Surveys for Friday 15 April 2011

Uid 11

On holiday on Greek island of Symi. Been on holiday since 12th April, so starting to chill out now. Still checking email and dealing with emergencies and an unco-operative colleague, who will not adapt to using email and insists on having paper copies of resit papers, even though they get submitted electronically. He doesn't seem able to use a printer - and he is an Information Systems lecturer!

Still, I have the advantage as I am demob heavy and counting down to early retirement and pension in July! I have started throwing away paper and giving away books and software and electronic bits from the office. My office colleague has already lined up my replacement so he doesn't get landed with someone insufferable.

Now thinking what to do when I finish university teaching - some A level tutoring already fallen into my lap. Maybe we'll move to Greece...

Uid 13

Woke up especially early (6 am) to get youngest to her school for a field trip out-of-state.

Got in to work by 8:30 am, and just wrote until 10 am. I have an NSF "Computing Education for the 21st Century (CE21)" due on Monday the 25th.

At 10 am, I met for 30 minutes with a visitor from another University campus. We're collaborating on a workshop at his campus in May.

I worked for 30 minutes until 11 am, then met with students for my Senior Design class. Back to writing, and a brief lunch, before teaching at noon.

I taught the end of a chapter on circular linked lists and graphs. I am using peer instruction with Ubiquitous Presenter to get a sense of student ability. They're still having trouble dealing with object references.

I headed home to do some shopping, then pick up my wife, and head back by 3pm to a graduate student's engagement party.

Uid 14

April 15 started very early. My 15-month-old threw a fit around 4:30, and because I was traveling, I was essentially up since then. It was the day of the Butler University Undergraduate Research Conference, an annual event in the midwest (USA) to which I like to bring my students. This is not so much because it is a well-attended or prestigious conference; the reason if far more natural. It is Spring, and Butler has a beautiful campus, ideal for throwing a frisbee and enjoying the company of professors and students. Usually, my students do the poster session, which I prefer for engaging interested parties---whether scholars or curious students from other institutions. This year I had students also give a formal presentation for the first time.

At 6:30, one of my undergraduate researchers picked me up at my house to go get the university vehicle we had reserved. My family has but one car, and the alternative would have been to rouse my wife and kids (who are too young to be left alone) for them to take me to get the university van. I would have biked if not for the heavy rain in the forecast. We picked up the other five students at 7:00 and were on the road to the conference.

The group traveling with me consisted of six students who are working with me in the development of a history education game, two of whom are also working on a separate project on the role of collaborative writing in STEM education. The six were a subset of the game development team, three opting not to travel with us. These six happen to be some of the funniest students I’ve ever met. Maybe it’s because I have fairly integrated myself into the social group that I feel so comfortable with them. I consider them as friends and coworkers, where I am the experienced team leader who tries to help them along the way. (See note at the end.)

We got there in just enough time to get registered and discover the morning coffee gone, and we found the room for our 9am presentation with 30 seconds to spare. The ten-minute presentation was pretty raw: they rambled about several ideas, all of which were good but none of which were clear. I had flashbacks to being a straight-A undergraduate and my advisor setting me up with speaking opportunities. I deluded myself into thinking I was prepared, and folks told me it went well, but I’m sure the lack of practice showed. I wrote a note to myself in my pocket notebook that I really need to get my students to do practice presentations, because the practice is an important part of the process.

The second and only other presentation in the session was poor: a student doing a presentation on what seemed to be an intro sociology project, attempting to draw conclusions from a poorly-designed instrument without reliability or validity, with way too small a sample size and way too many pie charts. It was a poor presentation, but not that much worse than my own students’. Yet, as we walked to the poster session, my students were laughing at how this other presenter basically had nothing important to say. I kept my mouth shut but kept a mental note to consider how to help teach humility as a virtue.

During the poster session, the second poster (beside my students’) that I came across was for another project at my university. It happened to be based on a technology of which I am more than dubious---in fact, I feel that it’s snakeoil, and that the upper administration’s push to commercialize it shows not only how poorly they understand technology, but how poorly they manage resources due to the hope for the next Gatorade or Vitamin D. The premise of the research was that one could make an objective measure of the quality of any teaching material, and I’m not sure that this is even a sound hypothesis. I may have been a bit rude to the student at the poster, but I was trying to get him to see my side---purely hopeless given his cockiness. The positive side of the story is that he brought over his advisor, someone I have been told many times to meet during my six years at my university. He and I got along smashingly, sharing some common interests in cognitive psychology, learning, and mind maps. We talked for about 1.5 hours, which included demoing the latest version of our educational game to him. He and I will get together in about three weeks for lunch or coffee to talk more about our respective interests.

After getting a lame box lunch at the conference, the team got back in the car for a meeting with TR, an independent game developer from Indianapolis. This is the third semester of the game development project: the first semester was an interdisciplinary colloquium on game design, which honestly did not go as well as I had hoped. I ended up patching together the ideas from the colloq over the summer to feed them to the next stage, a one-semester game programming class. This is the third semester, in which I took eight of the best students from the previous semester and brought them aboard to finish the project. This is significant since the last time we met with TR, it was about three-fourths of the way through the design colloquium, when we had hit bottom. It was great to be able to meet with him again and show him an actual playable artifact.

His feedback was generous, but his insights cut me to the bone. He pointed out that what we had was good for our timeframe and that it should serve its purpose, but he was right to also point out some serious problems. At this point, we have to have this done by the end of the semester, and barring herculean volunteer efforts in the four weeks between the end of semester and the ship date, we are pretty much stuck with our core design. This worries me, because my co-PI and I talk a lot about making the learning come from the fun, and how this is is supposed to represent an enlightened approach to educational game development, but it’s possible that we’ve missed our mark. This especially hurts because I know how critical I am of projects (like the one mentioned above) where professors drastically oversell the value of their efforts. I need to allocate serious time to reflecting on this, if for no other reason than to find some inner peace regarding it.

We drove back from the meeting, briefly going over TR’s comments on the road. I dropped students off, dropped off the van, was picked up by my family, and went out to a church fish fry, which was great. My friend BB came in as we were finishing up and set next to us, and she and I got into a discussion about teaching. She is a math education professor, and she had spent the day at the national math teacher’s association conference. She was clearly excited about the conference but also concerned about some quality issues and, mostly, the claims of silver bullets that everyone with a product wanted to make. I told her about my recent reading of Thomas and Seely Brown’s “A New Culture of Learning,” and she seemed really interested. She and I really should get together more often. When I think about more progressive and avant garde modes of teaching, I often wonder about the role of pure mathematics.

We came home and I played with the boys a little, then lie down on the couch. When I awoke, my wife was already putting them to bed---I had intended to get up and help, but she knew I was pretty tired. At 8pm, three of my undergraduate researchers who had been with me all day came over for some board games. In fact, we sat in my living room talking for about 70 minutes before we even got out a game. We played a round of Betrayal at House on the Hill, which only a bum die roll kept me from winning, and then they headed out around 10.

Of all my day surveys, even the weekend ones, today’s might have been the least overtly professorial. However, it was also one of the best days I’ve had all year. No committee meetings, no marketing, no grading: just spending the day with students whose company I enjoy and whom I inspire to work on what they all call their greatest undergraduate experience.

Based on my working with this group, I have spent a lot of time this semester considering the role of the professor in the “new culture of learning.” (Note---I haven’t finished the book yet!) As I was thinking this over today, I found my mind moving towards Alistair Cockburn’s model of software development as a cooperative game. Cockburn states that the game has two goals: the first is the production of working software that has value to the customer, and the second is setting up for the next game. This second goal is really about learning, especially learning through reflective practice. I state it to my students in no uncertain terms: scholars like Cockburn and practitioners like Fowler both frame software as a learning activity in which the team is learning how to solve the problem. So, if learning is already the real goal of software development, where does this leave CS education? Why not just have all of our students just go into the workforce and learn in situ? A thought passed through my mind today: what if at the undergraduate university level, Cockburn’s two goals were inverted, so that the primary goal was setting up for the next game, and the secondary one was working software with value? The next game is the rest of their lives. I still need to spend some time thinking about this and kicking it around, probably going next to my blog.

Uid 21

Woke up early this morning (about 6:20), which is better than I've

been doing for most of the week---I've been waking up at 3 a.m. a lot

of nights and working through until 11 p.m.

Started the morning with breakfast and washing out the cast-iron

skillets that had not been cleaned yesterday. Over breakfast, I read

the Science Times section of the Tuesday NY Times, which I had not a

time for earlier this week. There was no very exciting science news

in it, but at least it wasn't one of their "special issues" where all

the writers try to focus on one topic. Those are usually terrible, as

half the writers have no idea what they are writing about and attempt

"human interest" columns that would be better off hidden in some other

section of the paper.

After my shower, I checked my e-mail and found that a student in one

of my classes had successfully installed a newer version of one of the

programs we are relying on it. It turns out that the newest version

is missing an important feature that was in the earlier ones, so we

need to keep both versions around---a nuisance.

I sent e-mail off to the class explaining some work I had done for the

class and where the results could be found. Later today or over the

weekend I'll have to try to find a workaround for creating a set of

files needed by the old version of the program, so that they can use

the feature that is missing from the new version. (I think that the

latest version omitted the feature not because it is unimportant, but

because they were having trouble generating these needed auxilliary

files.)

8:00 am Checked the status of my blog. Only one new comment since

last night, and it did not need a reply. Readership is down from my

peak in January (I'm now getting 600-800 views a week, not 1,600), but

I've not had anything very exciting to say lately---too tired and

stressed from teaching my two classes.

Teaching two grad classes this quarter is more stressful than I

expected. I've taught 2 courses at once in the past, but usually they

were classes that I had taught many times before and had a good handle

on---I could do extemporaneous lectures with only a half hour prep,

since I had put in the many hours of development work in previous

years. This quarter, both my courses are substantially new material,

and only one exercise and a couple of lectures were ones that I could

do without needing extensive prep. I've been putting in almost 5

hours of development time per lecture, so with 6 lectures a week, I'm

getting up to 37 hours of work just on my teaching, not counting the

time I'm spending meeting with grad students.

The Dean has asked grad directors to do a detailed analysis of the

existing curriculum to look for ways to streamline it. I looked at

the request and saw that it was asking for about as much effort as

half an ABET-accreditation review---that is, it was asking for about 6

faculty-months of effort in the next month. Everyone in our

department would have to stop all real work (teaching and research) to

do what the Dean requested. He'll be at our department meeting today,

and I'll tell him that his request was ludicrous. We'll also plan how

to do the important work of updating and streamlining our curriculum

over the rest of the spring and summer. It'll have to be done by then,

as I'll be on sabbatical next year, and I have the most experience

with curriculum design of anyone in the department. (Am I saying I

don't trust my colleagues to do a good job without me? I'm afraid so.)

Since the dean will be at our faculty meeting this afternoon, I put on

my most formal T-shirt (one I designed last year for students in my

spring quarter class). I have to impress him a little bit with my

seriousness about curricular reform, as I've already butted heads with

the Associate Dean for Research and Graduate Studies, who was

insisting that I format information he had requested into a

spreadsheet for him. I refused to do clerical work for him---if he

doesn't like the format of the information, he can damn well format it

himself. I offered to resign as grad director, which was not a very

serious threat, since no one else is interested in doing the job. (We

do have a replacement for me next year, when I'm on sabbatical, but he

was chosen only because he has filled in for me before and is the

least reluctant to do it.)

8:10-8:50 tried writing up a referee report for a journal article that

I have mixed feelings about. I think that the study is deeply flawed,

but that the idea needs to get out to the community for discussion.

I'm not sure that the journal it was submitted to is the best forum

for that discussion, but I'm not sure where would be, as the

discussion needs to include two communities that essentially never

talk to each other (high school biology teachers and professional

bioinformaticians).

9:10-9:45 On my bike commute up the hill, I mused about what I would

do on sabbatical next year, adding yet another project to my list of

choices. This one is perhaps the biggest I've thought of

yet---writing a book. I'm not a particularly fast writer, so it would

take a full year. If I don't do it during sabbatical, it'll be 10

years before I have enough time again to write a book. The book I'm

thinking of would not be based on my current professional interests

(for those I'd be better off getting journal papers done), but based

on a project I started back in 1981 and have played with as a hobbyist

for a few months once a decade since. The book would be written for

hobbyists, but contain enough tutorial material that it could be used

to really learn the subject. The subject is not related to my current

research, but is technical and professional enough that it would be a

reasonable use of sabbatical time. Advantage: I'd have an excuse to

really work on the hobby nearly full time. Disadvantages: I'd have to

write a lot, and if I get writer's block I'd have nothing to show for

the sabbatical. It also would not help me decide between the two main

research fields I'm thinking of getting into, and would leave me still

without grant funding.

9:45-9:55 wrote in this time log.

9:55-10:10 cleaned and set up bread machine for this afternoon's

departmental bread-and-tea.

10:10-10:55 tried to refactor and debug a Makefile and program to show to the

morning class (not needed until Monday)

10:55-12:10 class in the Science Library, with an excellent presentation

by the librarian on advanced search techniques and specialty

databases.

12:10-12:20 buy lunch at the taco truck (I didn't have time to wait in

line, so bought a pre-made sandwich)

12:20-1:55 More debugging. The Makefile seems fine now, but there is

a problem in the program I'm using---either I'm completely

mis-using it, or the feature I'm trying to use has been broken

by bug fixes elsewhere in the code since it was last used

about 6 years ago.

1:55-2:00 Run back to Science Library

2-3:20 Another excellent session with the science librarian, having

very little overlap with the first one!

3:20-3:25 Run to the faculty meeting

3:25-5 Faculty meeting with the dean. Lots of talk about budgets and

space planning. After the dean left, we got down to a

proposal by another faculty member for a joint program with

another department for an NIH training grant, which would

require creating some new courses. I merged this idea with

the Dean's request to streamline our course offerings to

reduce teaching expenses. We've started a complete curriculum

overhaul of our grad program, and will do the undergrad

curriculum in a month or two.

5-5:30 Bread and tea with the grad students. Played a couple of

games of foosball with them.

5:30-6 Read and responded to e-mal

6-6:20 More debugging. It looks like something is broken in the

code, but I've not yet pinpointed where.

6:20-6:40 Switched to looking at the other class. Did an analysis of

the data generated by the students (k-mer counts from one of

our sequencing runs). The results look surprsingly good.

6:40-6:50 Sent out mail to the faculty requesting specific constraints

on the curriculum redesign (which courses they see as

essential, elective, ...)

6:50-7:00 updated this time log.

7-7:05 Another email to faculty on the curriculum redesign, with info

about the current curricular structure (which half the faculty

are clueless about).

7:10-7:20 cycle home

7:20-7:40 heat and eat dinner

7:40-8:40 clean up kitchen and wash accumulated dishes

8:40-9:10 read and cleaned up e-mail from earlier in the week. Now I

have only 123 messages that have not been deleted or filed---that

is nearly a record low, as I get about 66 messages a day (averaged

since Jan 1, after the spam filter. My own procmail filter blocks

another 45 messages aday---I have no idea how many more messages a

day the filter provided by the university blocks. Oh, I didn't

count the 35 messages a day that I prefilter into files based on

subject tags and read in blocks. So my estimate should be more

like 100 messages a day after filtering.

9:10-9:20 helped my son load his clothes into the washing machine and

start a load.

9:20-9:45 Watched a "Whose Line is It Anyway?" episode on YouTube

9:45-10:10 Did situps and leg lifts with my son, brushed teeth and

went to bed.

10:10-11pm Read part of a fantasy book (Sherri Tepper's Jinian

Footseer) to help me get to sleep.

Uid 22

Up and away early, we needed to go the train station and meet my wifeâ€™s brother and his family at the train station. My wifeâ€™s family is coming to town to celebrate her birthday so itâ€™s going to be a busy weekend. Despite this detour I was at work before they had opened the doors.

Todays schedule includes learning Javascript, HTML5 and a Python lecture.

Javascript is kind of interesting ... I donâ€™t know if I mean it in a good way or in a bad way. I need to get a proper book on Javascript to get the details on why it behaves the way it does.

Spent most of the day looking at Javascript. Then it was time to buy some food and start to prepare for tomorrows party - a large part of our relatives are going to descend on our house on saturday. Pfjuuuu.

Uid 23

A quiet, uneventful day. It’s week two of our Easter vacation period and I spent today at home marking MA assignments from distance study students. They should have been done and second marked by now, so I am feeling guilty. There were some really interesting ones, including one from a student who managed to conduct a small study, with data collected from her students, in a part of the Arab world that has been under a state of emergency. The students came in to give her data between taking part in public protests! Now that’s what I call commitment (from her and them!). She and I had some Skype conversations about the logistics of it all when she was working on the assignment, so I was wondering how she’d manage to pull it together in those extraordinary circumstances. Good to read the product.

Also had some e-mail communication with a campus-based undergraduate and her mother. The student has pneumonia and is fretting about assignments and exams. I can give her an extension for individual coursework but one piece of work is part of a group research project and the others can’t proceed without her input. It’s the literature review – would be, wouldn’t it?? Have told the lass not to worry and been in touch with the module tutor; we’ll meet on Monday to try to sort it out.

Tomorrow is my birthday – have had some lovely greetings from friends in Australia, Japan and Spain already today. Another year – wonder what the world (wider and Uni) will feel like next birthday? So much has happened since last April...

Uid 24

April 15, 2011

A typical day.

I taught CS2 at 9:00, then had a chunk of time to prepare for my 1:00 compilers course. I was supposed to get a call from an HR person regarding a former student, but my phone remained silent all morning. After my 1:00 class I met with a student who is struggling a bit - we have regular meetings set up to try to get them back on track.

Then I met with a fellow faculty member who had questions about serving as the faculty advisor for a student group. After that, yet another student meeting, with another student who's fallen behind. Then it's off to my 4:00 CS2.

In CS2 we finished up defining an iterator for a BST. Students seemed to understand the use of a stack in the implementation - a promising sign. In compilers we finished up a discussion of back-patching jumps during intermediate code generation.

On a personal note, got the good news that my spouse's biopsy results were negative. That's what we expected, but we had been anxious nonetheless.

In the evening we took the kids out for Sushi and then went for a movie (Rio). A good time was had by all.

Uid 25

You know the way retired people say that their days are so full they cannot imagine how they ever had time to go to work? The end of term last week meant that, in theory, there would be more time to think,reflect and plan but in fact all sorts of stuff has surged into the time available. Partly this is about being so tired that everything takes longer and I have less resilience to say no. The exhilaration of getting our new Masters off the ground has been somewhat temepred by the slog of writing offical paperwork,but this is now done.

I share the outrage at the shabby treatment of a postgraduate student here,treatment which came to light in a discussion following a teaching observation. This poor guy,in the first year of his PhD and completely new to teaching, teaches in exchange for some fee remission,which is fairly common here and no doubt elsewhere. BUT he has been asked to convene two undergraduate modules on a satellite campus,which is serious responsibility, and appears to be getting no support. Mercifully this has now come the attention of his supervisor who is appalled and will take action. But this is eight weeks into term. On top of it all he lives soem distance from the campus,uses a wheelchair and nobody had told him he should claim mileage.

