face the rest of her day.

The second student is having a problem on his practice placement and just needed to talk. I get teased that all the boys come to talk to me - maybe it's because I allow them to be vulnerable, I don't know, but as long as they keep coming I will listen. Half an hour of letting off steam is often all that is required and that half an hour is time well spent in my book.

12.50 Lunch time while I wait for another student who is running late - he's on placement and didn't want to leave until his patients were sorted. Once I have seen him I am heading home to work on curriculum documents - at least there I should not be interrupted.

13.15 Still waiting - just got a text to say he is on a bus stuck in the traffic jam caused by the local roadworks!

Uid 129

I was excited about this month's diary entry as I thought that I might have something interesting to write. I was due to be in Madrid giving a paper on the journey from research in crafts and sustainability to the development of curriculum to accommodate the research. Off I set on Sunday to the airport, nervous but ready and excited to be sharing what I've been doing for the past two years with disinterested colleagues across a range of disciplines and fields. And then the train before mine went through a tunnel, the driver thought he'd heard something dropping onto the roof, the tunnel was closed and all movement towards the airport ceased. By the time coaches had been arranged and alternative transport set in (slow) motion, my window of opportunity for checking in had well and truly closed. I arrived at the airport to find the flight closed.

I should have been giving the paper around about now.

I was nervous about giving a paper - just plain old performance anxiety as I am quite happy with the paper itself - but that nervous feeling is nothing compared to the bottomless pit of frustration and despair when events conspire to stop it being given. In any case the nervousness is something I have developed a raft of procedures and techniques to deal with; acts of god are by definition beyond my control.

It gives me no joy to consider that part of the research was looking at the proposed effects of peak oil, one of which is that sections of infrastructure will slowly begin to break down. In the summer the family moved to Cornwall and nobody warned me that the winter here is entirely taken up with the maintenance of infrastructure that cannot take place in an area almost entirely devoted to tourism at any time when the sun might conceivably be shining. It is one thing to objectively, rationally and dispassionately consider the disruptive results of peak oil; quite another to be sitting on a bus with a churning stomach and a feeling of impending - I mean right now impending - doom and the implosion of any further chances for me to access any budget to give research papers.

Having said that I got the best - if most disbelieving - laugh of last week when I read this:

"It was a looming doomsday scenario: â€œPeak oilâ€ would someday hit, potentially sending food prices soaring, stock markets reeling, and countries to war to seize and protect remaining oil reserves.

Instead, the International Energy Agency said Tuesday, peak crude oil already came and went unnoticed in 2006.

Crisis averted, apparently."

(http://chicagopressrelease.com/business/international-energy-agency-says-peak-oil-has-hit-crisis-averted-the-christian-science-monitor)

Well I for one am very glad that we haven't had soaring food prices, a reeling stock market, or - um - a war to seize and protect...um...oh wait...

Doh!

So what I have done today instead of going to Madrid and giving a paper is to finish a totally overdue resource review for the sadly soon-to-be-defunct (I read today) ADM-HEA. We - and they - were pretty sure it was coming but unlike certain other bodies I could mention,\* which I was perfectly happy to see immolated on the bonfire of the quangoes, (quangos?) - ADM-HEA were really useful, inspirational, supportive and forward-thinking. I feel bad for all those employed in it and wish them luck finding other employment.

(Because there isn't much of it around)

(unless you are a tunnel engineer for First Great Western)

The resource review, Module Evaluation Reviews - also totally overdue, module overview snapshots for the course leaders, a proposal for study skills sessions which will make sure I am up to my proportional hours, and an again overdue PDR. Even though I seem to have been given a bit of "extra" time (as in unbudgeted for) by not going to Madrid, I am still way behind and feel that I have no prospect of catching up. And I'm only proportional!

\*I won't be crying for any of the RDAs

Uid 131

A cold morning - and a difficult one. A nice weekend with family, celebrating my mother's 65th birthday and probably drinking way too much, means that I am not feeling 100%, am sleepy and groggy. And Monday mornings bring 2 hours of back to back teaching in the morning.

And it's not an ideal start, because I remember that on Friday afternoon I was failing to focus and decided that the remaining teaching prep I would need to do for this week could be done on Monday (not the weekend - the dangers of being away over the weekend!)So I have to pour coffee down me and spend an hour or so checking up on the course I'm teaching this afternoon to remind myself. I always seem to have brilliant ideas about how to teach too late - I note down a couple of interesting approaches I could take to this session, but mostly that needs to be borne in mind for next year - despite my good intentions, I'm running late again...

And then my classes.

The first is depressing. It's a difficult group - they are all exchange students and not used to small group teaching in the way that we do it. In addition, they're not terribly motivated - I get the sense with most of them that as long as they pass they will be happy. So at least half of them are sitting at tables with a pen at the ready, waiting for me to speak and then writing it down. This is not what I want, but most of them are only here for one semester. Should I try to change their behaviour, or simply accept it? I suspect I'm taking a rather defeatest approach.

The second, however, is wonderful. For some reason, this years first years are great and that cheers me up no end. They are interested in the material. They have read it, thought about it, understood it and are asking question about it. I hope it's what they thought they'd be coming to, at university. It's certainly what I hope for every time I walk into a class.

Finish, back to my office. I resolved this year to take proper breaks and lunch breaks. So I go to the shop to buy some lunch and sit with a book in my office, eating noodles. I used to feel quite self-indulgent about this kind of thing, but I'm over that!

Then an hour wrestling with competition law. I set the slides and animations up last week, so I just need to make sure I know what I'm talking about. I don't really - it's the area of the course I feel most insecure about. But I know enough to teach 2nd years and that's what is important, I think. So I review the cases and plan the class (for tomorrow), changing the order of the questions set by someone else, in order to make for a more coherent class.

Then the third class of the day. I'm trying something new with this group - I've done audio material for them to listen to in advance of the lecture, and then using the lecture to explain and exemplify, rather than outline. As a result, I feel insecure. I don't quite know whether they're learning as well as they should be. I have a horrible feeling they are not reading as much as they should and that I am spoonfeeding them. Sometimes I wonder if I'm too afraid to challenge students.

Then back to finish my emails. Nothing too complicated - a student wondering where to get a book for her dissertation (doesn't seem to have heard of ILL); an admissions question I can't answer and need to wait until someone is back from holiday; some costs that need approving; a reference for a graduate, which is great news (as he has a job!) except he's already told me he's accepted it so I wonder why I'm writing the reference...I leave at 5pm - another resolution I'm trying to keep. As I commented in my last entry, I can't survive unless I wind down. 9 hours a day isn't always enough - but if I work late I sleep badly. So I go home, cook dinner (and eat it) watch TV, drink a glass of wine, and try to catch up on my rest.

Uid 134

This was my day off.

Having spent much of the weekend helping to run a conference for the Association of Paediatric Chartered Phyiostherapists I was exhausted. So had a lie-in and then focussed on catching up with all those jobs that hadn't got done over the weekend!!

My mobile did ring at one point with the name of a work colleague coming up on the display. I hesitated - it might be really important. But then I decided that she had probably forgotten to check my diary and didn't realise I was on a day off (I was right about that!). Spent the next half an hour fighting the fretful thoughts, and finally convinced myself that I didn't need to worry. The ensuing sense of mastering that was worth it!!

After that, not a thought was given to work!

Uid 136

Well it is about 8.45 and I started work, at home, at 6.30 (having been up till 2am), and continued on the train – marking second year lab reports. They are a bit like the Ancient Mariners albatross – a dead weight which never goes away and serves constantly to remind me of what I should and should not have done to get to this point!

I arrived at the office a few minutes late, having slowed as I walked through the War Memorial Gardens to ponder on the futility of war and to pray for the families, friends and other concerned individuals who had written the names of individual service personnel on the little crosses stuck in the ground.

In my office I have started to process e mails (hence writing this!), so far mainly admin – 718 unopened, though admittedly some of those are old and ‘junk’, and only about 50 have come in over the weekend - , but keep being interrupted (it is now 9.20!) by students who are seeking coursework extensions and deferrals of in class assessments for a variety of valid reasons. Each of these individually is a sad tale but more worrying to me is the picture it builds up overall of the level of stress in the student population at present. There is stress in the staff population too – for some reason the semester so far seems to have been much harder and more frenetic than ever before. Everyone is saying it but no-one can put a finger on why. More people are ill and tired, off sick with a range of minor and more serious conditions, from the cleaners to senior academics. From a personal viewpoint I have had more all night work sessions this semester than in the previous 10 years in total, just trying to keep my head above water. Our head of school reports e mails timed throughout the night too, so I don’t think I am the only one!

Need to stop now (9.45) to prepare for meetings – 10am to discuss how we will structure our revamped project module for undergrads next year, and at 11 a Programme Development Team for an MSc programme – this has been for part time students only for several years and is being opened to full time students – as these will not be in relevant employment and many are likely to be from overseas (I really hate that phrase ‘international students’, it is so parochial and Englocentric!) there are significant resource implications, especially for project work.

4pm. Well, I spent much of the day talking about resources, what we’d like to do and what we may need to do. The MSc programme leader has said she will not take any FT students if she doesn’t get a firm commitment to resourcing projects, external speakers etc. I can’t say I blame her, but it seems such a waste of time – one of my programmes currently undergoing review may not run because of changes in the NHS, while a recently appointed lecturer tasked with revising some modules is concerned that we won’t have enough students on his programme to run the modules. We put such a lot of effort and time into organising good learning experiences for students and sometimes I wonder why we bother.

I am trying to remember what else I have achieved. Well, I have spent an hour with an undergraduate project student talking through her first draft. She is a part time student, employed in a local lab, and we fitted in a PDP interview while she was here; she is fairly disillusioned about job prospects, and her lofty career plans when she joined us a few years ago are reduced to staying in the same job but keeping an eye out for anything which comes up in the right area. One of her problems is grade inflation – she reports that the candidates for the jobs which interest her have masters if not doctorates, so what hope does a mature student with a BSc Honours have?

There have been some positives to the day too – an old friend now retired came into the department today and we had a brief chat; I have a colleague who is enthusing everyone with the material she has located for a first year discussion on the nature of disease, and my PG Cert HE mentee is doing well and not acquiring too much admin as yet. I completed an on line survey about my experiences of discrimination as a result of my faith; well I had nothing really to report although it can sometimes be hard to be an active Christian in a science department, my colleagues are never overtly hostile, but they surely do not want to know about my odd habits!

More marking has come in, from some literature reviews and in class tests but I seem to have got off lightly from the latter – they obviously didn’t like my essay!

Just need to download a mark sheet for the level 2 lab reports, then I think I will go home early, so I can watch Sarah Jane on TV with my son.

Uid 138

It’s not often that I want to take a sickie, but it is negative 4 degrees outside, and bed is very warm. (I eventually remember that no work gets done while lying in bed, and am in my office by 8).

Having spent all Sunday reviewing papers for journals, I am incensed by the recent comments in the THE by a representative from an academic publishing firm saying that they did not think that the subscriptions paid by universities for journals were unreasonable, even taking into account the millions of pounds worth of unpaid hours spent by academics who review papers. His comment that "The only way for universities to save money is to make people redundant” is insulting. Not considered in the article are the many many hours that academics spend formatting papers for publication – gone are the days when you sent plain text and the publisher formatted it – it can take days to get a paper into the format required: this is not interesting or useful work for an academic to do. At least peer-reviewing a paper can be (sometimes, maybe, possibly) somewhat interesting, unlike battling with fonts and margins and picture placement. One article I reviewed yesterday bore no relation at all to the subject matter of the journal; it should have been filtered out pre-peer-review. What do the publishing firms Actually Do?

Deadline for a journal special-call paper today: having told my overseas colleague that I do not like last-minute-working-to-a-deadline (as other priority tasks get shifted), I am annoyed that I have let myself get into a last-minute-rush situation where the paper has effectively been written in the last week. I like being organised and hate it when external events or people prevent me from being so.

My current slogan is “I wish I were important enough to be able to demand the resources I need to do my job properly”: network connections in lecture theatres don’t work, there are no working overhead projectors any where, projector screens occlude the only whiteboard in the room … there are never the range of facilities that I need to do my teaching properly. Very frustrating. And this is aside from photocopiers that are continually being repaired, lifts out of action, and servers down.

We have been called to enter in data for our mini-REF: indicators of esteem, best four papers, impact. I always find doing things like this very scary: I seem to be working all the time, but never feel that I am making any substantial contribution that anyone but my students and my collaborators might value. It makes me think about where and how we are (or should be) valued: does it matter if my ‘impact’ is only so-so, when I had a great lecture today with interested and enthusiastic students who obviously enjoyed the session and obviously learned a lot? Does it matter if my four best papers are not in the most highly regarded journals when one is the result of my advising a cross-continent collaboration of post-docs who have now learned sufficient techniques and methods for them to pursue the research area without my guidance? Does it matter if my research grant record is not brilliant when I have just signed a textbook contract?

It is dark and cold. Tonight I will fix some software for my lab on Wednesday – hope I manage to fit in my Monday night ritual of University Challenge and Only Connect.

Uid 139

Monday 15th November

Forgot all about doing this during the day – in spite of the reminder. So this is going to have to be from memory.

I had to take the car in for its MoT first thing so I got to work a bit later than normal. I’d guessed right for the trains from that station so I only had a quarter of an hour to wait – they’re every half hour so it wasn’t particularly bad. I must have arrived at just after 9am. But Monday morning doesn’t have any classes so it isn’t too bad arriving a little late.

Dropped off revised design curriculum to the other design staff for comments first thing. No response by the end of the day so I need to get them to write up their units now.

I’d sent an email to see if I could change the timing for an MSc viva. That was fine, so it will now be 12 noon.

Started revisions to the MSc Enterprise curriculum which goes from 15 CATS units and got part way through the process. It shouldn’t be particularly difficult but there’s the rather straightforward issue that in the change this course doesn’t seem to have much of an option other than to simply increase unit sizes: things don’t get redistributed very well for it.

Meeting for Faculty Learning and Teaching Chairs at 11am. Just the four of us. This is something that we instigated ourselves so it is our own thoughts about what’s going on and about what we’d like to be going on in the University. A bit of a chinwag, to some extent. But we’ve picked up some useful information about the things that are going on in the different faculties, particularly in the Health one. I was the only one to have gone to the David Baume meeting so the others got an informal report. We are feeling that the University seems to be forgetting about the scholarship and innovation in teaching and wants to concentrate on KPIs and numbers, disregarding the rest. A sad state of affairs.

12 noon bench interview / viva with the MSc student who quite plainly hasn’t got where he should be. We threw the QAA masters level outcomes at him and he had considerable difficulty even understanding what we were talking about, let alone demonstrating it.

1pm lunchtime meeting to sort out grades for MSc projects. A bit of a bunfight, but we managed it quite well. This year we don’t have the huge bunching in the 60s that we had last year, so the external wil be happy about that, but we do have a double-hump distribution with some extremely good students in the 70s and 80s and a few who either just crawl over the bottom hurdle or who don’t get there at all. So a very odd year from that point of view. The statistics will look weird. (But then they will end up with whatever they will end up with…)

Afternoon tutorials with final year students. Six out of ten attend. Most have done something useful: in one case something very useful, and there’s been quite a bit of thinking and progress. In at least one case more thinking than progress, as he hasn’t put pen to paper and got the paper speaking back to him yet.

The evening session at home was catching up with the marking. Now all the MSc Enterprise project reports have been read, and all the Intellectual Property Development reports have been read too. So numbers need to go in tomorrow.

I even had a bit of time to get the bicycle bit made. Not quite finished, but getting there. Ray, the technician, had managed to cut one bit out for me in the afternoon, but I still had to do the other one myself at home. He used snips, as he knows what he’s doing with them. I used big files and a grindstone because I don’t.

At some time during the day I also managed to get an email sent to all the MSc students from Simon as a bit of general feedback from their poor performance at Friday's concept design assessment session...

Uid 140

Arrived late because my bus was cancelled.

Began by checking e-mails

Wasting time waiting for lifts. One of the two serving the 9th floor is out of service, similarly one of the two in the main foyer. Lift has gone past twice without stopping. Useless things.

As Level 2 tutor I have spent time chasing up details of a student who failed his referrals in August-a complex story that needs to be unravelled.

Reading Annual Monitoring Reports for tomorrow's boards of study. Rivetting.

Checking on-line coursework submissions. Only 10 out of 30 submitted with 4 hours to go. University insists we use Blackboard Assignment Handler. Hope it works.

Printed off paperwork for Micro lab.

Just finished afternoon micro lab

Will spend the rest of the afternoon preparing for tomorrow's lectures and keeping on top of my project student.

Uid 141

Normal start to the day. Rushing to get daughter out to school only to find that my car had frosted up. So we were late! Oops.

Fortunately, it's not far to work and I am driving at the moment after having had such a bad cough a couple of weeks ago that I've pulled a muscle in my chest and can't ride my bike. Sigh.

Mind, it was quite nice to get into work and not be (a) out of breath or (b) cold or (c) wet.

So today was a relatively free day. I had a free morning until 2pm when I was due to meet a PhD student. Wonderful feeling - lots of time to get on with things. Here was the plan:

1. Spend at most an hour on email

2. Write a lecture

3. Prepare an assessment for giving out the next day

4. Perhaps do some research

What happened was...

Planned my day while my computer booted up. Did email for an hour and a quarter. And in that process, I had to look at two applicants for the MSc I lead and also working out plans for meeting people. Then I got an exam back that needed to go the admin team straightaway (after edits). Then on my way to the admin office met a colleague who has been off sick for a long time with serious problems. Lovely to see her and catch up with her and then her partner as we walked down the corridor together. And then I met another colleague who is "retired" and was in to do some work on our usability labs.

It's an interesting question whether that's work. Cos I am not being "productive" and I am sure RAE/REF and QAA would not recognise this activity. Yet it's essential to making work places function. It's the oil in the wheels. And actually what makes work enjoyable. Heaven forfend! That I think I should be able to enjoy the job!

Any road up so it was 12 by then and I had two hours (not four) to write my lecture and sort out the assessment. Which I managed - necessity is the mother of invention. And lunch can be eaten at a desk!

I met my PhD student who is doing really well. Much better than earlier in her studies. Still not brilliant but it's really encouraging to see the progress.

Then a pause and a chance to sort out a website still for the module I am teaching. Bit more email to stop it backing up then seeing an undergraduate project student who is just kicking off his project. Really nice to have these research related chats. The teaching prep is fine and I love the teaching but the contrast and the nice one-to-one experience is really refreshing.

Then it's off home to walk the dog.

Later in the evening, I did a bit of email while waiting for the supper to cook. It's just an endless dribble of stuff that mostly I could live without but if I don't clear out the dross, I can't find the gems I need.

And then later still I read a chapter of another PhD student. Sadly though well written it was hard to stay awake and I nodded off after an hour or so. And woke up in time for bed!

Uid 142

08:30 - OK - might actually manage at least part of this today - in early for several reasons - have the afternoon off (yay!) to see a friend; so I've driven in. Needed to get in in plenty of time to get a parking space; also had to photocopy an article I found on Friday (re. Twitter & student engagement for class to discuss)

Hoping that the last minute lectures I prepared yesterday will work, but as the VLE appears to be down at the moment ... just glad I put them on the external hard drive as well as uploading them!

We appear to be out of paper - so they're going to have to share blue copies in pairs, rather than having 1 white one each. Oh well, gets them talking.

16th: am

It did get them talking - and some good ideas; though it was more the level 2 students in the next group that were more inspired - by what I'd thought would be potentially more boring! Who can tell!

PM:

Afternoon off ...woohoo; dropped all my stuff in my office & dashed off - managed to get to meet friend in next town (some 20 miles) in a very respectable time, so had a lovely afternoon with her planning our Xmas holiday (I have a feeling that that's going to be the first weekend this semester when I don't spent at least part of one day of the weekend working...)

Managed \*not\* to put the computer on when I got home - lovely. (Watched Harry Potter 2 in preparation for the next film)

....

Afterthought. Is 'Champagnedrinker' the best pseudonym. Oh well, you said pick something that helps to anonymise you. Think it does that well ... had I said '20 coffees a day' could be more truthful, but maybe more revealing!

