

Challenges and Learning Opportunities

In this section, Kevin Desmond shares challenges he faced in teaching 15.S50 Poker Theory and Analytics and how he addressed them.

One challenge I faced in teaching this course was that the level of experience students had with poker varied substantially, ranging from students who could realistically play at a competitive level to those who still needed to learn the rules of poker. I decided to keep the lectures advanced, so that everyone would benefit from the time in class, and I quickly added several recitations during the week to help students who were struggling with concepts or needed a refresher on poker in general.



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In planning for and teaching this course, I learned the value of being flexible. The few contingency plans I made were tested, thanks in part to a blizzard that struck Cambridge halfway through the course. There is no amount of planning that will prevent last-minute cancellations or hardware malfunctions and the best course of action, I learned, is to identify operational risks and adapt accordingly.

Teaching this course was also an opportunity for me to learn that there will never be enough time to teach everything there is to know about the subject. I found that spending more time on my areas of expertise was more interesting for the students and rewarding for me as an educator than trying to cover every topic in the limited amount of class time.