

# SchedTask: A Hardware-Assisted Task Scheduler

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## ABSTRACT

The execution of workloads such as web servers and database servers typically switches back and forth between different tasks such as user applications, system call handlers, and interrupt handlers. The combined size of the instruction footprints of such tasks typically exceeds that of the i-cache (16-32 KB). This causes a lot of i-cache misses and thereby reduces the application's performance. Hence, we propose SchedTask, a hardware-assisted task scheduler that improves the performance of such workloads by executing tasks with similar instruction footprints on the same core. We start by decomposing the combined execution of the OS and the applications into sequences of instructions called *SuperFunctions*. We propose a scheme to determine the amount of overlap between the instruction footprints of different *SuperFunctions* by using Bloom filters. We then use a hierarchical scheduler to execute *SuperFunctions* with similar instruction footprints on the same core. For a suite of 8 popular OS-intensive workloads, we report an increase in the application's performance of up to 29 percentage points (mean: 11.4 percentage points) over state of the art scheduling techniques.

## CCS CONCEPTS

• **Software and its engineering** → **Scheduling**; Virtual memory; • **Computer systems organization** → *Multicore architectures*; *Cloud computing*;

## KEYWORDS

scheduling, architectural support for operating system, cache pollution

### ACM Reference format:

Prathmesh Kallurkar and Smruti R. Sarangi. 2017. SchedTask: A Hardware-Assisted Task Scheduler. In *Proceedings of MICRO-50, Cambridge, MA, USA, October 14–18, 2017*, 13 pages. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3123939.3123984>

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The execution of OS-intensive applications such as web servers and database servers typically switches between different tasks such as application code, system call handlers, and interrupt handlers.

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*MICRO-50, October 14–18, 2017, Cambridge, MA, USA*  
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ACM ISBN 978-1-4503-4952-9/17/10...\$15.00  
<https://doi.org/10.1145/3123939.3123984>

Previous works [7, 11, 16, 31, 35] have shown that the combined size of the instruction footprints of these tasks typically exceeds that of the i-cache (16-32 KB). Since traditional OS schedulers typically execute these tasks on the same core, they evict each other's i-cache lines, and thereby reduce the overall performance of OS-intensive applications by up to 50% [11, 35].

Several papers [7, 15, 29, 31, 35] have proposed to tackle this problem through *core specialization*. Under this scheme, tasks with dissimilar instruction footprints are executed on different cores. *FlexSC* [35] and *Disaggregated OS Services* [29] execute user applications and system call handlers on separate cores. However, these techniques are agnostic to asynchronous events such as interrupts. Hence they do not perform well for IO intensive applications. *SLICC* [7] is another state of the art core specialization technique. It spreads the i-cache footprint of an application across different cores and uses special hardware to migrate a thread to a core that may contain the i-cache line, which it may access next. However, this technique does not allow an idle core to steal pending threads waiting at other cores. Hence, it suffers from high core-idleness when there is a significant imbalance of work across cores.

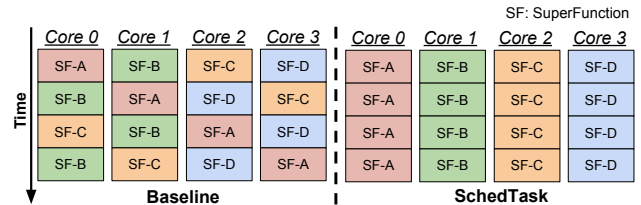


Figure 1: An overview of the SchedTask technique

This paper proposes *SchedTask*, a hardware-assisted fine-grained scheduler for OS-intensive applications. We start by decomposing the combined execution of the OS and the applications into sequences of instructions called *SuperFunctions*. We then propose a scheme that determines the amount of overlapping sequences of instructions between different *SuperFunctions* using a hardware based Bloom filter. Those *SuperFunctions* that are deemed similar are scheduled on the same core, resulting in reduced i-cache pollution.

We first characterize the execution of 8 popular OS-intensive applications and show that there is a high correlation between the type and the number of *SuperFunctions* that are executed in consecutive epochs (fixed intervals of time). Therefore, by profiling (at run-time) the *SuperFunctions* that are executed in an epoch, we can make better decisions regarding how to schedule *SuperFunctions* in the next epoch.

A core might become idle if all *SuperFunctions* that are currently being executed are scheduled to run on other cores. We show that it is possible to improve the performance by scheduling a *SuperFunction* that is already assigned to one of the other cores to run on the idle

core. This work stealing approach works as long as the selected *SuperFunction* executes instructions that are already in the i-cache of the idle core.

Specifically, this paper makes the following contributions:

- (1) A fine-grained decomposition of a thread’s execution into *SuperFunctions*.
- (2) A technique to quantify the overlap between *SuperFunctions* at run-time and then appropriately schedule them using a two-pass technique.
- (3) A novel work-stealing algorithm to increase the instruction execution throughput by scheduling a suitable *SuperFunction* on an idle core, thereby improving the performance.

We evaluate our approach for a suite of 8 popular OS-intensive applications. For these applications, we show that the performance benefit of *SchedTask* is better than that of the state of the art scheduling technique *SLICC* by up to 29 percentage points (mean: 11.4 percentage points).

We discuss the related work in Section 2 and the details of *SuperFunctions* in Section 3. We then discuss the benchmarks and their characterization in Section 4 and the details of our implementation in Section 5. Finally, we discuss the main results in Section 6. We discuss additional results pertaining to the compared techniques in the appendix [5].

## 2 RELATED WORK

### 2.1 Core Specialization

Futuristic operating systems such as Corey [13], Factored OS [38], and Barrelfish [9] follow the principle of core specialization. They model the operating system as a server, which runs on a selected set of cores. Applications use remote procedure calls (RPC) to submit system call requests. However, these operating systems still do not support the popular OS-intensive applications such as *Apache* web server or the *MySQL* database server. We find that the functionality of these operating systems is still very restrictive and it will take time for them to reach the maturity of a traditional operating system such as Linux.

Several papers [7, 8, 15, 21, 29–31, 35] have recently proposed core specialization solutions for traditional operating systems. *Selective offloading* [31] uses twice the number of cores as a normal system; half the cores are reserved to execute application code and the rest half are reserved to execute OS code. Threads execute the application code on application cores and are transferred to an OS core if they execute a system call instruction. The primary drawback of this technique is that it lacks a load balancing algorithm. Even if an application core is idle, it cannot execute applications that are waiting to execute on other application cores. Additionally, they do not specialize OS cores for specific OS tasks. Hence, we observe high i-cache pollution in the OS cores. In Section 6, we show that even while consuming half of the area (for the cores) of the *Selective offloading* technique [31], *SchedTask* outperforms their technique by around 12.5%.

*FlexSC* [35] executes user applications and system call handlers on separate cores. It executes application threads on top of a special user-level scheduler. The scheduler takes a system call request from the application thread and offloads it to special OS threads that execute on different cores. It then executes another *runnable*

thread belonging to the same application. When a single-threaded application calls the user-level scheduler, it offloads the system call’s execution to OS threads and then yields execution to the Linux scheduler. As we show in Section 6.1, executing the Linux scheduler for every system call can lead to a slowdown of up to 63%.

*Disaggregated OS Services* [29] improves upon the *FlexSC* technique in multiple ways. It divides the user applications, and groups the system call handlers into multiple regions; each region is executed on different cores. It then uses a scheduler to migrate a thread from one core to another based on the data region that it is accessing. While the authors propose a runtime region detection algorithm for application code, the regions accessed by the OS code are identified by the OS programmer. For example, all filesystem related system calls are treated as accessing the same data region. Like *FlexSC* this technique also ignores i-cache pollution due to OS tasks such as the scheduler or interrupt top-half and bottom-half [39] handlers.

*SLICC* [7] is a hardware technique that reduces the i-cache misses of OLTP workloads. *SLICC* spreads the i-cache footprint of an application across multiple cores, and uses a hardware unit to migrate threads between these cores. The hardware migration algorithm of *SLICC* is agnostic to OS events such as system call handlers. Hence, while the technique is able to group common portions of application+OS execution across threads of the same application, it fails to take advantage of common OS execution across different applications. Consequently, the performance of *SLICC* suffers when multiple OS-intensive applications are executing at the same time. *STREX* [8], a recently proposed technique also uses a hardware module to reduce i-cache misses of OLTP workloads. *STREX* time-multiplexes the execution of similar transactions on a single core such that the instructions fetched by one transaction are reused by subsequently executed transactions. However, as mentioned in the original paper, *SLICC* outperforms *STREX* for a 32-core system. We thus compare our technique against the *SLICC* technique (omit *STREX*) in Section 6.

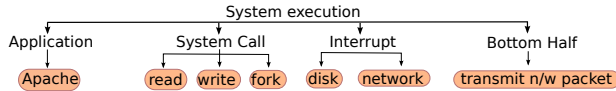
### 2.2 Architectural Support

**2.2.1 Additional Caches.** Nellans et al. [31], Chandran et al. [16], and Bhalla et al. [11] propose to reduce the i-cache pollution in OS-intensive applications by storing the lines belonging to the application and the OS in separate caches instead of the same cache. Bhalla et al. [11] have additionally considered a third cache to store hypervisor lines. The main drawback of this line of work is the 100% area overhead of the additional caches, along with the complexity of the logic to locate, and migrate lines between the caches.

**2.2.2 Instruction Prefetching.** Instruction prefetching is an alternate approach to improve the performance of OS-intensive applications. PIF [18] and RDIP [26] are the most advanced instruction prefetchers that are implemented completely in hardware. However, these schemes require additional hardware structures of 64–200 KB per core, which makes it difficult to deploy such schemes in real hardware. Other notable instruction prefetchers such as pTask [25] and CGP [6] require recompilation of the user applications, which makes such schemes unsuitable for systems that rely on third party binaries.

**Choice of instruction footprint as a scheduling parameter:** For OS-intensive applications, giving attention to i-cache misses as opposed to d-cache misses is a standard design decision taken in almost all the related work [6–8, 11, 15, 18, 25, 26, 35]. This is because OS-intensive applications have low i-cache hit rates (80-90%). Additionally, optimizations in modern processors (OOO pipelines, load store queues, data prefetchers) already hide the latencies of d-cache misses. It can happen that collaterally d-cache misses reduce (as in our case); however, this is not any design’s primary objective.

