# Developing SimObjects in gem5



#### We will cover

- Development environment, code style, git branches
- The most simple SimObject
- Simple run script
- How to add parameters to a [SimObject]



#### Let's begin by building gem5

Let's build gem5 in the base **gem5** directory while we go through some basics. Do it by running the following commands.

```
cd gem5
scons build/NULL/gem5.opt -j$(nproc)
```



#### Some Basics on gem5's build system

gem5's build system is complicated

As we'll see in the coming sections, gem5 has a number of domain-specific languages and source-to-source compilers.

This means two things:

- 1. It's not always obvious what the final code is going to look like
- 2. Setting up the gem5 is build has many, many options.



#### Configuring the gem5 build

As we've seen, there are multiple ways to configure the gem5 build and this results in different binaries.

There are to categories of options:

- 1. Build-time configuration (e.g., what models to include in the binary)
- 2. Compiler configuration (e.g., optimizations, debug flags, etc.)

If you forget any of this

scons --help will explain the targets and Kconfig tools.



#### **Compiler configuration**

This is specified by the *suffix* of the gem5 binary you build. For example, <code>gem5.opt</code> is built with the "opt" configuration. The options are:

- [fast]: All optimizations, no debug symbols, most assertions are disabled.
  - Use this only after you have fully debugged your models.
  - Significant speedup over [opt] because the binary is smaller (~50 MiB)
- opt: Optimized build with debug symbols and all panics, assertions, etc. enabled.
  - This is the most common build target, but it's very large (~500 MiB)
  - Can use this with [gdb] but sometimes it will say "that variable is optimized away"
- debug: Minimal optimizations (-01) and all debug symbols.
  - Use this when you need to debug the gem5 code itself and opt doesn't work for you.
  - Much, much slower than [opt] (order 5-10x slower)

Remember, these options are for the *gem5* binary, not the simulated system. Choosing *fast* or *debug* will not affect the output of the simulator (unless there are bugs, of course).



#### **Build-time configuration**

There are many options for configuring the gem5 build.

Two ways to do this

- 1. Use the defaults found in gem5/build\_opts
- 2. Configure with Kconfig (the same tool the Linux kernel uses)



#### **Build\_opts**

Garnet\_standalone

ALL GCN3 X86 NULL\_MOESI\_hammer X86\_MESI\_Two\_Level ARM MIPS POWER X86\_MI\_example ARM\_MESI\_Three\_Level NULL RISCV X86 MOESI AMD Base ARM MESI Three Level HTM NULL MESI Two Level SPARC VEGA\_X86 ARM\_MOESI\_hammer NULL\_MOESI\_CMP\_directory

X86

In [build\_opts] you'll find a number of default options. Most of them are named [<ISA>\_<PROTOCOL>].

NULL\_MOESI\_CMP\_token

For example, [X86\_MESI\_Two\_Level] is the build option for the X86 ISA and with the MESI\_Two\_Level protocol.

You can also build multiple ISAs into a single binary (e.g., ALL), but you **cannot** build multiple Ruby coherence protocols into one binary.



#### **Using Kconfig**

Kconfig is a tool that allows you to configure the gem5 build interactively.

When using Kconfig, you first must create a build directory.

Note: This directory can have any name and live *anywhere* on your system.

Common practice is to create a directory called build in the gem5 source directory and to use a default from build\_opts.

scons defconfig build/my\_gem5/ build\_opts/ALL

In this case, we are using <code>build/m5\_gem5</code> as the build directory and <code>build\_opts/ALL</code> as the default configuration.



#### **Using Kconfig (cont.)**

Once you have created the build directory, you can run scons with the menuconfig target to get an interactive configuration tool.

```
scons menuconfig build/my_gem5/
```

<script src="https://asciinema.org/a/nMSV0wVOKNavHSJEt3I77jxyu.js" id="asciicast-nMSV0wVOKNavHSJEt3I77jxyu" async="true"></script>



#### Putting it all together

To build gem5, once you have a build directory set up and configured, you can run the following command.

```
scons build/my_gem5/gem5.opt -j$(nproc)
```

This will build the gem5 binary with the configuration you have set up. It will build the "opt" binary.

Note: gem5 takes a long time to build, so using multiple cores is important. I don't know how many cores you have, so I've used -j\$(nproc) to use all of them. You may want to use fewer cores if you're doing other things on your system.