Nearly thirty years since I was first a part-time university teacher with damn-all in the way of rights or support,but is this really what a 21st century employer should look like?

Uid 26

Fridays. I usually like Fridays, but not this one. Today was one of those "combining work with being a supermom" kind of days...

Woke up late and ran around the house in the morning trying to get everyone out the door on time. Took son to school and then helped with the flower sale for an hour, it was a fund raiser for son's drama program at school. Left from there and went to pick up a jacket for the dance concert at daughter's school. (I'm on the Fine Arts Board and agreed to run the errand as it was "in my neighborhood.")

Then went to find a place for brunch that had free wifi...had to log in and answer emails and prep for noon conference call for grant proposal. Ate lunch while typing.

Then drove to daughter's school as I was chaperoning the chorus for their competition. As I drove to the festival I was on the conference call...glad I can muti-task. Finished the conference call and went into the festival. Handled coats and bags while the group sang (they were wonderful). Upon conclusion of competition, left and had to pick up son from school. Drove home and arrived just in time for second conference call, introductions for a new project I've been assigned to. Not very interesting, will have to find a way to bail after the initial meeting.

It's now 5 pm and the "real" work begins. I have a research meeting tomorrow and a conference that I'm co-chair of. Must print off agendas for the meeting and sign-in sheet. Make a list of what to buy for breakfast food tomorrow. (Thank heaven that lunch is pre-ordered.) Send out reminders to all participants about room numbers and times. Now I must work on two more sections of the grant proposal before bed. Oh yes, time to think about dinner...must feed the family, then back to work. Called it quits around 9 pm. Had a nice glass of wine and then went to bed. Tomorrow is another day...

Uid 28

Teaching is over, so the more relaxed atmosphere means my early morning swim lasts longer than usual. I have only recently learned to swim the crawl and discuss the finer points of the leg action with fellow (faster) swimmers. We are looking forward to when the Open Air pool opens at the end of the month.

Arriving at work, I realise that I shouldn’t have been as relaxed as I have quite a few tasks to get through. I send out some MSc marketing material to colleagues for comment. The material took nearly two days of concentrated work to prepare and I make a note to feed this back to the marketing department who send out requests for copy with deadlines of a week, without realising other commitments of academic staff.

I have a pile of assessments to mark and am interrupted in sorting these out by the arrival of a colleague who has retired but still does some part-time work for us. It is lovely to see him as his enthusiasm for the subject is undimmed and he has an unquenchable interest in new technology. When he hears that our third year project students are presenting their bid for a technical merit prize, he is genuinely pleased to come along. The students are characteristically late but once they get started, they do a very professional presentation of their product and the technology involved in it. We listen to four presentations that are all good in their different ways and there is much discussion over who will receive the prize. There are the usual tensions between the more creative multimedia and games development staff and the more technical software development staff of the relative merits of creativity and software engineering. I would like us to work more closely together as I can see that there is a need for both but each sees the others’ discipline as being of lesser importance, somehow.

My colleague had asked me to sit in on a meeting with one of his tutees who needed advice about her module choices for next year. It was a delicate matter as the student was signed up to a course consisting mainly of software development and she was struggling with our first year programming module. Although she had put in a great effort, she did not seem to understand the basics. We wanted to advise her to change her course without undermining her achievements. She left us saying she would look at other options so we shall see what she decides. After she has left we discuss how we are going to plan a new three month funded project. We are concerned that with such a short time-scale and so many other pressures intruding, it could easily get side-lined and we could end up not completing it.

As I got back in my office the phone was ringing. It was an almost daily call from one of my 3rd year project students. He is feeling very stressed and constantly needs advice and reinforcement. This time the call was about a forthcoming job interview which he felt ill-prepared for and was too much pressure when he was trying to finish assignments. He then went on to complain about the lack of involvement of one of his fellow students in his group. Pressure mounts at this time of year in final year group work and I try to keep my distance as they have to learn to sort problems out themselves. However, occasionally I intervene when there is extreme behaviour. In this case, the student concerned was retaking the module and exhibiting the same behaviour of not making any contribution. This year, he made a token effort at the start but it has degenerated. Understandably, his fellow group members don’t want him to get any of the credit for their product.

I liaise with ICT services about getting some old computers for one of the project groups to demonstrate their product at our annual public exhibition of group work. They have developed a mobile application for systems administrators to be able to remotely monitor computer systems. They want to show that if you pull the plug out of the computer, the application will detect it. We used to have a very poor relationship with ICT services but we have both tried to work together on various projects and we have a much better relationship now and they are very helpful.

I forward an email to all MSc teaching staff from a student who wants a supervisor for his research area. Many members of staff took voluntary redundancy a couple of years ago and we have further loss this year. As I enter the remaining lecturers involved in postgraduate teaching in the To: list of the email, I realise how depleted our staff base is and wonder how we are going to service all the teaching we are committed to for next year, let alone the research supervision. I arrange a workshop on small group teaching with the same staff. The general compulsory modules have healthy cohorts but some of the specialist modules have small numbers and it is often difficult to cope with such small classes when students have widely different backgrounds. These range from overseas students who have English as a second language and no professional experience to part-time UK students who might work in the specialist area that they are studying.

My original target for today was to finish reviewing a paper for the IET. As I settle down to this task I get a call from my husband to remind me that we are meeting friends in the pub at 6pm to celebrate his birthday. As the deadline for the review is not for another week, I convince myself I need to approach the review with a fresh mind and head off home. I stuff my bag with a couple of books looking at small group teaching methods but am aware that the garden needs a lot of attention and I might not open them...

Uid 31

It's Friday. Admitted students are visiting, so things are more crazy

than usual. It's also been a service-heavy week for me, as two of my

ad-hoc committees have had visitors to campus this week, and I've needed

to meet with them.

Last night I was too tired to prepare for class, so I do it first thing in

the morning (before 7 a.m.) I read the paper over breakfast. En route to

school, I rethink one section of the lesson plan. I have students answer

questions based on the reading on a discussion board the night before

class; students didn't really seem to "get" one part of the reading, so I

decide to lead a more structured discussion rather than just turning the

students loose to discuss it. I rewrite my notes quickly in the ten

minutes before class.

The first half of class goes reasonably well, but there isn't enough

time to walk through this new topic. I also discover that there has

been a correction to the book since the last time I taught it - one of

the graphs in my copy was incorrect. Oh no! Chaos ensues, as half the

students have one version of the graph and half have the other. At least

it is easy to tell which one is correct. This discussion takes longer

than expected and we don't quite finish - I tell students that we will

finish on Monday. Not one of my greatest triumphs, but that's life.

I make a note to find the corrected version of the graph (on the web, I

hope) and paste it into my book.

In the time between my two morning classes, I

\* Call to schedule a meeting about fixing a broken window at my house

\* Prepare for my second class at 10 a.m.

\* Post next week's assignments for my 8 a.m. course - more challenging

than I expected since I had a visitor guest lecturing the last time

I taught this course, so I have to reapportion the readings.

I teach my 10 a.m. class. Students ask great questions. They take a

quiz. We don't have enough time for the lab, so I assign it as homework.

At 11 a.m. I have a meeting - a pitch from one of the consulting firms

that put in a proposal to audit our college web site. (Committee work.)

It is surprisingly insensitive to our particular situation. In my view,

they are not likely to win the contract.

At noon, the dining hall is packed with prospective students. I find

something to eat and take it upstairs for CS Table - a weekly meeting of

students and faculty interested in computer science. I haven't watched

the video we are discussing, so I mostly listen, but I contribute a few

points.

I stop by my office to get rid of my notebook and raincoat, then go down

to a first floor science classroom to co-host an event to recruit students

to our science pre-orientation program. I persuade one of my colleagues

to give the presentation and then spend five minutes finding the

powerpoint file on our network. Something like twenty prospective

students come, versus the four that came last week. My colleague gives a

great presentation. The prospies ask lots of good questions. I show a

parent over to talk with someone about medical school admissions, and

reward myself with a second popsicle.

I start writing this diary in the 15 minutes between the end of that

event and my office hours. One of my advisees shows up to talk about

registering for classes next semester. Last fall was rough, and as a

result we had a lot of re-planning to do at the start of this spring.

Things are going a lot better now.

I take care of some email correspondence about guest lecturers and

observers visiting my 8 a.m. class. I just realized that next week is

the last week that I don't have a guest lecturer in this class. So if

a colleague is going to observe my teaching in this class before I come

up for tenure, it had better be next week.

I also email my scholarship accountability group and explain why I didn't

get anything done this week... too many committee meetings....

I have a couple of visitors to talk about a grant program they are

applying for at the end of my office hours. I address them quickly and

walk with my colleague over to the gymnasium for the "Faculty Fair" for

admitted students. We have about four students talk to us about computer

science in a 45 minute period, which isn't bad. No one wants to talk

about Technology Studies or the General Science major, which I am there to

represent.

Thanks to my careful planning, I'm able to dash in and out of my office to

head home, feed the cats, and meet my taxi. My husband is returning from

a business trip, and I'm meeting him in "the city" for dinner out and an

evening at the theater. After an hour's conversation with our small

town's only (and highly educated) taxi driver, I meet my husband at our

hotel and spend the rest of Friday and all day Saturday blissfully free of

work.

Uid 32

Well. The semester has caught up with me. I have been fighting the "crud" all week and today.. \*bam\*. Down for the count.

One of the things I did do today was to begin to cobble together a budget for a subcontract on a grant. Part of this may be my fault for not asking every time I think of it.. but... if you want to sub out a part of your project, please ... give us all the details and not just the main story arc. I'm knew at this whole grant thing and I don't want to mess it up. But I'm fairly certain someone will tell me I did it wrong. Sigh.

I am also working on an adult learning / non credit course for this summer. That is just fun -- I get to teach a discrete topic in a short time with no assessments or the pressure that goes with them. My goal is to spread the fun out a bit. I hope the students have as much fun as I do. I spent today digging around online and in my library for source materials. I really enjoy going "down the rabbit hole" looking for information and putting together talks on interesting topics.

But for now, exhaustion has kicked in. I need this weekend to do nothing - it will be the first one in many weeks. I'll watch a ball game and read a for-fun book (yes, the one that is still on my table from the last time we talked).

Uid 34

15 April 2011 (all timings Paris time: GMT+2)

=============

I am currently (month of April) working at the joint INRIA/Microsoft research centre at Orsay, south of Paris. I the French Government chooses to fund its half of the centre by paying for me to work in Paris for a month, I am not going to complain.

06:20 Wake up in a friend's flat in central Paris, where I've spent the last two nights while she's away.

06:20-07:05 The 3 S's (s\*\*t, shave, shampoo), pack, tidy up, write "thank you" note, and leave the house.

07:05-07:50 Metro to the Etoile, then get lost.

07:50-09:00 (English-speaking) Alcoholics Anonymous meeting. I'm lucky, in that I can go to either English or French ones, but only the anglophones are up at 8.

09:00-10:00 RER (suburban railway) and bus to the Lab. I get in some programming on the laptop once the train empties slightly.

10:00-11:45 At lab. Other than the actual research, I am nominating a team of Canadian colleagues for a major software prize, and orchestrating letters of support.

11:45-12:30 Lunch (a serious event in French labs, self-service - two starters, main course, salad and dessert). Coffee in the Lab afterwards. They have an excellent self-service machine, but no milk (we feeble anglo-saxons don't understand REAL coffee). Make another note to myself to drink more water.

12:30-13:30 My UK e-mail, and various other tasks, are taking longer that expected, which I track down to a problem with the Domain Name Service entries by computers are seeing for my home university. Some discussions with technical staff at home, but it ends up looking like a problem at this end.

13:30-13:45 The Royal Society have sent me some things to referee, so I download them, and print the relevant instructions. I'll actually DO it over the weekend (or possibly this evening), but I should be prepared.

13:45-15:30 More work on Canadian case. It's due in today but not until midnight New York time. 6 extra hours!

15:30-16:00 Discussion with staff back home as to how I can continue this research with its mass of interlinked software. They suggest a private Linux build, which seems appropriate.

16:00-17:00 More work on software nomination.

17:00-17:50 Discussions with my host. Lucky, as he's not here much of next week. I explain my plans for my next phase, and he points me to some useful software tools for my project, which should make the programming of the interface somewhat easier. The actual graphics will still be tricky though. We also agree that there's a piece of the mathematics neither of us understand but he lends me a suitable book.

17:50-18:05 Walk to bus stop, bus to RER, and wait for train. I wonder whether to nip back to the hotel and drop my overnight bag, but there's not time.

18:05-18:45 Write up these notes, and my TRAC return, then continue the Canadian write-up.

18:45-22:00 Coffee/coke at Place St. Michel, then dinner, with a professor from another U.K. University, who's an external assessor for the centre I am working at, but a different project. The restaurant is near enough the Pantheon to get EduRoam from the Sorbonne (in the loose sense). The talk is partly of comparative university politics, partly of subject politics, partly of France and partly of mathematics. Very enjoyable. I walk her to her RER platform, then find mine.

22:00-22:30 (On the train) writing up these notes, then continue the Canadian write-up.

22:30-22:57 Re-find my hotel, and do a bit of unpacking.

22:57-00:15 Canadian write-up - finished (I hope) and mail it to co-sponsors.

00:15-00:40 read and tidy up general e-mail: rather neglected today.

00:40-01:10 Personal admin, sudoku and e-mail.

01:10-01:20 Submit nomination; go to bed.

Uid 38

On holiday! Tried not to think about work all week, but I must admit I did check email on my Blackberry at the summit of a Lake District Fell...

Uid 45

It will be a very busy day. Three classes, plus a student club meeting. The club is planning a big event 2 weeks from today, and there is a lot to do. The semester is supposed to be winding down but there seems to be more to do, not less. Graduation is one month away.

Must go to class now.

Uid 46

Spent Monday-Wednesday of this week at the premier European conference in my area. Did triage of email while at the conference, spent all of yesterday attempting to catch up. Inevitably, some of that catchup spilled over into a couple of hours this morning. Despite having been involved in its invention and promotion, it is exactly at these times that I wish email had never appeared to constantly plague us. Or at least, University management had never been introduced to email, so that it was strictly a channel for technical and learned exchange.

This afternoon we have a 3-hour meeting scheduled to review the ~40 promotion requests for the College. I spent approximately 4 hours reviewing the promotion requests so as to contribute positively to the meeting. As usual, I had to eat my lunch while performing this review, and then spent the remainder of the day at the promotion meeting. Fortunately, all of the promotion requests from my School that I had endorsed were successful.

Today is the closing date for a lecturer post in the School. The last time I looked, we had 15 applications, of which ~7 look interesting. I expect that a few more will trickle in today, so we will have to review ~20 applications to produce a short list next week.

Looking forward to gardening this weekend. Spring is finally here, and it is time to replace the casualties from the extended freezing period we experienced in December. Having built all of the wooden planters last weekend, there will be plenty of structural work to redo the north border to accommodate the planters.

Uid 47

15 April 2011

6:00 am Who doesn't love 6 am?

6:10 am Phone call: my son will be returning on the bus from Washington D.C. in one hour. I go a bit early so I can sit and read in peace while waiting for him to arrive. He doesn't have school after he gets back so he'll be tagging along with me today.

7:30 we get back to the house so he can say good morning and good bye to his mother who will be heading out of town right after she finishes work today. He's got a million things to tell her about his trip before she leaves.

9:30 Finally arrive at work. Class prep at home didn't go so well but my son got his trip photos up and labeled in iPhoto, so that's good. Now he's going to play legos, write his journal and sleep while I'm working a bit.

First task: approve a late senior degree application. I turned in all of the others over two weeks ago. Apparently there's no amount of procrastination that a sufficiently high late fee can't handle.

This might be one of those bustling about days where there are a million little things to do. So far I've sent out reminders about talks, posters and picnics; handled appointments for prospective students; started a list of students from one section who want to take the final with the other; and monitored an online survey I'm running for a theology professor. Really need to get to that course prep now!

10:30 Friendly, helpful colleague commandeered computer to show my son something. Wasn't using it so no problem, but still haven't finished prepping...

10:55 finished prepping with five minutes to spare before my next meeting. Even had time to add the giant Stay Puft Marshmallow Man from Ghostbusters to the Blackboard page. (I'm sure it's relevant to power functions and proportional growth...)

11:50 Fantastic meetings with my seniors finishing their senior projects. They're getting ready to present next week so this is the fun part. Also we've brainstormed some million-dollar apps we should write over the summer. (I told my son if this works I'll give him a button to wear to college saying, "My education is funded by dumb people.")

12:10 signed books for the seniors, consulted about ballots for faculty committees, and now time to take my son to lunch.

12:50 No such thing as lunch in peace. The Dean called to discuss staffing for the fall. We have an interesting situation of an open tenure track line that is in danger of being lost to an administrator returning to our department -- of course he is not in the area we need that line to cover.

Also took the chance to deal with a tenure issue that's come up. Just more of the glorious fun that comes with being chair.

3:30 Teaching complete! ("Mischief Managed!") Having my son in the room is always somewhat interesting. He asks questions which usually surprises the students. His main question today was about why -7 can be considered a power function, which let us talk about x^0. On the downside he was against throwing a rock from a bridge even if it would make a nice parabola. The students, he tells me now, told him that he seems more mature than me.

Time to go pick up my daughter from school and then we'll see if there's time to get any more work done...

7:50 pm quiet time with the kids after getting them dinner. I guess I really should start those taxes now.

Uid 50

My grading backlog has reached an all-time high, and I've been scrambling trying to get back on top of things. I made some good progress yesterday, and if all goes well today I might be close to caught up.

This is the first of two days when admitted students (and their parents) are invited to sit in on classes. I'm trying to come up with interesting material to present. I didn't plan very well though -- we'll start talking about inheritance in my intro classes, and it's not an obvious choice for impressing parents or prospective students!

I'm also well behind on a variety of tasks -- from paperwork documenting my work on the curriculum committee to internal work on our 5-year curriculum review document. (I get to see it from both sides!) I'm also working up the nerve to meet with the dean regarding our teaching load issues. (We want to shift to a required lab component in our intro classes at long last, and need to negotiate teaching credit issues.) I'm supposed to organize our department's end-of-semester "conference" where students present talks on their work too. It's two weeks away and I haven't finalized a program yet!

At home, I've had kids' birthdays to help with, visitors to host, and a flurry of household chores to complete as we're considering selling the house. It's been busy...

Uid 51

It's been a long week, month, and semester. Am like the kitten on the poster: "When you get to the end of your rope, tie a knot and hang on." Am hanging on for just a few more weeks.

Spent good portion of morning on phone with Uni Honor Council over students who cheated on work. I don't know why students think I won't see it when they turn in IDENTICAL copies of the work and both claim to have worked independently. Then sit in my office and boldly proclaim, "I'm not a cheater." Ummm, I beg to differ. I hate it when this happens. I start suspecting ALL my students and that's simply not fair to them. Most students are hard-working and motivated to learn. It's a case of few bad apples tainting all the others.

