RACE CONDITIONS & SYNCHRONIZATION

Lecture 23 – CS2110 – Fall 2015

Announcements

- A7 due on Sunday
- See Piazza for corrections to the starter code and our solution to A6
- Lots of office hours, including over the weekend
  - Gries 1-3pm
  - Foster 3-4pm
- A8 out next week
- Prelim #2 next Thursday
- Please fill out P2Conflict **today**!

Reminder

- A “race condition” arises if two threads try and read and write the same data
- In such cases it is possible that we could see the data “in the middle” of being updated
    - A “race condition”: correctness depends on the update racing to completion without the reader managing to glimpse the in-progress update
    - Synchronization (also known as mutual exclusion) solves this

Java Synchronization (Locking)

```
private Stack<String> stack = new Stack<String>();

public void doSomething() {
   synchronized (stack) {
      if (stack.isEmpty()) return;
      String s = stack.pop();
   }
   //do something with s...
}
```

`synchronized` block

- Put critical operations in a **`synchronized`** block
- The **`stack`** object acts as a lock
- Only one thread can own the lock at a time

Java Synchronization (Locking)

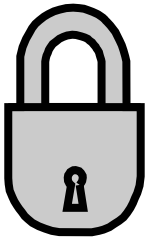
- You can lock on any object, including `this`

```
public synchronized void doSomething() {
    ...
}
```

behaves the same as...

```
public void doSomething() {
    synchronized (this) {
        ...
    }
}
```

How locking works

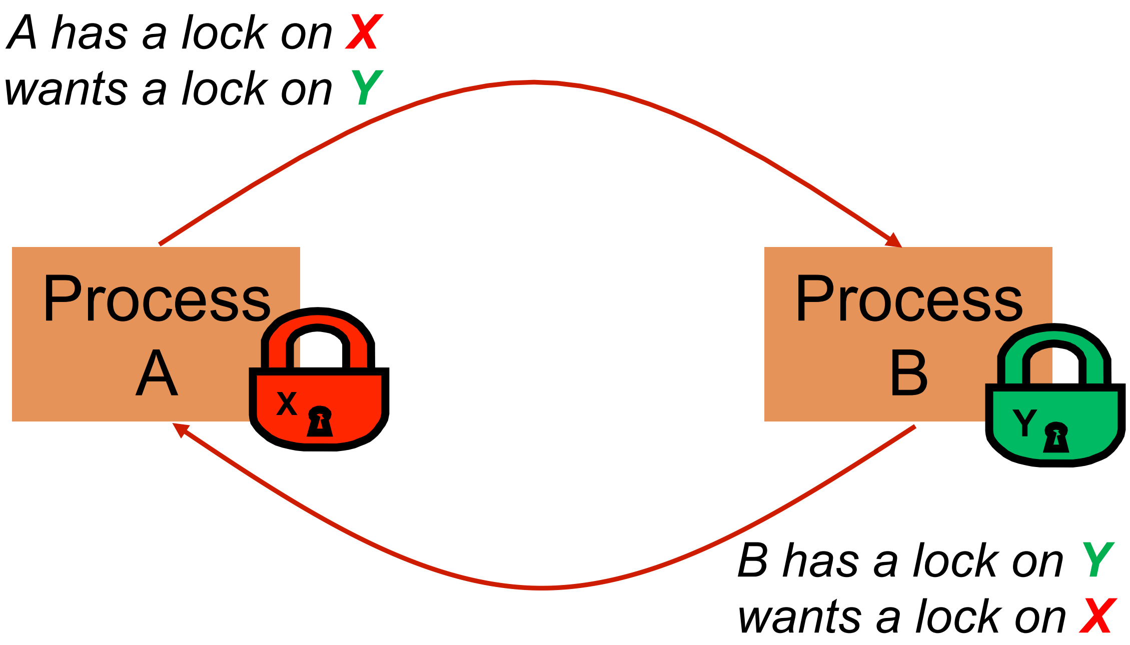


- Only one thread can “hold” a lock at a time
  - If several request the same lock, the Java runtime decides which one gets it
- The lock is released when the thread leaves the synchronization block
  - synchronized(someObject) { *protected code* }
  - The protected code has a *mutual exclusion* guarantee: At most one thread can be in it
- When released, another thread can acquire the lock

Locks are associated with objects

- Every Object has its own built-in lock
  - Just the same, some applications prefer to create special classes of objects to use just for locking
  - This is a stylistic decision and you should agree on it with your teammates, or learn the company policy if you work at a company
- A piece of code is said to be “thread safe” if it can handle multiple threads using it… otherwise it is “unsafe”