### 3 SUPERFUNCTION



**Figure 2: Decomposition of the system execution (Apache)**

As shown in Figure 2, let us decompose the code running on a system into four categories: (1) applications, (2) system call handlers, (3) interrupt handlers, and (4) bottom-half handlers. For example, an *Apache* executable is an application. *read* and *write* are examples of system call handlers. This decomposition helps us in finding pieces of code that have a predictable pattern of execution. We shall use this high level notion to define a *SuperFunction*.

In formal terms, a *SuperFunction* is defined as an ordered list of triplets  $\langle pc, t, c \rangle$ , where  $pc$  is the program counter of the instruction that was executed at time  $t$  on core  $c$ . It captures a sequence of retired instructions. In this paper, we define four types of *SuperFunctions* based on the type of the task (as shown in Figure 2). They are: (1) application, (2) system call handler, (3) interrupt handler, and (4) bottom half handler. A *SuperFunction* begins and ends on specific OS events. They are as follows: (1) start of a user process, (2) system call instruction, (3) hardware interrupt, and (4) invocation of a bottom half handler’s routine. When a *SuperFunction* terminates, a new *SuperFunction* begins. Note that by our definition, if two instances of the *read* system call are executing concurrently, then each of them represents a different *SuperFunction*. Let us elaborate further.

An application *SuperFunction* is the entire user-mode execution of a process. It is created by the *fork* system call handler and continues till the process completes execution. In contrast, the OS *SuperFunctions* are merely event handlers that are executed in response to OS-specific events. These trigger events are: system call instructions for system call handlers, interrupts for interrupt handlers, and function calls to bottom-half handler routines for bottom half handlers. When a core receives a hardware interrupt, it pauses the currently executing *SuperFunction* and starts the interrupt *SuperFunction*. On completing the interrupt handler, the previously paused *SuperFunction* resumes execution.

Let us discuss the insights regarding why we define *SuperFunctions* this way. Consider two threads of the *Apache* program running separately. Both will execute the *read* system call, and their instruction and data footprints will be roughly similar. If the execution of these code sequences are scheduled on the same core, we can take advantage of locality effects. Moreover, it is possible that the execution of the *read* system call of *Apache* might actually be not that different from the execution of the *read* system call of *MySQL*.

We would benefit by locality in this case as well. Stretching the argument further, in a heterogeneous ensemble of tasks, we wish to find all the similar sequences of execution, such that we can co-locate these execution segments, and take the fullest advantage of locality. For this purpose, we need to break the execution of a typical system intensive workload by inserting artificial boundaries (create *SuperFunctions*), and then try to find similarities. We shall discuss mechanisms to identify similarities across *SuperFunctions* in Section 3.1 and Section 3.2. Our scheduler uses these mechanisms to schedule the execution of similar *SuperFunctions* on the same core; we shall discuss it in Section 5.

#### 3.1 Type of Task

<i>SuperFunction</i>	Category ID (2 bits)	Sub-category ID (62 bits)
System call handler	0	System call ID
Interrupt handler	1	Interrupt ID
Bottom half handler	2	Program counter of the bottom half handler’s function
User application	3	Checksum of the code pages

**Table 1: Category and subcategory of *SuperFunctions***

We encode the type of the task that a *SuperFunction* is performing in a 64-bit number called the *superFuncType*. Since *SuperFunctions* performing the same type of task typically have similar instruction footprints, *SchedTask* executes *SuperFunctions* with the same *superFuncType* on the same core.

*superFuncType* represents a task’s category and subcategory. Table 1 shows the value that we assign to each category and subcategory of tasks. In a 64-bit *superFuncType*, first 2 bits represent the task’s category, and the remaining 62 bits represent its subcategory.

An OS *SuperFunction* is executed in response to an OS event; we use the event’s property to encode its *superFuncType*. Hence, the *superFuncType* of a *read* system call handler<sup>1</sup> will be 3 irrespective of the application that called it. Similarly the *superFuncType* of a *keyboard* generated interrupt<sup>2</sup> will be  $0x4000000000000001$  irrespective of the application that is consuming the keyboard’s input.

**Application *SuperFunctions*:** We define an application’s *superFuncType* as a hash of all code pages that it accesses at runtime. At the beginning of an application’s execution, we set its *superFuncType* to 0 and disable the execute permission for all its code pages. When the OS receives a security exception for a valid code page of the application, it computes a hash of the code page contents and adds it to the application’s *superFuncType*. Then the OS enables the execute permission of the code page and resumes the application’s execution. All threads belonging to the same application have the same *superFuncType*. Since the hash computation is performed only once for each code page, the execution overhead of creating an application’s *superFuncType* is miniscule ( $< 0.0001\%$ ).

#### 3.2 Similarity between Different Types of Tasks

Consider a scenario where three *SuperFunctions*: *read*, *pread*, and *fork* system call handlers are simultaneously created by different

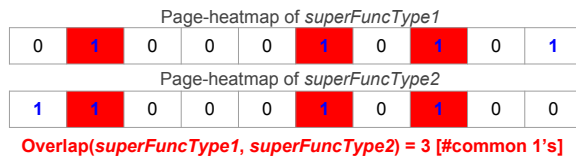
<sup>1</sup>system call ID 3 for Linux 2.6

<sup>2</sup>interrupt ID 1 for Linux 2.6

threads. If *SchedTask* is forced to execute two of them on the same core, it will choose to execute `pread` and `read` on the same core because they mostly execute the same set of instructions. This decision will improve the instruction locality and thereby improve the application’s performance. Notice that each of these *SuperFunctions* has a different *superFuncType*. Hence, we need a mechanism to identify the similarity between different *superFuncTypes*.

*SchedTask* quantifies the similarity between two *superFuncTypes* as the number of common physical pages (containing instructions) accessed. Since two applications sharing the same executable (e.g.: two instances of `scp` applications) or the same library (e.g.: `libc.so`) can use different virtual addresses to access the same i-cache lines, the overlap between different *superFuncTypes* must be detected in terms of physical page frames and not virtual pages. A summary of all the physical page frame numbers (PFN) of all instructions executed for a particular *superFuncType* is stored in a 512-bit vector called the *Page-heatmap*. This contains a hash of all the PFNs accessed, and this hash is produced by a Bloom filter [12].

We want to capture the PFN of all the instructions that *SuperFunctions* belonging to a particular *superFuncType* have accessed in the last time-epoch. Hence we do this: At the start of an epoch, the *Page-heatmap* associated with each *superFuncType* is set to all zeros. Before executing a *SuperFunction*, *SchedTask* loads its *superFuncType*’s *Page-heatmap* in a special register called the *Page-heatmap register*. When an instruction with PFN  $pf$  is committed in the pipeline, we set the  $(hash(pf) \bmod 512)^{th}$  bit of the *Page-heatmap register* to *true*. We define:  $hash(pf) = (pf) + (pf \gg 9) + (pf \gg 18) + (pf \gg 27) + (pf \gg 36) + (pf \gg 45)$ . Note that we need only 9 bits to index the 512-bit *Page-heatmap register* and the PFN is 52 bits<sup>3</sup> long. Hence, we perform five right-shift operations (9,18,27,36,45) on the PFN to consider all of its 52 bits in the hash function of the Bloom filter.



**Figure 3: Quantifying the similarity between two superFuncTypes**

At the end of a time-epoch, we calculate the similarity between two *superFuncTypes* as the Hamming weight (number of 1s) of the bit-vector representing the bitwise-and of their respective *Page-heatmaps* (see Figure 3 for an example scenario). The extra **hardware** required to calculate this similarity is: (1) 512-bit *Page-heatmap register*, (2) hardware to implement the hash function, and (3) assembly instructions to load and store the *Page-heatmap register*. The *Page-heatmap* values of different *superFuncTypes* are maintained in the kernel’s address space for security reasons. We calculate the similarity between *Page-heatmaps* vectors by breaking a single 512-bit bitwise-and operation into sixteen 32-bit operations (supported by existing hardware).

Keeping storage requirements and performance in mind, we chose to compute the similarity in instruction footprints at the granularity

<sup>3</sup>Assuming a 64 bit physical address and a page offset of 12 bits

of pages. Furthermore, we limit the number of bits in our Bloom filter to 512. We shall discuss the consequences of such choices in Section 6.5. Note that in an alternate rendition of this idea, it is possible to give the capability to user applications and/or the kernel to modify the *Page-heatmap* register in software. However, since the OS can change the page mappings of an application at runtime, the software approach must map each instruction’s virtual address to its PFN at runtime; the overhead of executing extra mapping instructions by accessing the TLB/page tables will cause a significant slowdown in the application’s execution. Recent works [3, 32, 37] have shown that exposing the virtual to physical page mapping to user applications can cause security vulnerabilities. Hence, modern operating systems do not allow non-root applications to access the address mapping [2] and therefore a software-based approach would not be applicable in scenarios where non-root users are running OS-intensive applications on the same server. Keeping all these issues in mind, we did not follow the software-based approach.

### 3.3 Structure associated with a SuperFunction

Our scheduler does NOT change the original algorithm of any *SuperFunction*. It merely governs when and where should a *SuperFunction* run. To do so, we execute a special code snippet at the start of a *SuperFunction*’s execution. This code creates a structure describing the upcoming *SuperFunction*. It then calls scheduler routines that decide when and where should the upcoming *SuperFunction* run. Let us first discuss the information that we maintain for each *SuperFunction*. We shall discuss the scheduler routines in Section 5.

We maintain the following information for each *SuperFunction*:

- (1) *superFuncType*: described in Section 3.1.
- (2) *superFuncID*: unique 64-bit number that is assigned to each *SuperFunction*.
- (3) *parentSuperFuncPtr*: address of the parent *SuperFunction*’s structure. We define a hierarchical relation between *SuperFunctions* so that we can transfer the execution of a thread from a *SuperFunction* to the one it was called from. We shall discuss the usage of this field in Section 5.1.
- (4) *tid*: ID of the thread that created the *SuperFunction*.
- (5) *coreID*: ID of the core that is currently handling the *SuperFunction*.

*superFuncID*: Assuming that the system has  $n$  cores, the  $i^{th}$  core assigns *superFuncIDs* sequentially in the range  $[\frac{2^{64} * i}{n}, \frac{2^{64} * (i+1)}{n} - 1]$ . If the range is exhausted, the *superFuncID* assignment wraps around. We do not maintain a global *superFuncID* counter because as pointed by Boyd-Wickizer et al. [14], such a counter can lead to a performance bottleneck when multiple cores are simultaneously creating a *SuperFunction*.

