XOS : Experimental Operating System

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, we introduce you to an operating system project that helps undergraduate computer science students learn and understand the basics of building an operating system. The specification of XOS or Experimental Operating System has been laid out for students to build it from scratch in a bottom-up manner. XOS runs on a simulated machine hardware with a simplified innate instruction set and utilizes its own filesystem. Unlike other common instructional operating systems, the complete development environment including custom programming languages, debugger, file system interface and a highly instructive roadmap for sequentially building XOS is provided. A student building XOS will implement features like multiprogramming, file systems, process management and virtual memory management.

Categories and Subject Descriptors

K.3.2 [**Computers and Education**]: Computer and Information Science Education

General Terms

Design, Experimentation

Keywords

XOS, instructional operating system, experimental operating system

1. INTRODUCTION

Teaching operating systems has been a challenge at undergraduate level. To tackle this problem several instructional operating systems like Nachos[2], OS/161[3], Pintos[4], GeekOS[1] etc. have been developed by various universities. Nachos[2] has been one of the most popular instructional operating systems available and is being used in many institutes across the world [1]. Although Nachos implementation is fairly simple, it uses a mixed mode approach, where the operating system kernel is co-resident with the machine simulator and fused together as a single program. This does not provide an intuitive idea of the separation between these components. Moreover Nachos[2] and OS/161[3] runs on top of MIPS machine simulator. For these systems, a user's machine running on other platforms require cross compilers to MIPS. However there are few MIPS tools available for newer machine architectures, and hence there is a need for custom tools. Developing custom tools for MIPS is tedious. The authors of OS/161 has expressed plans of moving towards a different architecture due to lack of freely available tools [3]. XOS or Experimental Operating System, which we propose as a project for undergraduate operating systems laboratory courses, addresses these issues, by providing an original mahcine architecture known as XSM (Experimental String Machine) which has its own instruction set. This completely new and easy-to-understand instruction set helps avoid complexity associated with actual architecture and helps students to focus on the operating system aspects. The complete package including the high level languages for application as well as system programs, their cross-compilers to XSM machine architecture, simulator and debugger for XSM is provided for building XOS from scratch. In XOS, there is a clear differentiation between the machine and the operating system kernel like OS/161[3], which is more realistic towards the actual scenario and has its own set of tools.

Instructional operating systems like Minix and Xinu [1], provide a functional operating system on which modifications are to be done by students. Almost every other instructional operating system provides a skeleton of an operating system. However in XOS, only the specification has been laid out, and students learn to implement XOS from ground up using the tools provided. Most instructional operating systems use C/C++ or Java for programming. Knowledge of a particular high level language becomes necessary for programming the operating system. In this project, a simple high level language called APL (Application Programmer's Language) and its cross-compiler to XSM instruction set is provided to write user programs to test XOS, and an XSM machine dependant language called SPL(System Programmers Language and its cross-compiler is provided to program the OS itself. Most instructional operating systems use the UNIX filesystem for file management by the operating system. XOS is different from other instructional operating systems by providing its natve file system known as XFS (Experimental File System). An interface to between the UNIX filesystem and XFS filesystem is also provided.

XOS has features like multiprogramming, process management, filesystem and virtual memory. A sequence of stages are provided in an instructive roadmap which helps students to build XOS sequentially. Although certain simplifications have been made in XOS, compared to real systems like absence of blocking system calls, device management and file caching, the elementary and fundamental aspects of operating systems and data structures have been retained. Process synchronization have been completely left out because, the it will turn out to be too much overwhelming for a student in a 16 week semester. The further sections describe in detail the various components of XOS.

2. SYSTEM COMPONENTS

As explained in the previous section, an the primary components of the project include a simulated machine hardware (XSM), file system (XFS) and the operating system itself (XFS). Apart from the primary components, various tools have been provided as part of the development environement. They include languages like APL and SPL and their cross compilers to XSM instruction set is also provided, XSM debugger, and a UNIX-XFS interface to transfer files between a UNIX machine and XFS disk. The XFS disk is basically a file in UNIX machine which acts as a disk for XOS.

2.1 Experimental String Machine (XSM)

XOS runs on a simulated machine hardware called XSM or Experimental String Machine. XSM uses an easy-to-understand native 2-address instruction set. The various components of the machine include registers, memory, timer and the disk. A UNIX file simulates the disk for XSM.

XSM has a timer which triggers after fixed number of instructions as compared to a timer interval in real machines. An instruction triggered timer was preferred over a clock-triggered timer to ensure that the timer interrupt is not invoked in between the simulation of a single instruction. Thus, an instruction in XSM is always atomic. Instructions are executed one after the other in a non-pipelined manner.

XSM has a memory of 64 pages. Size of each page is 512 words. A word is the smallest addressable unit in XSM as compared to a byte in MIPS. XSM is a string machine, and each word is stored internally as strings of size 16 characters. However, the XSM supports two data types, integer and strings and has instructions for both the data types. There are two privilege modes in XSM, the user mode and kernel mode. Switching between modes is done by instructions.

