Surveys for Friday 15 October 2010

Uid 11

My work day started at - when I checked emails on my iPhone efre taking the dog out for a walk and getting breakfast

11.00 am - noon Lecture on Multimedia Systems module, looking at Visual Language, Gestalt etc.

12 noon - 1 pm Tutorial on Multimedia Systems

1 pm - 2 pm Tutorial on Multimedia Systems

2 pm - 3 pm Tutorial on Multimedia Systems

3 pm - 4 pm Tutorial on Multimedia Systems

4 pm

Lunch grabbed in the gaps between students leaving one session and coming in to the next...

I need to do 4 tutorials straight through because a colleague is off work, awaiting an operation. Hopefully, he will be back at work after the Christmas break - otherwise I will start to dread Fridays.

Uid 12

Started today having an emergency wisdom tooth extraction - not as bad as I thought it might be - at least the tooth ache has gone! So arrived at work mid-morning and have been playing catch up since. My plan today was to complete the final report for a technology enhanced learning project, put together some online materials for a module, and arrange a session on assessment for the same group. It is now 10 to 5 and I haven't got to any of these main tasks.

I have pulled together a list of external funding achieved across the university for the PVC, sorted out a few urgent project invoices, had a meeting with colleagues on staff development, produced news items on project activities over the past month, and dealt with lots of email. None of these were on the agenda at the start of the day - I seem to have been reacting to demands all day.

My lift home has arrived so off home - where has the day gone? The original planned things are still needed for Monday so will be a busy weekend.

Uid 13

This was an unusual day. Because we had Fall Break the following Monday and Tuesday, I had no meetings, and I'm not teaching this semester. So I had the day to work. From a Share Practice standpoint, it wasn't a particularly useful day.

After getting kids off to school, I went to the gym and got to the office around 10 am.

What I worked on today:

- As usual, it took about 2 hours to get through all my email. I ate lunch at my desk to get through everything.

- I made up two quick blog posts -- just commentary on news items. Took me about 20 minutes.

- I'm being nominated by my department for an award -- which I'm quite pleased about, but creates additional work for me. I spent about an hour updating the cover letter and nomination statement.

- I had an article that had been returned for revisions. I spent about 90 minutes on those revisions.

- I am an ACM Distinguished Lecturer, a program which is being updated by ACM. I was asked to update my biography, lectures, abstracts, and picture. That was another 90 minutes.

I think I saw two other people on my floor of the building all day.

I still had some big to-do's left on my list (e.g., an NSF report which is drop-dead due by 10/31), but left around 4:30. A shorter, quieter day.

Uid 14

Woke up at 7am, listened to NPR for about 15 minutes in bed. Felt guilty about the fact that my spouse had been up for over an hour with our 9-month-old, so I got up. Played with the kid for 30 mins to give her reprieve.

7:45 or so, read my morning comics and blogs. Enjoyed xkcd, posted on Facebook, got some comments on it from friends and friended alumni during the day.

Played a little Civ V. Stopped Alexander's encroachment on the British empire.

8:30 Got to work on a proposal for a seminar next academic year. I've had a hard time focusing in on this. I know I want it to be on game development, but I feel pressure to make it about serious games, even though I don't exactly toe the party line on their value. After putting this off for several days, though, it felt good to make some progress.

8:50 Discovered an error with sound in Linux. Spent about ten minutes fixing it.

9:00-ish, fielded a question about lab usage policies for our undergraduate computer lab, then back to the seminar proposal.

9:30 Via facebook, saw a CNN report about Software Architect being #1 job in america. Put it on the department's Facebook page. Flipped through about 35 of their 100 pages, immediately became dubious of their reporting and ranking methods. Still, good press, and lots of IT and CS.

10--10:30. Wrote up materials for my sophomore-level class' final project, which will be a six-week project in two three-week deliverables.

10:30. Made coffee, made lunch, biked to campus.

11--11:20. Met with research team consisting of two undergraduates (supported internally through our Honors College). Discussed some frustrations with student groups for the game programming class they are both in, and I also vented about some family problems. Everyone felt a little better after this.

11:20-1:00. Worked with the research team in a quiet corner room. One of the guys seems to have finished OAuth integration. I am working more closely with the other, and what we thought we could do weeks ago, it turns out we can't. Frustrated with the third-party API we're using, which is woefully underdocumented. In fact, it's a good example of a deep OO hierarchy: lots of inherited and incorrect or vague docs, lots of methods that are overridden to throw not-implemented-for-this-class exceptions, despite the lack of documentation thereof. In the end, I give him some things to look for on the Web over the weekend, and we'll meet again 11 on Monday.

1:10. A quick lunch in the office.

1:25. Two articles on Guzdial's Computing Education blog. Enjoy reading about them.

1:35. A student from my 2pm class comes to my office to tell me some guys in the lab could use my help, so I mix up my horchata and go down to help. This is my game programming class, officially scheduled 2-3 MWF, but I mostly consult during these times. It's great to work with the students in this project-oriented course. I linger around until about 2:45, occasionally being called in for consultation, occasionally overhearing dangerous decisions being made and intervening.

3:00. Student shows up for an appointment to look at code for my other class. He and his partner are supposed to be there, but his partner had "a family issue." This student is one of the best of his generation. He shows me some code and I help him with some design suggestions, the most interesting one being to break the dependency on a File by instead making his Analyzer class take an InputStream, since this allows more seamless unit testing. I am also his advisor, and he tells me what he plans to take next semester, which is a good plan. We send an email to the advising coordinator to officially declare his math minor.

3:40. Meet with the chair and administrative coordinator to go over the curriculum change paperwork due Monday. I had it mostly complete on Wednesday and asked the administrative coordinator to clean it up, but when she got it, she started comparing it to the print catalog and making changes. Unfortunately, we don't use print catalogs anymore, so she was looking at the program from two years ago; part of this meeting was for me to make sure that everything she changed, we changed back to what I had.

4:10-4:30. Ghost-wrote letters of support from my chair for two grant proposals. Assembled these in an email that explains the two projects. They are both three-PI projects, and the other two PIs really did the design. I am coming in as a tech expert, to help students with technology and hopefully bring in some CS students to the team. Both are strictly Summer projects, getting me Summer funding to team-teach with the others. With no solid plans for Summer just yet, this would be a good opportunity to do something a little different, make a few bucks, and potentially generate something scholarly, or at least an opportunity to write a light article about interdisciplinary collaboration with historians and archaeologists.

4:40. Tired of being in the office and knowing it's the last full day that my parents-in-law and brother-in-law are visiting, I go home. Turns out they are not home and there's no indication of when they will be back, so I crack open a Saranac Caramel Porter and beat down Alexander's Grecian army in Civ V. The rest of the night is spent enjoying food and drink, chatting, trying to get the two boys to bed, playing Carcassonne, and not really thinking about work too much.

Uid 17

Daily Activity Log

Friday 15 October 2010

[In my September 15 diary, I included a background section giving my institutional context and summarizing my current major activities. I expect that will be helpful to the reader of this diary.]

I was up at 5:30 this morning, which is actually later than I prefer to get up. I find that having quiet, uninterrupted time in the morning is a good time to get work done (or at least to read the paper and have a cup of tea). There wasn't any milk, though, so rather than having tea at home I left a little early and stopped at Starbuck's for a latte.

I met my carpool as scheduled at 7:45. We all live about 50 miles from campus, so the carpool is essential for us, not primarily for economy or environmentalism but just to avoid having to be behind the wheel so often. Our carpool has been in operation for nearly 20 years. One colleague in my department and I started it; we were joined about 15 years ago by two other regulars (both administrators of writing programs, from whom I learned quite a bit over the years), but one of them retired two years ago and the other just took another job. The carpool has been augmented over the years by a variety of people who have worked at our campus for shorter periods. At present there are two, one a post-doc in Physics and the other a part-time lecturer who has taught at our campus on and off over many years. We all operate on academics' schedules, with occasional travel and other constraints such as child care, so we arrange each week's schedule separately, the weekend before. I'm the clearinghouse and coordinator, which isn't a huge burden and which does ensure that scheduling screw-ups are rare. Maybe in a later diary I'll describe the scheduling process and the very clever algorithm we have for determining whose turn it is to drive (a decision that's complicated by the fact that not every carpool member goes to campus every day).

Today the Physics postdoc drove. She has a ratty old two-door Acura---at nearly 30 years younger than the rest of us, she doesn't yet have a car that's comfortable for middle-aged commuters. It requires a fair bit of contortion to get into the back seat of her car, but I was gratified when she told me that some of her friends had driven with her over the weekend and complained about the back seat far more bitterly than I ever do.

On the drive down, I used my laptop. My colleague has a cellular modem, which provides internet access on the freeway. I'm not willing to pay the monthly charge to get one myself, but it really is wonderful to be able to use the commuting time to catch up on things. It's kind of the same as a long plane flight; there are so few things possible to do that being able to work uninterrupted seems like a pleasure.

On this morning's commute I'm finishing up making subcommittee assignments for the universitywide educational policy committee that I chair. I needed to identify seven committee members to represent our committee on various subcommittees and task forces. I collected the preferences of the members at our first in-person meeting earlier in the month, but of course the preferences didn't distribute evenly across the available slots so there was a certain amount of cajoling and following-up to do. By assigning my vice chair to something, I'd managed to fit the last puzzle piece together, so on the commute I drafted Email messages informing the members (and the committee's staff support person at university HQ) of their assignments.

My first class, at 9:00, is an orientation seminar for new undergrads. I co-teach this with a colleague who came to my school about three years ago; he taught a course like this at his former institution. We meet for two hours each week, typically devoting one hour to the transition from high school (or community college) to the university---how to manage time, how to approach faculty, how to get involved with research---and one hour to a talk by a faculty member. At today's class, I was surprised (and a bit concerned) when my colleague didn't show up. But the scheduled speaker did, so he gave his talk (about fractal arithmetic, clearly and accessibly explained but not related that well to mainstream computer science). Then, after the break, I addressed issues, comments, and concerns of the class. The one I recall was how to find out in advance which classes have the highest workloads; my impression was that the student wanted to know this for good motives---avoiding two project-intensive classes at once, for example---rather than for base work-avoidance. My best answer was to talk to other students who have taken the class with the same instructor; I also suggested more formal approaches like consulting previous syllabi on the web. Later on I got in touch with my colleague by Email. He said he just "spaced on the class." It wasn't a big deal---the class hardly needs both of us to be present---but at our age, late 50s, there's a tinge of morbid concern when episodes like this occur.

I returned to my office at 11:00 and ate lunch at my desk: a tomato, a piece of last night's leftover tilapia, a bell pepper. I'm trying to eat more healthy food and lose some weight, another middle-age issue.

At 11:30 I met with four students in our relatively new Business Information Management major. They wanted advice on forming a student organization centered around this major. I said what I always tell student organization leaders: The hardest thing is building a set of potential successors so the organization continues, and keep a log of everything you do (getting money, scheduling events, whatever), so your successors have a handbook and don't have to reinvent the wheel. Three of the four had been my students in the past, though I knew only one well. Nonetheless, it was a very enjoyable meeting. I hate to engage in stereotypes, but these business-oriented students were more personable that similar groups of more technically-oriented students.

Right after that meeting, I signed a timesheet for one of my lab tutors. I don't enjoy that particular bureaucratic task; I don't have the appropriate supervisory mindset, of needing to verify that people worked when they were supposed to work. But last year one of my lab tutors was confused about how to fill out the forms and put down so many hours she broke the bank and had to write them back a refund check. So now I have to check more carefully. Come to think of it, that lab tutor was one of the people at the BIM-student organization meeting!

After that I worked on my subcommittee assignment Emails until I remembered to make some notes for this diary.

From 1 to 3 I teach my seminar for new computer science teaching assistants. They're all required to attend this once, although the follow-up and enforcement is lax. This course (and the Advanced TA Seminar, whose theme is teaching and organizing one's own course) is probably my very favorite. I've taught it every year I've been teaching, sometimes more than once. After all these decades, I feel as if I've amassed enough experience that it's verging on wisdom. I have the students give presentations, do mock grading, and discuss issues like presentation media and academic honesty. But every class starts with my asking them for issues that have come up in their week's teaching, and I just love being able to analyze their situations and come up with a range of possible responses. In recent years I've been saying that teaching is a design activity: There are multiple approaches and techniques, and a good teacher should know the advantages and disadvantages of each so that he or she can use the one that fits best in a particular situation.

Today the leadoff question was from the guy who's the reader for my first-year course. He was frustrated that the same students kept asking him the same questions (about where to find their grades), the answers to which were available on the web and in Email messages to the class; he wanted to know at what point he could express his annoyance. I let the other participants (there are about 20) have their say, and they touched on most of the issues: It's likelier that the students are legitimately confused than lazy or deliberately obtuse. Students do need to be encouraged to use the resources at their disposal rather than always depending on the human expert. And in fact, in this course, there had been a few missteps in the posting of scores for the class (formatting issues, score scaling issues, all things that might get a student confused). So I ended by suggesting a graduated approach: The first time, just answer the question (and maybe say where the information could be found). The second time, answer it straight again. The third time, maybe just give the link to the answer. The fourth time, ask gently, "Didn't we correspond about this same issue before?" And I noted that in my experience, it almost never goes past the second time, and that some students are extremely sensitive to the slightest correction, so it's probably best to be more patient so that nobody gets scared away from asking questions.

There were a few more questions, and then six or eight people gave their (required) five-minute micro-teaching talks. The topics covered were: Statistical fault localization for software testing, formalizing a puzzle for AI solution, the algorithm for finding the convex hull, a review of Bayes' Theorem in the Monty Hall problem, ideology embodied in digital media, large-scale data management, assembly language programming, and visualizing social networks. As I may have mentioned, our school covers computing very broadly. Most of the TAs did quite well; only one had any trouble communicating.

At 3:00 was the weekly departmental colloquium. This week, one of our own assistant professors (up for tenure this year, probably no cause to worry) spoke about his recent work. He attempts to recognize cerebral palsy in premature infants by attaching sensors (tiny accelerometers) to the infant's limbs and recording its movements. Apparently there are movement patterns characteristic of cerebral palsy that human observers can recognize reliably, and my colleague's work produced comparable results automatically.

The work was interesting, but I also had my laptop in the session to follow up on those subcommittee assignments, so I wasn't perfectly attentive. It's very common in our unit to use laptops in talks and meetings, and what happens is just what I tell my students: The computer is a seductive distraction and studies show that people who think they're good at multitasking are really about as effective as they'd be under the influence of alcohol or drugs. I'm usually the only one at faculty meetings who doesn't bring a computer (and more and more often, we need to refer to documents on line during the meetings, so I have to bring my machine).

At 4:10 the carpool left for home. I spent most of the evening watching TV on my computer. For the longest time, I didn't even have a TV, and even when I did, weeks would go by between times I watched anything. But now that shows are available over the web, I find my previous resistance weakened, and TV taking up more of my time than I'd really like.

Uid 21

2010 Oct 15

Traveling today, so time log created from memory, rather than contemporaneously. (Thurs Oct 15 was a very heavily scheduled day, with meetings from 7am to 5:45pm with only a brief break to commute to campus. Things have been hectic lately, and I've got a lot of sleep-debt accumulated.)

I'll report all times in my home time zone, though there was a 2-hour change.

5 a.m.-8 a.m. dozing and recreational reading

8-9 am breakfast and shower

9am-11am packing, house cleaning

11am-noon ride with EarlyBird to airport (napped in car)

noon-1:30 lunch at airport and wait for plane

1:30-5:45 flight, some recreational reading, some napping

5:45-6:15 wait for taxi, taxi to hotel

6:30-10 visit with family, some of whom I've not seen for 5 years

I normally have 2 classes on Fridays. One of them is co-taught with another instructor, who is covering for me that day. He has also arranged for a guest speaker who I was not interested in hearing to give a presentation for part of the hour that day. The other class is a first-year grad class. A visiting grad student offered to give an

overview of machine learning to the class. I'm sorry to miss that talk, but am grateful to the grad student for providing material that I would not have presented.

Uid 22

06:00 Woke up, still sick

06:30 Ohh, nice, the neighbors lawn is white - the snow is still here

07:01 Checking email

07:05 Reporting a bug in a program

08:26 At the office, sick, worse than yesterday, I should have stayed at home today. I should write on a paper today, don't think I will succeed :(

09:23 As I suspected, can't do any writing today. Let's try reading some papers instead.

11:21 This is bad, I get dizzy when I get up from my chair

12:24 Lunch with advisor and colleague

13:16 Back at the office. Strange, but I haven't this motived to do research for the last 6-10 months. But right now I just want to lay down in the sofa, a blanket and a good movie.

15:26 Searching for more papers about concurrency

16:00 Sigh, lost my concentration again. Sneezing and coughing isn't really good for concentrating.

16:45 Time to get home

17:20 Making dinner

19:00 Celebrating sons birthday

20:00 Have managed to find an instructor replacement for sundays session, just need to find someone for the second session also. I'm not going to in shape to do anything on sunday

20:15 Watching a science program about how the universe is going to end

21:00 Watching some Sci-Fi: Stargate Universe

21:49 Coughing, sneezing - I'm not feeling well !! Must go to bed soon

Uid 23

Week 1 of the new academic year finishes today, and our three new, inexperienced colleagues (out of a FT team of 6) seem to be coping well. My mentee is certainly calmer than I’d be in her position and that’s making my life easier.

I stayed home today to work on my research project, and spent the day summarising the data, and trying to come up with a framework for analysis. Lovely to just focus on one thing! I dipped into e-mails more often than I should, but nothing urgent.

Our VC gave his annual talk to the troops today. I usually go but this time I decided it was better to stay home and work. Phoned a friend and colleague who went to a meeting yesterday where the same issues (I imagine) were raised of the ENORMOUS cut in Government spending on HE teaching – 82%, it seems! I just can’t begin to comprehend that. How on earth will we make it up in fees – and by when? The same person had just received an e-mail from the Deputy VC Resources asking if he’d like to discuss taking early retirement. No! This is one of our best, most-respected teachers; how could we cope without all his years of experience when everything else is in such flux? What would happen to his new PhD students? He and I are the last of the old group who have been merged three times now into new departments and Schools, and I feel we’ve travelled the same path. Who would I turn to to laugh at the craziness of it all, and be made to see a way forward?

Uid 24

Today is atypical. I am attending our second annual local CSTA conference. It has almost 30 attendees, fewer than last year but still respectable. We have several presentations lined up for the morning, and two workshops for the afternoon. The conference runs 8:30-4:30.

Uid 25

The major backdrop to this entry is the very recently published Browne review of HE. Here,writ large, is the business model of HE - incredibly depressing. I am normally an equable sort of person,but this is too much. I burn with indignation that young people, whose aspirations to study at university level have been raised for the last decade or more, are now deprived of places because the government will not fund them and,in future, will make life choices based so much on the level of debt they are prepared to cope with. I despair of the Lib Dems' scrapping their ethical stance on that debt;it is disingenuous to say it is graduates, not students who pay.

Today I lead a discussion with early career academics on the ethical consequences of government policies for their teaching and research. Feelings run high,from which I take some comfort - better this than fatalistic acceptance, although that may ensue. I am constantly intrigued by the member-of-staff-as-student role. We have fairly extensive discussions about different roles the teacher may have in relation to their students (guide on the side, co-learner etc)and most endorse the idea that our role in general is to promote learner independence,autonomy,criticality etc. All well and good. Someone bemoans the fact that students email with questions which are answered in the student handbook, then another does the same to me! This happened today (not for the first time) and needed handling with humour. Also cheered by a conversation with a fairly senior academic who said that the quality of the place would be lower were it not for the work which we (a central service)do.

Tough times ahead but I love the teaching I do,believe passionately it makes a difference to individual and to societal wellbeing. I simply,deeply,resent attempts to treat higher education solely as a business.

Uid 26

Ahhhhhh, Friday. No classes, usually not an office day, a catch up at home day. Actually got to sleep in late until 8:15 as I didn't have to drive my son to school...he's off on a Boy Scout camping trip. Got up had coffee and then headed to the computer.

Read / handled emails for about 2 hours, lots of cleaning up of the inbox and doing all those little things that don't take much time but never seem to get done at the office...responding to requests for information, catching up on the listserv posts, etc. Then I read a couple of journal articles that I'd been carrying around for a couple of weeks. I thought about grading some student programs, but as it was now lunch time, decided to go to lunch with the husband (who was also working from home) instead.

Returned from lunch around 1:30 and glanced at email again to see if anything new and urgent had arrived. Yes, the course proposals from IT department had finally been sent. Once again, they are proposing courses that already exist within our department, but they want their "own" version. Such silliness! I don't understand the need for the turf wars when there are only so many students to begin with...why separate them even further? As undergraduate coordinator of two programs, just another battle in the war to be waged on Monday.

Had a look at the open house recruitment powerpoint that I'll be presenting tomorrow morning at school, seems old and dated, but I'm currently not inspired to rework it. Perhaps I'll find some time before the next Open House in January.

It's now 3 pm and it's a beautiful autumn day so I'm quitting all work related efforts for the day and I'm going for a walk with the dog to enjoy the sunshine.

Uid 28

Friday of Week 3 of term seems like an achievement. We have survived the induction week, delivered the two weeks of intensive introductory lectures for the MSc students, negotiated an MSc exam Board and all the students, undergraduate and postgraduate seem keen and eager to learn. This is going to be a good year!

After an intensive week of lectures, preparation and admin, culminating in lecturing until 8.30pm last night, I decided to do just the bare minimum today and leave before lunch. Friends from Scotland had arrived the previous evening and we had tickets for an afternoon event ‘Building for the Future’ considering climate change and sustainability with Tom Dyckoff, Leo Hickman, Chris Goodall and Kevin McCloud.. I arrived at work to find 15 missed calls and the telephone rang non-stop all morning. I had forgotten that this was the day MSc students could see their results on-line. Some were disappointed that they had failed or referred. We were still waiting for marks from some of the markers and students were alarmed by the way our system records this, thinking they had been given a mark of 0.

In between calming anxious students and liaising with the admin staff, I gathered together materials I needed to prepare the first couple of next week’s lectures over the week-end. I reasoned that there would be no time to do this on Monday if this morning was any indication. My Head of Department burst in, incandescent about the outcome of a meeting to discuss visa lengths for overseas Masters Students. The rest of the University did not appear to realise the importance of choosing a realistic course length and had decided on a visa time much shorter than our competitors. This could be the death-knell for our recruitment of overseas students, a major income for the department. He then described his plan for that afternoon’s Research Methods workshop which assumed my input, though he hadn’t though to ask me. I had to let him down as I was attending the climate change event. It seemed more important.

I felt very guilty as I cycled out of the University gates at 1pm that afternoon, even though I had worked more than 50 hours that week. I had time to make a soup for the evening meal with home-grown beans and vegetables (though with little contribution from me) before heading into town to meet up with partner and friends. The ‘Building for the Future’ panel were knowledgeable about their subject and had interesting ideas. We left clutching books by Chris Goodall on green living as he seemed to have based his book on extensive research. He gave such burning questions as ‘Is it better to use a tumble dryer or hang damp clothes about the house?’ due consideration. Back home for soup via the pub to continue the discussion.

Uid 31

6:20 a.m. Up and at 'em. Groom, dress, breakfast, newspaper.

7:25 a.m. To the office to review lecture notes before 8 a.m.

class. I am nervous that I planned too much material and

will end up lecturing, but I really want to wrap this topic

up before fall break. Also nervous about handing out mid-term

course evaluations. I have been worried about how the class

has been going, with a new textbook and a more diverse range

of backgrounds than past offerings of the course. I am

hoping that the course evaluations will be helpful for making

mid-course corrections, but I'm also hoping they aren't too

brutal on things I really can't change.

7:55 a.m. To class.

8:45 a.m. Return to my desk to wait for the course eval forms.

I got through the material, but I lectured too much and didn't

engage the students as much as I would like. Worried I skimmed

over worthwhile material. I also only gave students five

minutes for the course evaluation and feel guilty about that.

Update my calendar: I thought I would not have any meetings over

fall break, but I do. Bummer. Read and respond to email;

vigorously defend my day off on Thursday, the only day during

fall break that my husband is home from his business travels.

8:58 a.m. The student has not brought me the mid-term course evals yet.

Uh-oh. What are they writing?

9:02 a.m. JR brings course evals. There is a lot of writing. Uh-oh.

I'll look at them carefully later. Another student wants to

get his exam back; we discuss arrangements for a redo of the

problems he missed. Deal with email from Intro students about

missing classes for various reasons.

9:25 a.m. I need to prepare for my 10 a.m. intro class.

9:45 a.m. Obsessing on the top course eval which I accidentally looked

at. Decided to take a quick peek at all of them. Conclusion:

you can't please everyone. Disappointed that one student is

"really disappointed", since I know all these students fairly

well. What did they expect? The plan was to set these aside

until next week, but I probably won't be able to resist.

9:50 a.m. Deep breaths. Read post on Tomorrow's Professor mailing list

on women in science. Go across the hall to teach the intro class.

10:50 a.m. It was a fine class. Generously decide to let two students who

came to class late make up the quiz.

11:05 a.m. Make photocopies and do reading for lunchtime seminar on

"Socio-Technical Issues in Computer Networks." Most weeks,

I picked the readings (so already read them) and a pair of

students presents. This week, no student presentation was

planned because of the break. A colleague has been following

the news on Internet voting trials in D.C. and I drafted him

to lead a discussion. The midterm course evals are like

a sore tooth; I can't help poking at them. Students want

more lecture??? Aargh.

11:43 a.m. Finish reading, check email, work on this, check Facebook,

go early to seminar to beat the long lines for lunch.

1:15 p.m. It was a good discussion. I got edible food on the second try.

Students are signed up to lead discussions; but I need to check

on students who were absent. A student brings me job & grad

school ads from a conference she was at; ask department chair

if we currently have a student assistant who maintains this kind

of stuff.

1:27 p.m. Call my husband about going for a walk, since he leaves on

another business trip tomorrow morning. He's free. We walk.

2:14 p.m. Get back to my office just in time to meet with an intro

student who signed up for office hours and wants to talk about

how he is doing in the class.

2:27 p.m. A student in my 200-level class wants to discuss his exam.

2:38 p.m. Email departmental assistant about posting/filing materials.

Delete some spam. Send out email about seminar presentation

sign-ups. Thank colleague for leading discussion today. Feel

depressed that I have no advisees graduating this year who want

to talk about their life plans.

3:00 p.m. Meet with intro student who signed up for office hours and

wants to work through some problems and talk about how she is

doing in the class.

3:30 p.m. Answer an email from an alum who wants to take CS classes at

my graduate institution.

3:42 p.m. Start weekly review. Go over to-dos for fall break; clear out

paper inbox; review/delete/answer/file accumulated emails;

look at calendar for the week after break.

4:37 p.m. Decide my work is sufficiently in order. Leave work early to

spend the evening with my husband before he disappears again

tomorrow morning. Take work home with me---a quiz to grade,

notes from visiting a colleague's class to report on, and

those mid-term course evaluations---but I won't look at any of

it tonight.

Uid 32

Today, I left my house at 8:30AM for a 4-hour drive to my Alma Mater for Homecoming. I got to seriously reflect on what we, as educators, give to our students. From my professors, I got the ability to think on my feet, to creatively solve problems (or to creatively explain why I thought the problem couldn't be solved!), and how to act around people in different roles than myself. Nothing to do with what they taught. Sure, I learned that -- I was pretty good at what I did when I finished my undergraduate graduate. But those skills did not completely make me who I am today. Those other things my professors taught me made me who I am. Lots to ponder over.

Finally, we finished the drive and wandered around the campus. Plenty of alums and current students - the former trying to find their way around (again!!) and the later trying to be too cool.

In evening we had a big event where the alumni re-create their job tasks from the days they spend on campus. It was a bit rocky at first, but by the time the event started, it was like riding a bike - no problem remembering all the tasks we learned those many years ago, and relearned at the hands of some great students who were more than willing to teach the old people how to do their jobs.

What great young people! They were very patient and explained the tasks with the precision of so-to-be-graduates and the training tasks they will need to take on. They had the same great training we did -- you learn the task well enough to teach someone else. Don't we aspire to do that with our students? We teach them, and then - hopefully - we watch them train someone else.

I've tried that in my classes (with some formality, rather than letting it come together however it comes together) for the first time this semester. What fun! The students have to tell others what they are doing, and then teach them some specific skill they learned (no limit in either direction on size). This has made my job so much easier - I no longer have to teach each individual skill - the students teach each other what they consider important, and I fill in the gaps and help guide the ship.

Later in the evening, I tape an interview with the alumni association... what is important to you? What did you come back? I came back because this school is my Alma Mater in the truest sense of the word -- it is my nurturing mother. I grew up here.

So, the task is then.. what do we do to give our students the feeling of being nurtured at our institutions? At a commuter school like mind, we don't have the students on our campus 24/7. How do we build up our students in a limited amount of time - and only in the classroom - each term? Something to think about. Maybe on the drive home on Sunday. For me, now, it is late and time to end this missive.

Uid 34

06:45-07:30 Breakfast and read e-mail: catch up daily e-mail Bulletin from ArXiV

07:30-08:00 The three S's (s\*\*t, shave, shampoo)

08:00-08:15 Bus into University

08:15-08:30 Discussion with Asst Dir. Computing Services

08:30-08:45 Discussion with Assoc. Dean (R), and Dir. Research in Dept. (separately) about Doctoral Taught Course Centre

08:45-08:50 Grab lunchtime sandwiches (the queue will be far too long by then) from the shop. Queue is far too long for coffee, though

08:50-09:15 Refereeing for Royal Society

09:15-09:45 Supervise computing Lab: 5 tutors and 70+ students, but (it being Week 2) all is going well once the teething problems (students forgotten groups etc.) are sorted. Grab coffee on way back.

09:45-10:00 E-mail, including soliciting a paper for a journal I founded.

10:00-11:30 Work on two High-Performance Computing EPSRC bids, with administrator and Computing Services colleague. Interrupted briefly to meet new tutor (see 09:15)

11:30-11:35 Check e-mail and say goodbye to office staff

11:35-16:55 Bristol to advise local Govermnent Department on computing needs (approved consultancy). Do some more grant-writing on the train.

16:55-17:15 Walk home from station while trying (on mobile) to calm down colleague who is being bullied by her Head of Department

17:15-17:45 E-mail; try to catch up on national training consortium that's being formed

17:45-19:53 Alcoholics Anonymous meeting followed by shopping for supper

19:53-20:37 E-mail, mostly national training consortium

20:37-20:50 Try to calm down (same) colleague who is being bullied by her Head of Department

20:50-22:10 Dinner and Sudoku (simultaneously)

22:10-23:00 Refereeing for Royal Society

Uid 35

Met my 8:00 finite math class to teach them about combinations. They were particularly dead this morning. Friday mornings do not seem to be particularly good for them. Of course, neither are Thursdays and, increasingly, Wednesdays. Today is a relatively easy day -- just my regular classes (another finite math at 10 and computer simulation at 2), racquetball at noon, and this evening I'm to M.C. at a church function. I hope to get 8 hours of sleep tonight for the first time in weeks. Still haven't made it to 6 hours for the last week.

The big thing on my mind has been the very serious illnesses of two friends, one of them our best friend. He has liver cancer, and is not expected to live long. The other has ALS and is no longer able to talk or move much more than one hand. Makes it difficult for me to concentrate on things for long.

In my simulation class I'm teaching NetLogo. This is a short unit in which I intended to cover simulation using cellular automata using NetLogo. I had no experience with NetLogo, but figured I could learn it quickly enough. So into the wee hours of this morning was the big push to learn enough about NetLogo to be able to teach it and give an assignment. And I did all that, but I was not impressed with the tutorials and especially not with the user manual. It seems that writing user manuals has become a lost art. It's almost impossible to get information about things that are available to use with cells (called "patches" in NetLogo). Even finding out something as simple as how to get the color of the cell to the right of this one was extremely difficult for me. My guess is that the writers of the manual were more interested in the turtles than in the patches. But at least I did succeed in figuring out how to do what I want to ask the students to do. They will at least have the advantage of having me explain how to use all the features that they'll need without having to figure out what those features are. And I now know enough about the language to be able to say that I know one more computer language. Woo hoo.

Uid 38

No classes today, so a chance to get on with writing exam papers for my second year programming module. Pretty much managed to get one paper done and start on the resit paper. I'm not sure that exams are the best way to assess programming, as students often struggle to write even small code segments in a written exam. Borrowed the idea of the "Parsons' Problem" from a paper by Paul Denny to help with one question. Not particularly easy to concentrate at the moment as there is a lot of uncertainty because of imminent reorganisation and 'portfolio review' as cost-cutting measures for obvious reasons, a picture which I suspect is pretty similar in most universities at the moment. Had a break away from the exam paper to have a Skype call with a company about some possible consultancy work, which tool about an hour (and wasn't very successful in terms of efficient communication due to poor call quality). Also took a look at some material on ASP.NET MVC as I'm due to teach this to postgrads soon and I'd better know something about it by then! Finally, a colleague is taking part in the next Disciplinary Commons, and asked to talk to me about my recent experience - I'm meeting him on Monday to warn him of what's ahead!

Uid 41

Wake up, coffee, feed cats and empty their poop box, then off to work by 8am &mdash; early start needed to guarantee a vaguely sensible parking space, else I'll spend 15 minutes or more driving round the campus.. Officially on sabbatical, but covering lectures for a retiring colleague, so print out and read through those, not forgetting to print out an attendance sheet [yes, we take registers at lectures -- if the students don't want to turn up, that's their problem in my opinion; given that they all have RFID student cards, there really should be a more efficient (and environmentally friendly) solution to taking attendance]. Started filling in the annual module monitoring report for a large-ish shared cohort module. For another year, trying to provide some justification for why our students fail this module -- yes, it's technically hard, but should be well within the reach of most of them. Ground teeth a bit explaining some of the explosive student outburst on facebook at one of my exam questions. They moaned about having a question in the exam which contained material which wasn't taught in the lectures, despite all the necessary information being given to them in the [one hour] question. Just reinforces that our students expect to pass by learning things parrot-style, which makes my cry inside a little bit. Unfortunately the concept of understanding is beyond some of them I think, including understanding their own learning and what is expected of them at degree level. Sad. Got temporarily depressed with module monitoring report, turn to today's post, which consisted of a canvas/plastic US airmail bag from ACM with two conference proceedings that I'd never asked for but which are a fun read. Thanks ACM :-). Did lecture for colleague, all happy. Got back from lecture, finished module report and sent round to other lecturers for comment; no changes required, good-o. Visited some old departmental rooms, which we gave back to the centre, in another part of the building. They've managed to smash down some walls and turn some of the rooms into another lecture theatre (just as well given the problems timetabling seem to have..). New appearances include a "postgraduate common room" full of fresh furniture and completely devoid of postgrads; grad-school probably forgot to tell them about it. Off for lunch with research project colleagues. Ended up visiting a nice Chinese restaurant in town and not too pricey; beef in black-bean sauce good :-). Ended up talking about the impending doom of the Government's university [un-]financing plan and why the hell anyone would want to become an academic at the end of it (when they have tens of thousands of pounds of debts). Head home after lunch to do some "research" (or whatever it was I said to the University that I'd do on my sabbatical). Managed to write a couple of hundred lines of code at least, so wasn't a completely dry afternoon. Sat by the phone for 20 minutes waiting to join a conference call. That didn't happen -- colleagues at other institution have recently changed building; the new conference phone there seems to limit the size of the conference to three. Get mail with apologies and promises of a new higher-arity conference phone for next week :).

Uid 45

Three classes today, which were fairly routine. Then a department meeting. More stuff that the administration thinks is important, which has nothing to do with actually teaching students. Someone decided that a statewide committe had to be formed about general education at the various colleges, then it was decided that the committee had to have a constituion, and the constitution had to be approved, and blah, blah. No actual work done yet. No consensus among the state faculty that the work is even worth doing. What's wrong with different approaches to general education? Lots of noise and money and heat and little light.

