COMP1521 22T2 — Concurrency, Parallelism, Threads

https://www.cse.unsw.edu.au/~cs1521/22T2/
Concurrent vs Parallelism
Flynn’s taxonomy
Threads in C
What can go wrong?
Synchronisation with mutexes
What can still go wrong?
Atomics
Lifetimes + Thread barriers
Concurrency? Parallelism?

Concurrency:
multiple computations in overlapping time periods ...
does not have to be simultaneous

Parallelism:
multiple computations executing simultaneously

Common classifications of types of parallelism (Flynn’s taxonomy):

- **SISD**: Single Instruction, Single Data (“no parallelism”)
  - e.g. our code in mipsy
- **SIMD**: Single Instruction, Multiple Data (“vector processing”)
  - multiple cores of a CPU executing (parts of) same instruction
  - e.g., GPUs rendering pixels
- **MISD**: Multiple Instruction, Single Data (“pipelining”)
  - data flows through multiple instructions; very rare in the real world
  - e.g., fault tolerance in space shuttles (task replication), sometimes A.I.
- **MIMD**: Multiple Instruction, Multiple Data (“multiprocessing”)
  - multiple cores of a CPU executing different instructions

Both parallelism and concurrency need to deal with *synchronisation*.
Parallelism can also occur between multiple computers!

Example: Map-Reduce is a popular programming model for

- manipulating *very large* data sets
- on a large network of computers — local or distributed
  - spread across a rack, data center or even across continents

The *map* step filters data and distributes it to nodes

- data distributed as (key, value) pairs
- each node receives a set of pairs with common key

Nodes then perform calculation on received data items.

The *reduce* step computes the final result

- by combining outputs (calculation results) from the nodes

There also needs a way to determine when all calculations completed.

(Beyond the scope of COMP1521!)
**Data Parallel Computing: Parallelism Across An Array**

- multiple, identical processors
- each given one element of a data structure from main memory
- each performing same computation on that element: SIMD
- results copied back to data structure in main memory

But not totally independent: need to *synchronise* on completion

Graphics processing units (GPUs) provide this form of parallelism
- used to compute the same calculation for every pixel in an image quickly
- popularity of computer gaming has driven availability of powerful hardware
- there are tools & libraries to run some general-purpose programs on GPUs
- if the algorithm fits this model, it might run 5-10x faster on a GPU
- e.g., GPUs used heavily for neural network training

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Parallelism Across Processes

One method for creating parallelism:
create multiple processes, each doing part of a job.

- child executes concurrently with parent
- runs in its own address space
- inherits some state information from parent, e.g. open fd’s

Processes have some disadvantages:

- process switching is expensive
- each require a significant amount of state — memory usage
- communication between processes potentially limited and/or slow

But one big advantage:

- separate address spaces make processes more robust.

The web server providing the class website uses process-level parallelism

An android phone will have several hundred processes running.
Threads allow us parallelism within a process.

- Threads allow simultaneous execution.
- Each thread has its own execution state often called Thread control block (TCB).
- Threads within a process share address space:
  - threads share code: functions
  - threads share global/static variables
  - threads share heap: malloc
- But a separate stack for each thread:
  - local variables not shared
- Threads in a process share file descriptors, signals.
POSIX Threads is a widely-supported threading model. supported in most Unix-like operating systems, and beyond

Describes an API/model for managing threads (and synchronisation).

```c
#include <pthread.h>
```

More recently, ISO C:2011 has adopted a pthreads-like model... less well-supported generally, but very, very similar.
**pthread_create(3): create a new thread**

```c
int pthread_create (
    pthread_t *thread,
    const pthread_attr_t *attr,
    void *(*thread_main)(void *),
    void *arg);
```

- Starts a new thread running the specified `thread_main(arg)`.
- Information about newly-created thread stored in `thread`.
- Thread has attributes specified in `attr` (NULL if you want no special attributes).
- Returns 0 if OK, -1 otherwise and sets `errno`
- analogous to `posix_spawn(3)`
**pthread_join(3):** wait for, and join with, a terminated thread

```c
int pthread_join (pthread_t thread, void **retval);
```