Visualizing deadlock



A has a lock on X
wants a lock on Y

Process A

Process B

B has a lock on Y
wants a lock on X

Deadlocks always involve cycles

- They can include two or more threads or processes in a waiting cycle
- Other properties:
    - The locks need to be mutually exclusive (no sharing of the objects being locked)
    - The application won't give up and go away (no timer associated with the lock request)
    - There are no mechanisms for one thread to take locked resources away from another thread – no "preemption"

"... drop that mouse or you'll be down to 8 lives"

Dealing with deadlocks

- We recommend designing code to either
  - Acquire a lock, use it, then promptly release it, or
  - … acquire locks in some "fixed" order

- Example, suppose that we have objects a, b, c, …
- Now suppose that threads sometimes lock sets of objects but always do so in alphabetical order
  - Can a lock-wait cycle arise?
  - … without cycles, no deadlocks can occur!

Higher-level abstractions

- Locking is a low-level way to deal with synchronization
  - A specific mechanism… very nuts-and-bolts

- So many programmers work with higher level concepts. Sort of like ADTs for synchronization
  - We'll just look at one example today
  - There are many other alterantives
  - Take CS 4410 to learn more…

A producer/consumer example

- Thread A produces loaves of bread and puts them on a shelf with capacity K
  - For example, maybe K=10
- Thread B consumes loaves by taking them off the shelf
  - Thread A doesn't want to overload the shelf
  - Thread B doesn't wait to leave with empty arms

producer

shelves

consumer

Producer/Consumer example

```
class Bakery {
    int nLoaves = 0;   // Current number of waiting loaves
    final int K = 10;  // Shelf capacity

    public synchronized void produce() {
       while(nLoaves == K) this.wait();  // Wait until not full
       ++nLoaves;
       this.notifyAll();                 // Signal: shelf not empty
    }

    public synchronized void consume() {
       while(nLoaves == 0) this.wait();  // Wait until not empty
       --nLoaves;
       this.notifyAll();                 // Signal: shelf not full
    }
}
```

Things to notice

- Wait needs to wait on the same object that you used for synchronizing (in our example, `this`, which is this instance of the `Bakery`)
- Method `notify` wakes up just one waiting thread, `notifyAll` wakes all of them up
- We used a `while` loop because we can't predict exactly which thread will wake up "next"

Bounded Buffer

- Here we take our producer/consumer and add a notion of passing something from the producer to the consumer
  - For example, producer generates strings
  - Consumer takes those and puts them into a file

- Why would we do this?
  - Keeps the computer more steadily busy

Bounded Buffer example

```
class BoundedBuffer<T> {
    int putPtr = 0, getPtr = 0;  // Next slot to use
    int available = 0;           // Items currently available
    final int K = 10;            // Buffer capacity
    T[] buffer = new T[K];
    public synchronized void produce(T item) {
        while(available == K) this.wait();  // Wait until not full
        buffer[putPtr++ % K] = item;
        ++available;
        this.notifyAll();                   // Signal: not empty
    }
    public synchronized T consume() {
        while(available == 0) this.wait();  // Wait until not empty
        --available;
        T item = buffer[getPtr++ % K];
        this.notifyAll();                   // Signal: not full
        return item;
    }
}
```

In an ideal world…

- Bounded buffer allows producer and consumer to both run concurrently, with neither blocking
  - This happens if they run at the same average rate
  - … and if the buffer is big enough to mask any brief rate surges by either of the two

- But if one does get ahead of the other, it waits
  - This avoids the risk of producing so many items that we run out of computer memory for them. Or of accidentally trying to consume a non-existent item.

Trickier example

- Suppose we want to use locking in a BST
    - Goal: allow multiple threads to search the tree
    - But don't want an insertion to cause a search thread to throw an exception

Code we’re given is thread unsafe

```
class BST<T> {
    String name;      // Name of this node
    T value;     // Value of associated with that name
    BST<T> left, right;  // Children of this node

    // Constructor
    public void BST(String who, T what) { name = who; value = what; }

    // Returns value if found, else null
    public T get(String goal) {
        if(name.equals(goal)) return value;
        if(name.compareTo(goal) < 0) return left==null? null: left.get(goal);
        return right==null? null: right.get(goal);
    }

    // Updates value if name is already in the tree, else adds new BST node
    public void put(String goal, T value) {
        if(name.equals(goal)) { this.value = value; return; }
        if(name.compareTo(goal) < 0) {
            if(left == null) { left = new BST<T>(goal, value); return; }
            left.put(goal, value);
        } else {
            if(right == null) { right = new BST<T>(goal, value); return; }
            right.put(goal, value);
        }
    }
}
```

Attempt #1

- Just make both put and get synchronized:
  - public synchronized Object get(…) { … }
  - public synchronized void put(…) { … }

- Let's have a look….