Uid 149

The 15th of November was a Monday so I had a slightly unusual start to a working day in that I was in Wales and thus far from the madding crowd. I had visited a colleague for the weekend and the morning was spent making our way back to the midlands, courtesy of Arriva Trains Wales. One day the service will improve and become more regular, so we’re told, but in the meantime we contend with unreliability and overcrowding. Never mind, at least it shows people are using public transport so it can’t be abolished as a result of lack of use. As I travel I check emails when we drift into areas with sufficient mobile network coverage and watch the inbox filling inexorably. Some of them I can despatch as we travel, but others require the consultation of documents far away in my office or on my computer at home. Others reflect a state of existential confusion into which some of my postgraduates on the taught programmes have lapsed. A Master’s level research methods module involves the students doing presentations this week and next, so a number of them have discovered urgent appointments elsewhere. First year undergraduates have begun to email me asking for feedback appointments to discuss their essays. In between times I am reading through a student’s submission to an ethics committee for her final year undergraduate project. I arrive back in my home city and pop home briefly to cuddle my partner before going out again to the university to see more students and a colleague who is looking to me to teach research methods this week to undergraduates. There is some stuff about interviewing and the interpretation of interview data that we have to finalise. In the evening I compose messages to the faculty accountant concerning a budget for a research project where it has become apparent that we will require further monies for the travel and hospitality budget. I always feel like I’m being told off when he speaks to me. So much for the notion of ‘support staff’ and ‘service departments’. So I’m not relishing the prospect of his reply. Whilst doing this I field a number of worryingly elementary questions from postgraduates preparing for their presentations on Wednesday. The task is to summarise and critique a paper of their choice, but the level of discussion via email tonight is more along the lines of ‘what do I have to do?’ or ‘How do I summarise a paper?’ which seems a long way from what I’d hoped. Surely it can’t be that difficult for students at Master’s level? I’m hoping for a moment or two to read through my colleague’s documentation for the research methods class I’m teaching on the undergraduate programme tomorrow. But the hands of the clock creep round and the messages keep arriving. One of the Master’s students writes to thank me for the help and I feel pathetically grateful. The day can be considered at least a partial success because I make it in to bed before midnight.

Uid 151

Today I have taken TOIL for the morning as I have a medical appointment with my daughter. Although this is the case I check my e mails before starting off to the orthodontists.

The distance from University allows me to reflect on the week ahead and the challenges that the week may present. Challenges come in many forms - Implications from the Browne report, student issues, team challenges, work life balance or not. I am having a particularly stressful home life at present as my sister in law is suffering from severe mental health issues and I now not only have my own 4 children to care for but my nephew and niece. Work with all its challenges seems to be my place of sanity.

On arrival at work I have the delightful role of getting a birthday card signed by the team for another team member. Although it is Monday it feels like Friday I should feel energised as tomorrow I will be celebrating Eid with my family. Wednesday is teaching throughout the morning my own studies in the afternoon and teaching in the evening until 8pm. As I have worked around 50 hours for the last 2 weeks I will be taking TOIL on Thursday and Friday. Part of this time I will be using for my personal studies and the rest will be used for my role as carer.

This is a short share note today and reflects the limited time available at this moment in time.

Uid 152

6.30-8am Getting my children & I ready for work / childminder

8-9am Dropping off children at childminders and travelling to work

9-10am Checking and responding to emails, I have lots at the moment on Monday mornings, as I am covering a placement module the second year UG students are doing, and so there are always lots of queries

10-11am Meeting with Faculty Research & Scholarly Activity teaching fellow to discuss a research idea I have and how to go forward with it

11am-12pm Finishing emails and updating academic CV to send to Faculty Research & Scholarly Activity teaching fellow

12-1pm Planning ahead for meeting with placement providers on Wed 17th Nov

1-2pm Lunch whilst finishing off a few odd & ends at my desk

2-4.45pm Creating new e-learning materials for UG students Technology module, using Wimba Create.

4.45-5.30pm Pick up children and drive home

5.30-6.15pm Teatime

6.15-7pm Bath & bedtime for children

7-8pm Online grocery shopping arrives, so unpack & put away groceries. Do washing up then make two phone calls to friends.

8-9pm TV

9pm Bedtime

Uid 153

Refelctions on building for the future

Today, and for the rest of this diary project (I think), I am back in my normal working environment – not gadding about the middle east.

The day starts and ends with interviews. Successful MSc graduates would like to pursue a PhD programme with us. It is gratifying that we are doing something right, that they want to stay with us. Personally, since I am module leader for research methods across the MSc courses, I am pleased that they enjoy the research process enough to carry on. Both wish to continue with the topic of their dissertation and take their initial research to a further stage. Both talk about writing articles and sharing their knowledge through teaching. I remember that for this reason; I too came into university teaching during my own PhD study.

In between, I have tutorials with current MSc dissertation students. I doubt that either of these will apply for PhD study, as they both struggle to articulate their ideas into readable prose. They are part of a large programme (over 100 students) recruited from south-east Asia. Although technically competent, many find the research methods module difficult. There are no right ways and wrong ways, just the most appropriate approach. They have to explain what they do and justify why they do it. Many resort to copying large quotes from textbooks. A few plagiarise the work of someone else. I don’t understand why they think that it will not be noticed. Of course, these are mostly the ones who do not attend the lectures and seminars – all carefully designed to help them through the thinking stages of developing a research proposal. Average attendance can be as low as 40% of the cohort.

But those who attend do well in their dissertation – and some come back after graduation to embark on a PhD. And then I know that a small part of my work is building for the future.

Uid 154

Up at 6 and out of the house by 20 to 7 to encounter a frozen up car – my first experience of this this year so it’s back into the garage to rummage for de-icer.

The journey to work is lovely. There’s a stretch of river valley beside the motorway and this morning it looks like fairy land, all white and glistening with mist rising from the river and a very pink sunrise.

I’m at my desk by 7.20, with a cup of green tea. Nobody else in the School is keen on this so I get passed all the packets of seriously top quality stuff given as presents by our Chinese and Taiwanese students. A perk indeed.

Writing this entry on Tuesday 16th I can say that the leitmotif running through Monday 15th was jobs and employment. On the previous Friday I had learned that one of our colleagues had got a new job overseas and would be leaving in the new year. I had mixed feelings about this news – delight for my colleague who was going to a post which was far more suited to their interests and concerns and which would make them much happier than they had been of late, and sadness about losing a valued member of staff who, in the years they had been with us, had become a good friend. I also felt some serious relief because I had been anxious about what was likely to happen to this person over the next few months. In a nutshell, the colleague was likely to ‘fail’ their probation due to lack of publications. This person is an exceptional teacher – truly exceptional in terms of the wonderful resources they produce and in their ability to engage and enthuse students. They also provide exceptional support in tutorials and in feedback. No-one ever doubted that s/he worked as hard as hard – putting in 14 hour days as matter of course. However, all their energy went into teaching and for someone on an academic contract that wasn’t ok. We had tried a number of strategies to try and help with getting some publications – and with regard to shifting contracts but for various reasons (personal and institutional) none of these was successful. So now we are losing a wonderful colleague. And the immediate upshot is that the gap they leave will have to filled by a couple of us who remain and who are already overloaded because we know there is little likelihood of replacement. I met with the head of department and we talked through a number of scenarios and ways of coping with the impending departure – as well as sharing our sadness. And out of the darkness appeared a glimmer of light as we talked through a plan which could provide some part-time work and experience for some brilliant PhD students who are waiting on vivas and who haven’t yet managed to get jobs.

Strangely enough, I had appointments to see a couple of these students during the afternoon and it was nice to be able to say let the HOD have your CV and we can probably offer you some masters level teaching, marking and supervision in the new year. My meetings with these students were primarily in order to talk about their vivas which will be within the next month but after 3 years working alongside these folk, sharing ups and downs and bottles of wine at conferences there was also talk about family and life in general. The vast majority of my doctoral students are mature – partly because I have many from our professional doctoral course but also because in my subject area, we do tend to get people who have had some work experience. The two students I saw this afternoon are both around my own age and we share many life experiences. One student in particular is particularly concerned about employment. S/he had an ESRC studentship and this just about enabled ends to be met but this ended in September and s/he needs a job. This student has a very strong and developing publications list (the colleague who is leaving would have been well in the clear if it had been theirs) as well as a CV containing teaching, lecturing, administration and high level managerial experience. But this is not a good time to be looking for a job in academia. And whatever the rhetoric, it generally doesn’t help to be in one’s 50s. I know this person would be a wonderful colleague. I would feel very confident having them working alongside me and in my role as REF co-ordinator I know this person has 6 publications (and I would say they are 3\*) already in the bag giving an embarrassment of riches. So..... maybe others will see and snaffle them up but there have already been a couple of disappointments.

As well as this job related stuff, today I: attended a teaching team meeting; replied to 54 emails; reviewed a journal article; did some amendments to a project proposal I’m working on with 2 colleagues from other institutions; did some admin and trouble-shooting around an international conference I’m on the organising committee for; completed an annual course review; and had a skype tutorial with an overseas student. I left for home at 6.45.

Uid 155

A full day - mixture of admin, student support, teaching and research. The day started with me finishing off some paperwork associated with 'quality assurance' proceedures: in short the university has insisted that all programmes have the same structure, and then ask us to create lots of paperwork to justify why we have changed the programme. I don't mind admin, and see its necessity, but there are times when one feels that no one benefits from the vast majority of the paperwork we create. Alongside this I have conducted quite a lot of tutorials - it is the time when students are getting more concerned about their coursework, and, third year students in particular, are increasingly concerned about how they are going to fit it all in. Teaching, in the early evening slot, was straight forward - a skills session for a research module. I am, though, a little concerned that many students still don't really know how to reference: out of a group of 16 none of them sucessfully completed all tasks accurately. I've spent the evening undertaking some research for a lecture next week. While doing this I have found lots of fascinating journal articles to read: not useful for the task in hand but interesting for some point in the future. Have added them to the 'interesting - read when you have time' file; I fear, though, like the interesting documentaries that I regularly record on Sky+ they will sit there until they are deleted to create more room for other things that will sit there until they too are deleted ... oh for a machine that could stop time so I can read all the wonderful things I find. I think that is more likely to become a reality than a reduction in the paper work that one needs to create to keep the quality administrators happy.

Uid 157

What a manic day! The day started getting myself and 7 year old son up and ready and out of the house, him to school and me to work, to commence at 9am sharp with the final 2 hours of lectures (a total of 13 hours) delivered to the final year students. Over this series of lectures I had fallen behind with the material (must stop going off topic!), so not only did I need to catch up but also complete my series of lectures in order that the students were ready for the following ones. That meant a bit of last minute rearrangemenet of the material. But lectures successfully completed! In the hour break before my next class I was able to answer a few e-mails - mainly from students with last minute questions about a piece of coursework due in later that day.

Then an hour seminar on a subject well outside my area of expertise. Always an interesting experience or challenge; the possibility that students will ask questions you don't know the answer to.

An brief break for lunch resulted in a chance encounter with a colleague from another School and an opportunity to catch up on a project we are both involved with. Then off to meet a guest lecturer and to ensure that the audiovisual equipment is working okay for them.

The day finishes (at work at least) with a 2 hour workshop with a fairly large group of 2nd year students. Fortunately they are an enthusiastic and motivated group and the two hours goes very quickly.

I then rushed back home in order to take over as mum as my partner has an important evening meeting. Sometimes juggling work and home life can be interesting! But work was not over as I spent a lot of the evening marking coursework. I went to bed exhausted and far too late. And it was only Monday....

Uid 158

Woke up today in a strange bed. Oh yes... I am in a meeting all day today to decide the fate of colleagues' future plans. The engineering work that dogged my trip here yesterday will not plague me on the way back (thank goodness).

The meeting itself was an eye-opener. There is a huge number of excellent researchers in the UK and reading their ideas made me feel quite inferior.

I feel, however, that my contributions were worthwhile so I leave the meeting with a warm fuzzy glow. The icing on the cake was that we finished early. As a result I made it home before 21:00!

Now I just need to prepare myself to make up for the time that has been diverted from preparing teaching in the last few days in order to prepare for that meeting.

Uid 159

start the day meeting with a colleague from our Lifelong Learning Centre to finalise details of a progression agreement for mature students currently on a preparation for Higher Education (PHE) programme. Our admissions team also present. All are committed to encouraging applications from the local population. Last year the Business School had one mature student; this year we have 20. The agreement should see that increase further.

Still trying to see students for their first personal tutorial meeting. Some are good at remembering and keeping appointments - others not. One student told me that today was the first time he had got out of bed, on a Monday, before 1pm!

Later in the day carried out a Headteacher's performance review (I am a school governor, something encouraged by the Uni). Unfortunately he had not met one of the objectives set last year and only partially met the other 2. The school has just emerged (after 2 years0 from special measures but still seems to be suffering from post-traumatic stress. Will need to contact the Chair to discuss next steps. reflected on the differences between my responsibilities/accountability in HE as opposed to teaching in a school. Quite frankly I don't know why anybody would want to teach in schools considering the stress caused by onerous bureaucratic demands that seem to occur on a daily basis. Tomorrow morning I am back at the school for a budget meeting.

Received todat the NSS scores and internal evaluation completed by year 1 and 2. Attached the Head of division's action plan. On the good side our scores do seem to have improved, in some cases by 25%

Uid 160

Just getting over the first flu of the term, which has been a real drag for the last week or so. It's one of the hazards of the job - you are so used to getting whatever virus is doing the rounds that you are surprised when you're not ill. This one was nasty: terrible headache and joint pain, especially in my back. Nevertheless, I fulfilled all my teaching commitments - although I might have been even more tangential to the topic that usual.

Uid 165

Have had a day at home today catching up on a research paper that I need to write. I'm pretty pleased as I've been able to get started on the writing of it as well as finishing reading a book and some articles in preparation. The argument I'm making is now clear to me and I went out for a bike ride today to get some thinking space. I find it really usefully to get my body physically engaged with something (like riding the bike or digging on the allotment) and consciously giving myself that space to think. I got the first couple of paragraphs written in my head by the time I got back and was able to get those onto paper straight away. Having got it started, it was then much easier to get the writing well underway. I talk to students a lot about how important it is to make this thinking space for themselves because it is so valuable to me. I also talk to them a lot about breaking the invisible barrier which is stopping reading and starting writing. The fact that I practice what I preach is important to me.

Not much else done today except dealing with some emails. Two particularly frustrating ones are worth dwelling on here:

1 - an email from two students which they resent to me because they'd sent it to the wrong person in the first place and were worried because I'd not replied. They were very confused about the first assessment task - but on reading their confusion it became clear to me that they'd not actually read the student handbook, but had only gone to the 'assessment' section of the VLE. While it was easy to point them in the right direction, it did remind me of just how easily students can get confused about things and in ways that I can't always fully anticipate. But it's a good headsup to go into that Assessment area on the VLE and put in more specific guidance that sends them back to the handbook or better still cuts and pastes the important stuff out of the handbook.

2 - an email from a colleague filling me on the problems we've been having with a colleague from another school who has been contracted to do some dissertation supervision for us. He's basically gone AWOL and has not responded to student emails or turned up to appointments. He's let us down before and it's frustrating that we have no say on who gets appointed to do this work. There is a level of professionalism here that I simply can't not meet - and it astounds me that others are able to sleep at night without meeting it.

Have been keeping half an eye on twitter today and was pleased to see myself being cc-ed into a tweet questioning lecturing as a teaching strategy. I'm a bit chuffed that I've got a reputation for being anti-lecturing. I'm assuming that it was someone who has read my blog. Sometimes blogging feels like you're talking to the ether and not much else. But then things like this happen and it feels worthwhile. I must get more blog posts out of my head and onto the screen! Also had some tweets from one of the quietest students I work with. She almost never says a word in class - but she's really really chatty online and in social networks. It's from using these environments in conjunction that I'm able to relax about her lack of engagement with face-to-face classes because I'm confident that she's taking it all in, processing it and reflecting on it in her online space. I know that pushing her to contribute in class isn't going to achieve much until her confidence improves so I'm happy to engage with twitter conversations with her to help build that up. This is more evidence that giving students a variety of ways to communicate is almost always going to be better than just offering one (talking up in class).

Also got the moderation back on my marking for the first years today. Thankfully they're all confirmed - and I can now sit comfortably in the knowledge that over half the students got firsts. There was an email from one of them today - incredulous at her result. It's a small group but boy oh boy are they good. Again - one of the students (who literally rarely does more than grunt in class) has written a stonking good essay. I can relax with him a bit as well now I've seen some of his work. They're a bright bunch - and it's going to be important to give them the challenges they need to continue to improve - while also concentrating on the two who are really struggling.

Enough for today. I'm going to ping off a few emails that will sort a few more things on my to do list and then concoct something fishy and tomato-ey for dinner. It's great to get the headspace that reading week brings.

Uid 167

7.30 am - get up slightly later than usual due to not getting to sleep well last night. Coffee and shower. Half listening to the Today programme with an item on proposals for trainee teachers to do more training whilst alraedy on the job - 'teach first' I think. Says a lot about current policy thinking about the value of theoretical grounding as part of training (for any career). Indicative of the erosion of the role of universities in general I think. Also just a stupid idea, surely.

8.30 still eating breakfast, start going through emails. Thank god its reading week, which offers a bit of pause in teaching activities and gives me the chance to work at home more this week. Unusually I have not looked at emails or done work all weekend (an agreement with my partner as a one-off) but there are fewer than I had feared and quite a lot are spam.

9.15 working on sections I am contributing to a large research proposal.

11am drive into work. I should be cycling but its really cold and I have lost my gloves. Am aware that I am not getting enough exervise these days - if I don't build it in to existing activities e.g. by cycling as the journey to work, I don't really find the time.

12 in work, pick up post, some documents to file. Look at email again. Have an email from a personal tutee with an issue to sort out - a module that many were finding difficult has put on some extra classes but not enough places for everyone and she didn't manage to sign up in time. I will need to think what to do about this. email her back with some interim advice. Other various emails about meeting dates, quite a few from a subject specific mailing list, more spam,

12.35 eating lunch at desk and reading BBC website. Some tutees drop in to collect some photocopies of reading for the next tutorial.

1.10 answering emails. Make some appointments with dissertation students, answer colleagues about research matters and meeting arrangements.

send an email to module organisers and year secretary regarding the access to extra classes issue raised by my tutee. am careful with wording, but very shortly get one back from the secretary who is clearly harrased by organising the whole thing. send her another one to smooth things over as I didn't think it was her fault. eventually through various emails the situation gets sorted and extra students get added to the class lists.

1.40 working on costings for my contribution to the research proposal. Thought this would be simple but it gets more complicated as there are issues about researchers having their own transport or not - have to speak to HR, our school manager, and then the transport section regarding care hire costs, as well as finance and the project PI.

15.00 a student was supposed to come for a progress review tutorial but did not turn up - this is the third appointment that I have made for her due to previous cancellations, and I am annoyed. Send her a stiff email reminding her this is a compulsory meeting and also that non attendance at tutorials goes down on their file which would be seen by anyone writing a reference in the future. This does the trick and I get a very apologetic smartphone email, and we make yet another appointment. I am being insistent because I know she is behind schedule on her dissertation and needs a bit of a talking to, but she does tend to be avoidant.

next hour or so write references for two students who are applying for PGCE courses. One is quite easy to do, the other a bit harder as this was a less bright student and I struggle a bit for things to say. Think of enough, and send them off.

Finish working on the proposal stuff and print off some documents that I need for a workshop tomorrow. Leave work at 6.30 without having finished reading emails, as I need to pick up my partner who has a puncture and take him to the bike shop. Do this, get some shopping, go home and eat dinner. talk about work too much over dinner ( he is also an academic) as he had a bad day and some research analysis is not going well.

10.45 pm - just another bit of email before bed....eventually switch it off at 11.20.

Uid 168

15th November 2010

Captain’s log month three, and the first “15th of…” on which I am actually doing some teaching. In fact November is a very busy teaching month for me, with a lot of 9 am lectures, practicals or tutorials. Knowing the way the month was shaping up, I made a conscious decision when the clock’s went back a couple of weeks ago to try to keep my body clock on BST in order to get up an hour earlier and get some work done before the clan gets up at 7. Today was no exception (despite a rather interrupted night). After a few emails I focussed my early attentions on going through notes for my 9 am lecture.

