Condition Variables

CMPU 334 – Operating Systems
Jason Waterman
Condition Variables

• There are many cases where we wish to have coordination between threads

• A thread wishes to check whether a condition is true before continuing its execution

• Example:
  • A parent thread might wish to check whether a child thread has completed
  • This is often called a join()
A Parent Waiting For Its Child

```c
1   void *child(void *arg) {
2       printf("child\n");
3       // XXX how to indicate we are done?
4       return NULL;
5   }

6   int main(int argc, char *argv[]) {
7       printf("parent: begin\n");
8       pthread_t c;
9       Pthread_create(&c, NULL, child, NULL); // create child
10      // XXX how to wait for child?
11       printf("parent: end\n");
12       return 0;
13   }
```

What we would like to see here is:

```
parent: begin
child
parent: end
```
Parent waiting fore child: Spin-based Approach

- This is hugely **inefficient** as the parent spins and **wastes CPU time**
- How should a thread wait for a condition?
How to wait for a condition

• Condition variable – an object used to wait for some condition to be true
  • Waiting on the condition
    • An explicit queue that threads can put themselves on when some state of execution is not as desired
    • The thread is no longer running, freeing up the CPU to run another thread
  • Signaling on the condition
    • Some other thread, *when it changes said state*, can wake one of those waiting threads and allow them to continue
Pthread Condition Variables

• Declare condition variable

```c
pthread_cond_t c;
```

• Proper initialization is required

```c
pthread_cond_t c = PTHREAD_COND_INITIALIZER; // Declaration and initialization
or
pthread_cond_init(pthread_cond_t *c, pthread_attr_t *attr) // Initialization with attributes
```

• Operation

```c
pthread_cond_wait(pthread_cond_t *c, pthread_mutex_t *m); // wait()
pthread_cond_signal(pthread_cond_t *c); // signal()
```

• The `wait()` call takes a `mutex` as a parameter
  • The `wait()` call release the lock and put the calling thread to sleep
  • When the thread wakes up, it must re-acquire the lock
  • It is assumed the thread is holding the lock with `signal()` is called
Integers done = 0;

void thr_exit() {
    pthread_mutex_lock(&m);
    done = 1;
    pthread_cond_signal(&c);
    pthread_mutex_unlock(&m);
}

void child(void *arg) {
    printf("child\n");
    thr_exit();
    return NULL;
}

void thr_join() {
    pthread_mutex_lock(&m);
    while (done == 0)
        pthread_cond_wait(&c, &m);
    pthread_mutex_unlock(&m);
}

int main(int argc, char *argv[]) {
    printf("parent: begin\n");
    pthread_t p;
    Pthread_create(&p, NULL, child, NULL);
    thr_join();
    printf("parent: end\n");
    return 0;
}
Parent waiting for Child: Use a condition variable

• Parent:
  • Create the child thread and continues running itself
  • Call into thr_join() to wait for the child thread to complete
    • Acquire the lock
    • Check if the child is done
    • Put itself to sleep by calling wait()
    • Release the lock

• Child:
  • Print the message “child”
  • Call thr_exit() to wake the parent thread
    • Grab the lock
    • Set the state variable done
    • Signal the parent thus waking it
The Importance of the State Variable

• Can you think of a scenario where we could run into problems?
• Imagine the case where the child runs immediately
  • The child will signal, but there is no thread asleep on the condition
  • When the parent runs, it will call wait and be stuck
  • No thread will ever wake it, sad!

```c
void thr_exit() {
    Pthread_mutex_lock(&m);
    Pthread_cond_signal(&c);
    Pthread_mutex_unlock(&m);
}

void thr_join() {
    Pthread_mutex_lock(&m);
    Pthread_cond_wait(&c, &m);
    Pthread_mutex_unlock(&m);
}
```

```c
int main(int argc, char *argv[]) {
    printf("parent: begin\n");
    pthread_t p;
    Pthread_create(&p, NULL, child, NULL);
    thr_join();
    printf("parent: end\n");
    return 0;
}
```
Another poor implementation

```
1 int done = 0;
2
3 void thr_exit() {
4     done = 1;
5     Pthread_cond_signal(&c);
6 }

7 void thr_join() {
8     if (done == 0)
9         Pthread_cond_wait(&c);
10    }
```

• Can you find the bug? (assume you don’t need a lock to signal and wait)
• The issue here is a **race condition**
  • The parent calls `thr_join()`
    • The parent checks the value of `done`
    • It will see that it is 0 and try to go to sleep
    • Just before it calls `wait` to go to sleep, the parent is interrupted and the child runs
  • The child changes the state variable `done` to 1 and signals
    • But no thread is waiting and thus no thread is woken
    • When the parent runs again, it sleeps forever, **sad!**
The Producer / Consumer (Bound Buffer) Problem