Uid 46

Jogged 1 mile before going to work.

Finished the 5 reviews for the Integrated Management conference. All but one of the papers were dreadful, but since I did not have enough time to register interest in particular papers, I got what I deserved.

Heads of School coffee meeting this morning. More grousing about the complete lack of administrative support from the college admin staff. Nice to know it's not just my School that is forced to go it alone, but we are concerned at how to rectify the problem.

Lecture this morning, decided that I needed to go over C basics again rather than introduce more material. There were even questions from the students, which is extremely surprising.

Meeting to determine the readiness of the School with regards to our safety and well-being requirements. I am grateful to the individuals involved that we are in good shape here, and it is one less thing for me to worry about.

Had a meeting with Computing Services, along with rest of the IT working group in the College. As expected, our measured approach is not enough to make them happy, they want us to sign up for all of their mythical services, regardless of the affect on teaching and research. Fortunately, the college secretary held his nerve. We need to come up with a definitive IT policy for the college this week.

Attended talk about student use of peer review. Looks like an interesting approach, but the talk did not give me much information on the start up costs incurred by an academic that chooses to use such an approach.

Convened the Friday afternoon meeting at the pub. The discussion, as always, was lively and varied. Collapsed when I got home, went to bed early, slept until 9:00 on Saturday morning.

It was a very hard week. Being head of school, especially when there is no support from the bloated college admin structure, is a thankless task. There are seldom, if ever, any wins, plenty of losses, and an endless pile of things to do. Oh well, 11 weeks down, 198 to go.

Uid 47

6:00 Students are on midterm break today so I make the executive decision to sleep until 7.

7:00 - 8:00 I pay for sleeping late with a clogged kitchen sink drain. Better have some breakfast while I wait on the magic drain liquid.

12:30: busy morning of blood giving and training on a data analytics tool that should make it easier for my department to find information ourselves rather than asking our support staff.

2:00 Working on our department's self-study as a distraction from the Dean's request for budget items for next year. We were given two days and needed to have costs and justification figured out. Since nobody is on campus, that's essentially impossible. I sent in my white flag of surrender. At least I can mark the item off my to-do list. Time to go get some lunch.

3:15 Working on a proposal for a new program on the math side of the house. It's interdisciplinary so we're now at the stage of gathering support letters. I'm drafting outlines so the other programs have some idea of what will be useful to our curriculum committees.

4:00 Back to working on our department self study. It sucks when you lose notes because you were about to work with them -- and then spend a week working on other emergencies and misplace the notes in the process.

4:15 Just have to redo the work. It's times like these that the job is really not enjoyable. Everyone else is having a day off and I'm still here as the afternoon goes on, now re-creating work.

5:50 The only thing worse than losing my notes is finding them, because they were electronic after all, after I've finished reworking everything.

6:20 Okay, sent off that draft document to my faculty. Nice to check something off the list. Moving on to some grading.

7:00 Frenzied burst of productivity has helped me finish grading my math course and also whip out the prep for the next class. Getting my computer science courses together isn't that easy!

7:30 Something I notice as prepping my data structures course, a course I'm much more familiar with than my math course, is that my prepping tends to fall more along a decision tree model than a straight line. The prep is very much about the questions I will ask and then how I will proceed depending on answers -- what I should introduce anyway and what I can hold off until it comes up someplace else.

10:30 In-laws arrived at 7:30 so it appears the weekend has begun. Of course, new work has arrived via email. It will have to wait. Overall a rather sedate day that somehow knocked a dozen items off my to-do list.

Uid 48

Teaching one module this morning followed by meeting my really good Masters project student - a good start

Then meetings to review allocation, staffing and timetabling issues.

Finished mid afternoon - looked at inbox 300+ - have to go through those - but can wait until Saturday/Sunday - sigh

Looking forward to clearing the email - as Section Leader and in charge of allocation - probably 50 of the emails need to be answered by Monday and will have knock on effects.

We have a lot of staff close to the limit and sadly many over - but may have to live with that for a while - sigh

NB family getting very fed up with many hours working evenings and weekends - have promised it will calm down soon. (lol)

Uid 49

Fridays are nice, my low stress, mostly unscheduled days. The faculty reserve 11am-1pm for faculty meetings all year, so when we don't have one (varies), you get a nice open hole.

This week was spent treading water on my super large, in development class -- and this was the day to catch up on other things that needed doing. I am considering writing a grant with some education people at another university, and had a meeting scheduled with them at 12:30. Luckily, their building is actually closer to my house than my own university, and so I decided to work from home for the day. (Aside, I can only easily meet with these people because their building is "off-campus" -- and doesn't a) require a parking permit and b) has readily available parking. We'll never break out of our institutional silos unless we can ACTUALLY effectively meet with people from other local campuses. Maybe the schools should pool resources and rent and office room or two in various locations around the area. A few whiteboards, digital projector, and internet and we'd be golden).

First thing in the morning was supposed to be finally reading carefully the call for proposals for the grant. As usual, at least one hour got dedicated to triaging email and getting the priority inbox down to <20. Some Fridays I make a real effort not to read email until at least a couple morning things are done. But sometimes, it just feels better to get it over with.

Read the grant, marked some notes and questions for the meeting. Had a half hour skype with a colleague here on sabbatical who I have roped into helping in large ways with my class. We work together on lectures and we're trying to study how students are affected by in-lecture experiences. But honestly we can barely keep up with lecture (and homeworks that we designated the TAs to create, but they can't seem to get the hang of what we want).

Having felt a bit better for the call for proposals' read (anything not related to the course content is so enjoyable!), I rushed to finish up an internal research grant application that will fund (surprise, surprise) a student I am already paying to do (this term) that very research we are proposing (for next term). It's interviews with students who are likely at risk in this new class. Due to previous rounds of "do X% of the work you want to propose in grant X with money from grant X-1", I am getting the interviews done now. BUT, I still really need to get this grant since we claimed to only need 2 terms to pull it off, but really it will be three. Qualitative research takes more time than I believe most of the (primarily science) faculty at my institution will accept.

Had gotten the key part (description of work) done weeks ago, and yesterday had finally sat down to get the IRB started, so I would have a temporary number to put on the app. Already had the dept chair's signature electronically. Amazing -- the amount of time sucked into getting the darn thing completely finished. Oh, they need an abbreviated CV, with specific requirements. Bleh. Why can't I just give them the one I submit for promotion cases? Better yet, given these people are on campus, but likely don't know me, can't I just say -- check out my web site? OK, maybe not, but the repeat and re-management of the same material over and over gets weary. This is not helping anyone.

That's done. Have enough time to realize the TA in charge of lab grading (starting 3 weeks ago) STILL has got nothing in place. Not sure he ever will at this pace, and it looks like I'me going to have to clean up the mess and organize it all. Spend a couple hours pounding out the last of that (setting up surveymonkeys and googlesdocs, writing full instructions for graders, passing my ideas by the two TAs awake at 8am. (yes, I did start around 5am this morning).

Well, I won't be able to finish that, but I can whip off the emails to him suggesting I take it over, letting him know this is not "good enough" but also giving him some positive feedback, as I have heard he's just super shy and had NO idea when I said, "set up and manage the grading of the lab questions" that YES he was supposed to do it (and ask questions as needed).

10:30 Weekly conference call with those people piloting the same course I am, at other institutions. Is a nice way to summarize in 5-10 min what worked and didn't this week.

Run off to meeting at other institution. Very enjoyable. These people seem competent AND interested. But what am I thinking in getting involved in more work? Am thinking to take my sabbatical (50%) and get enough money on this grant to not teach at all next year.

By the time I get home at 2:30 though, I am exhausted and drained. I need to handle the TA/lab thing and wrap it up. But I just can't. I need to read 2 research papers for reading group on Monday -- should be fun, but I can't summon the energy for that either. So I veg and nap on the couch.

Well, will have to work tomorrow morning.

Uid 50

It's Friday. It's been a long week.

Most of my day went to grading exams -- a miserable task. (More on that in a second.) I was interrupted by a recent graduate dropping in for advice, and ended up spending close to two hours talking with him about grad school and career options. He's one of our top graduates from recent years, and was doing a master's program in Germany but got disillusioned and quit. We talked a lot about what he enjoyed, what he hoped to do with his life, and the kinds of grad programs he might find to support that.

I also spent about 30 minutes on the phone with a colleague a couple of thousand miles away about ways in which I can support his NSF proposal. I wrote a letter of support when he initially submitted, but it looks like it's going to get funded and he's hoping I can take a more active role. It's an interesting project, and I offered to get more involved, though I've really been trying to cut \*back\* on my commitments in recent years to spend more time with my kids. I just can't say no...

The grading: midterm exams from my networks course, and from my assembly/comp org course. The networks course is senior level, and I try to ask questions that ask students to reason about things rather than regurgitate (e.g. proposing modifications of Ethernet's CSMA mechanisms and asking about the impact). Makes for some miserable grading though, as many of the answers are essentially essays. Thankfully I've got a small Networks class this term -- just 5 students.

The computer organization course has 23 though, and has been much harder to grade despite being more specifically focused on skills and facts. I gave them an assembly programming problem, and therefore have to wade through 23 pages of hand-written MIPS code. I'd been reading about Parson's problems in an ICER paper recently, and had \*really\* wanted to try doing something like that to test programming ability on this exam. I didn't come up with any problems in the new style that I was comfortable using, though, and so went with the "old familiar". As I started grading I was regretting not having tried a Parson's-style problem, thinking that they'd have been easier to grade. But the more I graded the programming problem the less I was sure it would've helped. Students solved the problem in some very different (and very clever) ways, and I fear that a Parson's problem would've constrained them.

Uid 51

Thank goodness for fall break. I really needed those two days off to rejuvenate myself. Before those two days, I was feeling extremely stressed and overwhelmed with all I had to do. After two days of relaxation, reading, and yard work, I realize that I really \_didn't\_ have that much to do. The stress was making me run in circles and I was getting (needlessly) overwhelmed. Lesson learned. Time for self is important too.

I was also annoyed with my teaching observation this past week. I taught what I know was a great introductory programming class. The students were engaged, responding to questions, and really grokking the material. They actually cheered when they finished telling me what code to write and the program worked as expected. Applause! In a intro CS course! It was a great day. I've never had that happen and I was thrilled that this all happened on the day of my departmental teaching evaluation. I met with the observer (who I'll call Eeyore because he never has anything positive to say to anyone from what I can see) later that day who said, "Yeah, it was fine." Fine??! No, it was more than fine, and I know it. A great teaching demo wasted on Eeoyre. Grrrrr.

I'll be really glad when my first year as a new faculty member is over. I feel like I'm spending so much time on mundane things that will be useful in the long run. But right now, they're sucking my time. For example, I managed to lock myself out of my voicemail and had to figure out the procedure to get it reset. Necessary, certainly. But time consuming.

It seems way too early to be thinking about next semester, but book orders and catalog descriptions are due at my school. So I'm scrambling to put that together for 4 courses (I'm only teaching two of them, thank goodness). All the stuff they don't teach you about in grad school... Being in a small dept. means that there really aren't any standardized textbooks or formats for classes I can pattern match off of. I really hope I get some of the same preps next year so that all this effort will make next year smoother.

Uid 52

I’m exhausted, it’s Friday and it’s been a really busy week and the next 10 days are going to be really really hectic as I have US visitors to the University arriving tomorrow and I am picking them up from the airport and entertaining them for large sections of the weekend. It will be fun, but there is very little space in the weekend and then I travel with them to Liverpool on Monday for the ISSOTL conference next week, before going on to Birmingham for the weekend…phew!

At least it has been great to have a day in the office today. Days in the office are all too rare these days, but it was good to schedule some time in to do some filing and clearing up since I moved offices last week. Also it gave me chance to catch up on masses of things.

I started the morning by making some phone calls and emails to arrange a teaching session I have been asked to do in November. Our University offers a training course on how to use the online system of submitting new and revised course and programme documents. They have had a lot of feedback from people wanting more support on how to write better programme and course aims and learning outcomes. So although we offer courses and one to one support in this area already, it was seen to be useful for us to link a session on how write good aims and learning outcomes with the session on how to use the online system of submitting course and programme documents.

There is now a man painting the room next door which is slightly disruptive as he is spending as much time painting as making loud phone calls on his mobile!

At 10.30 I head downstairs to meet a new group of academic staff who are attending their first class of the PG Cert in Academic Practice. I meet them in the coffee break so that those in the class who will have me as their peer tutor know what I look like and I have met some of one of my new peer groups too. Then back upstairs to work on an extended abstract that a colleague and I are hoping to submit today for a special edition of the International Journal for Academic Development. Of course the deadline is today, but we should get it done. So having made some nearly final changes, I have sent that off to my colleague for her to look over before we submit it later.

Then I spent time pulling together some packs for the US visitors who will be here on Monday, including some documents about a funding bid on which I am collaborating with one of the visitors. Then I spent time setting up a supervision meeting with one of my Masters’ students.

The next task for today was setting up a new webcam on my computer. We are about to launch a new distance course from our unit and we will need to be able to use Skype and record lectures using software like Camtasia, so it took me about half an hour to sort the camera out (not helped by all the rubbish on my desk preventing me getting to the back of my computer – note to self – I need to tidy up my desk yet again)!

I grabbed a sandwich at my desk and then my colleague finished her teaching session which meant we spent a short while discussing and finalising our extended abstract. As lead author she has agreed to submit it this afternoon, so one less thing on my list for the afternoon, great!

I then moved on to responding to my recent performance review report. The report contains some comments that I don’t entirely agree with so I have spent some time trying to word my response carefully to explain why I have some concerns with specific comments and presenting an alternative perspective. Slightly awkward so I have saved the response and draft email and will leave it until Monday to send so I can come back to it fresh on Monday to check if I want to change anything before then.

So after a good cup of coffee, I started a large task which will take up some significant time this year – the redesign of our Masters in Academic Practice. I have done some preliminary work on this, but spent some time brainstorming on a flip chart some ideas of how the programme could be structured and some of the key principles around which we want to design our new programme. This took me up to nearly 4.30 when a flurry of urgent emails came in needing to be dealt with before the weekend (!)

Just when I wasn’t expecting it, one of my colleagues sent me an email to say that the bid for funding from the British Council that we submitted last month has been successful. Fantastic news, we have £30,000 for some partnership work with a University in Northern Iraq. However, the challenge begins of having to fit this into an already very busy diary. I shall take some time next week to review our bid and start thinking about ways we can take this forward. That’s nice news for a Friday.

So home time – I am taking the vehicle belonging to our centre, home for the weekend so I can collect our US visitors from the airport tomorrow. So I need to collect the keys and I am also the last person in the building this evening, so I shall need to set the alarm too…better pack up for now…

Uid 59

En route to Oxford for a reunion of my college year.

Spend morning updating material for remote collaborative learning exercise in academic writing between our students and students at University of Cologne. Afternoon on bus from Aylesbury to Oxford. Receive request from colleague for rapid input to a research proposal with a very tight deadline and start to pull ideas together. Deal with two emails from taught postgraduate students who are going to have to re-submit their dissertations. Difficult to strike appropriately sensitive yet stern note, particularly in the email world!

Uid 60

7 a.m.

My day always begins with checking mail. This is my non-teaching day. I taught yesterday. I log into our learning management system. I notice that my students have all made it to the deadline and uploaded their assignments. It is rather nice to have a system that can enforce deadlines!

I spend an hour revising a paper that I am writing. I relish the quiet time before I leave for the university.

10 a.m.

I am at the university. Today, the Geek Club is organising a Clean PC workshop for the students and staff of the university. As mentor, I check that all the arrangements are done for the visiting speakers. I am constantly amazed at the way that students and colleagues can ignore basic anti-virus and firewall safeguards on their laptops. This is one way to generate awareness, and get the club to offer their services later.

10:30 to 12:30

I attended the workshop. The attendance is less than expected. However, the ones who attended appeared interested. I noticed a number of Business majors. CS and IS majors have falling numbers, and during the workshop I pondered if it was the job market, or perceptions of computing that kept students away.

12:30 to 2:00

My lunch is mostly a sandwich at my desk. However, today I went with the Dean to have lunch with two faculty members from another university. This was a preliminary discussion for collaboration. We are looking for visiting faculty to teach and they are looking for students to help with research projects. It seems a win-win situation and we part with the understanding that we can now take the next step through proper channels.

2:00 to 5:00

This is grading time. I am pleased with the quality of some of the assignments that have been submitted by my students. It seems that they actually read the criteria carefully. Language is a major issue in this part of the world, and sometimes stuff gets lost in translation. I worked steadily, interrupted only by colleagues who dropped by to chat. Returning encouraging feedback does require concentration. I check that I am ready for next week's classes.

5:00 I leave the university.

I spend some time hunting for a gift for a friend who will have her birthday soon. I find the perfect gift – a spa set!

It’s Friday. I spend the rest of the evening relaxing at home with my husband. A spot of cooking, reading, TV. Nothing unusual.

Uid 64

Awake at 4.15. Should I get up and continue working on the policy documentation which I can only spend bits of time on here and there (on the train, early in the morning, lunchtimes…)? Instead, lie awake for a while thinking about what needs doing and then doze off again half an hour before the alarm goes off at 6am. I have to get into work for 7am to pick up some papers to take down to a meeting at our most distant campus. Have a quick cup of tea in the office, reading the Times Higher online, before leaving for the station at 7.30am.

There is a good turnout for the meeting and I collect up about 20 sheets of notes to take away and process. I have an impromptu meeting with one of the attendees afterwards which means that I have to run to the station (about a kilometre away) to catch a train back to the office at 1pm. I’m back in the office by 2pm, just in time for a tutorial.

At 3pm I manage to eat some lunch while sorting out the morning’s email. I then make a list of all the things I’ve promised to do next week. It looks a bit ambitious. Maybe if I make a start on Sunday I’ll have a chance of getting through it.

I talk to a colleague about communication of some policy matters and then work on some writing up for an external project until it’s time to leave to get a train at 5.30pm.

Uid 65

1200h: Felt really rough yesterday – dizzy, with a thumping headache, nausea, a backache, and feeling really tired, and generally in no condition to be at work. Decided what I really needed today was sleep. Consequently, it was 12 noon before I switched my computer on at home to check my email. I took some pills and felt a little more alive than yesterday but didn’t plan on doing a heavy day’s work at home. I checked my email and responded to a couple of urgent inquiries from staff and students – still making adjustments to staffing and student allocation to first year tutorials. Then spent two very slow hours updating my antivirus software following an email saying the ICTS section were going to stop supporting the software I currently use. It’s a pity they don’t make these sort of decisions at quieter times of the year when we have more time to respond.

1500h: After a quick bite to eat, spent two hours updating lecture notes for a third year lecture I’m giving next Thursday. I am not usually able to work on lectures so far in advance (!) but I have some heavy commitments next week and am determined to get some decent rest this weekend. Updating lectures is not like it used to be. I update my text-based lecture notes first, then update the PowerPoint slides (which I’m slowly trying to convert to Prezi shows), then convert files to .pdf so students can print them off more easily, and finally upload them all to our virtual learning environment – both PowerPoint and .pdf versions. It’s a long way from hand-writing a few overhead projector acetates........

1800h: Quite for the day. A short day but I will be much more effective next week if I get some decent rest this evening and over the weekend. Still trying to find time to download and skim the Browne Report that came out a couple of days ago. It’s all a bit worrying and disconcerting – all this change – but it might be for the good in the end......?!

Uid 69

Today I was teaching about 220 (final numbers and class lists are still not finalised, it might be about 250, but I don't count heads, it is difficult to get an attendance sheet around the room as it is...) final years two separate modules between 12 noon and two pm and from two and four pm. This means approx 440 potential individuals asking me stuff. I discourage individual silly queries, where they can find the info elsewhere. But it is inevitable as it is the cult of the individual. E-mail has a lot to answer for as they think nothing of firing off a random query ~ 'tell me everything you know about..'

I need a break and heaven knows they do, so I finish one lecture theme at approx quarter to 2 and then start the other module at approx 2.05 pm. Not ideal.

I have to teach off site to get a lecture theatre big enough, otherwise I would have to repeat it twice.

I met some of them in the cafe near the lecture theatre to discuss some of their dissertations etc from ten a.m. onwards.So that is actually a full six hours without a proper break at final year level.

I am kept behind talking to students until about 5.30 pm. Add another hour and a half.

The support staff want us out, to clean and close the building, we often end up out on the street. The cafe is of course shut at 3.30 pm

I come home, access and respond to the inevitable flurry of e-mails. Rewriting docs for the equal framework.

Write this diary entry while it is still fresh in my mind, all the demands of the day.

Some of the queries are pastoral related, but since I am the main academic that they see all week I inevitably get more than my share of these.I suggest who they can access.

I have overseas students who have joined us for their final year and they are totally lost. I do not have time to talk with them, suggest anyone who needs more than a quick query makes an appointment to see me back at base in my office next week.

I have a new member of staff who is coming to watch me and how I teach large groups. She looks scared to death.I have given her a few tasks these last couple of weeks just to put up a couple of ppt slides and encourage some further reading/activities. She is getting more comfortable with this way of getting involved as a member of staff.I need to spend more time with her prior to and after the sessions.To her it looks effortless, but this is 20 years of experience and constant research to keep abreast of a very dynamic subject area. I miss my two team teaching buddies that I 'trained' who have gone to pastures new, but not at all greener!

I have become a mentor to her without being asked.

Another member of staff was 'told' to take advantage of this but has so far failed to turn up or engage with me.

That was the 15th October 2010

Uid 70

This was a nice day at the end of a busy week where I was out for three days.

I met with the programme administrator for our Masters programme to check arrangements for the assessment board taking place next week. This was all good and we appear to be organised for this.

I then met a member of staff who is thinking about registering for the PhD programme we provide so we discussed her potential areas of research and what she might do as well as format.

Following this I has a similar conversation with a member of staff on the phome.

I met with one of the masters students to discuss her module choice this year and what she hoped to do.

I then met with a colleague from anotehr department to discuss supporting programme teams undertaking periodic review and how we might manage this for the year across all schools.

Around these meetings I was able to catch up on some administration work and review some staff appraisal documents for next week.

It has been a nice day being abole to consider individual staff development and how tey might like to progress over the next few years as well as what research they might like to do

Uid 71

wake up hungover - department seminar last night and was out with colleagues til late-ish. 3 of of hung out in the beer garden smoking and complaining about the small university town we live in. The job is good but the prospect of staying here for years is grim.

10 am - attend PGCHE to qualify me to be a teacher even though I have taught for some years already. it is relatively useful at times but mainly boring. had a nosebleed - gratefulto escape the boredom for some quiet alone time in the bathroom. This teacher for PGCHE is quite good - at least she understands the pointlessness of the whole thing and doesn't pretend to teach us anything we don't already know.

lunch with colleagues in the canteen - one gossiped about his PhD student and how he is failling to write because of mourning his dead cat. After lunch I meet with my first PhD student for the first time. She is doing her PhD in the law faculty (I am social sciences) in the area that I did my research in. She seems very bright and engaged. She gave me her report to write and I have sent her a barrage of stuff to read - including my own thesis. She will find out that I only finished it last year shortly before I started working here. Enjoyed having an academic level chat about my own topic of interest. Looking forward to future supervision!

After that back to the office to finish up some encyclopedia articles I have agreed to write. I don't get much more than book tokens for it so it was silly to agree to it. nonetheless, it makes ne read and research things that I can later use in teaching.

Should have finished a presentation for a conference in a fortnight's time. have barely started. Ignoring it for now. Took reading on the train to London (where my partner lives). if I get the slow train it's 2 hours of extra reading time but I feel asleep for 20 minutes or so. Finished work at 8.30.

Uid 72

12 midnight-3am Working on computer experiments for research idea (at

home). Have had a good idea and since 10pm yesterday I have been

implementing it and testing it. Seems to work well, but need to do

comparison against other methods on a wider set of data sets. Take a

semi-break at one point and watch an old episode of '70s BBC

engineering programme "The Great Egg Race" for inspiration -

astonishing how disorganised and undistilled TV programmes were in

those days. Get concerned that I have just reinvented a standard

technique so I look things up in a textbook - hurrah I can look this

up online despite the book being in my room at the University - and

look up some related papers. Some colleagues from the States had a

paper in Science about these techniques a year or so ago so a

significant innovation would be great - but their paper had a lot of

experimental physics work in too so I don't think we will be aiming

that high. If it works out it'll make a nice talk for the European

conference for which the deadline is looming, then a good journal

paper. Try to install a charting program to do automated charts for my

program, but it doesn't install properly and screws up the text editor

too. Time to give up work for the day - tinker around on some piano

music (another technology hurrah I can play piano on my electronic

piano at 2:30am without disturbing the neighbours) and watch some TV I

recorded earlier. Go to bed at about 3am.

10-11am wake up, shower, coffee whilst checking emails and copying

files over to University machine, go up to University getting

croissants for "breakfast" from local shop whilst on way bus stop.

11:00-12:30 Lots of little tasks. Talking to various colleagues individually about UG and PG admissions, National Student Survey, access to the building. Tinkering with computer program for research and sending emails in the gaps between this.

12:30-13:15 Go down to lunch in refectory, chat socially to a couple of research students over lunch.

13:15-15:00 Work on computer program for research (little details that can easily be fitted amongst other tasks), talk to one of my research students about his upcoming viva, have a read of national student survey results and discuss this informally with another colleague.

15:00-15:30 Tea and cakes as end of induction programme for new research students; chat with students and colleagues.

15:30-16:00 Skype call from colleague at another University asking if I would consider standing as vice-chair of a learned society in which I am active; have a chat about that and a couple of other things and say that I'll get back to him next week.

16:00-17:00 I Skype call a colleague at Warwick to talk about a research project. We spend about half an hour updating each other on what we are doing and setting plans for the next week, then we spend about half an hour on social chat.

17:00-19:00 Working on computer program for research project, gradually fades into pissing around on the internet for half an hour at the end looking at cartoons and blogs.

19:00-21:00 Go to gym on campus, something which I am bizarrely managing to keep up fairly well after making a new years resolution to go regularly a couple of years ago, though whether it has any effect I don't know. Nip to shop on campus to buy food and newspapers and get bus home.

21:00-22:30 Cook dinner whilst watching television, read the newspaper, get a phone call from a friend.

22:30-24:00 Feel inspired to do something productive again. Finish reviewing a paper for a journal, send it off, then spend an hour reading a book about new media - the latter feels like half work half personal interest.

Uid 73

Grabbed my breakfast whilst still trying to finalise the briefing document for the session in the afternoon. Gathered together plastic cups and a bag to hold the cakes in. Feeling slightly anxious about the briefing meeting for the afternoon - this was a step outside the norm for me - encouraging students to take on a development project that was outside of the normal scope for second year software modules.

Made it into work and grabbed the podcast hardware. So far the students have appreciated the lectures being podcast, but it does take a bit to set up and pack down. Not too impressed with the lecturer in the session before me as he continues to overrun his lecture and insists on shutting the computer down as he goes (as apposed to logging off). Trouble with the computer is that it takes a good 10 minutes to come back up again. He doesn't seem to get any hints as in I have this camera and I need to get in the room to start on time, not late. I think I shall need a more direct approach - it is a shame he appears to come across as unthinking.

Slightly disconcerting that the students start yawning half way through the lecture. I must work out a way of keeping them engaged. I've rewritten this several times to keep it fresh but I'm still not managing it.

The briefing meeting was very exciting and vibrant. They were very keen to get their teeth into something for a client. The client supplied cakes and juice which was appreciated. I'll have my work cut out trying to coordinate all this enthusiasm - lets hope it doesn't fizzle out.

Grabbed all my stuff, books, laptop etc to work from home this afternoon. Means I can create the podcasts for the practicals in a quiet area. Podcasting seems to be appreciated and does make it easier for running the practicals as the students do like to review things in their own time.

Uid 75

This seems to have been a long day. With M on early shift, the alarm went off at 6:45am. For some reason, I was thinking about logarithm calculation algorithms. It was only one of the exercises that I added to a worksheet yesterday. I made good progress on conditional and loop exercises yesterday but still a little way to go before I release it next week.

Wrote my usual morning reflection on yesterday. Continued to think of things that are still missing from the worksheets. In some ways my worksheets are a draft for a programming book but I will need more time and opportunities to test my ideas.

With having to replace our HP Slimline machine (motherboard failed), I am thinking about startup and background services on Windows and their impact on performance. The replacement machine is quick on the startup but then we don't have all the applications loaded. Isolation of applications into virtual machines so they were not competing for resources might be a better environment. We have a range of different usages so separating them might help improve performance because we don't have all applications assuming they are always going to be used.

We also thought and prayed for family in New Zealand. Especially M's dad in hospital dying of cancer. My mum has also decided not to put her name on a list for a unit. There is a three year waiting list for the units so I can understand when she is still living in the family home.

At least my head seems a lot clearer. The head cold remnants might be going. Still must dress warmly for the day. The days have been overcast and fairly cool for most of the last few days.

While I dress M is already getting her breakfast and making her lunch. As usual, she will get the base of mine ready as well. I will finish my lunch preparation when I get downstairs.

Breakfast, lunch making, and make the bed before heading off. Damn still sneezing this morning. Not sure that is good.

M raised having purchased New Zealand organic apples when she prefers to buy local. It reminded her of an article on the benefits of New Zealand manuka honey. She also talked about the tragic death of someone she interacted with in her work. With nephew's murder in July in NZ, death seems to be a familiar topic at the moment.

7am and M is off to work as I finish making the bed. Almost ready to go myself even though there isn't really any need to be there this early. I do find getting in early allows me to get on top of things before the other arrive. Sharing an office can be difficult for retaining focus during the day.

7:35am and I am at my desk having survived a near miss with a truck that changed lanes while going round a round-about. left lane on entry to right lane on exit and then back to left lane 100 feet up the road at the next intersection. No concern for other road users. Not keen about UK driver habits. Regularly blocking intersections.

There was a voice message from M's mum. Dad has deteriorated and they are now saying he may die in the next 24 to 48 hours. Rang M and tried to ring son, P. Rang M's mum. B, M's brother staying at hospital overnight to be with dad. Mum has gone home to own bed at hospital's advice. M rang back and we talked. Brought a tear to my eyes.

8am and finally cleared the emails. Usual stuff from the discussion forums. P rang back. He is to fly to NZ tomorrow and will go down to Palmerston North after a nights sleep after arriving. Must email daughter, A, in Texas and give her an update.

An email from a student who has been sick and missed assessments. Responded him of the welfare system as it may relieve him of some of the assessment pressures.

8:30am. Quick review of a student's final year proposal. The proposals are due in at midday.

9am. Emails processed. Have sent an update request for the syllabus for the First Year Programming module. Also reviewed text for a poster on the course and decided that I didn't like the emphasis on Java. Now I have to reword the poster amongst all the other pressures.

10am Looking for flowchart diagrams for conditional and loop statements. Reusing some material dating back to 1993. Some things change little but I want to contrast this with interactions in object-oriented development later in the course.

10:50am and I am off to this morning's lecture. Just need to finish off the material on data types. Today is focusing on strings in Java. This went much more smoothly than I had expected so I managed to get through the material. There were still some questions but not as many as earlier in the week.

12:00pm Went to reception to clear my box on the way back from the lecture. Attendance sheets for next week's advisory tutorials and project meetings. Another piece of administration to satisfy another government regulation. Took back down the final year project attendance sheet for the last two weeks. Another task completed. A quick catch up on Facebook posts and posted on father-in-law. Facebook is a good way to let a big group of people know the status. Also offered a lift to three or four people to ten pin bowling this evening.

12:20pm and the recording of today's lecture saved and given to MS for loading to the web site. Started to complete marking scheme for the second week's exercise.

12:45pm and it is a quick discussion on the marking of an M.Sc student project that I supervised. She had indicated that she had used code from the internet but never acknowledged it in her dissertation. It now seems she has clarified the situation but without having the code that she says she referred to, we can't prove how much was copied. As a result we have to trust what she says.

13:00. A software workshop exercise class. Focussed on exercises Java string usage. The class was fuller than I had expected. I thought I had chosen a couple of code reading exercises that we would be able to complete quickly but the discussion around them filled the time available. It was good though because we had to deal extensively with the way strings are handled in Java and why the standard comparison operators don't work. It also laid some foundations for talking more about objects. Still not convinced that I have everyone on board. There were some fairly blank faces in the room.

14:10 again reviewed emails, sign off the earlier student project grade decision, and registered for the staff and research student outing on 3 Nov. It is difficult because we could easily be in NZ rather than here in Birmingham depending on when M's dad dies.

14:30 Meeting with a final year project student to review her proposal. Another weak student so she is going to need a lot of support. The proposal does really tell me what she is going to do but she has already handed it in before she came to see me (her supervisor).

15:00 Back to worksheet development. Getting closer to completion. Added an exercise to compare the different loop constructs and recursion. If the students do this one then they should have a much better idea of the way each of these constructs work. Now, there are just some flowchart diagrams and structure diagrams to add.

16:30 Relief break and discussion with to TA's about a course that I helped with last year. They are keen to have me work with them as a tutor in term two but I will already be helping the primary lecturer with the course. Next term, I will have one to lead and two to assist with so I could already be fairly busy.

16:45 Pack up and prepare to go to ten pin bowling. This proved nice and relaxing. Didn't bowl as well as I should have but none of the students were doing particularly well either. At least I improved in the second game. The highest score for the evening was 166 by one of the students. My best in the second game was 108. I really should have been over 150.

19:41 checked weight on the Wii. slightly higher than last night but still lower than I had expected. There are no phone messages so dad must be still hanging on.

Letters from Southern Electric saying we are late paying our electricity and gas bills. I queued up the payments last week so it must be the slowness of the banking system. In NZ, you could guarantee that it would be paid on the day you said. Checked the back account and yes they were paid on the day on had loaded them for.

Discovered that i had left the DVD in the drive after installing the Adobe suite last night. The spam count in the email is high today. 79 messages. A quick review shows that only one is miss identified. I find it strange that spammers seem to believe that I might actually take an interest in their spam if they can find a way around my spam filter. At least the number that I have to manage manually is declining.

Signing into the bank is frustrating with the multilevel security codes that I can never remember. It really give the impression that the bank doesn't want me to be able to manage my money. The interface to both of our bank's on line systems are crap compared with our NZ bank. Need to transfer some money or we will be over drawn at the end of the day. Fixed. Discovered that I had missed some entries on our finance tracking spreadsheet while checking bills that still need to be paid.

Found and installed the tab manager in Forefox and made sure its options were set up the same as the laptop. Another step to getting the desktop back to what we had before the motherboard failed. removed the Skype plugin from Firefox. We never use it so it is simply wasting resource. I suspect there are others as well but it takes a bit to identify them especially when what they do isn't documented anywhere and the related application simply assumes you need them. Why should developers and companies assume they know what I need?

Now, to write this up and type it in while I watch "New Tricks." Done now time for bed 22:45. A long a fairly full day and no telephone call to say dad has died so that is promising. Really don't want to have to fly to NZ before Wednesday. With lectures on Monday and Tuesday, there would be less reorganising to do it we are away from for the second half of the week.

Some Final Reflections

This has been a busy day and left a number of issues for further consideration. I am still not confident about the teaching sequence despite my original mind map and progressive exercises. I made some mistakes last week when talking about expressions by introducing operators that required knowledge of data representation issues. This week dealing with the data representation issues seems to have brought this back on track. I am now planning to do control structures ahead of interfaces as type and classes. I think this might be a mistake as I could have dealt with objects as simple abstract data types without knowledge of control structures. Introducing strings as objects in Java has laid the foundation for this but now I am going to step away for a week before returning to that theme.

Meeting with project students has also helped me rethink the writing of proposals. I am placing much more emphasis on the proposal laying the foundation for later evaluation and dissertation writing. I would like to see the students saying more about their intended process and the relative importance of features. However, most are so vague that it is really difficult to tell what they are trying to achieve. When I teach the Team Java paper in term 2, I need to try and emphasise the type of things that I am looking for in the proposals. Unlike last year, this may mean that I will need to read and respond to them all rather than relying on my tutors. Even though the tutors are Ph.D. or MSc students, I don't think they understand the implications of a poorly written proposal. It is only as I am moving more into the assessment issues that I have begun to really consider what should be in a proposal.

