ECS 145 Final Project Report

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**What is DES?**

Discrete Event Simulation (DES) is a way of modelling a system and the events that occur within said system. To be a valid system for DES, the events of this system must occur in distinct blocks of time. The average number of points scored by a basketball player over the course of his season would be a valid use of DES. Each game is a discrete event, and each set of points is a discrete number. The changes in wind speed in a certain location would, on the other hand, not be a valid use of DES.

To model DES with a programming language package or library, the package must have specific functionality. First, it must be able to simulate a given length of time. This will allow the package to accumulate data from the events as they occur over time. One way of doing this involves storing a time variable and a time limit variable in the class. To similate passing time, the package incremented the time variable at certain points, and ends the simulation when the time variable passes the time limit variable.

The package must also be able to decide when the events occur during that time. Packages usually do this through keeping a schedule of events, often in a queue. When the simulated time of the package reaches the time that the event is scheduled to occur, the event is popped from the queue, handled, and data is gathered from it. This schedule allows the code, in some implementations, to handle the passing of time through a step function. This involves incrementing the stored “current time” to the time of the next event, after the previous event is completed. Since nothing is scheduled to happen between those two times, that time can be safely skipped over.

The package must also have code to simulate the popped event happening, using any parameters it is given. Without the ability to specify event parameters, such as frequency and magnitude, the user has no flexibility in using the program and likely will not be able to get the data needed for analysis. The package must also be able to calculate and deliver the desired analysis to the user. In the basketball example, that might be the average and standard deviation of points scored per game. For the warehouse example, it might be the same statistics for the average number of items in the warehouse. If the package can record the data, but cannot do anything productive with it, its usefulness drops.

There are multiple methods used to implement the skeleton of DES. These methods focus on different aspects of the DES model. Two of the methods are the process-oriented method, and the event-oriented method.

**Event-Oriented DES**

Often, the simplest way of implementing DES is to make it event-oriented. Many of the possible implementations of different parts of DES discussed in the previous section are used in Event-Oriented DES.We see one full implementation of an Event-Oriented DES skeleton in the DES.R example (see code listing at the end). As implied by the name, Event-Oriented DES, and by extension DES.R, bases its simulation on handling each event in sequence.

One of the major aspects of Event-Oriented DES is its use of shortcuts in its simulated time-frame. It uses these shortcuts to skip to each new event that it must track. This is where the event list comes in handy. A known event is scheduled and put into the list. When this happens in the course of the simulation is left to the user. After one event finishes, the system moves to the time of the next event. Since we know that the given event is the next event to happen, we know that no events of consequence will occur in the times that we skip. Therefore, it is safe to skip those times. The algorithm is essentially as follows:

nextEventTime = eventQueue.front.eventTime

if(nextEventTime < endSimTime)

currentSimTime = nextEventTime

else

exit()

We see another example of this in DES.R. See the chunks of code labelled “skipTime” and “skipTimeFunction” by comment blocks. Sometimes, we need extra functionality regarding the priority of different kinds of events (such as in a natural disaster simulation). In these cases, we use a priority queue instead of a simple list. DES.R specifically uses a matrix to simulate a queue.

Once the Event-Oriented DES is at the next event time, it must handle the event. In many cases, this may involve multiple events, so the system must have a way of knowing which event is about to occur. DES.R makes a framework for this through its “evnttype” variable, in which each type of event is given a different identifier. As we see in the code labeled “eventHandle”, this information goes into the event queue with the event itself. It also uses a user-supplied “reactevent” as the specific event handler (as clearly the handler will need to be different for different uses of the library).

The general algorithm for Event-Oriented DES is simple. While there’s still an event scheduled to happen within the time limit, we skip to the next event and call the event handler. As opposed to Process-Oriented DES, this is much easier to implement (avoided threads) and often works faster, especially because most of the simulation time is skipped over.

**Process-Oriented DES**

Process-Oriented DES is exactly what it sounds like, a DES implementation using similar concepts to UNIX-style processes. In Process-Oriented DES, we use a “process” (often a thread) for each object in the simulation, as well as another one for the handling system. One might alternatively call it “Object-Oriented DES” were the term not already claimed in the programming world. For languages like R, that do not support multithreading, generally each “process” is a separate invocation of the language.

For a single MM1 queue simulation, a Process-Oriented DES involves four different processes, one for adding to the queue, one for processing the items in the queue, one to manage the simulation, and a main thread to start them all. If there were multiple servers, each one would need its own process. Any Process-Oriented DES implementation will have to have a manager thread to keep track of the simulated time, among other things. In R, this manager thread will be the one that specifically invokes the DES library in use, while the object threads will invoke the simulation code itself.

In dealing with simulated time, Process-Oriented DES works somewhat similarly to Event-Oriented DES. If the event queue is nonempty, the manager will jump to the next time, skipping uneventful time. It will then yield to whichever thread handles that event. If the event queue is empty, however, the manager will sleep until either a) it is nonempty, or b) time runs out.

The Python library Simpy is a famous example of Process-Oriented DES. Simpy has a clever way of jumping between event and manager processes, which themselves are all held in a Simpy “environment”. To make these jumps, it assigns a generator functions (usually called Run) to each of its event threads. Generator functions are iterators that yield back values after each iteration. These are the functions that a Simpy program’s main process will use to activate the event processes. This happens by passing the event process’s Run() function as an argument to Simpy’s activate() function.

The generator in an event process will, at certain point, yield to another process for a specific amount of time. It generally does this through either a time out or by passing a number back to the manager thread via the yield. Once that time has passed, the yielded event thread will resume. Simpy takes advantage of a generator’s ability to yield to its calling function to get out of the event process and wake up another process. Simpy can also use the generator ability to return values with a yield to help deal with advancing its simulated time. Through these uses of Python generators, Simpy can function as a Process-Oriented implementation of DES.

**Rposim Package**