

15-213
"The Class That Gives CMU Its Zip!"

Introduction to Computer Systems

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Topics:

- Theme
- Five great realities of computer systems
- How this fits within CS curriculum

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Course Theme

Abstraction is good, but don't forget reality!

Courses to date emphasize abstraction

- Abstract data types
- Asymptotic analysis

These abstractions have limits

- Especially in the presence of bugs
- Need to understand underlying implementations

Useful outcomes

- Become more effective programmers
 - Able to find and eliminate bugs efficiently
 - Able to tune program performance
- Prepare for later "systems" classes
 - Compilers, Operating Systems, Networks, Computer Architecture

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Great Reality #1

Int's are not Integers, Float's are not Reals

Examples

- Is $x^2 \geq 0$?
 - Float's: Yes!
 - Int's:
 - » `65535 * 65535 --> -131071` (On most machines)
 - » `65535L * 65535 --> 4292836225` (On Alpha)
- Is $(x + y) + z = x + (y + z)$?
 - Unsigned & Signed Int's: Yes!
 - Float's:
 - » `(1e10 + -1e10) + 3.14 --> 3.14`
 - » `1e10 + (-1e10 + 3.14) --> 0.0`

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Computer Arithmetic

Does not generate random values

- Arithmetic operations have important mathematical properties

Cannot assume "usual" properties

- Due to finiteness of representations
- Integer operations satisfy "ring" properties (usually)
 - Commutativity, associativity, distributivity
- Floating point operations satisfy "ordering" properties
 - Monotonicity, values of signs

Observation

- Need to understand which abstractions apply in which contexts
- Important issues for compiler writers and serious application programmers

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Great Reality #2

You've got to know assembly

Chances are, you'll never write program in assembly

- Compilers are much better & patient at this than you are

Understanding assembly key to machine-level execution model

- Behavior of programs in presence of bugs
 - High-level language model breaks down
- Tuning program performance
 - Understanding sources of program inefficiency
- Implementing system software
 - Compiler has machine code as target
 - Operating systems must manage process state

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Great Reality #3

Memory Matters

Memory is not unbounded

- It must be allocated and managed
- Many applications are memory dominated

Memory referencing bugs especially pernicious

- Effects are distant in both time and space

Memory performance is not uniform

- Cache and virtual memory effects can greatly affect program performance
- Adapting program to characteristics of memory system can lead to major speed improvements

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Memory Referencing Bug Example

```
main ()
{
    long int a[2];
    double d = 3.14;
    a[2] = 1073741824; /* Out of bounds reference */
    printf("d = %.15g\n", d);
    exit(0);
}
```

	Alpha	MIPS	Sun
-g	5.30498947741318e-315	3.1399998664856	3.14
-O	3.14	3.14	3.14

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Memory Referencing Errors

C and C++ do not provide any memory protection

- Out of bounds array references
- Invalid pointer values
- Abuses of malloc/free

Can lead to nasty bugs

- Whether or not bug has any effect depends on system and compiler
- Action at a distance
 - Corrupted object logically unrelated to one being accessed
 - Effect of bug may be first observed long after it is generated

How can I deal with this?

- Program in Java, Lisp, or ML
- Understand what possible interactions may occur
- Use or develop tools to detect referencing errors
 - E.g., Purify

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Memory Performance Example

Implementations of Matrix Multiplication

- Multiple ways to nest loops

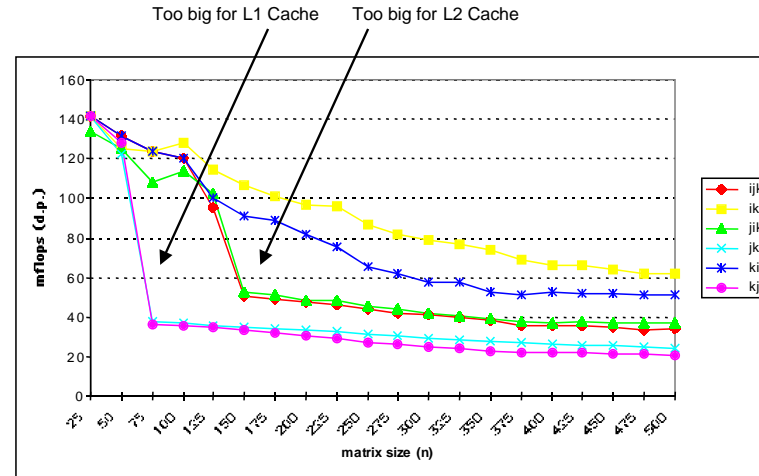
```

/* ijk */
for (i=0; i<n; i++) {
  for (j=0; j<n; j++) {
    sum = 0.0;
    for (k=0; k<n; k++)
      sum += a[i][k] * b[k][j];
    c[i][j] = sum;
  }
}
    
```