Uid 77

08.00

It’s getting darker in the mornings. Husband tells me he isn’t coming into University this morning, so have to reorganise my travel arrangements at the last minute! Decide against the cycle ride, and take the car instead. Not particularly environmentally friendly, but having cycled 2 days on the trot, not sure I am yet fit enough for the three days: 5 miles each way so good for exercise. Besides, if I take the car, I can go straight to the supermarket after work which will be more efficient.

So decide to get in early (much to the moanings of 17 year old daughter who has to decide whether she wants a lift to the bus stop where she will wait for 10 minutes, or to walk, which will take 10 minutes! (She chose the lift). So in at 8am, to a quiet office. It’s open plan, but I have a desk tucked away at the back, so am away from the general area. The incoming head of school clearly doesn’t think this is good enough so there are building works planned for the Christmas Holidays, to make an office for him (he starts in January). The upside of this, is that it seems that there will also be a office space for me and my colleague, so there will be a partition and door separating us from the main office. It will make things easier, for example for conference calls. I still haven’t quite got used to having to book a room if anyone comes to see me. Got ‘told off’ (well nicely asked to move) for having a work related conversation with one of the others in the general office yesterday. I am sure it doesn’t help efficiency if you have can’t have impromptu conversations in a workplace.

However, my husband (who is a senior member of faculty) reported back yesterday that there might be further new building in the offing, and that our school might be on the move across the sports fields. Which begs the question whether it is worth doing the internal building work at Christmas, but then Universities have never been much good at joined up thinking.

I realise too, that today is the end of my 2nd month in this job. Certainly beginning to feel more at home here, and getting to know the students too.

The urgent job, getting ready for the UCAS form arrival is almost sorted. I think/hope I’ve managed to improve the process without upsetting too many people. To be honest, the previous system was probably worse than a lottery, but there are a lot of people attached to it, so I’m having to take it gently.

Work programme for today is sorting out the Interview part of the admission process and to actually try to find time to do some research related tasks.

13.30:

Oh dear, famous last words! A phone message requesting me to do an ‘emergency interview’ about something I have never heard about has opened yet another Pandora ’s Box that I know nothing about! Finally got it sorted, but it has not helped my ‘to do’ list! The lack of any sort of Standard Operating Procedures is beginning to show.

Did have a really productive discussion with the assessment officer, and have a way forward for moderating the admissions process.

14.30

Escaped and went for a walk to the transport office to find out a bit more about car parking. It smells of Autumn out there. Now I’ve cleared my head, I can get down to doing some of the things I planned to start this morning.

16.30

Well finally got some of the work I had planned to do today, done. But have also had to put the rest into my bag to take home for the weekend., sometime between taking the car to the garage, getting two weeks washing done (none done last weekend because I was away at a research meeting!) shopping etc, and being with the family!

16.57: home!

Uid 78

The main task for today was a PhD viva for which I was the internal examiner. I found the thesis somewhat patchy. It was interesting overall and the results were quite startling in places but parts of it were really heavy going while other sections were platitudinous. Fortunately the external and I were in agreement and although I've been anxious about how the viva would go it turned out to be quite an enjoyable experience. The candidate is a rather dour Northern European but even he said, once he had relaxed a bit, that he had enjoyed it. He has a pass with minor corrections which is a good result.

Prior to that I very much enjoyed a coffee with a colleague and our new member of departmental staff. We took the opportunity to fill in our new colleague about some of the history of our largest Department course. This discussion included what he is likely to encounter at the exam board which will take place next month. Other duties mean that I no longer attend this particulat board but our discussion reminded me how much I used to enjoy such occasions. The decision to award students 60 credits towards their degrees feels like the culmination of all our joint (staff/student) efforts. I think I might see if I can go back to this task next year.

Another snatched conversation was with a colleague who attended senate yesterday. An issue of significance for the senior university management structure was due to be discussed. The relevant paper has been presented as something that will affect senior staff but the proposed change has significant implications for the line management of the people who stand in front of students. I was pleased to learn that there had been proper discussion. The paper has been presented by a very senior member of university management who many of us don't trust to deal fairly.

By the time I got home this evening I was relieved and happy that it is Friday. I've worked very hard this week and intend to close my computor when I've finished this and enjoy some R&R.

Uid 80

Another meeting in the review of the stage gate process we use to determine which curriculum is developed, review its success and ensure its quality. This was introduced several years ago and is time for it to be revisited. We have taken the stance that the current process is sub optimal and recognise that there have been a number of organisational changes that need to be properly accommodated within the revised process. This is probably about the eighth meeting of this small group and we are tidying up our ideas and planning a workshop for next month at which we set out the broad nature of our recommendations to key faculty members and elicit their feedback before taking any further. This was an opportunity for me to test out my embryonic idea of introducing a recognising previous achievement aspect to the process. This came out of a conversation with a colleague earlier in the week, and might provide an appropriate way to take this forward. Catching up, or at least trying to get on top of all the other bits and pieces. The reorganisation (or lack of) within the new unit continues to tax us, and I find myself spending a lot more time that I want thinking about the things that I feel should have already been determined by others whose job it is. I've avoided mention of the Browne Review.

Uid 81

I don't have much teaching this trimester, but I do today - 6 hours of it. 4 hours straight this morning and a two hour gap to do this log, eat lunch, address some urgent issues for the professional body I have a major role in, whittle through the email and attend a one-hour research seminar with a guest from North America, who is also one of our graduates.

Today I play second fiddle in the classroom as one of our colleagues in a university central support service is delivering two hour workshops on transactional analysis to our first year (in Scotland - technically the equivalent of A-level in England but in reality a little more demanding)

predominantly male and with a reasonable proportion not yet 18, the "child" state comes readily to some which triggers the "parent" state in us! But actually these are really good, energetic, demanding but rewarding workshops. TA is a simpel concept - doubtless over-simplified, but it's just the right level for these students.

Just had the third of four over the two days, and it was the best. We got the students in groups to design ATM dialogues in one of the TA states. The "free child" ATMs are a hoot, but so too are the "nurturing parent" and unusually today the "adult" one was actually different and innovative - usually we get the standard ATM dialog for that.

It does make me think that as the trends grow towards more playful approaches to systems design - hedonics etc, that what we define as adult-adult quality of interaction being somehow optimal and professional, will need some examining.

last night was fun - I was chairing local branch meeting of the professional body, and afterwards took the speaker - a professor in my subject and another professor, I hadn't met before out, for a meal and we had one of those grown up intellectual conversations that you love about conferences, but too rarely find in your own institution

Uid 82

Today, Friday 15 October, was supposed to be a research day... that's not quite what happened.

The day began productively enough, with me getting various research-related things done in the morning, whilst working at home. However, things started to unravel when I first of all discovered that Royal Mail had just shoved a card through the door rather than ringing the doorbell to get me to take delivery of a very important letter. This related to a personal matter that in turn has an impact on teaching - I am a witness in a court case. I had to call the sender to find out the contents of the letter and was actually relieved to learn that the court case, which I had feared would disrupt my teaching this term, had been delayed for a further six months. As I'm covering some work for colleagues on leave, I'm over points on my workload allocation and was not looking forward to having to drop teaching at short notice to go over something unpleasant in court. That said, it will now disrupt my sabbatical \*but\* my sense is that at least disrupts fewer people, rather than than impacting on lots of people...

After lunch, my plans for a quiet day getting on with some reading and editing were utterly disrupted... by students! I made the age-old mistake of looking at my email whilst working. Shortly before heading out for lunch I had received an email from a student which made me feel riled at first, and then - after I'd had my lunch and sat down to reply to him - I found it quite funny. I had emailed him earlier that morning to answer a question he had asked me, but I also asked about his behaviour in the previous class, which had not been appropriate, and had raised a number of pastoral flags for me, having known him since he was in the first year (now a 3rd year). He pretty much had a tantrum back at me, which was based on unsubstantiated claims about how he'd not chosen my module, it had been assigned to him at the start of this term and he'd not wanted to do it because it was hard (not true - he was one of the first to sign up back in the spring). I wrote a firm, but fair, rebuttal of this, and have yet to hear anything back (I write this on Monday). Once I'd got back on track from this distraction, I was then bombarded with emails from a student who was trying to get an extension on some coursework due that afternoon. I seemed to spend an inordinate amount of time asking her to just put her draft in, whereas she kept demanding more time to put a finished version, despite this not being what was asked. Later, a batch of students tried to submit work online at 6.15 when the deadline was 6pm. Argh! What was depressing about all this was the fact that I'd been clear about my expectations, whether it be in terms of how I (and the dept/uni) expect people to behave in class, and what we wanted them to do. I suppose I felt hijacked - certainly the student who wouldn't take no for an answer disrupted my work. I could have not looked at let alone answered my email, but in all cases, I thought the emails would have been fairly simple things to fire off quickly so that I could get on with other stuff... evidently not.

I am very much looking forward to going on study leave. I will miss teaching, but I won't miss the headaches that go with it sometimes...

Uid 87

Friday 15th October, 2pm

Working at home today, am keeping two days a week for 'research' as opposed to teaching and admin, and find it less distracting to have these days at home. Also gives me a chance to recharge batteries as I'm taking a pounding on the office-based days. Energy levels are better than last year, but I'm still not back to normal after the chronic fatigue of the last 2-3 years. Sometimes struggle to hold it together on a 'normal' working day, and these days let me breathe deeply and take it more slowly. Essential health-and-safety recuperation, you might call it!

So, coupled with the start-of-term germ-bath that's going round, have felt really exhausted this week and have slept all morning both 'research' days - REALLY unusual for me. I have effectively only worked a few hours yesterday and today, keeping on top of emails and reading a few bits and pieces, but not able to concentrate on the paper-writing I had lined up. This is frustrating though, as the next two weeks' 'research days' I'm away at conferences, so that means it'll be 3 weeks till I get another chance to get this blasted paper revised and submitted.

So, what HAVE I been doing?

Dealing with students' emails about their coursework case study selections, it doesn't seem to matter how much guidance we put in the handbook or talk about in person, they still don;t seem to get some of the most basic points.

Reading and responding to emails flying between faculty members in the department about how we organise the supervision of student projects.

Collecting ideas for potential masters student projects from colleagues, to have a nice handful of project briefs to give to the students. I'm hoping this year, for the first time, to direct some student projects onto stuff that is directly part of my funded research projects, taking on stuff in addition to what we have planned. That would be more fun, would exploit this enthusiastic resource, and would give them experience of working in a research team, seeing their name on publications, etc, which is invaluable if they're planning to do PhD study afterwards.

Planning a new research project kick-off meeting for next week, and thinking about the public project launch a few months down the line.

Dealing with starting to organise a seminar series of internal and external speakers for the next semester.

Reading a PhD student's draft chapter in time for his meeting next week.

Writing to an academic to invite him to be external examiner for one of my PhD students.

Thinking about a mock REF we're holding, planning the papers to submit and narratives to go with them.

Lots of this stuff can stay in my inbox till Monday, then I'll deal with the admin from the office, but starting to put them on the radar now, is useful. But as is rather clear, it's all LITTLE stuff, and really I ought to be spending these research days doing BIG stuff like revising and submitting MY PAPER!!! But when I'm feeling run down it's difficult to get the concentration required.

Uid 90

Day at my desk planned today. I need to meet up with one student who requires learning enhancement support otherwise its a case of tidying up two lectures due to be given next week.

Took longer to update my lecture for one and so am now behind on preparing the other. Within medicine things change so rapidly within a year that although my titles stay the same the content dramatically changes.

Uid 93

I was at a conference (Educause) in the US on education and technology. So not a usual Friday but a good one. Have blogged my ideas so that I can take them back to the office and share with others.

Uid 95

I have a 9 am lecture - this week it is on Time Management in the context of Professional Skills. Have lots of colourful handouts for students to fill in - time logs and summary sheets. Finish by 10 am and students happy that they have the rest of the day off (they head to family homes, relieved to have got through the first three weeks). Many questions from students before I head back to office, collecting well earned coffee on the way.

The rest of the day is spent on admin. tasks. It's lots of things that involve lists, checking in coursework, and identifying any "problem sudents".

A Level 4 tutee arrives to talk about career prospoects and we work on her CV. I insist on CVs before I write references. This particular student is a top student who, in theory should not have a probelm etting a position in the subject area.

More admin and by the end of the day I have time to look through next week and check that my notes are in order, send masters for printing, and make yet another "to do" list ready for Monday morning.

Uid 98

0830 Arrive, meeting with student to clarify coursework

0855 Walk to other end of our small, city-centre campus

0900 Sat in on three presentations from applicants for a half FTE lecturing post; discussed our findings for submission to the interviewing panel

1100 Talked over MSc dissertation marks with colleague; tried to get through some back email correspondence and largely failed.

1230 Lunch with PhD student, discussing current state of play, transport arrangements to conference and new form for presentation

1355 Left for next meeting and went via one of the candidates to ask if there was any news: good news for him and us

1403 Late for meeting with student who had left on the hour; emailed to say he wcould come back. Continued with emails until his rerurn

1420 Worked on GIS with student

1445 Few emails before leaving for next lecture

1500 Lecture on azimuth and coursework.

1615 Left lecture room; talked to overseas student on way through campus

1640 Left for home

2000 Emails for hour (45 received, 23 sent in day)

Uid 99

Today was a busy teaching day for me. Two hours in the morning with undergraduates, then a three-hour seminar in the afternoon with postgrads. A school meeting was called which clashed with the first hour of the afternoon class. With all the uncertainty around at the moment, I was very keen not to miss it. I spent most of the week juggling around in my head how I could restructure the class to have them working independently for the first hour, only for the meeting to be cancelled the day before! It made it easier for me today, but it probably means that I will miss it anyway, as it's likely to be rescheduled at a time when I am away teaching overseas.

In between my classes, I squeezed in a sandwich lunch at my desk and two meetings with students (it would have been three, but one didn't show up).

So, a pretty straight forward day for me today - teaching, teaching and more teaching. Since it's my favourite part of the job, that makes it a good day!

Uid 100

Spent the morning in a team meeting. Everyone was trying hard to stay upbeat despite senior management over-recruiting our programme by around 75% and us all having to fight tooth and nail for any additional resources to manage the extra intake. Thank goodness for supportive colleagues and a positive team ethos; let’s hope it lasts through the year.

After a hurried lunch, drained away several frustrating hours tracking down DVDs and videos in the newly rearranged library. Some of the media resources have now been spread over different floors in a policy of integration that seems to defy both Dewey’s system and logic. Back to the office and after judiciously avoiding a single glance at emails, I gathered resources for a lecture that I’ll write over the weekend. Next stop the gym and then home to flake out on the sofa.

Uid 105

09:00 - After dropping the kid at school, this day starts a little differently as I have a medical appointment. Luckily, it didn't take long.

10:00 - After the daily dose of traffic, I finally arrived at the University and continued working on next week's practical classes of the Introduction to Programming course. The exercises are aimed at allowing students to make the transition from pseudo-code to Java.

11:30 - Finished the preparation of the exercises and the scripts (including resolutions) for my colleagues. Edited and uploaded the exercises to the appropriate webpage so that students can have a look at it during the weekend and prepare themselves beforehand. As if.

12:00 - Bureaucracy time. Started gathering the student attendance and summary sheets (for statistical purposes since the attendance at classes is not mandatory) to send to the central services. This is the boring part of each week since it includes gathering all this information and update it in different channels: central services, school management system and the course's webpage.

12:30 - Lunch time with a bunch of colleagues. For the last two weeks the topics of conversation have always been the same: the cuts in the salary mandated by the Government amid the concerns of the current financial crisis that is hitting Portugal; and the evaluation process that will start next year, which has led to considerable controversy because there's no consensus as to what metrics should be used to evaluate, for example, publications. Some believe giving more importance to scientific journals will diminish the importance of some well-renowned international conferences.

13:00 - Introduction to Programming class with around 25 students. We worked on specific pseudocode exercises, mostly dealing with manipulation of numbers. It also included an introduction to Eclipse, the IDE that will be used during the rest of the semester as we make the transition to Java.

16:00 - Class is finished, it's time for a snack and a bit of hallway conversation/tutorial with a colleague regarding the use of Blender (a free animation software) to produce more appealing movies out of the output of collaborative robots simulations.

18:00 - Normally, this would be the time to leave and enjoy the weekend but today is a bit different since there's a talk at the campus on hacking and internet security by Samy Kamkar. "Privacy is dead" - this is how he ended his presentation. I, for one, believe him. Why? Well, because he gave some very compelling arguments. In his presentation, suggestively titled "how I met your girlfriend", he showed how some basic internet infrastructures are fundamentally flawed and may enable ill-intentioned users to take advantage of those flaws to gain access to private information. I was also very happy to see a bunch of my students in the front rows. Nothing like the prospect of meeting hot girls through hacking to make the students become interested in programming languages.

20:00 - In the wise words of Obama, "Yes, Weekend!"

Uid 106

Lousy cold for 2 days, blocked nose, dry throat, tired. After yesterday's meeting about the difficulties on clinic with limited staff, calling in sick was not appropriate! Students again keen to learn, very enthusiastic, mostly treatment planning but some restorative stuff. The place seems calmer today, there is a team leaders' meeting this afternoon to try to sort the staffing and security issues out. My peer review papers were on my desk and D seems quite pleased. A couple of weaknesses, one of which I identified myself, but a useful process. Actually found the process quite encouraging. This is now week 5 of the new project and I think it has gone well. It is exciting to be part of something never tried before, yet the contrasts of working in a large department, with all its personality conflicts and gossip, with the previous 30 years of working in a small practice, managing it and running it largely myself, are still difficult. Am I struggling a bit because unlike the previous 30 years, I am not in control? I am a very small cog in a large spinning wheel now. I also miss the one to one working with other staff, and those close working relationships a small team generates. But then that's one of the reasons I wanted a new direction ...... I was fed up with managing that. Can't have it both ways! I think I can teach, I think I relate well to the students, but I could do with some training and I would like to develop some more research. Early days.

Uid 108

Term has started and lectures are in full swing. We have a lot more students this time round so getting the logistics sorted has been interesting - printing of notes has gone awry for everyone, room bookings have been clashing, technical glitches have occured just before class, registration confusion still reigns - normal stuff until the dust settles. My diary is suddenly full of appointments with tutees, teams and project students so the day contracts at an alarming rate and the todo list and email inbox expand. The students are really keen and nervous and eager to do well - so the mood is high. I am glad to see them back. It takes a week or so to get back into lecturing mode after a Summer of research and quietness but I am eager to get my modules under way and see how the new set of students get on. I like seeing them learn and love looking at what they produce in the end - which is always great and much better than they expected. In the staff room, apart from Chilean miners and sitting up all night glued to the TV in anticipation - the talk this week is about the announcement of the removal of the cap on tuition fees. I have never agreed with fees and believe education should be free for everyone, however a free market in HE may make some wake up to the fact that teaching well is important and always has been but is set to become more so. I wonder though how the policy of widening participation will gel with the fees idea or are we just scrapping that now? A new government, new students, a new term - ok, let's go!

Uid 110

Answered school-related email, about 15 mins

Lunch with a colleague, 1 hour

Research and writing, 3 hours

Misc. non-work related errands, 2 hours

Uid 113

Today was office based and quiet - most unusual.

The key event was a PhD viva. As this went well the day was good. I read the thesis yesterday (in bed!) so it was fortunately very well written -I have a 'just in time' strategy for managing work demands. Often it backfires but it didn't yesterday.

The external struggled to get here on time so I was also fortunate to be sitting my own office and had extra time to catch up on emails and administration and get us both some lunch. Really, I can't stress enough how unusual this is.

The viva itself went very well - myself and the external agreed that the thesis was in good shape and the candidate performed well; enthusiastic, articulate, thoughtful, open to criticism, able to link her work to the wider field and see how it might develop in the future....keen to publish and present and happy with the very positive outcome. It was also good to spend a bit of time with the external whom I know only slightly.

i'm knocking off for the weekend soon - before 6pm. Am taking home some reading and preparation - I've a presentation to give on Monday morning to some NHS colleagues and that needs a bit of thought. Also 2 more theses to read and digest I'm external exmainer at Sussex and Manchester in the next 2 months. So this weekend might be a good time for that.

Yesterday I had a paper rejected from my favourite journal - that was frustrating. However, as I have a new PhD student who is very keen and eager for things to get on with she is already working on amendments to the paper (recoding data) which will help us resubmit fairly swiftly and give her a very swift publication too. The frustrating thing s that although some of the reviewers' comments are spot on and are things we can fix, some comments are simply because they didn't read the paper properly - it happens to us all but it doesn't make it less irritating. Anyway I emailed the editor to see if he'd accept a revision - it's not very likely but worth asking anyway. Plan B - another journal with an improved manuscript.

Also today fixed up for an RA to attend some in house training on systematic reviewing. We've done a huge amount of work which needs polishing off so she's going to get a quick fix of techniques to give her the confidence that what we have done is up to scratch. If she finds it's not I'm not sure either one of us will find in within to do the coding and grunt work again...so fingers crossed. Even with the REF years away it's very hard not to fixate on it and see each potential publication in terms of the submission that'll be made in a few years time.

Had an impromptue meeting this mornning with a part time staff member who has experienced a significant personal tragedy in the last year. They are feeling it a bit hard to return to work (not surprising) and we talked through strategies to help focus on the key activities and limit time spent on less important stuff. I don't really understand why it's sometime hard for people to give up on stuff they don't enjoy and which they say is taking up research time and paper writing time - or perhaps i do know or at least have hypothesis but it's tough getting them to shift their behaviour. Anyway they certainly have 'permission' to give the stuff up - I don't actually think they need my 'permission' but it seems like they do....whatever happened to the concept of personal and professional autonomy as an academic?

I'm also troubled by some interpersonal stuff that's going on in the group. We've recently appointed someone really talented who is winding other people up far too frequently. It seems to be about being bossy and issuing 'commands' to others - this isn't how we work at all and proving very contraversial. As we are usually easy going and have managed to avoid previous clashes this is new territory for me. I need to find a way to stop the person concerned being so dominant and bossy and help others assert themselves, whilst keeping both sides on speaking terms. Emotions are running high, tears have been shed, talking has been done behind closed doors, and it feels like the wagons are circled. I'd hoped to talk to the person today but haven't had a chance - so next week then I suppose!

Since I've started this entry the rain has arrived - most annoying as i could have left in dry weather if i'd gone sooner. There is no escape from the rain in the 30 minute walk home.

Uid 114

Not a great start to the day - my partner arrived home from a client meeting at 3am yesterday and was lucky to be literally sent to the dog house!

It is an ongoing grumble in our household that he gets paid 3 times as much as me. He claims that it is because he works longer hours. This is not actually true - his contract specifies longer hours. My contract specifies fewer hours but I work nearly as many. But the real bone of contention is that I don't get paid extra for being woken up in the middle of the night!

Anyway, rather bleary eyed I arrived at the office at 8am after only 4 hours sleep :-(

This is a really busy time of year for me. I have some courses starting in November and need to allocate tutors. The interviews were done in August and I have well qualified and very keen tutors wanting confirmation that they will get a student group. But with 2 weeks to go I still don't know how many students I have. With the current economic situation there is pressure to appoint as few tutors as possible. However, I am keen to keep the student groups small as I believe that will improve retention. It frustrates me that the university is always focusing on reducing expenditure and, in my view, doesn't pay enough attention to the overall cost in the longer term. Deciding on the group sizes isn't as simple as employing as few tutors as possible, but that is the atitude of our administrators and somehow they have been given increasing power and can stand in the way of my academic judgement.

The final result of 3 hours looking at figures and negotiating is that I appoint two tutors and defer the other decisions till Monday. Usually we end up with whatever model I suggested int he first place, but the system forces me to delay decisions meaning that my new tutors will be less prepared for teaching the new course.

My next task of the day is to try and join in the co-ordination exercise for two courses which ahve just ended and need projects marking. It takes several e-mail to estabilish where I collect the scripts from and then to reset my access permissions so that I am able to download an electronic copy. It is 4pm before I get access to them so they will have to be marked over the weekend.

My other main task of the day is much more self focused. I have recently been diagnosed as dyslexic, or perhaps that should be officially identified as I have self identified a long time ago but only just went for an assessment. I chose to go for the assessment as I was finding that even with working additional time I was unable to get some of my work completed by various deadlines being set, and some colleagues had complained about my spelling. An assessment would get me access to dictations and readout software which I hope will help me work more efficiently. I felt it would be worth the £300 assessment to get some support.

I am still trying to get that support though. Although the university is very good at supporting students with dyslexia I am now discovering that there is no process for supporting staff. My line manager was very sympathetic but directed me to Occupational Health. OH said it wasn't their problem and I needed to go to HR. HR said it was a matter for "staff in my area". Today I sent details to the head of department in my faculty and am waiting for a response. So far I have had to speak to 6 different people about a matter that is supposed to be confidential, and still I haven't found anyone who can help. I'm only asking for a couple of bits of software and a slight upgrade to my hardware. I'm certain the cost will be recovered in improvements in my work, it is a legal requirement that I am offered support, but nobody wants it coming out of their budget.

I will keep pushing to try and get the university as my employer to provide help. But as a back up optionI have registered as a student and start the process of applying for a Disabled Student Award which will get me to the same end point via a different route.

I head out of the office at 4pm and collect my partner on the way home. Flowers and tea persuade me that we should be friends again and I get to go for a nap whilst he collects the children.

I'm trying to make a start on the marking when the kids arrive and soon put a stop to it. The kids quite rightly point out that they spend all week working hard to get their homework done so that they can make the most of the time they spend with their Dad and me, not so that they can watch us doing work!

Work computers and phones are turned off and it is all put out of mind till Monday :-)

Uid 115

Woke up feeling tired this morning - up late last night doing emails I could ignore no longer and writing my pressing to-do list - 28 items and counting did not make for a restful night. Feeling guilty that mother in law is having to take M. to fracture clinic this afternoon instead of me - but dont think I can get away from conference in time to make clinic.

Dropped M at school for breakfast club -which she hates - so I had a fighting chance of getting to conference on time to make sure AVA will work for our presentation, get a sense of the room etc. Gods on my side - great run up to the conference centre and so managed to catch sight of some of our alumni before everything started.

First few presentations very clinical, so sat with T in the coffee room catching up. Crazy at work at moment - one member of staff taking annual leave (in october!) - another off sick /working at home due to recent surgery - rest of us like headless chickens getting new students settld in and trying to damage limit the impact of insufficient admin support. No matter how many times I point out our students average age is 40 and most of them are working at Consultant level - central services seem to have a mindset full of 18 year olds with time on their hands. Find clamp down on ID and visa checking uncomfortable - first interactions imply lack of trust rather than fostering good first impressions of organisation.

Anyway, great chat with T - planned our 90 min workshop conference slot in a bit more detail and caught up with plans for next week. Caught up on EdD progress too - hoping to submit mine in a few weeks time - T making great strides and should have his in after Xmas.

Conference presentation and workshop ok. Have shamelessly recycled somethign we did together before - didnt really feel at ease and not sure it hit the spot with regards to the audience. Got some engagement, interested questions (about learning styles of all things) and woke them up - suspect it has been death by powerpoint for the past couple of days. Stayed for networking lunch - touched that someone came up to say it was the most stimulating session of the conference - and that one of our students currently on an interruption of studies said she remembered why she loved the course so much and can't wait to come back in Jan. She is losing her job due to reorganisation of the PCT and is being unvoluntarily retired - our oldest student at 64! Says she will get her MA if only to put it on her grave stone. Wonderful woman - can't wait to have her back doing her project.

Manage to escape at 2 - so dash down motorway and make it to the fracture clinic before M has left. She has been to see consultant and had another x ray - definately scaphoid fracture and will be in a cast for a couple of months. Wave granny and granpa off and settle down to see consultant post x ray - 1 and a half hours playign hangman and having a cuddle - then 5 min consult to say everything fine and see us again in three weeks. M in tears as she realises she wont be horse riding for a few months - even thought horse is reason she was there. Feeling guilty that I have achieved so little today - and panicked at lack of prep for monday and tuesday teaching. Send a few emails to colleagues leaving messages on work phone about soem missing documentation for course review, start dates for new staff member next week and projects that have been sent special delivery to my home for second marking in advance of moderation day. Realise the weekend will be full of work (yet again) and so 'treat' myself to an early finish, settling down with M to watch masterchef, with a glass of wine and some crisps. Friends coming over for chinese take away later - not sure I will stay awake much beyond 9 but good to have some down time

Uid 116

8:49 AM: We're on fall break for a couple of days this week. I'm taking advantage of the lack of classes to visit my wife who is back in grad. school out of state. I love the school at which I teach, but its location isn't great. There are very few opportunities there for my wife, so we're living in separate households this school year while she updates her vita. The separation has been hard, but it's been nice to spend a few days here visiting. I slept past 8 this morning—sleep is the biggest leisure of break—then caught up on email and the morning comics. I have some work to do to prepare for my classes next week, but I can do that while my wife is at her classes later today.

11:00 AM: I walked with my wife to her morning class. It's nice to be on a big campus again. I appreciate the hustle and bustle of thousands of students going their own directions. It gives the place a certain energy, even if half the students look barely awake. After seeing my wife to class I parked myself at a coffee shop and caught up on some reading. I find it amazing that I can carry the vast majority of my reading list on the phone in my pocket. Now I'm pack at our apartment to do some laundry in preparation for a conference trip starting tomorrow. While the laundry tumbles I'll work on learning the Go programming language so I can introduce it to my class.

1:39 PM: One of my students was very kind and created a VIrtualBox VM image for use by my students in the Programming Language Paradigms class I'm teaching. We're going to experiment with Google's Go programming language, which currently runs on Mac and Linux, but not Windows. The VM will let my students who run Windows on their laptops do the course work with a minimum of installation fuss. I can't overstate how grateful I am for this student's generosity; he just poked his head in my office the other day and asked me if I'd like him to do it. I've spent midday playing with the VM—there were some issues with the networking configuration—and revising the installation instructions accordingly. I really like to use practical tools in my courses. I think it's important for computing professionals to develop skills in finding their way through new technology. The challenge is that requires a significant time investment in not just learning the tools, but also updating assignments, lab description, and installation instructions.

3:07 PM: I posted the VM installation instructions and started writing an initial homework assignment. I plan to spend the rest of the day with my wife, and will be without reliable bandwidth for the next couple of days. As such, I'm pulling down a Google video on Go so I can use it as the basis for a homework assignment next week while I'm away at a conference. I should have plenty of airport/airplane time to put the assignment together tomorrow.

7:12 PM: We went for a wonderful hike on a local mountain, then went out for pizza. Time for a relaxing evening at home.

Uid 118

I spent much of the day trying to prepare for a study skills session with some post qualifying social workers. There was also a meeting with a student to talk about improving his writing, and some discussions with colleagues about research projects.

The first part of the day was spent doing some work on the part time PhD that I'm taking alongside my full time teaching. It has been hard to priortise this over the last year, but I finally seem to be making some space for it in my schedule. I think that it has been about priorities rather than time, if I am to be honest. My own work doesn't often seem so important when set alongside the obligations that I have to others. Fencing off a little time each week when I set aside my other commitments seems to be the only way to make progress. I think I'm learning (finally!) that people will sometimes wait a bit longer for things if I let them know in advance. Managing people's expectations seems to be a key part of this job, as it has been in other work that I've done.

Time spent with the student was rewarding and interesting - so much so that it almost feels like a guilty pleasure. I let the admin and the marking stack up a bit as a consequence. Towards the end of the day I drafted an email to a colleague in another school for whom I've agreed to do some teaching. It's tricky - he's posted some alarming comments about my subject area on Blackboard for all students to see. I feel that he's really distorted the reality of the work that I'm engaged in in order to make an impact with students, and I'm trying to find ways of hauling it back in. Doing this tacfully whilst making my point clearly is proving a challenge.

Looking back, it was a busier day than I remembered. My standard view of this job is that I float through the days without getting much done, but my perceptions may be misleading me a little.

Uid 119

It is 4:40 PM on Friday, October 15, 2010, as I write this, and this is the very first chance that I have had today to write this journal. It has been a good day, but very, very busy.

The day started off well. I was up at 6:10 AM and in the pool by 7:45 AM. It is a cool and rainy and windy day in New England, but I am not the type of person who is bothered by weather.

I was in my office shortly after 9:00 AM, dealing with the normal onslaught of e-mail and gathering things I needed for my class at 10:00 AM. I also made a PDF out of the article "Pushing Positive Reinforcement" by Darby Lewes that appears in this month's NEA Higher Education Advocate for a colleague who is having trouble teaching non-majors in one of our department's service courses and sent that to her via e-mail.

Our Department Chair walked by, and I called out to him to see if he had a moment to discuss a small point about my upcoming application for sabbatical. We talked for just a couple of minutes, but cleared up a fine point dealing with that issue.

The Associate Chair then came in to see me and asked me to help him revise our standard curriculum grid for students enrolled in our new robotics minor. We did this together and talked about a couple of other things, including an NSF proposal that we are writing together, and that took up pretty much all the time I had before I had to leave for class.

Class was good. We finished our introduction to regular expressions and their use in validating user input on web pages and then returned to our discussion of CSS element selection techniques. I met with a student after class who had not submitted an assignment that was due on Wednesday and learned that he had correctly loaded the page on his website, but that he had not submitted it electronically as he is required to do. He thought he had done this, but on returning to my office I checked the submission log and confirmed that he had not. I therefore e-mailed him, telling him that he had to submit the assignment properly today. He did so early this afternoon.

I also e-mailed the one other student in my class who had not submitted this assignment. Only a simple, two-page paper was required, and the students have had an entire week to get this done. I asked the student why he had not submitted. He replied a short time later citing some detailed personal reasons that are not necessary to repeat in this journal, but that I fully believed were true. I therefore responded to him saying that I would accept paper from him if he would submitted by Sunday morning, when I expected to be doing the grading. He replied again to thank me for my consideration and said that he would be sure to submit the paper electronically by Saturday night.

A colleague from another department then showed up as planned to go to lunch and discuss the NSF proposal that we are working on together. (This is the same proposal that I discussed with the Associate Chair.) We just went to the cafeteria on campus, and we spent about an hour discussing my second draft of the proposal summary and the comments on that draft that he had e-mailed me earlier in the day. We are still struggling with stating the project goals and measurable outcomes clearly and succinctly. My colleague agreed to take the next cut at this if I sent him my notes from our conversation. I said that of course I would do that, but I felt that they were to illegible for anyone but myself and that I could not simply copy the sheets that I had been writing on and give those to him. So on returning to my office I dictated my notes into an e-mail using Dragon NaturallySpeaking and sent that e-mail to three other colleagues working on this proposal with me as well as to the colleague I had lunch with.

At that point I was back to dealing with yet more e-mail, including one from the college I had sent Darby Lewes's article. That e-mail identified some problems with CSS and asserted that things worked properly in Internet Explorer but not in Firefox. I believed that just the opposite was true, so I tested the CSS with the W3C Validator and did indeed find errors. So I spent some time writing this colleague an e-mail explaining her errors and why the page appeared to work in Internet Explorer (which excused the error) but not Firefox (which did not excuse the error).

My next task was to try to address some networking issues dealing with mapped drives under Windows 7. I've been working on this problem for a couple of days now. Windows 7 simply seems to lose the connection to certain mapped drives while some large files are being copied. It is very frustrating. I talked to our system manager about it and also one of the networking specialists on our faculty. Neither was able to help me. I tried a few tricks that I had found on the web pages, but to no avail. The problem still exists, both on my systems at school and at home, but I just had to cut my losses due to the time involved in trying to track down the source of the problem.