The lecture in question is new to me, one I have inherited from a recently-retired colleague. With considerable foresight and wisdom, he went to the trouble of making audio recordings of all of his lectures over the last couple of years and has made these available along with the PowerPoint slides – this has certainly made my preparation very much more straightforward than it would otherwise have been. I am not anywhere near retirement, but I am nonetheless inspired to make audio record of my lectures this year in case I ever need to pass on the baton to a colleague. I’d recommend that other colleagues who may be due to hand over a block of teaching to someone else records their lectures. The recordings are also invaluable if you are someone who simply forgets what they said in their lectures from one year to the next. They can, of course, also be made available to the students as a formal “podcast” but I know some academics are concerned that by offering a nice set of recordings along with copies of their PowerPoint slides they will have literally talked themselves out of a job.

The lecture itself went reasonably smoothly until about 5 minutes before the end. This year for the first time I’ve introduced some interactive MCQ slides into several of my lectures with students picking their answers via interactive response pads loaned to them by the School. It’s entirely formative, we don’t record who has given each answer. In the first three lectures I’d carried out these MCQs it went very well, but today – ironically - the technology failed. As I tried to move into the ‘voting’ section the PC locked up and with insufficient time left for a full reboot I decided to call it a day and promised to conduct the quiz at the start of the next session.

After the lecture I was surprised to find a non-academic member of staff paying a visit to my office. He works on a different floor of the building so I was curious to know what the problem might be. It turned out to be a relatively straightforward question – he has been asked to carry out the marking of a student assignment and wanted to know if the institutional rules allowed a non-academic to do so. I reassured him that there was plenty of precedent for this and, whatever his job description, his experience in the relevant field was adequate qualification to offer feedback on the relevant task.

Later in the day a second visitor also called by, the convenor of a first year module asking if I would be willing to cover a tutorial the following day as a substitute for an unwell colleague. I’m not teaching on the particular course this year but I have done so in the past so I was familiar with the content and happy to be able to help out.

The rest of the working day was dominated by two activities. Firstly, I spent some of the time converting some marker’s notes into a stand-alone blog post. The content relates to a recent scientific article which we had required students to critique. Having put considerable effort into interpreting the paper in order to write notes for the tutors marking the assignment and since the topic seemed of more general relevance to a wider audience, I decided to add a post on the theme to my academic blog.

Secondly I completed and circulated instructions for tutors regarding a session that will take place later in the week (in the same module). For many years now we have videoed students giving short presentations in order for them to see themselves – tutors show short excerpts that illustrate some of the key lessons – good and bad – from the talks. This year we have been required to abandon the old VHS-based system and use newer formats. The move makes sense but it necessitated production of a whole new set of “how to” notes for tutors. I elected (last Friday) to take some photos of the equipment and spent some time over the weekend assembling those into a pictorial guide for tutors. Today I finalised this and e-mailed it to the rest of the team. I’m quite please with the guide, but the process is definitely a notch more complex and I wonder whether some of my more technophobe colleagues will manage to get the system to work, particularly the playback stage which requires the cameras to be connected to a data projector via the DVD player in the seminar room.

Some of the day was also spent reflecting on the sorry announcement that the Higher Education Academy has elected to close the Subject Centre Network as a cost-saving exercise. I am deeply disappointed by this decision; the subject centre for our discipline has done a fantastic job over the last ten years, making a real difference to teaching and the student experience.

Only other event of note… it was a Monday and that means it was University Challenge – Exeter v York. Sadly the music round was ‘classical’ not ‘contemporary’ which took the gloss off an otherwise enjoyable show which featured a spirited but ultimately unsuccessful fightback by Exeter.

Uid 171

Was up till 2.30 last night, working on a lot of things, then up at 8.30 to come to work. Got here after 10, settled toddler in the nursery and didn't have time to get coffee before my office hour started.

I saw 7 students in the hour, one wanting advice about doing a term abroad in the US, but the rest were all third year students who were either checking that their well-prepared dissertation project proposals were indeed well prepared or were still casting about a bit aimlessly. These are the 'big thinkers', who want to philosophize about some huge aspect of language and who lose interest in a project once it's made tractable. These students are usually great fun, since they're not afraid to act 'intellectual', but I do worry for their dissertations...

Then a meeting with my Head of School, for which I was prepared to make the case that some funding would need to be found to support my unit next year, as we're losing 1.5 colleagues to planned redundancies, but only losing .5's worth of teaching. I got some unexpectedly optimistic news about how the resignation of a professor in another area might help to sort out our problems--so I didn't have to make much of a case. (phew)

A little Twitter break at lunch, with a colleague popping in to say that something's happened in the computer system and now no one but me can release marks to students. Joy.

Then I opened my email. The volume of it was not too bad, and there was some good news in it about administrative work-arounds that have been found to accommodate students in difficult situations. But there was also a series of emails from a doctoral student who doesn't seem to realise that there are ways to get things done without being confrontational. This is a very able person, but I'm thinking about how I'm not going to be able to say in her letters of recommendation that she's easy to work with and wondering whether the people looking at her for jobs will notice that. I'm also trying to think about how I can give her some advice on professional conduct without risking her (little) trust in me. I don't think I can.

I'm trying a new list-making self-organisation method, so I got lots of bits and pieces done during a free hour: following up on research correspondence, writing a letter of rec for a former UG (PGCE), doing the paperwork from a viva I externalled last week. Not sure I'm convinced by the method, though. Seems like a way to spend a lot of time 'sharpening pencils' and not enough dealing with things that have deadlines this week.

Then the visiting speaker for our seminar series arrived, we went to get her a bottle of water and set up her powerpoint. She gave an interesting talk (not my area, but still interesting), for which I was rather frustrated that more 3rd year students hadn't showed up. But then I saw some of them marching by the window. It was only later in the evening that I heard that students have occupied a lecture theatre in response to the cuts to university funding. I sympathise with the students--I was that type of student activist myself--but I'm not sure what the point of occupying one's own university is when it's not the university that is doing the cutting. I hope for their sake that they inspire the same on other campuses, in order to make it more of a movement.

I think that the govt's approach to HE is incredibly short-sighted and that they're trying to do some major social engineering too fast and without a safety net. But I haven't been taking part directly in protests so far because they seem to be hijacked by the issue of whether students should pay for HE. Having come through the US system, I tend to think that they should. Basic education is a right--but I think that higher education is a privilege, and that funding of student places should be on the basis of merit, student need, and (to some degree) societal need (e.g. for medics). Of course, I'm better off if HE is perceived as a right and everyone gets to go through HE and more of us PhDs can hold onto our jobs. But I can't justify that. I teach middle class students in the humanities. They're here because that's what middle class students do after school. I don't think the society at large should be bankrolling that.

I still want to protest the cuts--particularly the cuts to research funds and to HEA Subject Centres. But I'm not planning on sleeping in any lecture theatres.

Anyhow...took the speaker out for dinner with two colleagues and had a lovely time talking shop.

Back home, took a half hour to watch The Trip (which my partner had kindly taped. It's genius.) and another for catching up with Twitter. Now I'm trying to finish reading a chapter of a doctoral student's final draft, which I've promised to have to her by the end of the week. It's nearly 2am, and I've 13 single-spaced pages to go. Not sure I'll make it. Am feeling rotten that I haven't touched the book manuscript that I'm finishing up with colleagues. In order to be up-to-date with that one as well as finishing reading this thesis, I'm going to have to burn the candle at both ends this week.

Uid 172

A day working at home, where I seem to get so much more done compared with time in the office, started with emails at 7.30ish and made tea before continuing with next batch of mail as server forwarded them. The server seems to work on a kind of pulse basis with the first 'pulse' of the day at around 8.30am. Always interesting to see when people are doing their email. The prof doesn't actually seem to sleep at all!

Followed emails with a review of two ethics applications, one good or at least acceptable, one not so good. Amazing that such poor work in an application, supposedly signed off by staff, gets presented to the committee. Used to sit on the other side of the desk and consider ethics committees to be a nuisance. Now not so sure as some of the proposals are quite unbelievable in their ideas as to what is 'ethical'.

Moved on to an MA dissertation proposal, now this was truly appalling and made me wonder how the student had manager to reach this point in the programme without someone picking up that his English needed some work. Always amazed that I can spot such poor work - had to work hard myself to bring English up to a 'publishable' quality. Am now, of course, wondering about the quality of this. For the student the run ons obscured meaning and they desperately need help to coherently organised the structure of the work. These types of students always take so much more supervision that the focused capable ones. Have now to consider how to broach this with hi so that he can see it is a good idea to seek help from Student Support.

Finish the day with a read of a hefty file sent to me for a student disciplinary hearing. I volunteered to be on the panel. Looks like a clear cut case of plagiarism but with mitigating circumstances. Turnitin certainly provides an insight into the quantity of copying in work. In this case there are obvious stylistic changes between the web material and the student's own work.

Uid 179

Must get finished with marking today. I have been working at it all weekend and, although the 'done' pile is now taller than the 'to do' pile, there is still more to be done than can sensibly be crammed into a day.

Resolved to get one more done before necessary Parents' Review Day at our son's school, but made the mistake of logging in to check email first thing this morning. Immediately hit with a tale of woe from one of my postgraduate dissertation students who is equally stressed out by approaching deadlines. Dealt with that, but as a result now one hour down on the day.

Much later: have been working all day on this marking apart from mini-breaks for phone calls with other dissertation students, occasional emails, collect second son from school, dinner, encouragement for first son after Review of Parents at his school. That is what it felt like: clearly we are not helping him enough with his homework.

It is now 10.30 pm. Probably at least another three hours to do. And up again at 6 to go to Seaside University.

But tomorrow, ah tomorrow they will be all done ... and I will be able to get on with the next task, due on Friday.

Uid 182

Today is mostly made up of planning meetings involving reimagining and revising our core undergraduate programme so I have meetings with various colleagues and committees running from 9am to 12.45pm and from 3-6pm. In between those meetings, I'm hoping to have enough time to make the return journey to supervise a postgraduate student on a placement between 1-2.30pm. I also have to check the info and finalise my paperwork for a grant application, write the minutes for 2 committees where I'm the secretary and send them out to the groups, write 2 references for recent graduates, correct as many of 60 essay first-year essays I can and arrange a guest speaker to come to the department next month.

I've just come back to this entry at 1.35pm. It turns out I can't go out on my planned supervisory visit due to an earlier meeting overrunning (having achieved no resolution to to that discussion which makes it more frustrating) so this will put significant pressure on me to try to find time over the next 2 days between lectures etc to do this visit as it has to heppen at latest by Wednesday this week. I'm going to spend the next 10 minutes trying to address as many emails in my inbox as possible, make a phone call with a publisher about a proposed collections of essays I'm co-editing and then I have an unexpected meeting with a tutee who is facing a plagiarism charge for an essay. I'm not looking forward to this conversation at all. I take my role as tutor very seriously in advocating and supporting students but in this case, it's going to be very difficult for me to remain appropriately professional and 'on the student's side' since the evidence seems so overwhelming that the student did this intentionally and on a personal note, the student is quite abrasive and I'm expecting them to be very resistant to concepts of accountability etc!

Uid 184

12:07am My work week begins on Sunday. Sometimes Saturday, too. I'm so busy during the week with classes, advising clubs, watching the computer lab, and meetings that I don't have time to attend to the menial tasks: grading, sending copy jobs to the print shop, and preparing for tests. So Sundays and weekday evenings are when I do those things, much to my girlfriend's chagrin. Seems like I'm at work 24 hours a day with no time for leisure. Frankly, I'm getting tired of it.

So here I am getting ready for Monday. I'll try to do the minimum possible. It becomes a game: what can I put off until later?

1:15am Enough for now. I'm off to bed. Up at 8:30 or so!

10:30am I'm at work now. Mondays are short days for me. I have only one class to teach: discrete structures. Today we're finishing up talking about graphs. I have to quickly make copies of the chapters from CS Unplugged that talk about Dijkstra's and Prim's algorithms. Love that book!

11:30am (middle of class) I really like this course. It's all about making connections. Connections from databases to set theory; connections from regular expressions to graphs; connections from algorithms to data structures. I've managed to retain most of the students. They may not all be getting great grades, but at least they're all engaged. I have them pair up and run through various graph algorithms on paper. Then we talk about real-world uses for them.

I decide not to give them a lab assignment this week. Maybe I'll have something for them next week.

2:00pm. Most of the rest of the afternoon is spent in the computer lab. There's supposed to be a faculty member present whenever the lab is open. Some of my colleagues flake out on their duties, so I fill in. I think it works out in my favor. Students from many classes who are in the lab see me hanging around, so they ask questions. I answer them. They see what other students in my classes are doing and get interested. It's free advertising.

Unfortunately, I don't get much done during those three hours in the lab because I'm helping students. The lab closes at 5, officially, but I let some students stay until 6 (when their evening class starts). Once I lock the door, I take an opportunity to do a little FaceTime with my girlfriend who's visiting her sister out of town this week.

8:00pm. Home. Grabbed dinner at a fast-food place on the way home. Now to sit down and prep for tomorrow. I tell ya, it never ends....

Uid 185

I was on two-day vacation , came back on Mon 15 and checked 35 exams only to realize that the students did not understand me

Uid 186

I'm glad the heading is on this morning. It is -4 at the moment.

Last semester 1 lecture with the first years today. I'm teaching academic and professional skills, and I'd like to think that they have learned something.

Trying to round up staff to help with an outreach event to school children in December. It's a fine balance between encouraging enthusiasm, and asking them to do something outside what they are expected to.

1st year's did their online exam today. Very low stakes, but their very first one. Everyone did really well. Good preparation for next week's higher-stakes version. Great for them to get a good start.

Someone wants to know (why do they ask me!) if Christmas day falls on a saturday, does that mean that they get an extra day's leave, as the university is closed after Christmas. If only I had that kind of decision-making power :-)

Faculty Board meeting this afternoon. Vice Principal wasn't there, so one of the School Deans took the meeting. They told us that money wasn't good for next year, and that when the Scottish Government anounces their budget, it might be worse.

Gosh. I hadn't expected that! :-)

Partner has her PhD viva next week, so as you would expect the atmosphere at home is a little tense. Still, we did well on University Challenge.

Uid 187

Monday, November 15, 2010

6:40 AM - Alarm awoke me after an "Good" night's sleep of 4 hours. Dressed and ate my usual bagel for breakfast.

7:45 - Out the door, headed to campus.

8:00 - Arrived at my office. Got PC turned on and checked and reacted to e-mail.

8:35 - Grading CS0 projects. It's going to be a long day of grading; these take a while!

8:50 - Helped in Intro to Computers lab until GA showed up

9:05 - Grading CS0 projects.

9:50 - Met with student in my office to review a makeup lab

10:25 - Back to grading projects.

11:10 - e-mail

11:25 - Exercising - Something I started a week ago...

12:40 PM - e-mail

12:50 - lunch

1:15 - e-mail

1:30 - Reviewing new version of Blackboard course management system

1:45 - e-mail

2:00 - Back to grading projects... just 23 more projects to go!

2:35 - Photocopying exams for Intro to Computers exam on Tuesday

2:50 - Back to grading projects.

3:50 - Visited a class to collect data for an ongoing research project

4:20 - Back to grading projects.

5:40 - Headed home

5:55 - Arrived at home, visited w/ my wife and opened snail mail

6:10 - e-mail

6:20 - Dinner

6:45 - Nap (unplanned - I sat still too long)

7:45 - Back to grading projects. Just 17 to go!

9:00 - Discovered an instance of cheating on the CS0 project. Started researching exact process I need to follow. Message drafted and sent to involved students. :-(

10:10 - Back to grading projects.

4:30 AM - CS0 project grading complete. All grades and comments recorded in Blackboard. Headed to bed.

Uid 189

7.45 arrive at work...attend to emails/mail

10.00 maths meeting

12.30 coffee and lunch

1.00 planning for next week

2.00 research meeting

3.30 faculty meeting

4.30 teaching

6.00 finish teaching...attend to emails

6.30 leave for home

Uid 191

Feels like a weird week to be writing this since it is our 'work week' and what that meant for me is that I went to Canada to visit my mother who is 87 and in a nursing home. So I have little to say of a working nature.

I guess I could (if I were more able) write all sorts of musings on mortality etc. but will just say that although she seems happy enough, she is a shell of her real self and the thought of ending up in that position myself is horrible - my stuff not hers.

I continued to deal with email while I was gone, which was OK in this circumstance (gave me something to do) but also rather horrible to think that in one day I can get behind on 60 emails. If I really didn't deal with it for 2 weeks I feel like I'd never recover.

I visited with my old college roommate who has just retired and asked her why she decided to retire early. She said that she just couldn't deal with the bullshit any more. Bit worrying since I'm at that point too but not financially or in other ways ready.

Uid 192

I had a migraine and couldn't get into to work.

I spent 1/2 hour on the computer, in between being sick, sending emails to cancel my meetings. One with a final year project student, another with a colleague which was to be spent planning a teaching session for Thursday 25th November.

I also put a message on the VLE and sent an email to the students in my Monday 11am lecture, to let them know I wouldn't be there and give them some very vague instructions about what they should be doing...

I also attempted to let my UCPD students know what their next task was to be using our closed 'social network' on grou.ps. This didn't work as expected and so I had to send an email to them all to explain.

Finally I called our secretary to let them know I was ill and wouldn't be in. Then I could finally collapse and get back to sleep.

I hate being ill - I get migraines every 4-6 weeks and they seem to be happening on Mondays & Tuesdays at the moment. People seem understanding, but it doesn't stop you feeling guilty and then stressed as you try to catch up.

Uid 199

Well today was spent, sorting travel plans to Nottingham for the Involve UK conference, listening to SU/C gripping on about the Gov cuts, then making a DVD on Carer issues with regards to the cuts, hey-ho another day in paradise

Uid 200

Woke up at 7:00 this morning and managed to get ready and out of the house before anyone else in my family was even awake, which is good because today is an exam day in two of my classes (where the enrollment totals 285 in two sections.

Got to campus a little before 9:00 and spent from 9:00-9:30 organizing for the exam - making sure I had proper copies, signs to post on the door about the exam taking place inside, and sorting the graded work to return back after the exam.

At 9:30, I walked from my office to the office of disability services on campus to hand off exams for students who have accommodations for test-taking because of some sort of diagnosed disability and then off to my classroom to set up for the 10:00 exam. There are three versions of the exam for this class and the classroom seats are not exactly in well-defined rows, so setting the papers up so that students with the same versions of the exam can not see one another is challenging.

Exam went well - as students finished the exam, I handed back their graded work. Then, I went to the door of my next class (which starts at noon), and placed the "do not disturb - exam in progress" signs on the doors.

Headed back to my office for office hours, which were packed with people wanting to ask last-minute questions about the noon exam. Left office hours at 11:45 to get ready for the noon exam.

That exam administration has 5 versions, but the classroom has the same problem with seating. That session started a few minutes later than noon, but most students were done fairly quickly.

After that exam, I came back to my office to finally read the morning's (and weekends) email. Then, I remembered it was diary day and was excited about it.

There were a number of people that did not take the exam and I am not sure why - it is required. I have never been able to understand students who just "give up" on a course. Of course, these students seem to never seek out help before "giving up", they just disappear. I determined later in the day that this number was 30 out of 285 who simply did not show up to take the exam, nor did I hear from throughout the day about some issue that prevented them from taking the exam.

Grabbed a slice of horrible campus pizza for lunch and settled in to figure out what I was going to lecture about for my 3:00 class, which I couldn't prep this weekend because I was busy (with my daughter's first birthday party) and writing the exam for the other class. The prep took me until almost class time (3:00). I have decided to have a discussion with the class about a scenario that I have used before, an elevator operating program.

The lecture went well. Although when people found out what we were doing, I had a small handful (about 3) who simply got up and left the lecture hall. I didn't think the topic was all that boring, but perhaps I am mistaken.

After lecture, I had another office hour, which was full of students asking me to regrade their first practical exam. This is the second semester that I am using practical exams with the students where they need to go into the lab environment and create a program that solves the task I have given. The grading for this exam has been problematic, primarily because I did not have it ready on the day of the exam, so students who did not name things properly received zeros from the automatic grading, even though they may not have deserved them. I probably saw 6 or 7 students for regrades. All received more points on their assignment due to various errors.

We (myself and the 5 TAs) started to grade the exam I just gave earlier in the day at 5:00pm. Grading these exams is always exhausting, but I am happy to report that we were done at around 8:45, which is good time. The last exam in this class took us until 10:00 to finish grading. All of the grades have been entered in the gradebook. All the papers were sorted and I left campus before 9:00. It was a good evening.