- waits until thread terminates
  - if thread already exited, does not wait
- thread return/exit value placed in `*retval`
- if `main` returns, or `exit(3)` called, *all* threads terminated
  - program typically needs to wait for all threads before exiting
- analogous to `waitpid(3)`
`pthread_exit(3)`: terminate calling thread

```c
void pthread_exit (void *retval);
```

- terminates the execution of the current thread (and frees its resources)
- `retval` returned — see `pthread_join(3)`
- analogous to `exit(3)`
```c
#include <pthread.h>
#include <stdio.h>

// This function is called to start thread execution.
// It can be given any pointer as an argument.
void *run_thread (void *argument)
{
    int *p = argument;
    for (int i = 0; i < 10; i++) {
        printf ("Hello this is thread %d: i=%d\n", *p, i);
    }

    // A thread finishes when either the thread's start function
    // returns, or the thread calls `pthread_exit(3)'.
    // A thread can return a pointer of any type --- that pointer
    // can be fetched via `pthread_join(3)'
    return NULL;
}
```

source code for two_threads.c

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int main (void)
{
    // Create two threads running the same task, but different inputs.
    pthread_t thread_id1;
    int thread_number1 = 1;
    pthread_create (&thread_id1, NULL, run_thread, &thread_number1);
    pthread_t thread_id2;
    int thread_number2 = 2;
    pthread_create (&thread_id2, NULL, run_thread, &thread_number2);
    // Wait for the 2 threads to finish.
    pthread_join (thread_id1, NULL);
    pthread_join (thread_id2, NULL);
    return 0;
}
int n_threads = strtol (argv[1], NULL, 0);
assert (0 < n_threads && n_threads < 100);
pthread_t thread_id[n_threads];
int argument[n_threads];
for (int i = 0; i < n_threads; i++) {
    argument[i] = i;
    pthread_create (&thread_id[i], NULL, run_thread, &argument[i]);
}
// Wait for the threads to finish
for (int i = 0; i < n_threads; i++) {
    pthread_join (thread_id[i], NULL);
}
return 0;
Example: thread_sum.c — dividing a task between threads (i)

```
struct job {
    long start, finish;
    double sum;
};
void *run_thread (void *argument)
{
    struct job *j = argument;
    long start = j->start;
    long finish = j->finish;
    double sum = 0;
    for (long i = start; i < finish; i++) {
        sum += i;
    }
    j->sum = sum;
}
source code for thread_sum.c
```
printf (  
    "Creating %d threads to sum the first %lu integers\n"
    "Each thread will sum %lu integers\n",
    n_threads, integers_to_sum, integers_per_thread);

pthread_t thread_id[n_threads];

struct job jobs[n_threads];

for (int i = 0; i < n_threads; i++) {
    jobs[i].start = i * integers_per_thread;
    jobs[i].finish = jobs[i].start + integers_per_thread;
    if (jobs[i].finish > integers_to_sum) {
        jobs[i].finish = integers_to_sum;
    }
    // create a thread which will sum integers_per_thread integers
    pthread_create (&thread_id[i], NULL, run_thread, &jobs[i]);
}
double overall_sum = 0;
for (int i = 0; i < n_threads; i++) {
    pthread_join (thread_id[i], NULL);
    overall_sum += jobs[i].sum;
}
printf （"\nCombined sum of integers 0 to %lu is %.0f\n", 
    integers_to_sum, overall_sum);
Seconds to sum the first $10,000,000,000$ integers using double arithmetic, with $N$ threads, on some different machines...