It is now time to go home, it will be a busy weekend. Not only do my wife and I have some personal things planned for the weekend, but a colleague and I want to go in to the Music Hack Day at MIT on Sunday. I have my normal load of grading and class prep to do, of course, but in addition I have two applications for promotion to review for a faculty meeting next Tuesday. And looming over everything is the NSF proposal.

The work is never done, but I wouldn't have it any other way.

10:00 PM Addendum...

For the last hour I've been catching up on e-mail and creating the modified curriculum grid for the Associate Chair. Unfortunately, I found a problem with that grid -- as laid out it only adds up to 119 credits while 120 credits are needed to graduate -- so I had to e-mail that bad news to my colleague to ask what he wants to do about that.

The Celtics game is now over an that's enough work for tonight, so it's finally off to bed.

Uid 120

So my first semester as a bona fide lecturer has begun. The students are surprisingly good, which is not to say I expected them to be bad, but rather that they come up with the most unlikely and often brilliant things every time I see them, and that there are only a very few from whom I cannot extract a decent sentence or two each class. I did not expect to enjoy full-time teaching as much as I am, since it is so time-consuming and there are so many other things that need to be done. But I find myself excited by the ideas they come up with, and keen to pull them from the pits they come so close to falling into through inexperience.

Today I taught two seminars of seven students for an hour each, on a course designed to teach first years skills in practical criticism. We read Wordsworth's 'Preface' to the Lyrical Ballads and four poems from the collection. The first group were stunning. They teased out a wide variety of complex responses to the poem and the seminar felt like a success. The second group are much more hesitant. I feel I do a bad job with them because my expectations are always so much higher after the first group, and we rarely get as far with the text. 50 minutes feels like nothing, and I'm sure it feels like nothing to them either. And now we move onto another text, and leave the Lyrical Ballads behind. I talk too much in classes, so today I broke them into groups to discuss different themes. It worked reasonably well and next week I am getting them to prepare for the seminar by asking half the class to argue one side of a critical debate and half to argue the other. We will see how this goes.

I then had a couple of hours in which to clear my emails, half-eat a sandwich and peel a mandarin but not have time to eat it, polish and send a proposal for an edited book off to a publisher, see a student who had missed a class, and tidy up a funding proposal for an outreach project I am hoping to work on. Then I went to a lecture for which I am teaching two two-hour follow-up seminars tomorrow. It is for a different course, also on Wordsworth, who is not my favourite and certainly not my speciality. The lecture was good, but I now have two hours to re-read Book X of Wordsworth's Prelude and create a lesson plan, before driving over an hour to get home. By the time I get there I am usually fit for nothing but dinner, which I will have to cook and which will be curried salmon, and then terrible television and bed. Tonight, however, I may have to stay up late since I have not read Wordsworth's Prelude since I wrote a dissertation on him as part of my M.St. six years ago. Time seems to slip away.

Uid 121

Fri 15th Oct

I don't work a Friday (I'm on a fractional contract), which allows me to have one non-working day a week enjoying being a mother to my 2 year old son and doing the school runs for my 6 year old daughter. Even when I'm not at work however, most evenings I will check my emails and Sunday nights I am often up until silly o'clock (to the extreme displeasure of my husband!), finalising lectures and teaching materials after the children have gone to bed. I forgive myself this intrusion of work into my family-life as I'd hope to consider myself a conscientious lecturer and in my subject area (marketing), students really benefit from contemporary illustrations of theory in practice.

In the evening, I went out with 3 other school mums who have become firm friends, for a welcome "letting our hair down" session. Unfortunately, I bumped into literally all of my personal tutorial group of students, which resulted in some comic eyebrow raises, comments of "WTF are you doing here?!" and even a bear hug from one rather "beer happy" student!! My friends thought it hilarious, I found it embaressing, but quite fun all the same! Do students really not consider that lecturers have a social life too?!!

:o))

Uid 123

8.30 a.m. - 10.00 final preparation for learning and teaching committee (which I chair)

10.00-11.30 working on an online part of a large first year course, putting students into groups and uploading an online lecture (problematic!)

11.30-12.30 emailing, emailing, emailing

12.30-2.30 Chairing School Learning and Teaching committee

2.30-3.30 Continuing discussion with colleagues post-meeting

3.30-4.30 Responding to students via email who are having difficulty viewing an online lecture.

4.30-6.30 teaching preparation and sorting out documents/materials for weekend work.

Uid 126

I am cross with myself for having left this entry until several days after the event. Friday was a long day and, by the time I got home, family concerns and planning for a Monday meeting and workshop took over.

As usual, an early start; breakfast, dog walk, and then time to read and to gather books about writing in preparation for the Teachers as Writers group on Monday. I am making a selection of readings about writing and the teaching of writing which busy teachers will find helpful and be able to read in the course of their working lives. I am struck by how little recent research there is in this area. I am able to take the morning in a rather more leisurely fashion as I have agreed to meet a doctoral student at her place of work which is fairly near my home. She has huge family pressures and so this saves her an extra journey and, I discover, allows me to re-read her latest chapters at home with a cup of coffee that I have brewed. Her subject is a really fascinating one and I am thinking about the way many part-time students, which usually means full-time workers and family members, have to write and read for a thesis, carving out time between all the other responsibilities and demands and developing a way of writing that does not allow for too much dillydallying once the time is there. For women, especially, there is also the way that they involve their children in understanding what hey are doing, and this is certainly true of this student.

Her subject is, as I said, really interesting and derives from a project in which she was thoroughly immersed. So I realise that what she has given me to read so far sounds more like a dispassionate report than an engagement with the issues and human unevenness and indeterminacies of the lived experience. We talk about this and she laughs; she can address that. This is a tricky thing to manage – the balance between the immersed and passionate insider and the capacity to draw back and make sense of what happened. The story she has to tell is, I think, a really compelling and important one, one that is very relevant today that relates to the care of our most deprived children. We spend an hour talking about the work. This is a student I have inherited. I am not sure if I am moving her in a welcome direction, or, indeed, whether she will manage to find the time to complete this writing.

I think about the work in the drive home and then, on to the university. I begin also to think about a week’s module on alternative curriculum planning I shall be contributing to at the end of next term. I had wanted to do something about pupil voice and starting with the child, but my colleagues have prevailed upon me to focus on the performing arts. I will still show how we can start with the child, but there will be an imperative to produce something at the end of the time. I am thinking about using giant puppets and a procession with willow framed lanterns. Since there is so little time during the teaching period I shall have to have chosen a theme. At the moment I am thinking The Odyssey, creation myths or maybe Ananse stories – or trickster stories from round the world, using Alan Garner’s book The Guiser. I want to refer to the work of Artichoke, Knee High, Welfare State and No Fit State circus. I am always struck by how limited students’ experience of theatre tends to be, apart from the drama graduates. Many of them state musicals as their preferred genre and I think that that does not transpose to primary school experience very successfully.

I arrive at the university and have lunch with colleagues. We discuss cuts, potential threats to the work we do, admissions, promotions, the coming week’s teaching. I find a colleague who absolutely brilliantly agrees to fill in an empty slot for me in our equality, diversity and inclusion workshops and help another colleague with a sign up sheet for a day of visits to various museums and wildlife centres. She then returns the favour. It is a fiddly administrative ICT job which somehow works better with two. I have a bitty afternoon altogether. There are e-mails to write and ends to tie up because I will not be in the university on Monday. I had hoped to leave sooner but small jobs pile up. Students have been doing maths and science audits today and so there is a lot of tension and the release of tension for both staff and students. I find that, as course director, I spend quite a lot of time talking with both students and colleagues. I think that it is important but it bothers me that maybe I spend too much time on it. Other colleagues seem to have a way of limiting the time they spend on this. I feel that it smoothes the running of things, but it also eats up time.

I have been invited to a gala opening of anniversary celebrations for the local puppet theatre. I am attending with a colleague and we find ourselves nipping in to the local supermarket for a quick bite rather than the more leisurely meal we had planned. The performance is inventive and thought-provoking, though perhaps lacks narrative drive. My colleague gets the giggles in the middle but it has been a good outing for her after a stressful week. I drive her to the station and am keen to be home as my son has come to stay to look after our ailing dog while I visit my mother for the weekend. I sit down to a late supper with him and we discuss politics, the quiz from last week’s Guardian, the sunflower seeds exhibition, and probably much else –red wine is consumed and I spend just a short time reading before I switch offthe light.

Uid 127

Share Project

Friday 15th October, 2010

It’s 12.05am on Friday morning, and I’m sitting at my kitchen table, marking a few more scripts. I know today (although it seems like it should be tomorrow, because I haven’t slept yet) is going to be a write-off, because I’m timetabled to spent 6 hours in the lab teaching. That’s an interesting way of putting it, isn’t it? The fact that I’d consider contact time with my students as not doing my job, because I won’t be doing the paperwork that’s mounting up on my desk…

In reality, I know teaching students isn’t a waste of time at all, and I thoroughly love running practicals – it’s actually my favourite part of teaching. It’s just frustrating that I’ve got so caught up in the rest of the job, the admin, the paperwork, the management and so on, that I’ve lost sight of what being a lecturer is all about – about enthusing our students about the subject which we’re passionate about. Maybe I need to sit back every now and again and write a diary more often – remind myself of why I’m here, why I’ve got into this life.

9pm, and I’m back at my computer, checking up on the emails that have been pouring in all day. The kids are in bed, the husband is doing the washing up, and having already spent an hour or so in the stupidly early hours of the morning doing that marking, and 7 hours on my feet during ‘normal’ working hours, I’ve still got plenty to do to fill a little extra time today, because the work has continued to pour in, even though I’ve not been there to collect it.

I find it quite interesting that so many people (students, friends outside of University life, and even some University colleagues apply here) don’t appreciate that academics can be out of the office literally all day. I have been known to put on my email out of office assistant to let people know that while ‘I’m not on holiday, but I won’t be checking my emails during the day because of teaching loads, so please be patient while waiting for a reply, because I will get back to you as soon as I actually get a chance to sit in front of a computer’.

Still, I did have an enjoyable day today teaching in the lab. The students were animated and enthusiastic, asking lots of questions and really getting involved. And I always deliberately make time for a proper lunch break out of the office when I’m running a double practical, so for once I got some fresh air, a decent coffee and a chance to eat my sandwiches somewhere other than my desk. I won’t be doing much more work this evening. I got that marking finished before I went to bed this morning, and with it being Saturday tomorrow I can do a bit extra then to cut down the to do list, because I shouldn’t get too many extra jobs over the weekend. Time for a coffee, a few biscuits, and a chance to talk to my friends online…

Uid 128

5.25 Up to get ready for work - as usual, the house is a tip so it's feed the dogs, load the dishwasher, get breakfast, wake the husband then off for a half hour walk round the park. My favourite part of the morning - birds just waking up and time for thinking about the day ahead.

Leave home at 7.10 to avoid the traffic - it worked, arrived at work before 8am. Time for a coffee with colleagues before actually starting work

8.20 - 20 minutes with a distressed student (2nd year Dip HE Nursing)who is having a difficult time with her family. So much of my student support role involves just being available to students to listen and support. I feel priveleged that students trust me enough to come an talk to me about such really difficult things in their lives.

8.45 - 2nd year student: husband left her last night; has 2 children under 6 and going into clinical placement soon. Needs to consider going part-time; advice re financial support etc. More tears to mop up!

9.00 - individual tutorial for re-submission of first assignment on programme. Lots of good material already there but advice given regarding use of literature to support discussion. Another student with major issues - just emerging from abusive relationship, so the tutorial also takes a bit of a counselling turn.

9.30 - handing out clinical skills workbooks to 150 first year students. I love to see their enthusiasm!

10.00 - preparation for CPD module. Brand new module running for the first time. Planning to include lots of online work - Journal and/or WebQuest and to adapt the onlin role play i use in my pre-reg module. 3 PBL sessions - think I will get them to look at identifying care needs, choices re location of care and end of life care.

10.30 - another student, this time 2nd year and well known to me. Big family problems here and in Columbia. Dad ignoring his angina, mum pretending everything is fine. Not surprising this girl's eating disorder has come back with a vengeance!

11.10 - marking log books (adult nurses views of the other branches). Thank goodness there is going to be a new curriculum - this is a huge amount of work for students and staff!!

12md - lunch-time at my desk (at least the workmen on the building site next door have gone for lunch and we can open the windows). Colleague has just been round to talk me through setting up my i-Pad to use at work - now I can really get going with it!

1pm - APPL group (similar to personal tutor group). 11am lecture cancelled so only 2 students stayed 9the 2 who changed from adult to child branch and have just taken a year out. Very enthusiastic and glad to be back - no major issues

1.30 - preparation time for CPD module until 2.40 when another student came to talk about her problems. Tis is a difficult one as there are issues here with regard to another student and I am going to have to take advice here.

Hopefully I will be able to leave early-ish today - I've been here late every day this week and it's Brownie night tonight. Being a children's nurse, it is really valuable to see children doing normally, healthy things!

Uid 131

Fridays, in term time, are my days for working from home. Today had to be an exception this morning, as I had a meeting to discuss programme surveys.

So I came in at about 8:30, dealt with emails and paperwork and the like until 10 am and then went to this meeting. This is a meeting of all undergraduate programme managers to discuss the results of the undergraduate programme surveys and how they may feed into our NSS performance. Even that way of expressing it makes clear quite how pointless the meeting feels. Findings: most students are pretty happy; some are not. There are some things we can do better, but also some things that students can do better. We cannot, for example, improve library resources to the point where they don’t have to buy any books, and we need to convey that message. We could have more time to do things better if we didn’t have to have these meetings.

A lot of the time was spent despairing. In part, the kind of despairing which has been going on in all the meetings I attended this week: what on earth is to come of us, post-Browne. How are things going to change? What do we need to do about it? Worries that this is just a dreadful step all round are combined with worries that we will not survive in this ‘brave new world’; that we get where you are due to reputation rather than facts, and that the facts might find us out. Worry that, if the evidence of the programme survey is anything to go by, there are some people who seriously need to get their act together. I heard stories of colleagues who have not yet met their personal tutees and dissertation students; students who are already being abandoned and ignored. A few people – but enough to explain a less that 100% satisfaction rate. A different sort of despair: really demoralising, because I came away from the meeting thinking that I can work as hard as I can, and I still can’t make a difference.

Meeting ended at about 11:30. I am determined to go home and at least have an afternoon working from home. My goal is to have at least one day a week when I can read. My job ought to involve far more reading than it does. But I finish a few more emails: to a GCSE student worried about what A levels to choose (I like her: please apply to us!); an opportunity for some of my students I want to draw their attention to; a long discussion with a publisher about why I can’t get into CATS, and why, when I get in, all my footnotes seem to have gone; a query about a pg dissertation I have to third mark, because the first two markers can’t agree (giving rise to fear – an old colleague (who struggles to get on with people) and a new colleague already failing to find a way to agree – I despair again of working with academics); correspondence with a Faculty officer who’s done some work that is going to need redoing because she didn’t check with me first as to whether anything had changed (it has);

I buy lunch. I go home. I read. I’m reading round a project I’m starting on digital literacy and legal research. What are digital natives; how do they think differently and what do we need to do about it? I read the best part of a book, making general notes as I go – I’ll return to the detail when I’m being more specific.

I’m excited by it, but also, again, despairing – will anybody listen to me. This is a new way of thinking about what we do, and I already can see what barriers are going to be thrown up, and how easy it would be to not bother. But I'm going to bother. I realise that negative thinking is not doing me good – this has been a day of reminding myself of the problems in my environment, and I need a weekend break to regroup. Already – it’s only week 3 of term!

More emails. A decision to take about an International applicant- why does his academic reference only tell me that he’s really good at bowls. And why did the senior colleague who has advised him several times not copy me in, given that I’m the person who takes the decision. And, at 4:45, a bombshell: a realisation that the fact that my footnotes have gone is only the half of it – both myself and the journal editor have failed to notice that the wrong version of my article has gone to be typeset. Human error – don’t want to beat myself up about it. But 2 humans making the same error is a problem. I fire off an email to the editor explaining what has happened. I worry about it, such that I can’t really focus on anything else. It’s Friday afternoon, so I treat myself to a bubble bath as an attempt to relax. I can’t. My mind keeps going round the mistakes I’ve made. I update my Facebook: …”is sometimes astonished as to how stupid she can be” – an attempt to make light of it. I cook supper, watch TV, consciously try to wind down. I manage it in the end. I’ve had years of learning how to wind down by myself, to leave work behind, to put it in perspective. As a single woman I have to do this alone – married friends are spending time with their partners and kids. In any event, I know if I’m with people, I’ll just talk about it. I know as an academic it’s difficult to switch off. Ideally, I’d switch off the stress and keep with the enjoyable things over the weekend, but that’s easier said than done. I need better emotional discipline. I know that I need to take this weekend off, anyway – no sneaky emailing; no reading anything that has anything to do with work. And this too will pass.

Uid 136

I try to keep Fridays free of teaching and other commitments as far as possible, and often work at home. For this I need Section Head and Head of School to approve, but there have never been any problems, and over the years students have come to realise that I am not available to them at this point. I find I need time away from telephones, e mails and students dropping by to get on with serious pieces of work. This week I have a major conflict of interests.

I have had a paper accepted by a major journal in the field but I need to complete the 'minor amendments' by the end of October. I have two conference presentations to make next week, and both the presentations and the conference papers to accompany them have to be completed. I have to do some amendments to a draft of another papar due for submission as soon as possible, and I am the last one to comment, so I am holding up the team. So, I could have a 'research day' - a treat! - and in fact I probably need to do this.

On the other hand, with my Programme Leader hat on I need to be producing review documents and new modules for the forthcoming Programme Review; our University is using a new continuous assessment approach rather than a 'big bang' one day event approach, and this is taking a bit of getting used to. Documents have to be prepared and uploaded into 'evidence folders' on a shared drive and as external reviewers get access to these folders and the documents within them, these must be done right, another job needing peace and quiet.

Programme leaders also need to produce Annual Monitoring Reports for 2009-10 - that will have to wait until the review documents are complete I think. However they can't be put off ad infinitum as they too need to be scrutinised by our professional body and state registration body by a particular date.

Another admin hat is School Teaching and Learning co-ordinator, and as such I need to be reviewing and revising School policies on a variety of issues. The most pressing is our peer review scheme, but there are others to revise, and new policies required in response to university initiatives such as assessment strategies including electronic submission and marking, a new student records interface and a long term risk analysis. These need to be prepared for discussion at our School Teaching and Learning Committee in a few weeks time.

And talking of teaching - there is a pile of about 140 second year lab reports waiting to be marked, and with the conference next week I am not sure when I will be able to start marking them if I don't do it today. By the time I get back from the conference I will also have a pile of first year essays to mark. I have already written the lectures for next week (pre-conference) but need to go over them, and also to prepare the lectures for the week I come back, which includes a couple of hours on a new topic for me which will require some preparation. And then I have a project student's plan to go through so she can start lab work, and a couple of dissertation outlines to approve....

So, that is what is milling around in my head on Thursday, as I plan what i need to take home with me tonight. But I must stop for now and see a project student - we need to go over her draft method. When I come back to this diary, it will be to say what I actually do tomorrow!

well, I did spend some time working on my two presentations, most of the day, but felt guilty for not writing references for students. I did the corrections to the joint paper but not my single author one and I did go over some lecture material for next week. However I feel overall I didn't get much done. I hae this constant sense of frustration that there is always a lot of urgent things to do and never enough time to do them. I know I didn't settle well to work and was interrupted when my son came home and needed help on homework, but even so I could have done more. Need to stop having or rather trying to have a family life!

Uid 138

Semester is well underway now (end of week 4), but the end seems very very far away. I am teaching a new course (never been taught in the department before), and the continual slog of preparing three lectures, one lab and one tutorial every week is getting me down – thank god I was disciplined enough to semi-prepare ‘one lecture a day’ over the summer: my task would be much more difficult otherwise … but it does mean that I have been living and breathing this stuff for over three months now… and there are still two months of it left.

The students are struggling though, and I am aware that in my desire to teach them a whole load of interesting stuff, I am not allowing sufficient time for in-class exercises and that they are finding it all a bit stressful. But I have been given an impossible course spec to follow: I will only be able to cover about a third of it (and even that seems like too much now that I know the students better). I wonder if the people who put this course spec together REALLY considered the market? My guess is not: so much of what we do we do because we think it is a good idea (and don’t believe that we could ever be wrong), when in fact even we make mistakes.

Like our PGT Masters programmes that assumed we would get lots of high-quality committed students who would feed our PhD programmes: how wrong we were. I have a radical proposal on how we could redesign our MSc programmes so as to take into account what we now know about the market – but know that the HoD and the professor in charge of PGT strategy would dismiss it as ‘lowering standards’. So today I got together some courage, took it to another professor who said she would support my putting it forward. Scary thought – but the university is determined to have us take on more and more overseas PGT students, and eventually we will have to start being less precious.

And in the midst of our worry of diminishing resources, there is yet another proposal for us to offer yet another course. We already offer too many. Way too many. But every academic member of staff wants an honours or masters-level course in their own area, and our Teaching Committee is too afraid to say no to individuals for the sake of the common good. We all teach too much, leaving little time for funding applications etc.

And then the day got better – a bright, cheerful, enthusiastic junior Honours student popped in to say hello. I am his new advisor of studies and he simply came in to meet me. Usually I only see the students for whom I am advisor when they have problems, so it was a delight to chat with someone so keen, lively and pleasant … without problems. Make me remember why I do this job – there are lots of undergraduates like him who I seldom see because they just get on with the job of being a student, cause (and have) no problems, have a fulfilling and challenging time, and come out the end as happy graduates. We tend to forget them amidst the concerns with the struggling, problematic students (and all the other stuff we have to do …)

I am supporting some members of staff in other departments in the use of a peer-review tool: it is so refreshing to speak to people from outside my own insular department. Nice to know that there is another world out there. The day ended with a departmental seminar from my colleague who is also working on this project – he was witty, relaxed and convincing. We have finding it hard to overcome the scepticism of academic staff who believe that students cannot be trusted to review their peers’ work. We are surprised that the most vocal objections came from the PhD student tutors rather than the academic staff themselves! And between us we discuss the fact that we found that peers’ marks (while highly correlated with tutors’) tend to be very slightly lower than tutors’ marks, that an academic member of staff had observed that PhD student tutors mark slightly lower than academic staff, and we speculate that it could also be that new academics mark slightly lower than their more experienced colleagues (now there’s an interesting study!)

Rush off for a two hour drive to Forfar to attend the opening of a neighbours’ art exhibition. Nice to unwind at the end of very hard week.

Uid 139

15th October

4am Woke in the middle of the night thinking my way through a presentation on designing courses for employability. Some good ideas but they haven’t been resolved and more ideas kept coming until I’d heard the clock strike 4, 5 and 6. I probably had a bit of sleep in between.

7.45 Left for work by bike. Saw a colleague at Newington Causeway to talk about the weather and the traffic (what else?)

8.30 Started in the office. Emails and I need to sort out exactly what the topic I need to present on is for next Wednesday. Is it really Design for Employability or something slightly different?

8.45 Emails. A student visa issue. Teaching room for Intellectual Property Development unit. A student with a draft project report. Teaching this afternoon. Nokia photographs…

9am Working on the presentation for next week. It seems to be getting there and the 4am brainwaves seem to be able to be incorporated reasonably well.

9.45am Brief meeting about the visa issue which I think will be able to be resolved quite easily.

10am Business and Enterprise unit on the topic of types of business and enterprise. A rather empty class because the students are having to do a presentation for the Group project unit this afternoon. We haven’t cracked that one, but it’s their loss. Those that were there found it quite interesting and covered stuff that they didn’t know.

11.30 Back briefly mid-class to pick up a couple of phone messages and sort one of them out. No time for the other. Also picked up student membership forms for the IED. Also picked up comments from research supervisor on my research report. They’re useful and need to be thought about.

11.45 Back in the class to continue

12.45 Back in the office. Phone call to sort out teaching at the end of October.

1pm Lunch

Lunch got interrupted but then that’s not unexpected. I need to sort out a book order and if I can get it done today that would be good. Also need to sort out a teaching contract for someone who was doing a bit of cover whilst I was on jury service. The forms issue seems to be going round and round and I think we have now found the right one to use.

2pm Class. The students have some difficulties with the workshops so I will need to sort this out, which I promise to do at 3pm for them. The 2pm class is supposed to be on Conceptual Design evaluation, but I discover that they haven’t done anything on conceptual design (which they should have done before lunch) so I end up covering that with them instead. Which is probably rather better received than something about evaluating a stage they haven’t covered…

3pm Head to try and sort out their workshop issue but I can’t find a specific technician. General discussion with other technicians doesn’t sort out the issue. I head back to class with the issue unresolved.

3.20pm Continue class having explained to the students that I haven’t sorted out their issue and give them the promise that I’d get a message to them on Monday about it, which means I will need to remember it.

The second session is more about use of creativity and processes they can use to develop it, which is a topic I really enjoy covering, even if we need to cover it rather quicker than I’d like to and with less hands-on stuff.

4pm Finish class and head back to the office initially. Go and find the head technician who is clear that the issue can be sorted and who has a method for doing this. Great.

4.20pm Book order written up but not signed off.

Some other suggestions for the visa issue. I’m arranging to see the student on Monday morning and we’ll see where we’ve got to on it.

Manage to leave the office by 5pm which is good as it’s a club evening which means I’d like to leave home by 7pm.

Uid 141

6:50am Woke up before the alarm worrying. I am about to start teaching my brand new, large undergraduate course and I just feel overwhelmed about sorting out all the niggling things. So woke up with things spinning around in my head: practicals to photocopy; webpages to write; assessments to edit; lectures to write and so on. I feel terribly behind despite doing nothing but organising this for the last two months.

7:10 Finally get up and start making breakfast.

8am Escape, briefly to shower. One of the few times in the day when I am left in peace and not interrupted. Often good thinking time. Not today. Brain freewheeled away from useful organising the day to remembering being at College as an undergrad.

8:10 Free time over. Rush to get me and my daughter dressed and out of the door by

8:30 when we cycle to school and then me on to work. It's quite nice cycling - only one thing to do. Requires full attention and it wasn't a bad day. Just a bit chilly. And I believe the exercise does me good though sometimes it doesn't feel that way.

9am Into work. Spot a teaching assistant as I go into the building and arrange to see her in 15minutes (time for me to get my computer on, get my head in gear and be ready to go).

9:05 Get to my office and worry about all the things I need to do. Joined by another teaching fellow who was also worrying so we had a chat worrying at each other. Doesn't help really but still nice to know I am not alone.

9:20 Quick flash of email deleting (spam) until my TA arrives. Sorted our her role on this new course only to find she's not here next week the first week. Aaaagh! Brief flat spin. Recovery. Saved up flat spin for later.

9:55 Have to move bike from bike shed! Due to our building still being a building site, they were closing the shed at a moment's notice. Last thing I need is ten minutes running around to sort out my bike.

10:05 Late for my 10am meeting with students to all sort out our new labs (another aspect of this being a new building). Everything was still in crates. Thanks to their help, only a few things are still in crates and a couple of things are set up and ready to be used.

11:45 Start of terms supervisions with my students. Nice to have a chat with them. It feels months since I last talked to students like this.

12:25 More emails and head of teaching popped in just to discuss the bike fiasco. I like it when people pop in - better than email by far.

12:30 Off to forage for a sandwich through the building site and have a bit of a break to clear my head. Fretting a lot now as I haven't had much time to solve the problems I have to solve.

1:05 Entered project marks into the project mark system. Another small but time consuming task. I had to do it then because somebody messed up the deadline and moved it from next Wed to Friday. Harrumph. Fortunately also spotted another TA and interrupted to see if she could fill in for the one who is away. She could. Hurrah! Phew!

1:45 Went for a meeting. Other participants late and delayed it but only after 20 mins of waiting. Still, chance to socialise with those that did turn up!

2:10 Fiddled around with the webpages that I was worrying about at 7am this morning.

2:25 Meeting started. Basically a getting to know you exercise. Would be nice ordinarily but I haven't time for pleasantries today. Or so it feels.

3pm That flat spin caught up with me. I attempted three different things all at once. And did them all badly. After half an hour, I caught myself doing this, stopped and did just one thing: wrote some webpages. Feel very anxious but at least I got it done!

4pm Talked to Sally Fincher about the course. Not sure how coherent I was given my day. Hey ho.

4:25. Home time. I was going to work this evening but actually, I just needed to stop thinking. So walked the dog with my family, had take away dinner and generally chilled out as much as I could. Which wasn't much but it was a start and the weekend did the rest.

Uid 142

6:30 am - manage to get up in time to do a (very!) short yoga session this morning - and still get on my bike before 8am, so as to avoid the school run 4x4s!

8:15 - check email - etc, then remember at just after 9 that I'd not changed out of the biking stuff & students were immenent. They didn't show - so over to the coffee shop with a colleague - then joined by another, to discuss mix of social & work related things.

Uid 149

I was out late last night as a result of a meeting in Derby about research plans and possible links with overseas universities, so it was a bit of a low start to the day. However, emails were composed concerning next week’s teaching and other administrative matters and fired off before we began our first meeting of the day at 10 a.m. I am ‘mentoring a number of colleagues with a view to increasing their research productivity in time for the REF deadline which now looks likely to be at the end of 2013. I had quite a jolly discussion with this particular colleague, who, in addition to her teaching role at the university has embarked on a taught doctorate in health psychology at another institution. Fortunately for us, as part of the work requirements on this taught doctorate she’s encouraged to submit items for publication, so that helps us a good deal. There are opportunities to collect data and design health education interventions too, so that gives her something to write about. Then it’s a meeting with a final year undergraduate student about her project, so we have a conversation about research strategies and different kinds of analytic technique. During this another colleague comes in and asks me why I haven’t replied to the emails she sent me yesterday. I’d glanced through them on the train, of course, but hadn’t done anything with them. She’s still resentful because she called a meeting earlier in the week which I couldn’t attend because I was teaching. When will I reply? Soon. But when? It might be this evening. Oh that’s too late. Once the student has gone I read her email again and give a brief but supportive reply, instead of doing what I had intended to start this afternoon. Finally, I can get on with some work. I have recently been awarded a small grant to do a pilot study on infection control in the ambulance service and as part of this is to pay for a research assistant to do the fieldwork and a literature review, I need to fill in the university’s forms – a post authorisation form, a job description and a person specification, even though the post hardly merits the effort, being only a very short term part time one. I find them on the intranet and save them, in the hope of finding something to fill in the boxes. Meanwhile the emails are arriving thick and fast, many with comments in about a scheme to allow staff to have intensive research periods. I shall have to compile the various views into another iteration of the policy sometime over the weekend. In the meantime, I am tied to the office because I am ‘available’ – that is, I have advertised today as an availability session when students can drop in and see me. Fortunately they are leaving me alone. Once my advertised hours are completed, I pick up the laptop and charger and a few bits of paper I shall need for the weekend and go home. In the evening I reply to more emails, concerning next week’s teaching – finding class lists, resolving questions about whether students on masters programmes have personal tutors (I thought not, but one has to check) and then a couple of documents arrive from a colleague at Nottingham. One’s a conference paper about the presence of compassion in the discourse of health professionals which needs my comments quickly as it has to be submitteed shortly, in advance of the conference. I have a look through it and spot a few errors and a whole load of new interpretations which can be made of the data so I write them in, in a different colour so they can be seen. It’s still a rather vulnerable paper because there isn’t much data, but perhaps there will be enough to pique the interest of a conference audience. By the time we do anything else with it, the remainder of the interviews on which it is based will have been transcribed and added to the data set so it will be of greater interest to potential publishers. Around about 11.00 I send it back to him. There’s just time to read through the second paper – a study of self-help in Norway – and think some preliminary thoughts. Hmm. It looks like social policy, but it will need a better developed theoretical framework to hit the spot for a social policy journal. I must ask the rest of the team involved where they’re hoping to place it, and that will help in refocusing it. Midnight and time for bed. I wonder if I will get a chance to do some more work on my book-manuscript-in-progress tomorrow?

Uid 151

My working day begins very differently to normal, yes I have the job of getting everyone organised for the day ahead and then I set off to get some new glasses from the opticians. My eyesight has been compromised of late and I have been having dizzy/ visual disturbances. On speaking with the optician I am advised that i have been suffering aura migraines.

I now have time to mark some research proposals for my group of students who are embarking on their first pieces of research. I am excited by the areas of study the students are wanting to research and can reflect when i was in their position ready to undertake my first piece of research. What i thought was a small piece of research looked in fact more like a national piece of research and i had to refine my area of research to be very specific. This was the issue for most of these students. I am really excited by the proposals and look forward to my tutorials next week to further develop their thoughts on their proposal.

As I am working in Sheffield today and not my usual commute to Derby I take the luxurious opportunity of going to have lunch with my parents. We exchange banter about our week and the issues that have arisen since we last met.

My final job of the day is going to an early years setting to undertake tutorials. I am immensley pleased with the students who are undertaking a foundation degree whilst working full time. I know the challenges this brings as I was in their position juggling work, study and family life with my husband and four daughters.

I finish relatively early especially as i do not have the drive home and join my family to start the weekend. I know I will still do some work over the weekend but I feel that I am on top of my current work load and the positive responses from the students enegises me for the following week.

Uid 152

Non-Working Day

7-7.30am Cuddle up in bed with eldest child

7.30-8.30am Get children & I, have breakfast

8.30-9.30am Housework

9.30-10.30am Check emails, play with children

10.30-11.30am Health Visitor visit

11.30-12.30 Prepare & eat lunch

12.30-2.30pm Rest, youngest child's nap

2.30-5.30pm Grandparents visit

5.30-7pm Tea time for children, Bath time, Bedtime

7pm Prepare evening meal, check emails, quick bit of social media stuff

8pm Eat meal & watch DVD

10pm Bed

Uid 153

Reflections on quality assurance

This month I am in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, about to start a quality review of the Computer Science department of a women’s university in the city. Yesterday I travelled here and tomorrow the review begins, so today has been a hiatus.

This evening I met panel members of my review team and three other teams, also working at the same university. We were asked by our hosts to develop a supportive and collegial relationship. We did this beautifully over a pleasant meal. We are from the UK, USA and Australia and all have the same concern that, while quality has to be assured, it should not be at the expense of constraining and stifling the creativity of the university staff.

Tomorrow we will do our best to do good for the women of Saudi Arabia.

Uid 154

For some reason I woke at 2 am. I tried to get back to sleep but thoughts about what I had to do and guilty awareness that I was going to have to stop work at 4 today became so insistent that by ¼ to 3 I decided to throw in the towel, make a cup of tea and get on with reading a PhD I’m external for. I get a lot of requests to examine and between September and December I’ll have been external for 3 PhDs and an EdD and internal for a PhD. So many come to me because I’m interested in what might be described as innovative methodologies and because I work in a Russell Group and have a respectable publications list I think I’m seen as kosher – at least that’s what I’ve been told. I’m certainly not a soft touch. I might be doing all these vivas but I did turn down 3 within the same period – I’ve taken the decision to only do things which really, really interest me now. Having said that, I do direct a very large professional doctorate programme which means that every year we’re looking for 15 - 20 examiners and I have a sort of suspicious belief that if I say yes to others, others will say yes to us.

The particular thesis I am looking at at the moment has turned out not to be quite as interesting as I’d thought and I remember looking at the clock and seeing it was 5.30 and the next thing is I’m being woken by the alarm. This is set for 6.20 and is really the very last time I can manage to get up, get ready and be on the way to avoid the worst of the traffic. So it’s a mad dash panic, complicated by having to remember to put things for the weekend into the car – my son is coming home from university and I’m taking him to Norfolk to see his girlfriend – hence the 4 pm stop.

My journey takes around 30 minutes if I leave before 6.40 but today I don’t get out until 7 and as I leave the motorway and start to come into the city I can see it’s going to be slow. Nonetheless it’s only 7.40 as I turn into the car part and bag the last pay and display space. It’s £3.20 for a full day but is, many of us think, preferable to paying the £600 a year for a space which isn’t even guaranteed if there are open days, graduations or any other events that the university stages and for which they expect us to do our corporate duty, present the institution in a good light, and give up the space.