This week has me so rundown that I showed two short videos in one class and am giving a problem set for in-class work in the other one today. They're relevant to class, but I'm just not up to giving a full lecture today. Hopefully I'll be back in force next week. And soon, the summer to recharge my batteries and wash the bad taste out of my mouth that this semester is leaving.

Uid 52

I was working at home today, so that means the massive list of tasks related to research and writing. However, there are always one or two pressing administrative things that can't seem to wait until I am next in the office. I started the morning by reworking a journal article that had been rejected for resubmission to another journal. Actually, even though the paper was rejected, the reviewer comments were quite positive and there was not a lot requiring change so I have resubmitted that elsewhere. There is a sense of achievement any time I submit an article even though I know they still have to travel the rocky road of peer review.

I then emailed and phoned several staff who have successfully reached the second round of our Teaching Excellence Awards this year. I am named as the person they can contact to get more information about how they got on in round one and how to consider enhancing their submission for the second round. Last week someone happened to mention in passing in a phone call about something else that my name had been placed on all the documentation as the person to contact. Strangely no one had checked this with me. It's slightly annoying as although I don't mind playing this role, it has been a very hectic week and most applicants for the awards have struggled to get hold of me, so I have been left with that nagging feeling of not being as responsive as I would wish to be. So I made up for it today with a dedicated block of time spent catching up with applicants.

Then I spent some time collating information about applicants for our MEd programme as the scrutiny panel for our new programme want the details of numbers of people who have shown interest in our programme and numbers of those who have already applied for the programme. Alongside this we have been undertaking a survey of the potential international market for our MEd programme. The responses have been very interesting and will be useful for us planning and designing the detail of the programme as well as how best to market the programme. We were quite interested to see an overwhelming response from the majority of respondents who are potential international participants on our programmes saying very clearly that our standard University international fees are way too high. I completely agree with them despite our fees being on a par with international fees at most UK universities. I think it's only a matter of time before someone challenges on the basis of equality and diversity, the international fees we charge for degrees.

The afternoon was spent redrafting another article that I am writing with a collaborator. Most of my writing collaborations have been rewarding and interesting processes, but this particular one has been a bit fraught with problems and hold ups. However, the draft is getting pretty close to a final draft and my collaborator is yet to contribute anything. I will see what response I get to the paper I have forwarded on today, but I am close to claiming the paper as a single authored work, which so far it absolutely is. The politics of authoring papers is such an important area of academic life and I know so many people who have ended up with names on papers that shouldn't be there or the order of authors doesn't fairly represent the work - usually because people are too afraid of putting noses out of joint or because the most senior person is in a position of power. It is so tricky if your line manager hasn't contributed to the paper, but insists on being first author and any questioning of this is likely to jeopardise your promotion prospects later in the year. There should be a whole area of leadership and promotion criteria related to publishing integrity and ethics. I haven't even started on the senior professor who pinched and published my work!

Finally it was time to round up the emails, a vast array of short queries and more serious larger scale responses required. However, there was also a massive 14 emails from one secretary trying to sort out a meeting with six people - surely Doodle or something similar could have helped here! It's Friday :-)

Uid 60

Friday, the 15th of April started as any other day. However, it ended up being very stressful. I spent the morning preparing for my noon class. Half an hour before my class was due to start, Windows crashed while updating! So there I was sprinting across campus to the IT Support office. Luckily, they had a new laptop available and I was able to use the material I had already uploaded on the universityâ€™s learning management system.

The class experience itself was delightful. My students are using a FOSS database to create a web-based project for the university. The teams are really working well. The main reason seems to be that the project is seen as real, useful, and interesting unlike other â€œtoyâ€ projects done earlier. Also, it is my belief that team monitoring and individual accountability components of projects work better with year 3 and 4 students.

The rest of the evening was stressful. I was able to load my work files from backup and sync across other devices. However, I also had to install a dozen programs I use for various classes. Think JDK, BlueJ, Jeliot, VMs, serversâ€¦. I also went from Vista to Windows 7, from Office 2007 to 2010 â€“ enough to make me wish IT Support would hand out Macs or seriously consider Linux OS.

All of the above was punctuated by a meeting with colleagues about funding proposals. It is useful to hear about other successful projects.

At the end of the day, I had just enough energy to cook a meal for two.

---------

There is no entry for March as I was preparing for my doctoral defense. I graduated summa cum laude. However, it seems that even after enlightenment, sages still carry water and chop firewood!

Uid 64

This is my first day of leave since Christmas. What a relief. Unfortunately, I'm quite behind with routine queries so I need to spend the first morning working through my inbox. However, doing this when I'm officially on leave means that I don't feel guilty about getting up every now and then to sit outside, or make a shopping list. I make quite a good hole in the query pile. Then I have to spend the afternoon starting to tackle the housework, which has suffered from the need to work every weekend this term. Oh well, it makes a change...

Uid 65

I worked at home today, it being during the Easter vacation when there are few people about at work. Most staff will be on leave, on fieldwork, at conferences, or like, myself, working at home. There are few meetings held at this time and most students will also have gone home. There are a few third year students around, generally in panic mode concerning their dissertations which are due in at the beginning of May. I didn’t achieve very much because I am unwell with a chest infection and accompanying cold. I couldn’t face embarking on any major jobs – of which there are many stacking up – but instead, busied myself with tying up various loose ends. Much of this short day (about six hours) was spent dealing with, as yet, unanswered emails, completing surveys, booking conference places and associated travel, and sorting files. These are the jobs that I don’t find time for during the usual chaos of mid-term, but which are so essential for efficiency and reliability.

Uid 67

Worked from home today. This included a lunch with a retired colleague who set up and ran the original programme. He’s so blissfully unencumbered with the stress of these ‘difficult times’ it’s impossible not to be envious.

The first week after a semester ends is always an odd one. Having been so focused on preparing for the next class, when the classes are over, it’s hard to know what to do. As a result it was a week of catching up on unanswered emails, sorting out student exchanges, meeting with people I’ve been meaning to meet with…etc. etc. as well as finishing my staff development exercise. This led to a not so subtle push in the direction of a PhD. The very idea of embarking on such an enormous endeavour scares the heck out of me, but I’m guessing that once this push became a shove by my department head (as it did this week), it’s perhaps in my best interest. I’m still not 100% sure, but at least I’d have a structure for my as yet rudderless research agenda.

Plans both odd and frightening in terms of restructuring the university continue and I remain only slightly aware of the impact. Our discipline has disappeared even further in the new school name and this may or may not be a cause for concern. I fear that Bob, Bill and Josephine might be more appropriate school titles at this stage, but no one’s asked my opinion. Well, there’s a locked comment box into which I can place my two cents. I think I’ll pass.

Uid 71

A good day! term is now over so I had a whole week to catch up with everything and more importantly: WRITE! I have been asked to redraft a book chapter for publication in a journal and have finally managed to get around to it. I've sent it off to the other author for her approval (hopefully).

celebrated by having a coffee and taking out my reading for the next project (a review on sentencing for drugs offences). A lovely strong coffee and getting my teeth stuck into a new project. AND the sun was shining. Looking forward to a long summer of reading and writing.

PS. I replied to an advert on gumtree and am now dogsitting. working from home is a bit lonely, but now I have some furry company during the daytime!

Uid 75

After four days solid focusing on reading team project reports, I decided to take a slow day and work from home. My initial activity was to create a blog on ecology and faith from an old journal entry. It raises issues about where my heart is in all the things that I am doing. Increasingly, as it continues to be difficult to get much more than fill in teaching roles in universities, I am wondering about a shift back into industry. The problem with that as a solution is that all my research projects would halt. At least with my Teaching Instructor contract, I can get final year and MSc students to do some work on the projects. Small steps and some prove useful.

As well as the marking, I have had quite a number of MSc students come asking me to supervise their projects / dissertations. The problem is that most don't really understand what they need to do and are wanting to write some system that already exists without doing any background reading. It takes quite a lot of time to push them to think about how their project might push the boundaries of their own learning and of some computer science field. To some extent, I feel many of these are the dregs at the bottom of the barrel that no one else wants to supervise. I send most away to rethink what they need to do. I still have signed up some but not necessarily on things that I want to see done. I agreed to another this morning even though I am concerned that he hasn't fully grasped what is required.

There are problems with my agreeing to supervise as I won't know until next week or later whether my contract will be extended for another 12 months. If it isn't then I may have to notify these students that they will need to look for someone else. Yet, if I don't agree to the better one's then I will definitely end up with the stragglers and those that will take a lot of effort.

The other problem is that it commits be to being around all through the summer or not being able to take two or three weeks leave. In 18 months on these contracts, I have only had a week's break when a sister-in-law came to visit last July and a week to go back to NZ for my father-in-laws funeral in September. I have been fully committed during term times to teaching and in the gaps to marking or supervising projects. I don't get a break of two or three weeks when I can take off and forget about teaching. My wife has next week off so I am going to try and take as much as of that as I can but I have a symposium to attend on Tuesday.

All of this is making me less enthused about the job and making me feel just like a spare part - used and then tossed aside when no longer needed.

As I write this, I have a presentation to prepare for the Teaching and Learning symposium but I don't have any enthusiasm for it. What I have said I will present is an active learning exercise but if I am not careful, I will deliver the seminar as just another knowledge dump. How do I communicate an idea that fosters interaction to an audience of computer scientists and engineers? I don't have an easy solution because I haven't had the time to think it through.

Give the mind a break. Mow the lawns. Play some Wii sport games and try and relax. Maybe I will get a better focus later but I suspect that I really need a holiday so I have said I won't be around other than for the seminar next week. In fact, I may not stay right through the symposium on Tuesday.

Another interesting distraction, a person came to look at a bike that I want to sell. I have changed my focus from cycle racing to long distance touring and I don't see the light weight race bike as suitable so it is on the market. However, we ended our conversation talking about how he is working with Birmingham City University looking a similarities and differences between poetry and hip-hop. That doesn't see to far away from my own interest in the variations in algorithms or coding solutions and how we can represent these to students to aid learning. Oh for some funds and a more permanent position to pursue these without the endless pressure.

Back to looking at the symposium presentation. Clarity of thought at last and presentation prepared. Buyer has also rung back to say he wants to buy the bike so that is good news as well. Maybe we will go to Derby next week to look at some possible recliner trikes and the Crown Derby factory.

One last thing to end the day, write a journal entry reflecting on this week of marking and project discussions with students. Basic problem with the projects is that the students don't understand what it means to write a report with appropriate background research. They see their projects as writing code with the rest as an undesirable requirement. I have made comments on project students above.

Uid 77

April already! Usual morning routine, but with the school holidays, easier as my teenager is still in bed! And the roads are quieter, so allow myself the luxury of a more leisurely breakfast before driving to the University. No cycling today, since I know there is a possibility of it being quite a late finish today (and I may pop into the supermarket on the way home).

The University is also quiet, as most students are on vacation, as it seems are many of the staff! In Medicine, however, we still have 3 of our years studying, although the 5th and 2nd years finish today, (the 4th years are here until next Tuesday). I had expected to be involved in the year 5 clinical assessment going on today (OSCE) but as I am only needed as a reserve this afternoon, I have the luxury of a morning to catch up on things. And as I have a long list of things to complete before my Easter holiday, in a week's time, this is a blessing.

For a change today for this reflection, I intend to include a list of all the email and other issues that cross my desk, partly for my own curiosity, and partly to give a snap shot to the project of the range of things I do in my day. (Appendix)

First task is short listing applicants for a post where I am the chair of the interview panel. This will be my first experience as chair, although I have sat on many interview panels in the past. Only 2 applicants, one of whom, on paper, fills the person spec better than the other, so the question is whether the apparent weakness in the cv would preclude appointment. As this is another school, I await the advice of the Head of School.

Next, to finalise my report on the overseas admission trip; something that needs about 15 minutes, but somehow I have never quite got around to it. And of course as I appear to be the only member of academic staff around, I get all the queries that are coming into the office, so already, I have had a small stream of queries. So for '15 minutes' read '1 hour'!

Ahhgh; trying to reply to an email that won't go! No idea why, and never come across this as a problem before.

Back to short listing the extra (?Late) candidate (and a nice cup of tea has appeared: thanks to Carole.), the post and checking my email: A confirmation of a paper submission at least shows me that my co-authors are getting things submitted: I have so little time to do real research involved now in so much education and university management. I like both, but I don't think I have the balance right. I was able to provide input into this paper because I spent several hours travelling this week, almost the only time I get to read! And I've still got one paper that I've read, but have yet to give feedback to my co-author.

A 5 minute break while I walk across to the next building to deliver my shortlisting summary sheet. It is nice to get out in the fresh air; I've managed to put on about 1/2 stone in weight since starting this job last year, so really do need to focus on getting more exercise! With the better weather, I've got my bike out again (I fell off in the ice, so have become strictly good weather cyclist only) but that doesn't seem to make much of an impression, despite the 5 miles each way. Need to get back up to speed, (literally and metaphorically) with my running. I've signed up for the 10km Race for Life in May, but haven't run that distance since New Years Day! I managed only about 4km last week and was a wreck!

Well after an hour or so of working on my report on Widening participation and Fair access, it is time to pack up and go over to the Clinical Skills department (about a 10 minute drive). I have been asked to arrive by 13.20 for lunch, and as a standby assessor. If I am not needed, I will then be free to return to my other work, else I will be examining final year medical students until 7pm this evening. Hope it is a good lunch!

Well no 'no shows' at least not amongst the assessors so I get let out, to spend the afternoon working at home, and back to report writing ( Oh and booking tickets for a trip to London next week). The emails continue to pour into my in box, I've got board of recording them now! You get the idea. Noticed the daisies are out on the grass as I walked to the hospital, spring really is upon us.

Almost the end of the day and the week. Now 6.30 and I've finished working (the disadvantage of working at home is that it is more difficult to stop working!) But my husband has come home, and wants to do go to our local for a drink, something that has become a bit of a tradition in recent months. The novelty of having a pub that serves real ale within walking distance! The choice is do we eat first, drink first, or eat at the pub? That is the sort of dilemma I like on a Friday evening!

Then I will have to turn my thoughts to the weekend. We've a 6am start and a 5 hour train journey for a family party tomorrow. I need not only to remember the gift and card (and wrap it up!) for the birthday boy ( my father) but as the rest of the family will be there, this is an ideal opportunity to deliver Easter gifts to the niece and nephews, golden wedding present to my Aunt and Uncle and birthday card and gift to another aunt. The train fair won't quite cover the postage costs, but will go some way, though I am going to have a lot to carry!

Appendix

Time

6.55

Email from academic colleague

Follow up from assessment group discussion on Wednesday (how can we improve our question bank)

8.35

Email from admin colleague

Information on collection for upcoming wedding of a member of staff

8.46

Email from admin colleague

Information on current level of bookings for July open days

9.05

Member of staff

What to advise a student with D&V about attending a (summative) clinical exam

9.11

Email from admin colleague

Notification of meeting (with request for agenda items) with Strategic Health Authority,

9.15

Email from admin colleague

Opportunity to respond to consultation on UCAS review

9.35

Email from research colleague (outside my own institution)

Reply to my email from yesterday

9.54

Email secretarial support

Forwarding a Ôround robinÕ email advertising a national meeting

9.55

Email from academic colleague

Comments on proposed changes to student regulations

10.02

Email from admin colleague

Another application to review for the short list

10.04

Phone call from academic colleague

To discuss short listing process for post in another school

10.36

From journal

Automatic confirmation of submission of paper.

10.45

Post

Further application to shortlist (sorted),

Advert for text books (filed in grey round bin on the floor)

Letter requesting feedback having not been successful in being offered a place at university (they failed to mention to which course they applied!)

11.06

email from (external) academic colleague

Cc'd into an email acknowledging a meeting we had on Tuesday

11.19

Email from admin colleague

Summary of exam results in response to an FOI (Freedom of Information act) request (from a current student!)

12.00

Emails from Academic colleagues

Discussion of the level of detail in the information it is appropriate to release.

Uid 78

I spent the day in the office today catching up with various matters and dealing with a number of student and tutor enquiries. It was very quiet. My office mates and admin support person were all on leave. I had several significant student encounters some of which were very satisfying and others less so. Much of the rest of the time was spent dealing with the fall-out from yesterday's module development meeting.

There was a satisfactry ending to a recruitment saga. It's our normal practice to offer academic posts on the day of the interview. Nearly two weeks ago I chaired an academic appointment panel for a three year full-time humanities post. We had three apointable candidates two of which promise to be high fliers. Our first choice was offered a permanent job in the same week and, after 10 days indecision, took the other job (outside the UK). Our second choice also wanted thinking time because of problems with his wife's visa. Today it all came good with the second candidate which was a considerable relief.

I dealt with two memorable students claiming problems with their tutors. Student A wanted to change her tutor. A fairly lengthy phone conversation revealed that her problem isn't really with the tutor but with her movement from Creative Writing, where she has done very well, to Philosophy, where she needs to learn skills. I like this kind of human contact with students, especially the less confident 30s/40s women. Our honest exchange probably did us both good.

The second significant student of the day had a problem that we encounter quite frequently. He expected his tutor to be sitting at home waiting for emails to ping into his Inbox. The student is unable to cope with any delay in response. I fear this one will end badly. The student exhibits signs of eccentricity and he regards the tutor's delayed responses as a personal slight. You just can't win sometimes.

These were little high- or low- lights in a busy Friday. I wouldn't like to add up my working hours this week. I'm definitely going to take the weekend off.

Uid 80

Best day for months. Spent the entire day thinking about research with no disctractions. I've had so many days (probably 15) this year where this has not worked and I've made little or no progress. Whilst today feels good I know that 1:16 is not enough.

Uid 95

Out of term so the day is mainly borin admin. mixed with marking IT work (on-line) and trying to update mark sheets for coursework. Most of my Level 1 and Level 2 teaching is finished so am on tte last lap.

Uid 98

On holiday for once. In Ireland - very nice. Still doing emails.

Uid 105

We're in Easter hiatus, so basically everyone uses this no-classes time to focus on research meetings and writing papers, which was the case for this day.

Uid 108

Easter break - time to catch up on the marking and organise research for the Summer break, think about next year's teaching and generally worry about what the changes higher fees will bring.

We have conducted a survey on teaching styles preferred by students in lectures. Our attendance figures have been poor this year and we are wondering why that is?

Is it the way we teach students? Is it more to do with students having jobs? Is it because lectures are viewed as unimportant compared to practical work in Computing Science? Do we need to introduce new methods of teaching in the lecture slot? The results so far from 150 students are, in part, reassuring and in some ways not so good. Apparently our students don't want to interact in lectures - they want to observe, listen and take notes.

Uid 114

I've just looked back at last months entry - how much life can change in just 4 weeks.

Today is a great day, I've taken the afternoon off to go shopping and buy myself a new posh frock to wear tomorrow when I will be graduating :-)

This morning I tried to clear some of my email backlog. When it gets to tripple figures I know that things are going badly and things are starting to fall apart. I have been trying to fix up some dates for interviewing with a colleague, we eventually decide to shortlist fewer candidates so that we can fit them in, and then only by doing 6 a day which is hard work for us and not really very fair on the candidates. Luckily we know most of them so it is hopefully a rubber stamping exercise.

