Memory
Dmitri Loguinov
Texas A&M University

April 14, 2022
Chapter 7: Roadmap

7.1 Requirements
7.2 Partitioning
7.3 Paging
7.4 Segmentation
7.5 Security
Main memory services of the OS:

1) Dynamic allocation/deletion
2) Process & data relocation
   - Transparent fragmentation of process data/code within RAM and swapping to disk as needed
3) Protection
   - No unauthorized access to space of other processes
4) Sharing
   - Ability to map portions of RAM between different processes

Requirements

Memory manager, address virtualization, hardware support
Chapter 7: Roadmap

7.1 Requirements
7.2 Partitioning
7.3 Paging
7.4 Segmentation
7.5 Security
Memory allocation is a complex problem
- We examine only the most basic approaches

- **Partitioning**: type of RAM segmentation into blocks
- **Placement**: actual block allocation algorithms

---

**Partitioning**
- **Static**
  - Constant-size blocks
  - OS paging
- **Dynamic**
  - Variable-size blocks

**Dynamic Placement**
- Scanning
- Buddy
  - many other allocators are not covered here

Note: memory heaps have nothing to do with priority queues
Static partitioning defines block boundaries a-priori
- Process may hold any number of blocks, which may appear to it as contiguous space
- Mapping done in hardware

Suffers from internal fragmentation

Blocks may be of constant or variable size
- For simplicity, most kernels have constant-size blocks called pages

Each page must be a power of 2 (usually 4 KB)
Heap Partitioning

- Tweaking virtual-page tables is slow and a privileged operation; allocation rounded to nearest page size
- **Idea:** add memory management to user space that can satisfy small buffer request with less overhead
- **Dynamic** partitioning (heap) grabs pages from the OS, then splits them into smaller chunks in user space
  - Much faster, but leads to external fragmentation
- More difficult to manage due to variable-size blocks
Heap Allocation

- Memory is typically allocated from:
  - Stack (local variables)
  - Heap (new/malloc)
  - OS (VirtualAlloc)
- We are now concerned with heap
  - OS issues covered during next class

- Scanning
  - Linearly search through RAM (or list of empty blocks) to find empty blocks to allocate
- Search types:
  - First fit: scans from start
  - Best fit: finds the smallest free block that satisfies the request
  - Next fit: searches from the last allocation forward
- E.g., Unix SLOB allocator for simple (embedded) devices

```cpp
void f (void) {
  int a; // on the stack
  // ptr on the stack, buffer on the heap
  char *buf = new char [100];
  // ptr on the stack, buffer from the kernel
  char *OSbuf = VirtualAlloc (...);
}
```
Heap Allocation

• Buddy System
  - Organizes OS chunk into blocks that are powers of 2
  - Smallest block has size $2^L$, largest $2^U$

• Request of size $R$ arrives
  - Find a block with size that’s nearest power of 2
  - If no such block exists, split larger free blocks in half until a block of correct size is available

• Example: $U = 20$, $L = 12$
  - First request is $R_1 = 90K$
  - Then requests $R_2 = 150K$, $R_3 = 200K$ arrive in that order
To free a block, check if the matching buddy is free
  - If so, combine and free the larger block
  - Process repeats until we can’t go further

Example:
  - Release order: R2, R1, R3
  - Which nodes are combined?

Method drawbacks?
  - Both internal and external fragmentation, constant splitting & merging

How to implement this scheme efficiently?
  - First problem is finding free blocks in U-L time
  - Second problem is merging buddies in U-L time
Given $R$, first determine the size of target block
- Needs to be the nearest power of 2 above or equal to $R$
- Use \_BitScanReverse to get the highest bit set in DWORD

Free blocks are kept in queues, one for each level
- Try popping a block from the needed level, if nothing there, go hunting for a larger block up the tree

```c
int levels = U - L + 1;
// queue of free blocks
Queue \*fb = new Queue [levels];
char* Alloc (int R) {
    if (R == 0)
        return NULL;
    // index of the queue in [0, levels-1]
    DWORD qIdx = GetIndex (R);
    // search for the nearest empty block
    int i = qIdx;
    while (i >= 0 && fb[i].size() == 0)
        i--;
    // anything available?
    if (i < 0) return NULL;

    // if so, split them down
    for ( ; i < qIdx; i++) {
        ptr = fb[i].pop();
        fb[i+1].push (ptr);
        fb[i+1].push (ptr + 2^U-(i+1));
    }
    // pop our block
    ptr = fb[qIdx].pop();
    return ptr;
}
```
Heap Allocation