## 4 BENCHMARK CHARACTERIZATION

### 4.1 Experimental Setup

We use a modified version of the full system emulator, Qemu [10], to collect the execution trace of the entire system. The execution trace contains information that is sufficient to perform a detailed timing simulation: list of retired instructions, load/store addresses, branch outcomes, and OS-specific events such as interrupts and system calls. We subsequently feed these traces to a detailed cycle-accurate



simulator, Tejas [33]. Table 2 shows the details of our simulated system.

Parameter	Value	Parameter	Value
Cores	32	Technology	22nm
<b>Pipeline</b>			
Retire Width	4	Integer RF (phy)	160
ROB Size	168	Branch Predictor	TAGE
iTLB	128 entry	dTLB	128 entry
<b>L1 i-cache, d-cache (Private caches)</b>			
Associativity	4	Size	32 KB
Latency	3 cycles		
<b>L2 cache (Private cache)</b>			
Associativity	4	Size	256 KB
Latency	8 cycles		
Coherence	Directory based MOESI		
<b>L3 cache (Shared NUCA cache)</b>			
Associativity	8	Size	8 MB
Avg. Latency	18 cycles		
<b>OS</b>		Debian GNU/Linux 6.0.1 squeeze	

**Table 2: Baseline System Details**

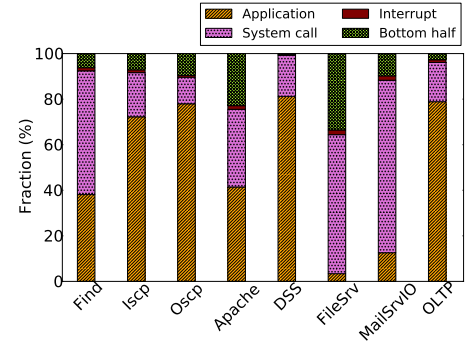
## 4.2 Benchmarks

We evaluate our technique for a suite of 8 popular OS-intensive benchmarks. Our choice of applications is inspired by previous work [7, 11, 18, 26, 31, 35] that also improve the performance of OS-intensive benchmarks.

- (1) *Find*: This benchmark simulates the execution of an application that browses the local filesystem. Specifically, we execute the Linux command `find` to search for a file in a large ext3 file system, starting from the root directory.
- (2) *Iscp*: This benchmark simulates the execution of a large network-copy over a secure connection. Specifically, we execute the Linux command `scp` to copy a 10 GB file from a remote machine to the local machine.
- (3) *Oscp*: This benchmark is similar to the *Iscp* application, except that it copies a file from the local machine to a remote machine.
- (4) *Apache*: This benchmark simulates the execution of a web server. Specifically, we execute the *Apache* web server on the local machine and use the `ApacheBench` utility to request web pages from a remote machine. We configure the `ApacheBench` utility to request 96 web pages simultaneously; this corresponds to 3 web pages for each core.
- (5) *DSS*: This benchmark simulates the execution of a decision control system. Specifically, we execute the `minimal_cost_supplier` query of the TPC-H benchmark [4] for a database of 1 GB; we use a MySQL database server.
- (6) *FileSrv*: This benchmark simulates the execution of a file server that serves concurrent filesystem requests such as read, write, create, and delete on the local filesystem. Specifically, we execute the `fileserver` workload of Filebench [1] with 400 threads.
- (7) *MailSrvIO*: This benchmark simulates the execution of a filesystem related system calls for a hypothetical mail server. Specifically, we execute the `mailserver` workload of Filebench [1] with 96 threads.
- (8) *OLTP*: This benchmark simulates the execution of a database server. Specifically, we execute the *OLTP* workload of *Sysbench* [27] with 96 threads.

The first 3 benchmarks (*Find*, *Iscp* and *Oscp*) are single-threaded, and the remaining 5 benchmarks are multi-threaded. For evaluating the impact of different core specialization techniques on single-threaded benchmarks, we simulate one instance of the application on each core of the system. We now discuss the characterization results of each benchmark for a representative block of 1 billion instructions per core (akin to [7, 8, 18]).

## 4.3 Instruction Breakup



**Figure 4: Instruction breakup**

Figure 4 shows a breakup of instructions for a system using the Linux scheduler. We show the fraction of execution (in terms of instructions) of each *SuperFunction* category: (1) application, (2) system call handler, (3) interrupt handler, and (4) bottom-half handler. As we seek to replace the Linux scheduler with a new scheduler, we ignore the execution of the Linux scheduler routines in the instruction breakup. We use the binary of the Linux kernel to determine which instructions of the trace correspond to the start of the scheduler and the bottom-half routines. Now let us understand the instruction breakup of each benchmark in detail.

*Find* searches for a specific filename in the inode structures of the directories recursively; as the search operation is relatively simple, the fraction of execution of its application *SuperFunction* is low (around 35%). Majority of the system call *SuperFunctions* executed by *Find* are related to filesystem browsing. Since *Iscp* decrypts the entire data that it reads over the network-socket, the fraction of execution of its application *SuperFunction* is high. The instruction breakup of *Oscp* is similar to that of the *Iscp* benchmark primarily because the nature of both the benchmarks is similar. *Apache* executes a lot of system calls for handling web page requests; most of these system calls are related to socket-create, and network read/write operations. Consequently, the fraction of execution of its system call handlers is high (around 35%). Additionally, since a web server receives a lot of network interrupts, *Apache* executes a lot of interrupt and bottom-half handlers; this is reflected in the high fraction of execution of its bottom-half handlers (around 20%). Since *DSS* executes long search and aggregate operations on database records, the fraction of execution of its application *SuperFunctions* is high (around 80%). *FileSrv* executes a lot of filesystem related system calls. As it interacts heavily with the hard disks, it receives a lot of disk interrupts; hence, the fraction of execution of bottom half handlers is high (around 35%). *MailSrvIO*, like *FileSrv* also executes a lot of filesystem related system calls. Hence, the fraction of execution of its system call handlers is high (around 70%). *OLTP*, like

DSS also reads database records from the disk and then performs search operations on them; hence, the instruction breakpoints of both these benchmarks are similar.

#### 4.4 Instruction Breakup: Similarity across Epochs

We now study the similarity between the instruction breakups of *SuperFunctions* across two consecutive epochs of execution. We consider time-epochs of 3 ms (inspired by previous works [11, 36]). We represent an instruction breakup as a vector of  $n$  elements, where each element denotes the execution fraction(%) of a particular type of *SuperFunction*. We measure the similarity between the instruction breakups of two epochs as the *cosine similarity* of the vectors representing their instruction breakups. The cosine similarity between two vectors  $A$  and  $B$  of length  $n$  is defined as:

$$\text{Cosine similarity}(A,B) = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n A_i \cdot B_i}{\sqrt{\sum_{i=1}^n A_i^2} \cdot \sqrt{\sum_{i=1}^n B_i^2}} \quad (1)$$

Its ranges from  $-1$  meaning exactly opposite, to  $+1$  meaning exactly the same, with  $0$  indicating no correlation. For all benchmarks, we observe the same pattern while computing the cosine similarity of instruction breakups across two consecutive epochs of execution: the similarity of instruction breakups between two consecutive epochs is low ( $0-0.3$ ) when a benchmark begins execution, it increases as the benchmark executes more and more epochs, and finally, stabilizes at high similarity values ( $> 0.995$ ). This behavior is expected as the code that an OS-intensive application executes at the beginning of its execution (*libc* initialization, allocating data structures) is typically not executed again. However, as the main loops in a benchmark begin to execute, we observe that similar *SuperFunctions* execute repeatedly.

The **main takeaway** from this section is that the execution of OS-intensive applications is highly repetitive. Hence, we can use a simple scheduler that collects the running times of *SuperFunctions* in one epoch, and use the same to create a schedule for the next epoch. During an epoch’s execution, *SchedTask* simply migrates *SuperFunctions* to the most appropriate cores when they start execution. We now discuss the details of our scheduler in the next section.

## 5 SCHEDTASK

### 5.1 The Timeline of a Thread’s Execution

Figure 5 shows how an application thread is executed on a system with the proposed technique. At the beginning of the epoch, an OS function called *TAlloc* is executed on core 0. This function maintains an in-memory system-wide *allocation table* that was created at system initialization time. An *allocation table* stores information regarding which core should execute which type of *SuperFunction*. The scheduler uses it to migrate a thread between cores depending on the type of *SuperFunction* that it is going to execute next. In this example, we begin the execution on core 0.

When *TAlloc* gets executed, it updates the *allocation table* according to the profile that has been collected in the previous epoch. Then, another OS function called *TMigrate* gets executed. Based on the type of the *SuperFunction* that is going to be executed next, *TMigrate* decides on which core the thread should run, possibly migrating it

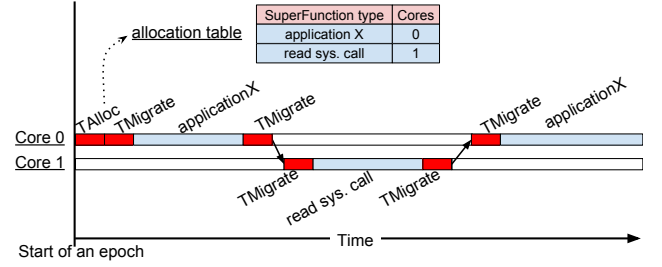


Figure 5: Timeline of a thread’s execution

to another core. We assume in this example that the *allocation table* indicates that the *application X SuperFunction* should run on core 0. Therefore, *TMigrate* schedules the thread to run on core 0. Note that because *TMigrate* has to schedule every *SuperFunction*, it has to run after every *SuperFunction* on all cores. Suppose that *application X* is going to perform the read system call, which is a different *SuperFunction*, the execution is trapped and the *TMigrate* function is invoked again to schedule it. According to the *allocation table*, the read system call handler should run on core 1. Consequently, *TMigrate* decides to migrate the thread to core 1 and the read system call handler will be executed there. Meanwhile, a *TMigrate* function running on another core might schedule a *SuperFunction* to run on core 0. If this was the case, then core 0 will execute the *SuperFunction* rather than being idle.

