Background: I/O Concurrency

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Outline

• “Worse Is Better” and Distributed Systems

• Problem: Naïve single-process server leaves system resources idle; I/O blocks
  – Goal: I/O concurrency
  – Goal: CPU concurrency

• Solutions
  – Multiple processes
  – One process, many threads
  – Event-driven I/O (not in today’s lecture)
Review: How Do Servers Use Syscalls?

• Consider server_1() web server (in handout)
Review: How Do Servers Use Syscalls?

Server waits for each resource in turn
Each resource largely idle
What if there are many clients?
Performance and Concurrency

• Under heavy load, server_1():
  – Leaves resources idle
  – ...and has a lot of work to do!

• Why?
  – Software poorly structured!
  – What would a better structure look like?
Solution: I/O Concurrency

• Can we overlap I/O with other useful work? Yes:
  – Web server: if files in disk cache, I/O wait spent mostly blocked on write to network
  – Networked file system client: could compile first part of file while fetching second part

• Performance benefits potentially huge
  – Say one client causes disk I/O, 10 ms
  – If other clients’ requests in cache, could serve 100 other clients during that time!
One Process
May Be Better Than You Think

- OS provides I/O concurrency to application transparently when it can, e.g.,
  - Filesystem does read-ahead into disk buffer cache; write-behind from disk buffer cache
  - Networking code copies arriving packets into application’s kernel socket buffer; copies app’s data into kernel socket buffer on write()
I/O Concurrency with Multiple Processes

- Idea: start new UNIX process for each client connection/request
- Master process assigns new connections to child processes
- Now plenty of work to keep system busy!
  - One process blocks in syscall, others can process arriving requests
- Structure of software still simple
  - See server_2() in webserver.c
  - fork() after accept()
  - Otherwise, software structure unchanged!
Multiple Processes: More Benefits

• Isolation
  – Bug while processing one client’s request leaves other clients/requests unaffected
  – Processes do interact, but OS arbitrates (e.g., “lock the disk request queue”)

• CPU concurrency for “free”
  – If more than one CPU in box, each process may run on one CPU
CPU Concurrency

• Single machine may have multiple CPUs, one shared memory
  – Symmetric Multiprocessor (SMP) PCs
  – Intel Core Duo

• I/O concurrency tools often help with CPU concurrency
  – But way more work for OS designer!

• Generally, CPU concurrency way less important than I/O concurrency
  – Factor of 2X, not 100X
  – Very hard to program to get good scaling
  – Easier to buy 2 machines (see future lectures!)
Problems with Multiple Processes

• fork() may be expensive
  – Memory for new address space
  – 300 us minimum on modern PC running UNIX

• Processes fairly isolated by default
  – Memory not shared
  – How do you build web cache on server visible to all processes?
  – How do you simply keep statistics?
Concurrency with Threads

• Similar to multiple processes
• Difference: one address space
  – All threads share same process’ memory
  – One stack per thread, inside process
• Seems simple: single-process structure!
• Programmer needs to use locks
• One thread can corrupt another (i.e., no cross-request isolation)
Concurrency with Threads

![Diagram showing concurrency with threads, app1 and app2 with stacks t1 and t2, within the user space, and kernel with filesystem and disk driver layers.](image)
Threads: Low-Level Details Are Hard!

• Suppose thread calls read() (or other blocking syscall)
  – Does whole process block until I/O done?
  – If so, no I/O concurrency!

• Two solutions:
  – Kernel-supported threads
  – User-supported threads
Kernel-Supported Threads

- OS kernel aware of each thread
  - Knows if thread blocks, e.g., disk read wait
  - Can schedule another thread
- Kernel requirements:
  - Per-thread kernel stack
  - Per-thread tables (e.g., saved registers)
- Semantics:
  - Per-process: address space, file descriptors
  - Per-thread: user stack, kernel stack, kernel state
Kernel-Supported Threads

Kernel

App1

App2

User Space

0
N
M

0

Disk Driver

Filesystem

Hardware

stack

stack, table

stack

stack, table
Kernel Threads: Trade-Offs

• Kernel can schedule one thread per CPU
  – Fits our goals well: both CPU and I/O concurrency

• But kernel threads expensive, like processes:
  – Kernel must help create each thread
  – Kernel must help with thread context switch!
    • Which thread took a page fault?
  – Lock/unlock must invoke kernel, but heavily used

• Kernel threads not portable; implementation heavily tailored to each OS...