#### gem5's Scons build system

There are two main types of files used to set up gem5's build:

- SConsctruct: Contains definitions of types of build targets.
  - All of the Sconstruct files are executed first.
  - Some code is also in [gem5/build\_tools]
  - To be honest, this code is confusing and not easy to trace.
- SConscript: Contains the build instructions for a file.
  - Defines what to build (e.g., which C++ files to compile).
  - You will mostly interact with these files.

We support *most* common OSes and *most* modern compilers. Fixing compiler errors in the SCons build is not straightforward.

We strongly encourage you to use **supported** compilers/OSes or use docker to build gem5.

You will not find the SCons documentation helpful. gem5 has customized it way too much.



## **SimObjects**



#### What is a SimObject?

SimObject is gem5's name for a simulated model. We use SimObject and its children classes (e.g. ClockedObject) to model computer hardware components. SimObject facilitates the following in gem5:

- Defining a model: e.g. a cache
- Parameterizing a model: e.g. cache size, associativity
- Gathering statistics: e.g. number of hits, number of accesses



#### **SimObject in Code**

In a gem5 build, each SimObject based class has 4 related files.

- [SimObject] declaration file: Python(ish) script (.py extension):
  - Represents the model at the highest level. Allows instantiation of the model and interfacing with the C++ backend. It defines the sets of parameters for the model.
  - **CAUTION**: You should not change parameter values (which we will learn about in the future) in this file if what you want to do is to reconfigure your SimObject.
- SimObject header file: C++ header file (.hh extension):
  - Declares the SimObject class in C++.
     Strongly tied to SimObject definition file.
- SimObject source file: C++ source file (.cc extension):
  - Implements the [SimObject] functionalities.
- SimObjectParams header file: Auto-generated C++ header file (.hh) from SimObject definition:
  - Declares a C++ struct storing all the parameters of the SimObject.



#### **HelloSimObject**

We will start building our first SimObject called HelloSimObject, and we will look at one of the SimObject files.

We will start with the following steps.

- 1. Write a definition file.
- 2. Write a header file.
- 3. Write a source file.
- 4. Write a Sconscript.
- 5. Compile.
- 6. Write a configuration script and run it.

Later, we'll do the following steps.

- 7. Add a parameter to the definition file.
- 8. Update the source file.
- 9. Compile.
- 10. Write a second configuration script and run it.



#### SimObject Definition File: Creating the Files

Let's create a python file for our SimObject under: <a href="mailto:src/bootcamp/hello-sim-object/HelloSimObject.py">src/bootcamp/hello-sim-object/HelloSimObject.py</a>

Since gem5 is still compiling, start by opening a new terminal.

```
PROBLEMS OUTPUT DEBUG CONSOLE TERMINAL PORTS COMMENTS

[ENUM STR] m5.objects.Cache, Clusivity -> NULL/enums/Clusivity.cc
```

Then, run the following commands in the base **gem5** directory:

```
cd gem5
mkdir src/bootcamp
mkdir src/bootcamp/hello-sim-object
touch src/bootcamp/hello-sim-object/HelloSimObject.py
```



#### SimObject Definition File: Importing and Defining

Open <a href="mailto:src/bootcamp/hello-sim-object/HelloSimObject.py">src/bootcamp/hello-sim-object/HelloSimObject.py</a> in your editor of choice.

```
In HelloSimObject.py, we will define a new class that represents our HelloSimObject. We need to import the definition of SimObject from m5.objects.SimObject. Add the following line to HelloSimObject.py to import the definition for SimObject.
```

```
from m5.objects.SimObject import SimObject
```

Let's add the definition for our new SimObject.

```
class HelloSimObject(SimObject):
    type = "HelloSimObject"

    cxx_header = "bootcamp/hello-sim-object/hello_sim_object.hh"
    cxx_class = "gem5::HelloSimObject"
```



#### SimObject Definition File: Deeper Look at What We Have Done

Let's take a deeper look at the few lines of code we have.

```
class HelloSimObject(SimObject):
    type = "HelloSimObject"

    cxx_header = "bootcamp/hello-sim-object/hello_sim_object.hh"
    cxx_class = "gem5::HelloSimObject"
```

- type is the type name for the SimObject in python.
- cxx\_header denotes the path to the C++ header file that declares the SimObject in C++.

