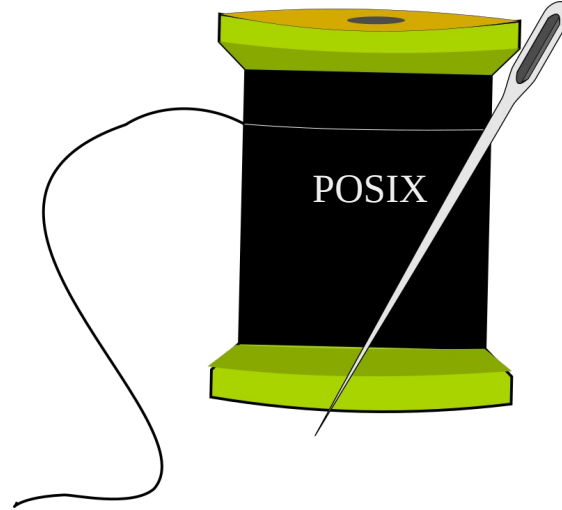


CS 470 Spring 2026

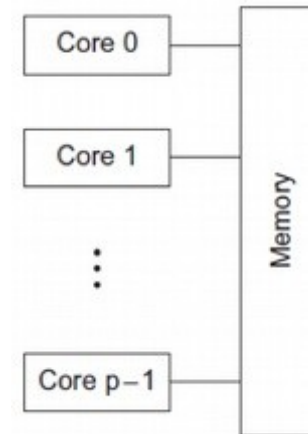
Mike Lam, Professor



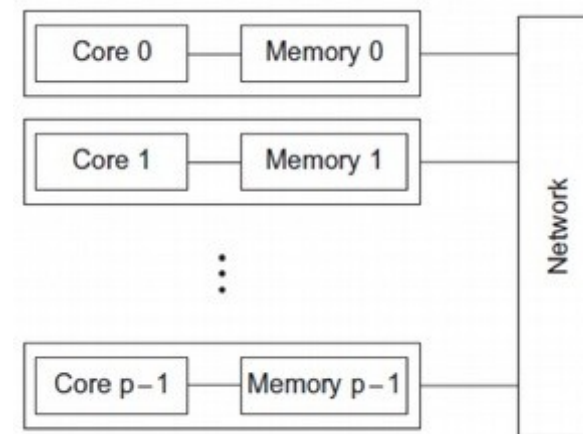
Multithreading & Pthreads

MIMD system architectures

- Shared memory

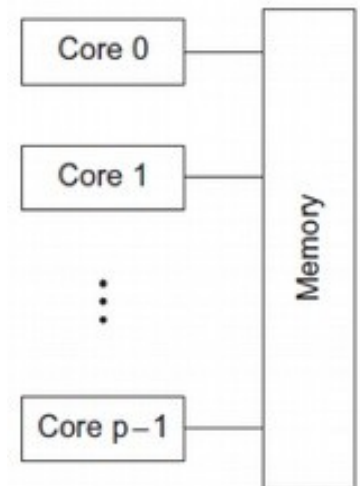


- Distributed memory



Multithreading

- A **process** is an instance of a running program
 - Private address space, shared files/sockets
- A **thread** is a single unit of execution in a process
 - Private stack/registers, shared address space
- **Multithreading** libraries provide thread management
 - Spawn/kill capabilities
 - Synchronization mechanisms
 - POSIX threads: **Pthreads**



POSIX threads

- **Pthreads** – POSIX standard interface for threads in C
 - Must `#include <pthread.h>` and link using `-lpthread`
 - `pthread_create`: spawn a new thread
 - `pthread_t` opaque struct for storing thread info
 - attributes (or NULL)
 - **thread work routine (function pointer)**
 - work routine parameter (void*)
 - `pthread_self`: get current thread ID
 - `pthread_exit`: terminate current thread
 - can also terminate implicitly by returning from the thread routine
 - `pthread_join`: wait for another thread to terminate