Safe version: Attempt #1

```
class BST<T> {
    String name;      // Name of this node
    T value;     // Value of associated with that name
    BST<T> left, right;  // Children of this node

    // Constructor
    public void BST(String who, Twhat) { name = who; value = what; }

    // Returns value if found, else null
    public synchronized T get(String goal) {
        if(name.equals(goal)) return value;
        if(name.compareTo(goal) < 0) return left==null? null: left.get(goal);
        return right==null? null: right.get(goal);
    }

    // Updates value if name is already in the tree, else adds new BST node
    public synchronized void put(String goal, T value) {
        if(name.equals(goal)) { this.value = value; return; }
        if(name.compareTo(goal) < 0) {
            if(left == null) { left = new BST<T>(goal, value); return; }
            left.put(goal, value);
        } else {
            if(right == null) { right = new BST<T>(goal, value); return; }
            right.put(goal, value);
        }
    }
}
```

Attempt #1

- Just make both put and get synchronized:
  - public synchronized Object get(…) { … }
  - public synchronized void put(…) { … }

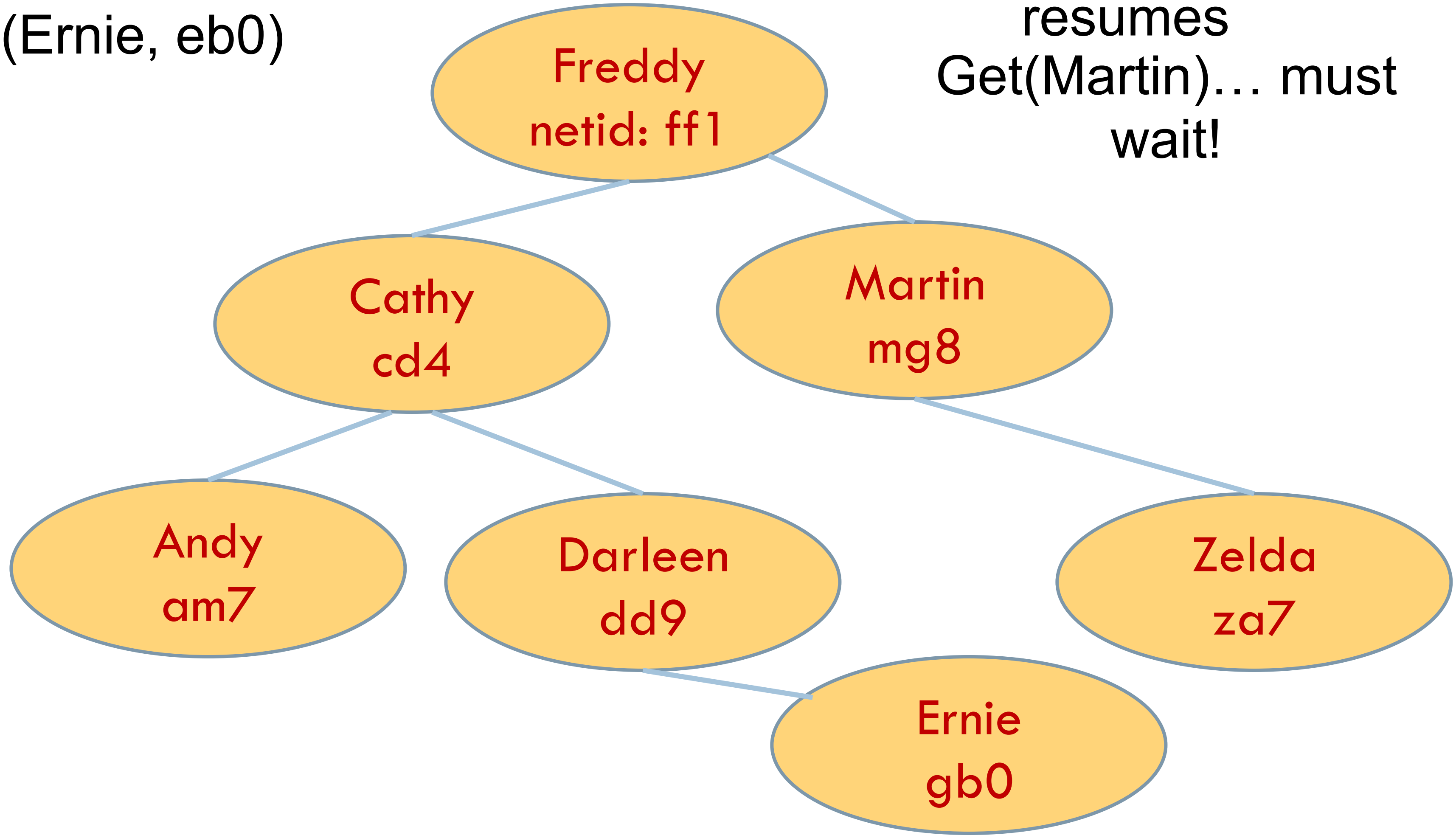
- This works but it kills ALL concurrency
  - Only one thread can look at the tree at a time
  - Even if all the threads were doing “get”!