  IMPORTANT: This path should be specified relative to gem5/src.
- [cxx\_class] is the name of your [SimObject] class in C++.

```
type, cxx_header, and cxx_class are keywords defined by the MetaSimObject metaclass. For a complete list of these keywords, look at <a href="mailto:src/python/m5/SimObject::MetaSimObject">src/python/m5/SimObject::MetaSimObject</a>. Some (if not all) of these keyword variables can be skipped. However, I strongly encourage you to at least define type, cxx_header, cxx_class.
```

#### Word to the Wise and A Little Peek into the Future

- I strongly recommend setting type to the name of the SimObject class in Python. I also recommend making sure that the C++ class name is the same as the Python class. You will see throughout the gem5 codebase that this is *not* always the case. However, I strongly recommend following this rule to rid yourself of any compilation headaches.
- We will see later that, when gem5 is built, there will be an **auto-generated** struct definition that stores the parameters of that class. The name of the struct will be determined by the name of the SimObject itself. For example, if the name of the SimObject is HelloSimObject, the struct storing its parameters will be HelloSimObjectParams. This definition will be in a file under <a href="mailto:params/HelloSimObject.hh">params/HelloSimObject.hh</a> in the build directory. This struct is used when instantiating an object of a SimObject in C++.



#### SimObject Header File: Creating the Files

Now, let's start building our <code>SimObject</code> in C++. First, let's create a file for our <code>SimObject</code> by running the following commands in the base <code>gem5</code> directory. <code>REMEMBER</code>: We set <code>cxx\_header</code> to <code>bootcamp/hello-sim-object/hello\_sim\_object.hh</code>. Therefore, we need to add the definition for <code>HelloSimObject</code> in a file with that same path.

touch src/bootcamp/hello-sim-object/hello\_sim\_object.hh

**VERY IMPORTANT**: If a SimObject class inherits from another SimObject class in Python, it should do the same in C++. For example, HelloSimObject inherits from SimObject in Python, so in C++, HelloSimObject should inherit from SimObject.

**VERY IMPORTANT**: SimObject parameter structs are inherited in the same way as the SimObject itself. For example, if HelloSimObject inherits from SimObject, HelloSimObjectParams inherits from SimObjectParams



#### SimObject Header File: First Few Lines

Open <u>src/bootcamp/hello-sim-object/hello\_sim\_object.hh</u> in your editor of choice and add the following code to it.

```
#ifndef __BOOTCAMP_HELLO_SIM_OBJECT_HELLO_SIM_OBJECT_HH__
#define __BOOTCAMP_HELLO_SIM_OBJECT_HELLO_SIM_OBJECT_HH__
#include "params/HelloSimObject.hh"
#include "sim/sim_object.hh"
namespace gem5
class HelloSimObject: public SimObject
  public:
    HelloSimObject(const HelloSimObjectParams& params);
};
```

#### SimObject Header File: Deeper Look into the First Few Lines

#### Things to note:

- \_\_BOOTCAMP\_HELLO\_SIM\_OBJECT\_HELLO\_SIM\_OBJECT\_HH\_\_ is an include guard to prevent double includes and cyclic includes. gem5's convention is that the name should reflect the location of the header file relative to the gem5/src directory, with \_ being the separator.
- [sim/sim\_object.hh] holds the definition for class [SimObject] in C++.
- As mentioned previously, [params/HelloSimObject.hh] is auto-generated and declares a struct named [HelloSimObjectParams].
- Every SimObject should be declared/defined inside the namespace gem5. Different categories of SimObjects may have their own specific namespace such as gem5::memory.
- Class [HelloSimObject] (C++ counterpart for [HelloSimObject] in Python) should inherit from class [SimObject] (C++ counterpart for [SimObject] in Python).
- Every SimObject class needs to define a constructor that takes exactly one argument. This argument must be a constant reference object of its parameter struct. Later on, we will look at gem5's internal process that instantiates objects from SimObject classes.



#### SimObject Source File: All the Code

Let's create a source file for [HelloSimObject] under: <a href="mailto:src/bootcamp/hello-sim-object/hello\_sim\_object.cc">src/bootcamp/hello-sim-object/hello\_sim\_object.cc</a>.

```
touch src/bootcamp/hello-sim-object/hello_sim_object.cc
```

Open <u>src/bootcamp/hello-sim-object/hello\_sim\_object.cc</u> in your editor of choice and add the following code to it.