Once the read system call handler completes, the execution is trapped again and *TMigrate* gets executed. This time, however, *TMigrate* has to return to the *application X SuperFunction* rather than scheduling a new *SuperFunction*. *TMigrate* recognizes this relation through the *parentSuperFuncPtr* field and schedules the thread to run on core 0.

Figure 6 shows the data structures used by *TAlloc* and *TMigrate* for a scenario where a 4-core system is executing four types of *SuperFunctions*. Kindly refer to this figure when we introduce the data structures in the subsequent text.

### 5.2 TAlloc

*TAlloc* is executed on core 0 at the start of each epoch. It maintains three in-memory data structures: *stats table*, *allocation table*, and *overlap table*. *stats table* stores the frequency, total execution time, and the *Page-heatmap* of each *superFuncType*. *TAlloc* first aggregates (see the aggregation operation in Figure 6) the per-core *stats table* of the last time-epoch and updates the system-wide *stats table*.

*TAlloc* then allocates cores to each *superFuncType* in direct proportion to its execution fraction in the last epoch; this information is maintained in the *allocation table*. In Figure 6, each *superFuncType* has an execution fraction of 25% in a 4-core system. Hence, we allocate one core for each *superFuncType* (consider a homogeneous system). Once the *allocation table* is created, we transfer each thread to the core that is mapped to its *SuperFunction’s superFuncType*. If an interrupt handler  $x$  is supposed to run on core  $y$ , then *TAlloc* programs the interrupt controller to route interrupts of ID  $x$  to core  $y$ . Interrupts whose IDs are not present in the *stats table* are mapped to core 0 by default. In order to minimize the cost of transferring threads from one core to another, we perform core allocation only

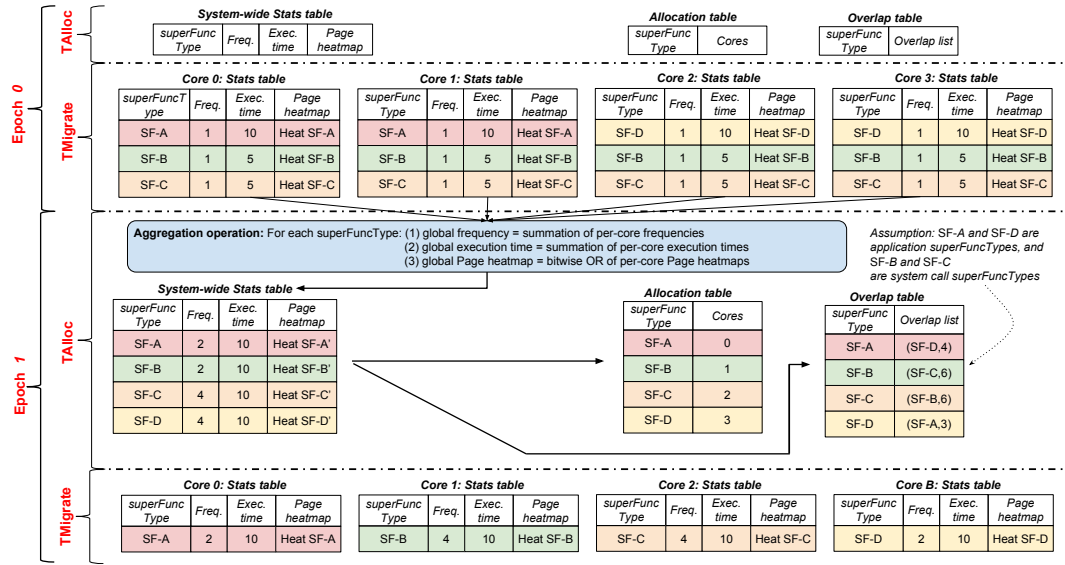


Figure 6: SchedTask: High level design

if the cosine similarity of the execution fractions for the last two epochs is less than 0.98.

Next, *TAlloc* creates the *overlap table* from the *Page-heatmap* values of different *superFuncTypes*. For each *superFuncType*, *overlap table* stores a list of tuples  $\langle \text{superFuncType}, \text{Page overlap} \rangle$  in the decreasing order of the *Page overlap* values. We do not calculate the *Page overlap* values between OS-specific and application *superFuncTypes*.

### 5.3 TMigrate

*TMigrate* is the OS function that handles the execution of different *SuperFunctions* on each core. Algorithm 1 shows the high level approach of *TMigrate* and the functions that it executes.

*TMigrate* maintains three in-memory data structures for each core: (1) *executingSuperFunction*, a pointer to the structure of the *SuperFunction* that is being executed, (2) *runnable queue*, a queue of all *SuperFunctions* that are ready to run, (3) *waiting queue*, a queue of *SuperFunctions* that are waiting for some event; eg: a *read* system call handler that is waiting for the disk interrupt controller to bring a page from the disk to the main memory.

**Collecting execution statistics:** The *TMigrate* function calls the *startStatsCollection* function before and the *stopStatsCollection* after each *SuperFunction*. These functions calculate the execution statistics for each individual *SuperFunction* and add them to the corresponding *superFuncType*'s entry in the *stats table*.

**Start a SuperFunction:** Before executing a *SuperFunction*, a thread first creates its structure and then calls *TMigrate*. *TMigrate* refers to the *allocation table* to decide which cores should execute the new *SuperFunction*. If there is an option to choose one among multiple cores, then the core that has the least waiting time is selected. The waiting time of a core is equal to the sum of the average execution time of all *SuperFunctions* that are present in its *runnable queue*. *TMigrate* migrates the *SuperFunction* to the selected core by appending it to the core's *runnable queue*. The *runnable queue* is updated using a lock-free implementation. If the *allocation table*

### Algorithm 1 TMigrate

```

1: procedure EXECUTENEXTRUNNABLETASK
2:   if runnableQueue.isEmpty() then
3:     stealWorkOfOtherCores()
4:   currentSF ← runnableQueue.removeHead()
5: procedure STEALWORKOFOTHERCORES
6:   sf ← stealWork(strategy = SAME_WORK_ONLY)
7:   if sf != NULL then
8:     addToRunnableQueue(sf) return
9:   else
10:    multipleSF ← stealWork(strategy = SIMILAR_WORK_ALSO)
11:    if multipleSF != NULL then
12:      addAllToRunnableQueue(multipleSF) return
13:    else
14:      idle()
15: procedure STARTSUPERFUNCTION(SuperFunction s)
16:   cores ← getAllocationTableEntry(allocationTable, s.superFuncType)
17:   if cores.isEmpty() then
18:     addToRunnableQueue(currentCore, s)
19:   else
20:     core ← selectCoreThatHasLeastWaitingTime(cores)
21:     addToRunnableQueue(core, s)
22:     if isIdleState(core) then
23:       sendInterProcessorInterrupt(core)
24: procedure STOPSUPERFUNCTION(SuperFunction s)
25:   deallocateRecord(s)
26:   executeNextRunnableTask()
27: procedure STARTSTATSCOLLECTION
28:   startTimeForSF ← getCurrentTime()
29:   clearFuncHeatMapRegister()
30:   initializeStateForRunning(currentSF)
31: procedure STOPSSTATSCOLLECTION
32:   entry ← getPerCoreStatsTableEntry(currentSF.superFuncType)
33:   entry.execTime = entry.execTime + (getCurrentTime() - startTimeForSF)
34:   entry.funcHeatMap = bitwiseOR(entry.funcHeatMap, funcHeatMapRegister)
35: procedure TMIGRATE(requestType, requestPayload)
36:   stopStatsCollection()
37:   if requestType == START_SUPER_FUNCTION then
38:     startSuperFunction(requestPayload)
39:   else if requestType == STOP_SUPER_FUNCTION then
40:     stopSuperFunction(requestPayload)
41:   else if requestType == PAUSE_SUPER_FUNCTION then
42:     pauseSuperFunction(requestPayload)
43:   else if requestType == WAKEUP_SUPER_FUNCTION then
44:     wakeupSuperFunction(requestPayload)
45:   startStatsCollection()

```

does not contain any entry for the *SuperFunction*'s *superFuncType*, it is executed on the local core.

**Stop a SuperFunction:** After completing a *SuperFunction*, *TMigrate* resumes the execution of its parent *SuperFunction*. It then executes the *SuperFunction* at the head of its *runnable queue*. If the *runnable queue* of the local core is empty, then *TMigrate* tries to steal *SuperFunctions* from the *runnable queue* of other cores. It tries two levels of work stealing in the following order:

(1) **Steal same work only:** This is the simplest choice to make. Steal only those *SuperFunctions* whose *superFuncType* is mapped to the local core. This strategy does not increase the possibility of i-cache pollution and yet reduces core idleness. Given multiple cores to steal from, an idle core always steals from the core with the maximum waiting time. If no such thread is found, then *TMigrate* tries the next level of work stealing.

(2) **Steal similar work also:** *TMigrate* now tries to steal *SuperFunctions* from the *runnable queues* of other cores. The stealing algorithm gives a higher priority to those *SuperFunctions* whose *superFuncTypes* have a high overlap with the ones that are allocated to the local core. *TMigrate* first combines the *overlap table* entries of all *superFuncTypes* that are mapped to its local core. It then iterates over this list in the decreasing order of the *Page overlap* value. The iteration stops when a *SuperFunction* with a particular *superFuncType* is found in the *runnable queue* of another core. If there are multiple such *SuperFunctions* in the remote core’s *runnable queue*, then *TMigrate* steals half of them. Initially such *SuperFunctions* will suffer from a low i-cache hit rate. To amortize this effort, the stealing thread typically steals a few more similar *SuperFunctions* from other cores. This strategy is used as the default scheme for evaluation.

**Pausing a SuperFunction:** When the executing *SuperFunction* goes to the waiting state, *TMigrate* adds it to the *waiting queue* and calls *executeNextRunnableTask*.

**Waking up a SuperFunction:** When the executing *SuperFunction* wants to wake up another *SuperFunction*, we merely move the other *SuperFunction* from the *waiting queue* to the *runnable queue*.

## 5.4 Modifications

**Software:** The scheduler routines *TAlloc* and *TMigrate* are implemented in the Linux kernel. *TMigrate* is called by special hooks that are added to the start of all *superFuncTypes*.

**Hardware:** *SchedTask* requires hardware modifications to maintain the *Page-heatmap* of each *superFuncType*. These modifications are: (1) adding a 512-bit register, (2) implementing the hash function to map a *PFN* to a bit in the heatmap register, and (3) special assembly instructions to load and store heatmap values. These changes are minimal (require < 0.01% core area) and they do not interfere with the critical path of any instruction.