• **Producer**
  • *Produce* data items
  • Wish to place data items in a buffer

• **Consumer**
  • Grab data items out of the buffer to *consume* them in some way

• Example: Multi-threaded web server
  • *A producer* puts HTTP requests in to a work queue
  • *Consumer threads* take requests out of this queue and process them
Producer/Consumer (Version 1)

- Put -- Only put data into the buffer when `count` is zero
  - i.e., when the buffer is empty
- Get -- Only get data from the buffer when `count` is one
  - i.e., when the buffer is full
- **Producer** -- puts an integer into the shared buffer `loops` number of times
- **Consumer** -- gets the data out of that shared buffer
Producer/Consumer: Single CV and If Statement

- A single condition variable `cond` and associated lock `mutex`
- Works if there is one producer and one consumer
- What happens if that is not the case (e.g., 2 consumers, 1 producer)
  - C1 runs and waits, P1 puts an item in and signals C1
  - Before C1 gets to run, C2 sneaks in and consumes the item, setting count to 0
  - When C1 runs, no more items left, sad!
- Recheck your state (in a while loop) upon returning from wait!

```c
1       cond_t cond;
2       mutex_t mutex;
3
4   void *producer(void *arg) {        
5       int i;
6   for (i = 0; i < loops; i++) {      
7       Pthread_mutex_lock(&mutex);    
8       if (count == 1)               
9       Pthread_cond_wait(&cond, &mutex); 
10      put(i);
11     Pthread_cond_signal(&cond);    
12     Pthread_mutex_unlock(&mutex);  
13   }
14 }

16  void *consumer(void *arg) {        
17     int i;
18   for (i = 0; i < loops; i++) {      
19     Pthread_mutex_lock(&mutex);    
20     if (count == 0)               
21     Pthread_cond_wait(&cond, &mutex); 
22     int tmp = get();            
23     Pthread_cond_signal(&cond);  
24     Pthread_mutex_unlock(&mutex); 
25     printf("%d\n", tmp);       
26   }
27 }
```
Thread Trace: Broken Solution

• The problem arises for a simple reason:
  • After the producer woke $T_{c1}$, but before $T_{c1}$ ever ran, the state of the bounded buffer changed by $T_{c2}$

• There is no guarantee that when the woken thread runs, the state will still be as desired $\rightarrow$ **Mesa semantics**
  • Virtually every system ever built employs Mesa semantics

• **Hoare semantics** provides a stronger guarantee that the woken thread will run immediately upon being woken

• Recheck your state (in a while loop) upon returning from wait!
This fixes our previous problem, however, this code still has a bug

- C1 runs, finds the buffer empty and waits, C2 runs, finds the buffer empty and waits
- P1 runs, produces an item, signals, and waits because buffer is full
- C1 wakes (from P1 signal) and consumes the buffer, signals, and then waits
  - Who gets the signal, P1 or C2?
- C2 wakes, finds the buffer empty and waits – everyone is sleeping, sad!

```c
1  cond_t cond;
2  mutex_t mutex;
3
4 void *producer(void *arg) {
5    int i;
6    for (i = 0; i < loops; i++) {
7        Pthread_mutex_lock(&mutex);
8        while (count == 1)
9            Pthread_cond_wait(&cond, &mutex);
10        put(i);
11        Pthread_cond_signal(&cond);
12        Pthread_mutex_unlock(&mutex);
13    }
14 }

16 void *consumer(void *arg) {
17    int i;
18    for (i = 0; i < loops; i++) {
19        Pthread_mutex_lock(&mutex);
20        while (count == 0)
21            Pthread_cond_wait(&cond, &mutex);
22        int tmp = get();
23        Pthread_cond_signal(&cond);
24        Pthread_mutex_unlock(&mutex);
25        printf("%d\n", tmp);
26    }
27 }
```
The single Buffer Producer/Consumer Solution

- Use **two** condition variables and while loops
  - **Producer** threads wait on the condition `empty`, and signals `fill`
  - **Consumer** threads wait on `fill` and signal `empty`

```
1 cond_t empty, fill;
2 mutex_t mutex;
3
4 void *producer(void *arg) {
5     int i;
6     for (i = 0; i < loops; i++) {
7         Pthread_mutex_lock(&mutex);
8         while (count == 1)
9             Pthread_cond_wait(&empty, &mutex);
10         put(i);
11         Pthread_cond_signal(&fill);
12         Pthread_mutex_unlock(&mutex);
13     }
14}
15
16 void *consumer(void *arg) {
17     int i;
18     for (i = 0; i < loops; i++) {
19         Pthread_mutex_lock(&mutex);
20         while (count == 0)
21             Pthread_cond_wait(&fill, &mutex);
22         int tmp = get();
23         Pthread_cond_signal(&empty);
24         Pthread_mutex_unlock(&mutex);
25         printf("%d\n", tmp);
26     }
27 }
```
The Final Producer/Consumer Solution