Thread creation example

```
#include <stdio.h>
#include <pthread.h>

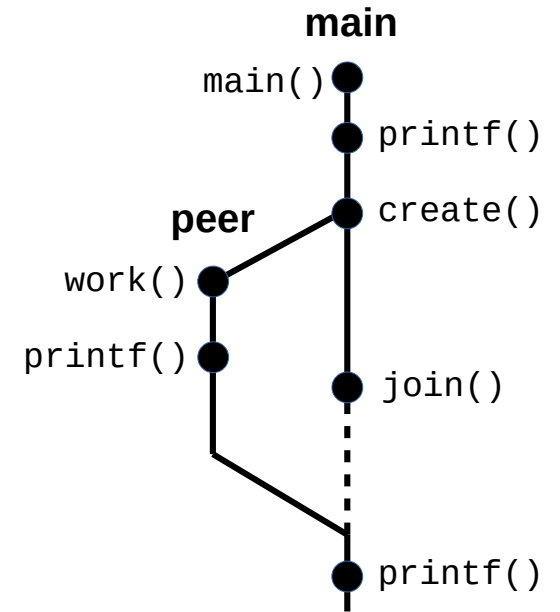
void* work (void* arg)
{
    printf("Hello from new thread!\n");
    return NULL;
}

int main ()
{
    printf("Spawning new thread ...\n");

    pthread_t peer;
    pthread_create(&peer, NULL, work, NULL);
    pthread_join(peer, NULL);

    printf("Done!\n");

    return 0;
}
```

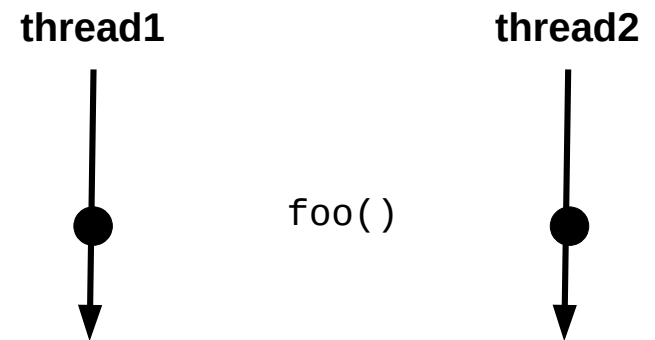


Shared memory

- Some data is shared in threaded programs
 - Global variables (shared, single static copy)
 - Local variables (multiple copies, one on each stack)
 - Technically still shared if in memory, but harder to access
 - Not shared if cached in register
 - Safer to assume they're private
 - Local static variables (shared, single static copy)
- Also shared:
 - Heap-allocated memory (if the threads have pointers)
 - Open files, sockets, pipes, etc.

Example (from CS 261)

```
int x = 0;  
  
void foo()  
{  
    x += 7;  
}
```



Example (from CS 261)

foo:

```
    irmovq x, %rcx
    irmovq 7, %rax
    mrmovq (%rcx), %rdx
    addq %rax, %rdx
    rmmovq %rdx, (%rcx)
    ret
```

x:

```
    .quad 0
```

thread1



thread2



foo()

Example (from CS 261)

foo:

```
    irmovq x, %rcx
    irmovq 7, %rax
    mrmovq (%rcx), %rdx
    addq %rax, %rdx
    rmmovq %rdx, (%rcx)
    ret
```

x:

```
    .quad 0
```

thread1



```
    irmovq x, %rcx
    irmovq 7, %rax
```

```
    mrmovq (%rcx), %rdx
    addq %rax, %rdx
    rmmovq %rdx, (%rcx)
    ret
```

thread2



foo()

```
    irmovq x, %rcx
    irmovq 7, %rax
```

```
    mrmovq (%rcx), %rdx
    addq %rax, %rdx
    rmmovq %rdx, (%rcx)
    ret
```

This interleaving is ok.

