

Student Success and Sorrow: The Determination of Professor Alignment and its Effects on Students

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Abstract

The “lawful-chaotic, good-evil” alignment system has gained popularity in describing real world personalities. We continue this trend by demonstrating how to apply it to professors. We also introduce a continuous “orbital” description of alignment oscillation. The resulting system has potential to aide students surveying potential courses by providing them with a more practical understanding of the professors in question.

1 A Discrete Analysis: The Traditional alignment Chart

1.1 A Background on Alignments

In the popular role-playing game *Dungeons & Dragons*, characters are categorized along two axes: *ethical* and *moral*. There are three possible values for each axis. Thus, in this system, there are nine possible alignments.

The ethical axis describes one’s adherence to rules. A *lawful* character follows the rules, a *neutral* character views them as flexible guidelines or is unaware of them, and a *chaotic* character willfully breaks them.

The moral axis describes one’s consideration of other people. A *good* character does what they believe is best for the general good, a *neutral* character will try not to cause unjustified harm (but not push themselves to cause active good), and an *evil* character will engage in unjustified malicious behavior.

We use these alignments to describe important components of professors.

1.2 Alignments as a Description of Professors

The approach of professors towards their courses are extremely varied, but the most important factors can be described with the alignment system.

Regarding ethicality:

- Lawful professors follow the rules set by society. In addition to following university policy and implicit social rules, they run their courses with a clear structure that adheres to the general expectation of what a course should be.

- Neutral professors merely take the above rules as guidelines, not considering them heavily before taking action.
- Chaotic professors have one or more of the following qualities: their courses are unstructured; their schedules/policies are generally in flux; the rules that they most strictly adhere to or enforce are ones they personally create, which may be unpredictable or seemingly arbitrary; they take pride in instances where they've broken socially accepted conventions.

Regarding morality:

- Good professors, whether or not they succeed, run their courses with the goal of reaching as many students as possible, being as effective a teacher as possible, avoiding directly causing harm to their students (such as stress, lack of sleep, etc.) and causing the greatest quantity/quality of net learning as possible.
- Neutral professors focus more on “doing their job sufficiently” than on “optimizing results”—they let the responsibility of learning the information fall almost entirely on the students. Their decisions are seldom based on improving student experience, and are instead based on performing the technical requirements of their position.
- Evil professors intentionally make the course unnecessarily difficult for students. Rather than increasing difficulty to increase learning across the board, they increase difficulty to weed out the weak, or because they find enjoyment in their students' struggles. Other behaviors that harm the student, such as putting them down to lower their self esteem, or publicly embarrassing them, are also considered to be in the evil category.

However, a professor need not always make decisions to harm their students to be counted as evil. They can certainly sometimes make decisions to benefit their students; the distinction that classifies them as evil is a willingness to knowingly make decisions that directly cause harm to their students and often take some form of pride in doing so. Professors who make their courses unnecessarily difficult or who otherwise cause harm to students but who do so without knowing or understanding the effect it has are not necessarily considered evil in this case, as the intent behind their actions is what matters most.

1.3 The Effect of Alignments

Obviously, a professor who actively works towards creating the best possible course for as many students as possible will tend to be a good professor by typical standards, and a professor that intentionally harms students will tend towards being a bad professor by typical standards. The professors that are neutral on the moral axis, however, are less obvious in categorizing. For these professors who merely do their job instead of aiming for a particular result, their other qualities will have a much more pronounced effect on the course as a whole. Typically, True Neutral professors will fail to engage the students in any capacity—they embody the classic “lecture hall full of sleeping students” scenario. Lawful Neutral and Chaotic Neutral professors are much more unpredictable.

The effectiveness of a professor’s ethical category largely depends on the student and the personality of the professor. Lawful professors may be easier to follow, but that predictability can also leave students less engaged. Chaotic professors may engage students and excite them, but can be hard to keep up with, leaving the student disoriented. Neutral professors can find a balance between the two approaches, but could also end up possessing the worst of both worlds.

| | Good | Neutral | Evil |
|---------|------|---------|------|
| Lawful | high | split | low |
| Neutral | high | low | low |
| Chaotic | high | split | low |

Table 1: The most likely public opinion for the quality of courses taught by professors of each alignment.

