A Strategic View of University Timetabling

University Timetabling has traditionally been studied as an operational problem where the goal is to assign lectures to rooms and timeslots and create timetables of high quality for students and teachers. Two other important decision problems arise before this can be solved: what rooms are necessary, and in which teaching periods? These decisions may have a large impact on the resulting timetables and are rarely changed or even discussed. This paper focuses on solving these two strategic problems and investigates the impact of these decisions on the quality of the resulting timetables.

The relationship and differences between operational, tactical and strategic timetabling problems are reviewed. Based on the formulation of curriculum-based course timetabling and data from the Second International Timetabling Competition (ITC 2007), three new bi-objective mixed-integer models are formulated. We propose an algorithm based on the constraint method to solve them. The algorithm can be used to analyze the impact of having different resources available on most timetabling problems. Finally, we report results on how the three objectives - rooms, teaching periods and quality - influence one another.

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