The Photometric LSST Astronomical Time-series Classification Challenge (PLAsTiCC): Metrics

We describe and illustrate the process by which a global performance metric was chosen for Photometric LSST Astronomical Time-series Classification Challenge (PLAsTiCC), a Kaggle competition aiming to identify promising transient and variable classifiers for LSST by involving the broader community outside astronomy.
This note is the brief introduction to the metrics used for the PLAsTiCC data challenge.

1. Introduction

The metric of this note is for the first version of the Kaggle competition, though there are future plans for an early classification challenge and identification of class-specific metrics for different science goals. This note serves only to summarize the results and code online in the ProClam repository. Interactive notebooks and calculations are provided there.

The criteria for the metric included:

- The metric must return a single scalar value.
- The metric must be well-defined for non-binary classes.
- The metric must balance diverse science use cases in the presence of heavily nonuniform class prevalence.
- The metric must respect the information content of probabilistic classifications.
- The metric must be able to evaluate deterministic classifications.

- The metric must be interpretable, meaning it gives a more optimal value for “good” mock classifiers and a less optimal value for mock classifiers plagued by anticipated systematic errors; in other words, it must pass basic tests of intuition.
- The metric must be reliable, giving consistent results for different instantiations of the same test case.

2. Methods

We considered two metrics of classification probabilities, each of which is interpretable and avoids reducing probabilities to point estimates

The Brier score is defined as

$$B = \sum_{m=1}^{M} \frac{w_m}{N_m} \sum_{n=1}^{N_m} \left((1 - p_n(m|m))^2 + \sum_{m' \neq m}^{M} (p_n(m'|m))^2 \right)$$

The log-loss is defined as

$$L = -\sum_{m=1}^{M} \frac{w_m}{N_m} \sum_{n=1}^{N_m} \ln[p_n(m|m)]$$

average within each class, then weighted average between classes.

We define a weight vector across classes, which will be provided to the Kaggle team separately, since it contains model-specific information. For both the Brier metric and the log-loss metric, the goal is to minimise the metric score.

In addition to providing the output of some classifiers evaluated on the metric, as shown in Figure 1, we also include various ‘systematics’ across which we test the metric performance.

These systematics include:

- idealized: highly accurate on all classes
- guessing: random classifications across all classes
- tunnel vision: classifies one class well and others randomly
- cruise control: classifies all objects as a single class
- subsumed: consistently misclassifies one class as one other class

3. Results

We show the performance of the metric on the various classifiers included in Figure 1.

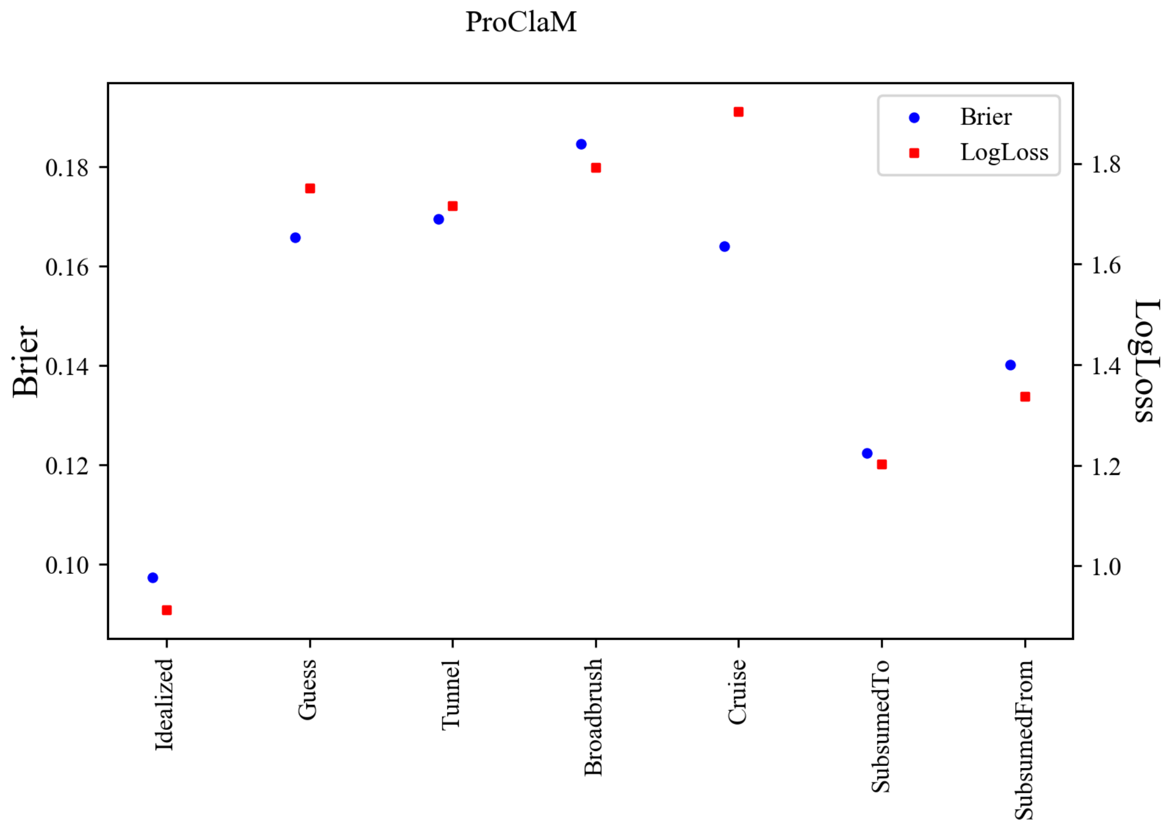

Figure 1. The Brier and Log-loss metrics evaluated against example classifications, and 'systematic' classification types. The code used to produe these plots is online as ProClam, and example ipython notebooks are provided for use by PLAsTiCC participants.

4. Conclusion

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