

Quantum Diaries

follows the lives of scientists from around the world as they live the World Year of Physics 2005. In their own words, in photos, blogs and videos, they tell the real-life stories of real physicists in real time. Quantum Diarist Gordon Watts from the University of Washington, for instance, would like to tell you about his day....

<http://www.quantumdiaries.org>

Photo: Reidar Hahn, Fermilab



Ego...Ego...Ego...

One of the things we physicists get along with our training is a huge ego. It takes a lot to bruise it. Yesterday did me in.

::Stumped

- It's the last week of term, so I'm busy teaching. Consequently, I had to miss a collaboration meeting back at Fermilab. Trying to update my research for the meeting, I stayed up until 3:45 a.m. Didn't manage.

- I was stumped by a homework question during office hours. I could hear the frustration in the student's voice. Nothing like a student's scorn to make me feel crappy!

- I presented some work at the Fermilab meeting via video. Halfway through the talk, an audience member contradicted something I said. By video, I couldn't see who was speaking; it turned out to be an expert on that particular item. It took me awhile to understand what he was saying, then more time to understand that his comment was not relevant to my discussion. In short, I thought I was wrong, in front of 50 people, for about 10 minutes. Painful.

::Humbled

My talk ran long at the video meeting, so I missed half of a meeting with a candidate for a faculty position, a condensed matter physicist. This is a topic I don't know a lot about, so I didn't feel comfortable asking a question. Humbling to hear someone talk about something you are supposed to know about but don't.

- The grader for my class discovered an error in my exam solutions; 30 minutes later, she found an error in my homework solutions. Sigh.

- A second candidate for the faculty position is visiting our group. She would likely work with me if she were hired. She was giving a talk, so we tested the projector with her computer in my office.

- The first collisions in almost 14 weeks began at the Tevatron, after a long shutdown. Something that I'm responsible for didn't work properly and I got called. In the middle of trying to fix that I had to...

- Rush with the job candidate to the seminar room. Once there, we realized that we needed an extension cord. Raced down 5 flights of stairs and back. Once everything was set up we discovered that her portable projector didn't work!! I raced back down and up the five flights to grab a backup projector.

- I returned to my office to fix the problem at Fermilab, missing almost 30 minutes of her talk.

::Lost

On the way to dinner, got lost. Walked around in the rain for 20 minutes trying to find the place.

::Awesome

Last night, I made sure to get sleep. Result: I'm once again INYINCIBLE! I gave an awesome lecture; did an extended derivation and kept the class with me the whole way. While I was lecturing, the weather went from hard rain to sun. Coming out into the sunlight was stunning. At another video meeting I gave a great talk and got many good ideas. Treated myself to a Kemper root beer for lunch. This afternoon is killer: at one point I'm triple booked in meetings. No matter, I can be in all three places at once!

posted by Gordon Watts



2 comments

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