Other Constraints and Assertions

“check” constraints

- We’ve seen a check clause on a user-defined domain:

```
create domain Grade as smallint
    default null
    check (value>=0 and value <=100);
```

- You can also define a check constraint
  - on an attribute
  - on the tuples of a relation
  - across relations

Attribute-based "check" constraints

- Defined with a single attribute and constrain its value (in every tuple).
- Can only refer to that attribute.
- Can include a subquery.
- Example:

```
create table Student (
  sID integer,
  program varchar(5) check
    (program in (select post from P)),
  firstName varchar(15) not null, ...);
```

- Condition can be anything that could go in a WHERE clause.

When they are checked

- Only when a tuple is inserted into that relation, or its value for that attribute is updated.
- If a change somewhere else violates the constraint, the DBMS will not notice. E.g.,
  - If a student's program changes to something not in table P, we get an error.
  - But if table P drops a program that some student has, there is no error.

“not null” constraints

- You can declare that an attribute of a table is NOT NULL.

```
create table Course(
   cNum integer,
   name varchar(40) not null,
   dept Department,
   wr boolean,
   primary key (cNum, dept));
```

- In practise, many attributes should be `not null`.
- This is a very specific kind of attribute-based constraint.

Tuple-based "check" constraints

- Defined as a separate element of the table schema, so can refer to *any* attributes of the table.
- Again, condition can be anything that could go in a `WHERE` clause, and can include a subquery.
- Example:

```
create table Student (
   sID integer,
   age integer, year integer,
   college varchar(4),
   check (year = age - 18),
   check college in
         (select name from Colleges));
```

When they are checked

- Only when a tuple is inserted into that relation, or updated.
- Again, if a change somewhere else violates the constraint, the DBMS will not notice.

How nulls affect "check" constraints

- A check constraint only fails if it evaluates to false.
- It is not picky like a WHERE condition.
- E.g.: `check (age > 0)`

age	Value of condition	CHECK outcome	WHERE outcome
19	TRUE	pass	pass
-5	FALSE	fail	fail
NULL	unknown	pass	fail

Example

- Suppose you created this table:

```
create table Frequencies(
    word varchar(10),
    num integer,
    check (num > 5));
```

- It would allow you to insert `('hello', null)` since `null` passes the constraint `check (num > 5)`
- If you need to prevent that, use a "not null" constraint.

```
create table Frequencies(
    word varchar(10),
    num integer not null,
    check (num > 5));
```

Naming your constraints

- If you name your constraint, you will get more helpful error messages.
- This can be done with any of the types of constraint we've seen.
- Add

  `constraint «name»`

  before the

  `check («condition»)`

Examples

```
create domain Grade as smallint
  default null
  constraint gradeInRange
      check (value>=0 and value <=100));

create domain Campus as varchar(4)
  not null
  constraint validCampus
    check (value in ('StG', 'UTM', 'UTSC'));

create table Offering(...
  constraint validCourseReference
  foreign key (cNum, dept) references Course);
```

- Order of constraints doesn't matter, and doesn't dictate the order in which they're checked.

Assertions

- Check constraints can't express complex constraints across tables, e.g.,
  - Every loan has at least one customer, who has an account with at least $1,000.
  - For each branch, the sum of all loan amounts < the sum of all account balances.
- Assertions are schema elements at the top level, so can express cross-table constraints:

```
create assertion (<name>) check (<predicate>);
```

Powerful but costly

- SQL has a fairly powerful syntax for expressing the predicates, including quantification.
- Assertions are costly because
  - They have to be checked upon every database update (although a DBMS may be able to limit this).
  - Each check can be expensive.
- Testing and maintenance are also difficult.
- So assertions must be used with great care.

Triggers

- Assertions are powerful, but costly.
- Check constraints are less costly, but less powerful.
- Triggers are a compromise between these extremes:
  - They are cross-table constraints, as powerful as assertions.
  - But you control the cost by having control over when they are applied.

The basic idea

- You specify three things.
  - Event: Some type of database action, e.g., `after delete on Courses` or `before update of grade on Took`
  - Condition: A boolean-valued expression, e.g., `when grade > 95`
  - Action: Any SQL statements, e.g., `insert into Winners values (sID)`

Reaction Policies

Example

- Suppose R = Took and S = Student.
- What sorts of action must simply be rejected?
- But a deletion or update with an sID that occurs in Took could be allowed ...

Possible policies

- `cascade`: propagate the change to the referring table
- `set null`: set the referring attribute(s) to null
- There are other options we won't cover.
  Many DBMSs don't support all of them.
- If you say nothing, the default is to forbid the change in the referred-to table.

Reaction policy example

- In the University schema, what should happen in these situations:
  - csc343 changes number to be 543
  - student 99132 is deleted
  - student 99132's grade in csc148 is raised to 85.
  - csc148 is deleted

Note the asymmetry

- Suppose table R refers to table S.
- You can define "fixes" that propogate changes backwards from S to R.
- (You define them in table R because it is the table that will be affected.)
- You cannot define fixes that propogate forward from R to S.

Syntax for specifying a reaction policy

- Add your reaction policy where you specify the foreign key constraint.
- Example:

```
create table Took (
   ...
   foreign key (sID) references Student
            on delete cascade
   ...
);
```

What you can react to

- Your reaction policy can specify what to do either
  - `on delete`, i.e., when a deletion creates a dangling reference,
  - `on update`, i.e., when an update creates a dangling reference,
  - or both. Just put them one after the other.
    Example:
    `on delete restrict on update cascade`

What your reaction can be

- Your policy can specify one of these reactions (there are others):
  - `restrict`: Don't allow the deletion/update.
  - `cascade`: Make the same deletion/update in the referring tuple.
  - `set null`: Set the corresponding value in the referring tuple to null.

Semantics of Deletion

- What if deleting a tuple violates a foreign key constraint?
- Example:

```
DELETE FROM Course
WHERE dept = 'CSC';
```

Semantics of Deletion

- What if deleting one tuple violates a foreign key constraint, but deleting others does not?

DDL Wrap-up

Updating the schema itself

- Alter: alter a domain or table

```
alter table Course
    add column numSections integer;
alter table Course
    drop column breadth;
```

- Drop: remove a domain, table, or whole schema

```
drop table course;
```

- How is that different from this?

```
delete from course;
```

- If you drop a table that is referenced by another table, you must specify "cascade"
- This removes all referring rows.

There's more to DDL

- For example, you can also define:
  - indices: for making search faster (we'll discuss these later).
  - privileges: who can do what with what parts of the database
- See csc443.