In my office I settle down to emails, opening mail, and marking scripts.

At 9.45 I go and see the office manager about some problems around one of the admin staff who works part time, who has too many things to do and who is having difficulties prioritising. This has meant me doing more of her job because students and colleagues who haven’t got things passed on to them that they should have had, come to me and I end up doing it. We have tried various ways of helping out by providing priority and task lists and by giving loads of advance warning but it’s not working. There is going to have to be a total review of admin work loads because we are struggling along, having lost people who, in the current financial situation have not been replaced.

At 10.15 I join with a colleague and we do some more work on a bid for research funding we are preparing for the ESRC. By 12.30 we have managed to complete another section on the JeS form and are feeling pretty pleased with ourselves.

I go and make a cup of tea and then go back to emails and marking – I had 20 6,000 20rd scripts in my pigeon hole this morning and I know there are around another 20 to come by the end of next week.

At 2 I leave and go to the hotel where there is to be a residential weekend for doctoral students. I am taking on a new professional doctorate supervisee and I’m meeting her for the first time this afternoon. I spend 2 hours with her, talking about her planned project, discussing how we will work together and drawing up timelines.

By 4.15 I’m on the road – I can’t wait to see my son but I feel a bit desperate about what I haven’t got done today – and won’t because I will need to sit down and listen to all his stories about his first weeks at Uni. Bugger the guilt for once.

Uid 155

Quieter day today - if I'd not been so busy recently I could have worked at home, but I needed to go in to see a couple of students as it was the only time I could fit them in. This did mean that the speed of the day was much more relaxed than normal and managed to complete a few of those tasks that I have been putting off; as always, they did not take nearly as long as I feared! The first of my autumn semester colds arrived yesterday and I felt jolly awful. Today I felt well enough to go in because it was an easy day: if I was on the tills at Marks and Spencer I think I would have called in sick. Thankfully I could leave at 2.30. Because I am feeling poorly, the writing of this is the only bit of work completed after 3pm: most unusual! Silly that I need to be ill before I have a Friday evening completely off.

Uid 157

Today was the first time that I have been part of the interview panel for an academic post. A lot of preparation was needed before the 15th - reading all the applications and the short listing procedure. Then re-reading the short listed candidates' CVs and applications. The day itself started off with the candidates all giving short presentations. As the post was a teaching post, all the candidates had been given the same title for their presentations. It was quite remarkable how varied the talks were, both in content as well as in delivery.

As the candidates were having a tour of the department and lunch I was able to catch up on some of the many e-mails that appear in my in box each day. I also had to meet up with a guest lecturer who was scheduled to give a lecture to the students on one of the modules I organise. This module has a considerable input from various experts from the local hospital and coordinating these individuals takes time.

The whole afternoon was devoted to the interviews themselves. This was a fascinating experience for me, as well as a slightly nervous one. After a number of hours of careful questioning and discussion a decision was made. I was enhausted; I imagine the condidates felt similar. I finished the day off with a beer with some colleagues.

Uid 158

Another diary entry to be made today. I feel quite slack having read some of the extracts from others. My day today will be made replete with meetings to chair. This afternoon I am chairing an interview panel and the presentations are in the morning. In between I have a meeting of Postgraduate Course directors to chair too.

All this pales into insignificance, however, compared to the small matter of the student who last week confessed to me, in no uncertain terms, their feelings for me. Their subsequent actions were such that the effect (psychologically) on me is disturbing. Although their actions up to now could not yet be described as "stalking" I am now able to empathise with victims of such behaviour.

Emails answered, meetings and interviews in the main successfully completed, and the student in question has been seen leaving campus. (I hope I don't have to refer to this in my next diary entry!)

Spent some â€œme timeâ€ in the laboratory getting an old piece of equipment to work on a new computer. This will give the experiment a new lease of life.

Now it is moderately late on Friday so I can leave all those other pressing matters for the weekend.

Uid 159

Still chasing up personal tutees who have not yet made an appointment.

Tutees from last year requesting references as they are applying for either a year in industry or a study abroad year - they do not feel that their 2nd. year tutor knows them well enough. Have to chase their final first year results - it would be so much easier if the information was made available to tutors without having to chase up the figures.

Stayed at home today to make a start on marking 120 essays but distracted by analysis of the Browne report and the predictions of HE funding cuts in the Common Spending Review.

As the parent of twin girls, who are nearly 14, I am worried about future tuition fees and, with the changes to tax thresholds and child benefit, a future loss in income.

I enjoy my job but wonder if i need to look at whether working full-time will result in a loss of income as well as affecting future HE tuition fees. I feel that these are very scary times and I am not so sure that even those Institutions which feel that they can easily raise tuition fees will escape the need to downsize. The phrase 'perfect storm' sums up how i feel at present.

Uid 160

Friday is IR Theory day this year, so I woke at 6.15am to thoughts of the relationship between political theory and international relations. I often find this: that I spend inordinate amounts of time thinking about my lectures, not just how to put them together, but the subject matter itself. When I first started teaching, I imagined that eventually you reach the stage that you have perfected a lecture and can just roll it out year on year with little or no change. But I find that I want to rethink mine even after I've given them four or five times. I'm not convinced that I got it right this time, it seemed to drag a bit in the middle. Perhaps it needs to be less historical. No doubt I'll be reflecting on this one again next year.

The seminar that followed was crowded and relatively lively after a bit of hesitation. I'm always pleasantly surprised by students' willingness to engage with abstract theoretical thinking (ie what is the nature and purpose of IR Theory?). We were soon debating whether theories should be able to predict future events - the group was divided, but enthusiastic. Hopefully this bodes well for the year ahead.

After teaching, I dealt with two or three student issues: I am a subject leader and head of the Faculty's international exchange programme, so admin rears its head on a regular basis. Talked to five students who are looking forward to exchange periods in Prague and Dresden in the spring. We discussed the potential difficulties in terms of assessment here and there, the bureaucratic procedures etc. It's good that they want to go and I think it will make a real difference to their futures.

All of this activity goes on in an atmosphere of depression and anxiety about the future. I teach in a small social science department in a new university. We get little in terms of research support and have little postgraduate teaching. The Browne Review seems to see what I do as unimportant. Yet when I think about the impact we have in changing students' lives and the effect our graduates have on the local and wider communities, that makes me pretty angry.

Uid 165

Left for work earlier than I did the previous week as I'd forgotten that it takes close to an hour to get from home to the Barnsley campus in the morning. This meant I got there in plenty of time to set the classroom up properly this time and spent almost 30 minutes doing furniture moving. The tables are quite small (big enough for one person) and they collapse so they can be stacked easily against a wall. But doing this involves turning them on their side and banging them quite hard on the floor. I felt really sorry for the poor folks underneath (hoping it was way too early to be disrupting anyone).

In the process I jammed a fingernail, banged my shin and then gave myself a paper cut when I was setting up my flip charts. This face-to-face teaching malarkey is dangerous work! Give me an online learning environment with a group blog, a wiki and a webinar space any day.

I set the classroom out in a similar way to that which I had done on the main campus the day before but had to find a way to work with only have a screen on one wall rather than the screens on opposite walls I have in the main campus. Students when they walked in reacted immediately to the change in furniture layout and I used this to show them how they were reading the room semiotically so they were already grappling with the day's topic prior to starting class!

The class went really well - and followed the same format I'd used with the four classes the previous day. Interestingly one student who had asked me explicitly not to ask her to read out loud in class had said on twitter during the week that she was keen to play with the ipad again. So - when she got it in her mits and started doing the shakespeare concordance search she was quite excited. What was really amazing was that she voluntarily read out loud from the iPad to the class and said she found it much easier to read from it than from a book. Her confidence seems to have grown enormously this week. Last week she was saying in her blog how she was thinking of dropping out and this week she is reading out loud from an iPad in front of her peers! Big breakthrough. She's said on twitter this week that she's going to ask her Dad for an iPad for xmas and she's made an appointment to see me in my office hours on Friday. Hopefully we can do some more productive work then.

I did some online teaching in between my face-to-face classes and that was fantastic. The quality of student reflection and engagement in the third year group blog is really astounding. They're working at a really good level and already, this early in the course, engaging with peer learning without needing me to model it first. Really proud of them - and told them so! It's by far and away the most satisfying and rewarding teaching I'm doing at the moment.

The first year class was once again heaps of fun - lots of stomping around the room and banging the tables to the rhythm of the poetry. I kind of baffled them with prosody terms a smidge but that was really the point - of making them aware that all that technical stuff sits behind the poems. C once again felt the need to tell me the things he can't do - this time it was how he can't read poetry technically which is I suppose not as bad as him saying he has a phobia about writing about himself. I think it is going to be slowly slowly with him so he can build his confidence and not feel obliged to protect himself from failure.

I went straight home from campus and spent the rest of the afternoon and early evening working through the second year reflective blogs and giving the students formative feedback. This was quite hard going but reassuring. It's really clear to me that the workshops we've held over the last two weeks on reflective writing are having a big impact. Many - perhaps even most of them - are at least giving it a good go - and some of them are already writing at a deep, critically reflective level. With formative support I'm sure the rest of them will get there too.

Ready for a long weekend away to recover from the big week!

Uid 168

October 15th 2010

Today was ‘atypical’ again, but isn’t that exactly the point of this exercise? I begin by reading and responding to students’ overnight comments on the social media forum we are using as a discussion tool. It’s proving to be an excellent means of engagement and quick response to any emerging issues. At this stage I did not anticipate going into the University at all today – the first port of call was a trip to the dentist so he can let me know how much I will be charged for some remedial work. I’m a “pay as you go” customer and it turns out I’ll be paying about £450 over the next six weeks.

Then it’s a quick dash to the railway station to catch a train to a meeting in London. I’m on the editorial board for a magazine produced by the learned society for my discipline and we have two or three editorial meetings a year. To be perfectly honest I haven’t really got the time to spare today, but I’ve missed the last couple and I don’t want to get thrown off the board as it does really excellent work. For trips to London I usually employ one of those legal scam that get passed on by those in the know (I was told this one by a history professor at our institution); by getting a return to a station part-way and a one day travel card from there the cost of the journey is literally halved. The downside is that the train you get on has to actually stop at that station and today my schedule is too tight so I buy the full-price standard ticket which is more than £100. I’ll claim it back, but it still seems a waste to pay over the odds.

On the train I read the paperwork associated with an application by a postgraduate student to move from the limnal status of “advanced postgraduate” to full-blown PhD. The report is very thorough, I’m impressed by the amount of training that the student has undergone and the thought put into the project proposal. It is a social science thesis (I am the external adjudicator) so the process of transfer to full PhD works slightly differently to that operated in my own department. I can’t imagine that there will be any difficulties when we meet with the student, scheduled for the following week.

Once in London I walk to the offices of the learned society and get there just in time for the start of the meeting. We flesh out themes for the issues scheduled over the next twelve months and suggest possible authors to approach. The meeting goes well and actually ends after 2 hours rather than the originally scheduled 4 hours. I’m pleased I came – attendance was quite sparse, and it was a good call to get the expensive train; if I’d arrived half an hour later (which would have been the alternative on the next ‘cheap’ train) then I’d have missed a quarter of the proceedings.

On the train home I read some possible articles for a “Science in the News” assignment we will be setting for our first year students the following week. We want to go for topicality which means last minute planning and all of the possible stories this time are flawed in one way or another – one aim of the task is actually to get the students to consider weaknesses in general news reporting of science but on this occasion the coverage was actually quite accurate.

The early end to the London meeting means that I have a couple of hours at the University before lining up two evening activities. I’m able to get some preparation of resources done, notably papers for other tutors on a fist year module I convene and to load some other materials onto our VLE. I’d thought I was going to have to some in on Saturday to get these jobs sorted, so this is an unexpected bonus.

At 6pm it’s time for farewell drinks with a colleague who is retiring after nearly 30 years working in the Department. He has been an excellent researcher as well as making a very significant contribution to undergraduate teaching. Needless to say, in the current climate, he is not being replaced, so his loss is a big blow; several staff, myself included, are having to pick up additional lectures from his portfolio.

After an hour and a half I have to make my excuses – time to move on to a 40th birthday party. No rest for the wicked.

Uid 171

I could start this at midnight...I was up till 1.30 doing various bits of work, but I'll start it when the alarm rang at 7.25. It's interesting to see that I had a headache exactly one month ago today--I've just taken Syndol again. This monthly diary thing might make an interesting health journal!

So, up, dressed, toast, partner got toddler ready, train, nursery, and...

This is a non-classroom day for me. My first unhappy appointment was to present a case at a misconduct board--the same case that we discovered exactly one month ago. These entries are matching up well! The student was not present, as she had returned to Iran, so the Students' Union Education Officer was her advocate. There are two academics and another Students' Union person on the board, and I'm always very impressed by the professionalism of the students in those roles. I have not yet heard the outcome of the case, but since they agreed it was plagiarism, the student will fail the course. It's frustrating because we have so many things put into place to prevent this--the most effective of which is for the student's supervisor to read their work in draft. But the student has to submit the work for that to happen, and some of the international students (there's a fairly reliable geographical/cultural divide on this) believe that because they were strong students in their home country, they don't need these kinds of support. This student had other problems, but she was very surprised by the accusation. I did not mention in the hearing that the student repeated several times in her emails to me and my colleague that she didn't see how this could happen to her when she'd paid so much to the University...

Got a coffee and came back to the office, where I worked a long time on typing up reasons why certain assignments in our UG programme have to be excepted from the new university policy of allowing very late submissions. If we allow students to submit an assignment at the end of the year, then we can't discuss the answers in class or correct the scripts of the students who submitted on time--and without that feedback, they won't have the skills to do the next assignment. We're linguists in a school of English, so my colleagues don't understand the problem, since they believe that there are no right or wrong answers to an assignment--but, of course, in grammar or phonology there are. So, once again, I have to fight on behalf of my group (we've been demoted from 'department', so I can't use that word) for what will work for our students, increasing my reputation among the school administration as a pain in the backside.

Then responding to final-year student posts on our VLE regarding their ideas for dissertation research. So, while I don't teach on Fridays, I'll have about two hours' contact with students by writing the long responses that I write to their proposals. I do this all on the VLE as a kind of workshopping process. Other students and staff also contribute to the discussion of student work, but since I'm the course convenor, I'm the one making sure that everyone's work has a good amount of attention. There are all sorts of interesting ideas, as well as the predictable ones. I do get a bit tired of students wanting to study student use of 'like' and slang and tired topics like that, but we do tell them to propose something that really interests them, and I have to remind myself that what's old news to me wouldn't have been old news when I was 20.

Because the plagiarism panel was the only thing in my diary today, I gave my daughter the treat of coming to have lunch in Mummy's office. So, we had a picnic of our homemade lunch on the floor, looked at the doggy in my pop-up book about grammar (he represents prepositions!), and shared an end-of-week piece of cherry cake that had been marked down to half price in the teabar.

After lunch, I had a look at my Twitter feed and Facebook, and through that accessed articles about marking and the Browne report's repercussions. The only comforting thing re the govt actions against HE is that my university had such a severe retrenchment last year, we'll have less retrenchment to do than some other universities.

The UG Spring timetable was announced this afternoon, which meant I had to go through it with a fine-toothed comb looking for clashes that they had missed. For entirely mysterious reasons, the UG timetable is done without reference to the MA timetable, so that there are always clashes where someone's supposed to be teaching UG and PG at the same time. Of the 10 UG modules we teach next term, 3 had errors in the t/table.

I had planned to spend the afternoon on research--we've got a co-authored monograph that's due at the end of the month. I spent a half-hour on it, updating the end of one chapter and drafting a proposal for how we should go about the final read-through edit.

It's frustrating that I've spent most the afternoon on little and big admin chores. Ugh. I spend so much time dealing with policy changes (the very late deadline thing) and others' errors (timetable, trying to find out why forms I've submitted haven't been dealt with...) It can get rather discouraging. I'd usually just do the writing after my daughter's bedtime, but tonight I have a belated birthday dinner with friends to look forward to...

Uid 172

Easy one today.

Taught for whole day 9.00-4.00pm.

Teaching was part of a programme for further education teachers that is deleivered by myself and a colleague, off site, every friday for two acaedmic years on a part time basis.

Students are already employed as teachers, by are new to the profession and are working towards their own FE teaching qualification.

Session for whole day was on innovative and creative teaching. Went well with students taking in some theories and starting wokr on the proposals for thier own innovative sessions.

Emails defered to Sat AM!

Uid 173

6am:

A very early start today as children to get off to school and I am teaching at 9am so keen to be in ahead of time.

It is my first lecture with this group and they have a bit of a reputation with other academic staff.

9am-1pm: Teaching time

The lecture went reasonably well although I feel I could have been more fluid. The group work exercises seemed to go well. The room was oppressively hot and although I took water, I didn't have any food and so felt quite unwell by the end of the day. 4 hours is a long session even when team teaching.

After the session I met with a student who had had a problem in a lecture yesterday and was still upset. We talked through the incident and the way she had managed it. We discussed ways that it could be resolved. It was difficult as I am supporting the student as her tutor but also empathise with the lecturer with whom the student has an issue as I feel she was poorly treated by other class members, and at Master’s level you expect more from students.

Following this I had lots of fiddly bits of admin to do, e-mailing students, sending out handbooks, setting up tutorials. I spent a bit of time uploading information and articles to the online teaching resource for one of my units.

I leave the office at 3.30pm to try and avoid the worst of the Friday traffic. One of the things I really appreciate about the job is the autonomy and the flexibility. I head off and do some grocery shopping.

5pm: At home and doing some reading and planning for a lecture next week that has been somewhat sprung on me. I will have to do some work on this over the weekend as next week is looking really busy.

6.30pm Finish off the day replying to a couple of e-mails. As I shut down the computer I realise I forgot to send some documents to a student – will have to get back on tomorrow to do that…..

Uid 179

Up early to go to Bournemouth University for the launch of the APM University Project Challenge. They'd made a good show of it, dressing it up with talks on the green knowledge economy and sustainability. Well attended, and some useful networking - though I had to miss the lunch to get back to Seaside University for my afternoon seminars.

Lively interaction at the seminars and impressed on how the project teams are building. Then a tutorial with an MSc student working on 'challenges and opportunities for eco-tourism in China'.

Exhausted, so came home and had a nap for an hour. Younger boy still not well: came home early from school.

Just starting work for the evening so doing this before dealing with the day's crop of fresh emails.

Uid 180

My heaviest teaching day - 6 hours contact time plus an office hour at lunchtime. Ended the day exhausted - finding it hard to sleep at the moment because of family pressures and anxieties in any case.

Up at 6.45, breakfasted and dressed before the kids got up and for once leaving the house before they did (causing chaos in the organisational department,as although they pack their own bags they seem to find my presence reassuring as they do so!). Got the bus to work - two buses and a 15 minute walk across campus. Finished doing some reading on the bus and then half an hour to do some photocopying and collect last materials together - a desperate hunt around the department for some chalk which I needed for an activity in the afternoon, as the office had just had a clear out and decided it wasn't worth keeping about a week ago!

Three 2 hour seminars - 10-12, 1-3, 3-5 - the first two on Freud and Cixous, and the last on place and space in contemporary performance. I'm audio-recording my seminars this semester and uploading the recordings to webCT - the students seem to find this really helpful, being able to go back over the conversation in their own time.

Really enjoyed the teaching but by the last seminar was feeling pretty worn out - we began with the chalk, drawing a huge outline of Britain on the studio floor, and situating ourselves where we lived - a combination of a name-reminding exercise and also beginning to think about conceived and lived spaces, as students told us first how their home town is perceived by others, and then by themselves. Realised to my horror that I had forgotten to draw Northern Ireland so one student was situated in the Atlantic, though! ... A good starting point, and the students had prepared posters exploring a particular theatre space/place which we then worked with on the map and in a variety of ways. By the end of the seminar though I was so tired not sure I did a great job - and then spent the evening worrying about it! Not particularly healthy.

After all that, a quick trip back to my office to try to shut down my PC (which is faultily refusing to do so - support staff called out) and then back across campus and onto the bus - got home just before 7, glad it was the weekend.

Uid 182

I don't have any lectures on Fridays this year since it's 'protected' as my half-day dedicated to research (according to my department's policy) but I always end up using the time instead for much more mundane and administrative work eg updating attendance records, writing of committee minutes, reviewing my lectures from the week and do the logistical issues eg photocopying, scanning, uploading content on Moodle for my next week's classes.

However, since I had to leave work at 1pm today to go to the airport for a conference trip this weekend, I arrived eaerlier than usual at 7.45am as I was feeling pressure to even physically clear my desk of the papers/new tasks which had accumulated over the last couple of days.

I had a 90-minute phone call with the co-editor of a collection of essays we're planning in order to review the sequence & structure of the volume and the feedback from our publisher and also had a 30-min phone call with the reviews editor of the magazine I co-edit in order to go over the proofs of the upcoming issue, since we couldn't arrange a face-to-face meeting.

I met a lecturer colleague with whom I'm co-teaching a new module over elevenses coffee where we discussed how to encourage more critical thinking from students on the module's discussion board.

A tutee arrived unexpectedly with an urgent financial problem so I had to explain the available funding application process and to phone the college pastoral support staff to make an appointment for her.

I wrote two references for tutees, one for a non-academic job and the other for a postgraduate course.

I had a 20-minute meeting with the subject librarian to discuss which journals to continue subscribing to, in light of budget cuts.

A lecturer who's also a friend wanted to meet to talk about his plan to apply for a sabbatical next academic year so although this was important and interesting, the conversation felt rushed and I wasn't able to fully concentrate.

Uid 185

Friday is not a work day in Israel, so the University is closed. I woke up ay 6:40 , walked the dog, and drove my son to school. He had to be there early today.

In 8:30 I had a meeting with one of my students in a coffee shop. We worked on a paper we co-write (part of her PhD). We also discussed the design of the next intervention and data collection. We had breakfast together.

At 11 I had to leave and drive to Jerusalem (40 minutes drive). I met with my daughter who serves in the army. As part of her service she studies in the Hebrew U and she needed my help with a certain project. I left there at 5 pm drove home and picked up my family to have a Sabbath dinner at my mom's place (40 minutes+30 minutes). I am at home now. It is now 10:12. My daughter called crying b/c she has problems with her project. I am now going to crash to bed.

Uid 186

Taking part in a interesting online learning staff development session this week. one of our learning technologists is doing 5-minutes a day online session on a web-2 tool. this week it is blogging. It has been good to be able to contribute some examples from our school where we are currently using this.

Last day to complete the data entry for the draft timetable system first run for the classes starting in January. Their promising a timetable by mid November, but I think Christmas is more likely. The staff want the timetable to only start at 10, and finish at 4, because it is "family friendly". I can't help thinking that there are a lot of families who have different schedules than that one....

Head of QA is on the other campus today. They are never where I need them to speak to. Have to produce a "commentary on the School Learning and Teaching plan" for the University. With all the financial uncertainty they don't need us to revise it (do they know something about our learning and teaching we don't?), just comment on it. The head of QA's response is "let's have a meeting, to discuss a strategy to think about an approach". I just want to write it, but they will re-write whatever anyway, so not sure that I will take the lead on this...

Two hours going over timetable requests with programme leader A. They want to overbook so they get good rooms... I'm not sure the strategy will work, and I would like to think that it came back to them if there were consequences, but I fear it will come back to me.

Another lecturer has come in with plagiarism reports for the first assignment for our new year 1 students - 5 weeks in. Two students has submitted identical essays (they share a flat, so the benefit-of-the-doubt says it is a computer user error.... let's hope so at this stage), and one other student has an identical essay to one of last year's students - and they also live nearby each other in halls. What do we do with this at this stage? W can't ignore it, and they are doing a professionally recognised qualification, so we have to monitor this... Let's hope they all see the error of their ways.

1.30pm, Friday. - the servers seem to be going down. Is this the university starting a 4 1/2 day week? :-)

3.00 one of my staff comes to discuss one of their staff. He is worried that she is forgetting to turn up to class and even that she has requested a class time change the week before. It is unlike her and I'm worried. That is 3 this week I have genuine health worries about.

3.55 timetable requests done, perhaps. I hope.

4.00 keen final year student here to discuss the first real piece of independent work. Good to see the enthusiasm, and the lights coming on after the discussion.

5.00 letter sent to all recent graduates reminding them of the government's promise to help them find employment. Not sure if it is good to be in a professional group that the govt. is supporting, or not.

5.30 School manager runs desperately down the corridor... Are you still here??? (what student crisis is this, i fear, on a friday at 5.30pm.....) It turns out she has a corrupt table in word, and I am the only person who might be able to fix it. I guess that is what being a senior lecturer is really all about!

Uid 187

Friday, October 15, 2010

6:40 AM - Alarm awoke me after an "OK" night's sleep of 7.5 hours - longer than my last two nights combined! Dressed and ate my usual bagel for breakfast.

7:15 - Out the door, headed to campus. Dropped my wife off at her building, and headed to the parking lot (We're down to one car at the moment.)

7:35 - Arrived at my office. Got PC turned on and checked and reacted to e-mail.

8:10 - Rearranged my desk contents to utilize a shelf on it.

8:50 - Headed for a haircut appointment

9:30 - Back in office. Class preparation & grading lab exams.

11:00 - Met with student - Lab exercise help.

11:15 - Grading lab exams.

11:45 - Met with student - Reading assessment make-up.

Noon - Checked and reacted to e-mail.

12:10 PM - Met with student - Lab exercise help.

12:30 - Lunch

12:45 - Met with Graduate Assistant about grading he's doing

1:00 - Took wife home

1:20 - Back to office; met with a second Graduate Assistant about grading he's doing

1:50 - Attended a graduate school Workshop on campus in support of the Golden Key International Honour Society chapter of which I am the Co-advisor.

3:30 - Further arranging of my desk to accomodate a second monitor for my computer! Woot!!

4:00 - Checked and reacted to e-mail, including explaining to a student why he was earning the grade he is.

4:45 - Grading lab exams.

5:15 - Headed home.

5:30 - Visit with my wife and daughter (who is home from college on Fall break); dinner.

6:30 - Packing for a Boy Scout outing

7:15 - Headed to Boy Scout outing

8:00 - Arrival at Boy Scout outing

11:00 - Checked and reacted to e-mail

11:30 - Grading projects

12:15 - Bedtime

Uid 189

7.45am Arrived at work and attended to emails

9am Meeting re. teaching maths

10.30am Met students for profiling

1.00pm Meeting

2,00pm Appeals Meeting

5pm Student meetings

6pm left office

Uid 191

Term has really started now, which is a bit of a relief really. The incessant registration hiccups are almost over. The problem is that while handling all that stuff I have got behind on actual teaching stuff.

I have 2 final exams, 2 assignments and a test overdue to go to final stage. Today I have only one tutorial - all my teaching is on Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays - thank heavens.

Today is a Friday.

9-9:30 - coffee room catch up - read THES. Ad for new VC. Much laughter from all. I hate that THES puts the 'executive ads' separate from the other ones - potential VCs can't even have their ads touching the hoi polloi?

9:30-11 - catch up on email and admin stuff. The originals of some change of registration forms have been mixed up with copies and the registry wants the originals. We can't find them. Why do they care?

Two students have a clash between introductory programming and a physics lab both of which are core. I don't even know why I am involved in this - it isn't part of the academic advisor's role that I can see, so I ask Head of Teaching to talk to physics Head of Teaching. I noticed that in last month's survey I mentioned being on the panel of a HERA appeal, this caused me to look again at the job evaluation stuff and think that I am in the words of HERA 'acting above my role'. This happens all the time and I am trying not to do it, since I don't get paid for it, I have no prospect of promotion, and I already have too much to do.

Our student-who-has-been-here-longest came in and has still not successfully completed registration. This is his last chance to get a degree - he is long past normal deadlines but has mental health problems. I have mixed feelings about this - part of me thinks he has spent enough time here and should get out. Part feels that he is well capable of getting the degree intellectually and should get enough time to succeed.

11-12:00 - Get both exams and all assignments sorted and given to administrator. Now I need solutions too but we both know I may never get to that. About to leave for lunch when.

12:00-12:30 - Student wants to switch out of intro to theory of computation despite having a-level maths. I go over last week's lecture with him - think he gets it. More a matter of looking scary than being hard (regular expressions). Feel horribly guilty about going too fast last week.

12:30-1 lunch - usually eat sandwich at desk but the machine is never refilled for Friday so have to go to cafe; ok, though because need to be near there for .....

1-2:30 - presentation on USS changes by union. Sit around and talk about it afterwards. Since when did 'consultation' mean 'we'll tell you what we are doing'?

2:30-4 - email and prep lectures for next week. I enjoy that - this survey experience has made me more aware of all the things I do that I don't enjoy - sigh!

4-5 Tutorial for second years. This is centered around a module on the Software Development Lifecycle which involves a big group project. I am manager for 4 groups. This one was very quiet and passive - maybe my fault but I'm too tired to worry..... homeward bound

Uid 192

Can't believe that a month has passed already.

We're now at the end of teaching week 2. It's been a difficult start to the term, having to deal with the death of a friend has been a lot more challenging than I expected. I was also ill at the beginning of this week. But I have made it to Friday.

I have a 9:00 am lab session teaching students how to make websites to XHTML strict standards. This is the lab where they really get started marking up some HTML. They also have to submit their group website coursework proposals by 2pm this afternoon, so I was running round a bit like a headless chicken in the lab. This involved such diverse tasks as explaining why copying and pasting from notepad turns apostrophes into question marks due to the character encoding, demonstrating the software we use (JPadPro), helping students find and recover from errors in their mark-up, to providing some feedback on draft proposals. I had left 1/2 of my morning coffee outside the lab, and picked it up, cold, when I left the lab 2 hours later, exhausted, but having thoroughly enjoyed the session.

My next session on a Friday is at 2pm, mentoring (or personal tutoring) twenty first year students. Somehow the time between 11am and 2pm flew by, including at least a 1/2 hour (well-deserved) rant by a colleague about timetabling issues and complaining students. This meant I was under-prepared. The students had asked me to do cover something on giving presentations as they have to do a presentation in a couple of weeks. I had thought how wonderful it would be to do a presentation in the style of "how not to do a presentation" and ended up boring them silly with only a few slides with bullet points on. May have ended up having the same effect! Anyway, week 2, 89% attendance, Friday afternoon. A result, I'd say.

After the class I spent some time attempting to finish preparing next Monday's lecture, and not doing a great job. A quick chat with a colleague I share an office with did help stimulate the ideas though, and I decided to cut down what I had originally planned (i.e. to give more work to the students and less to myself).

We were also distracted by a student popping into the office for a chat. He had been thinking about dropping out, but has decided to stick with it. I think he finds it hard to ask for help, and possibly thinks that you are a 'failure' if you need to ask for help. Maybe he just wasn't really aware of the amount of help the University has available. He is taking both my 2nd year module and my colleague's, which will help us keep an eye on how he's getting on.

Finished at half 5 sharp to go and meet my cousin for dinner.

Uid 204

9am - 3pm: teaching - a 2-hour lecture and two 2-hour tutorials. This is my first-year course, and it's really precious to me. It can make or break students right at the start of their degrees. If they get the ideas, they have an excellent foundation for everything that follows. If not, even if they scrape through the course they fumble around in subsequent years, really not comfortable because they don't have the required basis for the rest of the work. So my job is to do everything within my power to help as many students as possible get the ideas. It's a challenge.

To add to that, this year I've dramatically revised the course, so it's all new to me as well as to the students.

When I went to a conference recently on the other side of the world, I left the morning after my Friday classes and made it back to campus, direct from the airport, half an hour before the next week's classes. I'd rather do that than ask somebody else to take my classes for a week. Why? Because I really believe that I do a better job of it than anyone else could do. Am I kidding myself? Probably. But if I'm right, I have to teach this course myself to give the students the best possible chance. Just as well I enjoy it!

3pm to home time: after 6 hours of teaching I'm not up to doing much that's serious. Email, phone messages, little catch-up jobs, corridor chats...

After dinner: a few days ago I had a couple of teaching-related papers accepted to a conference. One of them is co-authored, so I started revising that in light of the reviewers' comments, to give my co-author as much time as possible to consider my revisions. The other paper will probably be done the night before the camera-ready deadline, as usual. My co-author is somewhat upset at the scathing criticism from one reviewer. I see it as telling us what we haven't yet explained well enough. It's a cliche, but a severe review offers great opportunities for improvement. And why be disheartened when the other reviewers were full of praise?

But of course we're nowhere near the deadline yet, so at 10pm I downed tools and called it a day. There's a whole weekend ahead of me...

Uid 206

No teaching for me today. I covered a session for a colleague earlier in the week (not very successfully, I might add - or so I felt, though the students seemed OK with it). But much of my day has been focused on either research (reviewing a journal article and discussing one with my co-researcher that's almost ready for submission), or research admin. Once a month I hold a discussion session on research. This month was about data, and knowing when you've got enough. It was a small group (teaching commitments mean that not everyone who wants to can attend), but a group from across the institution, and a lively discussion. I always find it interesting to watch how the conversation shifts back & forth between colleagues' own difficulties with research and their students' difficulties with research. The difficulties students have with dissertations are really no different from the issues staff struggle with, in essence.

I find the relationships between research & teaching interesting, but tend to feel somewhat bemused by the fact that there's a 'debate' over whether or not the two are connected. Like you can separate the ideas in your head?

Talking of which, I've got three of my first dissertation supervisions of the year on Monday.

Uid 207

5.00 am: Wake up and regret it. Had hoped to sleep later as probably a late finish to my day.

6.00 am: Give up on sleep and go downstairs. Look at papers for a visit to a local school which is now the university academy, surf the schools website to find out as much as I can about the science dept. They have recently opened a new building and I want our outreach to them to be as co-ordinated and effective as possible. Have had a previous experience of interaction where the strains on their time made for a rabbit in the headlights type response. Determined to use the evidence that repeated interventions is what raises asprirations.

7.30 am: Find I’m missing vital list for morning meeting and go into office on campus. First time in a fortnight I have used the car to go into work and enjoy the luxury of a very very short journey.

7.30-8.15 am: Send out e-mail to students on a module to ensure that they can start the next sessions of self directed study immediately they submit their work later today. Panic at 8.15 and make it to local school for 8.45.

8.45 – 11.30: In school and meet with science staff - very pleasant but harassed – and discuss possibilities for 2011/2012 program of work with them. They are very enthusiastic but I need to manage their expectations. School of 650 with 5 science teachers, two of whom are part time. Then meet with school’s vice principal and the university’s project director (and ex-PVC). Useful discussion of how to ensure institutional memory. Again expectations have to be managed about what we can realistically provide in terms of help and input.

11.30: Back to dept. E-mails to students and 2 student references for GTTR applications are written. Second year undergraduate comes to see me to sign extenuating circumstances form – worried as his course has a higher ‘bar’ than many and his first year was littered with problems. Take 10 mins to talk to him before his lecture. Suspect my interventions only marginally helpful but encourage him to continue to attend counselling sessions.

12.30 Drive quickly to get something to eat over other side of campus. Happily meet friends/colleagues from another dept. and spend 30 mins over lunch discussing their projects. Leave directly from there to drive to another university 150 miles south. Have a meeting there at 4pm. Useful meeting that gets some problems ironed out on a joint project – Skype doesn’t see to answer the problem of interaction in quite the right way – perhaps we need more practice.

5.30pm Book into a hotel – as aged parent is in hospital another 150 miles south use the meeting at geographical mid-point to give me some break in the routine of driving down there most weekends, Use hotel wireless internet to log onto university wiki space and remove 40 student’s editing rights on coursework that had a deadline that afternoon.

6.30 pm Meet friend and colleague from the other university for a quick drink – idea was to go onto dinner but both exhausted (first week of his teaching) and so back to the hotel for 9pm. Asleep by 9.30 pm

Uid 211

In the morning session was teaching communication skills patient interactions to a cohort of undergradute students. As per usual photocopying etc was being done at the last minute- poor time management.