## 6 RESULTS

### 6.1 Comparison: Performance Improvement

We compare the performance benefits gained through five core specialization techniques: (1) *SelectiveOffload* [31], (2) *FlexSC* [35], (3) *DisAggregateOS* [29], (4) *SLICC* [7], and (5) *SchedTask*. Table 2 shows the details of the baseline system and Table 3 shows the configuration for each core specialization technique. Please read the Appendix [5] for understanding the sensitivity of the results to:

- (a) Multi-programmed workloads: multiple OS intensive applications are running simultaneously.

Technique	Configuration
<i>SelectiveOffload</i> [31]	64 core system. Offload system call handlers whose run length is greater than 100 instructions.
<i>FlexSC</i> [35]	Zero cycle delay for user-level scheduler. Specialize cores for all system calls.
<i>DisAggregateOS</i> [29]	Zero cycle delay for micro-scheduling.
<i>SLICC</i> [7]	Zero cycle delay to search for remote tags. Size of the hardware components are taken from the original paper.
<i>SchedTask</i>	Our technique → see Section 5

**Table 3: Configuration of all core specialization techniques**

- (b) Size of the instruction cache (16 KB, 32 KB, 64 KB).
- (c) Cache configuration: 2-level, 3-level memory hierarchy.
- (d) Number of cores (8, 16, 32, 64) in the system.
- (e) Instruction prefetcher [6].
- (f) Trace cache [28].

The additional results show that *SchedTask* is the best performing technique across all evaluated configurations.

We evaluate all techniques on a cycle-accurate architectural simulator, Tejas (verified vis-a-vis native hardware). The evaluation has been performed on a simulator because: (a) three of the evaluated techniques (including ours): *SelectiveOffload*, *SLICC* (state of the art) and *SchedTask* propose non-trivial architectural changes and hence, they cannot be evaluated with a purely software based framework, and (b) the evaluated system (32 core out-of-order system) has not been released by any vendor. Hence, we use the same approach as the one used by highly cited recent work [7, 8, 17, 18, 26, 31]. Like our proposal, they also use architectural modifications to improve the performance of OS-intensive applications. We inserted hooks in the Linux kernel to invoke all the *SchedTask* routines. The extra hardware support required for *SchedTask* (special assembly instructions, Bloom filter, and *Page-heatmap register*) was emulated using a patched version of the full system emulator, Qemu. Qemu provides execution traces to the architectural simulator, Tejas.

A system running OS-intensive workloads runs a lot of threads; if some threads are not ready, then a few cores may remain idle. Hence, the standard practice employed in such systems is to spawn more application threads than the number of cores in the system. Hence, for all results shown here, we do this (also done by [7, 35]). We treat the ensemble of all the individual benchmarks discussed in Section 4.2 as the baseline workload and in our experiments we double it. For single-threaded applications, this means spawning twice the number of applications, and for multi-threaded applications, it means spawning twice the number of threads. In Section 6.3, we discuss the impact of varying a benchmark’s workload on the performance of these techniques.

Figure 7 shows the impact of each core specialization technique on the application’s performance as compared to a baseline system that employs the standard Linux scheduler. We calculate an application’s performance as the number of application-specific events that it performs in one second of system execution. For *Find*, an application-specific event is searching an i-node entry; *iscp* and *oscp*, it is receiving/transmitting a data packet; *Apache*, it is serving a web page, *DSS* and *OLTP*, it is processing a query; *FileSrv*, it is completing a file-operation; *MailSrvIO*, it is completing a mail-operation. We instrument the source code of each benchmark to count the number of such events.

The mean (geometric) improvements in the application’s performance for these techniques are: *SelectiveOffload* (10.62%), *FlexSC*



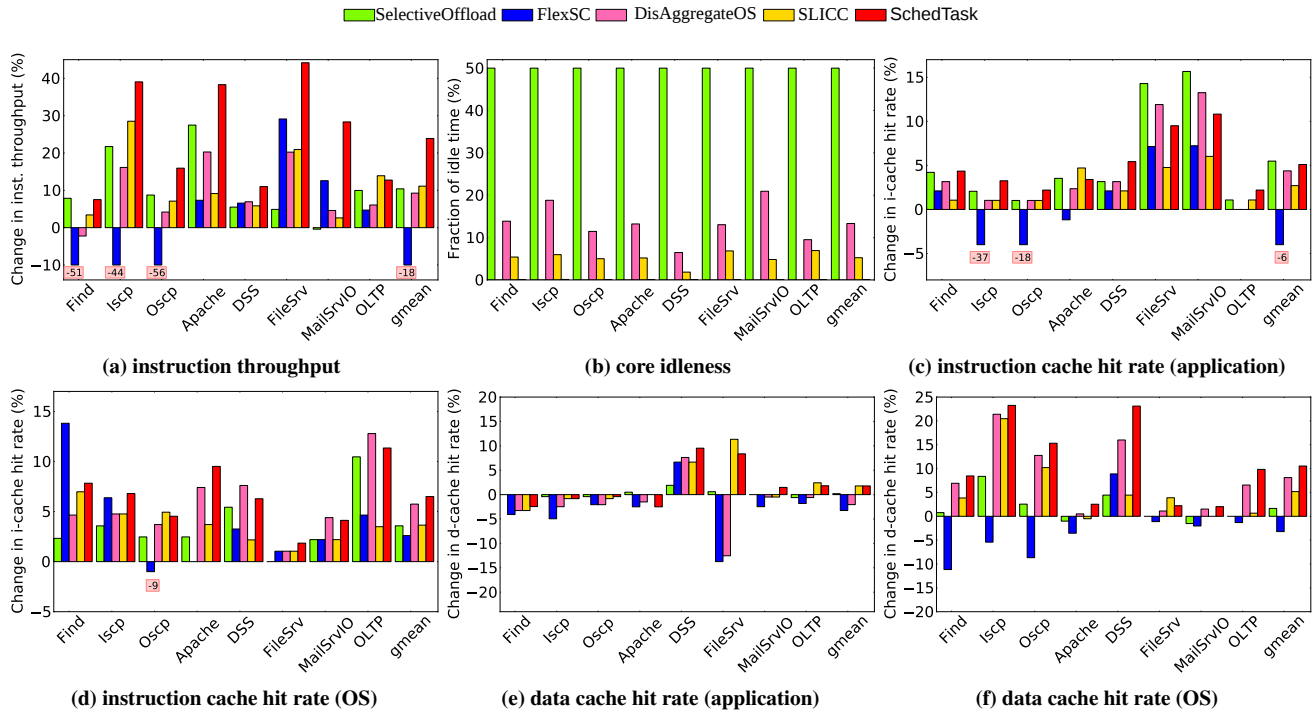


Figure 8: Impact of core specialization techniques on microarchitectural parameters

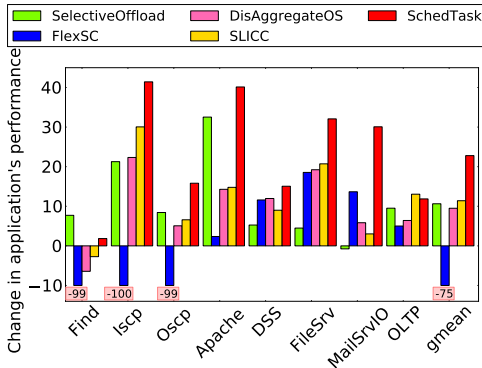


Figure 7: Impact of core specialization techniques on application's performance

(-75% for all benchmarks and +10.08% for multi-threaded benchmarks), *DisAggregateOS* (9.49%), *SLICC* (11.39%), and *SchedTask* (22.79%). *SchedTask* outperforms the state of the art technique *SLICC* by 11.4%. We study six microarchitectural parameters to understand the application performance results that are reported in Figure 7:

- (a) instruction throughput (#insts/second) (Figure 8a),
- (b) fraction of time a core remains idle (Figure 8b),
- (c) i-cache hit rate when the application code is executing (Figure 8c), and when the OS code is executing (Figure 8d), and
- (d) d-cache hit rate when the application code is executing (Figure 8e), and when the OS code is executing (Figure 8f).

On comparing Figure 7 and Figure 8a, we observe that the impact of each technique on the application's performance is roughly the

same as its impact on the instruction throughput. We observe two changes. *FlexSC*'s impact on the performance of single-threaded applications is much worse than its impact on the instruction throughput. This is because *FlexSC* executes the OS scheduler each time a single-threaded application executes a system call. Hence, the system executes a lot of *additional* kernel instructions that contribute towards the calculation of instruction throughput but do not contribute to actual application work. Next, we observe that the application performance of the proposed technique, *SchedTask*, is lower than its instruction throughput by around 0.5-1%. This is because *SchedTask* executes *additional* kernel instructions for the *TMigrate* routine; they do not count as application's work. The performance gap between *SchedTask* and the state of the art *SLICC* is still high: 11.4 and 12.7 percentage points in terms application's performance and instruction throughput respectively.

The macro benchmarks considered in this work have sufficient number of threads to overlap compute and IO work. Also, as the evaluation of such benchmarks in previous work [19, 20, 22, 24, 35?] suggests, even with a substantial increase in the compute speed, such macro benchmarks do not saturate the bandwidth of the IO devices. Hence, increasing the compute speed leads to an increase in the applications' performance. Let us now analyze the performance of each core specialization technique in detail.

