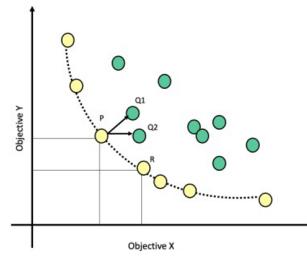


# Help Khoury Assign TAs to Labs!

## Resource Allocation with Evolutionary Computing

Prof. Rachlin / DS3500



### Purpose

- Use evolutionary computing to solve an interesting resource allocation problem
- Help Khoury College faculty with managing TA / lab allocation for large classes
- Explore an important field of AI: Intelligent Decision-Support
- Practice functional programming and test-driven development (TDD)

### Overview

Northeastern University's Khoury College offers several large classes supported by dozens of teaching assistants (TAs). These include Intro to Programming with Data, Discrete Structures, and Fundies. These courses have many lab practicums that need to be supported by the course TAs. Allocating TAs to labs is a difficult but interesting resource-allocation challenge. While a simple sign-up sheet might be a solution, the results are often sub-optimal. In general, our goal is to assign TAs to labs that are consistent with their availability and preferences while making sure we assign enough TAs to each lab. Performing this scheduling task by hand takes many hours of the instructor's time and it is unlikely that they are coming up with the best possible solution. Solving this problem would be a great service to Khoury college. In this homework assignment we take on the challenge! (Creating a web-based application to make this software more widely available would make for an excellent project, by the way.)

Two tables of data have been provided using *real data* from DS2000: Intro to Programming with Data.

**sections.csv:** A table of information about each lab/section. There are 17 sections numbered 0-16. The critical columns are min\_ta and max\_ta, the minimum and maximum number of TAs that need to be assigned to that section. The min/max values are determined by the number of students enrolled in that section.

**tas.csv:** A table of information about each TA, how many sections they are willing to support (max\_assigned) and their availability and preferences for each section (U = Unavailable, W = Willing, P = Preferred).

In this assignment, we will use evolutionary computing to assign TAs to specific recitation sections. You should be able to use the evo.py framework developed in class as is, though you may need to modify that

code to specify a running time limit. Your main tasks are:

- a) Define functions for each objective (described below). Each function should be written in a functional style. Avoid loops and assignments to the extent possible.
- b) Implement at least one unit test for each objective function to verify that your objectives are working correctly. Three sample solutions have been provided. Here are their evaluation scores (see below for a description of each objective):

Objective	Test1	Test2	Test3
Overallocation	37	41	23
Conflicts	8	5	2
Undersupport	1	0	7
Unwilling	53	58	43
Unpreferred	15	19	10

- c) Define agents that modify existing solutions and create new solutions. These can be simple or complex. It is entirely up to you. I recommend having some agents that try to address specific objectives. Code up at least four distinct agents.
- d) Run your optimizer *for at most 5 minutes*. There is no limit on how many agent invocations you perform or how many solutions you produce. Your only limit is *time*. You will need to modify the evo framework so that the evolve function accepts a time limit parameter. (I recommend that your time limit be specified in total seconds, e.g., time\_limit=300)
- e) Report your best, non-dominated set of solutions. You must output the solutions in table format in **exactly** the format specified in the deliverables section below.

## Objectives

1. **Minimize overallocation of TAs (*overallocation*):** Each TA specifies how many labs they can support (max\_assigned column in tas.csv). If a TA requests at most 2 labs and you assign to them 5 labs, that's an overallocation penalty of 3. Compute the objective by summing the overallocation penalty over all TAs. There is no minimum allocation.
2. **Minimize time conflicts (*conflicts*):** Minimize the number of TAs with one or more time conflicts. A time conflict occurs if you assign a TA to two labs meeting at the same time. If a TA has multiple time conflicts, still count that as one overall time conflict for that TA.
3. **Minimize Under-Support (*undersupport*):** If a section needs at least 3 TAs and you only assign 1, count that as 2 penalty points. Minimize the total penalty score across all sections. There is no penalty for assigning too many TAs. You can never have enough TAs.

4. **Minimize the number of times you allocate a TA to a section they are unwilling to support (*unwilling*)**. You could argue this is really a *hard constraint*, but we will treat it as an objective to be minimized instead.
5. **Minimize the number of times you allocate a TA to a section where they said “willing” but not “preferred”. (*unpreferred*)**. In effect, we are trying to assign TAs to sections that they prefer. But we want to frame every objective a minimization objective. So, if your solution score has unwilling=0 and unpreferred=0, then all TAs are assigned to sections they prefer! Good job!

## Deliverables

1. Submit all code to gradescope. This includes your version of evo.py, profiler.py, assignta.py, and test\_assignta.py.
2. Submit a summary table in comma-delimited value (csv) format. Each row is one *non-dominated Pareto-optimal* solution. Each column is the score for one objective. The SIX columns are: **groupname, overallocation, conflicts, undersupport, unwilling, unpreferred**. The group name can be whatever you like, but please limit to 8 characters, no spaces, and no special characters. The group name will of course be the same in every row. If you don't format your summary in exactly this format your team is disqualified from the competition! (By the way, this assignment is a friendly competition to see who can come up with the best solutions. I will be participating in the competition, and I hate to lose!)
3. Submit the details for ONE of your solutions. (Which ever you personally think is the best). The details should simply list the assigned sections for each TA and the assigned Tas for each section. Indicate the evaluation scores for your chosen solution and explain why you consider it your best solution in lieu of the tradeoffs involved.
4. Submit your pytest unit test report to convince the TAs that your objectives are scoring your solutions correctly. (All tests should pass!)
5. Submit your profiling report proving that your solutions were produced in five minutes or less.

## Policy

It is entirely your responsibility to submit all deliverables listed above. Forgetting to submit one of the deliverables will earn you zero credit for that portion of the assignment. *Verify your submission!*