CS 455: INTRODUCTION TO DISTRIBUTED SYSTEMS

[THREADS]

Threads block when they can’t get that lock
Wanna have your threads stall?
Go ahead, synchronize it all
The antidote to this liveness pitfall?
Keeping the lock scope small

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Frequently asked questions from the previous class survey

- User thread stacks use virtual memory, so why worry?
- Should we never use join()? Can it cause a deadlock?
- Does a thread release locks when it terminates?
- What’s a good reason to interrupt a thread?
- Is it common to terminate threads by throwing unchecked exceptions?
- What if we have correct implementations of suspend() and resume()?
  - Can we then use it? No!
Topics covered in this lecture

- Data synchronization
- Synchronized blocks
- Lock fairness
- Wait-notify

Heisenbugs

- Term coined by ACM Turing Award winner Jim Gray
  - Pun on the name of Werner Heisenberg
  - Act of observing a system, alters its state!
- Describes a particular class of bugs
  - Those that disappear or change behavior when you try to examine them
- Multithreaded programs are a common source of Heisenbugs
What about regular bugs?

- Sometimes referred to as Bohr bugs
  - Deterministic
  - Generally much easier to diagnose

Two friends plan to meet at Starbucks
But there are two Starbucks on College Avenue

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>@ the First Starbucks Store</th>
<th>@ the Second Starbucks Store</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12:10 A is looking for friend B</td>
<td>B is Looking for friend A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:15 A leaves for the second store</td>
<td>B leaves for the first store</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:20 B arrives at store</td>
<td>A arrives at store</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:30 B is Looking for friend A</td>
<td>A is looking for friend B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:40 B leaves for the second store</td>
<td>A leaves for the first store</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Both friends are now frustrated and undercaffeinated!
Why sharing data between threads is problematic

- **Race conditions**
- Threads attempt to access data more or less *simultaneously*
  - A thread may change the value of data that some other thread is operating on
Example code with race condition

```java
public class MyThread extends Thread {
    private byte[] values;
    private int position;

    public void modifyData(byte[] newValues, int newPosition) {
        ... Modify values and position
    }

    public void utilizeDataAndPerformFunction() {
        ... Use values and position
    }

    public void run() {
        ... Main logic
    }
}
```

In the previous snippet a race condition exists because ...

- The thread that calls `modifyData()` is accessing the same data as the thread that calls `utilizeDataAndPerformFunction()`

- `utilizeDataAndPerformFunction()` and `modifyData()` are not atomic
  - It is possible that `values` and `position` are changed while they are being used
What is atomic?

- The code cannot be interrupted during its execution
  - Accomplished in hardware or *simulated* in software
- Code that cannot be found in an *intermediate state*

Eliminating the race condition using the synchronized keyword

- If we declared both `modifyData()` and `utilizeDataAndPerformFunction()` as *synchronized*?
  - Only one thread gets to call *either* method at a time
    - Only one thread accesses data at a time
  - When one thread calls one of these methods, while another is executing one of them?
    - The second thread must *wait*
Example code with no race conditions by using the synchronized keyword

```java
public class MyThread extends Thread {
    private byte[] values;
    private int position;

    public void synchronized modifyData(byte[] newValues, int newPosition) {
        ... Modify values and position
    }

    public void synchronized utilizeDataAndPerformFunction() {
        ... Use values and position
    }

    public void run() {
        ... Main logic
    }
}
```

Revisiting the mutex lock

- **Mutually exclusive lock**
- If two threads try to grab a mutex?
  - Only one succeeds
- In Java every object has an associated lock
When a method is declared synchronized …

- The thread that wants to execute the method must acquire a lock.
- Once the thread has acquired the lock?
  - It executes method and releases the lock.
- When a method returns, the lock is released.
  - Even if the return is because of an exception.

Locks and objects

- There is only one lock per object.
- If two threads call synchronized methods of the same object?
  - Only one can execute immediately.
  - The other has to wait until the lock is released.
Another code snippet to look at ...

```java
public class MyThread extends Thread {
    private boolean done = false;
    
    public void run() {
        while (!done) {
            // Main logic
        }
    }
    
    public void setDone(boolean isDone) {
        done = isDone;
    }
}
```

Can’t we just synchronize the two methods as we did previously?

- If we synchronized both `run()` and `setDone()`?
  - `setDone()` would never execute!

- The `run()` method does not exit until the `done` flag is set
  - But the `done` flag cannot be set because `setDone()` cannot execute till `run()` completes

- Uh oh …
The problem stems from the scope of the lock

- **Scope of a lock**
  - Period between grabbing and releasing a lock

- Scope of the `run()` method is too large!
  - Lock is grabbed and never released

- We will look at techniques to *shrink the scope* of the lock

- But let's look at another solution for now

Let's look at operations performed on the data item (done)

- The `setDone()` method stores a value into the flag

- The `run()` method reads the value

- In our previous example:
  - Threads were accessing *multiple* pieces of data
  - No way to update multiple data items *atomically* without the synchronized keyword
But Java specifies that the loading and storing of variables is atomic

- Except for long and double variables
- The `setDone()` should be atomic
  - The `run()` method has only one read operation of the data item
- The race condition should not exist
  - But why is it there?