I have also spent some time looking for a colaborator for some research. A colleague has suggested I use my recently identified dyslexia as the basis for a case study. The idea was that I could find someone to interview me and write it themselves with me just being the subject. However, now I have found an expert in the field it is clear that he's not falling for that trick! So I have not got mayself an additional task of researching and writing a paper on my dyslexia and the difficulties I have with working in academia. Hopefully this will payoff in the long run, but right now feels like I have shot myself in the foot by finding more work to take on.

The other task I tried to complete this morning was writing some assessment questions. Writing the questions was failry straight forward but there is also an expectation that I will imput them into Moodle. After much swearing at being unable to work out what style of question I needed, how to set up catagories and general computerbased angst I gave up trying to work with moodle and complied a word document - someone else can input it!

Although I'm only supposed to write about the 15th, I want to tell you about the 16th because it was a fantastic day :-)

Although I alreayd hold a BSc and MA, I've never actually been to collect a degree at a graduation ceremony before. This time round my partner was very keen for me to collect my MSc and celebrate it properly. Dressed up in my new posh frock and accompanied by my partner, his children and his mum I went and joined all the other students who were graduating today. Strangely I have attended 10 ceremonies as an academic, just never recieved. It was lovely to be on the other side, to have my name read out and walk accross the stage to the applorse and shouts of my family up in the gallery and my colleagues on the stage. The VC congratulated me and also thanked me for all that I do for the university which was very touching.

Not many of our staff go to the graduation ceremony but I strongly encourage everyone to do so. There is such a lovely atmpsphere and it reminds you what all our hard work is for.

Uid 116

8:45am: It was an early start today. I need to get a last load of laundry done before heading to work. Tomorrow is a crazy day--13 mile run in the morning, then a flight to Seattle to look for sabbatical housing. There's not enough time between now and the flight to get everything done. For an extra degree of difficulty, my brother-in-law and his buddy are stopping over tonight en route to Muncie. It'll be nice to have company for dinner, but I'm not in condition to be a good host.

9:42 AM: Taking care of a few quick emails and plans for three faculty candidate interviews the week after break. Spring break is next week. I have one more class before break. I'm expecting very low attendance. That bothers me, but the bright side is the students who come will be the engaged ones.

10:45 AM: Remarkably good class today for the day before break. Attendance was good and the students were nearly all engaged in the material. Always good to go into a break on a high note.

11:45 AM: Had a good meeting with my undergrad thesis student. He's making good progress on his project. It won't change the world, except in so much as he is learning a lot. I've decided that's OK. He's earnest and hard working, if a bit disorganized.

12:30 PM: Met with a colleague for some planning on a project on which we're collaborating. Mostly we're just doing data analysis this term as a third colleague is teaching the course we're studying. That colleague tends to be very unstructured, so I'm concerned that we won't get the information that we would like for our analysis. However, we're doing what we can and am not going to get upset about it.

1:30 PM: Enjoyable lunch with a colleague discussing our sabbatical plans. He's going to Africa for the year on a Fulbright Fellowship. All the logistics of moving him, his wife, and their five children, put my minor trials of moving to Seattle in perspective.

Weighing on me is that my wife hasn't found an internship in Seattle yet. If one doesn't materialize soon, she is likely to take a position in Philadelphia. That would mean another six months of living apart. That routine is getting very old. For the next few months, practicality dictates that we do what we have to do, rather than what we want to do. Once she finishes her current degree, hopefully we'll be in a position to make some choices about what we \*want\* to do together. That may mean that I have to leave academia for industry. I'd miss the teaching, but my students are finishing bachelors' degrees and taking jobs that pay more than mine for less work. We'll see how much I really miss teaching while on sabbatical this year.

2:18 PM: Spending the early afternoon knocking off a bunch of odds and ends before leaving. There's always a mountain of things to catch up on after a break, but if I can leave the decks mostly clear I'll be less frantic when I get back. I typically use spring break to catch up on grading, putter around the house, and prepare for the final sprint to the finish of the year. This year I'm spending half the break in Seattle and the other half in Pennsylvania. That mean the last four weeks of the term will be more stressful than usual.

2:28 PM: Heading home to meet with the contractor who has cleared the mold from our crawlspace and furnace. Need to crawl under the house to inspect the work, then cut a bigger check than I'd like to pay the last installment.

4:08 PM: Contractors had reinstalled our dehumidifier incorrectly, but otherwise did a fine job. Money well spent, since we can now sell the house if need be.

Now to pack for my trip, then enjoy a beer with my guests. The rest of the tasks will still be there in a week.

Uid 120

I am now 30 weeks pregnant. Thank goodness term is over. Today I'm working from home and my husband is at home too because he's a school teacher and on Easter holidays. I have 30 essays to mark and have already hacked through ten of them - they're good, but nobody has yet achieved a first class mark. The structure of the course (with which I, as only a co-teacher, have serious problems) didn't allow the students time/space to develop a thorough grounding in the period studied or in theoretical approaches to the texts, so they are offering a series of quite localised readings, many of which are error-filled. On the other hand they've demonstrated a lively and committed engagement with the texts and some really hard work. It's frustrating because they are bright students and I want to reward them more than I can. I'll probably mark another ten this morning, and put some resources on the intranet for a different set of students who are now revising for their exams. I must remember to set up revision classes for them,.

I also have four dissertation students, two of whom have gone off the end of the world and aren't replying to email, which is worrying, so I'll chase them up today. My most pressing concern, however, is to finish my manuscript before I go on maternity leave. I have 60 images in my book and no permission to publish any of them. This is going to take time. And I have a chapter which has unravelled and gone wild. The taming project starts today. It'll be amazing if I get it sent off before I have the baby - what a relief!

I'm not sure how far I'll get with this project today, since I'm also going for lunch with a friend in town. She's had a rough time recently and it'll be lovely to see her, and I'm just in the mood for a nice bite to eat and some traditional work-avoidance. If by this time next week I've done my marking and sorted out my chapter I'll be happy.

Uid 123

I am in Helsinki this week taking part in a University Review (Aalto University). It has been interesting but very, very hard work. This Friday is the last day of a week of 12/14 hour days, all off-timetable.

7.45 Breakfast

8.15 Taxi from Hotel to University

8.45 to 11.30 finishing touches to evaluation reports for 6 Business and Management programmes and a presentation on an overall evaluation of the School of Economics.

11.30-3.30 Presentation and discussion with Deans and University Senior Management Team

3.30 Taxi to airport and then catch flight to Heathrow and bus to Oxford

9.00 p.m. Arrive home in Oxford

9.00-11.00 Catch up with kids and reply to two urgent emails.

Uid 125

Last day before a week off for Easter hols whoop whoop! sorting lots out as come straight back into teaching MSc students for 8 weeks right into summer just as everybody else is finishing...good points to this: we can have any room we like, anywhere we like, at any time we like and students get our undivided attention.........bad points to this: the uni is like the Marie Celeste and everyone is finishing for the summer!

I will be marking assignments during my week 'off' as the turnaround 'suggested' by the university doesn't really account for holidays and we are encouraged to get work back as soon as possible - the union is none to happy with that as you can imagine! The week I return to work dissertations and 3 other module assessments will also be landing in my pigeon hole so the huge amount of chocolate I am intending to consume over the Easter wekend should just about sustain me through the slog! I quite liked the method of marking empolyed on the new TV series Campus utilising a dart board - could be the way forward I think!

Uid 126

April 15th 2011

I am writing this on Sunday, as I was walking in the Lake District on Friday 15th. It was the last walking day of a week’s stay in Rydall with my elderly mother whose sight is failing. Friday was warm but cloud was low and most of the day was damp. We drove to Grizedale Forest where the walking can be straightforward and where the sculptures set in lovely mixed and ancient woodland are engaging and thought-provoking. At some stages in the walks we did I regretted not having small children with me, especially when we found the two small shelters/ houses made by a sculptor with a local school. What was good was that the walks were reasonably strenuous but not too rocky to make walking extra hazardous for my mother. There were sounds of running water and views out across brightly green pasture. We enjoyed the sculpture of six wooden sheep, tucked into trees by a stream’s edge and a high arch made of larch wood. My mother enjoyed the friendliness of northern walkers, our home, really, and the airy cafe which welcomed muddy dogs and mud splattered children who had been on the cycle trails. She was also very taken with the spacious education centre with its display of stuffed birds and animals and colourful pipe cleaner sculptures of birds.

I need the silence and the rhythm of walking to help me write and love the literature that refers to that link between walking and writing. Walking in mountains, amongst trees, and by water adds other rhythms and music to the thoughts and words that will finally become written. I have three things to write in the next month. A short article about teaching drama that is already well overdue and must be finished by tomorrow, a paper on the research about writing that I have been most preoccupied with as I have walked this week, and a chapter for a book that I am writing with a colleague. The trouble with that is that I am having to think about it in small threads and so it is not clear in my mind. The paper about writing has swished back and forth in my head like water in a bowl. I think that I am beginning to get hold of some new ideas but I need to go back to older ones and to the work of the teachers with whom I am working to try and grasp what these might be.

I have read a strange mixture of things whilst away; a couple of children’s books –Kevin Crossley-Holland’s new book which somehow came together at its end – which is where it had begun for him; Neil Gaiman’s The Graveyard Book, a book that has stayed with me during my walking, and parts of Robert Macfarlane’s The Wild Places. I read the section on climbing Red Pike in the snow, and wondered about sleeping on a frozen tarn, and then re-read the section on the east coast wildness of Blakeney and Orford, closer to home at the moment, and where I shall be staying with my daughter next week. I like this kind of writing. What is it that makes some publishable and some not? I resolve to send my own proposal out again.

I have been particularly enjoying an IoE publication: Passion and Politics which is based on interviews with established academic writers at the London Institute. I am struck by the number of women who describe ‘writing on the move’. I recognise that, for me, that started when I was writing up an MPhil, and I had two small children, so that lots of drafts happened as I pushed a buggy along and stood in parks and commented on passing sights and sounds. It has become a habit. Thinking about academic writing is part of my thinking about writing in general, and the feeling that when one talks about writing, one –or perhaps people in general- means fiction or poetry. Quite a number of these successful academic writers have a yearning to write a novel, Jimmy Britton always seemed more pleased with his poetry than his thoughtful and thought-provoking writing on education. I do like to write poetry and I do want to address writing both poetry and fiction more carefully, but I also love the writing that is about practice. I think, for me, it holds a great deal of value.

So, Friday 15th, a day walking, good food in the evening, time to read in the still Lakeland evening and the knowledge that tomorrow there is the long drive to my mother’s house and then my return to the e-mails and the keyboard to start writing again.

Uid 127

Share Project

Friday 15th April, 2011

I have been looking forward to this Friday for weeks. It is the last day of term, which means that when it is over, I will have a chance to catch up on the huge backlog of paperwork that has been building up, and maybe even have a break! Before then though, I have to deal with another 6 hours of timetabled lab sessions.

The last three weeks have been absolutely insane - I will have had 80 hours of contact time in these 15 days, and my normally highly organised life has disintegrated under the sheer weight of exhaustion and lack of time. I reckon I have spent 4 hours in my office in these three weeks, and it shows. I’m clearly annoying colleagues with my lack of responses to timetable requests and project title requests, and upsetting students by seemingly ignoring them regarding queries over assessment problems. I’m doing my best to keep on top of things, answering the most urgent of emails in the evenings and on my phone while I’m waiting in queues at shops. Even today, while I am officially teaching for two three-hour sessions, I made the decision in advance that I’m probably going to be finished a little early for each session, so I’ve arranged meetings in the labs for half an hour before the formal end of the session, reckoning I will be free to talk by then…

But the end is nigh, and as I grab a quick coffee at lunch I can feel myself relaxing… big mistake… as I do so the inevitable happens, and half way through the afternoon session my head starts aching, my throat starts to feel dry, and my voice starts to sound husky. Without a doubt, the first few days of the ‘break’ will be dominated by the filthy cold I have been holding off for days.

Still, I finally get a chance to talk to my HOD at the end of the day about my workload, and how we’re going to resolve it for the next academic year. At the same time, however, he drops a rather interesting proposal in my lap which will likely push my workload even higher, but with the prospect of promotion and increased responsibility. This Easter break will involve some soul-searching about my future academic career…

Uid 131

Easter vacation, and I'm feeling rather unmotivated. Really, this is the perfect time to go on holiday, but I don't have one booked till August! No marking yet, teaching mostly over, long bank holidays making it difficult to dedicate time to things. There are things I could be doing, but I can't get up the motivation. I'm just tired really - tired after a thoroughly exhausting semester.

There aren't even that many emails. The only tricky one is someone who clearly has "issues" trying to get admission to our degree. He can't, but we have to work out how to handle him.

I've made a decision to do some general reading around one of my courses so I get on with that. But, if I'm honest, I only do half a day. It's good weather, so I spend some time clearing the garden, and then I watch the racing from Newbury. I suppose I'm just taking advantage of a quiet period to have some down time and set myself up for the marking season. But I worry that the lack of motivation is setting me up for something else. I think I need to spend some time reviewing my next steps and planning, because otherwise things are happening around me.

Uid 134

Share Project

15.4.11

Arrived shortly after 8 this morning. Despite it being student holidays there is still a great deal to do and no let up in the pressure. Before I got to my office I was stopped by a colleague with a query about a student. Should she be granted an extension or the requested leave of absence? It appears that she is “playing the system” but it is difficult to prove that. A thorny issue! Off to get that coffee to get the day going now!

The last 2 hours have been spent trying to tackle the mountain of emails which never seems to get any smaller! One email leads to another task. Met with our placement allocations officer to make sure we have registered the growing number of students who need deferral or retake placements during the summer. Further follow up with regard to the student above who, it seems, will take leave of absence. From a placement point of view this is rather inconvenient, since the placement allocated had been very accommodating. Minutes checked and email sent for agenda items for next week’s team meeting. And after all that I have barely scratched the surface of either the email or task list. Let’s hope there is nothing really important there!

The last 2 hours should have been spent completing a form which amounts to a justification of my job! I spent about an hour on it, and was interrupted by colleagues – all good interruptions, but doesn’t get the job in hand done! This is a recurring problem. Whilst women are good at multi-tasking it also means they are easily distracted and tasks do not get finished! The said form is proving to be more motivating than originally thought, although it does feel as though get it wrong and you won’t have a job anymore! It has made me think about what I actually do and where do I want to go. It’s forced me back to my job description, and to focus on my job and not the distractions! As a colleague remarked “We have to be selfish sometimes”. As a healthcare professional (and a woman!!) this does not always come naturally. However, another focus if this form is to drive us to be more research focussed in our teaching. A good and valid point, although if I’m honest I feel that I am filling out forms at the expense of time to research! Nothing like a bit more bureaucracy!

The interruptions involved inspiring (I hope!) others in completing their forms as well as touching base with regard to some difficulties with students on placement, and liaising with regard to teaching.

Well – it didn’t get finished again, but at least half of the day was covered!! Better timing next time!

Uid 136

Today is a Friday so I am able to work at home; I keep Fridays as free of teaching and other commitments as possible becasue I can work on major items uninterrupted. Today I have two tasks - marking projects and finishing marking courseworks before exam scripts start coming in next week, and catching up on reading journal articles. However, sneakily I start by checking the proofs of my own paper which is to be published shortly - does not take very long but is very satisfying as it is all too rare an occurence! I then indulge myself further by reviewing the number of papers I have in the pipeline - quite a few if only I get time to write them. I am much better at gathering data and starting the papers than at finishing them and sending them to pubishers. Does this indicate a deep seated fear of rejection I ask myself, or am I merely putting my personal work after all the other demands on my time? However if I could get a few finished I might get recognised as 'research active' and therefore take the pressure off teaching and admin so I have more time to write. It is one of those vicious circles these days - looking backk over my career I realise that 20 years ago I seemed to have a much better balance between teaching and research. Of course I didn't have so much admin then either, and there were fewer students who all seemed better prepared before arrival and had fewer personl problems, and I didn't have a child or a husband with a serious chroninc illness, but even so.... I take off my rose-tinted nostalgia-soaked glasses and get out the pile of coursework. This is the reality today - and it is already 9.30am.

I intersperse marking with reading, and make steady progress, so that by the time my son comes home from school at 4 I am ready to take a break and chat with him. It is the last day of his second term at secondary school and his first experience of 'end of year' exams comes up straight after Easter so it will be a rather subdued Easter break including a lot of revising. We are looking forward to having a week away, and meeting up with friends at a wedding on Easter Saturday. For now though after juice and a banana it is back to work for both of us.

Sudden panic as I remember something I promised to do for my School Director and I haven't even looked at it yet. Marking (4 projects and 5 portfolios remaining) goes on hold while I look at this task. One hour is nowhere near enough to complete it so after tea and domestic duties I get back to it. At 10pm, take a break to watch TV with my husband; having succumbed to a supper of cheese and biscuits and glass of wine, at 11.30 I decide husband's suggestion that I go bed is a good one. I can always carry on working over the weekend - I usually do.....

Uid 138

Dull, dull, dull, dull, dull, dull, dull. I am spending all my time writing funding bids - describing the research I would do if I were funded rather than actually doing the research that I want to do in my currently unfunded state. Since the former is unlikely and the latter is more productive, I find it hard to understand why we have been told to prioritise funding bids over everything else.

Nice to have a quiet period over the Spring Break - although exam and project marking and the creation of exam board spreadsheets is looming. I am in charge of getting all the spreadsheets together for our first year courses - I find it hard to understand why putting exam scripts into alphabetical order and entering exam question marks into a spreadsheet is considered an appropriate task use of academic time. There is so much I don't understand about my job!

Uid 141

Holidays! I was in Norfolk with my family. The weather was pretty decent so on this day we decided to go to Holkham Bay, one of the finest beaches I know of. (And featured at the very end of Shakespeare in Love!)

Goofed around in the morning over a leisurely breakfast. Prepared a picnic lunch. Went to the beach. Ate lunch. Made some very fine sandcastles and one of my most complicated moat arrangements to date. Looked for shells and found loads of oyster shells. Paddled in the North Sea (brrr) and then demolished the sandcastles.

Went home for tea.

Work? What's that?