2.2 Experimental File System (XFS)

The disk for XSM (which is a UNIX file) can be formatted using XFS or Experimental File System. XFS is the file system compatible with XOS. Since file system management is done by students building XOS, the disk organization must be easily understood and at the same time must give an insight on the data structures used in real file systems. Hence we chose to have a native file system for XOS.

The disk is formatted with this file system using the interface provided as part of the development environment. XFS is a simple file system with no directory structure. The data is organized into blocks of size equal to the page size in XSM memory. There are 512 blocks in XFS which holds the file and disk data structures, OS routines, user programs and data files. The various data structures in XFS include the Disk Free List which maintains information about used and unused blocks on the disk and the FAT or the File Allocation Table stores details of the files in the disk.

2.3 Experimental Operating System (XOS)

The specification for an Experimental Operating System or XOS is laid out to the students. In this project, students will build XOS to meet the specification. XOS is a simulated operating system which runs on top of XSM which is a simulated machine hardware. The OS kernel unlike Nachos [2] resides in the memory of the machine during runtime, and is not fused together with the simulated machine and compiled as a single program. The simulated disk formatted using XFS, permanently stores the OS routines and data structures like in real systems. The disk is simulated using a UNIX file. This system is close to real systems and the abstractions are easy to understand.

The various components of the operating system include routines like OS startup code, eight interrupt routines including the timer interrupt and the exception handler routine, memory-resident data structures like ready list of PCBs, per-process page tables

2.4 Development Tools

Because tables cannot be split across pages, the best placement for them is typically the top of the page nearest their initial cite. To ensure this proper "floating" placement of tables, use the environment **table** to enclose the table's contents and the table caption. The contents of the table itself must go in the **tabular** environment, to be aligned properly in rows and columns, with the desired horizontal and vertical rules. Again, detailed instructions on **tabular** material is found in the *LaTeX User's Guide*.

2.4.1 Application Programmer's Language (APL)

Immediately following this sentence is the point at which Table 1 is included in the input file; compare the placement of the table here with the table in the printed dvi output of this document.

To set a wider table, which takes up the whole width of the page's live area, use the environment **table*** to enclose the table's contents and the table caption. As with a single-column table, this wide table will "float" to a location deemed more desirable. Immediately following this sentence is the point at which Table 2 is included in the input file; again, it is instructive to compare the placement of the table here with the table in the printed dvi output of this document.

2.4.2 System Programmer's Language (SPL)

Figure 1: A sample black and white graphic (.ps format) that has been resized with the `psfig` command.

Immediately following this sentence is the point at which Table 1 is included in the input file; compare the placement of the table here with the table in the printed dvi output of this document.

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2.4.3 XSM Debugger

Immediately following this sentence is the point at which Table 1 is included in the input file; compare the placement of the table here with the table in the printed dvi output of this document.

To set a wider table, which takes up the whole width of the page's live area, use the environment **table*** to enclose the table's contents and the table caption. As with a single-column table, this wide table will "float" to a location deemed more desirable. Immediately following this sentence is the point at which Table 2 is included in the input file; again, it is instructive to compare the placement of the table here with the table in the printed dvi output of this document.

2.4.4 XFS Interface

Immediately following this sentence is the point at which Table 1 is included in the input file; compare the placement of the table here with the table in the printed dvi output of this document.

To set a wider table, which takes up the whole width of the page's live area, use the environment **table*** to enclose the table's contents and the table caption. As with a single-column table, this wide table will "float" to a location deemed more desirable. Immediately following this sentence is the point at which Table 2 is included in the input file; again, it is instructive to compare the placement of the table here with the table in the printed dvi output of this document.

As was the case with tables, you may want a figure that spans two columns. To do this, and still to ensure proper "floating" placement of tables, use the environment **figure*** to enclose the figure and its caption. and don't forget to end the environment with figure*, not figure!

3. ROADMAP

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4. CONCLUSIONS

This paragraph will end the body of this sample document. Remember that you might still have Acknowledgments or Appendices; brief samples of these follow. There is still the Bibliography to deal with; and we will make a disclaimer about that here: with the exception of the reference to the LaTeX book, the citations in this paper are to articles which have nothing to do with the present subject and are used as examples only.

5. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This section is optional; it is a location for you to acknowledge grants, funding, editing assistance and what have you. In the present case, for example, the authors would like to thank Gerald Murray of ACM for his help in codifying this *Author's Guide* and the **.cls** and **.tex** files that it describes.

6. REFERENCES

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Table 1: Some Typical Commands

Command	A Number	Comments
`\alignauthor`	100	Author alignment
`\numberofauthors`	200	Author enumeration
`\table`	300	For tables
`\table*`	400	For wider tables