Evil professors tend to maximize the difficulty of their courses out of malice. Otherwise, the prioritization of passing the majority of students tends to lower the course difficulty. The exceptions to this are chaotic good professors, who are willing to take risks and employ the flexibility necessary to make their course as difficult as possible while still maintaining student satisfaction.

We give a more detailed guide to student alignment-based satisfaction with professors in Section 3.2.

2 A Continuous Analysis: Alignment Orbitals

2.1 Defining Alignment Orbitals

In the process of classifying professors, we began to notice certain patterns in how professors fluctuate between traditional alignments. These fluctuations tend to follow patterns that are predictable based on specific characteristics, prompting us to create a more detailed sub-classification system, in which each professor in a traditional alignment may also fall on a *alignment orbital* that provides more detail as to their approach to their courses. Identifying these orbitals may clarify the behavior of a professor, and ease both the process of classifying them and the process of predicting the nature of their courses.

It is important to keep in mind the following:

- Having an alignment that contains an orbital does not necessarily mean one lies on that orbital.
- Each professor on an orbital is still centered in a traditional alignment; in our visualization of these orbitals, this is represented as the nucleus around which a professor orbits. The location of this nucleus indicates the traditional alignment that the professor in question generally falls into.

2.2 Alignment Orbitals as a Description of Professors

The orbitals we have observed are as follows: the *neutral chaotic-evil* (NCE) orbital, the *good lawful-chaotic* (GLC) orbital, and the *evil lawful-chaotic* (ELC) orbital. Other orbitals are not discussed in this paper.

2.2.1 The NCE Orbital

The defining characteristics of professors on the NCE orbital is that they are self-centered and do not hold strictly to rules. The decisions they make are based primarily on their own best interest, and they are willing to take actions typically viewed as unethical for their purposes.

There are two key components in determining the nucleus for a professor in the NCE orbital:

- Professors centered in chaotic neutral will not knowingly break rules to either hurt or help their students, so the harm or benefit that befalls their students is coincidental.

Professors centered in neutral evil will break rules that may cause harm to their students in some way, and while they are aware of this harm, they will still break the rule if doing so benefits themselves.

- Professors with a “chaotic neutral” center are generally more aware of the fact that they are breaking a rule when they do so and are proud of that fact.

Professors with a “neutral evil” center are generally less aware of the fact that they are breaking a rule and are instead just doing what they feel is best for their needs without necessarily regarding what is or is not against a rule.

2.2.2 The GLC Orbital

The key common characteristic of professors on the GLC orbital is that they are actively trying to benefit their students in the way they make decisions, and are aware of any rules that are in place.

Professors centered in lawful good tend to obey the rules imposed on them, but will occasionally break certain ones if they feel the benefit is worth the transgression, or if they feel the rule is particularly unreasonable. Professors centered in chaotic good tend to view their personal creed as above the rules imposed on them, but they have certain rules that they fully support and will always strictly follow.

It is important to note that this orbital does not actually pass through the neutral good alignment, as neutral good implies a lack of awareness or understanding of societal rules and whether or not they are breaking them. In contrast, professors on the GLC Orbital are often “reformers”—they desire a system optimized for student learning, and are willing to go against convention to achieve that.

2.2.3 The ELC Orbital

The ELC orbital operates in very much the same way as the GLC orbital, except that professors on this orbital are willing to knowingly make decisions that cause their students harm in some way. It is essentially the reflection of the GLC orbital on the opposite side of the morality axis.

3 Utilizing Professor and Student Alignments

3.1 Determining Your Alignment

There are many quizzes online to determine your alignment, but we present a simplified quiz for the specific purpose of determining student-professor compatibility. For each section below, add the number in brackets to your sum (initialized at 0) for the questions you answer “yes” to.