• How to free blocks and find who their buddies are?
  - Assume both ptr to start of block and its size are known
• XOR block ptr with its size
  - This gives a ptr to buddy block
• One approach is to scan the queue of free blocks, if buddy is there, merge
• However, this requires more overhead than we wanted (i.e., $2^{U-L+1}$ worst case)
• **Idea:** store allocation state with the blocks
  - Reserve a shadow buffer at the start of block
• Merge happens only when our buddy is free and their size matches ours
• Example when checking only the free flag is insufficient?
  - In this tree, 4B when freed will attempt to merge with 2A since starting address of 2A and 4A is the same (i.e., 0)
• To expedite efficient removal from queues, block headers may be organized into a doubly linked list instead of using separate queues
Allocation

- Modern malloc (stdlib, glibc) are variations on buddy
- Unix *slab* allocator
  - Do not merge up when expecting new requests of similar size and maintain a cache of small blocks
  - Threshold size for merging may be guesstimated from prior request patterns or hardwired ahead of time
- Low fragmentation heaps
  - When multiple options are possible, attempt to optimize continuity of space
  - 4B might be preferred over 4D for new splits
- Per-CPU heaps with better concurrency
Practical Issues

- **Overhead per block**
  - Release mode 16 bytes, debug 64 bytes
- **Stack overflow**
  - Too many local variables for default stack size or recursion too deep
- **Stack corruption**
  - Buffer overflow on local arrays
- **Heap corruption**
  - Block header wiped out or no man’s land is written to

- **Heaps grab large pieces of memory from the OS**
  - Since heaps are in user mode, they are quicker than asking the kernel
  - Allocation more efficient for small pieces (all kernel blocks rounded off to 4KB)
- **When you run outside the heap into OS territory, hard crash on access violation**

```c
void buggy (void) {
  double a [1e8];
  int b [100];
  memset (b, 0, 10000);
  char *c = new char [100];
  memset (c, 0, 10000);
}
```
• Unless it’s extreme, heap corruption goes undetected
  – In debug mode, until the next new/delete operation sniffs something wrong and throws an assertion violation
  – In release mode, nothing happens until you crash
• Example: threadA corrupts the heap, threadB crashes
  – How to make these situations more suitable for debugging?
• Can ask the OS for the buffer using VirtualAlloc()
  – If writing outside page boundary, kernel does not tolerate any funny business, throws access violation immediately
Practical Issues

- Sometimes catching a crash obscures its cause

```c
// SEH-style handler
__try {
    f(x);
} __except ( MyCrashHandler ( GetExceptionCode() )) { 
    // catch other exceptions here
}
```

- Writing a library that is used by someone else
  - Should you test their pointers for NULL?
  - Should you check if memory is valid using IsBadReadPtr, IsBadWritePtr, IsBadCodePtr, IsBadStringPtr?

MyLibraryAPI (char *ptr) {
    // how much checking to do on validity of ptr
}
Practical Issues

• One school of thought is to catch crashes, return explicit errors that help understand the problem
  – E.g., ReadFile returns error 998 (ERROR_NOACCESS)

• Another direction is to just crash without any checks
  – If someone is passing NULL or invalid handles, they’re probably not checking for return codes; bugs should be made obvious to them

• Finally, your API can catch the crash, silently ignore it, and make someone’s life more difficult
  – Not recommended

// homework #1 example
HANDLE pipe = CreateFile (pipename, ...);
while (true) {
    WriteFile (pipe, command, ...);
    ReadFile (pipe, buf, ...);
    // add rooms to queue, check uniqueness
}

// homework #1 example
HANDLE pipe = CreateFile (pipename, ...);
while (true) {
    WriteFile (pipe, command, ...);
    ReadFile (pipe, buf, ...);
    // add rooms to queue, check uniqueness
}