• ...though practically all modern OSes now include a kernel thread implementation!
User-Level Threads

• Purely inside user process; kernel oblivious
• Scheduler within user process for process’ own threads
  – In addition to kernel’s process scheduler
• User-level scheduler must
  – Know when thread makes blocking syscall
  – Not block process; switch to another thread
  – Know when I/O done, to wake up original thread
User-Level Thread Implementation

- Kernel
- User Space
- Filesystem
- Disk Driver

App1
- t1 stack
- Thread Scheduler

App2
- t2 stack

Process Scheduler

Hardware
User-Level Threads: Details

• Apps linked against thread library
• Library contains “fake” read(), write(), accept(), &c. syscalls
• Library can start non-blocking syscall operations
• Library marks threads as waiting, switches to runnable thread
• Kernel notifies library of I/O completion and other events; library marks waiting thread runnable
User-Level Threads: read() Example

read() {
    tell kernel to start read;
    mark thread waiting for read;
    sched();
}

sched() {
    ask kernel for I/O completion events;
    mark corresponding threads runnable;
    find runnable thread;
    restore registers and return;
}
User-Level Threads: Event Notification

• Events thread library needs from kernel:
  – new network connection
  – data arrived on socket
  – disk read completed
  – socket ready for further write()s

• Resembles miniature OS inside process!

• Problem: user-level threads demand significant kernel support:
  – non-blocking system calls
  – uniform event delivery mechanism
Event Notification in Typical OSes

• Usually, event notification only partly supported; e.g., in UNIX:
  – new TCP connections, arriving TCP/pipe/tty data: YES
  – filesystem operation completion: NO

• Similarly, not all syscalls can be started without waiting, e.g., in UNIX:
  – connect(), read()/write() on socket
  – open(), stat(): NO
  – read() from disk: SOMETIMES (e.g., aio_read())
Non-blocking System Calls: Hard to Implement

• Typical syscall implementation, inside the kernel, e.g., for read() (sys_read.c):

```c
sys_read(fd, user_buffer, n) {
    // read the file’s i-node from disk
    struct inode *i = alloc_inode();
    start_disk(..., i);
    wait_for_disk(i);
    // the i-node tells us where the data are; read it.
    struct buf *b = alloc_buf(i->...);
    start_disk(..., b);
    wait_for_disk(b);
    copy_to_user(b, user_buffer);
}
```
Non-blocking System Calls: 
Hard to Implement

• Typical syscall implementation, inside the kernel,

Why not just return to user program instead of calling `wait_for_disk()`?
How will kernel know where to continue?
In user space? In kernel?

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    start_disk(…, b);
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}
```

Why not just return to user program instead of calling `wait_for_disk()`?
How will kernel know where to continue?
In user space? In kernel?

Problem: Keeping state for complex, multi-step operations

```c
wait_for_disk(i);
wait_for_disk(b);
copy_to_user(b, user_buffer);
}
```
User-Threads: Implementation Choices

• Live with only partial support for user-level threads

• New operating system with totally different syscall interface
  – One syscall per non-blocking “sub-operation”
  – Kernel doesn’t need to keep state across multiple steps
  – e.g., lookup_one_path_component()

• Microkernel: no system calls, just messages to servers, with non-blocking communication
User-Threads: Implementation Choices

- Live with only partial support for user-level threads

But why bother with user-level threads now that kernels all support kernel threads?

Performance. High-performance servers now process packets in user space. Don’t want to have to trap to kernel to switch between handling different packets. (This is an area of ongoing systems research!)

- e.g., `lookup_one_path_component()`

- Microkernel: no system calls, just messages to servers, with non-blocking communication
Threads: Programming Difficulty

• Sharing of data structures in one address space
• Even on single CPU, thread model necessitates CPU concurrency
  – Locks often needed for mutual exclusion on data structures
  – May only have wanted to overlap I/O wait!
• Events usually occur one-at-a-time
  – Can we do CPU sequentially, and overlap only wait for I/O?
  – Yes: event-driven programming
Event-Driven Programming

- Foreshadowed by user-level threads implementation
  - Organize software around event arrival
- Write software in state-machine style
  - “When event X occurs, execute this function.”
- Library support for registering interest in events (e.g., data available to read())
- Desirable properties:
  - Serial nature of events preserved
  - Programmer sees only one event/function at a time