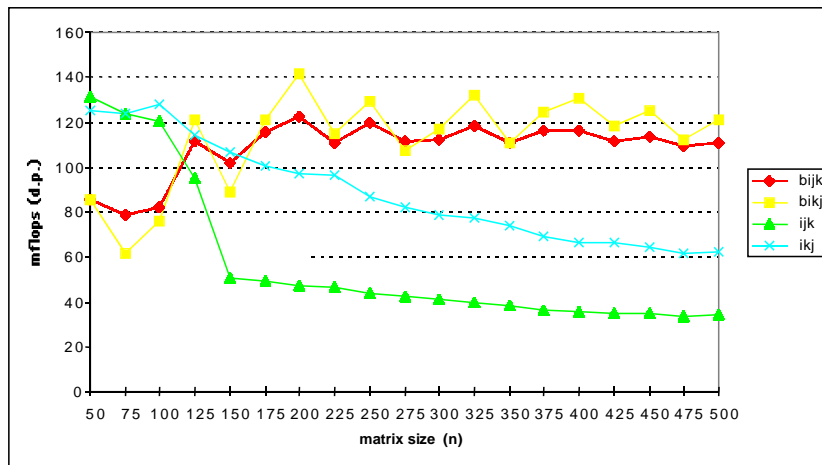
```

/* jik */
for (j=0; j<n; j++) {
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    sum = 0.0;
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      sum += a[i][k] * b[k][j];
    c[i][j] = sum;
  }
}
    
```

Matmult Performance (Alpha 21164)



Blocked matmult perf (Alpha 21164)



Great Reality #4

There's more to performance than asymptotic complexity

Constant factors matter too!

- Easily see 10:1 performance range depending on how code written
- Must optimize at multiple levels: algorithm, data representations, procedures, and loops

Must understand system to optimize performance

- How programs compiled and executed
- How to measure program performance and identify bottlenecks
- How to improve performance without destroying code modularity and generality

Great Reality #5

Computers do more than execute programs

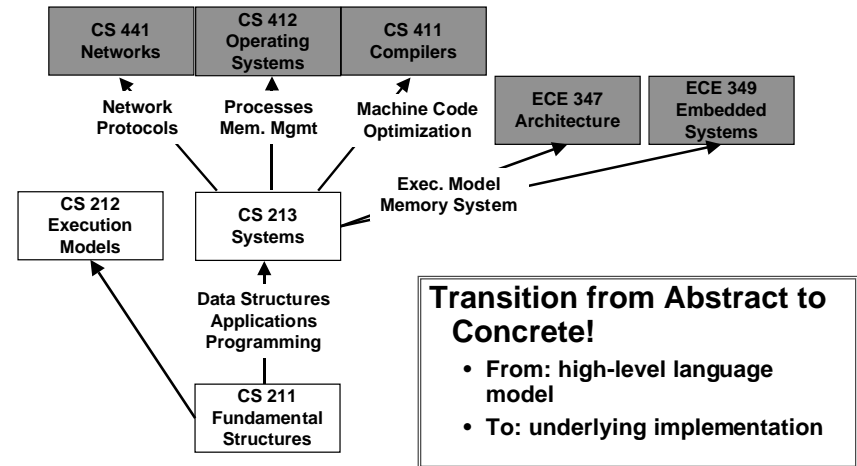
They need to get data in and out

- I/O system critical to program reliability and performance

They communicate with each other over networks

- Many system-level issues arise in presence of network
 - Concurrent operations by autonomous processes
 - Coping with unreliable media
 - Cross platform compatibility
 - Complex performance issues

Role within Curriculum



Course Perspective

Most Systems Courses are Builder-Centric

- **Computer Architecture**
 - Design pipelined processor in Verilog
- **Operating Systems**
 - Implement large portions of operating system
- **Compilers**
 - Write compiler for simple language
- **Networking**
 - Implement and simulate network protocols

Course Perspective (Cont.)

Our Course is Programmer-Centric

- Purpose is to show how by knowing more about the underlying system, one can be more effective as a programmer
- Enable you to
 - Write programs that are more reliable and efficient
 - Incorporate features that require hooks into OS
 - » E.g., concurrency, signal handlers
- Not just a course for dedicated hackers
 - We bring out the hidden hacker in everyone
- Cover material in this course that you won't see elsewhere