Example (from CS 261)

foo:

```
    irmovq x, %rcx
    irmovq 7, %rax
    mrmovq (%rcx), %rdx
    addq %rax, %rdx
    rmmovq %rdx, (%rcx)
    ret
```

x:

```
    .quad 0
```

thread1



```
    irmovq x, %rcx
    irmovq 7, %rax
    mrmovq (%rcx), %rdx

    addq %rax, %rdx
    rmmovq %rdx, (%rcx)
    ret
```

thread2



foo()

```
    irmovq x, %rcx
    irmovq 7, %rax
    mrmovq (%rcx), %rdx

    addq %rax, %rdx
    rmmovq %rdx, (%rcx)
    ret
```

PROBLEM!

Issues with shared memory

- **Nondeterminism**
 - **Incorrect code can produce “correct” results**
 - Test suites cannot guarantee correctness!
- **Data race**
 - Multiple threads attempting to access a shared resource simultaneously
 - Different interleavings may produce different outputs
- **Deadlock**
 - All threads waiting such that none can make progress
- **Starvation**
 - A particular thread never gets access to a shared resource

Tools for detecting thread issues

- [Helgrind](#): Valgrind-based thread issue detector
 - Available on the cluster! (use it for P1!)
 - Usage: `valgrind --tool=helgrind <YOUR PROGRAM>`
 - Detects data races, deadlock, and other Pthread misuses
 - [Helgrind documentation](#)
- Other tools:
 - [Intel Inspector](#)
 - [Arm DDT](#)
 - [Google ASan](#)

Example

```
#include <stdio.h>
#include <pthread.h>

int count = 0;

int increment(int x) {
    return x + 1;
}

void* work (void* arg) {
    for (int i = 0; i < 10000; i++) {

        count = increment(count);

    }
    return NULL;
}

int main () {
    pthread_t peer;
    pthread_create(&peer, NULL, work, NULL);

    for (int i = 0; i < 10000; i++) {

        count = increment(count);

    }

    pthread_join(peer, NULL);
    printf("count = %d\n", count);
    return 0;
}
```

```
#include <stdio.h>
#include <pthread.h>

int count = 0;
pthread_mutex_t count_mut = PTHREAD_MUTEX_INITIALIZER;

int increment(int x) {
    return x + 1;
}

void* work (void* arg)
{
    for (int i = 0; i < 10000; i++) {
        pthread_mutex_lock(&count_mut);
        count = increment(count);
        pthread_mutex_unlock(&count_mut);
    }
    return NULL;
}

int main ()
{
    pthread_t peer;
    pthread_create(&peer, NULL, work, NULL);

    for (int i = 0; i < 10000; i++) {
        pthread_mutex_lock(&count_mut);
        count = increment(count);
        pthread_mutex_unlock(&count_mut);
    }

    pthread_join(peer, NULL);
    printf("count = %d\n", count);
    return 0;
}
```

Synchronization mechanisms

- **Busy-waiting** (wasteful!)
- **Atomic** instructions (e.g., LOCK prefix in x86)
- **Pthreads**
 - **Mutex**: simple mutual exclusion (“lock”)
 - **Condition variable**: lock + wait set (wait/signal/broadcast)
 - **Semaphore**: access to limited resources
 - Not technically part of Pthreads library (just the POSIX standard)
 - **Barrier**: ensure all threads are at the same point
 - Not present in all implementations (requires `--std=gnu99` on cluster)
- **Java threads**
 - **Synchronized** keyword: implicit mutex
 - **Monitor**: lock associated w/ an object (wait/notify/notifyAll)

Mutexes

- `pthread_mutex_init` (`pthread_mutex_t*`, `attrs`)
 - Initialize a mutex
 - `PTHREAD_MUTEX_INITIALIZER` macro for defaults
- `pthread_mutex_lock` (`pthread_mutex_t*`)
 - Acquire mutex (block if unavailable)
- `pthread_mutex_unlock` (`pthread_mutex_t*`)
 - Release mutex
- `pthread_mutex_destroy` (`pthread_mutex_t*`)
 - Clean up a mutex

Barrier w/ mutex

Setup:

```
int counter = 0;                // number of threads waiting
int thread_count;              // number of total threads
pthread_mutex_t barrier_mutex;
```

Threads:

```
pthread_mutex_lock(&barrier_mutex);
counter++;
pthread_mutex_unlock(&barrier_mutex);
while (counter < thread_count);    // busy wait
```

Issue: wasted CPU cycles!

