

Security in Objecte Oriented Database Management System

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Abstract

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1 INTRODUCTION

The data model for a general-purpose object-oriented database system attempts to model the "real-world" as a collection of objects, where each object in the "real-world" corresponds to one database object. These database objects can have a complex internal structure composed of other database objects to model the details of the "real-world" objects to which they correspond. Database objects such as these with a complex internal structure are sometimes called composite objects. The internal structure of an object is implemented using instance variables. An instance variable is nothing more than a named slot inside an object that can contain a value. This value may be a primitive data value (such as an integer number or a string of characters) or a pointer (object identifier) to another object. (Some systems do not distinguish between these two types of values all data is an object, including primitive numbers and character strings.) If the value of an instance variable is a pointer to another object, this object may in turn have instance variables pointing to other objects, and so on, to describe the internal structure of the "real-world" object being modeled.

A useful concept related to inheritance is abstract classes. An abstract class is an object class which will never contain objects. Instead, it is used in the inheritance hierarchy to define instance variables and methods that are in common among its subclasses. In this way, the instance variables and methods are defined once in the abstract class, and inherited by all the sub-classes rather than being defined individually in each.

Another aspect of an object-oriented data model (especially one that is behaviorally object oriented) is encapsulation. This means that the

internal state of an object the values of its instance variables is hidden from view outside the object, and is accessible only through the methods that have been defined for the object class. This feature of an object-oriented data model seems particularly useful for security enforcement and control of data integrity.

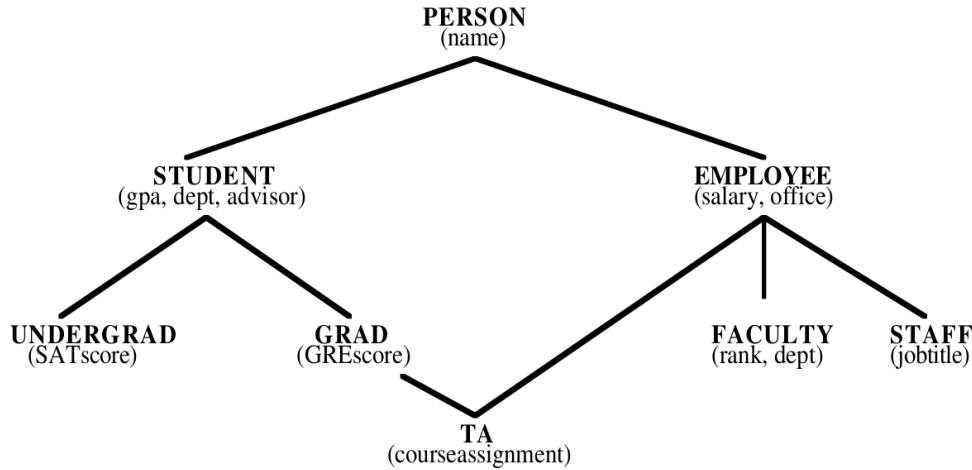


Figure 1: Inheritance Hierarchy Modeling University Staff

2 SECURITY CONSIDERATION

Several features of the object-oriented paradigm for database management make it attractive from a security point of view. First, an initial layer of protection is provided by the fact that all data is stored as values for instance variables that are encapsulated inside objects and available only through the methods defined for the object's class. These methods can be used to enforce security requirements for the data in the objects using techniques similar to those used in Hydra and other capability-based and abstract data type-based systems. In addition, the enriched semantic modeling capabilities of the object paradigm should allow the "real-world" and its security requirements to be modeled more naturally in the database. Finally, inheritance, at least on the surface, looks like

a useful tool for simplifying the specification of security requirements. The security requirements for an application can be defined for object classes near the top of the inheritance hierarchy, and inherited by all classes lower in the hierarchy.

Two orthogonal views of the objects in a database can be used for defining security access controls. The first is to view the objects as composite objects organized into object hierarchies where the root object corresponds to some "real-world" object, and the other objects in the hierarchy define its internal structure. This view is completely independent of the inheritance hierarchy for objects, and is the view that must be used in structurally object-oriented systems. In this view, access controls must be defined to deal with composite objects – that is, authorizing access to an object and all the other objects that define its internal structure.

The orthogonal view of objects for defining access controls is the view presented by the inheritance hierarchy. This view is not available in structurally object-oriented systems, but it becomes important in behaviorally and fully object-oriented systems. It is the view that must be used if inheritance is to be exploited for defining access controls and authorizations. Using this view, access controls and authorizations are defined for the classes and objects in the inheritance hierarchy. The security model must define the semantics for inheritance of these access controls through the inheritance hierarchy. As is discussed below, this is not always easy to do. In fully object-oriented systems, both views can be used simultaneously for defining security requirements. It remains to be seen from future research and experience whether this is a good idea, and how the two views can be coordinated.