- More **concurrency** and **efficiency**
  - Add more buffer slots
  - Allow concurrent production or consuming to take place
  - Reduce context switches

```c
1 int buffer[MAX];
2 int fill = 0;
3 int use = 0;
4 int count = 0;
5
6 void put(int value) {
7     buffer[fill] = value;
8     fill = (fill + 1) % MAX;
9     count++;
10 }
11
12 int get() {
13     int tmp = buffer[use];
14     use = (use + 1) % MAX;
15     count--;
16     return tmp;
17 }
```

```c
1 cond_t empty, fill;
2 mutex_t mutex;
3
4 void *producer(void *arg) {
5     for (int i = 0; i < loops; i++) {
6         Pthread_mutex_lock(&mutex);
7         while (count == MAX)
8             Pthread_cond_wait(&empty, &mutex);
9         put(i);
10         Pthread_cond_signal(&fill);
11         Pthread_mutex_unlock(&mutex);
12     }
13 }
14
15 void *consumer(void *arg) {
16     for (int i = 0; i < loops; i++) {
17         Pthread_mutex_lock(&mutex);
18         while (count == 0)
19             Pthread_cond_wait(&fill, &mutex);
20         int tmp = get();
21         Pthread_cond_signal(&empty);
22         Pthread_mutex_unlock(&mutex);
23         printf("%d\n", tmp);
24     }
25 }
```
Covering Conditions

• Assume we have implemented a multi-threaded memory allocator

• Also, assume there are zero bytes are currently free
  • Thread $T_a$ calls $\text{allocate}(100)$
  • Thread $T_b$ calls $\text{allocate}(10)$
  • Both $T_a$ and $T_b$ wait on the condition and go to sleep
  • Thread $T_c$ calls $\text{free}(50)$
  • Which waiting thread should be woken up?
Covering Conditions Example Code

```
1 // how many bytes of the heap are free?
2 int bytesLeft = MAX_HEAP_SIZE;
3
4 // need lock and condition too
5 cond_t c;
6 mutex_t m;
7
8 void *
9 allocate(int size) {
10   Pthread_mutex_lock(&m);
11   while (bytesLeft < size)
12     Pthread_cond_wait(&c, &m);
13   void *ptr = ...;  // get mem from heap
14   bytesLeft -= size;
15   Pthread_mutex_unlock(&m);
16   return ptr;
17 }
18
19 void free(void *ptr, int size) {
20   Pthread_mutex_lock(&m);
21   bytesLeft += size;
22   Pthread_cond_signal(&c); // whom to signal??
23   Pthread_mutex_unlock(&m);
24 }
```
Covering Conditions Solution

- **Solution:**
  - Replace `pthread_cond_signal()` with `pthread_cond_broadcast()`
  - `pthread_cond_broadcast()`
    - Wake up all waiting threads
  - **Cost:** too many threads might be woken up
  - Threads that shouldn’t be awake will simply wake up, re-check the condition, and then go back to sleep
Covering Conditions Solution Code

```c
// how many bytes of the heap are free?
int bytesLeft = MAX_HEAP_SIZE;

// need lock and condition too
cond_t c;
mutex_t m;

void * allocate(int size) {
    Pthread_mutex_lock(&m);
    while (bytesLeft < size)
        Pthread_cond_wait(&c, &m);
    void *ptr = ...;  // get mem from heap
    bytesLeft -= size;
    Pthread_mutex_unlock(&m);
    return ptr;
}

void free(void *ptr, int size) {
    Pthread_mutex_lock(&m);
    bytesLeft += size;
    Pthread_cond_broadcast(&c);  // wake up all the threads waiting
    Pthread_mutex_unlock(&m);
}
```
Condition Variable Summary

• We have a new **synchronization** primitive beyond locks:
  • Condition variables

• Allow for a thread to sleep when some program state is not as desired
  • Once asleep, another thread must wake up the thread by signal/broadcast

• Condition variables are used in conjunction with a lock
  • When waiting on the CV, the lock is (temporarily) given up
  • While returning from the wait, the thread re-acquires the lock

• When a thread is signaled, it may not wake up right away
  • The state of the world may have changed
  • Recheck your state (in a while loop) upon returning from wait if there is any chance the state may have changed