#### SimObject Source File: Deeper Look

#### Things to note:

- gem5's convention for the order of include statements is as follows.
  - the header for the SimObject.
  - C++ libraries in alphabetical order.
  - other gem5 header files in alphabetical order.
- We only define [HelloSimObject's] constructor since that's the only function it has so far.
- The params object passed to the HelloSimObject::HelloSimObject constructor is an object of HelloSimObjectParams which inherits from SimObjectParams. This means params can then be passed on to the SimObject::SimObject constructor.



#### Let's Start Building: SConscript

We need to register our <code>SimObject</code> with gem5 for it to be built into the gem5 executable. At build time, <code>scons</code> (gem5's build system) will look through the gem5 directory searching for files named <code>SConscript</code>. <code>SConscript</code> files include instructions on what needs to be built. We will simply create a file called <code>SConscript</code> (inside our <code>SimObject</code> directory) by running the following command in the base <code>gem5</code> directory.

```
touch src/bootcamp/hello-sim-object/SConscript
```

Add the following to the **SConscript**.

```
Import("*")
SimObject("HelloSimObject.py", sim_objects=["HelloSimObject"])
Source("hello_sim_object.cc")
```



#### Let's Start Building: Deeper Look at the SConscript

#### Things to note:

- SimObject("HelloSimObject.py", sim\_objects=["HelloSimObject"]) registers HelloSimObject as a SimObject. The first argument denotes the name of the submodule that will be created under m5.objects. All the SimObjects listed under sim\_objects will be added to that submodule. In this example, we will be able to import HelloSimObject as m5.objects.HelloSimObject.HelloSimObject. It is possible to define more than one SimObject in one Python script. Only SimObjects listed under sim\_objects will be built.
  - Source("hello\_sim\_object.cc") adds [hello\_sim\_object.cc] as a source file to be compiled.



#### **Let's Compile**

Now, the only thing left to do before we can use [HelloSimObject] in our configuration script is to recompile gem5. Run the following command in the base **gem5** directory to recompile gem5.

```
scons build/NULL/gem5.opt -j$(nproc)
```

While we wait for gem5 to build, we will create a configuration script that uses HelloSimObject. In a separate terminal, let's create that script inside gem5/configs. First, let's create a directory structure for our scripts. Run the following set of commands in the base gem5 directory to create a clean structure.

```
mkdir configs/bootcamp
mkdir configs/bootcamp/hello-sim-object
touch configs/bootcamp/hello-sim-object/first-hello-example.py
```



#### Configuration Script: First Hello Example: m5 and Root

Open <u>configs/bootcamp/first-hello-example.py</u> in your editor of choice.

To run a simulation, we will need to interface with gem5's backend. [m5] will allow us to call on the C++ backend to instantiate SimObjects in C++ and simulate them. To import [m5] into your configuration script, add the following to your code.

```
import m5
```

Every configuration script in gem5 has to instantiate an object of class [Root]. This object represents the root of the device tree in the computer system that gem5 is simulating. To import [Root] into your configuration, add the following line to your script.

```
from m5.objects.Root import Root
```



# Configuration Script: First Hello Example: Creating Instances in Python

We will also need to import HelloSimObject into our configuration script. To do that, add the following line to your configuration script.

```
from m5.objects.HelloSimObject import HelloSimObject
```

The next thing we need to do is create a [Root] object and a [HelloSimObject] object. We can just add our [HelloSimObject] object as a child of the [root] object by using the [.] operator. Add the following lines to your configuration to do that.

```
root = Root(full_system=False)
root.hello = HelloSimObject()
```

**NOTE**: We are passing [full\_system=False] to [Root] because we are going to simulate in [SE] mode.



### Configuration Script: First Hello Example: Instantiation in C++ and Simulation

Next, let's tell gem5 to instantiate our SimObjects in C++ by calling instantiate from m5. Add the following line to your code to do that.

```
m5.instantiate()
```

Now that we have instantiated our SimObjects, we can tell gem5 to start the simulation. We do that by calling simulate from m5. Add the following line to your code to do that.

```
exit_event = m5.simulate()
```