Friday pm was spent prepping for level 6 session for tuesday 19th October. enjoyed this as it is co teaching , co prepping makes for better range of creative ideas for teaching and making the best use of classroom environment

The best part was actually having some time with colleague , not working in isolation,support gained , ideas shared.i find teaching on this unit intriquing as peer feedback always useful.

looking forward to the weekend - busy week

Uid 213

Yesterday I was up at 525 so I can get in to work by 8 so I have time to prepare for my 9am class. I got home last night thirteen hours after I left. So today I felt a bit slower. Missed the train I intended because I was just too tired to rush down the street.

I write draft emails on the train to send once I'm at work (wifi only connection), and then start reading and giving feedback on student work. I ask my creative writing students to write about 500 words at week and post them on our VLE. I print them off and give them written feedback each week. I started this a couple years ago. I like doing it - I like giving them feedback year round, rather than just on their formal assessments, but sometimes I'd rather just look out the train window or read the Metro like almost everyone else on the train. This semester I'm teaching 112 students over three days. Realistically, they don't all post their writing each week, but that is potentially 56,000 words to read and mark each week. I'm not sure I can keep it up all semester.

I had a meeting first thing with my associate dean going over the validation papers for a new MA I'm writing. She works in Education, so we talked about the potential cuts and changes to PGCEs. The potential cuts terrify me.

I teach four hours on Fridays, and I have an hour working at the helpdesk - a pastoral and academic advisory drop in session open to all our undergraduates. This is part of my administrative role. I had a student who wanted me to tell her whether or not she should drop out, since she found reading hard. I advised her to see the academic skills tutor. I understand she wanted advice, but I didn't have a magic answer for her. Saw a few more students, then ran to get lunch that I didn't have time to finish eating at my desk before going down to teach my first class.

My classes are meant to be capped at a certain size. I have four students over the amount that can fit into two sessions - too few, I've been told, to add a third session. So I have a massive class. The third years are fun, I've taught them all before, so it's managable, but I had to change my syllabus as a result of the class size.

Back upstairs for a quick one hour. I needed to do some teaching prep before my last class, but I had two students to see me. One wanted a signature, one wanted me to fix something I have no power to fix. He hadn't been to see the person who could fix it, as I advised him last week. And he wouldn't leave. That took ages, and I barely had time to grab my stuff and go to the loo and go to my class. Just as I was about to leave, the phone rang. It was one of the administrators, who said she had a quick question, since it was nearly going home time. I said I was off to teach a 2 hour class. She was shocked.

Half the class was missing today (the effect of a 4-6 class on a Friday evening), so I had a lovely, relaxed class. Our third years are great. I've taught them throughout their degree, so I know them well enough to joke and tell personal stories to illustrate points in a way I don't with the new first years. They are all still nervous and jangly, and I don't have a strong sense of them as people yet. Their names are coming though - it's one of my particular obsessions - I have to know the names of all my students, even when I have 112. I'm always amazed by colleagues who don't. I look forward to getting to know the first years over their three years - assuming we're still teaching the Humanities in two years!

Uid 214

Today I spent my day doing four things: three of these were useful and the other one probably pointless but unavoidable - worrying about the impact of the Browne Report on Higher Education and the Comprehensive Spending Review on the university system.

As regards the reform of the university system, as a relatively junior academic there is frankly nothing practical I can do about this except continue on in my job in as efficient and innovative manner as possible while trusting more senior colleagues - from my Head of Department right up to my university's Provost - to fight our corner in these troubling times, which segues neatly into the other three things I did. These were: [a] work on the final edits of a book; [b] work on a grant application and; [c] advise a colleague on a piece of consultancy they are undertaking. All of these tasks were useful in their own right and particularly useful in the climate of financial peril we find ourselves in since each contributes to the public awareness of the value of universities in undertaking research that contributes to public well-being and crucially to the economy. To highlight this public value and economic benefit in detail I then add the following notes (for reasons of confidentiality I'll not go in to specifics as regards the content/theme of these tasks). It should be added that I am not teaching today but did have teaching earlier in the week.

[a] the book is for a major academic press but is a 'general interest' volume aimed at students and the public. The research underlying it was undertaken as part of my general workload and in my own time - so it has merely 'ongoing' rather than any exceptional costs (i.e. a big research grant, piece of equipment, or other expense). The book will make my university some money, and should also help our student recruitment (in that if students like my book they might wish to come and study with me). So it is an example of a useful investment by the university where the pounds spent on my salary and expenses will eventually be outweighed by the profits accrued from my output.

[b] the research grant is for a pilot project to test the data availability and methodological validity of a larger project that I want to undertake. The grant is for £7000 - £5000's worth of time of a research assistant and £2000 for essential travel related to the project. If the project is successful (which it will be - I'm confident!), then the bigger project would apply for grants of hundreds of thousands of pounds. In the meantime, the pilot project will still produce useful data that will be published by me, and will also contribute to the economy - the £5000 spent on a research assistant will be taxed when they earn it in income, and the remainder spent by them on their rent, food, and so on - pumped back into the economy. The remaining £2000 will also be pumped back into the economy by being spent by me on the hire of a car, the fuel for that car, hotel rooms and some living expenses while undertaking the research. And the project has a strong public 'impact' component that should help enthuse local communities engage with their local heritage as well as promote Britain as a tourist location. So again, this is a good investment that will eventually create more income for the UK than it costs. And lest anyone forget, this will be subject throughout to rigorous peer-review and accounting.

[c] the piece of consultancy my colleague is undertaking is being paid for from EU money to help develop the higher education system of another country ravaged by war. Every aspect of the project and my colleague's time is paid for by EU money, and I helped them out in my own spare time as a favor since they are a friend. They are being well paid, and so again their efforts contribute directly to the economy - the EU pay the university for their consultancy time, covering all the admin costs, and eventually they get paid consultancy fees that they'll spend on rent, food and so on - again, the net result is a contribution to the UK economy.

Overall then, this brings us back to proposed cuts to the university sector. They baffle me - there is no other word for it. Thousands of people in universities around the UK spent today doing similar work to me - practical things that contribute more to the UK both in terms of the economy as well as wider social benefit than these cost through initial investment. All of us are 'making' things that contribute UK Plc. - and from my limited understanding of economics that is precisely what we are all meant to do. So cutting so brutally so productive a part of the economy sounds like a grave error to me.

Uid 219

Early start today, because we have a huge ERC research funding bid brewing, and suddenly lots of people are really engaged and enthusiastic, with matched funding possibilities popping out of the woodwork right, left and centre. It is incredibly exciting, working with people from all sorts of other disciplines who are considerably less sleepy and cynical that many of the old guard in my home faculty. It's also especially exciting, because everywhere else there is talk of doom and gloom and cutbacks, yet our faculty is expanding rapidly and feels very vibrant. We're probably going to be able to employ several new lecturers and research associates on grant and third stream money, if this comes off, and the odds are probably about 1 in 3, so it has given everyone a boost.

People at work are also delighted that the ESRC is looking at its peer review process and trying to improve things, as many colleagues have put in exquisitely crafted applications over the last five years only to have reviewers say pointless and silly things in response, indicating the applications have not been properly read, which makes a mockery of the whole system. There now seems to be a feeling that the ESRC is on the up and we are about the get the Academy we deserve.

Lots of stuff in the press this week about raised tuition fees. My own kids have been quite worried about what university is going to cost them. I have pragmatically advised to include Maths amongst their A Levels, go to the oldest university possible, and do a course with a likelihood of a high salary at the end. (There is no point in being in the business if you can't use your social, cultural and intellectual capital to advance your own family's cause, methinks). My eldest son asked me to look at an elite university's website with him and then identified Linguistics and Economics as two possible degree options. This is all very well and good, but a bit of me was sad, as the lad is only 12 and should be less preoccupied with such things at the moment. I am also aware that he may go to university elsewhere in Europe or in the US now, to save money, which again is sad, as I will miss him.

I have a very good bunch of new students - standards are rapidly going up due to higher competition for places. One of the new mature students seems to have an Enid Blyton style schoolgirl crush on me, sending me little notes and cards and telling me how brilliant I am. I have copied everything to her tutor and asked the tutor and senior tutor to share in her handling so as to dilute her affections! It is nice to have a fan, but you always have to be aware of the bunny boiler potential of this sort of thing.

Uid 221

Friday 15th October - no formal academic work as I work only 3 days a week and Friday is not one of them. Spent a little time thinking about following week's teaching and planning how to manage time.

Uid 223

Friday is the weekend here in the UAE, and on this occasion parental activities kept me focused off teaching and other work for once.

Uid 224

Today is the last day for handing in assignments for my first year algorithms course. A lot of students are getting worried about finding all their bugs before the deadline.

9-9:30 dealing with emails, mainly about the impending assignment deadline

9:30-10 meet with HOD to discuss administrative issues in the department

10-11am Choir practice for the Engineering College (yes, the head of engineering also likes conducting choirs, and is running an ad hoc choir; conducting a choir is a lot like running an academic department!)

1-2pm met with a student interested in doing a research project over the summer; hopefully he'll apply, hopefully he'll get a scholarhship.

On and off today I have been responding to students having problems with the assignment due today. Most of the queries are from people with delays for medical reasons. I didn't have so much sympathy for the one who lost their only copy of an assignment which was on a flash drive. No copy anywhere else, just editing it on the flash drive. Does everyone learn about backup the hard way?

Spent most of the rest of the time drafting an agenda for a facilities committee that I chair. People have made many requests for new equipment, and I need to nail down all the details so that the meeting next week will be efficient.

Uid 226

October 15, 2010

Today is one of my rare days at home. Got up late (7:00), cleaned up and did a load of laundry. Checked email. Left for doctor's appointment. Reviewed grant proposal for possible funding while waiting at doctor's office. Home in time for online teleconferencing with my research group. We are re-grouping after a break for the summer. Technical difficulties delayed the start of our meeting but we managed to discuss some of our reading as well as set our goal through New Year's. Ran some more errands and went to yoga class. That's it for today. I admit it. I played hookey today.

Uid 227

For the first time this semester I had a day with no teaching and admin!!! Foolishly I did look at the new system that the HoD has set up for communicating more efficiently with the Department. Unfortunately he still hasn't got the hang of letting us know he has added information so there are now several deadlines looming for reports to be completed.

After that I spent most of the day on data sorting for my research. i have many more days of this and I really do need full blank days to be able to tackle this properly which are few and far between.

Uid 228

I planned to do some writing today, but having worked a 12 hour day on Thursday and with the prospect of a busy day teaching on Saturday I found myself unable to focus. I felt under such pressure that I struggled to cope with my workload. I have 50 x 5000 word essays that are being submitted on Monday and the worry about getting them marked was playing on my mind. I also have an annual evaluation report to write which is report which is of significance across my school so needs my attention. This needs to be done in the next week. I have a resit board for my course to prepare for so have to contact any students who haven't submitted their work for reassessment or fail them which is something I don't want to do, yet they don't leave me much choice by not submitting. So I spend time chasing students up to find out if there are any extenuating circumstances that I can get them to submit in order to keep their place on the course alive.

I answered a number of emails;

1) from two students struggling to submit their assignment via Blackboard,

2) from a student offering to present a short demonstration of their skills at the day school on Saturday

3)to arrange to meet the student support advisor to talk about how to adapt an online course for a student who is deaf blind.

4)to liaise with the computing services people about populating groups within the VLE with 84 groups of students (there are 1050 students taking this course)

5) to arrange a research interview with a colleague

6) to respond to a student who wants to delay entering the course until January

7)to provide some draft feedback on an assignment

8) to arrange to meet with a company based in Pickering as part of a Business Innovation scheme.

As I read through this list I realise what a lot of complex functions my role involves. As I said this is a day that I feel that I did nothing, yet my email log shows otherwise!

Uid 231

10am get out of bed to answer a call from a potential PhD, feeling like hell. Got home at 10.30pm last night from teaching and worked on my course until 12.30pm when the Commonwealth Games Closing was on TV. Eventually got to bed about 3pm. Had some tea toast and aswered a few more call before turning on the email. Far too many to deal with and feeling even worse so I went back to bed until 1pm.

1pm made call to colleagues re industrial action that the Union is planning to support enterprise bargaining and then turned the email back on to deal with yesterday's and today's email. Took about two hours to clear them. Group assignment requirement for self and peer assessment due at midnight tonight, so lots of emails re students having problems with software. These emails and calls continued all afternoon. Paid bills left lying around for a month and read some journal papers that I should have read before today.

3-4.30pm Check assignments in Turnitin and email students who have problems to alert them of the need to correct the assignments.

Too sick to anything of substance and need to host a student Multicultural evening this evening, so just pottered around doing the odd email and shuffling papers until 5.30pm when I showered and dressed for the evening.

6pm -10pm Multicultural evening with our students presening music, songs and dance from various countries. Wonderful evening, sort of makes all the pain and strain worthwhile.

Home at 10.30, answer urgent emails from students, do my diary, and plan to go to bed shortly as I have a big weekend of marking ahead.

Uid 234

6:00 Check emails, though admittedly this isn’t just work emails. There is nothing work related.

07:35 Leave for work. Traffic dreadful. Damn commuters!

08:10 Get to work. Send out an email about how we are going to get to 9:30 road show. Apparently a taxi has been laid on.

Send out emails trying to clarify student placements. This is where I feel like an administrator rather than a researcher or a teacher.

09:00 Travel to road show. Everyone is in a jovial/ cynical mood.

At registration/ coffee bump into professional friends – it’s always good to catch up.

Between 09:30 & 10:30 there is an opening address, the sum total of that address by the chairman is, “We are imposing a very regimented & structured system upon you but we insist on local/ imaginative ways of implementing it.”

I accidently stand next to the chairman in the coffee queue, whilst trying to be friendly/ professional I also wanted to point out that certain points of his grand nationwide plan were flawed, if for no other reason than there simply wasn’t the human resources to deliver what he was prescribing. He smiled and nodded, and said it was all about being flexible. Noticing that I was talking to the Chairman my colleague Bill joined the conversation. Bill asked whether he had heard correctly – that the minimum length of an assessed placement had been removed. He had heard correctly. I interjected that our clinical partners would not be happy. The Chairman smiled and nodded, and said it was all about being flexible.

The question & answer session after coffee confirmed my broad brush prejudice that we are having a structure imposed upon use with a loose & woolly idea that it was about local, imaginative strategies to implement the strategy.

In the toilets afterwards a colleague told me that the journal that we had just publish in wanted some more articles from us. Which was nice.

In the taxi journey back to the office everyone was in a jovial/ cynical mood.

From 12:30 till 14:00 I answered emails, mostly regarding placement issues.

I am currently covering a colleague whilst she is off sick, I had to deal with the external examiner in getting the exam questions for the module accepted. Part of me covering for my colleague is that I have inherited her personal tutees. One of them came to see me.

The poor woman is in a bad way. For years she has managed the stress in her life by abusing laxatives, vomiting and starving herself. Over the summer she sought help for her eating disorder. The only coping strategy she has come up with to replace the laxatives, starving & vomiting is jogging, but her treatment team has said not to do this as it burns too many calories. So she has the stress of having to reject her old coping mechanisms, having no new ones to embrace, a father who is an alcoholic & is threatening to kill himself and being in the 3rd year of her degree. Poor woman. We talked & chatted, but more than anything I think she just wanted to vent all the stress that running around her head. I encouraged her to come back if she wanted to vent again and that I would support her if she wanted to tell her placement she needed Wednesday afternoon’s off to go to specialist eating disorder services.

I had planned to do three hours towards my research this afternoon. The best laid plans & all that.

Throughout the day I have kept an eye on the unfolding Liverpool saga. Fascinating stuff.

I’m going to finish work at the office shortly, but will keep an eye on emails up until 18:00. After that time I no longer feel responsible for work until Monday morning.

Uid 235

This is my first month of of working part-time - so today I am not at work! It's only a temporary breather to help me recover from a really difficult year. And so far it's been very hard to put clear boundaries around my 3 days of work, since of course work doesn't just happen at work, or on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays. I find myself having to arrange tutorials and meetings on my 'days off' just because of other people's availability.

But one positive aspect of the change has been that we have started to address the problem of our terminally lazy colleague Folly. Having cancelled much of his teaching and announced 'no specific publishing plans' after an entire summer supposedly writing at home, he appeared to have no reason for being in post at all. He will be a real problem in our REF preparations, and other colleagues are running themselves ragged with teaching. My reduction in hours has meant that the workload has had to be looked at carefully and he has now been given extra teaching, tutorial and marking duties to take the load off others. So that's good. It makes my blood boil to see a (male) academic simply taking a free ride on the hard work of his (female) colleagues - but it's easy to see how a man might calculate that this is a time-honoured and reliable way of dealing with the demands of academic life.

Browne review published this week, so having been to a really useful briefing on it on Thursday (by a respected professor of higher education), spent some of today reading the report in detail. Sobering stuff for those of us working in 'fair-to-middling' universities with comparatively little STEM provision and no stellar reputation in anything much. My boss is cock-a-hoop as she feels it 'ticks all the learning and teaching boxes' and so will guarantee her educational development function. I think this is rather a simplistic reading ... but we will have to wait and see what actually emerges from the political bunfight following the comprehensive spending review.

Uid 237

Diary entry 2

Friday 15th October 2010

Context:

The last day of a fairly manic week which included highs and lows. The biggest high was starting a new research project with my old supervisor which is going to draw on previous consultancy work I have done but go way beyond this in terms of scope and the amount of responsibility I have over the actual research carried out (last time I was a post-doc RA when I was doing similar evaluation research). The biggest low was the Browne report and the leak today regarding the dramatic cuts in HE teaching funding.

Content:

Today I had a lie in, until after 9 o'clock because I was shattered (averaging 4hrs sleep a night this week, mainly because I got back from a research meeting in London at 11pm Tuesday night and then had to finish writing a 2hr lecture and sort handouts before Wednesday morning so only had 3 hrs sleep). I had a mtg with a student 10.45 - 11 before a meeting with all my dissertation students 11-12.

I thought the 11-12 meeting would only take 40mins as it was designed to give them an indication of the level and nature of work that I was expecting from them. I had seen most of them previous to this general meeting yet DESPITE this, ended up saying that I would see them all individually after the meeting. So... the whole point of the meeting was to see them as a group to save time, yet I ended up spending twice the amount of time, firstly by seeing them as a group and secondly individually (another 90mins of my time). I am too giving with my time. I have a colleague who manages to see his dissertation students in 10 minute slots. How does he do this exactly?

Next task of the day was sorting out a staffing problem. A postgraduate tutor on a module I am coordinating has pulled out of seminars (two groups per week) because of stress (taking too much on and didn't feel could cope). This consumed the next hour or so of my time finding a replacement and sorting out, a couple of weeks into term, exactly what information would need to be conveyed to the new tutor to ensure that everything ran smoothly.

After grabbing some lunch, the next task was to look through the 140 or so emails that had accrued in my inbox (Institution A inbox) as a result of teaching at Institution B and being in London the first half of the week (I do get very frustrated with the time spent managing emails, esp. now I have 4 email accounts, 3 of which are work-related email addresses). I hardly made a dent in the unread emails before 3pm was on me and I had a meeting with a Masters student (who is also working on a research project with me) and then personal tutorials 4-5pm. During the 3pm meeting the student was unexpectedly upset/tearful - not usual for this student - and thus most of the hour was spent encouraging the student positively about work/life etc. The student was worried about having to get a job and not being able to do a PhD, and my advice was to concentrate as much as possible on the masters course in hand and not to worry, certainly not over the next couple of months, about next year.

And talking about worries about the future (aside from the fact that I personally don't have a full-time permanent position and thus am also worried about next year!), in the latter part of the day I became aware of leaked information regarding the extent of the cuts proposed by the goverment for HE funding (further to the Browne report earlier on in the week). An angry end to the day; HE is one of few arenas in which people from differing socio-economic backgrounds are on an equal footing (at least in many respects). Removing the cap on fees and creating a privatised market for HE institutions, making universities businesses (the way it's been going for some time anyway with increasing focus on numbers instead of scholarship) will create cultural hierarchies, result in less research collaborations (between researchers of different universities) and reduce the value of degrees even further.

Uid 238

Oct. 15, 2010

My school gives faculty and students a two-day fall break every year. This year it occurred on Oct. 14 - 15.

I generally do not give assignments over break since I feel the students (and I) need some down time to renew

their(our) energies for the remainder of the semester. As a result, my spouse and I took the opportunity to

travel to a neighboring state, do some camping, and visit my daughter and grandson. I must admit though,

that I did take computers, a mobile broadband device, textbooks and homework to work on, just in case there

was any lull time in the weekend. There wasn't.

On the other hand, I did find myself thinking teaching related-thoughts occasionally. When we went geocaching, I thought that I should develop a geocache hunt based on CS ideas for my classes. As I took photographs over the weekend I was reminded about a project I had seen about giving students a file that represents a photo and having them produce the picture with a prize for the first-to-find where the photo was taken on campus.

Of course, the short vacation was a two-edged sword - I got

away from work for a few days for a much needed and appreciated break, but I did not get caught up on the

seemingly endless list of grading, administrative reports, research, curriculum design, lesson planning,

purchase orders, etc.

Uid 239

up all night the night before to complete an application form for a job that could take me away from all this! Wrestling with ill-designed froms that do not take account of the user took up most of the time! In at 6.45 to complete the form and email to the recipient. Thank good ness for email perhaps-buys us more time in these situations- curse to email in other ways as I have some unanswered from the mountain of email I received the day before. The day starts badly with complaints that some one got left off a list for a meeting. I had assumed that they were on it-so my fault again- difficult in this job to separate out what might be my ultimate responsibility but is not my fault! another complaint because a member of staff has been asked to move office location and I thought this had all been agreed but now somehow it isn't. Meeting across campus with no time allowed to allowed to get there so I'm running again. Meanwhile thinking as I go to the meeting of at least five things I must do when I get back before my next meeting.-decide I need the equivalent of a pedometer to log in meetings as I run. Reflect upon how ridiculous this all is!

General feeling of frenzy creeping into the whole place at the moment. It would interesting to study 'frenzy' in large organisations-what precipitates it and how it abates-remind myself to suggest this to HR- would they takes this seriously?

Exam board where there are more staff and nearly more external examiners than those being examined-note to myself that we must look at this! Between exam boards just about remember of phone builder about hole in roof.

after exam boards feel slightly more relaxed-seek out a couple of staff to chat about the update to the strategy. They are still smarting about something that happened earlier in the week. Leave office at 7.15pm which is tough for a Friday! Sit in a heap Friday night-when I should be getting on with loads of clearing up after the work being done in the house- instead pick my way through the debris to bed!

Uid 240

Most of the day was a field trip to IBM Research--two school vans full of students, two faculty and two folks from our IT staff. The presenters were excellent and spent a lot of effort engaging the students.

I had not met many of the younger majors and it was an excellent forum for getting the pulse of that group. It was affirming for me as a faculty member to listen to corporate researchers giving the students advice and stories similar to those I give them.

We saw demo labs highlighting sensor technologies and practical applications in energy conservation, health care, and home device control. But the most impressive was the tour of a real lab where the latest servers were being tested -- water cooled petaflop machines! A long way from the labs where we wired plug boards in the 60's.

The engineers were a varied lot, but all enthusiastic and good role models for the students.

Much of the conversation in the van, however, centered around the latest game technologies, none of which were even touched upon during our tour. By the time we returned to campus there was little time for anything. Hardly a wasted day, but definitely one that left my mailbox and to-do list much longer than I would have liked as we go into the weekend.

Uid 241

Today is Friday. On Monday and Tuesday there are no classes because of Fall Break, so hopefully I will be able to get caught up on some grading. I have a set of approx. 36 programming assignments to grade, and I will be getting approximately 36 homeworks in one class and 32 homeworks in another class today to grade, as well. I have three classes to teach today. One was at 8:00, our first algorithms class. Several students missed, probably getting an early start on Fall Break. I handed back a homework in that class. Most of them did well on it, but I went over the solution anyway for the ones who didn't do so well. We then got back into the Chapter 4 material on the Divide and Conquer problem-solving paradigm. We analyzed mergesort using the master theorem for recurrences. I explained why the master theorem works by using geometric series. The corequisite for our algorithms class is Calculus 2. I let them out 1 minute early and said that was a present for them. They laughed. As they were leaving, one of the students said that she hadn't started on the programming assignment

It is hard to concentrate on work now because my grandmother is very ill. Last night, my aunt called me, crying, saying that she may have had a stroke. A little later, my cousin called me, saying that she might have had some kind of seizure. The doctors don't think that they can help her and they said that she might only live a couple of more months. I want to go visit her this weekend. She lives in my former home state, about a 5-hour drive from where I currently live. My beloved dog is old, too. I don't want to lose him either. So far, he is in decent shape, although it is harder to get him going in the mornings, and he doesn't want to walk as far. I have been calling my aunt and cousin to find out what is going on with Grandma. I am having to use Skype because my cheap Tracfone cell phone doesn't have service in my office. Skype works great.

I have two more classes to teach today. Attendance should be good because I am collecting homework assignments in each class. I will be returning tests in the object-oriented programming class. Many of the students forgot about using "this" to call an overloaded constructor in Java, and they also forgot about object casting. One student in the senior/graduate-level algorithms class just stopped by to ask a question about the homework.

I called my grandmother's house just now to talk to my other aunt, who stays with her. The doctors had ordered some blood tests, and she is waiting for the results.

Uid 242

Friday started well.

It ended less well.

Is it bad when your Department Chair wants desperately for you to remain at the institution, and the other two colleagues in your department would like nothing more than to see you move on?

I think it is. Sadly, I thought we were passed this.

Uid 243

8:00 am - woke up (kids out of school so can sleep late!)

20 minutes email

Uid 244

Up early again.

06:30 Drank a cup of coffee and prepared the last details of a special exam that would be sat by some of my students at 9am.

Printed the exam and packed to go to work.

08:10 Dropped Kristina at school on the way to work, we always seem to be running late :-( School starts at 8:10....

Drove into town.

09:00 Met the students who would take the exam, booked a meeting room for them to sit in and handed out the exam and writing paper.

The rest of the morning was spent multi-tasking trying to do the following

- supervise the students taking the exam

- record enrolments for students in the MSc program I coordinate

- finalise the exam paper for the larger exam in the afternoon, and print it (needed 100+ copies).

- fiddled with the LaTeX class file I use to produce exams to improve the layout and add a Uni logo in colour.

11am, needed to see systems support to collect a new account and password so that I can access the enrollments record system for the Uni.

11:30 lunch

12:30 realised that I have no idea how the new systems will work for anonymous written exams and entering grades!

The online system has send me three links for the same course, and it seems that I need to enter codes according to degree programme :-( What a huge admin overhead, this is going to take more time.

14:00 attend the exam hall to answer questions, about half the students taking the exam had not enrolled for it, so they don't have an anonymous code anyhow, so much for students caring about anonymity of assessment!

15:30 left work to collect Fredrik and take him to his tennis lesson at 16:30.

16:00 collected both kids, when to tennis, and bought food to make a nice friday dinner. A good autumn stew was on the menu.

17:30 headed home

18:00 food cooking, red wine open, realised that I was going to miss the deadline for returning reviews for a conference, which are due tonight. Drat, left that too late.

22:00 put kids to bed, and zzzzzzzzzzzzzzz

Uid 245

I got into work before 8.00 and did admin - ie answered emails.

Then had to walk up the hill 15 minutes to give a lecture 9-11. Not a popular timing, from student lateness. The session went quite well, although had a long chat walking back with a student who is disappointed by the other students' lack of engagement. He wants more long chats over coffee discussing things intensely. At the end of the conversation he seemed reassured, but its an interesting question how I could do more to create a context for that intense experience he is after. Aren't we all after that?

Then one of my research students doing a presentation to upgrade from Mphil to Phd. Meeting with a student who is trying to write a research proposal to get funding to do a phd. I am not hopeful for her.

Was shocked to read the leaks about funding cuts for HE. Looked really severe. I was surprised how upset personally I was by this. I suppose in a way it feels like an assualt on one's status as an academic. Probably if you have been in the job for a long time you will feel that status has plummeted for a while, but this was the first time I felt such a loss. I went home on the bus around 3pm.

Went for an hour plus run. It felt good, although it rained.

Wrote some more emails, chasing people up.

The end of a long week.

Uid 246

I got up earlier than I normally do because our department has a computing seminar every Friday at 7am. Our students absolutely love getting up before the sun makes its appearance. ;-) Today's seminar was a little different than our traditional seminar. Instead of one of our graduating seniors giving a technical talk, a 2004 graduate came back to talk about how to be a successful programmer. I think his advice really got the students' attention since he closer to their age and has gone through what they are about to go through when they enter the workforce. The entire department enjoyed a nice breakfast together with our alumnus and his wife.

I attended chapel at 9am with 4000 of our undergraduates, and one of our History faculty members gave a memorable talk about being a child of God. The singing was excellent.

I gave an exam at 10am to my Internet Development course. I've only graded the first two pages, and it looks like most of them have done alright. No one left the room in tears, so that's always good. ;-)

At 11am I led my CS1 students in a lab where they completed a tic-tac-toe game that I had partly coded for them. This assignment is the first to combine arrays and functions, so it's usually pretty challenging. None of the teams were able to complete it in class, but I've given them until Tues to finish it.

At noon I played basketball like I normally do on MWF. We had exactly 10 guys which meant lots of playing and no waiting. Just wish I hadn't missed those two easy shots.

After grabbing a quick lunch in the student center, I taught my 2pm GUI class about how to rename nodes in a .NET TreeView control. Unfortunately, I strayed from my script a little and tried to shown them how to do something that I thought was very simple to do, and it didn't work the way I expected. I was totally astounded why my code wasn't working. I was frustrated, but I used it as a teachable moment. "Sometimes your professors run into coding problems, so who do we go to? Google!" I showed them how to search online for the problem, and we found a few possible solutions. I think it's helpful to show students how to problem-solve using a search engine, but I'll never forget the comment I got a few years ago from a student who dinged me on a teacher evaluation because he thought me using Google in class showed ignorance. Oh well.

Now I'm back in my office for office hours. I don't usually have any students stop by on Friday afternoons, so I'll probably get some stuff done. I've got a pile of exams to grade, and I really want to figure out that coding problem!

I'll shoot to be home by 5:30 so I play with the boys before putting them to bed at 8pm. Then my wife and I will enjoy some peace and quiet.

Uid 250

Friday 15 October 2010

I began the day as I have most recent days, by running 2.25 miles on a treadmill at the local YMCA. Running has been going well. I've be injury free and slowly getting faster and adding distance to my runs.

Following my run, I had an appointment with my primary-care doctor (physician). After waiting a while (maybe 25 minutes) in the exam the doctor arrived for the checkup. The appointment was just a follow up from having reduced the number of blood pressure medications I am on. As he always does, he listened to my heart and lungs, and pressed on my liver.

His report: blood pressure is good; follow-up in 6-months; keep up the running and weight loss.

Given my recent appointment to Acting Department Chair, it is remarkable that the new source of stress has not increased my blood pressure. I am sleeping relatively well and not tempted to eat a lot of sweets. I give all that credit to the running.

I went to the post office to send a package to my daughter on my way to campus.

I arrived on campus (about 11am) and immediately checked to see if the Dean was available for a meeting. I needed to follow-up with him about budget issues for the Spring teaching schedule. After about 75 minutes, he agreed to the plan I had proposed, but hesitantly.

I had planned to work on Dean Evaluation survey this afternoon. As you will see, that didn't happen at all.

Lunch! It's Boss's day and my secretary wants to take me to lunch. What a nice gesture. We had a nice time. The food was fair (university restaurant) but the conversation was good.

I met with a junior faculty member to discuss their plans for submitting a (USA) National Science Foundation CAREER Grant. This discussion, scheduled for one hour, took approximately 2.5 hours. The ideas are good. I believe I contributed to the ideas brought by the faculty.

Now it's about 4pm and the list of things to do that I carry around with me (mentally and physically) isn't shrinking. I sent an email message to my wife to indicate my plan to work late until 6:30pm and to coordinate meeting at a restaurant for a late evening meal. Fortunately, she agrees.

I have (approximately) 15 undergraduate students folders (academic records) on my desk to audit them for graduation eligibility. It doesn't take long. Most students are a minute or less. My secretary has done the tedious part. A couple of students records are not clear. Two or three of them require double checking the online transcript.

After completing the checks, I begin to mow down the email and voice mail messages that have accumulated over the course of the day.

I try to log into the payment system to approve payments, but I can't. I later learned my password had expired. 15 minutes wasted trying to get that done.

Drive to the restaurant and meet my wife. Wine, food, conversation, and sleep conclude the day.

Uid 252

Not teaching today, so can sleep in a bit. Chronically sleep deprived this semester due to 8 am class.

930-10 Email

10-1030 Preparing for meeting. One of our alumni has agreed to be interviewed for my current research project. This is also an opportunity to see how things are going with him seven years after graduation and to explore the possibility of internships for current students. Need to find and print out consent form and interview script.

1030-11. Travel time.

11-2. Meeting with alum. He's working in a small software company in a renovated old mill building -- beautiful space. Interview goes well. In addition, it's encouraging to see that he's been very successful -- says he's making more than he ever thought he would, and has contributed significantly to the company. The president of the company is on our External Advisory Board, and I also get a chance to meet with him briefly. Both of them are very willing to have students shadow an employee for a day and to hire interns.

2-230. Travel time.

230-630 Personal time.

630-730 Email.

730-830 Working on reimbursement paperwork for conference. A tricky job. Finally have assembled all the receipts I can find, written a budget and a cover letter, and filled out the forms. Still need to xerox everything, but copy center is closed, so that will have to wait until tomorrow.

830: done for the day.

Uid 256

Diary October 15th

Before 7.00 I&#146;m not sure I kept my diary in a sensible or helpful way last time. Will make notes in this box, and just use middle one for timings and descriptions.

Rose at 6.45, checked e-mails, one or two foreign ones overnight, one I had to reply to asap. (15 mins)

07.00 &#150; 08.00 Social, so to speak (45 mins) On computer and internet (15 mins)

Made coffee and toast, and took it back upstairs. Read Scotsman and tried to solve the crossword.

Then I got up to struggle with getting my podcast out to students in Taiwan. It&#146;s too long (5 minutes download) for some routes, but my software resists uncoupling Norton and sending it to their website. Good thing I sent it by airmail yesterday on a stick, but all this takes time, waiting for it to upload &#150; and then be rejected.

08.00 &#150; 09.00 Social (20 mins) On computer and internet (40 mins)

That struggle continued. Admittedly I am technologically inept, but I don&#146;t like switching off Norton to try to get through to Taiwan. Feel insecure. Got it back on again, though.

09.00 &#150; 10.00 e-mail and scanning (20 mins) Personal (30 mins) External examining (10 mins)

This seems a better format. Best use it for November?

Now run scan on both machines.

e-mail advice to former PhD student about follow-up to job interview by Skype. It looks promising, but he just needs reassurance he is on the right lines.

Time to shower and shave &#150; oh this diary shows my sloppiness!

Must get back to work on that grim WBL draft

10.00 &#150; 11.00 60 mins commenting on draft.

Working on a grim draft, which my laptop doesn&#146;t seem to like, yet it&#146;s easiest for me normally to comment, and suggest changes, on a revised document. Struggling on&#133;&#133;..

11.00 &#150; 12.00 Wrestling with IT 30 mins. Hearing aid fitting 30 mins

&#133;&#133;&#133;..saving and cutting up the files in an effort to sort it out. Although I&#146;m working for Napier, their IT have a policy of no assistance whatsoever for machines and software provided by the pt lecturer, which is my situation.

Hearing aid man comes to replace and retune the aid in my left ear. Great. I should be able to hear properly again

12.00 &#150; 13.00 30 mins not managing to sort out the IT! 30 minutes socialising with young grand-daughter.