Uid 149

The undergraduate students are on vacation and I awake with an image in my mind of the tidal litter of piles of marking in my office. It not only demands my time to mark it, but in the interests of protecting ourselves against complaint and litigation it must be moderated to within an inch of its life. But these are jobs for another day. I should begin by noting that I have suffered two major computer failures over the past week , one involving my home desktop machine and the other involving my trusty tablet laptop. No data has been lost because I transfer t regularly on my network, but a reconstructive effort has had to be undertaken. The laptop, which has been on more or less continuously for four years, emits an alarming grinding noise as the bearings on both fan and hard disk have expired. As parts are now unobtainable |I have bitten the bullet and ordered another. A knock at the door at 7.15 indicates that the extra RAM I’ve ordered for the new laptop has arrived. Now all I need is the computer itself. Before it arrives I need to depart for work, leaving my partner at home to take delivery. But what of his computer at work? I hear you ask. Needless to say, the university computing facilities, whose machines are out-dated and underpowered, where we have such limited privileges that we cannot even change the colour of the desktop background and on which we have limited storage capacity, hardly figure on my radar. Indeed, so useless is the machine supplied for my desk at work that I have put it away in a cupboard. Long ago I realised that I was pretty much on my own in the IT field and have coped much better, thank you. With the barely suppressed excitement of a child at Christmas, I set off to work. Today, even though it is the vacation period, we are interviewing applicants for a new master’s course today. I find my colleague who was inviting them for interview and find the room. She even supplies me with a cup of coffee, which is nice of her. The internal phone rings and it’s the reception desk telling us an applicant has arrived, who turns out to be a very personable young women from Greece. Then we get on to a couple of our own recent graduates who are interested in coming back to study with us and then some more outsiders and so on. The interviews are enormously enjoyable. It reminds me of why I found my way into higher education in the first place. Bright young people with good ideas. The form is duly filled in after each one and we have a brief discussion as to their suitability. I pop back to the office in between and discover several emails from our press office asking if I can do a radio talk show about depression and comment on various other human interest items that have been in the news lately. I give them a quick call back and say no, because we have more candidates to interview and I have Masters’ students booked in to talk about their coursework later on this afternoon. Nice to do media work, of course, but the day job has to take priority. Back down to the interview room and a couple more applicants, and then back upstairs to an email from my partner to say that a parcel has arrived for me. I can barely contain myself. I have a couple more students to see, whom I try not to rush, and then I’m off home, leaving the piles of marking looking sullen on the office floor. Oh what fun. Once my cafetiere has been filled, I dismantle the new machine and fit the new RAM cards, before switching it on and configuring it. I really enjoy putting new software on a new computer. Office, Acrobat, disk management utilities, archiving and indexing software, various kinds of browsers, antivirus and antispyware utilities. Plus getting rid of the junkware and freeware with which the manufacturer clutters the hard disk. My partner is talking to the cat. ‘He gets a new computer and he completely ignores us’. So I supply cups of cocoa and cat treats, as it is now around suppertime. Right, now onto the real work of the weekend. I have papers to review for a special issue of a journal I am editing, and a talk to write for a conference next week. I’d better do a good one as it is supposed to be the keynote. Ooer. Uneasy lies the head that wears the crown. I shall talk about the notion of responsibilization in health policy and I’d better get on with it quick because they want my Powerpoint presentation in advance of the session. ‘Are you coming to bed?’ asks my partner. ‘Maybe later in the weekend’ I reply.

Uid 152

6-8.30am Getting everyone up, ready & out the house for the school run.

8.45am Drop off my son at school

9am Travel to work

9.30-11.30am Prepare an exam paper for one of my modules and send it to EE for approval

11.30am-12pm Coffee

12-1pm Student Tutorials

1-1.30pm Uploading materials and sending out announcements via Blackboard

1.30-2pm Lunch

2-3pm Meeting about an e-learning package I am developing for clinical supervisors

3-4.30pm Gerally sorting, tidying, doing email etc

4.30pm Home - to pack for holidays!! Hurahh :)

Uid 154

Today was not a good day. It was my husband’s 63 birthday – but he didn’t want to do celebration because he had an appointment at the hospital with regard to his loss of peripheral vision, asphasia and memory problems. Even though I had a fairly certain view as to what we would be told, it still came as a shock to hear the consultant say that it was a form of dementia and that it was progressing very quickly.

I’m 55. I’ve got at least a decade of working life ahead of me. I’m supposed to be doing 2 keynotes in Australia in the summer and have accepted an invitation to do a visiting professor stint in America next autumn. It may sound appalling to be mentioning these things but they are in my mind along with the terrible, terrible sadness about and for the man who I have loved since I was 14 and whose partner I’ve now been for 38 years.

Didn’t get much work done today – only answered emails – and explained to my HOD that my fears had been realised and that there might be some implications for my work.

Uid 155

This week there is not 'normal' teaching, but rather we have a week when we can run special activities for students. Geographers go on field trips, Drama people run special performance work shops, and we have study skills. Today we were doing public speaking, in preparation for an externally focused event that the students are running in a few weeks time. They had all written their scripts, and were very nervous, but they did really well. Interestingly, the student who has additional needs and who has a plan recommending that he does no public speaking did the best - a really excellent performance. I hope he does as well on the day. I am all for making reasonable adjustments for disabled students, and recognising their needs, but I do feel that some advice from the student liaison services is about limiting the experiences of disabled students rather than supporting them to fulfil their full potential.

At the end of a rather long, but rewarding, day of helping students with their delivery skills (I was part Simon Cowell, part Sisco Gomez) it was back to a silly number of emails. Thankfully my colleagues rescued me and sent me to the pub! We had a really good meal out and a very good laugh. I am really lucky that I have good friends at work, who are not only fun but they also we share ideals about what we should be doing to making university better for the students. Whenever I have a rough week I remember how lucky I am - I have good colleagues and fabulous students to work with, and I am paid to talk about the subject I love. Really, why do we complain? Ah yes, because we want it to be even better, and there is nothing more frustrating than working with those who seem set on making things worse. Those people are now on holiday for a bit, so I can just concentrate on the good bits!

Uid 157

Today was a day of meetings, marking and e-mails. With the undergradautes away (term finished last week) there is an opportunity to catch up with all those meetings and administrative duties that get put to one side by the immediacy of teaching. I'm taking over responsibility for teaching in my department in August later this year, so I am currently shadowing the out going Teaching Director (and already taking on some of the responsibilities) now. As I am rapidly realising this means multiple e-mails a day about a myriad of different teaching related subjects (including subjects I had no idea were happening) and attending numerous meetings. Today was one of those days dominated by meetings with various colleages regarding both UG and PGT teaching activities. Who is willing to take over organising various modules, who should teach what (and indeed what should be taught), how far is the developement of new degree programme etc?

E-mails seem to appear with regular and alarming frequency. If I don't deal with them straight away, which by no means is possible or really ideal, they can get forgotten especially if they disappear off the bottom of the screen. So some of today was going through old (only a week or so!) e-mails and seeing what I had missed or forgotten to do.

Much of the rest of the today was taken up with marking essays. Today's lot proved to be a mixed bunch - some that had really grasped the ideas I was trying to get across whilst others only treating the subject in a very superficial way. The time consuming aspect of this, as always, was writing the feedback. Giving constructive criticism and showing how to improve in future work is crucial if the students are to gain from the exercise.

Finished off the day with the department TGIF (thank goodness it's Friday) - a nice drink in pleasant company with general chat about anything and everything (today's subjects were what does a Teaching Director do, how to spring clear a laboratory and the pros and cons of facebook).

Uid 158

Having got out of the habit of swimming regularly this semester I am easing myself back in and managed to get a few lengths done before work.

Called in on our departmental Director of Teaching on my way back and ended up spending a good hour discussing developments. Some of the latter may be forced on us by a juggernaut of reform dictated from above and others were about integrating some key aspects of the subject more firmly into current teaching.

Once back in the office I made an unsuccessful attempt to clear the inbox before coffee.

The break was interrupted by a phone call, which then led to signatures being required. More work at the computer (installing updated programs, trying new programs, checking recommended websites) filled the time until lunch and shopping.

Meeting after lunch to discuss a bid and then off to deal with some admissions business. Returned to the office to find a impecunious student requiring advice. I think I managed to reassure them and point them in the right direction. By the time we had finished colleagues were massing for tea.

Back to the office to find that Microsoft need to install 21 updates to Windows and Office so I left the computer to its own devices and went home.

Spent some of the evening searching the web for components for a project that I am starting work on.

Uid 168

15th April

After a few insomniac mornings, I managed a lie-in until 06:40.

Once in at work the main task for the day was completion of the final live-action filming for an educational video I've been working on for the last couple or years. A landmark day which sometimes looked like it would never come. We only have the animation to do now,although alongside other pressures this is likely to take some while.

Having spent a couple of hours doing the filming we looked at the footage, which is really great (and for which I can taken none of the credit).

Before a departmental seminar at lunchtime I had the opportunity to finally firm up arrangements for a prize meal. Nearly a year ago a group of us won a sports quiz for which the prize was a meal with an international sportsman. The busyness of his schedule and ours meant that I'd almost given up the event for lost, but we now have a date after Easter in the diary, which is a step on from any previous development.

Following the seminar, the afternoon was spent on various admin tasks - a query from a colleague about payment for postdoctoral tutors, letters written in follow-up to a UCAS visit day held earlier in the week and some e-mails to colleagues chivvying them to book for a day conference I am organising.

All in all a good final day before a well deserved holiday getaway next week.

Uid 171

We've been 'on break' since 18 March, and I get very, very grumpy when people (students, non-acad acquaintances) ask me if I'm having a nice holiday. Is this a holiday? This is what I've done today:

- Met with final year student re his dissertation

- Met with DPhil student about a chapter draft

- Created a spreadsheet for managing data for a project, and wrote up instructions for using it for Research Asst.

- Email/VLE-supported several students on aspects of assignments due next term.

- Organised the supporting documents for a misconduct viva on Monday.

- Wrote up two reports on DPhil students' progress.

- Met with a colleague to review the candidates that we've shortlisted for a job and prepare for next year's teaching assignments.

- Answered questions about my field from the general public via my Twitter feed/blog.

- Read HE news items.

But mostly I worried about the misconduct viva. Turns out it's the most serious case the University has ever had--in that it's doctoral and it's massive. I have no doubt he'll be disqualified. I have no doubt he will appeal it. And I worry that the appeal will have some effect because of the University's urge to avoid litigation. And I also worry about the creepy student doing something drastic. And the whole thing just feels terrible. (And I'd prefer this didn't go in the monthly sum-up, thanks.)

Uid 172

6.00 train to get to a conference/meeting for 9.30. In the various presentations and meetings all day until 15.30. Then 16.00 train to be home at 20.15.

Presentations not really that engaging. Missed opportunity. I am always disappointed by the 1) reliance on powerpoint, 2) highly teacher-centred nature of the content and 3) within ppt the use of text and bulletpoints on slides. As professional educators, with plenty of research as to 'why not to' why do we continue to lull audiences into a coma.

Still, on way here read a UG dissertation and on way back reviewed three fellowship applications.

Uid 173

In really early today as it is a social work student interview day. I was asked to take over coordinating these days from a colleague who was taking over as programme lead from a colleague who was leaving the University after reaching retirement age and not having his contract extended. This is an issue in itself given the University's alleged commitment to widening participation and embracing diversity,(other than age it seems....). Anyway, the upshot was that even though I wasn't supposed to have admin duties in my probationary year I didn't feel I could say no, as I am a team player and want to be viewed that way.

So back to the early start - in early and running around putting up signs, organising furniture, emptying overflowing bins so that the room doesn't smell etc. It is definitely a job that requires multi-tasking and being willing to muck in - literally.

I came in slightly earlier as I had squeezed in a tutorial with a student who had failed an assignment in order to talk through the re-write. The student didn't arrive for tutorial and didn't contact me about this and still hasn't. This is very frustrating as I have arranged my time to be available and letting me know that she will not be attending is a common courtesy I would have thought. I have noticed over the year that students are sometimes surprised that you are not endlessly waiting and available in your office or at the end of a telephone. That is perhaps an over-generalisation, as there are plenty of students who do not fit this profile. Maybe I have not reflected on my irritation as I have not had time.

The interview days involves managing groups of prospective students, service users involved in assessment, staff and local practitioners to be in the right place at the right time and it is a very tiring day. From 10am-4pm it is a constant process. I facilitate the group with the service users and organise their feedback so their score can go forward to the final panel and so in between my coordination role I have to switch into my more social worky group facilitator role to make this happen.

At 4pm we have the panel to discuss who gets a place and who doesn't over coffee and biscuits (that I have had to organise as well....). We are already trying to focus on a higher calibre of student as per the social work reform board but this is often a subjective feeling amongst those involved - the debate about applicants is healthy and robust.

After the interview process is finished I need to sort out e-mails and directions for various placement meetings that come thick and fast at this time of year. So by the time I leave at about 6pm I am well and truly exhausted.

Uid 179

Friday, 15 April 2011

Holidays... So first an appointment with the dentist for a root filling. (Excuse me if I mumble: it's the anaesthetic.) Then taking a reluctant teenager to meet his new Spanish tutor and now marking for the rest of the day - although I hope to escape for a bit of exercise on my bike early this evening. I really want to finish this pile of marking by

early next week so I can have a few days off during this \_very late\_ Easter.

8.30pm: Any Questions is cancelled, the M1 closed until tomorrow: what is the world coming to? Back to marking, I guess.

Uid 182

Today was the last day that I could visit students on placements so I managed to fit in two supervisory visits this morning along with the post-visit conversations with them. I got back to my office approx 12pm and addressed approx 10 email tasks/replies in my inbox before a committee meeting at 12.30pm about planning/admin for a postgraduate course. I bought sandwiches in a garage on my way back to eat during this meeting (which is fine etiquette wise as this is common practice among this group due to the usual time constraints).

Between 1.30-4pm (when I have to leave to give a conference presentation this evening), I'm hoping to get all of the following done: write two references for past students; mark approx 10 first-year essays; update my primary and secondary sources booklist for the library for a summer course; write minutes for a committee meeting earlier in the week; phone to confirm a visiting lecturer for a May session; research and book a hotel for a conference stay; talk with IT about fixing my printer (this has really slowed me down the last fortnight as I keep having to use another printer on another level of the building and because some material is confidential, I keep having to distrupt whatever flow of work I achieve to go and collect the print-outs immediately); search online cfp's to update that section of a society website which I coordinate; update my attendance records online; put three posters up in my lecture room (these have been under my desk for approx 6 weeks still in their cases due to lack of time to display them); print off the posts of a discussion group I'm moderating so that I can start evaluating their participation.

Uid 186

Today seems to be student complaint day. And I don't mean students complaining, but rather formal complaints.

They are complaining that they are being treated differently to other students.

They are complaining about the government not funding them adequately (not sure how that is my problem)

They are complaining that staff treat them unfairly...

Must be a friday.

Spent lots of time listening to a staff member who is being given voluntary severance. She is looking forward to it, but it will leave a big hole in the team, and we don't have any money to plug it. It will also be difficult to realign staff (the current jargon wording), as it is a specialist area.

My life as a senior manager seems to be spent these days divided between writing reports for more senior managers, and writing procedures/processes for academics to follow (do they never remember from one semester to another), and listening to academics complain about other academics.

Uid 187

6:35 AM - Alarm went off

7:00 - I finally got out of bed, got dressed and ate my usual bagel

7:30 - Headed to campus

7:45 - Arrived at office & checked email. Had a reminder that I needed to keep this log! So glad I put that reminder in MS Outlook. It was one less thing I had to remember.

8:05 - Final preping/review of presentation file for CS0 class

8:45 - Headed to CS0 class

9:50 - Came back to my office and had three students waiting to pick up their copy of a section of a new textbook I'm helping class test. Got them taken care of and read email. Also did some last-minute fund-raising for the American Cancer Society Relay for Life walk that I'm participating in starting this afternoon/evening on Campus.

10:45 - Headed to CS0 lab for the rest of the morning and part of the afternoon. There are really only two one hour labs scheduled, but I typically provide a lab exercise that takes longer than an hour to complete. They can finish it on their own time, but many students choose to stay and complete it, so one lab time runs into the next. I'm glad to stay and help, but it does make for a long day at times.

1:00 PM - Snuck out of lab and warmed up my lunch. Took it back to the lab and ate it between questions over the course of the next couple of hours. It was warm when I started eating it...

4:00 - Headed to my office. The Graduate Assistant assigned to me dropped by and we had a good discussion about how things were going for him as his first year wraps up and what his plans for next year are.

5:15 - Headed home

5:30 - At home, visited with my wife, ate dinner, gathered a chair, pop-up tarp, water bottles, snacks, etc to take to the Relay for Life walk tonight.

6:15 - Headed to the Relay for Life walk.

12:30 AM - Back home from the walk. Checked email and started to do some work. Woke up an hour later and...

1:45 - Headed to bed.

Uid 189

Working from home...was intending to mark assignments but ended up reading a pile of articles for tonight's EdD session that I am attending as a part-time student at MMU.

Readings are for tonight, Saturday and Sunda's sessions...I am vague about its meaning...oh dear!

Read from 9 to 3 then went off to MMU as a student from 5 to 8

Uid 191

Hay - this is US tax day isn't it! I was I US but am now in Canada visiting my mum and brother and family.

It is a relief to be away from work, although I am still working of course.

Got an email from the chair of the local USS asking if we were willing to have the 1/260th vs. 1/365th deduction from pay discussed in exchange for considering set days and hours. My first reaction was 'why not' but when I thought about it my current situation illuminates the situation pretty well. Am I working at the moment? I am not in XXXXXXX but I am reading my email, just finished critiquing a student's dissertation, advising a student about degree schemes, and am in the middle of writing a paper. If I had set days and hours how would that work. How would I define these 3 weeks, could I even define them as 'working'?

What does the University hope to get out of this discussion?

Meanwhile, though, I am in a better frame of mind. Went to a workshop on teaching programming that although not brilliant did give me the opportunity to reflect a bit on my teaching and chat with people in the same boat. Gave me some ideas for next year. Reconnected with old friends and family. Saw the Mississippi. Thank heavens for Easter break!

Uid 200

Attended CCSC NE conference all day. It was a busy day. I drove into Springfield, Massachusetts late last night (11:00pm) and was up around 7:00(ish). I met with my co-presenter for my workshop at breakfast at 8:00am, and then we attempted to drive to campus.

Apparently, neither of us can read (or more accurately interpret directions) and it took us slightly longer than expected to get from the hotel to the campus where the sessions were being held.

However, we got to the room in enough time and were able to start on time at 9:00am. The workshop ran until noon and I think it went well. Some of the people in the audience felt it went well too. I did have to do some debugging of basic syntax for some of the participants. It seems that they may not have been as proficient in Java as we had expected coming into the workshop. We got through the material we wanted, but some of the more advanced topics in the second half of our presentation may have been over the heads of the beginning crowd we had attend the session.

Then, we had lunch, which was a nice break and it gave us some time to figure out what our Tutorial presentation was going to contain (that was 5 hours later). Both of us wished the two presentations would have been on two different days.

Then, it was time for the opening keynote of the conference, which was good. I skipped the first official session of the conference to finish up some "camera-ready" elements for a conference in July. After the coffee break, it was on to the tutorial session, which was a condensed version of our workshop that only showed completed demos, not hands-on exercises. I think that session went well too.

Then, it was a social hour before the dinner at 7:30. The dinner was very good for a campus-catered affair. By 9:00, I was back at the hotel and collapsed on the bed. After a day of conference, I'm not sure I picked up any new information, but I definitely had very little voice left after the two presentations.

Uid 204

Under massive pressure from several huge tasks due in the next week or so, when I woke at 5.30 I realised I wasn't going to get back to sleep, so I sneaked out of bed and started writing the exam answers that are needed at an overseas campus before Monday. Stopped for breakfast at my usual waking time of 6.50, and was on my way to work (which I sometimes wryly think of as my second office) by 7.15.

One of our academics has recently departed, abruptly and not of his own volition, and I spent some time working out with other staff how to reallocate teaching to take up his load.