**SelectiveOffload:** Since the *SelectiveOffload* technique lacks a work stealing algorithm, the idle time fraction of *SelectiveOffload* scheme is high: 50% (see Figure 8b). Owing to aggressive work stealing algorithms, the idle time fractions of *FlexSC* and *SchedTask* are almost 0%. *SelectiveOffload* executes only one application thread on each application core. Hence, among all the evaluated techniques, the i-cache hit rate of the application code is the highest for the

Workload	Technique	Find		Iscp		Osep		Apache		DSS		FileSrv		MailSrvIO		OLTP		geom. mean*	
		Idle	Perf	Idle	Perf	Idle	Perf	Idle	Perf	Idle	Perf	Idle	Perf	Idle	Perf	Idle	Perf	Idle	Perf
1 X	SelectiveOffload	50	7	50	21	50	8	50	27	50	5	50	3	50	0	50	10	50	10
	FlexSC	0	-51	0	-44	0	-55	0	13	0	5	0	5	0	18	0	4	0	-18
	DisAggregateOS	39	-8	50	-4	41	-11	43	5	25	5	40	-6	53	-8	37	-1	41	-3
	SLICC	41	-9	41	1	41	-8	37	-14	43	10	42	-12	39	-9	41	0	41	-5
	SchedTask	18	4	13	17	20	14	11	17	5	1	0	42	7	22	7	2	10	14
2 X	SelectiveOffload	50	7	50	21	50	8	50	27	50	5	50	3	50	0	50	10	50	10
	FlexSC	0	-51	0	-44	0	-55	0	7	0	6	0	26	0	13	0	3	0	-18
	DisAggregateOS	13	-1	19	13	11	5	13	20	6	6	13	18	20	4	9	4	13	8
	SLICC	5	4	5	25	5	8	5	9	1	5	6	22	4	2	6	13	5	11
	SchedTask	0	8	0	34	0	17	0	39	0	10	0	42	0	28	0	10	0	23
4 X	SelectiveOffload	50	7	50	21	50	8	50	27	50	5	50	3	50	0	50	10	50	10
	FlexSC	0	-51	0	-44	0	-55	0	20	0	7	0	6	0	14	0	4	0	-18
	DisAggregateOS	5	3	8	10	3	9	5	28	1	8	4	24	7	14	2	3	4	12
	SLICC	1	3	1	17	0	5	1	22	0	5	0	15	0	4	1	9	0	10
	SchedTask	0	12	0	33	0	17	0	52	0	12	0	42	0	31	0	11	0	25
8 X	SelectiveOffload	50	7	50	21	50	8	50	27	50	5	50	3	50	0	50	10	50	10
	FlexSC	0	-51	0	-44	0	-55	0	30	0	8	0	47	0	15	0	6	0	-13
	DisAggregateOS	1	11	4	-4	0	18	1	35	0	8	1	51	2	20	1	5	1	17
	SLICC	0	9	0	4	0	12	0	29	0	5	0	4	0	6	0	12	0	10
	SchedTask	0	19	0	16	0	27	0	58	0	11	0	42	0	34	0	14	0	27

Idle → fraction of idle time (%). Perf → change in instruction throughput (%) relative to the baseline with the same workload

**Table 4: Impact of the workload on the instruction throughput and idle time fractions**

*SelectiveOffload* technique (see Figure 8c). *SelectiveOffload* has a coarse grained mapping for OS cores; it executes all system call handlers on the same core. Since different system call handlers evict each other’s lines in the i-cache and the d-cache, *SelectiveOffload* results in low i-cache and d-cache hit rates when the OS code is executing (Figure 8d and Figure 8f). Overall *SchedTask* outperforms *SelectiveOffload* because of lower core idleness, and higher i-cache and d-cache hit rates for the OS code.

**FlexSC:** As discussed in Section 2, *FlexSC* executes the Linux scheduler each time a single-threaded application executes a system call. Hence, it’s performance for single-threaded applications is low (mean: -98%); however, it’s performance for multi-threaded benchmarks is high (mean: 10.08%). For multi-threaded applications, a better performance of the *SchedTask* technique (mean: 25.37%) can be attributed to two reasons: (1) a fine-grained core mapping, and (2) a smarter work stealing algorithm. While *FlexSC* specializes cores for system call handlers, it does not eliminate the i-cache pollution due to interrupt and bottom half handlers. Additionally, *FlexSC* migrates tasks from one core to another when there is an imbalance in the run-queue sizes of different cores. While this strategy ensures that the core idleness is minimal, it regularly migrates the OS threads (that execute system call handlers) between different cores. This decreases the data locality of the OS thread, and thereby leads to a lower d-cache hit rate.

**DisAggregateOS:** Due to a fine-grained core mapping, the i-cache hit rate for the application and the OS code are high for *DisAggregateOS*. Additionally, because it maps system call handlers that access the same d-cache lines on the same core, the d-cache hit rate for OS code is also high for *DisAggregateOS*. However, owing to the low idle time fraction, *SchedTask* outperforms *DisAggregateOS*.

**SLICC** performs well on the four parameters: i-cache hit rate for application as well as OS code, and d-cache hit rate for application as well as OS code. However, the mean idle time fraction for the SLICC technique is around 5%, mainly because SLICC does not allow an idle core to steal threads from other cores.

**SchedTask** performs the best among all the compared techniques. The technique performs well on almost all the studied parameters.

Due to a fine-grained core mapping, the i-cache hit rates for the application as well as OS code are high. Additionally, since *SchedTask* uses a smart work stealing algorithm, its idle time fraction is low (almost 0%) and its d-cache hit rates for application and OS code are high.

**Data locality:** In a baseline Linux system, a system call handler gets executed on the same core on which it got invoked. So if it got invoked on multiple cores, the OS data structures that it accesses are fetched into the respective data caches. If fetching that data incurs any stalls, the overhead will be incurred on all of the cores. In addition, if a shared cache line got modified by one of the cores, there will be an additional overhead due to cache coherence. Since *SchedTask* executes different instances of a system call handler on the same core, the data used by the handler is loaded once into the d-cache and reused in later executions of the handler. Hence, as shown in Figure 8f *SchedTask* significantly improves the d-cache hit rate of the OS code. A similar effect is also observed for the application code for multi-threaded benchmarks.

**Other statistics:** Let us now discuss some more results, and present aggregate statistics instead of benchmark wise results due to a lack of space.

**(1) SchedTask related overheads:** The *SchedTask* technique replaces the Linux scheduler with two components: *TAlloc* and *TMigrate*. We observe that the system spends a negligible amount of time (< 0.01%) executing the *TAlloc* function. This is because *TAlloc* is executed only once during each time-epoch of 3ms. On the other hand, the *TMigrate* function is called at the start and the end of each SuperFunction. Hence, it contributes much more (around 3.2%) to the system’s execution. This is roughly the same amount of time that the baseline Linux system spends executing its scheduler; impressive speed ups in the program execution (around 24%) compensate for the execution of *SchedTask* related routines. Through simulation studies, we observe that the data state maintained by *SchedTask* causes a reduction in the d-cache hit rate of the non-*SchedTask* codes by 0.78%.

**(2) TLB hit rates:** Due to a reduction in the instruction and data footprints on each core, the hit rates of the iTLB and dTLB also increase by 0.98% and 0.65% respectively.



Figure 9: Impact of work stealing strategies on different system parameters

(3) **Interrupt latency:** Since *SchedTask* steers many interrupts to the same core, sometimes the interrupts have to wait before being serviced. This increases the mean interrupt latency by around 0.53%. This is miniscule.

(4) **Fairness of scheduling:** We measure the fairness of a schedule by comparing the instruction throughput of all threads using Jain’s fairness index [23]; its value ranges from  $\frac{1}{\#threads}$  (for a completely unfair schedule) to 1.0 (for a completely fair schedule). The mean fairness index for *SchedTask* is 0.99 indicating that *SchedTask* allocates almost equal execution times to all threads. This is because we use the FCFS strategy in the *TMigrate* routine.

## 6.2 Thread Migrations

Figure 10 shows the number of inter-core thread migrations per billion retired instructions. The baseline system employs the standard Linux scheduler. Linux’s scheduler tries to allocate the same amount of work to all cores and it migrates a thread from one core to another only if there is a significant imbalance of work across cores. Since almost all threads of the considered benchmarks are uniformly stressed, we observe minimal thread migrations in the baseline system. In contrast, the core specialization techniques migrate threads too often. It must be noted that migrating a thread from one core to another does not decrease its performance if there is a concomitant increase in instruction and data locality. Hence, in spite of an increased number of thread migrations, owing to fine-grained scheduling decisions and a smart work stealing algorithm, *SchedTask* outperforms other techniques.

## 6.3 Impact of the Workload on Performance

Table 4 shows the impact of a benchmark’s workload on the idle time fraction and the instruction throughput of different core specialization techniques. 1X refers to the ensemble of individual workloads as described in Section 4.2 and 2X refers to two times this workload.

1X: The idle time fraction of all techniques is high for a 1X workload. While the *SelectiveOffload* technique gives the best performance, it also employs twice the number of cores as compared to other techniques. As mentioned in Section 6.1, *FlexSC* performs poorly for single threaded benchmarks. For multi-threaded benchmarks, *FlexSC* outperforms *DisAggregateOS* and *SLICC* by 10-15 percentage points, primarily on account of its low core idleness. The results clearly show that *DisAggregateOS* and *SLICC* are not

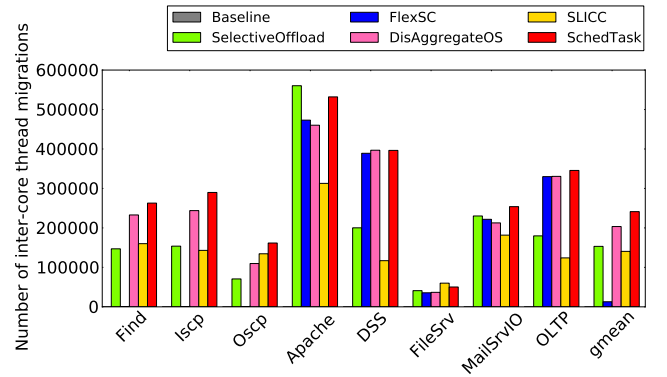


Figure 10: Number of inter-core thread migrations

suitable for servers that have less work. As discussed in Section 6.1, *SchedTask* has low core idleness and a high i-cache hit rate. Hence, in spite of a higher idle time fraction than that of *FlexSC*, *SchedTask* outperforms *FlexSC* even for multi-threaded benchmarks.

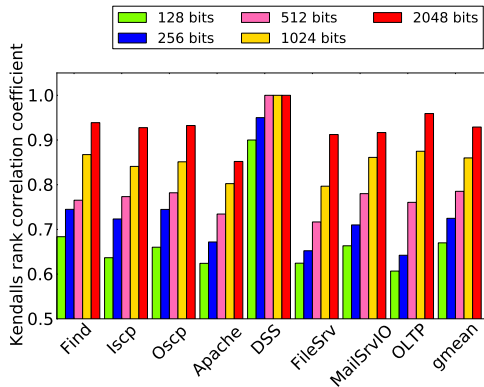
2X: As we increase the workload from 1X to 2X, the idle time fractions of *DisAggregateOS*, *SLICC*, and *SchedTask* drop significantly. Due to fine-grained core mapping, both *SLICC* and *SchedTask* outperform the *SelectiveOffload* technique (*SchedTask* being the best).

