CSE 120
Principles of Operating Systems

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Lecture 4: Threads

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Announcements

- Homework #1 due now
- Project 0 due tonight
- Project 1 out
Processes

- Recall that a process includes many things
  - An address space (defining all the code and data pages)
  - OS resources (e.g., open files) and accounting information
  - Execution state (PC, SP, regs, etc.)
- Creating a new process is costly because of all of the data structures that must be allocated and initialized
  - Recall struct proc in Solaris
  - …which does not even include page tables, perhaps TLB flushing, etc.
- Communicating between processes is costly because most communication goes through the OS
  - Overhead of system calls and copying data
Parallel Programs

- Also recall our Web server example that forks off copies of itself to handle multiple simultaneous requests
  - Or any parallel program that executes on a multiprocessor

- To execute these programs we need to
  - Create several processes that execute in parallel
  - Cause each to map to the same address space to share data
    » They are all part of the same computation
  - Have the OS schedule these processes in parallel (logically or physically)

- This situation is very inefficient
  - **Space**: PCB, page tables, etc.
  - **Time**: create data structures, fork and copy addr space, etc.
Rethinking Processes

- What is similar in these cooperating processes?
  - They all share the same code and data (address space)
  - They all share the same privileges
  - They all share the same resources (files, sockets, etc.)

- What don’t they share?
  - Each has its own execution state: PC, SP, and registers

- Key idea: Why don’t we separate the concept of a process from its execution state?
  - Process: address space, privileges, resources, etc.
  - Execution state: PC, SP, registers

- Exec state also called thread of control, or thread
Threads

- Modern OSes (Mach, Chorus, NT, modern Unix) separate the concepts of processes and threads
  - The **thread** defines a sequential execution stream within a process (PC, SP, registers)
  - The **process** defines the address space and general process attributes (everything but threads of execution)
- A thread is bound to a single process
  - Processes, however, can have multiple threads
- Threads become the unit of scheduling
  - Processes are now the **containers** in which threads execute
  - Processes become static, threads are the dynamic entities
Threads in a Process

Stack (T1)

Stack (T2)

Stack (T3)

Heap

Static Data

Code

Thread 1

Thread 2

Thread 3

PC (T1)

PC (T2)

PC (T3)
Thread Design Space

Address Space

Thread

One Thread/Process
One Address Space
(MSDOS)

Many Threads/Process
One Address Space
(Pilot, Java)

One Thread/Process
Many Address Spaces
(Early Unix)

Many Threads/Process
Many Address Spaces
(Mach, Unix, NT, Chorus)
Process/Thread Separation

- Separating threads and processes makes it easier to support multithreaded applications
  - Concurrency does not require creating new processes
- Concurrency (multithreading) can be very useful
  - Improving program structure
  - Handling concurrent events (e.g., Web requests)
  - Writing parallel programs
- So multithreading is even useful on a uniprocessor
Threads: Concurrent Servers

- Using fork() to create new processes to handle requests in parallel is overkill for such a simple task
- Recall our forking Web server:

```c
while (1) {
    int sock = accept();
    if ((child_pid = fork()) == 0) {
        Handle client request
        Close socket and exit
    } else {
        Close socket
    }
}
```
Threads: Concurrent Servers

- Instead, we can create a new thread for each request

```c
web_server() {
    while (1) {
        int sock = accept();
        thread_fork(handle_request, sock);
    }
}

handle_request(int sock) {
    Process request
    close(sock);
}
```
Kernel-Level Threads

- We have taken the execution aspect of a process and separated it out into threads
  - To make concurrency cheaper
- As such, the OS now manages threads *and* processes
  - All thread operations are implemented in the kernel
  - The OS schedules all of the threads in the system
- OS-managed threads are called *kernel-level threads* or *lightweight processes*
  - NT: *threads*
  - Solaris: *lightweight processes (LWP)*
  - POSIX Threads (pthreads): `PTHREAD_SCOPE_SYSTEM`
Kernel Thread Limitations

- Kernel-level threads make concurrency much cheaper than processes
  - Much less state to allocate and initialize
- However, for fine-grained concurrency, kernel-level threads still suffer from too much overhead
  - Thread operations still require system calls
    - Ideally, want thread operations to be as fast as a procedure call
  - Kernel-level threads have to be general to support the needs of all programmers, languages, runtimes, etc.
- For such fine-grained concurrency, need even “cheaper” threads
User-Level Threads

- To make threads cheap and fast, they need to be implemented at user level
  - **Kernel-level threads** are managed by the OS
  - **User-level threads** are managed entirely by the run-time system (user-level library)
- User-level threads are small and fast
  - A thread is simply represented by a PC, registers, stack, and small thread control block (TCB)
  - Creating a new thread, switching between threads, and synchronizing threads are done via procedure call
    - No kernel involvement
  - User-level thread operations **100x faster** than kernel threads
  - pthreads: `PTHREAD_SCOPE_PROCESS`
Nachos thread control block

class Thread {
    int *stack;
    int *stackTop;
    int machineState[MachineStateSize];
    ThreadStatus status;
    char *name;
    <Methods>
};
U/L Thread Limitations

