Threads

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Updates

• Quiz on Thursday
  – System Programming Tutorial (pay attention to exercises)
  – Pointers, VS debugging tools/strategies, APIs
  – Common Microsoft data types
  – The last two lectures (OS concepts, processes)

• Common issues in hw1p1
  – Not waiting for CC to exit
  – NULL pointer for bytesWritten in WriteFile

• Make sure to check operation status
  – Catches bugs as soon as you veer off course with invalid rooms and simplifies debugging
Chapter 4: Roadmap

4.1 Processes and threads

4.2 SMP

4.3 Micro-kernels

4.4 Windows threads

4.5 Solaris threads

4.6 Linux threads
Motivation

• Why parallelize a single program?

• Two main reasons
  – Take advantage of multi-core CPU capacity
  – Perform many concurrent blocking operations quickly

• While non-blocking I/O helps with the second issue, it doesn’t solve the first one
  – Also makes code more complex, non-modular
**Taxonomy**

- Why not fork a new process then?
- Two main issues:
  - Frequent process context switch is expensive
  - Data sharing is inefficient (i.e., goes through kernel) and tedious to program
- Thus, there is a need for a simpler concurrency model that uses threads
  - **Thread** is a dispatchable unit of work within a process

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- **single process, single thread (MS-DOS)**
- **multiple processes, single thread (old Unix)**
- **single process, multiple threads (user library over uniprogramming OS)**
- **multiple processes, multiple threads (modern OSes)**
How to Implement Threads

- Historically, threads didn’t exist in multi-tasked OSes
  - Users wrote special libraries (e.g., pthreads) to emulate threads
  - OS scheduled the process, then library scheduled threads

- Benefits of User-Level Threads (ULT):
  - Thread switch completely in user mode (i.e., fast)
  - Control over scheduler and its policy
  - Portability of code (no dependency on OS APIs)

- Problems:
  - When kernel APIs block, the entire process is blocked
  - No ability to run concurrently on multiple CPUs
How to Implement Threads

• Later OSes became thread-aware and offered **Kernel-Level Threads** (KLT)

• Two modes of operation
  - A. Kernel directly runs threads
  - B. Kernel runs **Light-Weight Processes** (LWP), each with their own ULT library

• Benefits of KLT:
  - Multi-CPU usage by the same program, non-blocking I/O

• Potential drawback:
  - Requires kernel mode switch
Performance

• How expensive is context switch?
  - Traditional numbers suggest ULT switch is 10x faster than KLT, which is 5x faster than process switch

• Windows benchmark agrees with the last ratio
  - ULT rarely used on Windows, no performance results readily available

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Operation</th>
<th>ULT</th>
<th>KLT</th>
<th>Process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Create</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>948</td>
<td>11,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Event wait + switch</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>441</td>
<td>1,840</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

old VAX Unix

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Event wait + switch</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switch</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

AMD Phenom II X6 2.8 GHz

• While these latencies are small, they do increase as the # of threads/processes in the ready state rises
Kernel Threads

- Difference from the single-threaded model
  - Threads have separate stacks and execution context called Thread Control Block (TCB), but share all virtual memory
Kernel Threads

- OS still enforces separation between processes
  - However, threads are not protected from each other
  - Buffer overflow in one thread may wipe out data of other threads in the same process

- Process owns
  - Virtual address space and shared memory
  - Security attributes of all objects (e.g., open files)

- Threads own
  - TCB that includes thread state (e.g., blocked, running, ready), thread context (registers), scheduler priorities and its auxiliary info, pending wait events
  - Execution stack (user and kernel)
Using Threads