For 4X and 8X workloads, the idle time fraction for all techniques except *SelectiveOffload* is almost 0%. For such workloads, the technique with the most fine-grained core mapping and the best work stealing strategy will perform the best. Hence, despite having almost the same idle time fraction, *SchedTask* outperforms *DisAggregateOS* and *SLICC*.

**Conclusion:** For 4X and 8X workloads *SchedTask* is still the best. Beyond an 8X workload, we observe that the d-cache pollution among application as well as OS threads becomes high. This leads to lower performance and is counter productive.

## 6.4 Impact of Work Stealing

Figures 9a, 9b, and 9c show the impact of different work stealing strategies on the instruction throughput, idle time fraction and the overall i-cache hit rate respectively. The first strategy is to not allow an idle core to steal any work from other cores. Due to reduced



**Figure 11: Impact of the size of the *Page-heatmap* register on the quality of its ranking**

i-cache pollution between different *SuperFunctions*, the i-cache hit rate for this strategy is high. However, there are periods of time when all threads and applications execute the same *SuperFunction* and hence, they wait in the *runnable queue* of just one or two cores; thereby leading to a high idle time fraction of 19%. The other two bars represent the performance of the two levels of work stealing that we discussed in Section 5.3.

As *Steal same work only* strategy steals *SuperFunctions* with the same instruction footprint as allotted to the local core, it does not increase i-cache pollution and still reduces the idle time fraction of cores by around 0.7% (compared to no work stealing). *SchedTask* tries the *Steal similar work also* strategy only if the *Steal same work only* strategy does not have any *SuperFunction* to execute. This strategy reduces the idle time fraction of *FileSrv* by a massive 45%. We note that *FileSrv* executes a lot of bottom-half handlers (see Figure 4) whose average length is around 24,000 instructions. In the *Steal same work only* strategy, most threads in the system wait to execute their bottom half handler. Since this strategy ensures that an idle core always tries to steal similar *SuperFunctions* first, it reduces the i-cache hit rate by a small amount (around 1%). However, this is adequately compensated by reducing the core idleness to almost 0%. Hence, *SchedTask* uses this as the default work stealing strategy. An alternate strategy is to focus only on core idleness: always steal work from the core with the maximum waiting time. However, this strategy causes higher i-cache pollution and hence has modest performance benefits (mean: 10.77%).

### 6.5 Impact of the Page-heatmap Register

As discussed in Section 3.2, we use a Bloom filter to approximate the set of i-cache lines that two *superFuncType*'s have in common. Given a *superFuncType*, we compute its Hamming weight against each other *superFuncType* and then compute a ranking (ordered list of *superFuncTypes* in decreasing order of Hamming Weight). We measure the effectiveness of this approximation (using a Bloom filter) by comparing the quality of its ranking against one generated using the actual set of i-cache line addresses. We compare two ranked lists using the *Kendall's rank correlation coefficient*  $\tau_B$  [34]; its value ranges from -1 (opposite ranking) to +1 (same ranking).

Figure 11 shows the value of  $\tau_B$  for different sizes of the *Page-heatmap* register. An exponential increase in the size of this register

leads to a linear increase in its  $\tau_B$ . However, the mean performance benefits of *SchedTask* with different sizes of the *Page-heatmap* register do not follow the same trend: 128 bits (15.87%), 256 bits (19.37%), 512 bits (22.79%), 1024 bits (22.63%), and 2048 bits (22.71%). The performance benefits for a *Page-heatmap* register of 1024 and 2048 bits are lower than that for 512 bits because of two reasons: (1) increased d-cache pollution for *TAlloc* and *TMigrate* routines, and (2) fewer chances of stealing *SuperFunctions* with higher overlap values at run time. Hence, we choose a *Page-heatmap* register of 512 bits in all our experiments. The mean performance benefit while using the ideal ranking and not facing any d-cache pollution is 24.99%.

## 7 CONCLUSION

In this work, we proposed *SchedTask*, a fine-grained scheduling scheme for OS-intensive applications. We began by decomposing the combined execution of the OS and the applications into sequences of instructions called *SuperFunctions*. We proposed a hardware technique (Bloom filter of 512 bits per core) to identify the overlap between the instruction sequences of different types of *SuperFunctions*. We then proposed a hierarchical scheduler that schedules similar *SuperFunctions* on each core. Our scheduler also contains a novel work stealing algorithm that reduces i-cache misses and also reduces the core idleness. Through extensive evaluation over a suite of 8 OS-intensive applications, we demonstrated a performance improvement of up to 29 percentage points (mean: 11.4 p.p.) over the nearest competing state of the art proposal, (SLICC [7]), in this area.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We thank Omais Pandith and Himani Raina for providing us their Tejas model of “Trace Based Instruction Caching”; it helped us evaluate the impact of Trace Caches on different core specialization techniques. We also thank Hadi Brais, Rajshekar Kalayappan, Rajesh Kedia, and Neetu Jindal for providing valuable feedback on the initial version of the manuscript; it allowed us to immensely improve our paper.

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# Sensitivity Analysis of Core Specialization Techniques

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## Abstract

The instruction footprint of OS-intensive workloads such as web servers, database servers, and file servers typically exceeds the size of the instruction cache (32 KB). Consequently, such workloads incur a lot of i-cache misses, which reduces their performance drastically. Several papers [6, 8, 5, 2, 3] have proposed to improve the performance of such workloads using core specialization. In this scheme, tasks with different instruction footprints are executed on different cores. In this report, we study the performance of five state of the art core specialization techniques: *SelectiveOffload* [6], *FlexSC* [8], *DisAggregateOS* [5], *SLICC* [2], and *SchedTask* [3] for different system parameters. Our studies show that for a suite of 8 popular OS-intensive workloads, *SchedTask* performs best for all evaluated configurations.

## 1 Multi-programmed Workloads

We compare the impact of all core specialization techniques on a server that is executing multiple OS-intensive applications. Table 1 shows the constituent benchmarks and their workloads for each multi-programmed workload, and Figure 1 shows the impact of different core specialization techniques on the weighted instruction throughput of each multi-programmed workload. We

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Bag ID	Constituent benchmarks	Workload of individual benchmark
MPW-A	<i>DSS, FileSrv</i>	1X
MPW-B	<i>Apache, OLTP</i>	1X
MPW-C	<i>Apache, DSS, FileSrv, Iscp</i>	0.5X
MPW-D	<i>Apache, DSS, Find, OLTP</i>	0.5X
MPW-E	<i>Find, FileSrv, Iscp, Osecp</i>	0.5X
MPW-F	<i>Apache, FileSrv, MailSrvIO, OLTP</i>	0.5X

Table 1: Constituent benchmarks of multi-programmed workloads

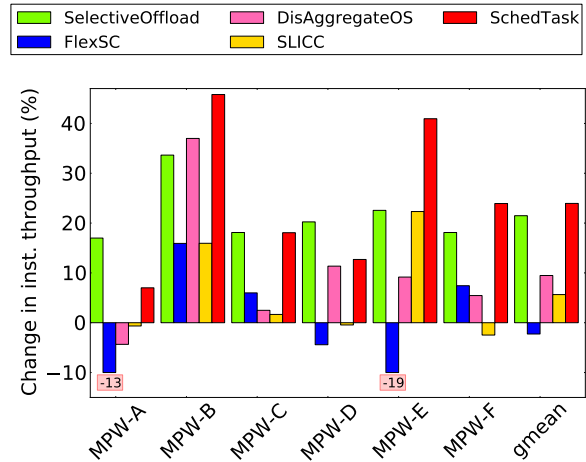


Figure 1: Impact of different techniques on the instruction throughput of a system executing multi-programmed workloads

start by allocating equal number of cores for each benchmark and then let the scheduling techniques decide the appropriate number of cores to execute the constituent tasks of each multi-programmed workload. The mean improvement in the weighted instruction throughput for these techniques is: *SelectiveOffload* (21.48%), *FlexSC* (-2.26%), *DisAggregateOS* (9.47%), *SLICC* (5.64%), and *SchedTask* (23.94%). The primary point to note from Figure 1 is that the performance of *SLICC* is low for multi-programmed workloads. This is an artifact of *SLICC*'s thread decomposition policy, which does not group common portions of OS execution across different applications. *FlexSC*, *DisAggregateOS*, and *SchedTask* group system calls based on their IDs. Hence, for these techniques, there is a high correlation between their performance of a multi-programmed workload and its constituent benchmarks.

iSize	Technique	Find		Iscp		Oscp		Apache		DSS		FileSrv		MailSrvIO		OLTP		geom. mean	
		iHit	Perf	iHit	Perf	iHit	Perf	iHit	Perf	iHit	Perf	iHit	Perf	iHit	Perf	iHit	Perf	iHit	Perf
16 KB	SelectiveOffload	1	10	1	21	1	12	1	31	3	5	0	6	1	0	4	11	1	12
	FlexSC	7	-48	6	-40	6	-50	-1	12	1	6	1	25	2	12	2	10	3	-14
	DisAggregateOS	2	0	1	14	1	10	2	20	3	6	1	16	3	0	4	9	2	9
	SLICC	1	4	1	24	1	12	1	1	2	5	1	15	2	0	2	11	1	8
	SchedTask	2	11	1	40	1	23	2	44	2	10	1	34	2	28	3	17	1	25
32 KB	SelectiveOffload	2	7	2	21	1	8	2	27	3	5	1	4	3	0	3	9	2	10
	FlexSC	10	-51	7	-44	6	-56	-1	7	2	6	2	29	2	12	1	4	3	-18
	DisAggregateOS	3	-2	2	16	1	4	4	20	3	6	2	20	5	4	3	6	3	9
	SLICC	4	3	2	28	1	7	3	9	1	5	1	20	3	2	2	13	2	11
	SchedTask	4	7	3	39	1	15	4	38	3	10	2	44	4	28	3	12	3	23
64 KB	SelectiveOffload	3	6	3	22	2	6	4	26	0	5	1	5	3	-1	2	8	2	9
	FlexSC	8	-52	6	-45	4	-57	1	8	0	6	1	23	2	12	1	4	3	-19
	DisAggregateOS	5	-1	4	16	2	3	8	22	0	6	1	27	4	5	3	5	3	10
	SLICC	5	4	3	33	2	7	8	21	0	6	1	26	2	5	3	19	3	15
	SchedTask	5	6	4	39	2	13	8	37	0	11	1	36	3	28	2	13	3	22

iSize is the size of the i-cache. iHit and Perf are the change (%) in i-cache hit rate and the instruction throughput respectively relative to the baseline with the same i-cache size

Table 2: Impact of the size of the instruction cache on the instruction cache hit rate and instruction throughput

## 2 Instruction Cache Size

Table 2 shows the impact of the i-cache size on the i-cache hit rate and the instruction throughput derived by all core specialization techniques. We evaluate all techniques for the following three i-cache configurations: 4-way 16 KB, 4-way 32 KB, and 4-way 64 KB. A baseline system with a smaller i-cache incurs more cache misses and therefore, the core specialization techniques can improve instruction throughput better. Our proposed technique improves throughput by 25%, 23%, and 22% over the baseline for a 16 KB, 32 KB, and a 64 KB i-cache system, respectively. This results in a performance improvement of 13%, 12%, and 7% respectively over the best state of the art techniques.

