

# Project 3 Design Document

## Memory Allocation

Desmond Vehar - dvehar  
Dave Lazell - dlazell  
Neil Killeen - nkilleen  
Melanie Dickinson - mldickin

May 21, 2014

## Design

Our task was to write a wrapper around the `malloc()` and `free()` calls in order to detect problems with memory management such as leaking memory. By using a header file we include and by linking to our object file, a user program will be checked for common problems and various stats on the memory usage will be dumped upon exit.

Our program is split into three main sections:

1. `slug_malloc()`, the wrapper around `malloc()`
2. `slug_free()`, the wrapper around `free()`
3. `slug_memstats()`, for printing out stats on program exit

Via macro substitution in our header file, all calls to `malloc()` and `free()` will instead call our functions `slug_malloc()` and `slug_free()`. This will allow us to collect and store data about each memory allocation. The data stored for each allocation includes the current timestamp, the size of the allocated memory, the address of the allocated memory block, and the filename and line number of where the `malloc()` was located in the original program. All of this data is stored in a struct which is used as a node in a linked list.

A linked list structure was chosen as the internal data structure for conceptual simplicity and ease of implementation (dynamic modification: insertion, deletion). Alternative designs considered include a dynamically resized, sorted array, and a hash table. These were discarded for their high cost in dynamic resizing and overhead in authoring and memory, relative to a linked list. The speedier lookup gained from these structures was determined to be too infrequently utilized to outweigh these costs. More problematic memory management may cause any number of references to addresses that would translate into worst-case searches of a linked list, but only actually results in one such search, since our library invokes termination at the very first reference to an inactive or invalid address.

Our `slug_malloc()` simply creates a new node with the above information and adds this new node to our linked list. It does this by calling `insert_node()`. Our `insert_node()` function, in addition

to adding the node to the linked list, also checks for a few errors: allocating memory exceeding 128 MiB, failure to allocate memory (out of memory), and attempting to allocate 0 bytes of memory. In all cases an error message is printed, and in the first two cases, the program exits. The tracked statistics (see `slug_memstats()`) are also updated here. Lastly, `insert_node()` sets up an `atexit()` callback on the first memory allocation. This callback will call our `slug_memstats()` function upon program exit.

When `slug_free()` is called, we check all of our allocations to determine if the address being freed exists in our list of allocations. If it doesn't, that means that the memory has already been freed, the memory was never allocated in the first place, or the address freed is in the middle of a block of allocated memory. In all cases, the program prints an error message and exits. If the memory is allocated, we deallocate it, remove the node from our list, and update our stats.

On program exit, the `atexit()` handler calls `slug_memstats()`. This function prints information on each allocation unit that was not successfully deallocated by the user program (although not necessary, it also frees this memory). This information includes the address of the memory block, timestamp, file, and line number in which the allocation occurred. After this data (if applicable), we then print the number of allocations, total bytes allocated, the average memory allocated, and the standard deviation of the size of memory allocated. We do this for the memory blocks that are still unallocated at exit (if any), and also for the total memory allocations over the life of the program. This information is useful by the user program to determine if there are any memory leaks. This function also removes any nodes in the linked list that are currently a

differentiate between attempted deallocation of memory inside a block, as opposed to the beginning address of a block.

Our library is limited to observation of the user program via just invocations of `malloc()`, `free()`, and program termination. It therefore does not aid in the debugging of errors or common issues dealing with memory access (e.g., off-by-one errors, read/writes just outside of allocated blocks, read/writes to uninitialized memory, read/writes to freed memory). This is consistent with the assignment specifications but severely limits the utility of a memory management aid.

## Implementation

The implementation follows directly from our design, and is divided into two files, `slug.h`, and `slug.c`.

### **slug.h**

This file is included by each program wishing to use our library to wrap `malloc()` and `free()` calls. This is accomplished by using preprocessor macros to substitute for our functions `slug_malloc()` and `slug_free()`, with added parameters for locating the calls in the user program, via filename and line number. Also, we expose `slug_malloc()`, `slug_free()`, and `slug_memstats()` for use by the user program. Usage documentation for each function is also included here.

### **slug.c**

This file holds our implementation of `slug_malloc()`, `slug_free()`, and `slug_memstats()`. We also define a node structure for use in our linked list, helper functions, and global variables for tracking statistics of memory allocations. These globals include the number of allocations, the total size of memory allocated, the mean, and the standard deviation. Both active allocations and total allocations are tracked. The head of the linked list is also kept as a global variable, for a total of nine globals. We decided to make these global and static as consequence of their frequent use throughout the functions contained in `slug.c`. Making them global significantly simplifies the implementation of statistics collection and access to the internal data structure representing the core facility of `slug.c`, without danger of namespace pollution for the containing user directory.

```
void *slug_malloc ( size_t size, char *WHERE )
```

This is the wrapper function for `malloc()`, called any time the user program calls `malloc()`. It returns the address of allocated memory. The parameter `WHERE` is a string constant that records the filename and line number of the caller, via the functionality of macros defined in `slug.h`. The private function `split()` is called to parse the name and number from `WHERE`, and the resulting information is fed into a call to `insert_node()`.

```
int insert_node ( int linenr, size_t mem_size, char* file_name, void** address)
```