At this point, the simulation will start. It will return an object that holds the status of the simulation. We can see why the simulation exits by calling <code>getCause</code> from <code>exit\_event</code>. Add the following line to your code to due that.

```
print(f"Exited simulation because: {exit_event.getCause()}.")
```

#### **Everything Everywhere All at Once**

Here is the complete version of our configuration script.

```
import m5
from m5.objects.Root import Root
from m5.objects.HelloSimObject import HelloSimObject
root = Root(full_system=False)
root.hello = HelloSimObject()
m5.instantiate()
exit_event = m5.simulate()
print(f"Exited simulation because: {exit_event.getCause()}.")
```



#### Simulate: First Hello Example

Run with the following command in the base **gem5** directory.

./build/NULL/gem5.opt ./configs/bootcamp/hello-sim-object/first-hello-example.py

```
root@codespaces-11c89e:/workspaces/2024/gem5# ./build/NULL/gem5.opt ./configs/
```



# A Little Bit of a Detour: m5.instantiate



# Detour: m5.instantiate: SimObject Constructors and Connecting Ports

Below is a snippet of code from the definition of [m5.instantiate]:

```
# Create the C++ sim objects and connect ports
    for obj in root.descendants():
        obj.createCCObject()
    for obj in root.descendants():
        obj.connectPorts()
```

When you call [m5.instantiate], first, all the [SimObjects] are created (i.e. their C++ constructors are called). Then, all the [port] connections are created. If you don't know what a [Port] is, don't worry. We will get to that in the later slides. For now, think of [ports] as a facility for [SimObjects] to send each other data.



#### **Detour: m5.instantiate: SimObject::init**

Here is a later snippet of code in [instantiate].

```
# Do a second pass to finish initializing the sim objects
for obj in root.descendants():
   obj.init()
```

In this step, gem5 will call the <code>init</code> function from every <code>SimObject</code>. <code>init</code> is a virtual function defined by the <code>SimObject</code> class. Every <code>SimObject</code> based class can override this function. The purpose of the <code>init</code> function is similar to the constructor. However, it is guaranteed that when the <code>init</code> function from any <code>SimObject</code> is called, all the <code>SimObjects</code> are created (i.e. their constructors are called).

Below is the declaration for init in src/sim/sim\_object.hh.

```
/* init() is called after all C++ SimObjects have been created and
* all ports are connected. Initializations that are independent
* of unserialization but rely on a fully instantiated and
* connected SimObject graph should be done here */
```

# Detour: m5.instantiate: SimObject::initState, SimObject::loadState

Below shows another snippet from instantiate:

```
# Restore checkpoint (if any)
   if ckpt_dir:
        _drain_manager.preCheckpointRestore()
        ckpt = _m5.core.getCheckpoint(ckpt_dir)
        for obj in root.descendants():
            obj.loadState(ckpt)
   else:
        for obj in root.descendants():
            obj.initState()
```

initState and loadState are the last step of initializing SimObjects. However, only one of them is called for every simulation. loadState is called to unserialize a SimObject's state from a checkpoint and initState is only called when starting a new simulation (i.e. not from a checkpoint).

# Detour: m5.instantiate: SimObject::initState, SimObject::loadState: C++

Below is the declaration for initState and loadState in src/sim/sim\_object.hh.

```
/* loadState() is called on each SimObject when restoring from a
* checkpoint. The default implementation simply calls
  unserialize() if there is a corresponding section in the
  checkpoint. However, objects can override loadState() to get
* other behaviors, e.g., doing other programmed initializations
* after unserialize(), or complaining if no checkpoint section is
* found. */
virtual void loadState(CheckpointIn &cp);
/* initState() is called on each SimObject when *not* restoring
* from a checkpoint. This provides a hook for state
* initializations that are only required for a "cold start". */
virtual void initState();
```



#### We Will See Later

You might have noticed that we also call m5.simulate in our configuration script. For now, HelloSimObject does nothing interesting during simulation. We will look into the details of simulate later.



