CAS Teaching and Learning (Lightning) Talk: Experiences with Flexible Deadlines

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Context

Since 2021, I have been teaching

- Databases
  (COMPSCI 3DB3 and COMPSCI 2DB3).
- Data Structures and Algorithms
  (SFWRENG 2C03 and COMPSCI 2C03).

Aim of both courses: *complex practical and problem solving skills*.

Context

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Aim of both courses: *complex practical and problem solving skills*.

Assignments are a natural choice.

Assignments

COMPSCI 2C03

- September 26.
- October 3.
- October 10.
- October 24.
- October 31.
- November 7.
- November 14.
- November 21.
- November 28.

COMPSCI 2DB3

- February 1.
- February 13.
- March 6.
- March 13.
- March 20.
- March 27.
- April 3.

Assignments

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COMPSCI 2DB3

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- March 20.
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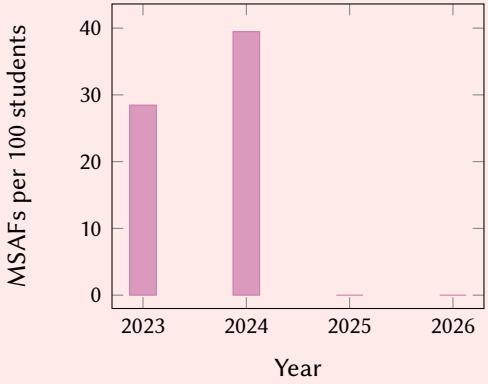
- April 3.

Exams: Predictable and easy (for those that worked on their assignments).

Problem: Deadlines

MSAFs, SAS Accomodations, “little graces”, ...



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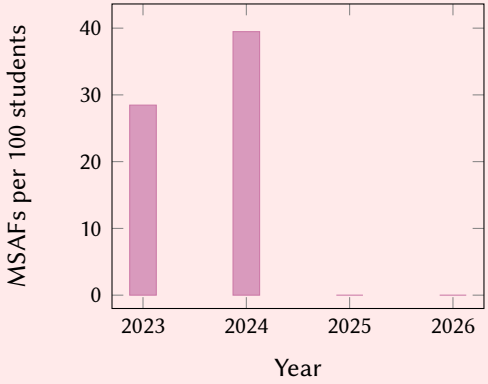

Administrative overheads, student stress, course conflicts, mid-terms, ...

Previous strategy: Best assignments count

COMPSCI 2DB3 Seven assignments of which the best *six* count.

COMPSCI 2C03 Nine assignments of which the best *eight* count.

Goal. Reduce student stress, e.g., due to impact of bad days, ...

Previous strategy: Standardize extensions

Grace period	Hand-in at-most 5h after deadline.
MSAF Type A	Always a three-day extension (no need to contact the lecturer).
MSAF Type B	By default, a 10-day extension *unless good reason* Longer: always replacement assignment.
SAS accommodations	1-week extension always applied (if in letter).

Goal. Reduce administrative overhead, especially of MSAF Type A and SAS.

Experiment: Flexible deadlines

Course outline

We provide a general *shared grace period* for all assignments of 5 days (120h) that students can utilize whichever way they seem fit without further notice or approval. For example, a student can hand in *one* assignment 100h late, or hand in 4 assignments 20h late (as long as the total stays below 120h).

Beyond the above grace period, we require students to *submit on time*. Late submissions are not accepted and will result in a grade of zero.

The above grace period *does not stack* with MSAFs or SAS accommodations.

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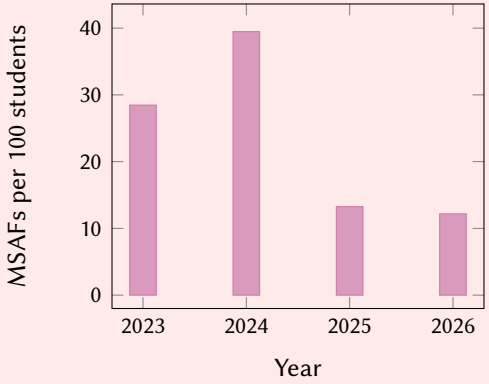
Similar details in assignment preamble and first lecture.

Results



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- Students are *outspoken happy* with this approach.
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I did not see any downsides and students are happier!

Other recent experiments

- Elimination of commercial text-books.
  - Databases: *Course Notes* (and slides).
  - Data Structures and Algorithms: *Slides* (with summary notes).
    References to free/open textbooks, references to other materials (e.g., CLRS).

- Closed-book exams with reference sheet, two pages of notes.
  Students use their notes in *diverse* ways (including: bringing old exam solutions).

- Recorded lectures (Echo360)—Databases, one semester.
  Did *not* see a huge difference in lecture attendance compared to previous years.