Threads are allowed to hold values of variables in registers

- When one thread changes the value of the variable?
  - Another thread may not see the changed variable
- This is particularly true in loops controlled by a variable
  - Looping thread loads value of variable in register and does not notice when value is changed by another thread
Two approaches to solving this

- Providing setter and getter methods for variable and using the `synchronized` keyword
  - *When lock is acquired*, temporary values stored in registers are *flushed* to main memory

- The `volatile` keyword
  - Much cleaner solution

If a variable is marked as `volatile`

- Every time it is used?
  - Must be read from main memory

- Every time it is written?
  - Must be written to main memory

- Load and store operations are *atomic*
  - Even for `long` and `double` variables
Some more about volatile variables

- Prior to JDK 1.2 variables were always read from main memory
  - Using volatile variables was moot

- Subsequent versions introduced memory models and optimizations

Synchronization and the volatile keyword

- Can be used only when operations use a single load and store
  - Operations like ++, --?
    - Load-change-store ...

- The volatile keyword forces the JVM to not make temporary copies of a variable

- Declaring an array volatile?
  - The reference becomes volatile
  - The individual elements are not volatile
Synchronizing methods

- Not possible to execute the same method in one thread while ...
  - Method is running in another thread

- If two different synchronized methods in an object are called?
  - They both require the lock of the same object

- Two or more synchronized methods of the same object can never run in parallel in separate threads
A lock is based on a specific instance of an object

- Not on a particular method or class
- Suppose we have 2 objects: `objectA` and `objectB` with synchronized methods `modifyData()` and `utilizeData()`
- One thread can execute `objectA.modifyData()` while another executes `objectB.utilizeData()` in parallel
  - Two different locks are grabbed by two different threads
  - No need for threads to wait for each other

How does a synchronized method behave in conjunction with an unsynchronized one?

- Synchronized methods try to grab the object lock
  - Only 1 synchronized method in a object can run at a time ... provides data protection
- Unsynchronized methods
  - Don’t grab the object lock
  - Can execute at any time ... by any thread
    - Regardless of whether a synchronized method is running
For a given object, at any time ...

- **Any number** of unsynchronized methods may be executing

- But only **1 synchronized method** can execute

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Synchronizing static methods

- A lock can be obtained for each class
  - The **class lock**

- The class lock is the *object lock* of the **Class object** that models the class
  - There is only 1 *Class object* per class
  - Allows us to achieve synchronization for static methods
Object locks and class locks

- Are **not operationally related**

- The class lock can be grabbed and released **independently** of the object lock

- If a non-static synchronized method calls a static synchronized method?
  - It acquires both locks
The synchronized keyword

- **Serializes accesses** to synchronized methods in an object
- Not suitable for *controlling lock scope* in certain situations
- Can be *too primitive* in some cases

Many synchronization schemes in J2SE 5.0 onwards implement the **Lock** interface

- Two important methods
  - `lock()` and `unlock()`
- Similar to using the synchronized keyword
  - Call `lock()` at the start of the method
  - Call `unlock()` at the end of the method
- Difference: we have an *actual object* that **represents** the lock
  - Store, pass around, or discard
Semantics of the using Lock

- If another thread owns the lock
  - Thread that attempts to acquire the lock must wait until the other thread calls unlock()

- Once the waiting thread acquires the lock, it returns from the lock() method

Using the Lock interface

```java
class DataOperator {
    private Lock dataLock = new ReentrantLock();
    public void modifyData(byte[] newValues, int newPosition) {
        try {
            dataLock.lock();
            ... Modify values and position
        } finally {
            dataLock.unlock();
        }
    }

class DataOperator {
    private Lock dataLock = new ReentrantLock();
    public void utilizeDataAndPerformFunction() {
        try {
            dataLock.lock();
            ... Use values and position
        } finally {
            dataLock.unlock();
        }
    }
}
```
Advantages of using the Lock interface

- Grab and release locks \textit{whenever} we want
- Now possible for \textit{two objects to share the same lock}
  - Lock is no longer attached to the object whose method is being called
- Can be \textit{attached to data, groups of data, etc.}
  - Not objects containing the executing methods

