

It Is Advantageous to Make a Syllabus As Precise As Possible: Decision-Theoretic Analysis

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Should a syllabus be precise? Shall we indicate exactly how many points we should assign for each test and for each assignment? On the one hand, many students like such certainty. On the other hand, instructors would like to have some flexibility: if an assignment turns out to be more complex than expected, we should be able to increase the number of points for this assignment, and, vice versa, if it turns out to be simpler than expected, we should be able to decrease the number of points.

In this talk, we analyze this problem from a decision-theoretic viewpoint. Our conclusion is that while a little flexibility is OK, in general, it is beneficial to make a syllabus as precise as possible.