

# CSCI 404, Spring 2020 - Project 2

**Due time: Thursday, 2/27/2020, 11:59:59PM**

## Task

The task in this programming assignment is to implement an agent that plays the Max-Connect4 game using search. Figure 1 shows the first few moves of a game. The game is played on a 6x7 grid, with six rows and seven columns. There are two players, player A (red) and player B (green). The two players take turns placing pieces on the board: the red player can only place red pieces, and the green player can only place green pieces.

It is best to think of the board as standing upright. We will assign a number to every row and column, as follows: columns are numbered from left to right, with numbers 1, 2, ..., 7. Rows are numbered from bottom to top, with numbers 1, 2, ..., 6. When a player makes a move, the move is completely determined by specifying the COLUMN where the piece will be placed. If all six positions in that column are occupied, then the move is invalid, and the program should reject it and force the player to make a valid move. In a valid move, once the column is specified, the piece is placed on that column and "falls down", until it reaches the lowest unoccupied position in that column.

The game is over when all positions are occupied. Obviously, every complete game consists of 42 moves, and each player makes 21 moves. At the end of the game, the score is determined as follows: consider each quadruple of four consecutive positions on board, either in the horizontal, vertical, or each of the two diagonal directions (from bottom left to top right and from bottom right to top left). The red player gets a point for each such quadruple where all four positions are occupied by red pieces. Similarly, the green player gets a point for each such quadruple where all four positions are occupied by green pieces. The player with the most points wins the game.

Your program will run in two modes: an interactive mode, that is best suited for the program playing against a human player, and a one-move mode, where the program reads the current state of the game from an input file, makes a single move, and writes the resulting state to an output file. The one-move mode can be used to make programs play against each other. Note that THE PROGRAM MAY BE EITHER THE RED OR THE GREEN PLAYER. THAT WILL BE SPECIFIED BY THE STATE, AS SAVED IN THE INPUT FILE.



Figure 1. The first 15 moves of a Max-Connect4 game.

## Interactive Mode

In the interactive mode, the game should run from the command line with the following arguments (assuming a Java implementation, with obvious changes for C++ and Lisp implementations):

```
java maxconnect4 interactive [input_file] [computer-next/human-next] [depth]
```

For example:

```
java maxconnect4 interactive input1.txt computer-next 7
```

- Argument `interactive` specifies that the program runs in interactive mode.
- Argument `[input_file]` specifies an input file that contains an initial board state. This way we can start the program from a non-empty board state. If the input file does not exist, the program should just create an empty board state and start again from there.
- Argument `[computer-next/human-next]` specifies whether the computer should make the next move or the human.
- Argument `[depth]` specifies the number of moves in advance that the computer should consider while searching for its next move. In other words, this argument specifies the depth of the search tree. Essentially, this argument will control the time takes for the computer to make a move.

After reading the input file, the program gets into the following loop:

1. If `computer-next`, goto 2, else goto 5.
2. Print the current board state and score. If the board is full, exit.
3. Choose and make the next move.
4. Save the current board state in a file called `computer.txt` (in same format as input file).
5. Print the current board state and score. If the board is full, exit.
6. Ask the human user to make a move (make sure that the move is valid, otherwise repeat request to the user).
7. Save the current board state in a file called `human.txt` (in same format as input file).
8. Goto 2.

## One-Move Mode

The purpose of the one-move mode is to make it easy for programs to compete against each other, and communicate their moves to each other using text files. The one-move mode is invoked as follows:

```
java maxconnect4 one-move [input_file] [output_file] [depth]
```

For example:

```
java maxconnect4 one-move red_next.txt green_next.txt 5
```

In this case, the program simply makes a single move and terminates. In particular, the program should:

1. Read the input file and initialize the board state and current score, as in interactive mode.
2. Print the current board state and score. If the board is full, exit.
3. Choose and make the next move.
4. Print the current board state and score.
5. Save the current board state to the output file IN EXACTLY THE SAME FORMAT THAT IS USED FOR INPUT FILES.
6. Exit

## Sample code

The sample code needs an input file to run. Sample input files that you can download are [input1.txt](#) and [input2.txt](#). You are free to make other input files to experiment with, as long as they follow the same format. In the input files, a "0" stands for an empty spot, a "1" stands for a piece played by the first player, and a 2 stands for a piece played by the second player. The last number in the input file indicates which player plays NEXT (and NOT which player played last). Sample code is available in:

- Java: download files [maxconnect4.java](#), [GameBoard.java](#), and [AiPlayer.java](#). You could compile using (this could be different based upon the system you are using):  

```
javac maxconnect4.java GameBoard.java AiPlayer.java
```

  
An example command line that runs the program (assuming that you have [input1.txt](#) saved in the same directory) is:  

```
java maxconnect4 one-move input1.txt output1.txt 10
```
- Python, version 2.4 : download files [maxconnect4.py](#) and [MaxConnect4Game.py](#).  
An example command line that runs the program (assuming that you have [input1.txt](#) saved in the same directory) is:  

```
./maxconnect4.py one-move input1.txt output1.txt 10
```
- C++: download file [maxconnect4.cpp](#). Compile using:  

```
g++ -o maxconnect4 maxconnect.cpp
```

  
An example command line that runs the program (assuming that you have [input1.txt](#) saved in the same directory) is:  

```
maxconnect4 one-move input1.txt output1.txt 10
```

The sample code implements a system playing max-connect4 (in one-move mode only) by making random moves. While the AI part of the sample code leaves much to be desired (your assignment is to fix that), the code can get you started by showing you how to represent and generate board states, how to save/load the game state to and from files in the desired format, and how to count the score (though faster score-counting methods are possible).

## PLEASE NOTE:

- **The above sample codes are provided for reference purpose only, but NOT for directly usage without any adaptation to your OS and/or compiler. Hopefully they could save your time and let you focus on the AI part without bothering too much on reading files and handling data structures. But, again, the sample codes are NOT supposed for direct usage!**
- You are completely free to use the above sample codes or develop your own codes without using these sample codes at all.
- The sample codes are already tested on several major compilers. However, due to resource limitations, these sample codes are **NOT** guaranteed to be compliable and runnable on all OS and all compilers. It is possible that these sample codes might not work on the latest version of the compilers, for which small codes porting might be required.

## Grading

The assignments will be graded out of 100 points.

- 35 points: Implementing plain minimax.
- 35 points: Implementing alpha-beta pruning.
- 30 points: Implementing the depth-limited version of minimax (if correctly implemented, and includes alpha-beta pruning, you also get the 35 points for plain minimax and 35 points for alpha-beta search, you don't need to have separate implementations for those). For full credit, you obviously need to come up with a reasonable evaluation function to be used in the context of depth-limited search. A "reasonable" evaluation function is defined to be an evaluation function that allows your program to consistently beat a random player. You can find some reference evaluation functions at [here](#).
- Bonus points (10 points): You can get up to 10 bonus points, if you implement alpha-beta pruning together with successor node prioritization. For example, for the maximization player (the computer in the interactive mode) should start node expansion from the successors of the current nodes with biggest minimax value or evaluation function value. In contrast, during the search the minimization player (human player in the interactive mode) should start node expansion from the successor node with smallest minimax value or evaluation function value.

**This is a group assignment, which means you can choose to work independently or work with a few fellow students in the class. You are free to form your own project team and every project team can have up to five students. Every team only need submit one deliverable package as detailed below. The grade of a submission assessed using the above criteria will be given to all the students in the same group.**

## How to submit

Implementations in C, C++, Java, and Python will be accepted. If you would like to use another language, please first check with the grader via e-mail ([lixiangyu@mymail.mines.edu](mailto:lixiangyu@mymail.mines.edu)). Points will be taken off for failure to comply with this requirement.

The assignment should be submitted via the Canvas. Submit a ZIPPED directory called `project2.zip` (no other forms of compression accepted, contact the instructor or TA if you do not know how to produce .zip files). The directory should contain source codes. Including binaries that work on windows (for Java and C++) is optional. The submission should also contain a file called `readme.txt`, which should specify precisely:

1. Name and CSM ID of the student.
2. What programming language and what version of the compiler are used.
3. How the code is structured.
4. How to run the code, including very specific compilation instructions, if compilation is needed. Instructions such as "compile using g++" are NOT considered specific.

Insufficient or unclear instructions will be penalized by up to 20 points. Code that does not run on Windows 7/8/10 machines gets AT MOST half credit (50 points).

## Submission checklist