Ditto until my grand-daughter arrives. Friday is &#147;In service&#148; afternoon at her school, and we have the joy (I mean it) of a visit from her.

13.00 &#150; 14.00 Social 35 mins. Preparing for phone call.

Lunch.

Then preparing for phone call with external examiner partner for the new LifeWide Learning Award at S University, which has a number of features we must discuss.

14.00 &#150; 15.00 Phone call 20 mins. IT struggles 20 mins. Off to feed ducks 20 mins.

Phone call meant it was best to listen to a newcomer to external examining, and let the other impress me.

Then a short time struggling with IT again.

Then off to feed the ducks at a local pond

15.00 &#150; 16.00 Social with grand-daughter 60 mins

Ducks, a walk and then back home. Snack and then playing Bananagrams

16.00 &#150; 17.00 Personal tutoring 60 mins

Back to work on the wretched WBL submission. I hope he can see it&#146;s best to withdraw, but meantime I must assist as much as I can.

17.00 &#150; 18.00 Social (60 mins)

Watching &#147;The Rescuers&#148; with my grand-daughter, then tea.

18.00 &#150; 19.00 Reading and making notes (60 mins)

Review of paper for journal.

19.00 &#150; 20.00 Reviewing paper. (50 mins)

Completing personal tutoring comments 10 mins

Comment: I need a break. Move on to reviewing a paper, for journal on whose Board I sit.

20.00 &#150; 21.00 Completing personal tutoring comments 50 mins. Keying up this diary 10 mins

Personal tutoring, then diary

21.00 &#150; 22.00 Social 60 mins

Time for this old man to have a break. Let&#146;s have a go at the Scotsman Crossword!

Supper and bed

Summary, again added later. I epitomise, I suggest, the pt academic who has no or little or no access to IT support, has to cope on our own, and often does badly in that. This can consume a great deal of time, distract effort, and frustrate to the point of a desire to just say &#147;OK,forget it; I&#146;m not being paid (much) anyway!&#148;

Uid 257

0000-0100hrs marking student assignments. In bed 0100-0900hrs. Then 0900-1145hrs breakfast and getting ready for the day, walking from lodgings to the campus, alongside marking student assignments and reading papers for a Faculty Graduate Studies Ctte next week. 1145-1245hrs, catch up with email concerning my Graduate School Strategy and correspondence from students on our programme for new teachers wrt observations of their teaching. 1245-1330hrs lunch in campus café with immediate colleagues, discussing the likely fallout of the Browne Review and expectations from the CSR. 1330-1430hrs, review and gather files and documents for the research conference I am attending and presenting at next week. 1430-1700hrs marking student assignments. 1700-2030hrs walk from the campus to the train station and journey home for the weekend, make notes on the work highlights of the week, including notes on today so far, read THE. 2030hrs, make some dinner and wind down.

Uid 258

My employers offer 'family friendly working' which, in theory, means that I work four long days instead of five 'normal' days (if there is such a thing).

What this means in practice is that I spend Fridays with my two-year-old daughter but work frantically while she's asleep, and snatch odd moments to reply to emails while she's otherwise distracted.

So today, while she slept in the afternoon, and after she went to bed in the evening, I marked Masters dissertations. Somehow, while she ate her tea, I also reviewed an essay sent in support of an MA programme application. This meant I was making a decision which may affect the path of someone's life while supervising toddler teatime (fish fingers, green beans and alphabetti spagetti, for the record). If only the students knew.

Uid 259

This day was a bit of a strange day. Living 60 miles from my workplace, and having no teaching on Fridays, I generally work from home and today was no different in that respect. When I say work from home, I really mean nearby because I find working "at home" too distracting (there's always the dishwasher to unload, laundry to hang on the line and a disastrously full biscuit tin that needs to be emptied). So I work from cafes, bars, libraries, hospital canteens, etc. After sporadic attendance over the preceding two decades, I have become a regular visitor to McDonalds (free WiFi and free tea/coffee refills at my local). I sometimes seek out WiFi deadzones and become the 21st century equivalent of the invisible man. Being out of the office, not in email, Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook, or Delicious contact and being very protective of my mobile number, I find there are many more productive hours on a Friday than on any other day of the week. So today I found myself at Starbucks which unfortunately has WiFi but to counteract this, has a motivating tea chai latte.

To understand my thoughts and actions today, it helps to understand how I got here. I had an absolutely horrendous year last year. A third of the department’s staff was made redundant and at the same time we increased our postgraduate provision from 15 students to 150. However hard I worked, however late in the evening I was on campus, however many evenings and weekends I brought home work, it didn’t seem enough. This, together with the politics of Higher Education, the “interesting” management of my University and the internal politics of the department, left me bewildered, exhausted and demoralised. I ended the year sitting in the car park crying and summoning up enough courage to go in each morning.

So why did I return in September? Well, despite all this, I love teaching, I love the students, I love learning (and I’m a foolish optimist). I came back with a strategy for survival that depends on me and my behaviour. So, as I am only allocated 50 minutes to prepare for each lecture, that is all the time I should spend. It’s my bad time-management that means that I spend half a day updating my knowledge or the lecture slides or the student activities. This year I intend to be much stricter with myself. Similarly, I can’t be as available to students. This way, I will survive, and I will be able to research and publish. I know that in order to put up with all the other rubbish that comes with the job I need to feel that I am developing myself as well as my students. My line manager understands this and discussed ways to help me publish. However, within a few days of this, extra managerial and admin responsibilities were being given to me with no corresponding reduction in my existing responsibilities. Will I end this year the same as I did last year?

Consequently Friday, is “do some research or work on a paper as a priority” day. So that was my intention today. I sat, armed with the research of one of my MSc students. The research was good but the student is not a strong writer so we had agreed that we would write a paper for publication together. I sat with the work before me and my netbook on, but also in my mind were the lectures for the coming week that I hadn’t prepared sufficiently, and wouldn’t have any time to devote to other than today. A conversation I had had with an undergraduate student two days earlier was also distracting me. I am the student’s dissertation adviser and his personal tutor so I have known him for three years. In those three years he has had a single ambition, a passion, a vocation that is drawing him through his degree. On Wednesday he said he had changed his mind so I did a bit of probing and listening. It seems that those around him think he should do something different, less risky, more mundane. I have no concern that he would be anything other than a complete success in either career but as he talked it was clear his first choice was still a burning flame in his heart. I gave him the simple advice to imagine himself in 10 years time in each career path, what his day would be like and how he imagined he would feel about himself, his work colleagues and those close to him.

Today, I have been brooding on that conversation; what is burning in me and where do I see myself in ten years time? Where do I see my department and university in five years time? Damn that Starbucks WiFi. I found myself “wasting” time surfing for research positions. I found one that interested me and one that excited me. I researched around them, fired off emails, had telephone conversations, sent off my cv.

At the end of the day I reflected back on what I had achieved for the day; not the work that I expected to but then it never is. The paper still isn’t written but progress has been made. The lectures aren’t as polished as I want them, but I never am satisfied. But when I thought about the possibility of leaving my current position and devoting more time to research a big smile came to my face and a feeling of peace that pushed out the usual feeling of panic and frustration. So thank you and goodnight Starbucks, I’m hoping that I won’t be able to afford you in the near future.

Uid 260

7:15am - I arrive at the university with the intention of updating a course on Moodle. Unfortunately, like all good simple ideas, Moodle has become ever more popular and complex. Somewhere within the source code, Moodle has sprung a leak and drastically slowed down. I was unable to decide whether the system was slow because I was attempting to update it at a time when lots of users were logged in or whether there really was some obscure system overhead that made navigating its interface like wading through treacle. Our ICT staffers were noncommittal about causes and queries elicited no more than a "We're working on it" response.

I see that there are only a handful of users and start uploading files. Initially all goes well and pages are revised and files uploaded smoothly. But after a little while I notice a creeping lengthening of system response time. Eventually the system starts to hang for so long that I am left unsure whether it has crashed or is merely creeping along. In an earlier incarnation I was a Human Factors engineer for a year or two and recall that the usability criteria for multi-user systems included a guideline that users should never have to wait more than 7 seconds for a system response. If that period is exceeded the system causes stress to users. This morning our Moodle server is taking anything up to 40 seconds to confirm a file has uploaded successfully. Around 9am the system has not just slowed down but sometimes does crash and boot me out of Moodle. The Moodle home page carries a banner that reads "We are working to improve Moodle response times".

By 9:15 I have had enough. In two hours I have only achieved a third of what I wanted to do and that has taken twice as long as the whole job should have taken. I am not a happy user. I repair to a cafeteria for coffee to sustain me.

9:35am - I return to my room to find a student waiting for me. He brandishes some sheets of paper telling me that they are his answers to next week's seminar and asks me if I can look over them to see if he's "on the right lines". In earlier years I would have told him that if he curbs his impatience he will discover that in next week's seminar. However, in this Brave New World of student satisfaction surveys I am mindful of the various homilies that our V-C, Dean and Head of School have delivered upon the importance of keeping the punters happy and so I read his thoughts on the topic and provide feedback. Happily he seems to be one of the stronger students so there was not much wrong.

9:50 - I take some materials to copy for this morning's lecture class but find that our sclerotic photocopier is so slow that I have time to copy only two-thirds of what I wanted.

10:00-11:00 - I give a lecture to a small but interested class. "Small" is the operative word. Due to an administrative misunderstanding in our Faculty Office students interested in taking my class were told they could not do so if they had taken a certain other class. They were wrongly informed but by then the damage was done and they had enrolled in other classes. My enrolment comprises the modest total of two - TWO - students. I had contemplated advising my Head of School and cancelling the class but on looking at my time table I decided that I have so few class contact hours that he would inevitably assign me to run seminars in one of the Year 1 compulsory classes. I decided that my research time was more precious than my commitment to teaching beginners classes and I decided to keep quiet. A class of two has the great advantage that there is no problem learning the students' names or noticing whether anyone has skipped class. The marking isn't too onerous either... They are bright and interested so we proceed.

11:10 - It's the end of the week and I prepare to leave the university. I live more than 100 miles North so I have a flat near the university to use during the week and return home for long weekends. I receive a text from my wife who advises that she no longer has to work in South East Asia during the Reading Week so I need not use annual leave to stay at home dog-minding.

11:15 - en route to the car park I meet a former colleague who retired 7 years ago. He looks happy, healthy and relaxed - he's come to borrow a book from the library. We chat for a while.

11:30-1:45pm I have an uneventful drive home

2:00pm - I call on my mother-in-law to take her shopping.

3:45pm - I read an academic paper related to an article I am writing.

4:30pm - I read through next week's seminar problems and ensure that I can still answer them. These relate to a course delivered by a colleague but is one that I formerly taught. However, although he is using my old seminar questions I have not taught the course for 5 years so need to check my knowledge is current.

5:30pm - I start to prepare our evening meal. My wife long ago abandoned cooking and now claims that she has been "de-skilled" in the culinary arts. I prepare the meal in leisurely fashion reading the Guardian as I go.

7:15pm - my wife returns home from work and we eat.

8:00-9:00pm - I attend to some e-mails and thank a speaker from abroad who gave a public lecture at our university earlier in the week.

Uid 261

What a difference a month makes. The fact it's taken me almost a week to find the time to input this says it all..... life suddenly becomes hectic, chaotic and busy in a way that seems unimaginable outside of termtime.

6:30 - 9:00

Get me and three kids up and ready for school and work, all delivered to the correct location.

9:00 - 9:40

In office, at desk, emails and essay extension requests, admin tasks that sap your energy and your will to live.

9:40 - 1:00

I'm teaching a long way from my office and so need to walk across campus. The furniture in the room is not set up in a way that is suitable for my teaching and so needs rearranging. The students are wonderful and arrive early to chat to me - although there are moments when ten minutes to collect my thoughts would be appreciated. Teaching proper kicks off at 10:00 and runs through until 12:30. I don't know why I find teaching to be so uniquely exhausting. I love it - it's a real buzz, my students are keen and engaged. But I'm wiped out at the end of it.

1:00 - 1:45

Lunch with colleagues and discuss the impact of the Browne Review upon our university.

1:45 - 2:45

We have our exam board at the beginning of November and so all marking needs to be up to date. I spend an hour marking three essays.

2:45 - 3:45

I've completed a journal article this week - it's a review of a conference I attended in July. I spend an hour reading through the style guide and submission regulations. I need to make some changes and create an anonymous copy of the article for peer review. I then have to fill in the online submission form and send pdf copies of the article. All this seems to take a long time.

3:45 4:45

I've also begun putting together a grant application this week - it's to the British Academy for £7500 for a small research project. Instead of a word limit there's a charcacter limit. So, I need to write about the project' aims in 3500 characters.... It all feels a bit like playing a game. I read through what I've put so far and make a few changes.

4:45

A colleague gives me a lift home.

5:30

Preparing tea for kids whilst tired I put a bread knife through my left index finger. Feel incredibly stupid. Arrange for neighbour to look after kids and spend remainder of the eveing in Casualty being glued back together.......

Uid 266

Wake shortly after 6.30, due to a combination of wife getting up, daughter coming into bed for a hug, and last night's curry night out with my football friends. First thought is to wonder how on earth I'm going to get through this term, given the ridiculous amount of writing new lectures and re-writing olds ones I've committed myself to. Morning is a bit fraught due to combination of wife's presentation at work, my needing to get to work asap after 9, when my first class starts (teaching assistants will hold the fort for me, but can't do that for long) and youngest daughter's fastidious preparations for Ancient Egyptian day at school. Wife leaves house at 7.45, I have breakfast with my girls, then get off asap. Take youngest into playground and make sure she is hooked up with friends before I leave, but still feel guilty for sprinting away across the playground at 8.55, trying to get to my 9am class 20 minutes drive away.

Get to class at 9.15am, TAs have done a great job getting everyone started. This is the big, whole year-group (120 students) geographical techniques/skills module, and this 2-hour prac needs to be repeated 3 times each week, cos' lab only fits 45 or so. It's the first week of term (we're still on terms, so only 10 weeks to fit in before Xmas), so we're in a computer lab doing some warm-up/revision/setting the tone Excel work with census and climate data. Changed the format this year from follow-the-instructions (which meant they didn't engage brains much) to setting tasks/challenges - seems to be going much better, but means I have to re-write the whole term's practicals as I go along. Most of the students are, as always, pleasant, bright, understanding and seem grateful for what we are delivering. Quiet, studied, but relaxed atmosphere - just the way I like it. End the session by getting them into groups for the big coursework project for this module, which allows me to take all their names, which I endeavour to remember for next session.

Back to office at 11, check I have everything for lecture at 1, then start work on next new lecture for Monday morning + give the email beast a few minutes of face time. Final year dissertation student comes in to deliver the draft she has produced over the summer. Previously, she was very quiet, and I worried she would be a little unengaged with the project, but she has produced a comprehensive draft, is chatty and enthusiastic and looks to have done some nice things. Help her with a specific technical issue, then promise to read draft asap, and put it on my to-do pile, under the umpteen other things (papers to review for journals, grant applications to review for NERC, big grant application I am leading and need to write draft for by today - ha ha ha - PhD students chapters - he needs to submit by end of month, two increasingly overdue big papers that are meant to be major planks in my contribution for the next REF that I probably won't be able to look at properly again now until the New Year, theses to read for the master course I am external examiner for, etc. etc. etc.).

At 12, attend meeting about proposed new first year structure - we merged with 2 other departments recently and this is part of the merger process. We feel that the process has been rushed, is pedagogically unsound, doesn't take into account the major challenges posed by the Browne report and a rash of imminent retirals in the dept, and has been somewhat forced on us, but that we are being painted as whingers just getting in the way of essential change. Atmosphere is collegial, constructive and professional, but with a spicy hint of a resistance movement - can't help picturing us all wearing berets and Che t-shirts. The general mood is that we agree with the general philosophy of a more joined up approach to teaching, but we need to be very carefuly about damaging our present provision, which is very popular with potential and actual students, especially given Lord Browne and the CSR, and the need to be strongly driven by what students want (and will pay for).

Leave at 1 to go to my 3rd year undergrad lecture, where numbers seem to be holding up, thankfully (this is an all new module, forged in a fire of enthusiasm for meaty, substantive (and thus difficult) science built up during my sabbatical last year) - I was a bit worried they would drift away from my little corner (lakes, rivers, estuaries) to the eternally popular glaciers or coasts. Manage to incorporate one of my party pieces - running across the room spilling a pile of all sorts of books,bags, drink bottles and shoes to demonsrtate the distinction between laminar and turbulent flow.

Back to room (via Greggs to buy a Friday treat of doughnut and coffee) at 2, chat briefly to wife on phone to reassure her that youngest daughter recovered from early morning fraughtness before getting to school, then start on lecture writing for next week. Enjoy re-remembering how a Rossby wave works.

Spend the rest of the afternoon putting together a re-structured lecture from a mix of old lecture slides, images from the internet, and explanations from out my own head. 5.20pm - finish first lecture for Monday, pull together the files, books and papers I will need over the weekend for putting together the second lecture on Monday and head home, looking forward to meatballs and spaghetti for tea, daughter's 8th birthday party and a bit of R&R.

Uid 267

Friday 15 October 2010

Still on research leave and living in West Wales. Had an awful night because of actions of teenage daughter on previous day. Woken up just before 8 by youngest (there is a big gap between our two older children and the small one)so can't complain. Did breakfast and got people off to school, nursery and university (wife is also academic - not on research leave but does have permanent advantage of actually living in same town as her academic institutuion of employment and not 5 hour car journey away!)

Answered emails. Research leave this week has consisted of sending numerous emails concerning various edited collections and research seminar series and waiting for overworked colleagues to get back on these. Discussed some of these points with colleague on phone. Spoke to wife on phone. Worked through 'to do' list. Nipped out for paper and had lunch. Started reading a book and making notes (this was the research bit of the daylight period).

Wslked in to meet wife at her university at 2.30, with various forms we need to sign amd get witnesses to sign to say we have signed (we are buying a house). Did that. Left together in car to try and find kitchen showrooms (2). We did eventually find one after a lot of searching and discussed options and picked up a catalogue. Walked into town, browsed in waterstones and then went to nursery to pick up youngest.

Evening meal etc. After youngest bathed and in bed (about 8.30), did another 2 hours of work writing on a paper (which has been given before, is going to be given again in a new different form and then subsequently going to become 2 different publications). Then did washing up with wife and went to bed together.

Uid 268

Today is a day without teaching. Notionally, it is my research day, but at the moment, I have to use much of it for teaching prep or I wouldn't get it done.

I did begin the day with sorting out some images for a research project. After that, I had to deal with a request to me as external examiner to double check a mark for a borderline student.

Much of the day was spent planning my practical class next week. Having given it a title weeks ago, I no longer felt sure what to do with it. I have now found something I think the students will enjoy doing and which they can debate in terms of the relationship between text, performance and the dramaturgical strategy taken.

I'm finding that I have crammed so much into this particular module, it is a little tricky for the students to keep track of it, or follow its logic. I'm asking a great deal of them and though they seem open to this, I'm worried they could start wondering what the core of it actually is. I hope it will become clearer as they apply some of the ideas in particular tasks, but I may need to introduce some moments where we reflect back and make connections between things.

I think they like me, and this is nice, but it's a slightly fond and amused kind of liking, and I'm not sure it means that they are necessarily learning anything.

Apart from this, I did a little reading for the lecture course and a tiny bit on the slides. I think my first two lectures were pretty good and I want to keep this up.

There is still the small matter of the book proposal that needs attention of course. Maybe at the weekend...

Uid 276

Teaching in full swing now and today brought three very different experiences. I started off uploading some documents and hyperlinks to the student portal, for revision and additional reading in several modules. My first contact session today was with my midwifery students, teaching genetics and blood groups for a couple of hours. I really enjoy these sessions as I always get asked lots of practice-related questions, there is a really good cohort dynamic and the group are generous in their feedback (I even got some cake last week!). I then made my way across campus to lead a third year seminar with a group of bioscience students, who were designing a research project involving a health survey. A small number of students made a sound contribution and had clearly thought about the task and done the relevant background reading and planning. However, a significant number appeared to be free-loading (or didn’t even turn up) and just expected everybody else to do all the work. This is really disappointing at this level; the conduct of study mark will be a good discriminator here. I didn’t get lunch today (just grabbed a bag of crisps and an apple on the hoof) before heading off to my last teaching session with the new first years. It was my first session in this module and they are a huge group this year (my module size has increased by 50% to 150 students). I showed them a DVD on embryo development which appeared to go down well – several wanted to borrow it again afterwards, so that’s a good prelude to my next series of lectures with them. Quite a few were anxious about the assessment which has just been set (an essay), so I had a few students asking me questions about this at the end. After this session I wasn’t really up to much for the rest of the day and I was grateful that it was Friday, that my voice could have a rest and that I’d survived another week!

Uid 277

Ah, HE in FE, what fun.

A.M.

The day begins with the news that our purpose built Dance Studio has been taken away from us, to make way for A level teaching, they simply can't stand the noise of us jumping. We are now to be housed in a portacabin. Where you can touch the ceiling. Without even standing on your tippy-toes.

The students have noticed the trend, they asked, 'they don't care about us, do they?' and of course the answer is no.

I then ask the students to create a viral campaign that shows 'Why We Must Value the Arts'. How painfully ironic.

P.M.

I am re-doing my SOW as this group of second years is the lowest level group that I have ever worked with. I have to re-think and start from the beginning. One of my groups consists of only two students. It has thrown me somewhat, as any group work and peer feedback is over quite quickly.

I can cope with lack of skills, but I can't cope with a lack of enthusiam:

Me: What contemporary companies inspire you?

Them: Er, I don't know.

Me: Okay, what kind of performance do you like?

Them: I don't know.

Me: Well, what performances have you seen recently?

Them: I saw The Lion King.

Me: When was that?

Them: 1999.

I am using the The 99% website to try and find inspirational texts to encourage any miniscule crumb of hidden passion. I want them to want it, as most of this group want to be teachers. Hoorah!

Uid 281

Busy admin day as we try not to teach on Fridays so we can get to institutional meetings. Got to office about 8am, despite being out until 9pm the previous night and then working at home until 11pm. Checked emails and went through post. Then a meeting for a submission to the sector skills council around mapping learning outcomes to employability skills. This exercise was the first team meeting with the additional members of my time following faculty reorganisation. We spent two hours mapping the Unit Outcomes to the Employability Matrix but felt very much at sea as the guidance the SSC gave out lacked any detail about how to do this validly and what stringency they used for issues of language.

After that it was a quick meeting about the next days' graduation ceremony and then off to collect the first student from a new joint partnership to take her to her course. This is a short term thing but useful in terms of settling this new relationship and showing we are supportive and accessible. After that I did a line management meeting at a charity I am Trustee for, enabled by work, because it helps us with community engagement and puts opportunities our way.

In between I managed to get five of the eight To Do List items sorted ranging from checking arrangements for an event we're co-hosting with the Students' Union to sending out joining instructions for the first MA residential session this year.

After the meeting I drove to Enfield to meet my partner as otherwise he wouldn't make it for the graduation ceremony on Saturday and he was invited by some of my students. He did buy dinner though! Rolled into bed at 11pm ready for an 7am start Saturday to get to the graduation. Tired? Oh yes, feel like this week has been a rollercoaster and I need some quiet time but with so many new initiatives that isn't going to happen for a few weeks at least!

Uid 282

6:00am Oldest daughter called long distance from Pennsylvania. She often does this as she is driving to work. We talked about a conference I will be attending in Boston, Massachusetts. at the end of October. She is coming down to the conference and we will pay our respects to my grandmother who is laid to rest in a nearby town. We are still trying to figure out which cemetery to visit. We also talked about the Remnant Trust, visiting at the university. I attended a guest lecture last night about the first edition of the King James Bible that is there with the Trust. I got to see it and touch it. The guest lecturer was our provost and his presentation was humorous as well as informational about the history of the King James bible. My daughter would have loved hearing it and seeing the bible.

After the call, listened to the morning news for the weather.

Husband called to find out what time I was planning to go home today. I have a 2:00pm appointment with a co-worker to host a guest to the campus. Once that is done, I will load the car and drive the 1 1/2 hours to get home.

Co-worker called on the phone to offer to bring by his edited copy of an article he has taken the lead on, but that I worked on yesterday too. We decided that I would see his edits when I got to the office. The due date for the article is today. I am excited about the possibility of this research being published.

Other things planned to do today: respond to student emails in online class, grading forums in online classes, start project for the university system (due Nov. 30). This will be a big project to complete. I have the slides made, but have to edit them extensively, then audio record them and organize them for online publication.

Uid 289

0900-1130 Accompanied my wife to a hospital outpatients visit. Though, I did take the chance while waiting to read a student project report that I was marking.

1130-1200 Worked though some emails.

1200-1230 Lunch. Eaten in a common room.

1230-1330 Worked through more emails. This entailed various other actions, such as checking on the progress of other people’s project marking (I am the Project Marking Coordinator).

1330-1430 Finished marking student project: last of my batch.

1430-1630 Assigning papers to reviewers in my role as associate chair of a conference. This is not my first attempt to do this. Some potential reviewers have not replied to emails, so I have to find some more

1630-1700 First meeting with a new MSc student.

1700-1730 Meeting with another new MSc student.

1730-1750 Clearing up before going home.

Uid 290

My diary told the lie that there would be relatively little to do today - just an afternoon one-hour lecture and an open-ended writing meeting immediately after with a colleague.

First up of the space-fillers was responding to a question about one of my assignments that had come in overnight. We are now one week into a two-week deadline and pretty much all of the questions have been from students who are clearly on top of things and pushing the boundaries of what is possible on a relatively straightforward piece of work. While it is encouraging to receive these kinds of questions, it is the lack of questions from those who might be having more difficulties that really concerns me. Experience tells me that the majority of the students won't have even looked in detail at the assessment yet, despite my repeated urgings from day 1 that they do so in order to direct their background reading.

Next up was fielding a phone call from a student interested in registering for one of our postgraduate programmes next year.

Neither of those things had actually taken up a huge amount of time, so now comes the dilemma. This afternoon's lecture is a course that is sort of new for me this year. Although I wrote the course with a colleague about eight years ago, I haven't taught on it for a long time. Nevertheless, the material is straightforward and I could probably walk in and give the lecture without any preparation. So do I do just that and use my spare time for some research, or do I take some time to find ways to work through the course's material that provides an alternative viewpoint from the static explanations of the course text and slides? The research-focussed voice says, "You should expend as little effort on teaching as you possibly can. Doing a good job of teaching won't advance you one iota." The teaching-focussed voice says, "You have a responsibility to the students, and your role as teacher and expert in this area is to pass on your understanding in a stimulating and accessible way." As is usual in these situations, the teaching voice wins out and I spend a couple of hours reviewing the material I want to cover and finding different angles from which to talk about it. There is also next week's class material to prepare for first-thing Monday morning, so that I can distribute it to my postgraduate teaching assistants. So, by the time the 2pm lectures comes around, about 4 hours have been spent on teaching preparation; research will have to take a back seat until another day.

Uid 291

Up 05:30

Coffee, glance at Guardian Online and read e-mail, check network logs,

collect milk

Think about 11:15 lecture -- should I handle strings or pointers first?

Realise that I need to copy a handout for 12:15 lecture, so move time of

waking wife. More e-mail

07:30

Coffee/tea at 07:30. Decide to use other laptop to mail myself notes, only

to find that I need to rebuild the software and d/l many development

packages. Eventually get this done and manage to get to breakfast

(very continental in style), and switch off the computers.

10:00

Leave home and on my bike for the 20 min ride, during which I still

discuss with myself what the first lecture will do. On arrival and

changing into semi-respectable clothes, duplicated the hand-out for

the second lecture. This gives me almost enough time to write a few

lines on paper as my lecture notes for the morning. Of course i

took them to lecture 1, but forgot the laptop and full notes for

lecture 2.

11:15

Lecture in the refurbished Management lecture theatre -- horrid with

white boards and not enough of them. As usual had a fight with the

AV system; it is so much quicker to reboot a piece of chalk! I

decided on the strings lecture, which went OK I think; some

interaction from the geeks in the back row, who I understand do IRC

between themselves as I lecture. Other students seemed engaged as

well, and we covered at least as much as I planned. After the

lecture many students came an asked questions, some easy to answer

and some from students who were very confused. One student was

evidently thinking about the throw-away problem I set, but had not

got there yet. Anyway I as late for lecture 2

12:20

Final year students and a different topic. Usual problems with my

laptop failing top sync with the projector but OK. Started with

some revision of last week, and then some maths. Only one mistake

on the board! Slight relief to play them some music to illustrate

additive synthesis, including part of a piece of mine. Also covered

wavetable synthesis rather too fast, and ended the lecture with

another piece of mine -- a joke work on dogs barking, which I wrote

last year as an example of wavetable synth.

After a student came and said he was enjoying the course but the

maths today was beyond him. I reassured him that this was the

hardest part, partially true. Eventually got back to my office for

lunch.

13:25

Lunch at my desk (banana and two apples) and think about the next

stages. Told that my Vising Research Fellow, RWD, was intending

coming this afternoon as he had just been paid -- he lives a

precarious existence. Spent a short time with the third member of

the team setting up a demo for RWD. But very short as we have

departmental seminar this afternoon. A research student came and

ask questions about examiners and thesis, but only a few minutes

14:15

Seminar time, with cake. First of two seminars from my friend and

room neighbour MDV; at last I understand some of what they do! We

we doing the short 25min seminar. It is my turn second. After the

usual problem with the projector I described the project I was

working on all summer, using a final year project from a very

talented student from 2009. Seemed OK, and the jokes raised at

least a smile.

Did not hang about much as we wanted to shown RWD the current

state of the project. He has been wanting this for 3 or 4 years and

at last we have it. Short discussion about how to write it up and

in which direction to go next. Actually feeling rather smug about

it.

A short coffee break, continuing the discussion, but I had to

leave to the next lecture

16:15

The second time today with these students. I was very unprepared,

but I filled in with some small points like file formats and

software, all free stuff of course. Also introduced the software I

expect them to use in the second coursework, and played some sounds

from it. The time passed, but not the best lecture in reality.

A group of students discussed square waves, non-existence of

discontinuities and psychoacoustics. Again I was delayed returning

to my office, and RWD seemed to have gone; a shame as we have not

met for a while and i wanted his advice on a number of topics.

There was a happy moment when I passed the Director of Teaching

en route to my office, and he reported that he had heard good reports

on the seminar (which he had missed), and he hoped that i would be

able to continue in the department next academic year (I am due to

retire next summer).

17:30

In PhD lab, and informal chats with two of my PhD students and a

research officer (not mine). Talking about the Browne report and

how things had degenerated since their u/g time, at least regarding

grants and fees. Really was looking for RWD or MDV. Bumped into

Director of Research who said that the seminar was excellent, and

many people had commented to him about it, and he personally really

liked it as it covered three distinct areas of interest to me. I

have never had such feedback on other seminars and it was rather

embarrassing if also gratifying.

18:10

It being Friday the three of us (two SLs and myself) decided it was

a night for a quiet drink -- we call it a juice night. I went to

the shop to get a bottle of pink, and about 18:30 we opened it in

the departmental kitchen. After dealing (again) with the student

writing up, and getting a bunch of forms to deal with registration,

thesis title, and annual report eventually our quiet time started.

Discussion was largely on Browne and the current report that

teaching budgets were to be cut by 80% and research by 1bn. I knew

that both my friends were actively looking at posts not in the UK,

though I think they did not know about each other. Pleasant to

relax with work colleagues with whom I have ongoing projects, but the

main topic is rather depressing. We broke up earlier than some

weeks as they had a society AGM to attend.

19:30

Cycle home, more concerned with how fast I was going that the day's

work. I cook a simple supper of salad, cheese and garlic bread,

with a bottle of decent Fitou. Somehow there was no evening left.

I suspect I fell asleep as soon as I got to bed, about 22:00. It

has been a hard week.

Uid 293

Day at home working

Started the day ay 6.50 - an hour of emails - responding to students and colleagues.

Stopped at 7.50 to make sure kids fed and dressed for school.

Began at 8.45 working on a presentation for Japan around feminism and disability studies. Worked on this for about 3 hours.

Switched to read some Masters work and a draft chapter sent by a ph- 1.5 hours.

Lunch at the desk and then read thorugh a jount proposal working up to submit between us (group of academics)- ready for Monday meeting.

Addressed some other new emails and worked on a new practitioner doctorate so looked in inquiry based learning for this.

Finished at 5 today (earlier) as friends coming for the weekend.

Uid 294

Friday - working at home, trying to keep this as a research day, but some other activities always encroach.

Activities completed:

Email correspondence with students on my programme who are still not sure of their tutorial groups, and with administrators to try to resolve.

Wrote reference for MSc student who graduated 3 years ago and is now considering further study.

Email discussion with Director of Admissions and AHD re student who wishes to transfer to programme.

Completed UKRIO survey on behalf of institution, reporting on incidences of research misconduct. Discussed potential changes to institutional procedure with assistant registrar.

Drafted application for ethical approval for project which is about to start.

A number of text messages exchanged with a year 3 student who was admitted to hospital yesterday following a severe asthma attack. Checking that she is ok and that her family are making sure she has everything she needs. She is disappointed to be told she has to stay in for another night but still talking about attending Uni on Monday - she's been told to ask again on Sunday!

Skype meeting with colleagues to refine methodology for upcoming project, 'Day in the Digital Life', documenting digital footprints.

Finished amendments to a paper for ITALICS and submitted it.

Finalised supervisor allocation for final year students, published list to students, provided details to staff together with dissertation handbook.

Arranged room for PhD student to use to conduct user survey and interviews.

Looked at some of the sites included in the Google Creative Internet showcase https://docs.google.com/present/view?authkey=CJ2Ug\_IF&hl=en&id=0Abmo0iWBO2gEZGY3cnc3dnpfMzM4Y3o2bmduZDY - scholarship activity with possible benefits for teaching and research activities. Considered which might be useful to include in my Emerging Technologies lectures.

Uid 298

15th October – a Friday and the end of a busy week which has had several long days. I don’t need to be on Campus until 1 pm and can just potter on with a variety of odd jobs. Research planning has been pretty intensive on the past couple of days and I need to switch into teaching mode for a bit. I am responsible for a new level 2 module that is being developed from scratch. I developed a new one last year and was hoping not to have to do another one from scratch this year. However, this deals with a core part of the programme where we have not been doing as well as we should. There is some pressure on this because I am expected to make this one work well right from the start.

[morning] I take a leisurely breakfast and look through the new textbook I am using while sketching out what I’ll do for next week’s lecture. I want to deal with the key issues that drive the RUP development cycle and make a clean break with waterfall models. I think there is a bit of Australian research I can bring in to good effect.

[13:00 – 14:30] Two sessions with students not sure what they want to do for final year projects but they like some of the topic areas in practical software development that I will supervise.

[14:30 – 15:00] Meet with our technical services manager to discuss delays in some of the lab software being available and actions to try and resolve this over next week.

[15:00 - 15:30] I am supposed to be doing an overdue PhD progress review and I go over to my colleague’s research unit only to find that they are not there. No one knows where they are.

[15:30 – 16:00] I go back to my office and work through the day’s emails and writing short responses on some teaching arrangements and research plans. During this time I get a phone call that my colleague is delayed coming back from a meeting in town but will be here soon!

[16:00 – 16:35] Put in some time working on the next laboratory exercise sheet that I am preparing for students on the level-2 module. I hate giving students things that don’t work on the University machines so I am making sure that it works on the current laboratory computers before uploading it to the server for students.

[16:35 – 18:20] This is a mature student who has been part-time for the last year and will now spend a year on a full-time bursary contributing to some contracted research. She is trying to cram her life’s work into a PhD and needs to be more focussed on the need to get to a successful thesis and viva in about 2 years from now. We discuss the need to focus and demonstrate research skills – the Nobel prize can come later. We also discuss how to make best use of the opportunity provided by the work the University is contracted to do over the next 9 to 12 months. For a student who has yet to reach the equivalent of a full-time first year her progress is good but not being able to attend our research methods classes because she was overseas shows in her approach to the problems.