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<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>12</th>
<th>24</th>
<th>50</th>
<th>500</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>6.6</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>0.8</td>
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<td>0.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>i5-4590</td>
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<td>4.3</td>
<td>2.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>IIIi</td>
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<td>68.4</td>
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<td>68.4</td>
<td>68.5</td>
<td>68.6</td>
<td>68.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5800X: AMD Ryzen 5800X; 8 cores, 16 threads, 3.8 GHz, 2020  
3900X: AMD Ryzen 3900X; 12 cores, 24 threads, 3.8 GHz, 2019  
i5-4590: Intel Core i5-4590; 4 cores, 4 threads, 3.3 GHz, 2014  
E7330: Intel Xeon E7330; 4 sockets, 4 cores, 4 threads, 2.4 GHz, 2007  
IIIi: Sun UltraSPARC IIIi; 2 sockets, 1 core, 1 thread, 1.5 GHz, 2003
Example: two_threads_broken.c — shared mutable state gonna hurt you

```c
int main (void)
{
    pthread_t thread_id1;
    int thread_number = 1;
    pthread_create (&thread_id1, NULL, run_thread, &thread_number);
    thread_number = 2;
    pthread_t thread_id2;
    pthread_create (&thread_id2, NULL, run_thread, &thread_number);
    pthread_join (thread_id1, NULL);
    pthread_join (thread_id2, NULL);
    return 0;
}
```

- variable thread_number will probably change in main, before thread 1 starts executing...
- thread 1 will probably print **Hello this is thread 2** ... ?!
```c
int bank_account = 0;

// add $1 to Andrew's bank account 100,000 times

void *add_100000 (void *argument)
{
  for (int i = 0; i < 100000; i++) {
    // execution may switch threads in middle of assignment
    // between load of variable value
    // and store of new variable value
    // changes other thread makes to variable will be lost
    nanosleep (&(struct timespec){.tv_nsec = 1}, NULL);
    // RECALL: shorthand for `bank_account = bank_account + 1`
    bank_account++;
  }
  return NULL;
}
```

(source code for bank_account_broken.c)

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int main (void)
{
    // create two threads performing the same task
    pthread_t thread_id1;
    pthread_create (&thread_id1, NULL, add_100000, NULL);
    pthread_t thread_id2;
    pthread_create (&thread_id2, NULL, add_100000, NULL);

    // wait for the 2 threads to finish
    pthread_join (thread_id1, NULL);
    pthread_join (thread_id2, NULL);

    // will probably be much less than $200000
    printf ("Andrew's bank account has $%d\n", bank_account);
    return 0;
}
Global Variables and Race Conditions

Incrementing a global variable is not an atomic operation.

- *(atomic, from Greek — “indivisible”)*

```c
int bank_account;

void *thread(void *a) {
    // ...
    bank_account++;  // ...
}
```

```asm
la $t0, bank_account
lw $t1, ($t0)
addi $t1, $t1, 1
sw $t1, ($t0)
```

```plaintext
.data
bank_account: .word 0
```
Global Variables and Race Condition

If, initially, \texttt{bank\_account} = 42, and two threads increment simultaneously...

\begin{verbatim}
la $t0, bank_account
# { | bank_account = 42 |}
lw $t1, ($t0)
# { | $t1 = 42 |}
addi $t1, $t1, 1
# { | $t1 = 43 |}
sw $t1, ($t0)
# { | bank_account = 43 |}
\end{verbatim}

\begin{verbatim}
la $t0, bank_account
# { | bank_account = 42 |}
lw $t1, ($t0)
# { | $t1 = 42 |}
addi $t1, $t1, 1
# { | $t1 = 43 |}
sw $t1, ($t0)
# { | bank_account = 43 |}
\end{verbatim}

\textbf{Oops!} We lost an increment.