A PhD student who believes he's almost ready to submit has come into serious conflict with his supervisors, who don't. Spent some time discussing this with the head of school; as always, she speaks with a wisdom that belies her tender 60 or so years.

Two hours at a school meeting. I can't say it was time wasted, but I remained acutely conscious of the pressing tasks that awaited me in my office.

Spent some time dealing with academic misconduct cases at an overseas campus - essentially, students sharing and modifying copies of the same work and calling it their own. I was greatly taken with the student who said 'You can't blame me: the assignment was my partner's responsibility, and I had nothing to do with it.' I also really liked the one whose letter of explanation was a word-for-word copy of his partner's, changing only his name and half of one sentence about extenuating circumstances. At least he's consistent!

Back home, after dinner I put in a little more sporadic work, but I was running out of steam, and once I'd finished the overseas exam answers at 9.45 I gave up for the day, after a little over 13 hours of actual work. But those deadlines remain frightening. For two weeks I've been stuck on a major aspect of the course I'm currently rewriting. That aspect needs to go in Monday's lecture, so I have to overcome the problems this weekend. Even though I'm only halfway through delivering the course, I have to finish the development by Monday week, when it's needed at an overseas campus. For that same course I have a batch of assignments to mark, again by Monday, and a final exam to write by Thursday. And I have two education research papers, one with multiple authors, that need a lot of work from me before the submission deadline of Wednesday. If I make it to the 15th of next month, it will be with great relief.

Uid 213

People (non-academics) keep saying to me how nice it must be to be finished for the summer and to have all that time off. I try to explain - politely - that not only do I have another week of formal teaching after Easter, I am expected to work even harder in the summer to get my research outputs through. I also have a pile of marking and I'm not taking any leave during the Easter 'break'.

Having said that, I didn't set an alarm today so I got up at about 745 - a real luxury - although since I'm working at home I had no commuting time. I spent most of the day working on an application for some internal research funding directed at early career researchers for teaching buy out. I sent a draft to a senior colleague who said that asking for six hours pushed the budget too high and I'd price myself out of competition. Buying out of four hours doesn't seem all that much when I normally do ten or twelve hours per semester. But four hours means 36 less assessments to mark and possibly a whole day without teaching. My administrative commitments remain, plus I'm revalidating one programme and validating a new one. Four hours starts to seem minuscule.

I worked until 6 on the bid and on student emails. I gave some feedback to a student who missed her chance in term time because she was two weeks late for the deadline. It reminded me afresh why I am so opposed to online marking - it took me ages to do what would have taken 10 minutes by hand.

I had planned to have drinks with a friend who is a visiting lecturer, but at the last minute she cancelled because she was in a book deadline panic. I'm guessing that her non-academic friends might be less sympathetic but I had been looking forward to seeing her - and giving her the pile of marking I'd collected for her earlier in the week from campus. I ended up having a nice dinner with my husband and watching three episodes of a tv box set instead.

Uid 214

A day spent recovering from a conference: an impossible number of emails built up over the previous two days to deal with; contacts and ideas scribbled in notebooks at the conference to decipher and action; news, ideas and developments to digest; and a hangover to fight off. Once those tasks were complete (noonish), the rest of the day was free to be spent writing part of the book I am badly behind schedule on - every word counts at present just to get to the stage of a full draft that I can then ruthlessly edit. Eventually, come the evening, a simple supper and some TV beckoned before blissfully early sleep so I was ready to do a lot more (and more effective) work the next day. Main lesson learned from all this: try to drink less at conferences, you're not as young as you used to be...

Uid 217

Nothing relevant today. Back on Wednesday from a conference in the States and, after a day of e-mail and MA applications, am today driving to Dorset for a friend's fiftieth birthday weekend.

Uid 221

I don't work on Fridays so did nothing academic today.

Uid 224

Today is basically annual leave for me, so I'm only working half the day.

7:00am We videoed a seminar last week for someone who couldn't be there; I had the format conversion running overnight, and it's finished. Time to burn it to a DVD - simple job, but all these things take a chunk of time! I clear a few emails, then time for annual leave.

8:00am Head into town to help my son, whose office has been locked down in the "red zone" for nearly two months since the Christchurch earthquake; he's been told that he's allowed 4 people to help carry things out of the office. We have a plan to get the high value items in the limited time we're likely to be given.

9:00am Queue to be allocated an engineer and safety person to take us into the red zone. We get assigned 3 people to escort us, and get to the office about 11am - pretty fast really.

11am The engineer doesn't like the way the stairs have come loose, and only allows two of us 5 minutes flat to make one trip with essential items from the office. The main rule of earthquake retrieval: if you get an opportunity, take it. We manage to get some essential/irreplaceable items out. (It turns out that the next day there was a significant aftershock, and the red zone is locked down again!)

1pm We happen to have a retrieval from our building at university today, so I join our staff for that. Compared with the red zone, this is a walk in the park! 15 or so staff are allowed to spend about 40 minutes in the building gathering up whatever they need, as long as they stay away from some glass that is threatening to come down.

3pm Items from the building have been delivered to where we can use them in our temporary accommodation in another department. Time to run some messages paying for some printing from a local print shop, since the campus printery doesn't have all its equipment available.

4pm I'm off for the day… it was a day off anyway, but now it's time for a friend's wedding rehearsal. Nice to participate in a regular event after spending the day trying to get hold of things that we normally have easy access to.

Uid 226

I'm scheduled to give a talk in Massachusetts tomorrow morning so today is a travel day. Airfare was over $1000 (!!!) so I opted for the train, thinking that a 7 hour ride was roughly equivalent to getting to the airport, waiting, flying and getting from the airport to my conference. It was a nice thought but wrong. The train was a bit delayed and the trip was longer than I thought it would be. I had good intentions to work while in transit but did not act on them. I was late, late, late to my conference but the reception and banquet were more pleasant than I anticipated. But I'm kicking myself for agreeing to talk at this small conference. It probably was not worth the investment in time and money. Although you never know what trees can grow out of small seeds.

Uid 237

Diary entry 8

Friday 15th April

Context:

Thursday 14th April I spent all day working on the analysis of results of a survey for a forthcoming conference, and then stayed in work most of the night doing marking...

Content:

...so my Friday started in work at midnight. I left work at around 5ish (or whenever it was) and went home for a few hours sleep. I got up at 10am and finished off my project marking before driving home to see my parents. After I had emailed the feedback sheets to the module leader, I did no further academic work for the rest of the day. I drove home, relaxed, went out for dinner and got an early night. Aaah. :)

Uid 239

Very glad that I had the chance to make a late entry for this day and that my memory has held out!! Hugely busy interviewing all day when many staff had gone off for their Easter break. Double shift of this as well as we had four posts to cover in a short space of time.

We ask a lot of people but it is always rewarding listening to what others can bring to the table. Got a few ideas.

Afterwards had to trawl through paperwork to finish off some tasks which was very debilitating-one thing after another until late in the evening when the caretaking staff considered I should no longer be in the building.

Then had to rush to event anyway, which after the wonderful preview the night before was a rather bleak experience. Very pleased to get home and do domestic chores.

Uid 241

The next few weeks will be rough due to the crunch at the end of the semester: programming assignments to grade, homeworks to grade, tests to make and grade, meetings, etc. We have five more Monday-Wednesday-Friday class meetings, so I have 15 more class meetings because of my three class preparations. I also have two more Thursday labs and two more meetings with my independent study student. Hopefully I will be able to concentrate and get everything done.

Uid 244

8am Drop kids at school.

9am Drove into town, filled up the car with petrol and put it through the car wash, there was quite a queue, so this took nearly 40 minutes. While waiting I thought about what I was going to say at 10:15 at the board meeting. I am one of the names proposed for "Prefekt" of the IT department. I'm not quite sure it is a role I want, since it will involve a lot of work, though there are opportunities to help with the strategic development of the department. In any case, at 10am the three of us who are nominated for the position will make 10 minute presentations to the Department Board. I decided that I would divide my presentation into three main parts Background/Relevant Experience, Reasons for accepting the Nomination, and Vision.

11am. Presentations are over. Hmm, interesting, I went into the meeting thinking that the other two nominees were much more strongly positioned than I was. After listening to all three talks I am not so sure. The person I thought was a sure fire winner was not as confident as I expected, and did not present as well as I had expected either. This may not bode well, maybe I have a better chance of being elected as "Prefekt" than I thought! Not necessarily a cheerful thought.

11-12:45 consulations with my MSc students about courses to choose for the Autumn. The deadline for online applications for courses is today so there were quite a few of them.

12:45-13:10 Eat a quick lunch

13:15 Lecture in computer networking underway. Today's topic is subnetting of IP addresses, so I get the class involved in a subnetting exercise in small groups. We end up spending 90 minutes on analysing the problem, and most people seem to have understood masking and how to divide up the network address range in a sub-net and host part. Overall I class the session as a success.

15:30 do some end of the week shopping on the way home, and then collect kids, soon time to cook tea.

Uid 245

I think I have finally learned what study leave is about and am trying to shut out other calls on time.

Uid 246

Last night we had a horrendous wind storm that knocked down trees all over town. I arrived on campus at 6:30 am to discover half of the campus was without power, including our entire Science building where we were supposed to have our senior computing seminar at 7 am. Thankfully one of my colleagues had arrived a little earlier than I did and was running from building to building to find a place for us to have our seminar. He finally found an open classroom in the Ganus Athletic Center across campus, so I staked out a spot just outside our Science building where I could direct our students across campus. The seminar went fine although it started a little late and had a smaller crowd than usual.

The computing faculty grabbed some breakfast after seminar, and our chairman was able to join us since his 8 am class was canceled due to the power outage. It was nice to visit, and we saw a number of other faculty enjoying their morning off as well.

The power didn't come on until 10 am, but thankfully I had plenty to work on that did not involve a computer until that time. My first class wasn't until 11 am, so the power outage affected me very little. However, one of my colleagues gave an exam audibly in the lobby (which has large windows) since he wasn't able to make copies of his exam. And I heard another faculty was holding a candle up to the white board as he wrote notes on it... I'm sure the students loved that!

I had rolled my ankle on Wednesday and therefore did not play basketball at noon like I usually do. Instead I worked worked through lunch, grading the exams I had given the day before, and I worked on preparing another exam that I was giving at 2 pm.

After giving the 2 pm exam, I was a little annoyed that one of my student had not shown up for the exam. I have a strict policy that says if you are unable to attend the day of an exam, you must contact me \*before\* the exam via email or voice mail or some means. I didn't hear from him all day. As I was about to leave my office at 5 pm, I sent him an email asking why he missed the exam. I got back a reply a few hours later saying he lost track of time and didn't realize it until 20 minutes into the exam. He figured he would wait until Monday and see if I'd give him the exam before class.

I have to admit I was quite angry that this student thought he could just skip, not say a thing, and then show up on Monday and expect me to give him the exam. He is a freshman, so I suppose he's just starting to learn that college doesn't work like high school. I've decided to give him the exam on Monday, but I will subtract 30% from his final score. I hope that decision lies evenly between justice and mercy.

This afternoon my parents drove into town for a short visit. We are going to celebrate my oldest son turning four on Saturday, and Becky and I had a faculty/staff dinner to attend tonight. It's nice to have parents who enjoy watching their grandchildren!

At the faculty/staff dinner tonight I was awarded one of the eight Distinguished Teacher Awards for the school year. It came with a rather sizable check. My wife knew I was receiving the award, but I had no idea, so it was quite a shock to hear my name being read! We joked that my career has peaked. Maybe it's time to change careers and go work for Google. ;-)

Uid 250

Even though I've been on campus more than 60 hours already this week, the alarm rings at 5am. Unfortunately, or perhaps fortunately, I did not move at 5. I arose at 6, a more normal time for me. The loss of the hour meant I would not get my exercise today.

<outline> with intentions of working on this later

A quick shower and off to campus.

There isn't much time before senior project presentations.

Walk over to university center

Meet industrial representatives

Work on scheduling student evaluation of teaching during presentations.

Lunch with industry and faculty

More senior presentations

Research office. Work with grants person on the million dollar idea.

Back to my office. I still haven't finished the Spring 2012 teaching schedule.

Tornado watch

Leaving campus. I don't think I'm off by much in reporting that I'd been on campus about 70 hours this week.

Sushi dinner

</outline>

Uid 256

Share Diary 15th April 2011

This will be a different kind of day, I suspect.

Began at 07.00 with usual survey of overnight e-mails and responses to these where possible. 07.00 – 07.30. Then breakfast in bed for my wife and myself as usual.

08.30: Problem with zipped files has been resolved for these pesky NTFS applications. I really need these on hard copy, as (just working out why) I’m not good at handling scribbled comments in the margins unless on hard copy. Struggles yesterday with a major rewrite on a dreadful paper of mine which certainly needs rebuilt show up the same problem. Some things fine on line; others not. So spent a while getting hard copy printed out. Maybe till 09.15 with my slow printer.

Much heftier submissions this year, it seems. And a more demanding response format. And I have five, not three. Must go back to the criteria, as it seems that under the heading of “impressiveness”, rank and file practitioners in a discipline area are disadvantaged. Worked on these until 11.00, then had a break on a few e-mails, as I was getting stale. 1.30, resumed, and worked until 12.15. Have now completed the first reading. It looks like one of my five is what I should be identifying as my selection, (55 out of 210) although they don’t put it that way. How much should I allow myself to be swayed by those applicants who describe almost everything they do in sweeping superlatives? I’m reminded of the Christian who was assessing his virtues and gave himself 10/10 for humility.

Short ten minute break for messages from participants on yesterday’s Skype and the previous day’s workshop. I like to get responses off, especially when they ask something, as soon as possible.

Also writing up this diary again. Up till 12.25. Now a wee spell on NTFS criteria. Notice that the ideal CV for their purposes is not a traditional format one. Some candidates have latched on to that; others have not. As usual I note, without judgemental comment, that supportive documents seem to vary in terms of knowledge of the applicants work and track record; and understanding of the NTFS criteria. Criteria clear. Criterion 2 clearly puts an exceptional teacher who hasn’t wandered outwith their own territory at a disadvantage.

12.40: Time for a break. Awaiting the arrival of my granddaughter, whom we look after on Friday afternoons, even outwith school terms. [Why not? I am a part-timer, and retired, after all!] But must get on with feedback to Taiwan students before the day – my day – is out. Their postings are piling up. Looks like that paper rewrite is going to have to go on hold until tomorrow.

13.20: Phone call about the materials we are writing – tools for enquiry for WBL students. Till about 13.40. Then a couple of items of snailmail correspondence till 14.00. Now out shopping for a downie cover and pyjamas for my granddaughter, for her new bed. Until 16.00. Then afternoon tea while catching up on e-mails about 5-year course review of a PGCertHE. And so back to the five NTFS submissions. I’ll put them in what I think is ranking order, and look at what I need to concentrate on to make the judgements. Usual struggle to be clear about the distinctions between the various Greek categories. Time to make the evening meal (17.00)

18.30: Spent a little time on this paper which needs rebuilt. I need to see progress there, so that it doesn’t become a thorn in my flesh and just get left unfinished. Found it difficult to switch back to the NTFS submissions. Reached a reasonable point at which to stop, print out, and draw breath 22.05. But running well behind schedule on tutorial comments for Taiwan, and to some extent on the NTFS submissions.

Uid 257

I was back home late last night after some intensive work in the office, not going back in to the university today. I need a lie-in and I have a hospital appointment with a podiatrist late morning, having been diagnosed with tendonitis last Autumn. I use the waiting around time to catch up with the trade press (THE) and consider feedback from students. Last Friday was the last day of term and the final class of a new M-level module I was teaching. I authored the module and this has been its first outing. I seem to have hit the right note with it and filled a (philosophically oriented) gap in the programme‘s repertoire, judging by how the students responded to topics and readings, confirmed in the initial feedback questionnaires (not all are in, since some had to leave the class early and will post in), the critical commenting being about organising of topics to fit the classes, with some spilling over or having to be curtailed. It is fair comment but much of the class time is given over to the students to present on a reading within a topic, so unpredictability in timing is built in. My partner had dropped me off at the hospital and picks me up afterwards and we take the opportunity to tootle around exploring local country lanes and try out a pub for lunch. Arriving back home mid-afternoon, I decide that I cannot put off any longer cutting the garden’s grass for the first time this season. I then spend a couple of hours or so checking and responding to email and planning ahead for work before stopping work to enjoy a leisurely evening.

Uid 258

It's the three week Easter break. I have two BIG TASKS for the students' vacation. Marking, and writing a journal paper (deadline: early May). It's the end of the week and so far I have started neither, instead I have been snowed under with admin tasks (and, er, writing my promotion justification which, if I have said exactly the right things, will swing me into the Princial Lecturer ranks) and seeing dissertation students

One of my per hates is when people say "ooh, lucky you, three weeks off!" when they hear it's the start of the vacation. I wish!

Anyway, Friday. My childminder can't work today, so I have the company of my delightful daughter. She announces that she doesn't want to go out, but wants to make things ... so we make a toy kitchen, do some baking, some painting, some face painting and some gardening. Usually, she sleeps for a couple of hours in the afternoon but today decided that she didn't want to. Aaaargh! This is the only time I had to do any work! So we did a deal. She could watch CBeebies, if she let me work on my laptop sitting next to her (and not insist on 'helping mummy with work.") So that's what we did. I wrote a paper, ultimately for our VC, while watching CBeebies.

Some colleagues complain about their lot but, having come from the private sector, the flexibility which comes as part of academic life is great and makes up for a lot of the issues and problems that come with our job. Mind you, being forced to watch an hour of CBeebies does make you crave a nice quiet office ...

Uid 260

Today I am (allegedly) on vacation. Despite that fact I nevertheless receive an endless stream of emails from students and colleagues demanding my attention. I resolve to ignore most of them. Two pique my interest and I look at them.

REF2014 has captured the attention of my university. We came from a low research base with our former Vice-Chancellor defiantly stating, "Research is not a priority." It might not have been for him but it was for some of us. Our university is financially secure and the present V-C is much more hospitable to research. He is investing heavily in supporting it - but with that there comes a price. We have rapidly developed a sizeable research administration bureaucracy. It has not quite descended to "Big Brother is watching you" but there is a strong desire to oversee, superintend and inspect our efforts while labouring at the research coalface. This well-intended desire to ensure that we don't backslide or falter in our quest for the Holy Grail of a 4-star REF rating is in danger of so burdening us with constant demands for progress reports, research writing plans, deliverables audits and the like that we will spend more time satisfying bureaucratic curiosity than we will have to actually do the research and write it up.

The latest command that has trickled down from on high is that all those earmarked for REF2014 submissions must submit their research writing plans for 2011-12. Since I am the Director of a research centre it falls to me to gather these in from my colleagues. Although the demand only went out on Monday I have today received the first writing plan from a very earnest young colleague. He is not a man who believes in hiding his light under a bushel and certainly exhibits no false modesty. I decide that I have to read what he has to say for himself. He lists four existing publications and modestly states "I would consider the above four pieces to be good enough for the REF and I think that a case can be made for them all being 4\*." I think not. I shall have to find a way of bringing him down to earth - he's a competent researcher but his works are not yet 4\* quality.