Ethicality:

1. Do you wish that every course was run with strict policies (with exceptions made only in extreme cases) and a pre-made schedule? [+1]
2. Do you think more professors should be given free rein on their courses, being able to make many decisions on a student-by-student basis? [-1]

(Sum meanings: -1 = chaotic, 0 = neutral, 1 = lawful)

Morality:

1. Were a professor to shame a student for asking a “stupid question”, would you feel a sense of disgust towards that professor? [+1]
2. Would you be happy upon learning a hard-working, but slow, classmate who went to office hours was ignored the entire time because working with them would take too long? [-1]

(Sum meanings: -1 = evil, 0 = neutral, 1 = good)

As an example– If you answered the above questions as “yes, no, no, no” respectively, your sums for ethicality and morality respectively would be 1 and 0, making you lawful neutral.

We will continue to utilize the above numerical labelling of ethicality/morality (ie. -1 on the ethicality axis is “chaotic”) in the following section.

3.2 Determining Your Favored Professor Alignments

Perhaps intuitively, students tend to favor professors whose alignments match their own. That is, a lawful student will favor lawful professors, and a chaotic student will favor chaotic professors. However, other important factors come into play: the student’s ease of success, and the student’s passion for the course subject. Our hypothesized measurement of student enjoyment of a course in relation to the ethicality or morality of a professor is depicted in Figure 1.

Recall from Section 1.3 that chaotic professors and evil professors tend to have harder courses. A student who must endure high amounts of stress in order to succeed, no matter how evil, will disfavor abnormally difficult courses due to the harm done to their own person. We theorize that morality has a greater predictable effect than ethicality on student happiness as a function of their ease of success, as the flexibility of chaotic professors can be an important asset for easily stressed students.

Additionally, students who do not enjoy, or even loathe, the course subject will want to put in as little work as possible. The flexibility of chaotic professors

does not aid them as much as it does high-stress students, as these students are unmotivated to seek help. Indeed, these students seek the easiest course possible, and the course that requires the least pre-planning. Generally speaking, the more lawful a professor, the easier it will be to work on their assignments at the last minute.

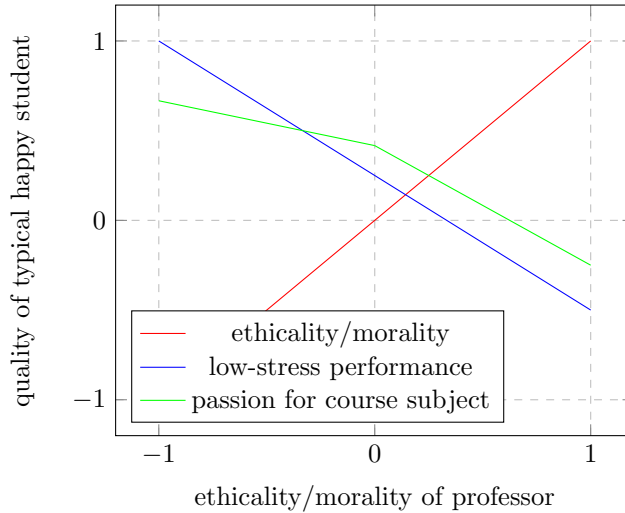


Figure 1: The theorized qualities of students that are satisfied with a professor of a given ethicality/morality. -1 indicates very poor performance, and 1 indicates very high performance; -1 indicates very low passion for the course subject, and 1 indicates very high passion for the course subject.

4 Conclusion

The alignment system as used in *Dungeons & Dragons* can be specialized in classifying professors. This specialized system can be used in determining the likelihood that a given student would enjoy a course taught by a professor. We believe that this system could be used by students as an alternative to standard Faculty Evaluations, and to sites such as RateMyProfessor, by providing a recommendation that takes into account the qualities of the inquiring student. Further research and discussion could be done on the dynamics in multi-professor systems (“the two-professor problem”) and hierarchical course structures (ie. those including teaching assistants).