Visualizing attempt #1

Put(Ernie, eb0)

Get(Martin)… resumes

Get(Martin)… must wait!



Attempt #2

- put uses synchronized in method declaration
  - So it locks every node it visits
- get tries to be fancy:

```
// Returns value if found, else null
public T get(String goal) {
    synchronized(this) {
      if(name.equals(goal)) return value;
      if(name.compareTo(goal) < 0) return left==null? null: left.get(goal);
      return right==null? null: right.get(goal);
    }
}
```

- Actually this is identical to attempt 1! It only looks different but in fact is doing exactly the same thing

Attempt #3

```
// Returns value if found, else null
public T get(String goal) {
    boolean checkLeft = false, checkRight = false;
    synchronized(this) {
      if(name.equals(goal)) return value;
      if(name.compareTo(goal) < 0) {
              if (left==null) return null; else checkLeft = true;
      } else {
              i                                             true;
      }
    }
    if (checkLeft) return left.get(goal);
    if (checkRight) return right.get(goal);

    /* Never executed but keeps Java happy */ return null;
}
```

relinquishes lock on **`this`** – next lines are "unprotected"

- Risk: "get" (read-only) threads sometimes look at nodes without locks, but "put" always updates those same nodes.
- Hence, this is unsafe...

Attempt #4

```
// Returns value if found, else null
public T get(String goal) {
    BST<T> checkLeft = null, checkRight = null;
    synchronized(this) {
      if(name.equals(goal)) return value;
      if(name.compareTo(goal) < 0) {
              if (left==null) return null; else checkLeft = left;
      } else {
              if(right==null) return null; else checkRight = right;
      }
    }
    if (checkLeft != null) return checkleft.get(goal);
    if (checkRight != null) return checkright.get(goal);

    /* Never executed but keeps Java happy */ return null;
}
```

- This version is safe: only accesses the shared variables left and right while holding locks
- In fact it should work (I think)

Attempt #3 illustrates risks

- The hardware itself actually needs us to use locking and attempt 3, although it looks right in Java, could actually malfunction in various ways
  - Issue: put updates several fields:
    - parent.left (or parent.right) for its parent node
    - this.left and this.right and this.name and this.value
  - When locking is used correctly, multicore hardware will correctly implement the updates
  - But if you look at values without locking, as we did in Attempt #3, hardware can behave oddly!

Another Example: Simple Counter

```
Class Counter {
  private static int counter = 0;
  public static int getCount() {
    return counter++;
  }
}
```

Using Locks...

```
Class Counter {
  private static int counter = 0;

  public static synchronized int getCount() {
    return counter++;
  }
}
```

Using Concurrent Collections...

```
import java.util.concurrent.atomic.*;

public class Counter {
  private static AtomicInteger counter;

  public Counter() {
    counter = new AtomicInteger(0);
  }

  public static int getCount() {
    return counter.getAndIncrement();
  }
}
```

More tricky things to know about

- With priorities Java can be very annoying
  - ALWAYS runs higher priority threads before lower priority threads if scheduler must pick
  - The lower priority ones might never run at all

- Consequence: risk of a “priority inversion”
  - High priority thread t1 is waiting for a lock, t2 has it
  - Thread t2 is runnable, but never gets scheduled because t3 is higher priority and “busy”

Summary

- Use of multiple processes and multiple threads within each process can exploit concurrency
  - Which may be real (multicore) or "virtual" (an illusion)
- But when using threads, beware!
  - Must lock (synchronize) any shared memory to avoid nondeterminism and race conditions
  - Yet synchronization also creates risk of deadlocks
  - Even with proper locking concurrent programs can have other problems such as "livelock"
- Serious treatment of concurrency is a complex topic (covered in more detail in cs3410 and cs4410)
- Nice tutorial at

  `http://docs.oracle.com/javase/tutorial/essential/concurrency/index.html`