The average on the exam was in the 70's, which is high in comparison to the last two exams I gave in that class, whose averages were in the 60's. On this exam, I did not include as many questions that were strictly from the reading and not covered in lecture. I have decided that this particular group of students does not like to and does not believe they have to read the text. Many of them simply did not purchase it. Therefore, they do more poorly on the questions from the text not covered in lecture. I wanted to test my hypothesis about this by not giving as many questions from the book as on previous exams. While I am not convinced I have proven my hypothesis, I have a bit more evidence that I am correct.

I arrived home a little after 9:30 and spent the ride home talking on the phone to one of my closest friends. She is a pharmacist and her oldest daughter is six weeks older than my daughter, so we have lots of stories and "mommy" things to discuss. Plus, we have known each other since high school and share a close bond.

When I got home, I helped to get my son off to bed and I don't remember falling asleep, but I did because the next thing I knew it was 2:00am by the clock by my bed.

Uid 204

Spent most of the day conducting annual performance reviews of my colleagues. Not exactly a teaching activity, but highly conducive to pondering the nature of what we do.

On the surface, and as typically assessed by my institution, good teaching essentially means being well received and liked by the students. Of course many good teachers are liked by their students; but many teachers who are liked by their students might not be good teachers. Is it possible to be a good teacher while not really caring whether and how and how much the students learn? Is it possible to be a good teacher when your main goals are to make life easy for the students, give them good marks, and sit high in their esteem?

On the other hand, some people take pride in the fact that their students don't like them. These can sometimes be the teachers who challenge their students, who underspecify assessment tasks and leave the students to work out what's really required, who refuse to spoon the material into the students' squawking mouths. Are these people good teachers? They are certainly likely to be remembered in a good light when the students have had time to appreciate the value of what they have learnt.

Where do I sit on this spectrum? I think the general perception is that my classes are enjoyable and my assessment demanding. Of course I think this is the ideal place on the spectrum, but is it really any better than the popular spoonfeeder or the unpopular challenger? Who's to say what good teaching really is?

Remarkably, did no work at home this evening!

Uid 206

Have decided not to write this month. A quote from my September diary in the THE referred to an event within the institution on 15th. I've not heard that anyone here read it, but it's kind of put me off. Maybe next month.

Uid 207

This diary day is going to be a little different from a normal working day. Aged parent is still in hospital, a 3 month stint of stroke/hospitalisation/stroke/nursing home/stroke. Had a meeting in Birmingham on Friday/Saturday so for once my weekend visit south started off from a more geographically reasonable point – and I was able to schedule a meeting with his social worker for the Monday morning without having to cancel any teaching.

7 am

Woke and spent 90 mins cleaning and sorting out various house issues for him then logged onto my e-mail quickly and replied to a few student requests to see me alter today with the suggestion that I should catch up with them Tuesday after their labs. Find it very difficult to focus on work while in this house – my priorities change completly once I come through the door. I suspect that is the only way I have retained sanity over the last 3 years of parent illness and weekend commutes.

9 am

Leave the house and have a quick word with the neighbours to reassure them that I will be back again next weekend (they themselves are well over 80 and nervous about an adjoining house being empty) and then drive to Local Care Centre canteen to meet social worker. Had intended to stop at brilliant café on the way to get a good breakfast but the traffic convinces me that I should go directly there and live with the instant coffee and toasted teacakes I know they can provide.

10 am

Get to local care centre and grasping a mug of coffee set myself u in one corner to wait for the social worker who has become my guide through the hell of DWP forms (seriously academia minutia has nothing on the attendance allowance forms or the continuing care assessment paperwork). Don’t log onto e-mail as feeling a bit worried there will be too much in it I can’t cope with right now and I want to be in a fairly calm frame of mind – so I settle to try and proof a thesis chapter for an overseas student. Get a few pages further through it when the social worker arrives. We get more coffee and talk through the complicated problems of someone with interlinking pathologies which have resulted in very limited mobility and dementia. My need to move him into care near me (and thus maybe restart a career that is definitely stumbling on the research side - where I do very badly without blocks of time to think things through) conflicts with is wish to remain as independent as possible for as long as possible, and it is this wish which has to be the primary driver. Discuss EPA and continuing assessments. Deeply regret not being a high earner who can simply find enough disposable cash to pay for private care without these assessments.

11 am

Leave and drive to the hospital. Have forgotten that it is a Monday and that they will not let me in out of normal visiting hours (as they will do most weekends) and so retreat to a pub nearby, order a meal and set myself up to log on remotely to my office computer (wireless dongles and remote desktop are another of my lifelines at the moment). Manage t reply to my personal tutees and close my eyes when I see that I have yet again managed to not send out reminders concerning a January meeting that I am co-ordinating with someone in the Netherlands. Very few UK registrations as yet and I had promised to send out reminders this past weekend.

2.30 pm

Go into hospital. Reassure that he is doing fine and that I will be back to see him next weekend. Discharge team contact me to suggest I come down in ten days time for a case conference. This will mean cancelling a going to a 2 day research conference but decide to say yes. Feel guilty when I try to leave by 4pm so as to make the 5 hour drive back in daylight. Try to persuade ward staff that he must be mobilised as much as possible but they clearly hope that the pushy visitor will just leave. Listen to book tape son the drive home. Buy a ready meal in a service station on the way back to save on time.

9.00pm

Home and supper and then finally log on and send off e-mail reminders about conference registrations.

11pm.

Sleep

Uid 213

I teach Wed-Fri, which is incredibly tiring having it all bunched up together. But it means Monday and Tuesday are my research days, which inevitably bleeds into admin days. I try to do these at home or in libraries in London to avoid the train fare to campus. I also get more work done when out of my office, as the interruptions are far fewer. I was a little ill yesterday, so I slept later today. This raises questions of guilt for me - if I taught this morning, I would have set my alarm as usual and gone in on time to teach. Because it's a research day, I felt less urgency to get up at the usual time and go straight to work. Teaching has such a stronger hold on me than research, although I am doing far better with the research/teaching balance than when I started working as a lecturer.

On Friday afternoon, my students started talking about the student protest (one of my Creative Writing students had a character make a reference higher fees in his story). One student horrified me when she said 'I thought the universities would be happy about the higher fees.' Apparently she'd heard about the fees, but not about the budget cuts for universities. A non-academic friend said much the same to me a week or so ago. How effective are the universities being at getting the full message across to the public? My manager said we could take leave to go to the march, if it didn't conflict with teaching. I was teaching until 12, outside of London, so I didn't go. Some of our student reps did (we had a meeting, and they sent apologies with the march as the reason). My partner's head of department went on the march though. I was impressed he took that much time out of his schedule.

I had a major part of my work load cancelled last week, due to financial and strategic resources. Delayed, they say, but I worry. I also felt relief, since I had been struggling to keep up with everything.

I've taught two female students with the same name for three years. One uses a shortened form, one uses the full name. They both dye their hair an unusual colour and have similarly shaped faces. I've never had them in the same seminar session until this year, and I keep getting them confused. After three years! It's embarrassing. I do know who they are, and on paper in their work, but the wrong names slip out.

My research days are a balance between working on my new project and sending out my last project for publication.

Tomorrow night I have a subject group social (yet somehow work related as they always are) outing, then Wed a research seminar and Thursday a work function until late. Then I teach on Friday until 6. I'm already tired thinking about it. So I've decided to cut the guilt about sleeping a little later today.

Uid 214

Today saw examples of two of the highs and lows of academia. The low first: I am in the thick (literally) of my first cold of the term, passed on from a student, a colleague, someone on the bus or tube, who knows? This means my brain is moving slowly and my temper is short. But work has to continue (I'm not \*that\* ill), and by good chance this is also one of the 'high' days of academia - a long-planned, uninterrupted whole day with no meetings, teaching, admin or other commitments to distract - just me, in my office (normally shared, but by good fortune with all my colleagues absent, so all to myself), working away on a project. Days like these are to be cherished as they are rare. And what I did today was work gleefully on the final edits for a big, multi-author book that I am editing with a colleague in the US. 20 chapters, over 30 contributors, close on 250,000 words, a major academic press - it ticks all the boxes of modern academic in terms of research output and social 'impact', especially since the book's theme is the 'contemporary relevance' of my research discipline to society. It is also, I immodestly say, extremely good - this was the first time that I have collated and then read all the chapters in their intended order, and like a flash of sunlight on a cloudy day I suddenly got my first glimpse of what the book will look like when it comes out in print, and I was extremely pleased. The editing I needed to do may have been a chore (correcting references to a standard format and so on), but this glimpse of the book's future gave me the energy to plough on, cold notwithstanding. And given an uninterrupted day or two more, the editing will be complete and the book ready to be sent off to the publisher before the end of the month... So all in all, a good day.

Uid 217

I failed to submit an entry for 15 October, so will do so briefly here (while in the pub with the new batch of MA students, I had my bag stolen with my phone, camera and diary with the log-in details - in coded form - in it, and by the time I got round to getting hold of them again it was too late). In fact the 15 October entry is very simple. I woke up and began marking MA dissertations and eventually - somewhere in mid-evening - stopped when I was too knackered to read any more....

Turning to 15 November, it went roughly like this:

Got up at 7, did e-mail, went into the dept and did more e-mail and some photocopying. Awkward meeting at 10.30 with colleagues to figure out who would cover for my and another colleague's research leave this time next year: a certain amount of reluctance was expressed quite bluntly (even though the premise on which we have a consistent leave rota is that we all agree to cover for each other). 11-11.30 I had a meeting with two colleagues on the REF panel to discuss the current status of my REF-entry list-of-items: they seemed happy with it (I have more than enough items, though there won't be a monograph this time because a) my last book was published a month before the last RAE deadline and b) editing projects in which I'm involved will take all the available time). 12-2.30 was the MA exam board meeting, which included ten minutes for sandwiches. 2.30-4 was preparation for a Comp Lit seminar I taught 4-6 (this was a guest slot I hadn't taught before, so it involved getting to know a new group of students). I did a bit more e-mail and then went for dinner with a friend who is editing a text for a series I general-edit, so it was half work, half socialising. He got the train back north and I was home by 10. That's it.

Uid 219

Technically off work sick at the moment after an operation, but still working away on the huge funding application, which is now hanging over me a bit. Really I would like to be in bed, rather than trying to do this whilst ill. An academic's work never ends, like many professional jobs. But in my next life I am going to pick a better paid one.

Uid 221

9-11 saw individual final year students for 10 minute sessions to continue discussing their project for the year. Not all of them turned up.

11-4 worked on preparation for teaching, sorting out student problems as personal tutor, particularly non-attendance of some first year students, processing email. Office hour 12-1 but no-one dropped in.

4-5 session with my first year group about how to carry out a presentation. Was planning to show some useful slides provided by a colleague, but computer in teaching room would not work owing to absence of a hard disc. Contacted technical support to report this, but no possibility of it being fixed immediately. Gave a brief talk about presenattions to students and sent them away early.

Uid 223

Coincidentally, again this month the 15th is a National Holiday in the UAE, but I did mull over an accreditation visit which I took part in recently, and for which I need to write part of a report.

Uid 224

Exams are over, marking is underway. Summer is around the corner! Today was most unusual - two out of town visitors with whom I spent nearly the whole day in meetings.

9am - 12 Spent most of the time meeting with a potential doctoral student from another university who would like help with supervision of her work.

12-5 Spent most of the rest of the day with a visitor from another university who has been working with me on developing material for the upcoming revised high school curriculum in Computer Science.

The day was punctuated by two quick meetings to grade 4th year projects. Handily in both cases the three assessors had all chosen almost exactly the same grade, so no negotiation was needed.

With meetings all day, the evening was filled with the email and preparation that I actually needed to do today.

Uid 226

I'm traveling this week - back to back events. Monday was the middle day of a small 3-day conference on computer security. I can only describe it as excruciating. Dull, dull, dull papers yesterday. Dull reports this morning with glimmers of hope. And the worst organized working group I've ever experienced all afternoon. I used my advanced meditation techniques for patience and wisdom to keep from running from the room screaming and even managed to make a number of constructive suggestions. Here's the rub - these folks are attempting to develop new curriculum but they appear to be doing it from a very limited perspective. They have a good understanding of the content matter but seemed to find the idea of identifying desired learning outcomes difficult to grasp. And no mention was made about some very good previous work on curriculum development. The good intentions were there but they were missing the boat in a lot of areas. All in all, not a comfortable meeting to be in. Apparently my skin is thinner than some, however, since the leaders appeared to appreciate the feedback - an admirable and adult reaction to some less-than-tactful criticism offered by the participants.

I was struck by the difference between the exclusiveness of this 'insiders only' crowd and the inclusive nature of a K-12 educators' workshop I attended last week. Both events were small; both were by invitation only; both were trying to move large, important national agendas forward. I felt a lot more comfortable with the educators than with the government and technical geek people. I think I'm outgrowing my technical interests. They no longer compel my interest and I am less and less willing to put in more and more time to stay current. But I'm too young to retire. It's going to have to be a career shift.

In the evening I had dinner with a colleague and skipped the late evening social event which was past my bedtime.

The whole thing was not particularly time well spent. But I received continuing education credits which are required to maintain my technical certificate, I showed my face and I made a number of contacts.

Uid 227

OK - today was once of those days. Started with Departmental Exec meeting - Monday is not a good day for these meetings. At least two colleagues had tried to turn over a new left and came with smiles on their faces rather than frowns, but these were soon turned upside down with the discussions that ensued. The current management regime within the department seems to lack the understanding that things do not just happen – people need to actually do the tasks, and usually they will need approaching, asking and making sure their workload is not increased. The current HoD seemed to have forgotten all the meetings from the previous few weeks and seemed unable to actually understand what the rest of the committee were trying to explain. Most left with little reassurance in his ability to lead, but maybe he was just having an off day.

For a department to survive in the future climate in HE they need to pull together, and this takes very strong management to take this forward, people must feel valued and that their contribution is acknowledged, appreciated and worthwhile. Without this instilled into a whole department it will become dog eat dog. So after a non- effective exec meeting, it was onto to hear the VC speak to the faculty – nothing much new there, headline is that we won’t know anything until at least February about the new funding regimes.....

After that onto teaching, good bunch of students, interested if a little sleepy with lectures late in the afternoon..... will have to start counting those whose eyes start to close... hopefully it is not my lectures being too boring!!!!

Uid 231

Am writing this a few days late, life has been so hectic with marking, research deadlines, meetings and so so much administrivia. I spent the 15th Nov at an all day workshop on Teaching and Learning. It was held in a hotel overlooking the beach so it was a pleasant break from a normal Monday of checking research student work. Almost two thirds of the Faculty were present which was a very pleasing as my colleagues are good people and we rarely have opportunities to get together. The point of the day was to share tips on teaching and try and work out why theundergraduate student feedback is so poor. It was pretty low level stuff and, as an exclusively postgrad teaching, most of it was irrevant to me. I was there to give a presentation on a new form of group assessment with which I have been experimenting this year. Again, nothing radical or really exciting but I stayed on because of the enjoyment of being with colleagues. In fact I stayed on for far too long and drank far too much at the post workshop drinks - it has been a long time since we drank together. Everyone is so busy these days that social occasions are low on the priority scale.

Uid 232

Most of the 15th was spent preparing a 'business plan' - a somewhat pointless exercise that is required by the project funder in order for a knowledge transfer project to be approved. The proposal has been technically approved and the business plan is a formality - no one will pay any attention to it - it's simply a box-ticking exercise to 'demonstrate' due diligence on the part of the funders.

Uid 234

Blimey. A month comes around quickly.

This entry will only cover 06:00-14:40, as I know after that time I’ll be rushed off my feet & won’t have the opportunity to sit down & write a meaningful entry.

Check my emails at 6; nothing work related has come in over night.

I take my 3 year old to Nursery School on a Monday & as I was leaving I notice that he was signing himself in. I had never seen him write before. I had a proud Dad moment.

I went home between Nursery School & Work. Made a flask of coffee. I’m an unreconstructed coffee addict & coffee snob. Well, at least it’s good to recognise one’s own faults.

On my way into work I listen to Nina Simone, now there’s a great way to start the day.

Upon arriving in the office I am relieved to find that there are no emails/ phone calls about the 1st years. Today is their first day out on placement. Sometimes, there will be messages like, “I’ve lost my head, what shall I do?” Or placements will ring up saying the student hasn’t turned up or worse – they turned up, stayed an hour & then ran away screamimg. So far, so good.

There was supposed to be a curriculum planning meeting at 10 that I was organizing/ chairing. But since it has been superseded by a larger meeting tomorrow morning I cancelled this morning’s meeting at about 5 on Friday. My first job this morning is answering emails saying, “So, are we having a meeting this morning?”

In fact the first two hours this morning is spent dealing with email related issues:

There’s a student who should have gone to a funeral in Thailand, but choose to stay in the UK to concentrate on the course. But she is so grief struck that she is really struggling with the requirements of the course, so I have to send several emails & a couple of phone calls trying to sort things out. In the longer term, in my opinion, she should have taken a year’s leave of absence to allow herself the time to grieve. Funeral’s in every culture play a pivotal role in the healing process (as I tell the 1st years);

I have to deal with room booking politics-if someone wants the room that you have booked why don’t they promise to book you a similar room rather than engaging in bizarre shadow booking & suggesting that you review whether you really need that room?

I’m participating in Movember (growing a moustache to raise money for Prostate Cancer Research) I had to sort a few fund raising issues with a colleague in another school;

The 3rd years want an essay submission date moved back (for good reasons). I had to spend time trying to orchestrate this. I think it’s been moved….?

Within the college there is a debate about giving students written feedback on their exams. I have no problems about this with small groups. But with large groups? Part of the joy of exams is that they are quick to mark.

I then settled into a nice pile of UCAS forms. Most were from the same local six form college, with the same tutor giving a reference. I offer most of them an interview, & those I reject it is on the basis of the personal statement. Saying that you are about to start doing voluntary work doesn’t help your cause. Why the personal tutor didn’t tell them not to send in their UCAS form until after they had started voluntary work is beyond me.

This afternoon I am going to be a tech-nerd. In January I organizing an interdisciplinary learning initiative & some of the teaching & learning is through Wikis. Whilst this is all good stuff, it does require a sizeable time investment setting it all up.

Uid 237

Diary entry 3

Monday 15th November 2010

Context:

This weekend I spent visiting family, and Monday was spent returning to the institution where I studied for my PhD (and lived for 5 years). I was returning for a number of different reasons, including meeting with my PhD supervisor (and now research collaborator), catching up with friends (some of whom were participants in my thesis research), ex-landlord (to collect post) and others. I had the day planned out by hour, although as one might imagine, it didn't run quite as smoothly as that!

Content:

I got up at 6am and drove for 2hrs to the dentists. The dentist was running late, so I didn't come out until after 10am and I plugged Booth Street (to visit my landlord at work) into the sat nav and it turned out there were two Booth Streets and I had gone to the wrong one. Given that it would have meant us having only about 10mins together in the end (we got on well), I decided I would make my 11-1pm research meeting on time and headed for the university instead (and agreed to meet my landlord for a cuppa later on in the afternoon). I arrived on campus and couldn't find anywhere to park (nothing changes), and eventually landed in my old department at 11.15am and went straight up to my supervisor's office (somewhere I'd been hundreds of times, but it felt different this time, I felt more in control this time). We had a very productive meeting about current and future publications. We'd just got a joint chapter in and just received an article back from some reviewers (with major revisions - better than a rejection!) so there was plenty to talk about. We also planned a new research study following on from work we'd conducted in separate previous studies. For once, we talked shopped the entire time, only venturing for a sentence or two here or there into more personal matters. We were both conscious of time pressing, as we both had different appointments at 1pm. At lunchtime I met with the university alumni officer and one of his colleagues over lunch (until about 2.30pm) and then went to meet my landlord who I had not met earlier on in the day (!).

When 5pm hit, I met some friends (a couple, in their late forties) after they had finished work at their house. This pair had played an integral role in my thesis research, as participants and then as friends, and then as those who encouraged others to engage in my research. It was a pleasure to be in their company once more. We talked shop (reflecting on myself for a moment, I do wonder whether I do anything but talk shop these days!) but also played lots of music and talked for hours about life in general. I started off on my drive home after dinner at around 10.30pm, and got home at 1am. I woke up at 7.15 the next morning and was at work by 8ish, feeling tired, but refreshed at my experiences the previous day.