The second email comes from the American office of a massive database we use. In my field American authors are tyrannised by the demands of the editors of a consortium of Ivy League publishers. Their style book is minutely prescriptive and runs into hundreds of pages. Over the years it has come to dominate the field in a way that is inconceivable to Europeans - not least because its influence has pervaded the American profession far beyond applying just to journal publications. Mastering its intricacies is such a huge investment in time that most American universities make its study the subject of a year-long course in the first year of academic study. The database publisher has come up with a service that allows users to upload an article which the database then checks for accuracy of quotations and citations but then formats all the citations in the required style. This represents such a huge saving of time and effort that I asked our library to contact the database publisher and arrange for a trial with a view to our taking out a subscription to the service. Alas, despite the library's best efforts, a year of correspondence has resulted in nothing. The problem is that the service provider never assumed that anyone in Europe might be interested in the service and has no formal mechanism for marketing it here.

I am made of rather sterner stuff than our librarians and am determined that there must be a way of getting a trial. After a long correspondence I persuaded the provider to give me access to the service and provide a month's free trial. Unfortunately, just as I was licking my lips in anticipation of evaluating their product, it appeared not to work. Whenever I logged on to the service it accepted the password but, when I uploaded an article for processing, I got a message saying that the service was not part of my subscription. More correspondence followed with me being forced inexplicably to deal with the monkey rather than the organ grinder. I would receive instructions from the monkey, try them, report failure to the monkey who would then report back to the organ grinder who would issue the monkey with fresh instructions to pass on to me. Last week even the monkey tired of this and decided that she would ask the organ grinder to phone me direct so that he could talk me through a logon and troubleshoot any failures in real time.

As of yesterday I had heard nothing from the organ grinder and had emailed the monkey again. Gratifyingly, I receive a grovelling apology and a firm appointment with a day and hour when the organ grinder will phone me. I could have understood this comparative indifference from a large corporation if the price of the service had been trifling - but an academic subscription costs $1200 per user per annum. The cost is so high that even many American universities balk at paying it. However, if its use enhances our ability to get articles accepted for publication in the U.S. then it is a price worth paying since there are 800+ American journals in my field compared with the 50 or so in the U.K.

I do some dog walking and shopping. I prepare a lamb tagine to put in the slow cooker for supper. I check emails again and find a message from Dr Bluestocking - she announces that she has recruited an American academic to the editorial board of a new journal she is setting up.

Finally I decide that I have run out of displacement activities and settle down at my new laptop computer and pick up writing an article I started last September and had put to one side. I'm surprised to find that I can remember all that I wrote previously and that in the intervening period of apparent inactivity there has been some subconscious gestation of ideas. My article concerns an issue that came to some press prominence when a high profile human rights campaigner challenged the impartiality of a government-appointed VIP who was to investigate some alleged human rights abuses. I have some acquaintance with the campaigner and I had written to him asking what had resulted from the letter he had written to said VIP. Rather to my surprise he supplied me not only with the reply he had received from the Treasury Solicitor on behalf of the VIP but also some subsequent private correspondence he had had on the matter that he had not publicised. Since he was happy for me to use and attribute this in my research I can now see clearly the shape my article will take and I write fluently for a couple of hours. I can see that this will be completed and ready for publication within the next couple of weeks.

My wife returns from work at 7pm. We eat the tagine and watch a couple of hours of TV. I finish reading this week's New Statesman and retire to bed.

Uid 264

(Written on Monday April 18th for the previous Friday.)

Friday was my day off (since I work 80% of full time.) I learned in previous years that unless I declare a specific day my non-university-work day, I end up working all 5 weekdays and much of the weekend.

On Friday I was very keen to get the online application system running for our CS4HS program. I finished the actual application on Thursday and just needed someone official to create a page on the department website and link it in. Over breakfast I sent a couple of emails and before 8 am had a promise that the site would be live in an hour or so. I spent an hour sorting out the emails for the more than 20 teachers that had requested application information and once the page was live sent them an announcement. I'm really excited about this summer program but a bit nervous about whether I'll be able to live up to my own expectations about making it truly useful for the teachers who attend.

The remainder of Friday I didn't work on academic tasks. The actual term is over and marks are ready for my fourth-year course (with the exception of 1 student with an extension.) The final exam for my other course is next week so I had a brief reprieve. I did check email and the course discussion board for questions but all was quiet in that regard and other university business could wait until Monday.

Uid 266

I was on holiday on Friday (15th April) - the plan was to go for a bike ride (yesterday's having been a great success, in large part thanks to jaffa cakes and some cute lambs) or an adventure (walking up or down a local river, clambering over rocks and fallen tree trunks, resting on bars or islands, exploring tributaries that disappear off to either side - something I started doing with the girls when they were little, and which hasn't lost its charm for them yet). But we all felt a bit tired, and I had Jobs To Do, so I spent the morning moving clothes around the eternal laundry cycle, sweeping the floor, mowing the grass etc. Took girls to piano lesson in afternoon, then completed tidy up before my brother and his family arrived from the south in time for tea. Delicious puff pastry chicken pie, with some beer, children to bed, read the paper and chatted in the evening, slept like a log.

Uid 268

I spent 15th April by the seaside with my family. It was a grey day, but a sandy, lazy one, followed by packing and a short journey home.

I did not think about teaching much that day, if at all.

I did think about research, as I was conference bound on 17th.

So, a short entry.

Uid 276

Still trying to sort out the costings for an extension to my research assistant’s contract for a new project I am involved with. It has taken 3 days already and I still don’t have the information - I really hate the financial wrangling bit of my job!

Spent some time catching up with a colleague who I do a lot of public engagement activities with; my fear is that he will take up the voluntary redundancy call and then I’ll be left doing it on my own. We really need to widen the pool of active staff in this area but everybody claims to be too busy to do this sort of thing when we ask…

Finally managed to create a poster for some colleagues who want to develop a ‘teaching activities’ display. They asked for it weeks ago and I told them I couldn’t do it before Easter but somehow it’s managed to creep up my to-do list and now I can go on leave feeling smug. Yes!

Uid 281

Friday's during the holidays are always wierd times. This is no exception. Spent most of the morning catching up with a friend who I hadn't seen for about 25 years and another one who I see more regularly(!). Ostensibly it was to talk about whether we wanted to move a reserch project forward and they were both key (non-academic) people to talk to if we did. But in the end we decided there was too much uncertainty and insecurity in all three sectors (HE, charity and statutory education) to move forward at the moment. So instead we talked about everything and anything ("cabbages and kings" as Elliot would have it only it was more like religions and holidays!).

Headed back to where I was staying (holidays giving the chance to spend more time with loved ones too when you are in a long distance relationship) and knuckled down to doing some more work on the consultancy job I have in hand at the moment. Unfortunately as an academic with a chronic disability which causes chronic, excruiciating pain this was interspersed with wandering around to try and alleviate the pain somehow. Managed to get a fair bit done but suspect I won't be ready for the delivery date of after Easter or at least not with the full package they want.

Partner came home around 6.30pm ish and we decided to cheat and order cheapish takeaway (£15 between the two of us) so I could keep working. He spent most of the evening reading and being quietly disapproving but then he's only ever seen me during this very busy period (that's lasted over a year now) so he doesn't understand that sometimes there can be quiet spells where I am twiddling my thumbs (although whether there will be again I don't know). Anyway packed up working at about 9.45pm and to be without hesitation. Just one thought kept playing on my mind - I haven't yet managed to complete the teaching planning for next term nor ensure all the web documentation is correct for the forthcoming IQER inspection. Did I sleep well? What do you think?

Uid 282

7:30 Got up and got a cup of coffee. Thank goodness for delayed time settings. I fixed the pot the night before so I would be sure to start the day with my coffee. Today is the undergraduate student research conference on campus and I am judging at 9:30am. Meanwhile, I checked email, responded to a few students and colleagues.

8:00 received call from principal in nearby school district. Proposal got accepted for ICET World Assembly so need to get district sanction for interviews, etc. The phone conversation was with my contact and the principal of the school that has implemented the Lesson Study model

for four years. This research will be historical in nature to provide the context and then it will record the process for the teachers as they work together to improve teaching and learning.

9:00 headed to the classroom center to locate my judging packet and the room where I will be until about 11:00. Upon arrival, met the other judge and told him how we would do this. I was the main judge and have been doing it many years. This is the first year a rubric has been assigned. Have to say, I like it. Judging was much easier this way. Because of my scripting ability (from being a principal in another life), I usually script the presentations to make scoring easier for me.

Four students presented their research. Why is it that the females underdress for this type of thing more than the males? The first presentation was a male in a suit and tie, an international student. His English was good enough for me to be able to follow and his study was interesting. He examined the current technology used for teaching at the university and presented the data and results with a polished use of technology himself. Impressive.

The remaining three presenters were females, none dressed as professionally as the male. One was about bilingual education, another about over testing emphasis in schools in Texas and the nation and the other was so impressive, that I have forgotten the topic. Not good.

Even so, I enjoyed this year's judging better than any previous year because for the first time I was judging educational research. I have always been put in with the sciences, and can do a fair job, but feel much more at ease in my field of expertise. Truly enjoyable experience this time.

Turned in the judging rubrics and then headed to my apartment to go home for the weekend. First, though, headed to the office to pick up some materials I wanted to take with me.

Packed the car and drove the 1 1/2 hours home and then headed to an early dinner with my husband and home. Really good day.

Uid 289

It's a bit hard to say what I was doing on 15 April. I am not sure where the day started and ended as I was crossing time zones.

We'd been on holiday for 3 weeks, visiting our son in Australia. We were due to leave Melbourne in the early hours of Thursday 14th, and to arrive in Manchester that evening. However, there were cyclones over Malaya, and our flight was cancelled. The airline (Emirates) put us up in a hotel. So the morning of Friday 15th was spent mooching around a suburb of Melbourne. Then we got a flight to Dubai. Instead of our original two-hour stopover, we had a day and night in Dubai, so our second morning of 15th, and the rest of the day was spent exploring Dubai.

My conclusion - it's a big shopping mall, with a bit of Las Vegas tacked on, but without the gambling.

With time on my hands, I did spend some of it writing a paper on a theory of names - in my head. That's it for work.

Uid 291

There is always a question of when a day starts. The concert on

Thursday evening as part of the University Arts for which I provided

hardware and technical assistance led to late supper and still in work

mode until after midnight.

Despite that up at 06:30 and with the initial cup of coffee started

the process of reading all the e-mails from yesterday that had been

neglected on account of setting up the concert. A quick read of the

on-line paper (strange that we still call them papers when reading

on-line) and it is time to start the marking. The first stage is to

prepare a spreadsheet for adding up the marks for the components. I

may have been educated as a mathematician but I still cannot do simple

arithmetic. Using the spreadsheet from last year it is not too hard

to prepare and adjust for the minor changes. I count the number of

submissions to the year 2 programming exercise; every year there seem

to be more and this year's cohort are whingey. Some scripts are still

in my office but it looks like about 10 students either did not submit

or have dropped out. Or could it be that the softer administration

has given extension to anyone who asked. We will see. I know I

should have started marking, but it never seems attractive an idea.

So rather than mark, I go back to bed for a little longer.....

Get the early morning family drinks and prepare breakfast. Over the

eating and after I fight the git system and branches. Basically it is

coherent but from a different universe to my mind. Eventually I

manage to get the two branches up to date after a major struggle.

The advertised date for hearing from the big conference about

acceptance is about ten days and still no news. There was an advert

for a commercial CD from one of the organisers, and I cannot help

having the uncharitable thought that they could have done the

conference before the CD. Still I will go to the conference anyway,

but one of the papers I submitted is really exciting.

In the email I have the first (or very few I hope) of students with

excuses. This was the classic "my laptop crashed" excuse, and can I

ignore the date. I reply this is not my decision. But, we teach the

importance of backups, use of repositories etc, but they still ignore

us. I suppose it is different in kind from the earlier e-mail this

morning which amounted to "my program crashes; what are you going to

do to mend it for me".

The usual cycle ride, but getting faster with the nice weather, and

get to university about 12:30.

One of the first things is to e-mail the University music coordinator

about breaking down last night's kit. More e-mail, but this time the

student came in person with a request I have not had before.

Basically she had submitted on time, but had since thought that she

would get more marks if it were unsubmitted and she used the rule that

a late submission by some days (I do not know how many) with a 40% cap

might give her more marks. My response is she submitted on time;

basically even hunting for the script seemed like an unnecessary

chore. The rule also seems misguided, or even wrong. Privately I

deplore the concentration on marks rather than learning or

understanding. I suspect that many (most?) of the students do not

want to understand and just want the tick.

Just after she left (unhappy or not I could not tell) but my desktop

computer started giving unlikely messages, and then froze -- very rare

occurrence. In fact the first time with this hardware. A reboot

fixes it, but i had to repair the RAID by hand.

I failed to get to seminar as I was interrupted on the way by trivial

things, and anyway it looked grade A boring, so instead I tried to fix

the problem that my laptop never connects wirelessly to the University

network. Much poking at discussion swith the support team gave

absolutely no result; I am still as I was.

A little more room tidying and throwing away and at 15:00 I take a

trolley to the concert venue to collect our speakers and cables.

Pack two crates with the eight monitor speakers, padded with the

cables, and take it down to the music coordinator's car, together with

the stands, all with the assistance of the VRF and an SL. Load sub

and a additional collection of cables onto the departmental trolley

and pull it across the site to our studio. Unload, and then to the

loading bay to collect the two crates from the car. Somehow unpacking

the crates turned seamlessly into packing the studio up for our

forthcoming building move. This move has been the major feature of

university life for the last 4 weeks or so. Throwing out, breaking

down, packing up.... seems endless. All for the privilege of an open

plan office. At about 17:00 things look under control, so leaving a

minimal studio so I can transcribe some tapes. The IVF goes home, and

I am back in my office, packing a crate of PhD theses and

undergraduate dissertations. Do I really need these I wonder but

decisions take too long.

Friday night is one of our social meeting evenings, but one of the

three of us has alternative plans so just two of us plan to go to the

bar. With interruptions from graduate students, e-mails and stuff it

is late before we get to drink our glasses of Guinness. My friend

outlined the revised plans for the forthcoming seminar/interview as

part of a job-change. As well as students the move is high in our

conversation, and our health issues, mainly our eyesight and cataracts.

Pack the last few assignments into my bike paniers, and leave, late as

ever.

Cooked supper (very nice vegetable stew on rice). Deal with more

e-mail before collapsing from a busy but unproductive day. I feel

that there are way too many of these recently.

Uid 296

I had a really good day today, partly because it was a clinical liaison day at a local NHS Trust. Saw lots of students. At the trust at 7.30am. spoke to commun ity midwives and reviewed the activities for the day before seeing a student at 8.30am. Reviewed a student's portfolio prior to her seeing the course director later in the day. She had completed the last few activities since I saw her previously. Then discussion with a third year student re: her progress and practice assessment document. After this saw 2 third year students on the maternity ward (surprisingly they were not too busy today) and had time to sit with them and discuss their progress, clinical practice issues and their practice assessment document. Couldn't see the third, senior student a she was busy on the ward round, so came back later and reviewed things with her (and made a date with her and her mentor to undertake the practice assessment meeting). Visited the labour ward...no students, but saw a few midwives and the lead midwife and talked about practice and student progress. Saw student and mentor on the birth centre (seeing them on Tuesday to go through her practcie assessment document). Had a quick break for a late coffee in the canteen where I nearly completed my expenses for travel and parking for March and April. Quick discussion with lead for neonatal care about neonatal care changes andTrust politics. Saw 3 more midwives on the ward and one student midwife on the Gynae ward where we discussed her progress and reviewed some cases. Home about 4pm.

Uid 301

Attended a four day conference, so I spent all day listening to academic presentations. Nice to be able to escape the normal routine and immerse myself in some technical papers. As always, interaction and discussion with colleagues from other institutions was stimulating and informative. This kind of event really re-charges the batteries.

Tomorrow I will present my own paper - Worked until 2am making final revisions.

Uid 310

15.4.11

Today was a day of critical reflectionâ€¦ aka (mostly) marking. Sitting in front of the fire, watching clouds race past the window and surrounding myself with paper, coffee, marking criteria, and assignments. It was almost certainly a mistake to start with the Masterâ€™s assignment and work down the years, as the Masters work was excellent. The Honours project was good, and so the second year essays mostly still need to be done. It is amazing how long one piece of poor work can take to mark. Just occasionally I do wonder if the students were in the same room as me during the year. And it is a real challenge to give as much feedback to the best as to the worst work, especially when, cynically, one believes that many of students look no further than the mark! They are now all in pre-exam panic mode and bombarding us all with emails night and day. Maybe I just have end-of-term-itis

As a little light relief spent an age writing up minutes from the most recent staff meeting (my turn) and realised that I must have switched off on at least a couple of occasions during the meeting, as I had no idea what we had decided. Yep, I definately have end-of-term-itis. Good job the Chair is tolerant and also keeps good notes. The part I do remember is that we decided an end of term team outing would be a GOOD THING now the students have finished their term.

Saved a nice end to the day, by responding to a highly motivated and well organised PhD student, reviewing an interesting paper for a journal and corresponding with an overseas colleague which may lead to some study exchange and/or research.

Next a long hot bath, then dinner somewhere quiet and congenial. No cooking on Fridays: itâ€™s the rules!

Uid 314

7am woken up by spouse getting up

8am crawled out of bed

somehow shoveled daughter out of bed and off to school by 9am

9.38 managed to catch bus

10 arrived at university

10.20 met external examiner for PhD student of mine; took him out for coffee

11-1300 student's PhD Viva. She passed!

13-1330 admin after Viva, including parading student all around labs accompanied by co-supervisor holding a very large (1m diameter) disc platter from a machine decommissioned 20 years ago, while banging it with a rolled up copy of student's thesis and announcing that the student had passed her exams

1330-1500 lunch to thank examiners and good restaurant downtown

1500-1530 walked around town, talked to student about what comes next (i.e. jobhunting)

1530-1600 get home

1600-1800 home! Daughter still at end-of-term film party with after school care! Bliss!

1800-1830 buy takeaway for dinner; supplies from supermarket, collect daughter from after school care bus (arrived late)

1830-1930 eat dinner. drink half bottle of wine.

1930-2030 file emails. put of doing admin for conference I will organise in about 14 months time

2030-2230 spouse watches American Idol. I send 30 conference emails, googling to find contact details etc etc

2230-2300 watch documentary on contemporary composer while finishing the emails

2300-0000 unsure. Read the web? fall asleep? Don't know

0000-0015 wake up. realize diary not finished. Download podcasts of "The Archers"

0015-0045 listen to podcasts. go to sleep.

Almost wished diary day had been last week - from monday 11th to sat17th inclusive, worked about 18 hours most days, 4-6 hours sleep each day, writing a 15,000 word paper - colleagues did the experiments & stats, I generated the libretto. Luckily I have only a couple of weeks like that each year, but when they happen, everything else takes second place.

