Instructor

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Course work and grading

Grades will be based on the following weights:

- Final project and presentation (groups of 5 or less): 35%
- Class participation (including attendance): 15%
- Homework (3 individual, 1 group): 35%
- Concept check quizzes (individual): 15%

Homework: There will be four homework assignments for the course. These will be type B1: Individual submissions, but you are permitted to discuss concepts and questions with other students). The exception is homework #2 which can be done in a group with a single group submission.

Concept check quizzes: There will be daily concept check quizzes that are to be done individually (no discussion with other students).

The final project will involve the analysis of one several sets of data and questions that I will provide. The final project can be done in groups of five or less. Project presentations will be given in the afternoon of the last class session on Friday of the block week.

Prerequisites

The prerequisites for the course are the Managerial Statistics and Business Analytics core courses. Good Excel skills are required and we will use the Business Analytics Excel add-in for analyzing data. This means that you need to have a laptop computer that is either a Windows machine or a Mac machine that can boot into Windows in order to run Windows Excel.

Detailed knowledge of sports is not required, but familiarity with the rules of baseball, American football, basketball, hockey and golf will be assumed. For example, in baseball, you should understand the basic rules and what the terms bunting and base-stealing mean as described in https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baseball_rules. For football, you should know about plays, downs, and scoring, as described in https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_football_rules.
Core culture

Core culture (present and on time, prepared and participating) is expected of everyone in the course. It is important for learning the material and for us learning from each other—and is more fun for all of us.

Connection to the core

This course builds on the Business Analytics and Statistics core courses. The course will use the tools of statistical analysis, predictive analytics, optimization and simulation. Issues of risk and return from Corporate Finance will be used in the course, as will game theory concepts from Managerial Economics and Strategy.

Course description

Sports analytics refers to the use of data and quantitative methods to measure performance and make decisions to gain advantage in the competitive sports arena. This course builds on the Business Analytics core course and is designed to help students to develop and apply analytical skills that are useful in business, using sports as the application area. These skills include critical thinking, mathematical modeling, statistical analysis, predictive analytics, game theory, optimization and simulation. These skills will be applied to sports in this course, but are equally useful in many areas of business.

There will be three main topics in the course: (1) measuring and predicting player and team performance, (2) decision-making and strategy in sports, and (3) sports betting and fantasy sports. Typical questions addressed in sports analytics include: How to rank players or teams? How to predict future performance of players or teams? How much is a player on a team worth? How likely are extreme performances, i.e., streaks? Are there hot-hands in sports performances? Which decision is more likely to lead to a win (e.g., attempt a stolen base or not in baseball, punt or go for it on fourth down in football, dump and chase or not in hockey, pull the goalie or not in hockey)? How to form lineups in daily fantasy sports? Are betting markets efficient? How to manage money in sports betting?

The main sports discussed in the course will be baseball, football, basketball, hockey, and golf. Soccer, tennis, and other sports will be briefly discussed. Students are welcome to pursue any sport in more detail (e.g., cricket, rugby, auto racing, horse racing, Australian rules football, skiing, track and field, or even card games such as blackjack, poker, etc.) in a project.

Class sessions will involve a mixture of current events, lecture, discussion, and hands-on analysis with computers in class. Each session will typically address a question from a sport using an important analytical idea (e.g., mean reversion) together with a mathematical technique (e.g., regression). Because of the “laboratory” nature of part of the sessions, students should bring their laptops to each class.

Guest speakers

There will be two or three guest speakers during the course. Past speakers have been professionals working in sports analytics groups for professional teams or sports analytics companies.

Additional recommended books

- Scorecasting, 2011, Moskowitz and Wertheim, Crown Archetype
- Every Shot Counts, 2014, Mark Broadie, Gotham Books
- Trading Bases, 2013, Joe Peta, Dutton

Software

Assignments need to be done in Windows Excel and will require the use of the Business Analytics Excel add-in. This add-in runs under Windows Excel but not Mac Excel (this is a limitation of Mac Excel which does not have the capability to run numerically intensive add-ins of this type).
Course outline

The block week sessions will be numbered 1 for Monday morning, 2 for Monday afternoon, …, 10 for Friday afternoon.

Sessions 1-4. Measuring and predicting the performance of players and teams

- Course overview
- Rating field goal kickers in the NFL
- Ratings teams and measuring the strength of schedule
- Predicting future performance of players and teams
- Assessing alternative models of performance
- Streaks, momentum, mean-reversion and hot hands in sports

Sessions 5-6. Decision making in sports

- Markov modeling of games: states, transition probabilities and state values
- Baseball: analysis of bunting, base-stealing and other strategies
- Football: analysis of run versus pass, punt or go-for-it
- Assessing the value of a play using run value added and win probability added
- Decision making with strategic interactions using game theory

Sessions 7-9. Sports betting and course wrap-up with golf analytics

- Overview: betting markets, odds, “prop” bets, setting betting lines
- Investigating the efficiency of betting markets
- Setting betting lines
- Money management and the Kelly criterion
- Analysis of prop bets
- Golf analytics: performance measurement, decision making and sports betting

Sessions 10. Project presentations