Uid 239

Really bad start to the day ie.at 1.0am in the morning, carefully constructing an email in response to an angry staff meember; will have to choose the right time to send it of course. Someone said it is a bad idea to open emails at the weekends or early Monday morning. I got caught out by my need to prepare myself as I have never quite shaken off that Sunday night into Monday morning blues. Really wound up as also needing to prepare for an interview I've got coming this week. But get into work before 7.O am to edit my lecture for 10.0am and find the slides as I couldn't access them at home- so much for the 'work any where' facility of technology!! How can I keep Monday serene I say to myself. By sheer luck I find the slides straightaway and the editing is actually simple. But what next I say to myself as I walk into my 8.0am meeting. Fortunately everyone who is there is calm today.

Uid 240

I walked three miles with my daughter and practiced my euphonium before heading off to work. My programming language seminar students and I discussed implementations of exceptions in various languages.

I spent a lot of time preparing contracts for advisors on my NSF grant and reviewing the grant budget with university budget officers.

I worked on a report for Peter Denning’s rebooting conference held in January of 2009. I also spent far too much time setting up an account in order to participate in tomorrow’s NCSWIT webinar

I worked several hours on material for the Charles Babbage Institute as we prepare to have them archive and host the Computing Educators Oral History Project.

Uid 241

I hope that next semester will go more smoothly than this semester does.

My grandmother is in hospice care in the hospital now. I went to see her on Thursday. I was able to get a substitute for my lab. For Friday, I was able to get a colleague to give a test for me, and I prepared lectures for my other two classes using Camtasia. She has not passed away yet. It is very hard to get substitutes, and I cannot afford to cancel class. This is the crunch time in the semester. I stayed at the hospital for three nights. The hospital had wireless access in the lobby, so I could answer emails. Several students sent me very nice messages of sympathy, and one student brought me some chocolate this morning after our first class.

Uid 242

Monday was the start of my third week playing racquetball.

This may not sound important, but I haven't played the sport since 2002. I was abroad for five years, and for the past three haven't found anyone to play with. As it turns out, there is an active group of faculty who play Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at lunch time. The mental and physical health aspects of regular exercise are massive, and I've thoroughly enjoyed getting back into the game.

The day started early. I reviewed notes from nearly 10 years ago, reviewing software I developed to manage course hand-ins and the like. I sat in on a colleagues class, and spent most of my time reflecting on lab-based instructional techniques, and how beneficial they might be; certainly, lecturing about programming seems absolutely futile (with no particular disrespect meant towards my colleague---only general disdain for the practice of lecturing about programming is intended).

The evening brought dinner with a hiring candidate in Chemistry, and that was a reasonable enough conversation. It felt as if they were less-than-interested in the position... but, then again, they had been interviewing with people for 10 hours at that point. It is tiring.

My semester is overrun with grading at this point, and most of it has nothing to do with computing. I'm desperately trying to finish revising application materials so I can look for employment elsewhere, as the political climate within my department remains grim. I spend too little time with my wife and child, and my colleagues remain... unsupportive.

But, there is always hope. We will see what the next day brings.

Uid 244

This was a rather different day.

A friend had bought a new house and needed some help to fix som urgent plumbing and wiring issues.

I decided, what the hell, and took the day off and spent 9am to 5pm helping him with his kitchen renovation.

Felt good...

Uid 245

8-9.30 Worked on lecture for the afternoon, ie spent loads of time reordering powerpoints and copying and pasting from past presentations. & (of course) did some photocopying.

9.30-10.30 PGT review. We are resuming our review of PGT, thinking the unthinkable. Trying to work out if there is core curriclum across all our programmes (in plain english- courses).

Avoided room naming event. I dont really think rooms should be named after people no one has heard of. It doesnt impart personality to rooms which chiefly look the same as rooms anywhere else on campus.

12.00-13.00 Distressing meeting where research student seemed to get very upset, but couldnt seem to express why. I think she is just struggling with motivation and conviction in her third year. I remember I rather hated supervision meetings doing my own phd. Either the supervisor upset one finding fault OR seemed to say nothing. Yet one invests so much in those meetings.

1.15-1.35 Talked at some students about the film they are trying to make about the digital divide.

2.10-4.00 The lecture. Went well. (I thought).

4.00-5.00 Professional skills session. We talked about networking.

5.00 long wait in cold for bus.

In between and before and after: email.

Uid 246

This morning started early as my lingering cough and sick kids got me up much earlier than I wanted to. I was at school by 8am and started frantically on my Android tutorials that I had to submit by the end of the day to Google Code University. I had a lot more to work to do, so I rushed through prep time for my other courses. I got the tutorials finished just in time to join the family for dinner. However, I didn't get anything else done today except teaching.

In my CS1 course, I handed back an exam where half the student did well (75% or better), and the other half flunked. I thought I would be gracious and have a special programming day tomorrow where the students could earn back half of the points they lost... it would give everyone some much needed practice and ease a few minds that were worried about their F. I was surprised that three of the students who failed did not show up for class. How do you expect to learn when you don't show up on the day we go over the exam answers? I suppose F students aren't usually the brightest.

We talked about creating login pages in my web development course and Java SWT in my GUI course. I also played some basketball at noon.

Last week I caught a couple of students cheating in my CS1 course on a project. One student copied a program off the web and then allowed another student to copy from him. The second student, let's call him Bob, is the same student who added me as a Facebook friend in my first entry... just checked, and I'm not his "friend" anymore. What a surprise. ;-)

Today I filed the official academic misconduct papers. Bob came by my office this afternoon to sign the form, but he was still unapologetic. The other student still hasn't apologized either. I'm really worried about what this says about their character. At least I didn't have 200 of my students cheat on their exam like they did at UCF last week!

Uid 250

Happy (wedding) Anniversary to us. 19 years.

Wow. Each day seems to be more busy than the previous.

I began the day with the normal trip to the gymnasium for a run. I had planned on two miles, but my body had a shorter run in mind. After completing about 1.3 miles, I quit. The combination of time pressure and lack of energy convinced me to abort.

Arriving on campus later than planned, I visited a classroom I would be using for the coming Wednesday's Senior Project presentations on the way into the building. Counting the chairs, I was pleased to learn there are more than 30 seats available.

I made my way to the computer system administrators office. He and I meet for 30 to 60 minutes each week, usually on Monday. Today, being Monday, he's expecting to meet. I don't really have the time. We had brief discussions about a) problems we've been having with Moodle, b) problems with the computer club's social website, and c) preparations being made for the coming term.

At about 9:45 I've made it to my office to begin last minute preparations for the next meeting: Dean Review Committee. Print a few documents and collect thoughts before walking over to the library for the meeting.

At about 10:15 I've made it to the conference room with the key. I pick a strategic place in the room and at the table to be in the middle facing away from the windows. I want to be as near to everyone as I can be, but not distracted. It turns out that being in the middle of the table makes it hard to see everyone, but I don't want to seen as the leader of the discussion. I want to be the facilitator.

The meeting goes well. There isn't much in the data (survey results) to cause anyone heartburn. By the data, I think most reasonable people would support retaining the Dean. I'll keep my comments to my self.

After that 1.5 hour meeting, I make it back to my office a little after noon to do some last minute prep for class. Unfortunately all the meetings have cut into my class preparation time. Given there is one more meeting today, this time it is even worse.

A little before 1pm I am off to another meeting. This one is to hear about another learning management system. These meetings are often more marketing fluff than I care for. Just show me the tool in use.

This committee will recommend the tool used by the entire (just about) University for the next few years. It is an important decision. But, I have to leave early to get to class.

Class begins at 1:30. I'm probably a few minutes late. I continue to amaze myself by being able to context switch. I haven't taught this class before and haven't put the time into the preparation that it deserves, but I explain the material very well. I have, very unfortunately, moved into the 'sage on the stage' mode of 'delivering' content. There is little interaction in class.

After class ends, I run into the laboratory manager for the ECE department. I'm negotiating for some borrowed space for some of the research assistants in my department. This impromptu discussion goes well.

3:00pm - time for the Monday afternoon research meeting. Matt and Chris meet in my office with me. We're making progress on the problem. We've defined a new data structure and related algorithms for solving a specific problem with laser scanner point cloud data. This meeting often runs late.

4:30 off to class. The students are practicing team presentations for their capstone projects. It goes well.

5:45 impromptu meeting with Andy and Susanna

6pm email for the first time

7pm was on the way out the building - Scott Miller

8pm leaving (less than 11 hours on campus)

9pm Panda / home / drop laptop / dinner / paper review

10pm Skype with daughter

10:30 pm didn't do any video work ! ARG! â€¦ keep plugging away â€¦ worked on Dean Review statistical report

11:15 give in to sleep .. set the alarm for 5:15

Uid 256

06.45 Still to resolve problem of not having posted my diaries for the first two months. Up to as usual anticipate e-mail from students in Taiwan, see what is expected of me in this Web 2.0 course. Nothing there as yet.

Had a Share reminder. That's the first one.

Just lost updating till 08.45. Must get this sysem right.

06.00 - 07.00 Sleeping 45 mins.

Checking and replying to overseas e-mails 15 mins.

07.00 - 08.00 Converting Share diary for Sept to plain text (15 mins)

Making coffeee and toast for self and wife, and consuming in bed (45 mins)

08.00 - 09.00 Finishing reading sports supplement (10 mins)

Converting Share diary St/Oct to plain text (20 mins)

Reading and printing tast for Web 2.0 online course (10 mins)

Updatingthis diary - twwice, having lost the first version 10 mins.

Washing, shaving, shower (10 mins)

Uid 257

0000-0200hrs, I am at home checking email and sorting files for the coming week, and doing housework before getting to bed. I get up 0715, get lift from my spouse to train station in the midlands arriving 0945, she going off to Manchester, I wait 45 minutes reading newspaper for my booked train down to Euston, then on to the HS1 service from St Pancras to Canterbury. I read THE and have a sandwich lunch for some of the journey, and I review the state of my ongoing work, including a joint bid to the Ideas Factory fund, which is with a view to exploring the commercial potential for a piece of learning technology developed in a preceding research project. We had started looking at last week and over the weekend (my co-applicant in Australia at the moment) - deadline today. After getting to the office around 1400hrs, I finish off the application form to this fund and deliver the hard copy to the Kent Innovation & Enterprise centre just before 5pm. Back in the office, while having a sandwich dinner, I catch up with general email correspondence, including one more specifically in relation to hosting a visiting speaker on Thursday for our seminar series (convened jointly with the Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain). I deal with paperwork and write comments in relation to recent and prospective teaching observations we conduct for new academics on our PGCert programme, do final edits and send off to SRHE HQ handouts for the session on the Postgraduate Issues Network which I am convening at the annual conference next month. I finish this off and pack up around 1930hrs and go to the Staff Badminton Club in the University Sports Centre, head away from the campus at 2230, bus and walking, back to lodgings 2315, go to bed midnight.

Uid 258

In the strange way that teaching timetables work, I get a lot of my teaching out of the way on Monday. This is both good (the rest of the week is fairly relaxed - teaching-wise at least) and bad (it can leave me shattered for the rest of the week).

I teach from 9:00am and should have caught a train to get me into the University for 8:00 - but I'd been away fellrunning in the Lakes all weekend, and felt guilty about leaving husband to get my daughter ready, so I caught the train which gets me to the University at 8:45. This leaves me with enough time to dump my bags in my office, collect handouts and registers, eat a cereal bar (breakfast!) and set up for a three-hour workshop ... luckily I'd prepared everything for this session last week.

At 9:00am there was only one student in the classroom ... the rest turned up over the next 20 minutes. Time to read the riot act.

At 12:00 I ate a salad (prepared at 6:30 that morning), replied to emails and did a bit of admin. I usually teach again at 1:00pm but a colleague was covering that session today, so I started preparing one of next week's lectures, but got sidetracked into an email discussion on Icelandic folk music. I don't have a lunchbreak but it's hard to maintain momentum sometimes. At 2:00pm I gave a seminar (attendance a bit low but students very engaged), and after that I did a bit more lecture writing before going home and collecting my daughter from the childminders.

As anyone with kids knows, it's pretty hard to do any work until they are tucked up in bed (and even then you have to eat/do the ironing, etc. etc.), so it was about 9:00pm before I sat down to answer some emails ...and even then I got distracted by something else.

Uid 259

Awoke early worrying about the week ahead. No real reason for it, just the usual - how will I fit it all in. Prioritising well however, I managed to get a morning coffee in with the colleague who attended the London demo on tutition fees. Glad that he wasn't arrested! Showing support for colleagues and my department is even more important at the moment as it doesn't take much to bring staff morale down.

I had two Breach of Assessment Regulation investigation meetings scheduled in today. These are normally attended by the person marking the work (and spotting the possible plagiarism). However, the markers on these occasions are external, hourly-paid staff employed as MSc dissertation supervisors to cope with the unusually rapid growth in MSc thesis applications we have recently experienced. So, as acting (unpaid) course leader, I attend in their place. The morning was spent familiarising myself with the work and the possible plagiarism and marking the work if the plagiarism claim was upheld. Sufficient, helpful feedback also has to be given to the student so effectively I had to mark the two theses from scratch. This bit into my day substantially. Both students attended the meetings which took up the first part of the afternoon. I'm known as a bit of a bloodhound at spotting plagiarism. At the moment, however, we are getting suprisingly few. Particularly compared with other courses such as business. I don't find these meetings pleasant but it is interesting to see the range of responses from students. I've seen it all from arrogance, denial, acceptance, bewilderment that what they have done is wrong, incomprehension that plagiarism is unacceptable, pleading, embarrassment etc etc, although I wasn't at the meeting where the student claimed to have brought God as their supporting person. These two were fairly straight forward and were both upheld so the rest of the afternoon was spent writing up the paperwork for them.

I then spent time with another member of staff just starting out in academic work. We are assessing a postgraduate presentation tomorrow. As it is their first time, I spent some time discussing the process, what to look out for, how to conduct ourselves etc. I enjoy nurturing staff in this way, which should not be suprising as this is the part of teaching students that I enjoy. I worked until 8pm on management/admin stuff until I felt that I wasn't working effectively, then drove the one and a half hour journey home, shopping on the way and getting home when some of my kids were asleep. Makes me wonder if it really is worth it. Still pursuing the research options of a month ago but not finding much time to research my options! The mood at work is still despairing.

Uid 260

Today is a non-teaching day that is formally designated as one of my research days. Accordingly I will work from home to avoid interruption by students and colleagues.

9.00 am - I start my day with an hour of dog walking. It's cold and muddy but my dogs don't mind.

10:30am - I begin the major task du jour. I have an international student who is nearing completion of her PhD - I am her Director of Studies. Fees for international students are high and she is keen to submit her thesis so she can return to her home country and take up an academic position. She had intended to use the 2010-11 academic year for writing up with a view to submitting around March 2011. Unfortunately she was informed by our Academic Registry that unless she submitted by the end of November 2010 she would be liable to pay the university a further GBP9,000 to continue her registration. This created a degree of instant panic as she felt she could not afford another payment of such a large sum and she therefore resolved to accelerate her writing up and submit this month.

Her determination to submit early comes at a price not just for her but also for me and my co-supervisor. Her thesis is already 25,000 words too long and losing 25,000 words without leaving clear evidence of academic "slash and burn" will not be a trivial task. My task for the day is to read some chapters and suggest to her material that can be removed without affecting her argument or which can be consigned to appendices. Much of this is hack editorial work but her methodology chapter requires extensive revision. Her work is partly inter-disciplinary and her lack of familiarity with qualitative and quantitative methods shows all too clearly in her justificatory narratives. The methods are sound enough but she has had great difficulty in writing up her methodology to the same standard as the rest of her work.

After struggling with the chapter for a couple of hours I take a break.

2:30pm - I resume the task. Her difficulty is that one of her examiners will be an academic with a lot of experience of qualitative research. If we had the luxury of a March 2011 submission date I could just offer her a few queries and a nudge here and there to set her on the right track. However, the urgency of a submission by the end of the month calls for some soul-searching as to how much more help I can give her and yet the thesis still remain properly all her own work. I wield the coloured marker pens as much as I can and reword some sections to reflect what she meant to say but was unable to find the rights words to express. This is a perennial problem with non-native English speakers but by 6.00pm I have done what I can. My conscience is clear but I suspect she will be disappointed with what I have left for her to do.

My colleague Dr Bluestocking is scheduled to deliver a paper in Australia in December. She has e-mailed me a copy inviting my comments. Admirable and disciplined academic that she is, Dr Bluestocking writes the full paper first and then produces the conference version. The full paper is a blockbuster publication of some 25,000 words destined for an American law journal. The conference version is a mere 3,500 words and, after the day's earlier struggles with my PhD candidate's prose, reads very easily and fluently. I smile as I recognise Dr Bluestocking's academic persona reflected all too clearly in her prose - phrases such as "ontologicaL angst", "instrumentalism and ahistoricity", "normative community" and "pastness of the past" leap off the page at me.

Uid 266

Wake exhausted at 6.45, having worked til past midnight last night, getting ready for today's onslaught - three consecutive hours of lecturing 10-1, then an office hour, and a three-hour computer practical in the afternoon. If I'd wanted to be a full time teacher, I'd have become, erm, a full time teacher. Drag myself through the morning routine, children as Monday morning-ish as me, and we manage to get to the school gate for 9.08, where youngest (not feeling her best, bless her) still manages to dawdle at the gate. Drive in filled with the mixture of exhaustion, anger, frustration, paranoia and hatred that seems to have been boiling inside me the last few weeks. Partly this is a result of being completely overwhelmed by my idiotic decision to update all my teaching (except for the entirely new final year undergrad module I am teaching, which I am writign from scratch as i go along) having had a sabbatical last year, so I am just running from delivering one lecture/practical to re-writing the next one the whole time. But also a strong element of fear about the ramifications of the coalition's vicious devastation of HE, the presures of the upcoming REF, and my failure to get the big grant application I had planned for December submitted, which only serves to heighten my sense of my so-called research career being a complete mediocre waste of space, and a target of sneering disdain from the department's big research beasts. Thus, arrive at work hating pretty much everyone and everything to do with it, most of all myself.

Get all my stuff ready for the next three hours and head off in a foul mood to my first lecture, where I am about 5 minutes late. Sort out PC, projector, memory stick, mp3 recorder thingy (trying podcasting this year, if that's the correct word), remote slide advancer and laser pointer, as quick as poss, apologise as sincerely as poss, get going.

Thankfully, this is one of those lectures where I know what I'm talking about backwards, so a soupcon of serenity sets in. I reckon if I can get through today, things should become a bit more manageable, although intangibles always rise towards the end of term, as office hour queues and email requests from students for help grow as coursework starts to get worked on. Severely not in the mood for audience participation, so just give it my best stand and deliver. At 10 on a Monday, I think the students are much of the same mind. 11: run down to the other end of campus for 2nd lecture with the same group of 60, + another 60. Try to explain ANOVA as clearly as possible - they're a great group this year, and I think contrary to urban myth the level of mathematical ability (and willingness to engage with stuff they find difficult) is on the up in the last few years, so I have no qualms about putting more of the nitty gritty details in than in previous years. Amuse myself with a few subliminal slides of continents riding in cauliflowers. Met with silence by students - not sure if its confused or disdainful - used to get laughs in previous years. Is this another sign of students taking things more seriously? Is this the effect of the £3k fees, and thus a sign of things to come? If so, I'll have to drop the court jester bit completely, probably a good thing.

12: run back up to near where I was at 10, for a 1st year lecture. Do my climbing up the lecture theatre desks trick, one's very wobbly nearly have an accident. Enjoy showing them the gapminder website.

1: back to the office, slightly dazed from the morning activities. a little office hour traffic, knock off a few emails. Do final prep for 3rd year module computer practical 3-6.

3: to computer lab, students stuffed in like battery chickens. VLE down (again - this is going to decimate our NSS returns, and therefore our league table placings and therefore our admissions and therefore our funds: one cock up on the computing front and we're all doomed!) so email prac instructions and spreadsheet to class. Last one went well, this one slightly mis-calibrated, end up with more frustration and more need of me giving step by step instructions than I'd hoped, but nothing disastrous. Students are, as always, engaged, interested, grateful, resourceful, friendly and gracious. By 5.30 they and I have pretty much had enough, so we finish up and stop at 5.45. Home for tea, with a feeling that I've got over a bit of a hill, and things are a little less fraught from now on.

Watch star trek voyager with my 8year old daughter, then read first to 8year old then to 10 year old, before prison break on dvd with wife once she gets back from pilates. End the day relieved and hating myself and the world a little less than at the start of the day.