Threads do not share registers or stack (local variables)... but they \textit{do} share global variables.
Global Variable: Race Condition

If, initially, bank_account = 100, and two threads change it simultaneously...

```
la      $t0, bank_account
# { | bank_account = 100 | }
lw      $t1, ($t0)
# { | $t1 = 100 | }
addi    $t1, $t1, 100
# { | $t1 = 200 | }
sw      $t1, ($t0)
# { | bank_account = ...? | }
```

```
la      $t0, bank_account
# { | bank_account = 100 | }
lw      $t1, ($t0)
# { | $t1 = 100 | }
addi    $t1, $t1, -50
# { | $t1 = 50 | }
sw      $t1, ($t0)
# { | bank_account = 50 or 200 | }
```

This is a critical section.

We don’t want two processes in the critical section — we must establish mutual exclusion.
`pthread_mutex_lock(3), pthread_mutex_unlock(3): Mutual Exclusion`

```c
int pthread_mutex_lock (pthread_mutex_t *mutex);
int pthread_mutex_unlock (pthread_mutex_t *mutex);
```

We associate a resource with a `mutex`.
For a particular mutex, only one thread can be running between `lock` and `unlock`.
Other threads attempting to `lock` will block.
(Other threads attempting to `trylock` will fail.)

For example:

```c
pthread_mutex_lock (&bank_account_lock);
andrews_bank_account += 1000000;
pthread_mutex_unlock (&bank_account_lock);
```
Example: bank_account_mutex.c — guard a global with a mutex

```c
int bank_account = 0;
pthread_mutex_t bank_account_lock = PTHREAD_MUTEX_INITIALIZER;
// add $1 to Andrew's bank account 100,000 times
void *add_100000 (void *argument)
{
    for (int i = 0; i < 100000; i++) {
        pthread_mutex_lock (&bank_account_lock);
        // only one thread can execute this section of code at any time
        bank_account = bank_account + 1;
        pthread_mutex_unlock (&bank_account_lock);
    }
    return NULL;
}
```

source code for bank_account_mutex.c

https://www.cse.unsw.edu.au/~cs1521/22T2/
Mutex the world!

Mutexes solve all our data race problems! Why not just protect everything with a mutex?

Similar approach made by the Python GIL.

Sadly, mutexes are slow! What else can go wrong with them?
Concurrent Programming is Complex

Concurrency is *really complex* with many issues beyond this course:

- **Data races** thread behaviour depends on unpredictable ordering; can produce difficult bugs or security vulnerabilities

- **Deadlock** threads stopped because they are wait on each other

- **Livelock** threads running without making progress

- **Starvation** threads never getting to run

If these topics sound interesting at all to you, consider COMP3231/3891 ([Extended] Operating Systems)!

Advanced reading: [cs3231 Deadlocks slides](https://www.cse.unsw.edu.au/~cs1521/22T2/)
Example: bank_account_deadlock.c — deadlock with two resources (i)

```c
void *andrew_send_zac_money(void *argument)
{
    for (int i = 0; i < 100000; i++) {
        pthread_mutex_lock (&andrews_bank_account_lock);
        pthread_mutex_lock (&zacs_bank_account_lock);
        if (andrews_bank_account > 0) {
            andrews_bank_account--;
            zacs_bank_account++;
        }
        pthread_mutex_unlock (&zacs_bank_account_lock);
        pthread_mutex_unlock (&andrews_bank_account_lock);
    }
    return NULL;
}
```

source code for bank_account_deadlock.c
https://www.cse.unsw.edu.au/~cs1521/22T2/
void *zac_send_andrew_money(void *argument)
{
    for (int i = 0; i < 100000; i++) {
        pthread_mutex_lock (&zacs_bank_account_lock);
        pthread_mutex_lock (&andrews_bank_account_lock);
        if (zacs_bank_account > 0) {
            zacs_bank_account--;
            andrews_bank_account++;
        }
        pthread_mutex_unlock (&andrews_bank_account_lock);
        pthread_mutex_unlock (&zacs_bank_account_lock);
    }
    return NULL;
}
int main (void)
{
    // create two threads sending each other money
    pthread_t thread_id1;
    pthread_create (&thread_id1, NULL, andrew_send_zac_money, NULL);
    pthread_t thread_id2;
    pthread_create (&thread_id2, NULL, zac_send_andrew_money, NULL);
    // threads will probably never finish
    // deadlock will likely occur
    // with one thread holding andrews_bank_account_lock
    // and waiting for zacs_bank_account_lock
    // and the other thread holding zacs_bank_account_lock
    // and waiting for andrews_bank_account_lock
    pthread_join (thread_id1, NULL);
    pthread_join (thread_id2, NULL);
    return 0;
}
Atomic instructions allow a small subset of operations on data, that are guaranteed to execute atomically! For example,

```
fetch_add: n += value
fetch_sub: n -= value
fetch_and: n &= value
fetch_or: n |= value
fetch_xor: n ^= value
```