Semaphores

- **sem_init** (sem_t*, pshared, int value)
 - Initialize a semaphore to *value*
- **sem_wait** (sem_t*)
 - If *value* > 0, decrement *value* and return
 - Else, block until signaled
- **sem_post** (sem_t*)
 - Increment *value* and signal a blocked thread
 - Use a loop to signal multiple blocked threads
- **sem_getvalue** (sem_t*, int*)
 - Return current *value*
- **sem_destroy** (sem_t*)
 - Clean up a semaphore

Barrier w/ semaphores

Setup:

```
sem_t count_sem;      // initialize to 1 (access to
waiting_threads)
sem_t barrier_sem;    // initialize to 0
volatile int waiting_threads = 0;
```

Threads:

```
sem_wait(&count_sem);
waiting_threads++;
if (waiting_threads < thread_count) {
    sem_post(&count_sem);
    sem_wait(&barrier_sem);
} else { // last thread to the barrier
    waiting_threads--;
    sem_post(&count_sem);
    while (waiting_threads--> 0) {
        sem_post(&barrier_sem);
    }
}
```

Issue: barrier_sem
can't be re-used later
(race condition if one thread
hits the second barrier while
another thread is still waiting
to be posted on the first)

Condition variables

- `pthread_cond_init` (`pthread_cond_t*`, `attrs`)
 - Initialize a condition variable
- `pthread_cond_wait` (`pthread_cond_t*`, `pthread_mutex_t*`)
 - Release mutex and block until signaled
 - Re-acquires mutex after waking up
 - A variant also exists that times out after a certain period
- `pthread_cond_signal` (`pthread_cond_t*`)
 - Wake a single blocked thread (should be holding the mutex)
- `pthread_cond_broadcast` (`pthread_cond_t*`)
 - Wake all blocked threads (should be holding the mutex)
- `pthread_cond_destroy` (`pthread_cond_t*`)
 - Clean up a condition variable

Barrier w/ condition variable

Setup:

```
mutex_t count_mut;  
cond_t done_waiting;  
volatile int waiting_threads = 0;
```

Threads:

```
mutex_lock(&count_mut);  
waiting_threads++;  
if (waiting_threads < thread_count) {  
    cond_wait(&done_waiting, &count_mut);  
} else { // last thread to the barrier  
    waiting_threads = 0;  
    cond_broadcast(&done_waiting);  
}  
mutex_unlock(&count_mut);
```

Barrier comparison

Semaphores

Setup:

```
sem_t count_sem;    // initialize to 1
sem_t barrier_sem;  // initialize to 0
volatile int waiting_threads = 0;
```

Threads:

```
sem_wait(&count_sem);
waiting_threads++;
if (waiting_threads < thread_count) {
    sem_post(&count_sem);
    sem_wait(&barrier_sem);
} else { // last thread to the barrier
    waiting_threads--;
    sem_post(&count_sem);
    while (waiting_threads--> 0) {
        sem_post(&barrier_sem);
    }
}
```

Condition

Setup:

```
mutex_t count_mut;
cond_t done_waiting;
volatile int waiting_threads = 0;
```

Threads:

```
mutex_lock(&count_mut);
waiting_threads++;
if (waiting_threads < thread_count) {
    cond_wait(&done_waiting, &count_mut);
} else { // last thread to the barrier
    waiting_threads = 0;
    cond_broadcast(&done_waiting);
}
mutex_unlock(&count_mut);
```