Uid 267

Monday 15 November

(Still on research leave, living West Wales, London University)

Woken up at 7 by 3 year old. Tried to lie in our bed with him a bit, then entertained him in his bedroom, then had breakfast. Then got up 14 year old for school. Wife had shower and we were out of house well before 9. At nursery, I said goodye and walked from there to my Welsh class, which runs from 9.30 to 11.30. It was a lovely sunny day but v.cold and the classroom for Welsh is freezing because they obviously turn building heating off over weekend and it doesn't get going again quick enough.

After Welsh, went to a second-hand book shop and bought some books related to work. Had lunch in Costa and walked back along seafront and up through woods to wife's university. I realise the teaching fanatics would probably have apoplexy if they read this, but I'm sorry part of being professional is staying fit and I try to get proper exercise at least on 3 working days a week. I have done teaching prep while on research leave and like most academics I know I like teaching when I'm in the room with the students - its the attached admin I don't enjoy. So the concept of feeling something missing if I don't teach on a day is not one I recognise. I'm looking forward to teaching after Christmas, but I am especially pleased that this year because I haven't been teaching this term I won't have to spend the Christmas and new year period answering email queries from students concerning their coursework (Hallelujah!)

Met wife at 2, to get mortgage deed for our impending house purchase signed. I had my signature witnessed by my Welsh teacher in the morning, then wife had her signature witnessed by departmental secretary and I was able to get the whole thing off in the post. Academic lives are flexible but we find we need to use that flexibility to the whole in order to manage everyday life. As a consequence one doesn't necessarily have to work every hour of the working day, but neither is one ever off work - spare moments always get devoted to the job and often late nights too.

Got home 2.30 and tackled daily emails (about 10-20 on average at this time of year). Spoke to a colleague on phone. Spoke to someone from GTTR on phone about the ongoing saga of my inability to log on and give a former student a reference for a PGCE. Miraculously resolved issue and wrote reference for student and then wrote reference for another student also for PGCE. I hate this online system - would rather send an email.

Then I started work on a publisher's report on a book proposal for a series for which I am on the editorial panel. I broke from this at 5.30, to cook evening meal of vegetarian pasta. Afterwards, read paper a bit, chatted, eventually bathed 3 yr old and read bedtime stories.

Resumed work on proposl report just after 8 and finished by about 9.45. Then contemplated writing this report but felt too tired, so answered a few more emails instead and shut down pc at 10.

Only to immediately reboot, as ongoing saga of our soon to be 18 daughter burst into life and we looked at online A level courses for half an hour. Emotionlly exhausted by subsequent charged discussion, wife and I slumped in kitchen unable to move for a bit before finally dragging ourselves to bed about 11.30. Another glorious day in the life of an academic. Maybe can get on with actually writing something during the rest of the week - even reading something would be good.

Uid 268

I do not usually lecture on Monday. However, I moved last week's lecture, to allow students to go to the London demo. I had intended to go myself, but many things transpired to make it seem increasingly difficult, from the prospect of travelling there and back on student coaches without another member of staff from my department, to a lack of early evening childcare, to this lecture, this Monday lecture, on Antonin Artaud. I feel guilty about not going and cross about the various ways in which it has been misrepresented anyway. But I'm tired, dog tired, enjoying it, but still dog tired...Still, Monday...

Never really felt enthused about Artaud. Surprising, someone suggested, because I do have quite an enthusiasm for some of his friends - not least Tristan Tzara. But despite his nihilism, there's always seemed something rather generous about Tzara. Plus there is a level of contradiction in Artaud that lacks the lucidity and self-knowledge of 'I'm writing a manifesto and yet in principle I am against manifestoes...'

There was a glass of wine on the lectern. Momentarily considered swigging it, but thought better not.

Given that it was an unfamiliar lecture theatre and the spatially challenged students arrived in sporadic clusters of a dozen at a time over the first half hour, progressively more flustered, red faced and out of breath, I thought it went quite well. I enjoy giving lectures and think I'm quite good at it, even though in some instances this term I am writing them from a standing start. It's the questions that are the hardest. They ask really great questions. 'What was the precise troupe of Balinese dancers that Artaud saw?' Great question, scholars failed to ask it for ages. Fortunately I could refer him to an article on the subject. 'You used the term "bad faith" - were you making reference to Sartre?' Um, nope. It's not as though my knowledge of Artaud extends to whether or not he had an influence on Sartre...

After the lecture I went to pick my daughter up from nursery to take her to her first 'taster' session at the school she is starting at in the New Year. She is very excited about this. When we got there, one of the little girls made a determined run for her, flung her arms around her and stroked her hair lovingly. L beamed at me, enraptured at playing the dolly. 'You can go now', she said. 'Really, I thought you wanted me to stay this time?' I replied, feeling rather deflated. 'I'll give you a hug first, then you can go', she said, kindly. A moment later, I was in the street and suddenly found myself in tears. I hadn't realised I was so emotional about it, as she has been going to nursery for ages. It was just something about her quiet confidence, as though she was saying, 'it's ok, I'll take it from here...'

Well, there wasn't time to go back to work before picking her up again, so I went for a coffee and reassured myself by looking at all the pairs of mothers and daughters, older profiles reflected in younger profiles; mirroring gestures and smiles. It looked like fun.

Later, of course, I had to work all evening to make up the time. As the usual lecture is Wed, I was, naturally working on the next lecture, which was on Brecht and Piscator, who I prefer and know a great deal more about. The students think they do too, of course, so I needed to surprise them.

I do enjoy it all enormously. That must be said, despite the moments when I'm counting the weeks, or worrying about the future.

Uid 276

Teaching first thing on a Monday morning is always a challenge, so three hours of nutrition with my health students let me know that the weekend was well and truly over. It was a lovely, bright and sunny morning for once but this meant sunlight crept in through the ineffective blinds and stopped the students from seeing the comedy video clip. It’s really frustrating when you try to liven up a session and something like that happens. I grabbed a sandwich to eat at my desk and then started to sift new e-mails. Somebody had sent a nationwide request to participate in an online survey about technology-enhanced learning, so I spent a few minutes completing that as I had recent experience of the particular technology in question and am quite an advocate of it. I was then stood-up by a final year student in the afternoon who wanted to discuss something but she did not show up (for the third time). My diary is unfortunately littered with cancelled tutorials, yet these are typically the very students who would really benefit from turning up. Sad. My first summative (essay) deadline of the term came and went in the afternoon, accompanied by a flurry of e-mails from students who had missed it due to illness, family problems, forgetfulness etc…Our system does not allow the tutor to offer extensions on deadlines, so a late piece of work gets a zero. Students can submit extenuating circumstances to support a claim and an independent Panel will consider the evidence and offer a standard extension if valid. Students who are used to having lots of attempts at things at school, with flexible deadlines, find this a bit of a shock…

Uid 281

Frustrating start to the day when the department administrator rung me at 7.30am to say she was ill and I realised I was having a bad muscle day. The problem with being a lecturer with a disability sometimes is that colleagues are very good at teaching awareness but less good about doing it themselves. I had woken at 7am but dozed for a while, the phone call spurred me to starting the process of getting up. Unfortunately it was 9am before I could contemplate leaving the house, having fallen over twice and taken 45 minutes to dress (simply clothing, elasticated trousers, zip up boots, pull on top). Then it took another 50 minutes to cycle to work with breaks, sit downs and fall offs. Annoying as all hell. Eventually made my office at 10am feeling frustrated and in discomfort.

Students on concourse stopped to ask questions about formative work which is easy to sort out. Feel a bit stupid I forgot it is Eid al-Adha tomorrow which one student pointed out. Another student queries scheduling of tasks - seems team communication may have swan dived somewhere. In meantime send email telling team about administrators sickness and Eid. Get a response from the Team member who-thinks-he's-superior-and-really-needs-to-check-his-misogyny-and-the-massive-chip-on-his-shoulder complaining he's never been sent this before and shouldn't this be done at a college rather than a team level. I ask whether he's volunteering for that job. The silence in response is deafening.

Crack on with workload by looking at peer marking exercise. Am confused as to why I am the only one who picked up on and commented on the plagiarism issues in the piece. This despite the fact I did a Turnitin check and sent them the results of it. Worries me that there might be such a lax approach from people who I trusted to be on the ball. Also spread the word about Wednesdays Walk Out for Education which, after the Free University at the weekend, I am hoping will tie into a more radical piece of action.

Finish up formative feedback on third year piece in some vain hope they might attend their class. But I know they have an essay due and so chances are they won't turn up at all. It worries me that they might scrape their degrees but haven't really tackled their very utilitatarian view of their work or their massive time management issues. Then onto summative marking for first year students - it's their first piece and so it takes a bit longer to get the feedback right so it's supportive but also rigorous. In the meantime I also email out to the tutors I am observing this year as part of our OTL programme - one of them is teaching at the end of this week and that would be ideal for me but I suspect not for him!

Go for coffee with research assistant as prep for tomorrow's meeting with the contracting organisation. This is a new thing for my institution (we're very small) and also for me. It's hard to manage a research team on top of teaching, on top of outreach and on top of managing a department but it's required.

Back and more marking before teaching third year students about identity. Their lack of dedication is so unusual here that I feel very disheartened with them. My only tactic left, more than half way through the course, is to just teach them the next session in the sequence and accept we aren't going to cover the whole syllabus. After that, checking Extension Request forms from students in my department. Mostly the new redesign is working week but one student has failed to complete properly.

Packing up and then heading home as I scored free cinema tickets for some rubbish film so need to cycle home and then pick up friend to go to cinema out of town. But the "night off" sounds so tempting I'm actually looking forward to it.

Uid 282

11:16 Entering diary info from home this time. Woke up this morning to husband leaving for work (about 5:30am), then got a call from daughter as she drove to work in Pennsylvania. Talked about making late lunch yesterday on Sunday for youngest daughter. All grandchildren were here yesterday except for the three in Pennsylvania. Turned over and slept a few hours before enjoying a long soak in my tub.

Got dressed and drove through pharmacy to pick up prescriptions called in earlier.

Drove the 1 1/2 hour commute to Canyon. By the time I arrived, it was already 4pm and I missed the university president's visit with the faculty in the Alumni building.

Unloaded the car, put away my stuff in the apartment and turned on the heater since the thermometer showed it was 42 degrees F. (at least 10 degrees colder than at home).

I was hungry since I had not eaten, so I ate some of the leftovers I brought from home and then washed the dishes. Then, found an outlet expander to add to the outlet so I could plug in my laptop and sit in my recliner and grade comprehensive exams given Friday. Watched television while eating.

Then continued grading while watching television in my comfy recliner.

Uid 289

I was away at a research meeting Wednesday to Friday last week so when I got in today there was a lot to catch up on. First, though, I had a dental appointment at 9.00.

With a new filling, I was in my office by 10 and hit the email in-box. I had email while at the meeting, but nevertheless a backlog had built up, consisting of mails that had arrived over the weekend plus others I could not deal with while away. The emails led to a number of things to do, relating to research and administration, but not teaching.

One teaching-related email I sent was to remind my MSc students about this afternoon's tutorial.

With this work backlog, I felt I could not afford a lunch break and ate my sandwiches at my keyboard.

Carried on working through emails and consequent actions, until mid-afternoon, when I had a tutorial. Did not get to the bottom of the backlog, and I know there are emails further down which cannot be ignored, and need action.

In the tutorial two of my students gave presentations to an audience consisting of the other two students and myself.

After that I went to a meeting with people from a number of other departments and the Pro-VC teaching. We were brainstorming about possible future joint programmes, mainly at the undergraduate level, but also possibly masters.

Then home. No work in the evening, except I went looking for a personal email and spotted one which needed a quick response. It was a request for an overdue chapter review. Fortunately I had done the review while travelling last week, so I was able to email it straight back.

Uid 290

Monday: Early arrival for a 10am lecture thwarted by the first heavy coating of ice on the car. (At least the battery wasn't flat, as it would be three days later.) An immediately following first lecture on a course that is delivered intensively in what is now the second half of the term. These first-thing lectures are often birthed in the midwife hours of the weekend. A last-minute check of the online timetable narrowly avoids me having to project my voice from the other side of campus as the location has been changed since I put the course in my diary seven weeks ago. What a contrast in audience between the two courses: first-year undergraduates, from whom it is nearly impossible to get a word out of, to motivated and engaged postgraduates who help to interactively shape the course material to conform to their particular state of understanding.

Straight from there to progress meetings with small-group software engineering teams who didn't actually get as much done as they had hoped in the preceding week set aside entirely for work on the project. Strange, that.

Time for a bite of lunch while I look over the training materials I am going to use with a group of external people who will be helping with an outreach activity. I train them for this in the afternoon. It is nice to see that they are really enthusiastic and on the ball. We get done in less time than I had thought it would take.

Returning to my office I am delighted to see that I have been sent some data I need for a research project I am working on with colleagues in another department. I am keen to keep this project moving along as it will too easily be crowded out by teaching commitments during term time - particularly now that I am involved in the new intensive course. So I get straight on with using the data, but also have to prepare some class material for tomorrow's classes before leaving for home around 6pm.

After the evening meal its back to the research project and I spend about three hours getting to the point I want to be with it. There's still tomorrow's lecture to prepare, but the day has to end somewhere.

Uid 291

Up late at 07:20 with my arm still painful. I have had tennis elbow for the

last two weeks and it is getting worse. No I do not play games,and I

think this must be a form of RSI. At least Mondays are my lightest

day, so I should be able to continue a rest strategy. Over the first

cup of coffee I remember that I promised my research student to read

her draft first chapter of the thesis. She is not a native English

speaker, and definitey not a native writer. It seems easiest to

rewrite some of it, but some words I just do not understand.

Wake up my wife with a cup of tea about 9:00, and after breakfast did

some planning for the second assignment for the DSP course. Ask my

net-colleagues and got an immediate response with some samples. After

starting the e-mail catchup after the weekend it became clear that

riding my bike would be too painful so decide to take the bus, which

amazingly actually came on time! (13:29)

At the University and my office well in time to prepare the lecture.

Corrected a spelling error/typo in the handout from last year, and as

it has detailed maths that I tend to write incorrectly on the board it

seems sane to photocopy the 4 sheets for each student as well as

putting on the web. Also invented a better way to show spectral

smear, using my laptop and decide to incorporate it into the lecture

14:15 lecture. The previous occupants had actually left which was a

change. Setting up the laptop took longer than it should; no idea why

this is not working like before. Lecture was no better than OK.

Still getting very little visual feedback; wonder if they understand

any of it! Also gave them a preview of the second assignment which

needs checking and signing off. At least I had an excuse to play Laurie

Anderson's "O Superman" to the class.

Back to my office talking to a couple of maths/CS students, who were

joking about the low level of one of the CS courses they are doing.

In the way bumped into colleagues who told me the examiners' meeting

had finished -- I was double booked by our new no-communication admin

-- and the student I had failed was to remain failed and so I need not

attend. So early coffee, after a quick look at the state of our latest

(and to my mind outstanding) research project -- unfunded of course.

Over coffee we discussed the teaching allocation which seems to have

non experts teaching subjects in which we have experts. Next year

will be even more interesting with forthcoming staff changes. Also

discussed the external examiners' comments on our semester one

papers. I was encouraged to respond to my concerns that the examiner

did not understand the situation.

I am still being asked about the equipment for the new teaching lab,

so more web searching for prices and options. Looks like the solution

I want is just over budget. This passed seamlessly into the search

for my own home equipment -- I need a pair of devices that are out of

manufacture. I suppose ebay is the only hope.

The follow-up to the year 2 forum is being requested. Really students

should grow up a bit. We provide resources they do not use and then

complain that they do not exist, complain if coursework is handed out

early or late.... I suspect I am just out of touch.

As my closest colleagues are doing the Euro-Don bit, travelling to or

from the near continent it seems that the early bus is a good idea. A

quick visit from the research student with the draft and I leave for

the 18:22 bus.

That gives time for more e-mail before cooking supper -- broccoli and

pasta, cheese and grapes. Nice

That leaves a little more time to look into my equipment and the lab

equipment before giving up about 22:30

Uid 293

I have injured my knee so cannot drive to get into work \_was meant to have a bidding meeting and also a meeting around data analysis - now need to reschedule this. So from home with leg up I have read and marked 3 masters dissertations for a master in Psychology ( 2 forensic and one counselling). The process is independent double marking and then a comparison. This process took 5.5 hours and so time to turn to somehting else.

Uid 297

Started the day with a meeting with an undergraduate project student to discuss her work in the lab over the next few days. Working on a research project is a great way to see what it is like to do science but I sometimes feel like I spend all my time supervising project students at the moment.

Two hours of tutorials with some First Year biological science students. This was great - really enjoyed it and the students also seemed to get a lot out of bullding molecular models too!

Had personal tutor meetings with 3 of my tutees in the Medical School to see how they are settling in. Spent a lot of time trying to convince them that doing PDP was NOT a waste of their time and that it was useful. I'm not sure that they were with me on this. One of them was worried about how she is getting on and has a lot of personal issues. I try to do my best for her but do worry as to whether I offer the best support.

Most of the afternnon was taken up with planning teaching, administration and support for module I convene. The students are giving talks tomorrow and I needed to make sure that they were going to cover the right things and that all the tutors knew what they needed to do. Also needed to place supporting material on the VLE and answering questions on the discussion forum.

Went over a lecture that I am giving later to make sure it flowed well. Gave the lecture at 5pm - horrible time. The students are tired and so am I.

Uid 298

Monday 15 November

[00:01 – 1:20] Again it starts by me being a night owl. Having checked my email on Sunday evening one of the teaching assistants has sent an urgent message that the Wiki server used in my practical labs is down and he is worried about what to do with the lab class on Monday. On looking into it the server has been off line since Wednesday but none of the 200 students has thought to email our technical support service! Midnight finds me on VPN and the remote desktop finishing off the maintenance upgrade that stopped it working and restarting the service. On trying to post an announcement for the students I find the blackboard option to format it in HTML isn’t working and type the announcement 3 times before it is finally posted. You just have to love how computer technology makes life easier!

[09:00 – 09:45] Clear the email and get onto the first of today’s research planning tasks. An EU bid (1) planned for the January FP7 call is coming together and a meeting of the key players is planned in Brussels next week. The favoured option is to meet on the Wednesday afternoon before the EU briefing so I need to email out that decision this morning and get arrangements under way.

[10:15 – 11:30] Need to have car exhaust replaced where a coupler has parted. Take car and laptop to Kwik-Fit – they work on the car and I work on the architecture outline for another of the EU bids (2) planned for January.

[12:00 – 12:30] One partner who was dithering has dropped out of a consortium for the January bid 1. It is not a fatal problem and I email them thanking them for their interest before making adjustments to the draft work programme.

[14:00 – 15:00] MSc Examining board to deal with awards to students who have completed dissertations over the summer. There seem to be a lot poor ones and I wonder whether this correlates with the students who have not had any contact with their supervisor over the summer. The students are as anonymous as the marks sheets in front of us. All the decisions are prescribed by regulation and I feel I have just wasted another hour – maybe I should be too busy to attend like the majority of my colleagues!

[15:00 – 15:30] Discussion with two colleagues about the EU bid 1 we have on the table, how we will proceed with drafting and the planned Brussels meeting. One of them will be at the meeting with me. We still haven’t got commitment from key partners on bid 3 and we decide to pull the plug on that one.

[15:30 – 15:45] Brief discussion with technical support manager about the wiki server status for level 2 students.

[16:15 – 20:00] Continued work on the system architecture plans for EU bid 1. I get them in pretty good shape (I think) for partners to cost the different components each of them will develop.

[20:00 – 20:45] Checking costing and status of a 4th project plan on the University project costing system ready for submission to EPSRC. Need to make sure all the figures are consistent and the reports tie up. The online data is OK check the rest tomorrow.

Uid 300

Today is a very busy day. I have a new course starting very soon and it needs a lot of development work. In this world of time-allocation models, Full Economic Costing (the appropriately named FeC) and so on, I find it intensely frustrating that nobody seems to think that development of material for teaching should be allocated any more than the merest token of time. "Time" means simply "time in front of students". Well for this course, that is a nominal 20 hours, but there are more than 150 hours of development work going on first. However, since it is not officially allocated, it just has to come out of any spare time that is lying around. As a result I have had to work every single day (i.e. Monday-to-Sunday inclusive) for 5 weeks just to fit it in. Annoying.

Still, I am happy with the course itself. It is nearly finished now and a good mixture of various media, some challenging assessment and lots of opportunity for exploration by the students. If I can just get it finished off within the next day or two, I may even be able to take a morning off on Sunday...