- But, user-level threads are not a perfect solution
  - As with everything else, they are a tradeoff
- User-level threads are invisible to the OS
  - They are not well integrated with the OS
- As a result, the OS can make poor decisions
  - Scheduling a process with idle threads
  - Blocking a process whose thread initiated an I/O, even though the process has other threads that can execute
  - Unscheduling a process with a thread holding a lock
- Solving this requires communication between the kernel and the user-level thread manager
Kernel vs. User Threads

- Kernel-level threads
  - Integrated with OS (informed scheduling)
  - Slow to create, manipulate, synchronize

- User-level threads
  - Fast to create, manipulate, synchronize
  - Not integrated with OS (uninformed scheduling)

- Understanding the differences between kernel and user-level threads is important
  - For programming (correctness, performance)
  - For test-taking
Kernel and User Threads

- Or use both kernel and user-level threads
  - Can associate a user-level thread with a kernel-level thread
  - Or, multiplex user-level threads on top of kernel-level threads

- Java Virtual Machine (JVM) (also pthreads)
  - Java threads are user-level threads
  - On older Unix, only one “kernel thread” per process
    - Multiplex all Java threads on this one kernel thread
  - On NT, modern Unix
    - Can multiplex Java threads on multiple kernel threads
    - Can have more Java threads than kernel threads
    - Why?
User and Kernel Threads

Multiplexing user-level threads on a single kernel thread for each process

Multiplexing user-level threads on multiple kernel threads for each process
Implementing Threads

- Implementing threads has a number of issues
  - Interface
  - Context switch
  - Preemptive vs. non-preemptive
  - Scheduling
  - Synchronization (next lecture)

- Focus on user-level threads
  - Kernel-level threads are similar to original process management and implementation in the OS
  - What you will be dealing with in Nachos
  - Not only will you be using threads in Nachos, you will be implementing more thread functionality
Sample Thread Interface

- `thread_fork(procedure_t)`
  - Create a new thread of control
  - Also `thread_create()`, `thread_setstate()`

- `thread_stop()`
  - Stop the calling thread; also `thread_block`

- `thread_start(thread_t)`
  - Start the given thread

- `thread_yield()`
  - Voluntarily give up the processor

- `thread_exit()`
  - Terminate the calling thread; also `thread_destroy`
Thread Scheduling

- The thread scheduler determines when a thread runs
- It uses queues to keep track of what threads are doing
  - Just like the OS and processes
  - But it is implemented at user-level in a library
- Run queue: Threads currently running (usually one)
- Ready queue: Threads ready to run
- Are there wait queues?
  - How would you implement thread_sleep(time)?
Non-Preemptive Scheduling

- Threads voluntarily give up the CPU with `thread_yield`

```c
Ping Thread
while (1) {
    printf("ping\n");
    thread_yield();
}
```

```c
Pong Thread
while (1) {
    printf("pong\n");
    thread_yield();
}
```

- What is the output of running these two threads?
Wait a second. How does thread_yield() work?

The semantics of thread_yield are that it gives up the CPU to another thread

- In other words, it context switches to another thread

So what does it mean for thread_yield to return?

- It means that another thread called thread_yield!

Execution trace of ping/pong

- printf("ping\n");
- thread_yield();
- printf("pong\n");
- thread_yield();
- ...
thread_yield() {
    thread_t old_thread = current_thread;
    current_thread = get_next_thread();
    append_to_queue(ready_queue, old_thread);
    context_switch(old_thread, current_thread);
    return;
}

- The magic step is invoking context_switch()
- Why do we need to call append_to_queue()?
Thread Context Switch

- The context switch routine does all of the magic
  - Saves context of the currently running thread (old_thread)
    » Push all machine state onto its stack (*not* its TCB)
  - Restores context of the next thread
    » Pop all machine state from the next thread’s stack
  - The next thread becomes the current thread
  - Return to caller as new thread

- This is all done in assembly language
  - It works **at** the level of the procedure calling convention, so it cannot be implemented using procedure calls
  - See code/threads/switch.s in Nachos
Preemptive Scheduling

- Non-preemptive threads have to voluntarily give up CPU
  - A long-running thread will take over the machine
  - Only voluntary calls to thread_yield(), thread_stop(), or thread_exit() causes a context switch
- Preemptive scheduling causes an involuntary context switch
  - Need to regain control of processor asynchronously
  - Use timer interrupt
  - Timer interrupt handler forces current thread to “call” thread_yield
    » How do you do this?
  - Nachos is non-preemptive in OS, preemptive among processes
    » See use of thread->yieldOnReturn in code/machine/interrupt.cc
Threads Summary

- The operating system as a large multithreaded program
  - Each process executes as a thread within the OS
- Multithreading is also very useful for applications
  - Efficient multithreading requires fast primitives
  - Processes are too heavyweight
- Solution is to separate threads from processes
  - Kernel-level threads much better, but still significant overhead
  - User-level threads even better, but not well integrated with OS
- Now, how do we get our threads to correctly cooperate with each other?
  - Synchronization…
Next time...

- Read Chapter 6.1—6.6