Barrier

Setup:

```
barrier_t barrier;    // initialize to nthreads
```

Threads:

```
barrier_wait(&barrier);
```

Condition variables

- Issue: POSIX standard says that `pthread_cond_wait` might experience **spurious wakeups** from sources other than signal/broadcast calls
 - Goal: optimize runtime and force programmers to write correct code

```
while (pthread_cond_wait(&cond, &mut) != 0);
```
- Issue: non-determinism!
 - Every condition should have an associated boolean **predicate**
 - The predicate should be true before condition is signaled
 - e.g., “`task_queue_size > 0`”
 - Waiting thread should **re-check predicate** after waking up
 - Another thread may have invalidated it in the meantime!
 - Best practice: use a predicate loop

```
pthread_mutex_lock(&mut);
while (!predicate) {
    pthread_cond_wait(&cond, &mut);
}
pthread_mutex_unlock(&mut);
```

Condition variables

Setup (static):

```
pthread_mutex_t mutex = PTHREAD_MUTEX_INITIALIZER;  
pthread_cond_t cond = PTHREAD_COND_INITIALIZER;  
volatile boolean status = false;    // protected by mutex
```

Thread 1:

```
pthread_mutex_lock(&mutex);  
while (!status) {  
    pthread_cond_wait(&cond, &mutex);  
}  
// at this point, status == true and mutex is locked
```

Thread 2:

```
// do something that triggers status  
pthread_mutex_lock(&mutex);  
status = true;  
pthread_cond_signal(&cond);    // or pthread_cond_broadcast  
pthread_mutex_unlock(&mutex);
```

Condition variables

Setup (static):

```
pthread_mutex_t mutex = PTHREAD_MUTEX_INITIALIZER;  
pthread_cond_t cond = PTHREAD_COND_INITIALIZER;  
volatile boolean status = false; // protected by mutex
```

initializer macros; can be used if you don't need attributes

C keyword meaning “don't optimize this variable; it could change at any time”

Thread 1:

```
pthread_mutex_lock(&mutex);  
while (!status) { check predicate again!  
    pthread_cond_wait(&cond, &mutex);  
}
```

// at this point, status == true and mutex is locked

always acquire lock before wait, signal, or broadcast

Thread 2:

// do something that triggers status

```
pthread_mutex_lock(&mutex);
```

```
status = true;
```

```
- pthread_cond_signal(&cond); // or pthread_cond_broadcast
```

```
pthread_mutex_unlock(&mutex);
```

Error checking

- All Pthreads calls might return a non-zero value
 - This generally indicates an error (except for `cond_wait`)
 - Recovering from errors is not our primary concern now
 - Although we'll talk a bit about fault tolerance later this semester
 - For now, just write a wrapper to abort on error
 - Example:

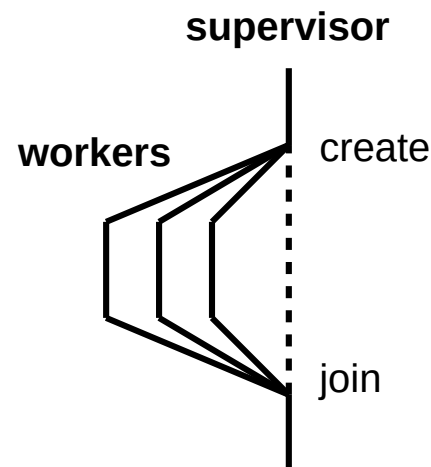
```
void lock(pthread_mutex_t *mut)
{
    if (pthread_mutex_lock(mut) != 0) {
        printf("ERROR: could not acquire mutex\n");
        exit(EXIT_FAILURE);
    }
}
```

Common synchronization patterns

- **Naturally** (“embarrassingly”) **parallel**
 - No synchronization!
- **Mutual exclusion**
 - Use a lock to prevent simultaneous access
- **Producer/consumer**
 - Protect common buffer w/ lock
- **Readers/writers**
 - Multiple lock types
- **Supervisor/worker**
 - One producer, many consumers
- **Dining philosophers**
 - Atomic acquisition of multiple locks