Advantages of explicit locking

- We can move them anywhere to \textit{adjust lock scope}
  - Can span from a line of code to a scope that encompasses multiple methods and objects
- Lock at scope \textit{specific to problem}
  - Not just the object
Much of what we accomplish with the `Lock` we can do so with the `synchronized` keyword

```java
public class DataOperator {
    public void modifyData(byte[] newValues, int newPosition) {
        synchronized(this) {
            ... Modify values and position
        }
    }

    public void utilizeDataAndPerformFunction() {
        synchronized(this) {
            ... Use values and position
        }
    }
}
```
Synchronized methods vs. Synchronized Blocks

- Possible to use only the **synchronized block** mechanism to synchronize whole method
- You decide when it’s best to synchronize a block of code or the whole method
- **RULE:** Establish as small a lock scope as possible

The **Lock** interface [java.util.concurrent.locks]

```java
public interface Lock {
    public void lock();
    public void lockInterruptibly()
        throws InterruptedException;
    public boolean tryLock();
    public boolean tryLock(long time, TimeUnit unit)
        throws InterruptedException;
    public void unlock();
    public Condition newCondition();
}
```
Lock Fairness

- ReentrantLock allows locks to be granted fairly
  - Locks are granted as close to arrival order as possible
  - Prevents lock starvation from happening

Possibilities for granting locks:
1. First-come-first-served
2. Allows servicing the maximum number of requests
3. Do what’s best for the platform

THREAD NOTIFICATIONS
Objects and communications

- Every object has a lock
- Every object also includes mechanisms that allow it to be a waiting area
  - Allows communication between threads

Conditions

- One thread needs a condition to exist
  - Assumes another thread will create that condition
- When another thread creates the condition?
  - It notifies the first thread that has been waiting for that condition
wait(), notify() and the Object class

```java
public class Object {
    public void wait();
    public void wait(long timeout);
    public void notify();
}
```

- Wait-and-notify mechanisms are available for every object
  - Accomplished by `method invocations`
- Synchronized mechanism is handled by using a `keyword`
Wait-and-notify relate to synchronization, but ...

- It is more of a **communications mechanism**
- Allows one thread to communicate to another that a **condition** has occurred
  - Does not specify **what** that specific condition is

Can wait-and-notify replace the synchronized mechanism?

- No
- **Does not** solve the race condition that the synchronized mechanism solves
- Must be used in **conjunction** with the synchronized lock
  - Prevents race condition that exists in the **wait-and-notify** mechanism itself
A code snippet that uses wait-notify to control the execution of the thread

```java
public class Tester implements Runnable {
    private boolean done = true;

    public synchronized run() {
        while (true) {
            if (done) wait();
            else { ... Logic ... wait(100);}
        }
    }

    public synchronized void setDone(boolean b) {
        done = b;
        if (!done) notify();
    }
}
```

About the `wait()` method

- When `wait()` executes, the synchronization lock is **released**
  - By the JVM

- When a notification is received?
  - The thread needs to **reacquire** the synchronization lock before returning from `wait()`
Integration of wait-notify and synchronization

- **Tightly integrated** with the synchronization lock
  - Feature not directly available to us
  - Not possible to implement this: native method

- This is typical of approach in other libraries
  - *Condition variables* for Solaris and POSIX threads require that a mutex lock be held

Details of the race condition in the wait-notify mechanism

- The first thread *tests the condition* and confirms that it must wait
- The second thread *sets the condition*
- The second thread calls *notify()*
  - This *goes unheard* because the first thread is not yet waiting
- The first thread calls *wait()*
How does the potential race condition get resolved?

- To call `wait()` or `notify()`
  - Obtain lock for the object on which this is being invoked

- It seems as if the lock has been held for the entire `wait()` invocation, but ...
  1. `wait()` releases lock prior to waiting
  2. Reacquires the lock just before returning from `wait()`

Is there a race condition during the time `wait()` releases and reacquires the lock?

- `wait()` is **tightly integrated** with the lock mechanism

- Object lock is **not freed until** the waiting thread is in a *state in which it can receive notifications*
  - System prevents race conditions from occurring here
If a thread receives a notification is it guaranteed that condition is set?

- No
- Prior to calling `wait()`), test condition while holding lock
- Upon returning from `wait()` retest condition to see if you should `wait()` again

What if `notify()` is called and no thread is waiting?

- Wait-and-notify mechanism has no knowledge about the condition about which it notifies
- If `notify()` is called when no other thread is waiting?
  - The notification is lost
What happens when more than 1 thread is waiting for a notification?

- Language specification does not define which thread gets the notification
  - Based on JVM implementation, scheduling and timing issues

- No way to determine which thread will get the notification

**notifyAll()**

- All threads that are waiting on an object are notified
- When threads receive this, they must work out
  ① Which thread should continue
  ② Which thread(s) should call `wait()` again
    - All threads wake up, but they **still have to reacquire the object lock**
    - Must wait for the lock to be freed
The contents of this slide-set are based on the following references
