

Goodbye, Spring

Written by Dylan Kissane

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DYLAN KISSANE, APR 14 2014

It's the final week of classes at CEFAM for the Spring semester and I've just a few hours to go with the students in my classes before I bid them farewell – at least for a week before some, inevitably, return to my classroom in the Summer.

It's been a hard and tiring semester as my teaching load grew to a barely manageable five sections of four different subjects before ballooning again to add an additional section of a fifth different class. Preparing and teaching five different courses is tough enough but I added to this a full administrative schedule (I coordinate the graduate program and manage the faculty for both the undergraduate and graduates programs, too), a research schedule (conference papers, presentations, book chapters and co-editing a new collection) and some side projects that somehow found their way to my desk (a large inter-university business incubator project and an inter-university steering committee on e-learning). Looking back over my calendar I can see that +50 hour weeks on campus are common and there are a couple of +60 hour weeks on campus in there, too – and neither of those figures includes the work I do at home.

Will I miss the Spring 2014 semester when it's gone? Not likely.

In the last couple of weeks I've had colleagues and friends comment that I look more tired than normal. They are right. In some ways I've moved beyond being tired and into the 'working while fatigued' category: getting in for a 7am start, staying on campus some nights until after 8pm, giving up Saturdays to work school events and trying to stay on top of the meetings, email, grading, projects and other calls on my time. I've started finding time to get through administrative tasks either early in the morning (6:30am to 6:45am is the perfect time to prioritise my inbox before heading off to work) or late at night (waiting for my son to fall asleep gives me half an hour to respond to students on my iPad between 9pm and 9:30pm each night). Yet this portioning of my time also means that my work day never seems to really end. I've managed to get a lot done this Spring but I cannot keep it up for more than another week – the stress and the fatigue are taking a toll.

I take some solace from a recent report that suggests I am not alone. Last week *Inside Higher Education* reporter Colleen Flaherty reported on a Boise State University study that found professors:

work long days, on weekends, on and off campus, and largely alone. Responsible for a growing number of administrative tasks, they also do research more on their own time than during the traditional work week. The biggest chunk of their time is spent teaching.

Boise's John Ziker, the man behind the research, noted on the *Blue Review* blog:

On average, our faculty participants worked 61 hours per week. That is 50 percent more than a 40-hour workweek. It's a good thing they love what they do. They worked just over 10 hours per day during the workweek and just under 10 hours on the two weekend days combined. Work was heaviest on Monday through Thursday, trailed off on Friday, then maintained approximately a half-day load on the weekend.

For what it is worth, the "50% more than a 40-hour week" comment reflects what we see here in France where my

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monthly pay slip speaks to 'official' working hours of just less than 152 hours per month or about 38 hours per week.

I'm counting the cost of the long hours I've worked this Spring on my extra-curricular life, on my research – always the first thing to be sidelined – and on my mental health and stress levels. I'll be glad to see the end of the semester and slip into a more bearable summer where, for about two months, I'll be able to focus largely on teaching and renewing my courses for the Fall. While I'm sure I'll look back on the Spring as a productive period, I can't help but think that if professors are all driving themselves into the ground like this and if university administrators get used to these sorts of 'volunteer' efforts then we may all be digging a hole it will later be hard to extract ourselves from.

I've got only a few days to go now until the final international relations research papers come in, until the final exams are done, and until I submit the final grades for the Spring. It'll be a pleasure to close the door on the semester and, I hope, take a few deep breaths and see things return to normal once again.

Bring on the Summer, and soon.

About the author:

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