2019-09-04

Why is studying OS's interesting?

- Tradeoffs
  - Efficiency vs portability (or abstraction or convenience)
  - Power vs simplicity
  - Flexibility of use vs security
- Difficulty and uniqueness of task
  - You're writing bare metal C without the aid of any syscalls
- New hardware constantly opens up new opportunities for OS innovation

How is this course structured

- Lectures explore ideas in OS construction, the inner workings of xv6
- Labs exercises our understanding of the material
  - Labs are split between **system programming**, **os primitives**, and **os extras**
- Reading papers covers modern topics in OS construction
- There are **two** exams
  - Midterm (in class)
  - Final
- 6.828 vs 6.S081
  - 6.828 will be pure research topics in the future
  - 6.S081 will be the undergrad version that will be available in the future

Roles of operating systems

1. Abstract hardware features behind a simple interface
2. Multiplex/multitask programs
3. Isolation of programs from one another
4. Supply primitives for sharing between processes
5. Orchestration of sharing and isolation primitives in such a way that provides security and performance

Core ideas of developing operating systems

- **Abstraction** = the principle of
  - In operating systems, oftentimes abstractions are created that don't map neatly onto hardware features
    - e.g. a filesystem has concepts of permissions and distinctions between different types of data, but the disk is just a opaque binary storage

- **Kernel** = embodies the notion that the OS should be entirely separate from the programs that run on it
  - **User-space vs Kernel-space** = the idea that encapsulates this separation
    - User-space contains things like running programs, text editors, compilers, etc
    - Kernel-space contains things like process control, device drivers, file systems, and the code that directly talks to hardware
  - **System call interface** = the collection of syscalls that allow userspace programs to trigger desired functionalities in the kernel
    - **System call** = an instruction in program whose opcode does not exist in the CPU's ISA but does have meaning to an operating system
      - Recall from 6.004
    - Modern OS's have hundreds of system calls available
      - This class focuses on a much smaller core set that has existed for decades (*i.e.* POSIX)

xv6

- **xv6** = a UNIX-like OS that is small enough to understand completely
  - Borrows UNIX ideas like file descriptors
    - **File descriptor** = an integer that represents a process's ownership over a file or resource
      - 0 is always *stdin*
      - 1 is always *stdout*
      - A mapping between a proccess's file descriptors and their referent objects is maintained in a kernel table

Tale of two syscalls: fork and exec

- **fork** = a syscall that generates a complete copy of the execution state for the current process and then returns an integer that communicates which process follows
- **exec** = a syscall that overwrites the virtual address-space of the current process with the contents of a binary that is specified in a parameter
- The combination of these two, along with wait, allows you to build a shell
  - **wait** = a syscall that will return when a child process exits

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How do syscalls work?

- Syscalls have a one-to-one correspondence with actual routines in the kernel executable
    - *So, why not just call those methods from our program?*
        - Answer: isolation cannot be maintained with a simple routine call instruction

Isolation

- **Isolation** = the principle that processes that run in userland should not have the ability to interfere with each other's execution
    - This is achieved using a few techniques
        - **Address space** = the space of userland memory locations that a process can touch
        - **Privelege mode** = hardware support for conditionally enabling access to hardware based on a running program's privelege
        - **Well-written syscall code** = a kernel's implementation of the syscall interface is the main threat surface when isolation can be compromised

Tale of a syscall

- Issuing a syscall follows the same calling convention that normal procedure calls do
    - Arguments go into the registers a0-an
- `ecall` instruction does several things
    - Saves userspace PC into special register used exclusively for that purpose
    - Sets PC to an instruction address register that is populated by the kernel
        - That address points to the **trampoline**, the region of userspace memory that performs part of the transition to supervisor/kernel mode
            - The code in the trampoline backs up userspace execution state into another region of userspace memory caled the **trapframe**
    - Sets cpu to **supervisor mode**
        - **supervisor mode** = the level of hardware privelege that enables unrestricted access to hardware resources (*e.g.* memory)
- Once ecall moves execution to the trampoline, user execution state (registers, PC, *etc*) get backed up into the trapframe
- Once user execution state is saved to the trapframe, execution switches to `usertrap`, which is located in the kernel

    - This does some additional processing on the trapframe and then uncovers the reason why a usertrap was triggered (maybe a hardware exception, a syscall, or a timer interrupt) and dispatches to the correct piece of kernel handler code for that reason

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Shared Memory and Isolation

- The presence of multiple processes sharing one physical memory introduces difficulties enforcing isolation between processes
- Strategies for enforcing isolation
    - Construct programs in a way that ensures that memory boundaries are respected
        - Con: *What if someone writes a program that doesn't play nice with that?*
    - Use **virtual memory**
        - **Virtual memory** = a scheme for mapping virtual addresses to physical addresses using page tables
        - Con: some amount of hardwawre support is necessary for ensuring the translation is performed when it needs to happen
            - **MMU** = memory management unit; responsible for performing the translation

Benefits of virtual memory

- Because the resolution process only depends on state stored in physical memory, the kernel can directly manipulate that state to implement optimizations and features
    - *e.g.* COW, lazy allocation, *etc*