`compare_exchange`

```
if (n == v1) {
    n = v2;
}
return n;
```

Complete list: [https://en.cppreference.com/w/c/atomic](https://en.cppreference.com/w/c/atomic)
With mutexes, a program can lock mutex A, and then (before unlocking A) lock some mutex B. i.e. multiple mutexes can be locked simultaneously.

Atomic instructions are (by definition!) atomic, so there's no equivalent to the above problem. Goodbye deadlocks!

Atomics are a fundamental tool for lock-free / wait-free programming.

Non-blocking: If a thread fails or is suspended, it cannot cause failure or suspension of another thread.

Lock-free: **non-blocking** + the system (as a whole) always makes progress.

Wait-free: **lock-free** + every thread always makes progress.
What's the catch with atomics?

Specialised hardware support is required – essentially all modern computers provide atomic support, but may be missing on more niche / embedded systems.

Although faster and simpler than traditional locking, there is still a performance penalty using atomics (and increases program complexity).

Can be incredibly tricky to write correct code at a low level (e.g. memory ordering, which we won’t cover in COMP1521).

Some issues can arise in application; e.g. ABA problem.
Final issue: data lifetime

When sharing data with a thread, we can only pass the address of our data. This presents a lifetime issue – what if by the time the thread reads the data, that data no longer exists?

How have we avoided this so far?

What kind of code could trigger this issue?

How can this issue be avoided?
Since we have allocated memory on the stack in `main`, but also called `pthread_join` on all threads created in `main`, we can say that `main` “outlives” all the created threads.

Since `main` outlives each created thread (and the stack data in `main` shares that same lifetime), we can be reasonably confident that the data we pass to each thread will be valid for the entire lifetime of each thread.
Data lifetime: triggering the issue

```c
#include <pthread.h>
#include <unistd.h>

pthread_t function_creates_thread(void) {
    int super_special_number = 0x42;
    pthread_t thread_handle;
    pthread_create(&thread_handle, NULL, my_thread, &super_special_number);
    return thread_handle;
}

void *my_thread(void *data) {
    int number = *(int *) data;
    sleep(1);
    printf("The number is 0x%x!\n", number);
    return NULL;
}
```

Source code for thread_data_broken.c

---

https://www.cse.unsw.edu.au/~cs1521/22T2/
Stack memory is automatically cleaned up when our function exits, which is causing us problems.

We've solved this problem before in COMP1[59]11 – use malloc instead!

We won't automatically remove the memory after passing it to the thread, so it will be the thread's responsibility to call free.
Data lifetime: solving our problem – malloc

```c
#include <stdio.h>
#include <stdlib.h>
#include <unistd.h>

static void *my_thread(void *data) {
    int number = *(int *) data;
    sleep(1);
    printf("The number is 0x%x!\n", number);
    free(data);
    return NULL;
}

int main() {
    int *super_special_number = malloc(sizeof(int));
    *super_special_number = 0x42;
    pthread_t thread_handle;
    pthread_create(&thread_handle, NULL, my_thread, super_special_number);
    return thread_handle;
}
```