## 3 Cache Configuration

Table 3 describes three cache configurations (Config1, Config2, and Config3) and their impact on the instruction throughput of all techniques. Config1 and Config2 have two levels of cache hierarchy whereas Config3 has three levels of cache hierarchy. Since the performance benefit derived by a core specialization technique is directly proportional to the i-cache miss penalty, the performance of all techniques is the least for Config2 and the most for Config1. Our proposed technique improves throughput by 24%, 21%, and 23% over the baseline for a system with Config1, Config2, and Config3 cache configurations re-

spectively. This results in a 7, 6, and 12 percentage point enhancement in performance (respectively) over the best existing techniques.

## 4 Number of Cores

Table 4 shows the impact of the number of cores on the instruction throughput of different core specialization techniques. We evaluate all the techniques for the following four systems: system with 8 cores, system with 16 cores, system with 24 cores, and a system with 32 cores. We do not consider a system with less than 8 cores because such a system is not practical for the OS-intensive server-class workloads that we consider. Our proposed technique improves throughput by 18%, 27%, 27%, and 23% over the baseline for a system with 8 cores, 16 cores, 24 cores, and 32 cores respectively. This results in 3, 9, 12, and 12 percentage points enhancements, respectively, over the best existing techniques.

## 5 Instruction Prefetcher

Figure 2 shows the impact of core specialization techniques on the instruction throughput when the baseline system employs a hardware instruction prefetcher. We use the hardware-only mode (CGHC-2K+32K) of the Call Graph Prefetcher (CGP) [1] as the instruction prefetcher. We use CGP because its hardware overheads are not

Cache configuration	Technique	Find	Iscp	Oscp	Apache	DSS	FileSrv	MailSrvIO	OLTP	geom. mean
		Change in the instruction throughput (%) relative to the baseline system with the same cache configuration								
Config1	SelectiveOffload	-1	18	14	18	9	13	17	12	12
	FlexSC	-57	-51	-60	17	1	11	20	8	-21
	DisAggregateOS	-7	9	10	0	2	16	25	9	7
	SLICC	3	27	16	20	6	18	15	18	15
	SchedTask	11	36	21	38	2	30	33	14	23
Config2	SelectiveOffload	-2	16	14	16	10	10	13	10	11
	FlexSC	-59	-53	-61	15	1	12	19	5	-23
	DisAggregateOS	-9	1	0	18	2	10	21	8	6
	SLICC	1	25	16	18	5	18	11	15	13
	SchedTask	7	33	20	31	2	27	28	10	19
Config 3	SelectiveOffload	7	21	8	27	5	4	0	9	10
	FlexSC	-51	-44	-56	7	6	29	12	4	-18
	DisAggregateOS	-2	16	4	20	6	20	4	6	9
	SLICC	3	28	7	9	5	20	2	13	11
	SchedTask	7	39	15	38	10	44	28	12	23
Config1	→	<i>Private caches</i>	i-cache and d-cache: (4-way 32 KB. latency = 3 cycles)							
		<i>Shared cache</i>	L2 cache: (8-way 8 MB. latency = 18 cycles)							
Config2	→	<i>Private caches</i>	i-cache and d-cache: (4-way 32 KB. latency = 3 cycles)							
		<i>Shared cache</i>	L2 cache: (8-way 8 MB. latency = 8 cycles)							
Config3	→	<i>Private caches</i>	i-cache and d-cache: (4-way 32 KB. latency = 3 cycles),				L2 cache: (4-way 256 KB. latency = 8 cycles)			
		<i>Shared cache</i>	L3 cache: (8-way 8 MB. latency = 18 cycles)							

Table 3: Impact of the cache configuration on the instruction throughput

#cores	Technique	Find	Iscp	Oscp	Apache	DSS	FileSrv	MailSrvIO	OLTP	geom. mean
		Change in the instruction throughput (%) relative to the baseline system with the same number of cores								
8 cores	SelectiveOffload	14	22	17	48	5	2	-1	17	15
	FlexSC	-24	-26	-41	13	6	5	12	3	-8
	DisAggregateOS	-17	-14	-16	0	-10	-19	-28	-1	-14
	SLICC	6	-5	-13	-4	-3	-10	-11	-5	-6
	SchedTask	20	24	10	36	9	16	22	12	18
16 cores	SelectiveOffload	19	27	26	47	4	6	0	23	18
	FlexSC	-24	-24	-40	13	5	4	15	13	-7
	DisAggregateOS	-1	-10	-14	3	-5	-15	-23	4	-8
	SLICC	17	6	-2	3	3	-3	-4	8	3
	SchedTask	32	37	22	51	8	17	31	26	27
24 cores	SelectiveOffload	15	29	16	40	5	6	0	15	15
	FlexSC	-45	-35	-53	11	8	22	13	10	-13
	DisAggregateOS	-4	1	-1	6	0	2	-12	4	0
	SLICC	7	25	6	6	8	9	0	13	9
	SchedTask	15	47	23	51	13	27	28	18	27
32 cores	SelectiveOffload	7	21	8	27	5	4	0	9	10
	FlexSC	-51	-44	-56	7	6	29	12	4	-18
	DisAggregateOS	-2	16	4	20	6	20	4	6	9
	SLICC	3	28	7	9	5	20	2	13	11
	SchedTask	7	39	15	38	10	44	28	12	23

Table 4: Impact of the number of cores on the instruction throughput



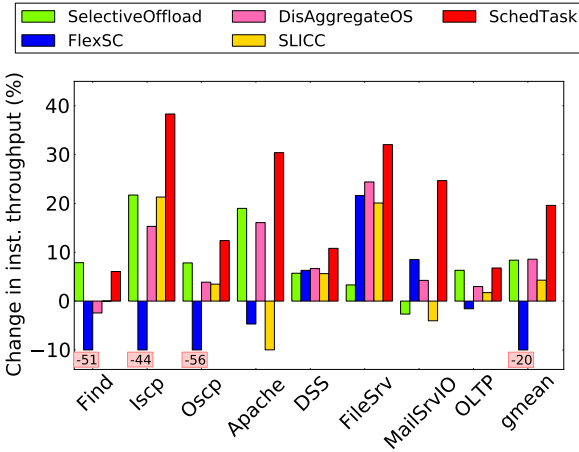


Figure 2: Impact of the instruction prefetcher on the instruction throughput

very high and it is shown to give better performance than the classical instruction prefetchers such as next-line prefetcher and correlation-based prefetcher [7]. We observe that CGP reduces the number of i-cache misses by 20-30% and thus improves the performance of a system without an instruction prefetcher by around 4-5%<sup>1</sup>. Since a baseline system with CGP incurs fewer i-cache misses, the scheduling techniques gain lesser by improving the instruction locality. The mean improvements in the instruction throughput of the system after employing CGP are: *SelectiveOffload* (8.37%), *FlexSC* (-20.93%), *DisAggregateOS* (8.57%), *SLICC* (4.28%), and *SchedTask* (19.6%).

## 6 Trace Cache

Figure 3 shows the impact of core specialization techniques on the instruction throughput when the baseline system employs a trace cache. We use the trace cache implementation that was proposed in [4]. We observe that since the instruction footprints of the considered workloads are very large (>250KB), traces belonging to different *SuperFunctions* keep evicting each other from the shared trace cache. Hence, the performance gains derived by using core specialization techniques do not change

<sup>1</sup>The original paper [1] uses a 2-level memory hierarchy only and hence it enhances performance more

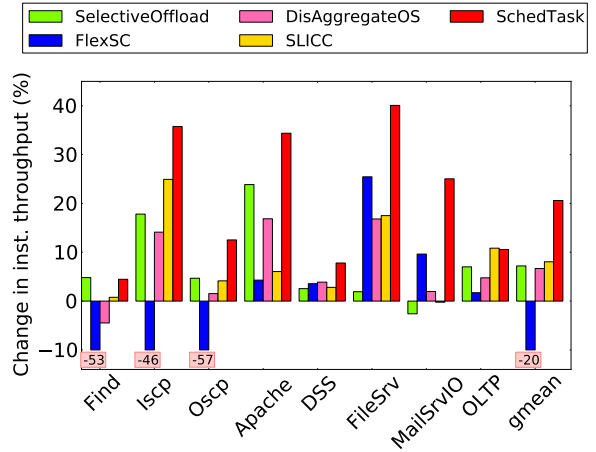


Figure 3: Impact of the trace cache on the instruction throughput

much for a system employing a trace cache versus one that does not employ a trace cache. For a system that employs a trace cache, the mean performance gains derived by different techniques are: *SelectiveOffload* (7.2%), *FlexSC* (-20.38%), *DisAggregateOS* (6.67%), *SLICC* (8.04%), and *SchedTask* (20.6%).

## 7 Conclusion

In this report, we studied the sensitivity of five state of the art core specialization techniques to multi-programmed workloads, cache configurations, instruction prefetchers, and trace-cache. Our studies show that *SchedTask* [3] outperforms other techniques [6, 8, 5, 2] for all evaluated configurations. This is because *SchedTask* employs a fine-grained task scheduler and a superior work stealing algorithm.

## Acknowledgment

We thank Omais Pandith and Himani Raina for providing us their Tejas model of “Trace Based Instruction Caching”; it helped us evaluate the impact of Trace Caches on different core specialization techniques.

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