The private function `insert_node()` contains the primary functionality of `slug_malloc()`, including the actual call to `malloc()`, insertion of allocation information into the internal data structure, updates to running statistics calculations, and basic checks for usage correctness. If the size parameter passed to `malloc()` is zero, it is reported to `stderr` as an unusual operation. If the input is excessively large (more than 128 MiB) it is reported as an error to `stderr` and the program is terminated. The function then updates the global variables tracking mean and standard deviation, then records the address, length, current timestamp, and location of the call in a node structure, which it finally adds to the linked list.

```
void slug_free ( void *addr, char *WHERE )
```

This function first checks that the `addr` is the start of a valid memory region that is currently allocated by looking through the linked list. If not, an error is shown and the program terminated. If it is valid, then `free()` is called and the node unlinked from the linked list. We also update the global variables tracking the running mean and standard deviation. Also, the important task of setting the `onexit()` handler is done upon the first allocation. This causes the program to call `slug_memstats()` on program exit.

```
void slug_memstats ( void )
```

This function traverses the linked list kept by `slug_malloc()` and `slug_free()` and prints out information about all current allocations. Each allocation report includes the size of the allocation, a timestamp for when the allocation took place, the actual address of the allocation, and file and line number in the test program where the allocation happened. In addition, a summary of all allocations is reported that includes the total number of allocations done, the number of current active allocations, the total amount of memory currently allocated, and the mean and standard deviation of sizes that have been allocated (both for all allocations not deallocated, and for total allocations made during the user program's lifetime).

## Determining the mean and standard deviation

We keep a running calculation of the mean and standard deviations of allocation sizes, since we do not keep information about individual memory allocations after they have been freed (see 1.1). To aggregate statistics covering the duration of a user program's lifetime without incurring exponential memory expenses for long-running or rapid-fire examples, we use an incremental algorithm written by Donald Knuth

[[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Algorithms\\_for\\_calculating\\_mean\\_and\\_standard\\_deviation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Algorithms_for_calculating_mean_and_standard_deviation)]

the mean. We also do the same for the active allocations. The difference is that in `slug_free()`, we decrease the globals associated with the active allocations. By keeping track of these values in `slug_malloc` and `slug_free()`, we are able to take the square root of the sum of the averages squared divided by the number of allocations to obtain the standard deviation. We do that in `slug_memstats()` when we report it.

## Testing

The goals of our testing process were as follows.

- Show a test program that correctly uses allocation in a nontrivial way behaves correctly.
- Show that after allocating and deallocating memory, trying to deallocate an invalid address is immediately detected.
- Show that after allocating and deallocating memory, trying to deallocate an already freed region is immediately detected.
- Show that after allocating and deallocating memory, trying to deallocate a valid region by passing in a pointer inside the region is immediately detected.
- Show that allocating memory and then exiting triggers the leak detector and shows where the leak occurred.
- Show that allocating memory of inappropriate size (zero or more than 128 MiB) is immediately detected, and results in a warning message or immediate termination, respectively.

## Strateg

Six C programs were written to test our library's facilities on common cases of memory mismanagement. Most of these cases will cause our library to report an error to `stderr`, which specifies the filename and line number of the offending call, and invoke immediate program termination at the first problematic call, as per the assignment specifications. This includes deallocation of invalid addresses, deallocation of already freed memory, and deallocation of an address inside a block (as opposed to the first address). In implementation, all three cases correspond to the situation of the address passed to `free()` not being found in the linked list of active allocations. Memory leak is detected and reported at program termination. Additionally, running the Valgrind utility on all test files provokes the appropriate memory leak (or lack of leak) records. No memory leak is incurred by the library functions alone.

The six programs created were:

- `test1` - This program shows that after allocating and deallocating memory, trying to deallocate an invalid address is immediately detected
- `test2` - This program shows that after allocating and deallocating memory, trying to deallocate an an already freed address is immediately detected

- test3 - This program shows that after allocating and deallocating memory, trying to deallocate with an address inside the block, but not the address of the beginning of the block, is immediately detected
- test4 - This program creates memory leaks by allocating memory, and not deallocating it. This is shown by the `slug_memstats()` report on program exit
- test5 - This program allocates and deallocates memory, showing that a normal program executes correctly and shows no memory leaks
- test6 - This program attempts to allocate 0 bytes, and then 128,000,001 bytes to show that both produce errors, and the second large allocation exits the program.

## Results

test1: Running this program correctly produces an error that the address attempting to be freed was the not first byte of memory allocated. (deallocating an invalid address)

test2: Running this program correctly produces an error that the address attempting to be freed was the not first byte of memory allocated. (deallocating an already freed address)

test3: Running this program correctly produces an error that the address attempting to be freed was the not first byte of memory allocated. (trying to deallocate with an address inside the block, but not the address of the beginning of the block, is immediately detected). Note that this program shows memory leaks, because per the assignment, when we detect the error, we exit before we free the memory.

test4: Running this program correctly produces a list of all the memory blocks allocated and not deallocated.

test5: Running this program correctly shows a report showing that no memory leaks were found.

test6: Running this program correctly shows a message stating that we attempted to allocate 0 bytes, and an error stating that we attempted to allocate 128,000,001 bytes, which exits correctly exits the program.

## Conclusion

Our design leads to an implementation which tests show to fulfill all goals of the assignment.