This example demonstrates how to use the `malloc` function to allocate memory for a variable `super_special_number` and then pass it to a thread function `my_thread`. The thread function accesses the memory allocated by `malloc`. It also uses `free` to release the memory when the thread is done with it.
Another solution is to force both the calling thread and the newly created thread to wait for each other. The calling thread shouldn’t proceed until the new thread has had a chance to read the data. The new thread shouldn’t proceed too far before letting the calling thread keep moving – could stall performance! We can implement this cross-thread waiting with barriers.
pthread_t function_creates_thread(void) {
    pthread_barrier_t barrier;
    pthread_barrier_init(&barrier, NULL, 2);
    struct thread_data data = {
        .barrier = &barrier,
        .number  = 0x42,
    };
    pthread_t thread_handle;
    pthread_create(&thread_handle, NULL, my_thread, &data);
    pthread_barrier_wait(&barrier);
    return thread_handle;
}

source code for thread_data_barrier.c
void *my_thread(void *data) {
    struct thread_data *thread_data = (struct thread_data *) data;
    int number = thread_data->number;
    pthread_barrier_wait(thread_data->barrier);
    sleep(1);
    printf("The number is 0x%x!\n", number);
    return NULL;
}

source code for thread_data_barrier.c
If topics such as:

- Data races (e.g. bank account without protection)
- Lifetime (e.g. the previous example)
- Safety through types (e.g. prevent accessing data without locking mutex)

sound interesting to you, you may want to consider COMP6991 (Solving Modern Programming Problems with Rust)!
Aside, pending time: Semaphores

Semaphores are a more general synchronisation mechanism than mutexes.

```c
#include <semaphore.h>
int sem_init(sem_t *sem, int pshared, unsigned int value);
int sem_post(sem_t *sem);
int sem_wait(sem_t *sem);
```

- **`sem_init(3)`** initialises `sem` to `value`.
- **`sem_wait(3)`** — classically **P**
  - if `sem > 0`, then `sem := sem - 1` and continue...
  - otherwise, **wait** until `sem > 0`
- **`sem_post(3)`** — classically **V**, also **signal**
  - `sem := sem + 1` and continue...
Example: Allow $n$ threads to access a resource

Common example: Web servers often launch 1 thread per incoming connection.

If a lot of connections come in all at once, the system could have huge slowdowns due to the enormous amount of threads created.

So, only allow the web server to be dealing with $n$ connections at any particular time.

```c
#include <semaphore.h>
sem_t sem;
sem_init (&sem, 0, n);

sem_wait (&sem);
// only $n$ threads can be executing here simultaneously
sem_post (&sem);
```
Example: bank_account_sem.c: guard a global with a semaphore (i)

```c
sem_t bank_account_semaphore;
// add $1 to Andrew's bank account 100,000 times
void *add_100000 (void *argument) {
    for (int i = 0; i < 100000; i++) {
        // decrement bank_account_semaphore if > 0
        // otherwise wait until > 0
        sem_wait (&bank_account_semaphore);
        // only one thread can execute this section of code at any time
        // because bank_account_semaphore was initialized to 1
        bank_account = bank_account + 1;
        // increment bank_account_semaphore
        sem_post (&bank_account_semaphore);
    }
    return NULL;
}
```

source code for bank_account_sem.c

https://www.cse.unsw.edu.au/~cs1521/22T2/
```c
int main (void)
{
    // initialize bank_account_semaphore to 1
    sem_init (&bank_account_semaphore, 0, 1);
    // create two threads performing the same task
    pthread_t thread_id1;
    pthread_create (&thread_id1, NULL, add_100000, NULL);
    pthread_t thread_id2;
    pthread_create (&thread_id2, NULL, add_100000, NULL);
    // wait for the 2 threads to finish
    pthread_join (thread_id1, NULL);
    pthread_join (thread_id2, NULL);
    // will always be $200000
    printf ("Andrew's bank account has $%d\n", bank_account);
    sem_destroy (&bank_account_semaphore);
    return 0;
}
```