- In Windows:
  - Security = NULL, stacksize = 0 (default), flags = 0
  - Must provide the address of start function
    - Thread executes from that address
    - Current thread continues as normal
  - Definition of a thread function:

```c
typedef DWORD __stdcall *LPTHREAD_START_ROUTINE
( [in] LPVOID lpThreadParameter );
```

```c
HANDLE WINAPI CreateThread ( 
  __in_opt LPSECURITY_ATTRIBUTES lpThreadAttributes, 
  __in SIZE_T dwStackSize, 
  __in LPTHREAD_START_ROUTINE lpStartAddress, 
  __in_opt LPVOID lpParameter, 
  __in DWORD dwCreationFlags, 
  __out_opt LPDWORD lpThreadId );
```

```c
DWORD __stdcall MyThread (LPVOID lpThreadParameter);
```
# Using Threads

```c
#define THREADS_TO_RUN 100
void main (void) {
    HANDLE thread [THREADS_TO_RUN]; // stores thread handles
    ThreadParam t [THREADS_TO_RUN]; // parameters passed to threads
    MyExample me;     me.count = 0;
    for (int i = 0; i < THREADS_TO_RUN; i++) { // start a bunch of threads
        t[i].threadID = i; // assign seq # to this thread
        t[i].me = &me;    // must pass a pointer to shared variables/classes
        // run thread with default stack size
        if ((thread[i] = CreateThread (NULL, 0, ThreadStarter, &t[i], 0, NULL)) == NULL) {
            printf ("failed to create thread %d, error %d\n", i, GetLastError());
            exit (-1);
        }
    }
    for (int i = 0; i < THREADS_TO_RUN; i++) { // now hang here waiting for threads to quit
        WaitForSingleObject (thread[i], INFINITE);
        CloseHandle (thread[i]);
    }
    printf ("result = %d\n", me.count);
}

(DWORD __stdcall ThreadStarter (LPVOID param) {
    ThreadParams *t = (ThreadParams*) param;
    t->me->Run (t->threadID);
    return 0;
})
```

```c
class ThreadParams {
public:
    MyExample* me;
    int     threadID;
};

class MyExample {
public:
    int    count;
    void   Run (int threadID);
};
```
Using Threads

- Try to encapsulate all functionality inside your class member functions
- Local variables are never shared (they stay in thread stack)
  - Shared between threads, but they are considered bad style and thus not recommended
- Global and static variables
  - Normally not shared unless you provide a common pointer to multiple threads and they dereference it

```cpp
void MyExample::Run (int threadID)
{
  Sleep (100);
  count ++;
  printf ("Thread %d finished\n", threadID);
}
```
Using Threads

- Thread execution is **non-deterministic**
  - Threads can be interrupted at any time
  - Speed of execution may differ by any factor

- Make sure each thread gets its own copy of `ThreadParams` to avoid problems like this:

```cpp
ThreadParams t;
t.me = &me;

for (int i = 0; i < THREADS_TO_RUN; i++) {  // start a bunch of threads
    t.threadID = i;  // assign # to this thread
    if ((thread[i] = CreateThread (NULL, 0, ThreadStarter, &t, 0, NULL)) == NULL) {
        printf ("failed to create thread %d, error %d\n", i, GetLastError());
        exit (-1);
    }
}
```

all threads may get their `threadID = THREADS_TO_RUN-1`
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**SMP**

- **SMP (Symmetric Multi-Processing)**
  - Consists of multiple CPUs connected by bus (e.g., HyperTransport in AMD)
  - Each CPU contains multiple cores and dedicated memory controller

- **SMP benefits:**
  - Performance
  - Availability (e.g., failure of some CPUs does not have to crash the system)
  - Scalability (e.g., more CPUs can be added to an existing motherboard if it supports them)
• CPU clock speed no longer scales due to insurmountable heat problems
  - Scaling cores is much easier at this stage
• Consumer-grade computers today
  - AMD Opteron w/12-core, quad-CPU configurations (48 cores per motherboard), Intel Phi expansion card w/60 cores
  - CUDA (nVidia Titan) video cards with 5000+ cores
• Evolution of computer architecture:
  - Sequential computers had a single CPU
  - Traditional 1940s-1950s mainframes
**SMP**

- **Parallel computers** used multiple CPUs
- **Notation:**
  - S = single, M = multiple
  - I = instruction, D = data
- **Level 1**
  - **SISD:** single CPU
  - **SIMD:** runs the same code on multiple RAM buffers in parallel (e.g., video cards, SSE, MMX)
  - **MIMD:** different instructions on different data
  - **MISD:** rarely implemented
**SMP**

- **Level 2:**
  - **Shared memory:** single motherboard
  - **Distributed memory:** multiple computers

- **Level 3:**
  - **Master/slave:** OS ran on dedicated CPU, programs ran everywhere else
  - **SMP:** OS and programs share all CPUs (modern computers and kernels)
  - **Clusters:** racks of servers, possibly geographically distributed in datacenters
Wrap-up

- Cache coherence issues drastically affect consistency and performance when multiple threads modify the same RAM location.