Uid 301

This day I was working from home. I do this about 1-3 days per week, depending on teaching commitments. It saves me about three hours traveling time per day, which allows me to get more work done. With an internet conection, I can work from anywhere, as I can answer student questions and upload materials via Blackboard VLE.

The workday started at my desk at home (I have the luxury of a home office) at 7:30am. The morning was spent on preparing lecture materials for later in the week. Even though these are based on lectures I have previously delivered, but updates each teaching period typically take two hours per 1-2 hour lecture. This is aminly because I try to include topical materials and update case studies, to keep student engagement by making the material as relevant as possible. This task took four hours.

I spent two hours answering various student and faculty e-mails. Most student queries concern questions about assignments (coursework) that have previously been covered in lectures. As only about 40% of students typically attend each lecture, I suspect that non-attendance causes most of the confusion. I struggle with deciding to spend time getting the students up to speed (which consumes my time), or forcing them to attend. This is becoming a significant drain on my time for the weeks leading up to assignment submissions.

Spent three hours marking MSc dissertations. As usual, I am behind on this marking, which is due this week. Whilst rcognizing the importance of marking, it is hard to get motivated by it. I am trying to develop some forms or structured rubrics to assist with marking as part of a PGCert program, but it is difficult to find the time to complete this.

Working from home has its challenges, as a few domestic chores intrude on the day. This means the research work I was hoping to do gets pushed into the evening. After spending time with my family when the come home in the evening, I put in more time from 8pm-11pm on answering more e-mails and remotely setting up a business simulation for a post-grad class this week.

Whilst this sounds like a lot of time on e-mail, it is actually very convenient to work remotely and a lot can get done via e-mail and VLE. I find 'office hours' were students come to my office for face to face problem resolution to actually be far more inefficient, as they often book a 30 minute slot for what is really a five minute issue.

I end the day once again feeling guilty that I have devoted no time to my personal PhD research. This is supposed to be a priority, as I have a time limited contract that requires me to complete my part-time PhD, but the urgent overtakes the important. This time management issue is down to me, as I have difficulty saying 'no' to work.

Uid 309

Monday is not a formal 'work' day for me. My department very kindly allow me to work Tuesday-Saturday, so that I can look after my daughter on Mondays. I am a single parent, and this helps enormously. So for timetabling purposes, I have my 'research day' on Monday, but do the work on Saturday.

Had a lovely day out with my mother and daughter, but switched my email on around 6 to check for anything urgent. Amongst other things: a message from my HOD wanting to arrange a meeting, a student cancelling our meeting tomorrow, and an email from my mentee, who has had some disappointing news. After my daughter has gone to bed, I spend about 45 minutes getting back to them, and catching up on a flurry of emails regarding the journal I edit.

I'll spend an hour or so reading a PhD student's work before a meeting tomorrow, and planning the week ahead. I have fallen behind with my research over the past couple of weeks, and really need to get this moving again - despite the piles of essays that will start coming in mid-week!

Uid 310

Dear diary 15.11.10

This was supposed to be a half day’s leave. I guess we should take time off in hours not days!

Drove from Scotland through a glorious landscape of snow and heavy hoar frost, then through a misty lake district. Great scones and coffee at Tebay service station, and finally to a foggy Yorkshire to return mum home after a relaxing weekend ‘up north’.

Arrived at work around 2, to find 46 new emails (and at least another 10 as I cleared these). Deleted 20 without reading them, including 5 from the Union. I am really not interested in many of the campaigns thought to be important in spending my membership fee, but leaving the Union is not an option, as it is one of the few voices of opposition to continuing commoditisation of education.

I increasingly find email deletion to be the most efficient (not to mention liberating) method of dealing with things I am not committed to. Any that really need attention are re-sent within a couple of days so clearly then need a response. Of the rest, answered 24 and ignored several of those which had attachments, although one claimed more attention. A meeting in London this week, and all papers sent electronically: 39 in total, all needing to be read in the next couple of days. Aaagh!

3-4pm Masters student tutorial. This is someone who is very comfortable in their professional role, but anxious about taking on an academic approach to study after years away from studying. A lot of our students are very talented professionals, and they find a real challenge in going back to the theory to justify their practice. This one is someone who is innovative, experienced and excited about study. All good, and can be encouraged in order to develop ‘evidence based practice’. Eventually they felt clear enough that we managed to sort an outline to structure the first piece of masters assessment together.

4-6pm MSc module teaching. This is a small group with very different experience and needs, so we have ensured it is student led (i.e. inefficient, so far as the University would be concerned) and therefore a lot of fun. I have probably learned at least as much as the students, because their interests have sent me off in all sorts of new directions, while helping them to find the literature they need to pursue their interests. Stammering in autism anyone? While we were there, an undergraduate student called in, concerned that she could not access the necessary technology to complete an assessment with me tomorrow. ‘Don’t panic’ seems to have become my catch phrase!. It will all be fine.

6-7pm Despite house staff trying to throw us out, I was not last in tonight. Sent off the poster, jointly authored with a recent graduate, for printing. Tried to submit the remains of a paper, but the journal web site is on a go-slow, so while most is in, it doesn’t like the figures, which apparently are very big files and it keeps falling over before thy are up loaded, Ah well, tomorrow.

Home and spent 2 hours reading draft Honours projects. One is needing a lot of work, a second is great. And then there was time to write this.

9.15 pm. Did I say half a day’s leave? Time to stop and write a long e-mail to the daughter in Africa (or wherever she has now landed)

Family time!

Uid 312

I got into the office around 8:30am this morning because I left a mountain of work on my desk over the weekend. The morning got off to a bit of an unsettling start with a brief meeting with a colleague about an undergraduate honors thesis proposal. Perhaps my questions/comments about it (not sent to the student) over the weekend were a bit too frank, because I think they were interpreted as harsh. As a new faculty member seeing many things like this for the first time, I have very little perspective about how to tread so as to not offend anyone. The unfortunate thing is that I was just being constructive to try to ensure the best research experience for the student, and I am now left feeling as though I can't provide the type of honest feedback we all relied on from our peers in graduate school.

After the meeting, I set to work on a variety of course prep tasks on my todo list. I spent the better part of the morning drafting the assignment document for the next project milestone in my senior capstone course---having drafted all of these before the start of the semester would have been a major help, but I digress. I put a fair bit of extra detail into this document in hopes of getting higher quality results out of the students. Thus far in the semester I have been disappointed in the thoroughness of the design documentation my students are producing.

Over lunch I drafted an optional homework assignment for another course (intro programming). This included the homework description, as well as a number of code files to scaffold the students in the task---thankfully I had already written the code for the completed homework and could use that as a place to work back from. Many students have done poorly on previous assignments, or they have missed the submission deadlines entirely. In an effort to give them a chance to make up some points, I decided to post an optional assignment that they can submit to replace their lowest homework grade. We'll see how many students take me up on it--it's a hectic time in the semester as it is.

Early afternoon brought a number of consultations with students in the computer lab about issues they are having with their latest homework submission. Of course, they didn't stop in during my scheduled office hours this morning. Alas. However, in helping the students I realized that several people are struggling with one particular detail that we didn't cover in class, so I intend to add that to the list of material for tomorrow's lecture.

In my senior capstone class today two students gave presentations about individual research topics---each student in the class is presenting over the next two weeks. One of the presentations was quite good, while the other one was a bit of a let down---a great topic, just not enough preparation on the students' part. I had to scramble a bit to fill the class time left unused by the student. Hopefully the upcoming presentations will make up for a rough start.

After class I drafted yet another assignment for the third course I am teaching (definitely drafting assignments was a trend today). Now that it is posted for the students on our course management system, I am going to head home for a quick meal before settling in for the evening drafting the exam I will be giving on Thursday. Hopefully I can get the full draft completed tonight.

As for the pile of papers and programs to be graded, those will just have to wait for tomorrow.

Uid 314

managed to get to sleep around midnight.

7.30am awake

8-9am get daughter to school

9am-10am exercise

10-11am get up, shave, answer email etc

11-12pm talk to grad students

12-3pm finalise course marks spreadsheet; talk to collegaues about honours students marks

3-4pm visit shrink

4pm-5pm talk to grad students, futz around

6pm-8pm home, cook pizza, feed family, watch Jane Austen

8pm-10pm desultorily read emails; mark up two chapters of another thesis;

10pm-12 sort emails, edit content onto programming language project blog

12ish crash

Uid 318

Have been away on conference all weekend and have some projects to be going on with - some kind of database of work about my discipline (as an emergent discipline, we lack this); another try at my interdiscipline collaboration with cognitive psychology, a paper to write up...

And now its time to run the hoover and clean the toilets.

I've been editing my newest book this morning, getting it ready to show my agent. I could easily keep doing this, but with me working (titularly) half time, we can't afford a cleaner and the house has taken a beating over the weekend. My inlaws don't leave until tomorrow, but they're out most of the day, so I'd better snap to the housework while I can.

I also have errands to run - to the Post Office and bank. I'll either walk or ride my bike, to get a little exercise. Although I've already done an online food shop, I need to pick up bits here and there, as well. I also think we need some nit treatment (sigh).

Daughter wants to hit the library on the way home...I have taken home two wonderful books I ordered in and can't find them in the house. Perhaps they'll emerge in the housework. It's always hard to find books in this place, as all three of us pile them high wherever we happen to land.

I've dealt with a problem on the VLE and caught up on emails. I shouldn't be doing any of this now, but I can't bear them mounting up and it doesn't seem fair to students to make them wait. We just got a slating in the NSS for not being responsive enough last year, when our workloads went up by 1/3 and we introduced a new modular scheme. Perhaps it was inevitable, but I don't like graduates looking back and feeling they've been cheated. I want them to be stuffed full of knowledge and achievement. And sometimes that means answering emails for an hour or two on your day off.

Uid 319

Back to teaching after reading week and start of a series of lectures with student presentations. The turnout was dreadful which given that they all have to present eventually seems ridiculous. Attendance overall seems worse this year than other years, though some students do seem to be informing us of absence more this year.

Attended pointless session on institutional approach to e-learning which just reinforced my impression that some of the people involved in running parts of the University do not understand that you really cannot run a University like it was a conventional business. This will not change of course, so we are doomed to even more stupid pointless forms and multi-stage approval processes, all of which mean that you are forced to be entirely unresponsive if you teach a subject that changes fast and frequently. Lots of people talking about "quality" of course (without being able to define it) and worrying about "feedback" (without knowing how to do it so that NSS scores will go up....)

The more I think about it, the more desperate the next few years are going to be, and almost certainly more than just a few. I'd give up and get out but I feel a strong responsibility to my students, now and in the future. I could not recommend anyone to take up an academic career anymore.

Uid 322

Wow, what a day. Knew it was going to be hectic because we had Learning and Teaching Committee scheduled at 10 and I knew it was going to be a 2-hour meeting. Fortunately a student cancelled their 9am meeting so I had a bit more time to prepare.

The committee meeting was quite full on. We started late (waiting for admin support to take the minutes), decided to start anyway and then about 10 minutes in the Director of Education got a phone call from nursery that one of her children was sick so she had to leave early. This was a shame because there was quite a lot to discuss about our college's responses to "education in the post-Browne environment". A lot of changes are suddenly being imposed from above right in the middle of term with no consultation. We can't really see the logic of some of these - it's basically to do with feedback and student satisfaction. However, our school's not doing so bad on the areas that they're trying to address (promptness of feedback). What we need to work on is improving consistency and quality and that's not really going to be possible if we all suddenly have less time to mark. We've had this major organisational restructure recently and there's a sense that we're not being consulted or considered with some of these changes. None of our colleagues are part of the college executive and people are starting to feel overlooked.

The rest of the day was pretty uneventful compared to the discussion at that meeting. Office hours were unattended so I managed to get some more teaching prepared for next term. I have to teach a new module and so I'm spending quite a bit of time on that - but it's actually been pretty enjoyable reading a range of different papers on topics outside my area of expertise. I had a brief student meeting at 4pm and that was fun. This student seems quite good and we're getting to do a project on a new area of interest for me. And we're going to do something around student collective action on changes to higher education, which is timely. It will be interesting to find out what our students feel about the protests and the changes.

The day ended with a heads-up from a colleague that our MSc students are writing a letter about some aspects of the programme. It's great that the students are working together and being pro-active about dealing with their issues but I know it's going to take a bit of time to deal with any issues (if we're actually able to) so I can envisage some stressful times ahead. I seem to be spending so much time on admin at the moment - part of this is because we've lost some admin support for the MSc programmes and partly it's because I'm the most experienced programme director (ironic given I've only worked in UK HE for 3 years).

On a more positive note, I submitted a symposium and an abstract for an international conference next year. I'm already getting excited about going so I hope that both are accepted. The symposium is related to a special issue that I'm doing for a journal and so will be a great networking opportunity with some high profile people in the field. One of my goals has been to try and increase my international profile so I think I'm making progress towards this.

Uid 325

Woke up and went through my emails while waiting for my little boy to wake up. Then drove him to University Creche at my work and dropped him off and proceeded to my office picking up around 100 exams for a 2nd year course to mark on the way (the students sat the exam this past Friday afternoon and the other lecturer for the course was marking it over the weekend while his parents were over visiting and gave it to me on Monday morning as he left for a conference).

Before being able to spend some time marking, had to handle a couple of urgent queries from a conference I am helping organise where keynote speakers go awol and don't reply to repeated emails trying to get their travel organised to/from conference. Just before lunch time managed to get started on marking.

During lunch visited University Health and Safety Nurse to get University partially funded glasses upgrade, went to optometrist for a new script and should have new glasses costing still a small fortune even after University discount in a week or so.

Got back to my office to carry on marking. Picked up my son from creche and my wife from her work on the way back home and asked my wife to look after our son/put him to bed etc as I marked exams into late evening. Decided not to stay up too late so that my head works the next day.

The next morning, once I got into my office, entered this survey and now will get back to marking my exam. ;-)

Kind of stressed that no research gets done while I do this since there are people waiting for me to finish my bit of work for the paper that is kind of urgent but not as urgent as exams. :-(

Uid 328

Lots of activity today going on outside the office whilst work men and colleagues frenetically fill crates and wrap items for a move to a new campus. The 'Big move' has caused a lot of logistical and territorial headaches for others – however I have put any concerns I have about the move into abeyance and they are on the periphery of my consciousness. I’ve done very little in terms of preparation and haven’t visited the new campus. I don’t know whether it’s burying my head in the sand or whether I’m convinced the move will go smoothly. Fortunately I have very little responsibility for ensuring that it does!

I’m preparing for a lecture tomorrow by going over the material and adding a few bits and pieces. I’m also busy writing for online content to update a distance-learning module. The deadline for this is some time away still but I tend to find preparation for distance learning is much more intensive and diverting than content given in the lecture theatre. So many more details have to be included and I’m thinking I should do them whilst I have the motivation and no contact time.

I hope I didn’t make a student cry today – had to tread a fine line between concern and consternation and think I may have come down a little too heavy on the latter. Inappropriate uses of cut and paste in an assessment – but I can’t say anymore.

Found some time to go over my research paper, but keep resisting the urge to submit it despite the fact that it’s been many years in the making. Possibly afraid of (another) rejection!

Uid 329

Prepared (i.e. updated) tomorrow's 2-hour teaching session for my 3rd year UG class - it's week 6 and they are beginning to flag a bit, so spent about an hour perking things up on my powerpoint presentation, in order to keep things ticking along smartly. Also added a 'pep talk' on the website re. their upcoming student-led seminars, to identify why they might put effort into something which is a) somewhat demanding, in terms of reading, prepartion and embarrasment factor (performing in front of peers, just so uncool), and b) not assessed. I constantly try to find ways of conveying the importance of reading, intellectual development ('brain gym'), WITHOUT the pavlovian trigger of 'assessment'. Although these people have never had a year in their schooling when they WEREN'T subjected to assessment of one sort or another, and seem to have no real grasp of the innate worth of doing something well in its own right, or for their own mental development. Sigh.

Also added website encouragement for any queries re. last week's (assessed!) practical class, where I asked at the end, so, what d'you do if you find you get really stuck on completing the practical report? And they chorused mornfully, 'cry'. OK, I said, plan A is 'cry', and plan B is ......'. 'Use the website message board to ask a query', they replied. 'Hurrah', I said.

The anxious vibes picked up from the class were almost immediately borne out this morning....no sooner had I uploaded the seminar pep talk when one of the students came to my office to ask if he could sign up to a different seminar group and topic from the one that, perforce (as he'd been slow on the draw), he was currently signed up for. I offered to spend the mid-lecture break tomorrow to get them all to discuss which group and topic (it's sad but true that many of these 3rd years don't know each other, the class sizes and/or diversity of modules and degree programmes mean they have no group identity).

More anxiety still this morning - the marks and comments for the wholly course-assessed work on a field course module went out to the (2nd year) students today. My marks (on a post-field course essay) were systematically slightly lower than those of my co-teacher on the course had given for thier week-long record in their field notebooks. A gaggle of maybe 7 or 8 students came to the office to ask if the field notebooks were less weighted than the essay marks, ie 10% compared to 90% for the essay? Well,both were equally weighted, so no idea where this idea had come from....but also fiund that the 50/50 split was implicit rather than explicit in the course description. So, another edit for next year's course booklet (it's only the 2nd time this field course has run, seems there's a bedding-in time to get every required detail down on paper).

Also disappointing to hear that there are 4 students whose notebook marks were much much higher than their essay marks but who didn't come to talk to me about it - instead went to the younger co-teacher, who kindly went through the essays - and all my many comments - with them. seems they were accepting of the lower marks after this process, but would have felt better if they'd come to me and not him. Increasingly it feels a tricky business, providing honest and constructive feedback and marks in order to maintain proper and rigorous academic standards, to students who seem increasingly unable to hear anything but praise and who increasingly expect 'good' marks, almost irrespective of their own level of preparation, thought and effort. This trickiness then amplified at departmental level, with 'moderation' of marks so that any class average is between 55 and 65. I feel unease at this process. I work very hard to teach very well, with student-centred enthusiasm as well as expertise.......adhering to the genius Michael Faraday's view that after giving a good lecture, you should feel pretty done in! So, despite these ongoing efforts, the 'rump' of the class chooses to work little, and play hard instead, their academic performance still gets artificially uplifted, and my teaching performance is viewed as somehow lacking? Very unsatisfactory. I cannot see how this can prepare the students for any of the harsh realities of real life. And meantime, I endlessly search for new and more inspiring ways of getting them to engage, participate, work, take responsibility for themselves and their academic achievements!

It's a true and salutary tale that an ex-student of mine, a very nice and able chap, once confied to me that he'd found my 3rd year course the best he'd taken...........because he'd sat all term immediately behind a girl he'd thought was the sexiest by far in the year.

Uid 333

At work early (7.30) to check email at home before heading into work. Dealt with significant student email from undergraduates and one graduate. Finally received (from a bilingual colleague) a translated copied of a reference that a German foundation needed in German. Sent this to the foundation.

Various undergraduates had written over the weekend for various reasons. One wants to suspend for a year (she has ME), another wants to talk to me about loss of motivation this term, another wants to talk about dissertation topics, two others required my written permission to stand for office in their student union. All of these emails were answered and the various requested meetings were scheduled. I make a point of not reading email over the weekend. I thus have a scheduled hour of email on Monday early to clear some of the backlog.

Went into work at 8.45am. Checked my post, which consisted of submitted work from applicants for undergraduate places.

Spent all morning (9-1) interviewing candidates for a post-doctoral research assistant post on a large funded project of which my HoD is PI. Was impressed by the quality, if slightly depressed that none of the people interviewed has a permanent job. The casualization of the academy is clear to see. The panel was unanimous in its choice of candidate (who was offered the post later today and has already accepted). The stand-out quality of the person offered the job was completely patent. The job we offered, however, is only for 3 years. Someone that good should really have a permanent position.

Quick lunch (30 mins) followed by reading through the submitted work from the UG applicants and photocopying UCAS forms for my co-interviewer. Decided that one of the applicants shouldn't be called for interview, so wrote emails to all the relevant people to confirm this. My decision will be double-checked to avoid anyone being rejected on the say-so of a single individual.