I have had brilliant part-time mature students – my best having completed the PhD in less than three years while holding down a demanding job. I have also had mature students who never managed to adjust to the needs of academic research. This one could go either way!

[18:20 – 18:30] Make sure I save all the files and the laboratory exercise sheet before going home.

Uid 300

Now settled in a bit to the new term. The new Computerised Timetabling System has still not managed to come up with a viable solution and a state of chaos reigns, but fortunately I'm not actually lecturing this semester, so I provide sympathy for colleagues, but not much more.

Today is being slightly curtailed by the residual effects of a start-of-term cold - I haven't been able to sleep it off as I've been giving and organising public talks for the last couple of days, so it is dragging on rather.

Today is dominated by catching up emails and paperwork from the last couple of days. In particular rewriting (again) a document for a pilot of a research funding exercise. Although this doesn't feed into the actual exercise, it's thought to be important to be involved at this stage. However (as always) the goalposts are either moving or just undefined and we are having to constantly rewrite the document as the aims change, which feels like a big waste of time. Very frustrating and led to me missing an interesting seminar.

Then some marking (very good work) course development (fun, but slow) and a few more emails.

Still no time to actually do any research, which is getting to be very annoying. It looks like another weekend in front of the computer...

Uid 301

Friday 15th October.

I went into the university (65 miles from were I live) on my motorbike. It's getting close to the end of the riding season. Travel to the iniversity and parking is always a problem, so I end up by only going in when I have to and trying to do marking, research and study at home.

In the morning I spent three hours preparing coursework assignments for this teaching period. In order to make the coursework relevant to the students and engaging, I wait until I know which degree programs are taking the course. As this doesn't get finalized until the second week of the teaching period, it's a rush to get an assignment created and out to the students.

I had several meetings with students who are trying to determine topics and find supervisors for their major final year projects. The best part about projects is the enthusiasm of the students and their naive desire to change the world with a single project. Guiding them to a project scope that can be delivered in the time and resource constraints they have sometimes feels like bursting their bubble, but they will appreciate it towards the end when they are rushing to complete.

This teaching period (11 weeks), I'm teaching four courses to ~450 students from different 8 degree programs. I give teh students opportunities to have one-on-one meetings to resolve issues. All I ask is that they arrange a timeslot so that I can manage my schedule. Students seem to think they should be able to just turn up at your office and you should be there to see them, so there is always juggling to be done that is frustrating for me and the students. The students seem blissfully unaware that you have anything else to do.

I receive e-mails from students asking questions, such as "When is the assignment due", without referenece to which course or what assignment they are referring to. I typically takes me 1-2 hours each day to answer student e-mails. This would take less than half this time if they could identify themselves.

I spend two hours on the phone and e-mail, arranging details of giving a guest presentation to an external engineering society, sorting out a simulation software event for later in the teaching period and following up on a research report that is overdue.

I gave a lecture in project management in the afternoon from 3-5pm. As usual, about 40% of the students attended. those present were attentive and engaged. I worry about those that were not present.

After the lecture I go to the IT dept to try and resolve availability of some key software for the students to use for an upcoming assignment. Support services at the university aren't very 'supportive'. The emphasis is very much on the lecturer resolving their own issues. This detracts significantly from the time available for teaching, preparation and research. Eventually, they reluctantly agree to move the request higher up the priority list - we'll see....

Another hour of marking for an external teaching commitment takes me to the end of the day at the university. However, I need to do another two hours when I get home of updating lectures for next week, before my Friday is done.

Uid 305

7.30 Wake up. Sometimes I would check emails at this point in the day but as I was up very late last night I think probably everything has been dealt with

8.30 Cycle to university

9am Lecture to first years - not giving, but listening as this is a new poetry course and we are all participating in the lecture course. Good to talk to colleagues about what we are all using for teaching.

10am Teaching first year poetry course. We discuss what should be including on a university English course, and defend reading literature at university. We then talk briefly about 'Ballad of Sir Patrick Spens' and listen to a folksong version of it.

11am Teaching first year novel course. This is the first meeting so the students need to introduce themselves to one another, and we discuss the novel genre generally. Students contribute names of recent novels they have read - from 'Do Androids dream of Electric Sheep' to '1984' (which surprisingly they deem 'not suitable' for a novel course!)

12 Teaching first year novel course. Novels read by this group include 'Dr Zhivago', 'One Day', 'Kite Runner' and works by Stephen King. We discuss whether translated works, contemporary lit, or 'popular' novels could be included on the course.

1-2.30pm Checking emails, talking to students. Organising a new student secretary for the student staff consultative committee and allocating presentations for student groups. Gather materials for working over the weekend, including finishing a lecture on Mary Wollstonecraft, and grant application.

2.30-3.30pm Cycle home and make soup for partner who is ill. Normally would work until around 8pm in the department, but planning instead to work at home until late. Really appreciate the flexibility of university research as I often choose to take late lunch breaks and work until late, especially on Friday after my teaching, when not many people are around in the department itself.

3.30-5pm Reading to prepare for first year classes; planning next Friday's classes and thinking about different approaches to the text we are discussing (Henry James).

5.30pm onwards. Work on grant applications: 1) for attendance at AHRC workshop (colleague has kindly given feedback) and 2) for AHRC collaborative grant with local institution.

Uid 308

Working at home

08:00-09:00 -- catching up on yesterday's email. Also made another stab and beginning to clear the backlog. The task is never ending but it would be good to stop the now daily hate mail from microsoft exchange telling me that I am close to the limit!

0900:10:45 approx -- Finished reviewing a grad student's chapter for discussion with co-supervisor. Relieved to find that after several years (at least 3 -- albeit part time -- since I took over), he finally seems to understand the quality of work that he will need to produce to get this degree. I really hope he can do it; there are some glimmers in this draft, but it is only one chapter, and he has spent so much time achieving very little.

10:45-11:30 -- steel self for afternoon of meetings / talks / etc. At least the walk to work provides a chance to organise thoughts and plan the rest of the day.

Now on campus

12:00-13:00 -- meet colleague who co-supervises the grad student. She agrees that (a) the work is improving; (b) he still has some way to go. She is very happy to carry out next week's supervision alone so that I can attend the conference.

13:00-13:55 -- meet U/G student (Canadian) for "mentoring" -- loathe that word but it is a useful shortcut. We discussed her options for the next steps. She is pretty excited about the idea of doing an LLM-R, which I think might suit her; but she is very sensible about the need to keep an eye on Canadian accreditation requirements. Very fine line between offering encouragement and support, which I am happy to do, and advice, which should be avoided at all costs, especially given the vagaries of the Canadian system.

14:00-14:45 -- Graduate student supervision -- Not a lot of progress since we last met in June. Unsurprising really with his new baby. He says that we should expect a short paper next week. He seems very absorbed by the categories. It may be that he is having a little difficulty with the "wood" v. "trees". He then does what so many of us do -- avoid the writing because he does not know what he thinks… but of course the only way to figure out what he thinks is to write. He'll get there… I fervently hope.

15:00-16:30 -- attended staff seminar; as feared the attendance was sparse -- Friday afternoon. Too bad that none of the staff whose work is closest to hers were able to make it. She was very patient about the questions...

16:30 - 17:00 -- brief meeting with the PG programme administrators. Sorted out a couple of issues and caught them up on my schedule.

17:10-18:30 -- misc tasks… email, drafted a couple of references, some programme admin work for the new U/G study abroad (Canada)… worked on the essay questions for the new postgraduate module.

Back home now, after supper.

21:00-23:00 email, marking.

Uid 309

Terrible traffic on the way to drop my daughter off. Missed the train, so decided to walk to work - I was running quite regularly over the summer, but time for exercise has completely vanished since the academic year got going, so it was nice to feel like I'd done something physical. Finally got in about 9.

For the first time all week, I had a morning without meetings or teaching. I filled out an upgrade form for a PhD student; sent a couple of emails for the journal I co-edit; chased up a few personal tutees who have gone awol; tried to get some exam papers to give a student feedback on her performance; caught up on email; and worked on the revisions of my book manuscript. It didn't feel like a particularly busy morning, but looking back on it, I got quite a lot done. Gloomy email from a friend at HEFCE, and an friendly but bracing exchange with a senior colleague I am hoping to collaborate with on a grant.

I had office hours from 12-1, but no students appeared. Grabbed a nasty supermarket sandwich at 1 and read the Times Higher on the Browne Report. It seems to mean the almost total privatisation of higher education - depressing stuff. Students will end up paying twice what they do now for the same level of resource. Not a recipe for a happy staff-student relationship. Had a quick look through my materials for my 2 o'clock seminar, and a brief chat with a tearful colleague who is already feeling the rough end of management.

At 2, my first session with a new seminar group. This year, I've instituted a chat about seminar etiquette after a few bad experiences with students texting and being perennially late. As ever, I provide tea, coffee and biscuits in the 10 minute break, but I have started asking students to bring their own mugs, as I seemed to spend most of last year washing mouldy crockery. Rather sweetly, most of them bring a mug, and enthusiastically brew up. They have done lots of reading, and we have a good initial discussion. Interesting how the dynamic changes with different gender mixes: this group is 50:50. I finish up by talking them through the preparation for next week, and silently marvel at how easy it all is once you've taught the unit once. The Blackboard site is all set up with the key readings and all I have to do is allocate students to groups. Bliss.

After the seminar, I chat to a couple of students about their dissertation plans, and have a quick catch up on email. A university administrator friend has posted a Facebook link to a BBC news item predicting a 79% cut in the higher education teaching budget. Yikes.

At 4.15 I head off to pick up my daughter and a bit of shopping on the way home. I'm going away for the weekend, but at the last moment I grab a print out of my book m/s to read through. I should be working through my pile of external examining material, but this is a deliberate attempt to prioritise research, which is all important at my institution. It takes a deliberate effort though.

On the way out I pass a student and feel an irrational need to justify my early departure. In fact, I've been up at 6 every day this week in an attempt to get on top of the workload. Feel utterly exhausted, but it has been nice to get stuck into teaching again. The endless preparation before term starts made me lose sight of how much fun it is.

At home, make tea for my daughter and myself. Oven fish and chips, with only some frozen peas as a nod at nutritional value. I'm a single parent, and consider myself extremely lucky to be able to have a job I love as well as a delightful daughter, but it is hard to keep up standards in all areas.

After my daughter's in bed, catch up with the latest on the higher education cuts. Truly grim stuff. I hadn't been planning to go on the demo on November 10, but I am beginning to think I will.

Uid 310

Dear diary 15.10.10

Already done 45 hours + this week, so a little less frantic today, working at home.

Put washing on the line as it was not raining yet.

Quick trip to the Co-op for bread and chocolate.

9-11.30 Clearing emails mostly resulting from challenging (!) situations regarding staff and/ or students and/or external colleagues. Most issues either resolved or meetings arranged for next week to sort. Also some good news: finally got a paper accepted after 2 re-edits; and a student managed to get funding to attend a conference where we have had a joint paper accepted.

Submitted crit of a journal article had forgotten to send a week ago.

Deleted sundry rubbish and turned off email for the day

11.30-1.30 Reviewed MSc project (possible fail) as external examiner for another University. Not brilliant, but just meets the threshold standard.

1.30-3 Retail therapy. Except I hate shopping, but it has turned cold and needed new jumpers, also bought new pen drive, as left my own I the computer at work.

3.00-3.15 Lunch.

3.15-4.30 Write external examiner report for exam board on Monday. Feed the cat. Turn off the computer.

pm out to dinner, but spend time discussing the so called bonfire of the quangoes. So far as I can see much of this is cosmetic. The Hearing Aid Council was abolished last June, British ship building only exists in name, British Nuclear Fuels.. well possibly gone so the Government can re-negotiate how much it paus to decommission the power stations.

Dear diary 15.9.10

7.45 Drove to work, arrived 8.am. Much less traffic today than yesterday when a major fire near the main road slowed down traffic.

8- 8.10 Turn on computer and wait…. and wait. New IT system in place and taking ages to let us log in. Meanwhile, sort out back-up plans and list for the next 3 days as away from the desk.

8.10-9.50 Lecture preparation. Students start next Monday. Contact repro to note that info for one set of handouts already sent off was incomplete and needed to be amended (and apologised, they have a huge work load at this time of year)

9.50 -10 Quick trip to canteen for hot chocolate and food

10-4 SPSS training, with breaks at:

11.45-12 (check emails);

1.15-2.00 (collect mail, email daughter in Cairo, lunch – nice to stop for a change instead of eating at the desk);

2.45-3.00 (back to office and delete minor emails)

Brain hurts!

4-4.30 Check emails. Phone colleague to respond to her request for advice in my role as external examiner for her course.

4.30-5.00 Corridor conversation leading to an office based mutual support meeting with colleague who is managing own life, and a number of staff, with a range of very challenging life circumstances. Could offer no solutions, but sympathy and phone no, in case I could be of any use.

5-5.45 Checked all papers needed for tomorrow’s meeting are on the laptop. Completed another lecture prep set and logged all handouts which have been sent off. This shadow system is the result of very erratic service last year when a major change led to all repro having to be done centrally and the new service being severely overstretched. Few problems have been experienced over the rest of the year, but this is a busy time and I need to be sure what I have already sent and what is still to do. Luckily, almost all is sorted out, so long as this comes back in time. The next move in the University (already well under way) is to ensure that students only get access to materials via the Virtual Learning Environment. Is this really part of the University’s ‘green agenda’ (like charging for car parking???), or could it possibly be a way of passing the cost of copying onto the student? The concern, of course, is that only well organised students download class materials in time for the class, and it first needs and well organised staff to load up the materials in the first place……..

5.45 Left the office before the house staff came around to evict us. First time this week. This is a week when students are not yet back (except many of the health care students who seem always to be with us) so the campus closes around 6 pm. Fairly unhelpful in the week before term starts, and again, it is a cost cutting exercise.

5.45-6.30 Drove home via the station to collect tickets for tomorrow’s train to London for an HPC meeting. The queue for the ‘fast ticket’ machine is always mobbed at 7am!

6.30 -7.15 Cooked, turned on lap top and had a fight with it, as it decided not to let me in! Poured large glass of wine. Eventually sorted the problem. Put wine glass in the fridge for later! Sort-of watched the news and rubbish TV at the same time as starting to write this diary.

7.15-7.30 Ate

7.30 -7.45 Phoned son, partly social, partly to ‘book’ accommodation in October, so I can attend a meeting in NE England but also see family including granddaughter. Ended up being persuaded to stay a second night as over-night babysitter.

7.45 -8.00 Phoned husband to let him know where I will be for the next few days and also update plans for mid-October when we had planned a weekend away following 2 days when I am working in Ireland. Sadly impossible as no flights from Scotland work for him, so rearrange my return journey. NOT Ryanair, so at least this was a civilised experience!

8.00- 9.00 Read papers for tomorrow’s meeting. 19 different papers all needing attention! Managed 5 and will do the rest on the train tomorrow. Annotated.

9-10 Demolished large glass of wine. Washed the dishes. Text to say one staff family life threatening crisis is now downgraded to non- life threatening but still crisis. Responded. Began to read book on the Balkans left behind by travelling daughter. Gave up and watched another mindless TV programme. Sleep

Long day!

Uid 312

Today was a full day, but then again every day has been thus far. Given that this is my first semester as a faculty member, it seems like there is just not enough time in the day for all of the things I have to do.

I arrived on campus early this morning to let students into the computer lab to work. Our labs are generally closed on Fridays because our department doesn't pay for students to monitor them on low traffic days. However, I had planned to be in the office anyway (despite the fact that I don't teach on Fridays), so I agreed earlier in the week to let students in who needed to work on projects. The first student to need the lab was a student in one of my courses, and I helped her out with some problems she was having with the project assignment that is due at midnight tonight.

Off and on throughout the day I assisted other students in the lab with a variety of issues. While I don't have formal office hours on Fridays, my door was open nearly all day, and I was happy to help students that stopped by. It was nice to see students from my courses working hard on a day that is typically pretty empty around the building. I saw none of my colleagues in the department, nor any admin staff members today. Like most Fridays, I'm the only one here.

I spent several hours this morning and afternoon grading the midterm exam I gave in one of my classes last night. I was a bit dismayed at how poorly the students did. Prior to the test I actually felt like the exam was on the easier side of things. However, the students in this course are not traditional computer science majors. Being a new faculty member here (and right out of graduate school) it's difficult for me to gauge these students' abilities and adjust accordingly. After looking at the scores I spent a good bit of time worrying about how to address the low scores with my class. Should I curve the exam? How can I get them to really learn the material? Is there something I need to change for future exams and course presentations?

Mid afternoon on Fridays I have a meeting with an upper-level undergraduate student for an independent study course. Today was a lot of fun. We briefly talked about changes that need to be made to a human subject proposal document for a study he is conducting (and why), and then we spent the better part of the hour discussing a research paper on UX practices in open source software projects. I had a lot of fun today doing this. The student was engaged in the paper, and I was able to pull in related material about other topics like communities of practice. Having now read and discussed 4-5 papers in the independent study, I'm starting to see progress in the student's ability to reflect critically on the readings--something he had never been asked to do in prior coursework.

I took a break from the mountain of work (grading homework, exams, etc) on my desk to have a long-distance research meeting with a colleague via Skype. Being away from the graduate school environment where research discussions were the norm, I realized how much I missed that kind of interaction. My colleague and I caught up a bit (we're both swamped with new jobs) and then we started brainstorming about some issues related to a research project she has started. In some ways I felt like I was back "home" in grad school, if only for an hour. I look forward to making these kinds of calls a regular part of my schedule to help me stay engaged in research. (The first 6 weeks of this semester have been all about course prep, grading, and other teaching duties. So much so that I worry when I'll ever have the requisite time to do the research that is needed to secure tenure---at least my other fellow new faculty feel the same way, and my senior colleagues tell me that it gets much easier after the first year or two).

As the early-evening set in I finished up some administrative paperwork that has been staring at me for a while. It's now nearly 8pm, and I'm exhausted. It's time to head home, eat dinner, and then sit down to grade some homework assignments (programs) submitted earlier this week. This weekend will be spent prepping an exam and materials for the coming week. Hopefully I'll be able to find some time to relax a bit with my wife and enjoy the gorgeous Fall weather outside.

Uid 314

midnight-3am. worked on marking up honours student's report.

7am up. exhausted

7-8.30 get daughter to school

9-11 watch groupwork presentations to mark 2nd year sw esign course

11-12 discuss marking

12-13 final lecture for 2nd year sw desn course. collected teaching evaluations & tell students about the exam.

13-16 work through anothter students' report. Talk to her about some of it, scan comments and email the rest to her at home.

16-17 prepare to go off for 2 weeks to conference trip

17-19 buy kitten food; take daughter to swimming lessons; eat out; talk to spouse (OK wife :-) about her trip away, job, mother-in-law.

19-21 ensure latest Devo album and Robert Scott "ends run together" in iTunes for trip. ensure machines backed up. read and file email that I haven't got to. build todo list for tomorrow.

23 listen to archers podcast. crash and sleep.

Uid 315

Today was the final day of the teaching trimester, and the final report submission day for our honours students.

I got in at 9:30am, and the entire "normal workings hours" part of the day revolved around lightening meetings with my four honours students, checking over report drafts. I did have one impromptu 20-minute meeting with a PhD student, but I had to leave while my fellow co-supervisor was launching into some discussion about the related work because one of my honours students had a particularly weak evaluation chapter that needed addressing.

I had to leave at 2:30pm to pick up my son from school, although I came back at 7:30pm and stayed until the midnight deadline, flitting between the different students, and trying to provide some high-level guidance as to where they needed to put their last-gasp effort in on their reports.

Not a typical day really - a lot more report reviewing and no lecturing or administrative responsibilities

Uid 316

Doing this in retrospect so it will not be as full as a main entry. Interesting to think what are the highlights of the day.

Got up tired as usual. Six hours is never enough. Got to work by 7.30 and put on the kettle. Lesson planning by 7.45.

Students start arriving at 8.30 and by then I have answered most of my mail but not all.

Start teaching GCSE English. Have a class of 5 sk it's a very easy lesson. Finishing a media response essay so have marked first attempts and two don't have to have a redo.

Next is ICT... Quite a fight stopping students from spending all lesson on games. Decided to close the ICT suite next week for a week.

Finish nails in leson 3 and then start in essay marking. One student hits an A grade and J tell him in his marhs lesson. He is chugged!!!

I have an inspection from 11.00 til 1.00 to approve our Food Tech Course . Schemes if work and lesson plans need to be in place. Also the kitchen needs approval. Inspector stays for over two hours but gives the approval... After a good grilling!

Short afternoon meeting on exam entries which are all good then students come back early from PE so end up making tea for ten!!!! Studentsall happy and in the cabs for 3.00.

a short break then off to pick up my own darling daughter and straight out to a weekend away Larping (cross country pantomime).

In general a tiring but successful day.

More when I am realtime not retrospective :)

Uid 318

I still have not adjusted to being half-time. I gave a reading in lecture last evening, dragging my eight year old child with me, and then I am teaching on Fridays on an hourly-paid basis and found myself going in a little early to do some admin tasks.

On Fridays, except for my afternoon class, I'm meant to be working as a housewife. I have a list of things that need doing and it's a long, long list.

But I spent a few hours Friday morning sorting out the tutors for an independent study module. I shouldn't really be doing this on a not-paid day, but the tutor on another module gave me the tutor allocations today (convenient for him, because he's full time) and not when I'd asked for it (when I was working). I didn't want my students to suffer a delay, so I did two hour's work unpaid to sort it. I'll have to remember to try and leave early one day next week...but I'm sure something else will be on fire by then.

When I pop by my pigeonhole there are two more MA manuscripts to mark. They're 30-40K words each and I'm eager to read them all. It's just when will I do it?

My first year workshop has poor attendance. I know it's a sunny Friday afternoon, but I worry that I've done something wrong, that I've set a task too hard or not engaging enough, that I have failed to be inspiring. We have a good time in my 'haiku surgery' and I keep hammering home the notion that being self-consciously 'poetic' isn't a good thing and that their own humble perspectives and words are the strongest elements of their writing. Over and over we find wonderful phrases in their speech as they describe what they saw and substitute those for the awkward or overblown language of their first drafts.

I am doing more than I am being paid to do, and when I pick up my daughter from school, I realise that I am struggling to get tea on the table and get her to tap dancing class. I am tired, after finishing my book the day before, and I have to do an Open Day on Saturday morning. I believe I am meant to have extra time off for this duty, but I don't think I've ever managed to take it. Also, I am doing an extra talk for a colleague in another subject and she has failed to email me any presentation materials. How shall I talk for 45 minutes about a degree I don't teach? It's preying on my mind as I lock the house and walk to the dance studio.

My daughter is about to have a dance show and I am away for most of it on conference. There are questions about hair and tights that the teachers can only answer on Saturday morning and I feel that I want to be there, instead of my husband, who may not get the details quite right... But at the same time, I want to be involved in my subject at such a critical time; both at the Open Day and at the conference, which is our subject's national conference. Just because I'm half time, doesn't mean I'm not still passionate about our subject. I won't be half time forever...I hope.

I could attend to these issues better if half my mind wasn't already buried in my next narrative. I can't wait to get back to it, though I'm not at all sure how I'll be writing it, and I have some problems in imagining my (near future) setting. I've just seen a grant to visit another country, where there is a similar setting (this one from the past) which would be very useful. If I was successful in getting the grant, I could go there for a month. I think about taking my daughter and having some time together, making maps and taking photographs and making notes about the feel of the spaces there. But it's tricky, making a case for creative writing as proper research. I've always had to fund such trips myself before, but I really can't afford it now. The head of research and the head of the school have said that they might support my application, if I make a good case for it on my draft application.

So, while I chat to the other mums and dads at tap, I am thinking about the draft application, how to write about it. When my husband comes in to see my daughter dance, I think that I'll also have to ask him if I have his support. Will we need to hire a cleaner again, while I'm gone?

While my husband puts a pizza in the oven for my daughter's supper, I run to pick up a pair of trousers I've had altered for him at M&S. I want to pick up a three-course and bottle of wine meal for £10, but they're out of vegetarian main courses, so I end up running to Tesco's, as well. I am just in time to collapse in a heap with the family to watch Star Trek Voyager at eight o'clock. At last, I stop thinking about work.

Uid 319

Been reviewing slide sets for various courses and trying to improve them. This is the second week of term. Attendance is still reasonable but the classes are much too large, and it is just depressing when you see people sitting zoned out at the back of the lecture theatre not even bothering to listen. Some keen students are interacting which is heartening but they are the ones who you know would interact anyway. The looming of the CSR and the probably irrecoverable disaster that it is about to be inflicted on us all (well apart from bankers, financiers and the rest of the rich) is an upsetting undercurrent at the moment. I do not see much future for Universities in this country anymore. I expect many colleagues to jump ship and move elsewhere (particularly people who are not UK in origin and who have lots of research profile)

Ended up with more students to supervise for projects than my I am supposed to have by the official model. Am really hacked off at colleagues' unwillingness/inability to generate projects that students will be interested in doing and their general unwillingness to supervise anyone at all. I get so angry at the "students are just a waste of my time when I could be doing my important research work" attitude - most of the time the "research work" is really rather dull, over specialised and not that important, and even more often, their research is actually writing project proposals or managing projects rather than doing any actual research. "I cant do my lecture can you fill in as I have to be at a meeting"

Research is important but so are the students. They are not better or more important than me because they have the luxury of time to send doing "research" and I do twice as much teaching as them.

Uid 322

This was quite a good day because I didn't have too many meetings. I got in early (8am) to have a skype meeting with a colleague in Australia. We're trying to organise a symposium at an international conference next year and so we wanted to discuss potential participants etc. Since the academic year has just started here, we also discussed the studies that I'm doing with my final year and MSc students that are related to the two grants that we hold together.

After this meeting, I then had some time before my next meeting at 10am. During this time I did admin e.g., answering emails, sending emails, uploading materials to the online learning environment.

At 10am I had a meeting with some final year students. This was their first meeting so we discussed the type of research design for their project and then spent quite a lot of time discussing the logistics of the research. They want to collect data with children (not something I've done before or have good access for) so this will be a bit more involved than my other student projects.

After the meeting, I spent about 3 hours working on teaching. I'm teaching a new module next term and so wanted to get started on the preparation. Luckily my colleague who taught this module last year (and who has returned to the US) has given me all of her module materials. I've decided to stick with her syllabus for the first year and then make changes depending on how the module runs. One task I do have to do is to find more readings for the module. This is because the numbers on our MSc programme have doubled and the module involves student presentations so I need to make sure that I have enough readings for all the students. But this was kind of fun because I got to spend some time looking at the most recent issues of journals in my field. I was trying to find some interesting articles that are very recent and that are also quite short.

At the end of the day I had my office hours but I only had one appointment with one of my second year tutees. I explained my new feedback initiative (spending time with students going through some feedback they received last year) and the student seemed very keen so that was nice.

After this meeting, I kept doing a bit of work on the teaching but was ready to leave at 5pm.

Uid 323

Up early for train to attend a full-day Regional Network meeting with other ITE providers. Useful networking of people with similar strengths and concerns over current political and economic climate for HEIs and ITE.

Uid 325

On the Friday the 15th of October, I spent the entire day packing, and preparing notes and presentations departing to the OOPSLA/SPLASH 2010 conference in USA. I only handled urgent queries regarding teaching over email but didn't do anything other than preparing to depart. Not the best day to pick. :-(

Uid 326

Nothing much to report as this was a non-working day (I'm semi-retired and trying to keep to half time work) which I spent visiting my daughter and baby grandaughter. However as usual I kept in touch with email via my trusty iphone, and checked out some research on drawing as a tool for learning - the focus of much of my recent work.

Uid 329

No formal teaching today but 6 individual 'mentoring' sessions with my new batch of 2nd year undergraduate mentees, of 15 - 20 mins each.

All but one came at their allotted time slots - just one failed to appear, the same person who had repeatedly double-booked an already-taken time slot on the Doodle meeting scheduler. This inability to book a free slot seems to represent a deeper lack of commitment to the offered mentoring process, since she has neither agreed to come at several other offered times, nor made any effort to come and see me of her own accord. At this point, I feel the onus is now on the student to remedy matters and email or drop by to arrange a time, rather than me continuing to chase.

Enjoyable discussions with all the other mentees - they seem engaged, courteous, willing to work with me. Thye in turn appeared to enjoy the informal meeting and one-to-one discussion.

Rather unusually and radically, the day also saw another teaching-related meeting - an informal meeting of a group of concerned colleagues, who each felt very anxious regarding a set of proposals to revise the Part 1 teaching programme, which seemed to go backwards rather than forwards, with likely impact upon clear pedagogic improvements explicitly made by the whole departmental unit in the past few years.

An excellent, thoughtful, and constructive discussion for about an hour, leading to an action plan consisting of some notes to be presented to the Teaching Director, and a suggested way forward. A key issue was the proposal to cut longer teaching modules into shorter, 'bite-sized' chunks, each with their own multiple assessments. Our recent experience had led us to teach longer, more integrative modules, and ask students to complete fewer, more substantial course assessments - clear improvements in their academic performance were evident from adopting such an approach. Hence, we all felt very unhappy at the proposals being bulldozed through from on high.

As a result of this meeting and the offered ideas, the Teaching Director has called another meeting. We wait to see what outcomes can be generated, despite being pressurised to agree, and rapidly, to the Director's proposals.

The rest of the day was taken up with research matters, including a scoping meeting I called with a number of colleagues from across the University, in order to discuss the possibility of writing a large, consortial grant proposal for a Dec deadline. Finally, I spent 2 hours working on some new data for a project nearly completed, and shortly to be written up for a heavy duty, high-profile publication, to be submitted to Science in the first instance.

Uid 331

...I am a bit stressed with Browne, CSR and the Russell Group lobby to increase fees. Throughout my department and many others around our institution, there is worry and anxiety. I only just discovered this survey today, and I hope to participate as much as possible and have time to make the required entries which causes me to reflect on practice.

Uid 333

Got up at usual time (5.45am) and was at my computer (home office) soon after 7am, preparing the agenda for my PI management meeting with the project manager of the current AHRC-funded project. This project is funded for a year and buys me out of 4 hours of teaching a week. The pressure to get external funding is huge, but I don't like the fact that it buys me out of teaching. Yes, I love research, but the research I love is my own, in a library, kind of research--not collaborative big projects, especially when I have to manage them. Wish it bought me out of admin...

After fixing the agenda I did an hour and a half of email, which included email with students wanting to make sure I would be able to sign their forms to approve their dissertation topics today. The deadline is midday.

Part of the funded project is to create a series of online tutorials for use by students and the public, so I then spent a couple of hours on that. Quite slow going, rather basic, and not very rewarding to do.

Went into work and picked up student dissertation proposals from my pigeon hole; signed them all off and then handed them to the administrator for processing. I have to sign for those I'm supervising (3) plus those of my personal tutees who are doing them (also 3). Would be much better to be able to do this electronically. I'm taking over as Director of Undergraduate Study next year and might see if I can change this.

Then I had my PI meeting with the project manager. I've moved these meetings from 10am to 11am (fortnightly). I break for lunch at 12 (because I get up early) and just found that starting the meeting at 10 made it run for 2 hours; starting at 11 keeps it to 1 hour.

Then I had a short meeting with a colleague and an administrator to find out if my college could increase the number of undergraduates it is taking in my subject. The department overall doesn't want to increase numbers, but one other college is axing my subject from 2012, so I wanted to take up the slack (of 2 students per year) that this created. A weakness of the collegiate system is that in small subjects students have little academic community from others in their own subject in their own college and yet students learn most from each other and studying together. Increasing the numbers from 2 to 4 a year in one of the colleges I look after would be great for their learning, even if it means more students for me to teach. This idea was approved in principle but has to go to another committee now.

Lunch with a colleague from another HEI who also does some teaching for me at my institution because he lives locally (and loves tutorial teaching, which his HEI doesn't do). Talked about how great the new first years at my colleges are. We were both very enthused by the prospect of teaching them.

After lunch, wrote up the minutes of the PI meeting and circulated to other members of the project team.

Spent much of the rest of the afternoon reading and preparing the materials for an AHRC Peer Review College training day next week, but managed to get an hours run-around on the real tennis court during mid afternoon. Rounded the day off with a Department pub 'meeting'. Only four of us (of 40+ people invited) but we had a lively and amicable chat about syllabus changes (very contentious issues to come at an away day later this academic year) and admissions processes.

Clocked off around 7pm.

Uid 335

I am cheating a little here, as I've just joined, and the 15th October was a good few days ago!

I'll write more about my reasons for joining in the next post (to avoid skewing the system).

But here's a little background on me. I'm reaching a 'turning point' in my life and career, and the next 6-12 months are going to be very important. So it seems appropriate to contribute to what's happening here.

15th October - taught the same 2 hour Masters seminar twice (because we have 50 students in the class and want to avoid seminars larger than 25). Only one student is from the UK, though there is a mixture of nationalities amongst the rest. We're three weeks into the course. This weeks activity was to read 1 of 4 possible journal articles. Most students have read at least one, which is a good sign. Those who haven't I split up amongst groups who have to form discussion groups. Some Chinese and Indian students are very reticent at first, and typically shy or nervous. Some friendly encouragement and they warm-up, but still don't seem to relax. Conversely, German students in the next group are very confident and relaxed, of course the challenge here is to support them in developing deeper critiques, while avoiding shutting out quieter students from other countries. But all the students are polite and patient, so things are looking good for the future.

Also had to send off a paper version of a funding application to do with teaching, which had taken all week to get together. Frantic running around emailing and begging people to get paperwork signed off to meet the deadline. A number of senior people comment to me that the universities systems, set up to protect the institution, almost seem to ensure that it's almost impossible to submit bids by deadlines. Seems like half the staff at the university had to approve the bid. We even had to get senior staff to apply pressure on support staff to sign-off. That being said, other support staff were absolutely amazing in the help they provided for me, who hasn't done this before and otherwise had no help or advice on what to do. Of course, it's all good for the CV, and getting the money to develop the project would be great, though I'm not sure that being successful will do anything for my stress levels or free time. Dean (of faculty) spots me in the corridor and congratulates me on getting it submitting, though I'm not sure that means I'm going to be given any more support if I'm successful....

Rest of the afternoon (and early evening) spent organised and editting teaching materials for all next week's classes, so they can be emailed to the university printers and sent to me for next week - this year my attempt to be organised seems to be working!

What is left of the evening spent trying to make some small progress on my part-time PhD which has to be submitted within months.

Uid 343

I have rather little teaching to do on Fridays, so I spent much of the day reading chapters that two of my research students had recently completed towards their theses. One was quite easy to read, though I pencilled in quite a few grammatical corrections. The other was full of detailed, highly technical mathematics and was slow going to say the least. I wasn't going to get through this in a single sitting.

Then in early afternoon I had an email from New Yoik: Benoit Mandelbrot had died during the night. I knew that he was suffering from cancer, but it was still a shock. The 'Father of Fractals', he had created the area in which I researched, and literally changed the way that many mathematicians and scientists thought about things. His thesis, propounded in the late 1970s, that highly irregular objects with detail at all scales were the norm rather than the exception, had a fundamental effect on many areas of mathematics and science. I remembered my many meetings with him and the support and friendship that he had given me over the years. I emailed the news on to a few colleagues - it was not announced publicly for a couple of days.

An ancient tradition (of at least 3 years standing) in our department is that one of the professors provides biscuits to go with Friday afternoon tea in the common room. It was my turn today, and I had bought quite a varied selection ranging from (expensive) Leibniz chocolate biscuits (we have to have those because of the mathematician of that name) to the rather more mundane rich tea. We generally get a fair number of people coming to morning coffee and afternoon tea in the common room each day, not least because that is where one learns about what is going on, but the lure of free biscuits and the feeling that the week is at an end, brings in a lot more people on Friday afternoon, in particular many research students. We chatted and joked about this and that before people drifted off, either to continue their work, or to go home.