

Math, Productivity, Happiness & Decision-making

Organizer(s): Andrew Critch and Nisan Stiennon

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| Wednesdays, 5:00–6:00pm, 740 Evans |
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Apr 18 **Anna Salamon, SIAI**

Fermi-type estimation in daily life

How much does it matter to know what matters? Do we ever really try to calculate that? In fact we should! Today we'll talk about methods for estimating the value of information and other tricky-to-think-about opportunities in our lives. As an example: Many people commit to years of education and tens of thousands of hours of work to “get a good job doing X” without having spent as little as 40 hours job-shadowing to see if they'd actually enjoy doing X, or even 10 hours cleverly searching for alternative possibilities. How can someone meaningfully decide whether an investigation like this is worth doing? With not much time and little practice, we can improve our ability to estimate the value of answering such questions *before we answer them*, and therefore notice a lot more sources of useful information in our lives than we otherwise would.

This week (and every second week) we'll go out for dinner after the seminar.