2-4pm I taught a (large) tutorial group of five students. One had emailed to say he hadn't done the work but would he still be able to come. His reason was that he was preparing for an important audition the following day, but because the students were presenting to one another (as well as to me), I wondered if it was unfair to let him benefit from them, while offering nothing himself. But decided to allow him to attend the tute in the end. Had a brief chat with him afterwards. I'm not cross that he has other priorities, but I just wanted him to understand that if he missed the opportunity for feedback in the tutorial, this couldn't be deferred to a later date of his choice. He seemed happy enough with that.

Tutorial was quite fun--some good presentations including powerpoint and handouts from the students--and the discussion and questions were pleasingly engaged.

More email regarding admissions followed at 4pm. Most email doesn't require quick answers to questions but requests that one does something which takes time. This afternoon (4-6pm) I assembled a bio and abstract for a public talk I'm giving in February and sent this to the organizers together with a photo of myself for their publicity machine; I sent abstracts of two project co-authored chapters for a book to the editor; I sent the bibliography of a book chapter to the editors of another book--I had in fact already sent this but they wanted it again for some reason (probably filing trouble at their end); and I finally filled in my SHARE diary for the day!

Uid 334

Diary 15th November

PCET strategy

Call for Papers

Emma UnDip obs - Yorkshire & Humberside College

Everything has changed. I’ve just started working in HE after years working as a manager on FE. I completed an MA and EdD on a part time basis over a 10 year period. I can’t say it was my dream to work in HE. I didn’t start the MA with this end in mind. Though I come from a fairly typical Caribbean family. We value education. My mother would always say – she came to England so that we could have ‘an education’. So being a University lecturer felt fantastic. Something that people like me did not achieve. Something to be proud of.

And I was happy to be doing this. I loved studying and feel passionate about education and what it can do. Publishing in FE – even as an EdD student is just not part of the game. It I worked full time and studied part-time – publishing was just one more thing that I had no time or energy left to think about. But I was so happy to be working in an old University that expected and encouraged me to be working as an academic – to be publishing my work. If I had written a diary this time last month – it would have been full of this – think about writing and publishing. My blog. Using images to convey my ideas about literacy. My book reviews and research plans. Conversations with colleagues. I felt so utterly excited and at the start of something big.

I work 3 evenings a week and given that this is the first time of working in HE, it’s a bit of a slog. I value the T&L of what I do. I’m not here to just be a fusty old academic. I want to challenge, inspire and develop my students. I spend a lot of time on preparation. It’s all very limited just now. Mainly power points and group activities. But I’m excited by the prospect of more interesting and entertaining approaches to teaching.

But my diary – what have I been doing:

This morning I had a strategy meeting, aptly timed after the cataclysmic blow of the spending review. A kind of strategy for survival and what’s the market like for teacher education. The dean, marketing person and head of department. I was in a tiny way instrumental in supporting a bid to host some high fee paying Saudi Arabian students – but that’s in 3 years. Plenty of redundancies will take place between now and then. Lots of ideas were mooted and I feel the fight back begins now. I’ve not been here quite so starkly before. But at least at this point feel there is hope, there is possibility and at least I can being to politic to find out what approaches might secure our position. I work in partnership – so have allies who will mutually support a position.

It is about self-interest – but it is also about defending something we believe in. After all – if the Tories dismantle the state completely – it’ll take so much effort to rebuild it when they are out of power. This is possible the way politics will run – Tories for 5 years – slash and burn everything, Labour for 15 slowly rebuilding.

I then spent the rest of the day pulling together information in preparation for an OfSTED visit – we’ve been expecting a call for the since before I started the post in February. It may never come – but we still have to prepare as if it will come.

After ages I sent my first draft to colleagues – for comment. Te data is the tricky bit. I need to recount until the numbers say what I want them to say. I then sent out n invitation to a meeting for mentors – they are volunteers so I have to word it in a way that its appealing even though many are not inclined to come to the university for training: this is what I need to do – to satisfy OfSTED. Observation cancelled – trainee unwell. Didn’t get round to call for papers – though this is a spinning plate. I have a draft to send off by end of month and am waiting to hear from Lit & Num studies (after a redraft). I have started my 3 year research plan.

Despite all this I feel a sense of optimism and calm., I know the signs are not good. But I feel hopeful. It's only 5 years after all. And what ever happens - we survive. This is not the 1st Tory government. If I'm unemployed - great. I shall rent out 2 rooms in my flat (pay the mortgage) and write, write, write.

Ok - that's said. I shall be more detailed about activities next diary. It had to be said though.

It’s my husband’s birthday.

Uid 335

Today I'm returning to work from a weekend away. I've booked the morning off from the university so I can travel back by train. My plan is to spend the morning working on my part-time PhD study on my laptop, but first I need to deal with some administration for my class this evening, which I start doing via my mobile phone email connection. A senior colleague (faculty senior manager) is teaching another class on the same course for one term (which I'm leading for the whole year), and last thing on Friday afternoon (before I got on the train out) suggested he would arrange to bring in a guest speaker this week, for tonight's class (Monday) and his own class on Wednesday. Although this isn't easy in a tight teaching schedule in the build up to assignments, I think it sounds like a great opportunity for the student, and something they'll appreciate, so I agree.

I start off by sending an email to the guest speaker, detailing the meeting time and plans for the session (as I also need to fit in a lecture into the same class). I also email my students to explain the new plan for today's session, hoping that this will encourage full attendance (and a prompt start-time).

I no sooner send off the email than my colleague rings my mobile to say that he has been asked to find a guest speaker for a local television debate this evening, so he has asked the guest speaker to join him at the event, instead of teaching my class. He suggests that publicly promoting the work of the university with the business community is probably more important than the class. I am aghast at this, and explain that while I understand the problem, I've already informed the students and they'll be disappointed, and that it will be unfair to have a speaker speak to one group but not the other. He apologises and says there's nothing he can do.

I send more emails to the guest speaker, saying how sorry I am that he won't be able to attend. I put off emailing the students again, as I decide it's better to tell them face-to-face than being embarrassed over email. I also email the faculty marketing officer to arrange for my senior colleagues session to be videoed (as the guest speaker will still be talking to his students). I then try to get back to my part-time PhD study, though I find a little difficult to concentrate on the train, thinking about the student's reaction to something which never needed to have been a problem in the first place.

My evening class is 5-7pm. It's a final-year option module taught in a flat classroom for 20 students who are studying for the 'top-up' degree - they've successfully completed a HND in the past and join us for one year to top-up to a degree. While these are mainly 'home' students who live in the local area, 50% of the class are also overseas students who have studied for 2 years at their home university and have joined the 'top-up' to gain a UK degree. Most of these are Chinese students.

The students are always good fun and much more confident about speaking up in classes than 'standard' undergraduates, mainly as they tend to be older (21-25), on good days the classes can be very dynamic, collaborative and involved. On the downside, they can be a little over-enthusiastic at times and tend to speak out when others are speaking. One student is particularly over-the-top at times and tends to speak-out apparently to impress girls on the course, but this often seems to intimidate the quieter foreign students, especially those from China, who need to be encouraged to speak. This particular evening is one of the 'good' ones. Two female students immediately say 'Wasn't there supposed to be a guest speaker tonight?' and I explain the situation - they're disappointed, but we agree that I should try to rearrange for another week. At the end of the session, two foreign students corner me to ask detailed questions about assignment drafts. This kind of enthusiasm and obsession with assessment is typical of this group as they often haven't completed assignments at university before and are nervous, as well as terribly task-driven (perhaps as many have recent work experience). We try to support this by developing tutorial sessions designed to develop referencing/writing skills and more importantly encourage students to think about argument and debate rather than point-scoring. These two students still obsess to me about their referencing style and whether they've got it 'right'. It's now 7.30pm, and although I want to get home and unpack my bags, I do my best to calm their fears and make suggestions, without being seen to 'pre-mark' their work in detail.

Finally, I jump on the train home to get dinner and unwind with some TV before bed - I'm shattered! Feeling guilty as always about not doing more PhD work today, but I'll try to pick it all up again tomorrow.

Uid 342

It's the week following UG Reading Week, and I am trying to write a lecture on Language and Identity. I am currently 0.5 on a Research project and 0.5 Teaching Fellow, and am not finding much time to create new resources. I am conscious that the module I have taken over teaching (a UG module on sociolinguistics) has rather dated references, and I'd like to have time to introduce some newer research into my lectures. Hopefully I will manage to do this by the time Wednesday comes.

It's a very busy time of year, not helped by the fact that I am surrounded by media criticism of how out of touch and lazy lecturers are. I have to try hard to focus and blot out the increasing terror that the job I trained 8 years to do and lived on the breadline for may be taken away from me.

Aside from this, I'm trying to complete my PG Cert so that I can be employable, and this means that by Friday I have to have given an example of constructive alignment in my teaching. The course has been quite enjoyable up to now, I just have to find time to finish the assignment.

I am enjoying my teaching but I do feel the general sense of being right in the middle of the semester and not having enough time to teach to the quality I would like. My students are all bright and committed and I feel rather overstretched.

Uid 343

I spend several hours of the day teaching. In the morning I give my first lecture on number theory as part of a course on pure mathematics. I discuss the distribution of the prime numbers, including presenting Euclid's proof that there are infinitely many primes - this is surely one of the most elegant arguments in the whole of mathematics and I feel the audience appreciates it.

It's a lovely sunny but very cold day, so for a change I take a break from work at lunchtime and go out for a walk along the beach rather than staying in my office sitting in front of the computer. The tide is way out and though I don't quite have the beach to myself, there are not many other people about. It's great working in a department that is just five minutes walk from a beautiful long sandy beach.

In the afternoon I take a couple of tutorials though they are not too well-attended. It's quite difficult to get the students to engage and discuss the difficulties that they are having so and I spend much of the time going over set problems.

I spend an hour with one of my research students discussing aspects of his thesis. He has his Oral Examination next week and he is decidedly nervous about it, though I try to reassure him and build up his confidence. He's at the stage of having gone through the thesis and background material so often that he's thoroughly fed up with the sight of it.

I spend several hours at home in the evening working on a paper that I writing in collaboration with a mathematician from Michigan. Getting all the details exactly right and typing up the equations is slow going, though I make quite a lot of progress. It's far easier to get on with this research at home without interruptions from colleagues, students and email than trying to do it in the office. If I didn't work in the evenings I doubt if I would get much research done.

Uid 344

A day working at home on my thesis - submission in less than two weeks. I have been working all weekend on it. I am not enrolled for my doctorate at the university where I work. There is no form of support or mentoring available to me from colelagues or line managers. I recently asked for someone to read a chapter, and I also asked for a mock viva where I work, but there has been nothing. This apparent institutional indifference towards my doctoral studies perhaps explains my decision 5 years ago to enrol part time at another university. I had thought research was the way to build a career, but we have been told that there is no money in research and we must concentrate on teaching because that is the way to ensure there are no compulsory redundancies. It appears I shall have to go the way of my former colleagues who wanted to establish a research reputation, and that is to find a job elsewhere - not easy at the moment. So whilst I will be working hard today for the personal goal of getting this thesis finished, it is all for nothing as far as the institutionis concerned.

Already today I have dealt with a query from a distressed student who has received a letter asking her to an interview about a disclosure she made on her CRB form, and a text from a colleague who doesn't seem to know what he is meant to be teaching this evening. I dealt with three student queries via email over the weekend and three on Friday night after work. I find it difficult to stay away from the email, and seem to have developed a culture of responding immediately to all emails and requests for help. I am doing this at the same time as working on my thesis. The effect on my workload and my stress levels is very strong. Some colleagues would think nothing of going off sick when things get tough. I find I can't do that morally. Today I am quite unwell with some sort of flu-type illness, but I just don't have the time to take a day off sick. Madness I know, and there are no systems in place to monitor staff well-being.

OK, still working on thesis but also reponded to several emails from students and colleagues. Why do I keep checking the email? Surely they could wait a few hours? I think I am aware of the performance culture, and I want colleagues and managers to know I am still working, even though legitimately engaged on working at home.

Now I am tracking correspondence between one of my personal tutees and a module leader about the student's lack of attendance. I am copied in to the debate (in which he claims he has attended more than indicated on the register) but I have resisted the temptation to become involved. This can wait until Wednesday when I see the student.

I have checked that my teaching is properly prepared for Wednesday. I will have to check out my teaching materials for Thursday on Wednesday, which is a bit last minute, but there are no concessions for people writing up research. It is really difficult trying to ensure teaching quality remains at a good level whilst writing up a doctoral thesis.

Uid 345

[binary]

Uid 346

I am off sick at the moment - I am recovering from breast cancer surgery and treatment. Apart from when I have felt very ill I have continued to do some work on most days. HR have been very understandig - they know I am doing some work and so does my HOD - however they prefer to turn a blind eye.

Today I read my work emails after breakfast. I then sent a long detailed email to a colleague from another university who co-chairs with me a national working group on work-life balance. This is my primary research area - it is ironic, as I have a very poor work-life balance and find it difficult to follow the advice I give others, and to adopt my own evidence based approach.

I then went to see my oncologist to discuss a phased return to work.

In the afternoon, I reviewed an article on work-life balance in academics subitted by a colleague from Australlia.

Uid 347

Another exhausting week begins with early trains and planes to meetings in london today and an early start tommorow at 4am for a flight to a residential meeting in the north - an echo of last week where I was in the same places but for different meetings. My netbook is loaded up with reports to read and write - must remember the electicity cable for it! What happened to the weekend - it seems to have been eaten up with preparing and packing for the start of this week! All this travelling can't be good for me or the planet!

Uid 348

4.00 am - wake up worrying about work issues. This is normal pattern. At the moment it's the govt. directives about systematic synthetic phonics that are uppermost in my mind. This, of course, combined with the implications of the Spending Review for this university(potentially serious) and anxiety about the forthcoming White Paper on the future of teacher education. In addition, a major reorganisation at our University has left us starved of adminstrative support and placed huge additional stress on the team. We are a team of seven with three 'early career' lecturers -- straight from the classroom and brilliant - but finding it all exhausting.

7.00 am - arrive - download emails sent to myself over the weekend with documents I worked on the Saturday. Deal with emails that have arrived since Sunday evening - 8.

8.00 - coffee with colleague - we plan a prospective meeting of students about to go on school experience and their class teachers. The logistics of a meeting for 400+ participants is daunting and exciting. Colleague tells me there is new Ofsted report on teaching of reading.

9.00 - 10.00 Download Ofsted report - check headlines - put together PowerPoint and circulate to team. Upload document and PP on to our shared drive and the students' virtual learning envt.Spot a typo and have to correct everywhere!

10.- 11.00 As well as constant stream of emails - work with colleague putting a display (another one!) about systematic synthetic phonics.

11.0 - 12.--

More emails. Meeting with adminstrator about mentor training. Spot my research mentor and note to myself that I should really let her know that my current 12 hour day regime mean I have got nowhere near my research targets. Christmas Day maybe?

1.200 - 1.00 Set up teaching room. Lunch at computer checking the latest version of spring term timetable. I first saw a version of this in June and this is about the 10th. Trying to ensure colleagues' well-being so that they are at least teaching in the same room all day. Finally this looks ok. More emails.

1.00- unpack photocopying paper (no technician to do this any more). Start preparation for teaching session.

2.00 - 3.30 Teach my Year 1 group - a delight. Thank goodness for the students - the whole reason for this job. They are enthusiastic, hard-working and anxious about their first assignment.

3.00 - 4.00 - meeting with adminstrator to arrange payment for part-time team member who is going to coordinate the TDA funded Leading Partners in Literacy Project. More emails - 40 have come in so far today.

4.00 - 5.00 - work with colleague on an extra session for finalist students on phonics before they go out on their School Experience. A moment of hilariy as we practise the Jolly Phonics actions...

5.00 - 6.00 Continue to respond to emails (I have sent out 50 today), work on phonics session. Mark a late essay. I'm leaving at 6 today so only an 11 hour day.

Uid 349

A very strange day. Woke up at 5.45 as always... Very very tired!

Kids up by 6.30 and since this is a standardisation meeting day I can take them into school, so it's just a really big rush from 6.30 to 7.45.

The rest of the day is spent discussing marking criteria and the changes in the English GCSE.. Controlled assessment is a nightmare and if I don't get it how the he'll will my students?

By 3.30 we are all ready to escape and I head home then have to deal with a work emergency. This takes half an hour of phone calls but at least I know what I am doing!!!

An hour and a half of answering mails and writing lesson plans and the it's almost wife home time.

Put the chickens away, pour a whiskey for both of us, cook up a soag bol while drinking it and then it's sofa time!

Write this diary while watching Master chef.

Wow this even reads like a borjng day to me... Sorry!!

Uid 350

Marking the last of the coursework 1 essays & a late submission from previous cohort. Tricky to get your head back round the late as it was a different assignment. Had to go back to criteria etc to remind self. Hope I did justice to the student. Things sometimes take time that is seemingly difficult to justify, but is important and can affect a students career. How to balance this is always, and will always be, problematic.

Uploading feedback & grades into VLE, panic as we realized that it didn't allow students to upload their resubmissions. Cludge solution found. Not neat, but at least the students can submit with ease (when introducing students to new tech it has to work, otherwise they loose faith in it and that has knock on effects later, so always worth spending time at this early stage of making changes to practice). We'll worry about the mechanics of it later.

Had news re cuts in funding in the Uni. Everyone very depressed, and annoyed at our Exec for asking us to make important choices etc about our future with little notice to plan, consider, think about sensible solutions instead of knee jerk reactions (as they are making). This stuff takes up so much time too, so doubly depressing as we have already wasted so much time in what amounted to unproductive 'thinking' and plotting and planning earlier in the year. Some people couldn't run a rowing boat...

Didn't manage to go to the gym - too busy, though that's the time you really should go.

Managed a quick meeting in the morning about some interesting technology developments. Short and sweet, but exchanged a lot of information and ideas between us.

Re-reviewed an ethics submission. A fine balance between pedantry and checking that implications to participants of (educational) research is considered.

Went home late. Played a computer game to take my head somewhere completely different for while.

Uid 353

8.15: arrive at work. Log into PC check emails and try to get a heads up but their technical problems and can't get into the system. Cant get onto VLE to choose and print an observation tasknfor trainees so manage to find a hard copy from week before so need to use that. Check CELTA timetable to upcoming deadlines

9am: head to classroom, give notices to whole group. Give 1-2-1 Teaching Practice prep to the two trainees teaching that morning.

10.30: ESOL ss arrive in class ready for trainees to teach them. I observe 2 teachers deliver 40 min session. Make notes on the net book.

12.00: lead group feedback. New technique introduced to the group this week which we call 'speed feedback' pair up an observer with a teahcer who has 3 mins to feedback before swapping. 2 teachers then paired and 2 observers pairs and they have to think of 2 key areas raised from the teaching. Feed these back to the whole group. I record a 2 min overview of the session, which I then email to the blog.

Teachers give me their memory sticks and feedback notes saved here for them to put them into their portfolio

12.30-1.30: lunch. Each sandwich at my desk. Catch up with other CELTA tutor and share how TP gone this morning. Get ready for afternoon sessions. Finally get to log in and check emails.

1.30: have a guest speaker from the flex centre to show trainees how to use Interactive Whiteboard IWB software. Have problems logging in. Find a new room and get someone to log into workstation only. Leave my grp and start to plan a session on teaching higher levels to be delivered on Friday. Have problems with photocopier, the materials I want to use are not photocopy friendly. Find electronic copies on the excellence gateway but still not easily transferred into a useable Word format. Get frustrated so produce less than satisfactory HOs with dodgy spacing. Print these.

Get materials ready for Teaching Practice tomorrow as will go straight to another site so need to take everything with me.

Answer a few emails.

3.15: my group gone on a break so spend 10 mins talking to MB from flex centre about ipads and iPhone apps. She tells me about Dropbox I tell her about Twitter.

3.30 - 5.00: have a full TP prep session. Set my 4 trainees to discuss the next TP points and to think about the structure of the whole lesson and them the structure of their short 20 min slots. They write this onto the WB and we discuss this. Take photo of the board and email this to the blog for reference.

5pm: colleges is closed Monday eves so we get kicked out by security bang on 5.

Teatime with family, games with my 4 yearvold them bath n bed.

Evening: look for the Dropbox app. Make a HO for my ESOL class on Friday by taking some photos in the house and saving them into dropbox. Make a HO on the laptop and insert the photos taken on the phone and saved in Dropbox. Twitter that an loving this new app. spend some time on Twitter, re-tweet one tweet. Don't read anything specific, jest general catchups.

Watch one episode of Fringe b4 bed. Read chapter of Affinity by Sarah Waters b4 bed.