Uid 319

tired, tired, tired, tired

Uid 325

Hmm... Any other day this week would have been full of meetings with thesis/other students and research programmers but not today: Friday 15th of April. As a result of people getting sick I get to do reading all day and thikning of teaching in the second half of 1st trimester since the 2 week break starts today!

Uid 333

Today I neared the end of my week-long holiday, cycling round the Bodensee. The last leg took me from Höchst in Austria, through Switzerland and back to Konstanz in Germany, without a single border passport check. Weather a bit chilly today, but still dry as it has been all week.

There has been no free wireless anywhere on this trip, so I've genuinely been unable to check work email. I've scheduled a whole day on Monday to clear the backlog, but I'm hoping that most people will have heeded my fierce bounce. I wish universities would actually disable accounts of staff on holiday so that the bounce was real and the message didn't get through (as it wouldn't if you tried to phone--I don't have an answering service--or knock on my office door). Then, if it was still relevant, people would have to re-send email when I'm really back at my desk, and only if they hadn't solved the question in the meantime, rather than being able to store up a whole week of stuff for me during what should be a holiday. Universities still need to develop proper email policies in my view.

Feel restored by the break but dreading opening the inbox on Monday...

Uid 343

Our University two week ‘spring break’ ended last week, so we are back to the normal teaching routine. Indeed, being in ‘heathen’ Scotland we take no notice of Easter if it doesn’t happen to fall within the break, so this year we will be teaching on Good Friday and Easter Monday. (However, the University has graciously granted us a holiday in a fortnight’s time to celebrate the wedding of two of our alumni...)

Today I chaired a meeting to discuss the courses that our department will be presenting next academic year. There was agreement about the portfolio of courses that we would give and, quite surprisingly, no disagreement about the content of a new course to be introduced. But just when I thought things were going smoothly, we spent over half an hour debating the name of the new course: should it be called ‘Topology’ or should it be ‘Metric and Topological Spaces’? All sorts of spurious arguments were put forward for which name would be most likely to attract students. It was frequently stated that the title needed to be ‘sexy’, but there was no consensus as to which was sexier (I suspect that to a non-mathematician either name would be a complete turn-off!). In the end, we opted for ‘Topology’. However, just as I was about to go home in the evening, the leading dissenter came to my office to try and get the decision reversed ...

Tea time on Friday is the occasion we particularly encourage staff and research students to come down to the common room to relax a little at the end of the week. It is a tradition (of at least 3 years standing) that one of the professors provides biscuits to go with tea as an incentive to people to socialise for a while, and it was my turn this week. We had a good turnout of about 30, though there is still a tendency for the staff to sit at one end of the room and the research students at the other. There was the usual trivial discussion about the quality of biscuits provided – with some vociferously complaining at having to put up with chocolate digestives after the Leibniz biscuits had run out.

Uid 344

I was on annual leave this week, and had been visiting family and friends. I had been feeling disillusioned with work because my application for voluntary severance has been turned down and there is no explanation. Also I have a stack of marking to get back to, and when I return home on Sunday I will need to work all day preparing teaching for Monday and Tuesday.

I made a concerted effort not to check my work email, but I knew I would have to dip in just to check in case there were any emails I needed to see personally. I could see the build-up of emails from students, some of which has been in my inbox for at least a week prior to my annual leave. The workload has become so problematic that I find I am unable to respond in a timely manner. I used to have a reputation amongst students for my prompt replies to emails, but this will soon be lost.

Part of the problem is workload, but also I have decided not to let work invade my private life quite so much. This has a detrmimental effect for students though, because it means they do not get a prompt reply from me.

I am also recognising that the increased workload has upset me, and this has demotivated me. I no longer feel the sense of pride in my work and care for the students that used to see me answering work emails whilst on leave. I am unsure whether this is a good or a bad thing, but it is certainly a sign of my increasing unhappiness caused by my teaching load being increased. We teach more than other academic schools here, and that sense of unfairness makes the demotivation so much worse.

As I see the build-up of emails, I begin to realise that there is a developing culture of neediness amongst students. Most of the emails are requests to have drafts commented on prior to submitting assignments. I really think I need to be more strict abiut my willingness to do this. It virtually doubles the marking workload.

Yesterday my mobile phone rang and it was a student asking for help with a dissertation. I don't normally give out my mobile number, but I have usually felt able to trust personal tutees and dissertation students in their final year. Unfortunately even that trust has gone - and my number is now being abused. This student wanted help with her dissertation because her supervisor is on annual leave. Having seen the out-of-office on my email advising I was on annual leave, she had chosen to ring me on my mobile. I find this unacceptable, but colleagues give out their personal mobile numbers quite freely so this culture ahs developed. I must work hard to re-establish my boundaries next year.

Uid 347

Another day of non-stop marking final year literature reviews, all on different topics. I'd learn so much if only I had storage space in my head for all this new information! I need to speed up or I'll not meet the 3 week turnaround target - but detailed feedback takes time....it'll all get done in time only if I deprive myself of sleep and become a social recluse - this can't be sensible!! My daughter's friend is moving into her first flat - get home just in time for her to collect spare household items/furniture - at least there's more space in my house now even if my head is full!!

Uid 348

On leave - should have been away but my partner is very ill so have stayed at home.

This means that, as well as looking after him I have checked and dealt with email regularly, marked a load of essays and worked on a conference paper. Some leave...

Uid 352

Last week of teaching for the term. My last class was on Monday,

Worked very very hard all day (all week) on re-designing our masters programmes for ministry approval.

Complicated, administrative and not helped by an internet application specifically created by our univerity for the occasion - still full of bugs, unfinished and under-sized (ie disconnects spontaneously every 20 minutes or so)

Meet at end of day with Education Faculty on one masters that we will be doing in collaboration with them.

Very satisfying meeting. Lots of fun.

Despite the hierarchy we will manage to (re)create some excellent degree programmes.

Uid 354

I woke early today, and lay in bed calmly thinking about the course I'm teaching, and how the redesign is working for the students and for me. Earlier this week, I, perhaps foolishly, committed to presenting a poster on some aspects of my redesign at the Teaching and Learning Symposium taking place on our campus in two weeks. Foolish because in the next four weeks I have to prepare and deliver a workshop at a conference of Scrum practitioners, and two research-in-progress talks on our campus. I also am trying to ramp up my software testing research, and work within industrial colleagues to launch a one-day workshop for industrial practitioners who want to learn more about how to do computer aided software testing. Oh well. I am coming to realize how valuable these force and functions are in order to get me to produce, so I'm not complaining.

In about an hour I had a diagram that I liked representing the modeling tools for the analysis and design course I am teaching. It shows the design team and the customer team, each of 3-4 students. It shows the 3’ by 4’ whiteboard that each team has for their use, and which they use for the design and modeling discussions in every class. It shows the digital camera to record the models they create on the whiteboard, the physical product notebooks that each student keeps, electronic learning logs, the coach (that's me), and the cycle of conversations used to create understanding with these tools.

Next I drew a logarithmic spiral, like the cross-section of a nautilus shell. Along the outside of this path I attached circles with smaller circles coming out from them. The appearance looks like a Julia set coming out of the nautilus spiral. The expanding area within the nautilus shell represents the richness and complexity of the various team and individual artifacts the students are creating during this course. The circles of Julia set represent the 1-day, 1-week, or 2-week iterations during which the students focus on creating the documents for a particular milestone. The smaller circles coming out from the edges of the milestone circles represent the conversations within a design team, or between a design team and a customer team. And on the outside of the team conversation circles are even smaller circles representing the spontaneous conversations among subsets of the people on these teams.

I like how the Julia set representation illustrates the fractal nature of the design conversations, and how the increasing volume between the lines of the logarithmic spiral illustrates the richness of the understanding that the students are creating as represented by the documents they produce.

Looking at the diagram, I realize that the Julian set is from my conversation with another professor yesterday. It continues to surprise and please be how quickly new ideas enter into my practice.

Using these forms also pleases me since they mirror the biologically inspired design underlined a talk I am preparing for next month’s national Scrum Gathering conference. The talk is Biomimicry: Innovation of the Future (Brought to you by the Past) and describes the connection between biomimicry and software and organizational design.

Even better than the diagram is the response I’ve had to the whiteboards. The energy level in the classroom is high. People are engaged and collaborating around their whiteboards with their visible artifacts. Having a central set of artifact that they are co-creating allows me to see their work and act effectively as a coach. Some students have grabbed a second whiteboard, not being used by another team. Another team filled their whiteboard and then moved to the front of the class to fill another 12 feet of whiteboard.

After that I jumped into the car and went to the pool to swim some laps. My right elbow has been bothering me again, perhaps because I sit so much in my job. A couple months ago, while spending four days grading papers at the end of the quarter, it really flared up and I had to go back to visit the acupuncturist. Now I am trying to let it heal back to normal, and jumping back into swimming a lot of laps probably is not a good idea. I did a shorter swim this morning. Even that puts me into a great mood for the rest the day. I feel alert. Calmer. Ready.

Back home, my daughter was up and getting ready for her high school. I made tea for her, and showed her the diagram I had just built as an example of the type of diagram I was suggesting she might want to create in order to understand the science homework she had been working on last night. I think she got the idea, and rightly pointed out that making such a complex design every homework assignment would take a long time. While eating breakfast, I extended my design with links to a few more notes, sort of a mini mindmap, and showed her this extension as an example of a simpler way of doing a diagram that might work for her homework.

Diagramming is such a powerful tool, and it seems to be so infrequently taught. Why is that?

Since I was already up and about, I dropped my daughter off at her friend's house nearby, where she will get a ride to her high school about 5 miles across town. It's such an amazing house. The front porch is a wreck. Tilting, boards rotting through, paint chipped. Yet when you open the front door, you enter into an amazingly done interior to the house. Beautiful carpentry. Wonderful artwork everywhere. Solidly built. Such a contrast to the entryway. It was all an accident, in a way. They put the money where it mattered as this will be resurrected the house they had purchased years ago. The porch was the least important thing to fix, so they left it last. Now they are sort of proud, and in use, at the contrast and it's how people are so surprised when they enter the house after crossing the wreck of the porch.

Back at home, I chat briefly with my wife about the events of the day, and ask if she's heard from our son who is off in Alabama at a NASA sponsored rocket club event. He's a sophomore in high school, and thrilled to be at an event that is largely attended by college students. I'm sure it is pretty cool with all those rocket nerds, and the tours, and the rockets shooting a mile into the sky with their scientific payloads. Things sure have changed since I was in high school. Or, perhaps, living in the city there are many more opportunities then where I grew up in the countryside.

I have been writing this entry as I go through the day. In a few minutes, I will be on a conference call for the Seattle Lean Camp that Jim Benson and some of us are organizing for this June at the beautiful Center for Urban Horticulture at the University of Washington Seattle. It's turning out to be very easy to organize this unconference, and Jim has procured enough sponsors so that the attendee fee is ridiculously low for the two day weekend. About $40.

The conference call went well. Afterwards, I updated my resume to include two talks I given recently, and that I am on the steering committee for this unconference. I also am working on seeing if our campus will be a sponsor for this event. That would be useful all around.

Given that this Friday, it is my day at home, and I weave in other nonwork activities. My mom, who lives a few houses away, stopped by to bring us up-to-date on her transition to a senior living home. My mom, wife and I had toured the facility last Friday, and in the meantime my mom decided that one unit which is available immediately is the best one that will probably be available for a long time. So, she's probably going to move soon.

This will be different for all of us. She will be getting a much more rich social life, being down town close to lots of activities and in the center of a community of older people who like to keep mentally active. The apartment she is purchasing there has a wonderful feel, and quite a nice view so I think it will work out well. The difficult part is that she is my best collaborator. When she and I get together to work out some work question, it goes extremely well. I'm going to miss being able to have her come over on a five-minute notice. Downtown is a half hour bus ride away, or a 15-minute drive. That is quite different from the 50-yard walk.

After discussing her move, the three of us spent a half hour looking for a photo to grace the front cover of the book of poems that my mom will be self-publishing. And then we all three went separate ways: my mom walked back home; my wife took the two dogs out for a walk; I heated up some lovely leftover shepherd's pie. Now I am back tidying up some work before walking over to the acupuncturist. After that, it will be a conference call with a student who is working on a human centered design course that I am creating for next winter.

The rest of the afternoon was filled with meetings with students I am mentoring for Independent studies or their internships. One was via Skype. It was the students first time using Skype, or Google Docs, but by the end of the meeting it was clear this would work for us. The student is doing an independent study with me on human centered design, helping me grade my analysis and design course, and doing an internship at a local company. It felt very efficient to wrap three different meetings into a single Skype call.

The next meeting was with a student who is doing an internship at a local research organization where she was just hired as a software tester. It is only 2 miles from my house, so I drove over (my bike is still in the shop) and met her at a coffee shop next to her work. It was good to see her looking much more relaxed than the last time I met her, a week or so after she'd started her job. As we talked about what she was doing in her job, and what she was learning I realized I was recording this is a diagram on a piece of paper. This is my normal way of doing things. So, I asked her if she could draw a diagram of the different parts of her organization, and her work, and what she's doing and how they relate? She wasn't clear on what I meant, so I flipped over another sheet of paper and sketched and talked to the diagram I had created for my course in the morning.

By the I time I was halfway through, it was clear she was getting the idea so we switched to discussing the different types of information she could record a diagram. The organization has 20 or so different applications. How do they relate? What information passes among them? What are the dependencies? Are any of them tightly coupled? If you made a change in one application, what other applications should be retested to make sure that the interconnections still work? These are the types of questions I think a diagram could be helpful in answering. And it is surprising to me, still, how little we focus on diagrams when we teach.

This discussion led me into a little rabbit hole. The prior evening, while discussing a workshop on biomimicry that I'm putting together with a colleague from industry, I came across the concept of stigmergy: how different agents can communicate with each other by leaving traces in the environment. This is central to how social insects communicate, using pheromones on ant trails leading to food, or mud balls being used to build a termite mound.

It is a lovely and useful concept, though as I write this I realize that ALL communication is done by modifying the environment. So, what is the essential difference between stigmergy and the other means? What are the other means? Here is something else for me to ponder.

Back at home, I try to put down my thoughts on the human centered design course I am designing, but the dinner party was about to happen downstairs, my energy was gone, and I could not concentrate. I sent an apologetic e-mail to the person who is been asking for this and to which I had committed sending something today, and then close my computer and headed downstairs.

That was the end of my workday. A day “at home” where I have the luxury of interleaving non-work activities with my work. A day where I can relax a bit after four long days at work. A day where I get some research done, but never as much as I want. A day where I avoid the commute. A day in which I feel like I have more freedom than I am accustomed to having an industry. A day in which I realize the week has gone well. My course flowing better. My research is beginning to flow. I met a couple of famous people in my domain, and had some interesting conversation with them.

Uid 360

Hi! A day's leave - did think a bit about a session i have to do soon - a new one so it will need a lot of thought. I was doing some gardening and got quite a few ideas. I hope they will work in practice!

Uid 362

Officially, the term finishes today. Formal teaching ended last week but I set today aside to meet up with some disseration students who wanted to meet before disappearing for the Easter break. It's fascinating the different levels of support students need - one today just wanted reassurance, another needed a bit of gentle prodding and a third, who hasn't written much yet (and the dissertations are due to be handed in in less than a month!) spent most of the time reassuring me! It was good to be able to leave my office by early afternoon - it's been a very long term and virtually everyone I bump into looks absolutely exhausted. I know why the date of Easter Sunday changes year by year but I wonder if it wouldn't be possible to have a spring break some time at the end of March and then just the bank holidays at Easter. Students will feel less jaded and staff might be left with a bit of energy to mark all the essays which fall due at the end of March.

Uid 370

Today was very quiet in someways - its the Easter break but resits week and so most of the staff are on holiday or 'working' from home. The majority of the students are on holiday but a significantly troublesome minority are about on campus and demanding attention. I particularly love it when they come and ask questions that indicate no engagement with the lecture in which the material was taught, the tutorials and/or labs in which it was developed, the in-course assessment that assessed it, or the first attempt at the exam that assessed it. Like the question 'how do you convert from metres to nanometres' by a student who is now on her fourth attempt at this particular exam having repeated the year. Some of the day was spent dealing with that sort of thing. Some of the day was spent marking resit papers in which a signficant number of students indicated that they lack the maturity to be successful in higher education: I wonder why they are wasting their money. Is there any chance that higher fees may put off this type of student? Probably not.

I also marked some overdue assessed problems, a couple of finalist bits of course work which were excellent, and a few other items of reassessment work. The reassessment is earlier this year because of the double double bank holidays for Easter and that other thing that's happening that shall go unnamed because I don't care about it.

I also worked on a couple of outreach projects, one of which has just been funded via an internal mechanism (yay!) so that needs to be properly evaluated as we go along in anticipation of writing the final report (boo!).

A fairly major part of the day was spent stressing about reviewers for a major funding application - for this type of money we had to specify reviewers but it turns out it was our responsibility to make sure they submitted their reviews. One refused, the replacement hasn't replied to the email asking if he'd referee it so Monday's stress predictably will be finding another potential reviewer. In any case, I actually cried when one of the other reviewers emailed to apologise for not completing it quicker, but that it had been done. I don't really mind whether it was a positive or negative review at this point, just that the review process is 50% complete.

I was supposed to do some paperwork for my PhD student - some kind of progress report thing but as its my first PhD student and the mentoring/second supervisor support that is supposedly provided by my university is non-existent, I'm struggling to work out what to say. Well, I'm struggling not to accidentally say something that will be a red flag to our over-zealous postgraduate committee and result in more meetings on the state of the students progression/work. Good monitoring of PhD students by someone other than the supervisor is a good thing but I've seen quite a few decent students and reasonable supervisors be chastised for things on these forms that were simply a question of phrasing rather than indicative of some major problem that might stop the holy grail of completion.

Other than all of that, I gave up at 4pm and went to the pub. Usually there are a crowd of us that goes on a Friday evening but everyone was away apart from me and my partner who's also an academic in the same department. At least it was a short yet frustrating yet productive day!

Uid 375

15.03.11

Even thought the Easter 'holidays' began a week ago I haven't yet had a day off, so made today an easy day. I was up early but spent much of the day reading for pleasure, and relaxing. I did answer work- and book-related emails and checked into social networking sites but in a laid-back way. Feel constantly exhausted and guilty that I'm not doing enough work.

Uid 377

Reflecting on the 14th, I tried to attend a University staff development course "Learning and Working with Disabled People". The course's stated objectives are "understand the barriers disabled people face within employment". The course was held on the 7th floor of the Gilbert Scott building: the lift stops at 6, and that's where the disabled toilets are. I have "one leg too few" so I let them start without me. I wonder if I am being subjected to Darwinian pressure? I am depressed.

Uid 378

The students are on exam leave so I spent most of the day working on a paper in glorious isolation. This was interrupted by a meeting with an MSc student about his literature review and an undergrad who wanted to know about a revision class. I also e-consoled a PhD student about a rejected paper. The meeting with the MSc student was extremely challenging as his English is very poor. He is a lovely chap, and tries his best to communicate but we both have to concentrate incredibly hard, and type into a power point window to make things clear sometimes. Is he an international student cash cow (ala Dispatches)?