#### **Params**



#### Let's Talk About Params: Model vs Params

As we mentioned earlier, gem5 allows us to parameterize our models. The whole set of parameter classes in gem5 is defined under m5.params, so let's go ahead and import everything from m5.params into our SimObject definition file. Open <a href="mailto:src/bootcamp/hello-sim-object/HelloSimObject.py">src/bootcamp/hello-sim-object/HelloSimObject.py</a> in your editor of choice and add the following line to it.

```
from m5.params import *
```

Now we just need to define a parameter for our [HelloSimObject]. Add the following line to the same file (the [HelloSimObject] definition) to do that. You should add this line under the definition of class HelloSimObject.

```
num_hellos = Param.Int("Number of times to say Hello.")
```

Make sure to take a look at <u>src/python/m5/params.py</u> for more information on different parameter classes and how you can add a parameter.

CAUTION: Params allow you to define a default value for them. I strongly recommend that you don't define defaults unless you really have to.

#### **HelloSimObject Definition File Now**

Here is what your HelloSimObject definition file should look like after the changes.

```
from m5.objects.SimObject import SimObject
from m5.params import *

class HelloSimObject(SimObject):
    type = "HelloSimObject"
    cxx_header = "bootcamp/hello-sim-object/hello_sim_object.hh"
    cxx_class = "gem5::HelloSimObject"

num_hellos = Param.Int("Number times to say Hello.")
```

**NOTE**: This change to [HelloSimObject.py] will now add an attribute to the [HelloSimObjectParams] the next time you compile gem5. This means that we can now access this parameter in the C++ code.



#### **Using num\_hellos**

Now, we're going to use <code>num\_hellos</code> to print <code>Hello from ...</code> multiple times in the constructor of the <code>HelloSimObject</code>. Open <code>src/bootcamp/hello-sim-object/hello\_sim\_object.cc</code> in your editor of choice.

Change HelloSimObject::HelloSimObject like below:

```
HelloSimObject::HelloSimObject(const HelloSimObjectParams& params):
    SimObject(params)
{
    for (int i = 0; i < params.num_hellos; i++) {
        std::cout << "i: " << i << ", Hello from HelloSimObject's constructor!" << std::endl;
    }
}</pre>
```

Make sure you don't delete include statments and any lines containing namespace gem5

**RECOMPILE**: All we need to do now is just recompile gem5. Simply do that by running the following command in the base **gem5** directory.

#### params/HelloSimObject.hh

As we mentioned before, the parameters of a SimObject are defined in an auto-generated header file with the SimObject's name.

Now that we have added a parameter to HelloSimObject, it should now be defined under HelloSimObjectParams in build/NULL/params/HelloSimObject.hh.

If you look at the header file, you should see something like this.



#### **Configuration Script: Second Hello Example**

Let's create a copy of <u>first-hello-example.py</u> named <u>second-hello-example.py</u>. Just run the following command in the base **gem5** directory to do this.

```
cp configs/bootcamp/hello-sim-object/first-hello-example.py configs/bootcamp/hello-sim-object/second-hello-example.py
```

Now, open <u>second-hello-example.py</u> in your editor of choice and change the code so that it passes a value for <code>num\_hellos</code> when you instantiate a <code>HelloSimObject</code>. Below is a full example of this.

```
import m5
from m5.objects.Root import Root
from m5.objects.HelloSimObject import HelloSimObject

root = Root(full_system=False)
root.hello = HelloSimObject(num_hellos=5)

m5.instantiate()
exit_event = m5.simulate()
```

#### Simulate: Second Hello Example

Run with the following command in the base **gem5** directory.

./build/NULL/gem5.opt ./configs/bootcamp/hello-sim-object/second-hello-example.py

```
root@codespaces-11c89e:/workspaces/2024/gem5# ./build/NULL/gem5.opt ./configs/boot
```



#### **Summary of Steps**

- Creating a basic SimObject
  - SimObject definition file (.py)
    - Defines the sets of parameters for the model.
  - ∘ [SimObject] header file (.hh)
    - Declares the SimObject class in C++.
  - SimObject source file (.cc extension):
    - Implements the SimObject functionalities.
  - SConscript
    - Register our SimObject with gem5.

- Auto-generated SimObjectParams header file (.hh)
  - Declares a C++ struct storing all the parameters of the SimObject.
- Configuration file (.py)
  - Instantiate SimObject and run the simulation.
- Adding a parameter (num\_hellos)
  - Update the <u>definition file</u> and the <u>source</u> file.
  - Write a new <u>configuration file</u>.
  - Re-compile and re-run.