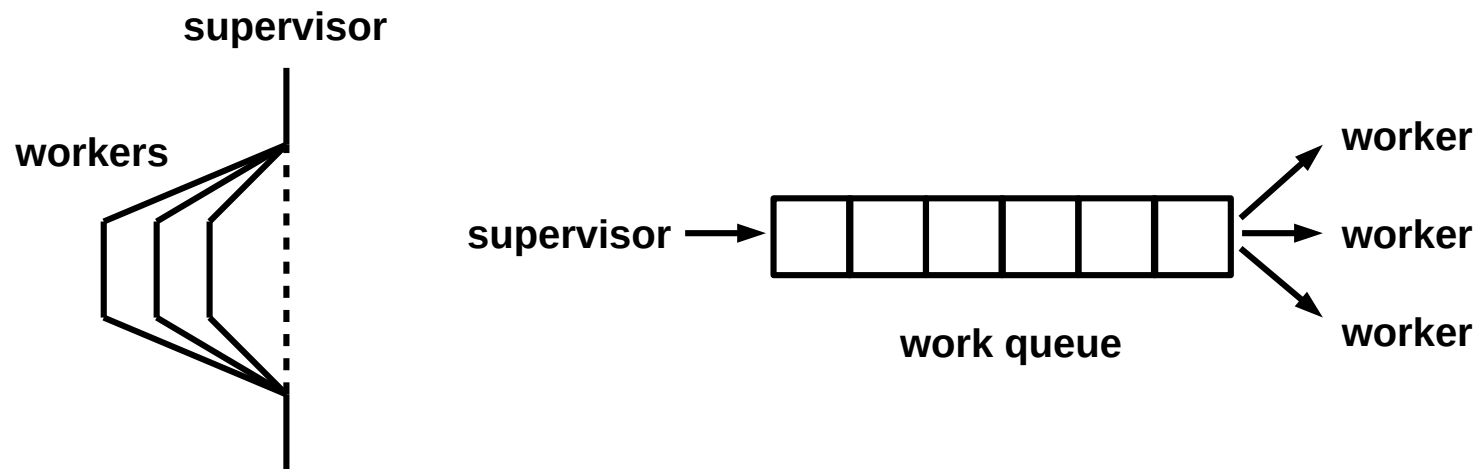
Supervisor/worker model

- Common pattern: **supervisor/worker** threads
 - Original “supervisor” thread creates multiple “worker” threads
 - Each worker thread does a chunk of the work
 - Coordinate via shared global data structure w/ locking
 - Main/supervisor thread waits for workers, then aggregates results



Thread pool model (P1)

- Minor tweak on supervisor/worker: **thread pool** model
 - Supervisor thread creates multiple worker threads
 - Work queue tracks chunks of work to be done
 - Producer/consumer: supervisor enqueues, workers dequeue
 - Synchronization required
 - Workers idle while queue is empty



P1 pseudocode

supervisor:

done = false
initialize work queue and sync variables
spawn worker threads

for each (action, num) pair in input:

if action == 'p':
 add num to work queue
 wake an idle worker thread

else if action == 'w':
 wait num seconds

done = true
wake any idle workers
wait for all workers to finish

print results, clean up, and exit

worker:

while not **done** or queue is not empty:
 if queue is not empty:
 extract num from work queue
 update(**num**)
 else:
 become idle until awakened

**NOT COMPLETE,
AND NOT THE
ONLY SOLUTION!**

Synchronization granularity

- **Granularity**: level at which a structure is locked
 - Whole structure vs. individual pieces
 - If individual pieces, which pieces?
 - Simple locks vs. read/write locks
 - Tradeoff: coarse vs. fine-grained locks

Table 4.3 Linked List Times: 1000 Initial Keys, 100,000 ops, 99.9% Member, 0.05% Insert, 0.05% Delete

Implementation	Number of Threads			
	1	2	4	8
Read-Write Locks	0.213	0.123	0.098	0.115
One Mutex for Entire List	0.211	0.450	0.385	0.457
One Mutex per Node	1.680	5.700	3.450	2.700

Table 4.4 Linked List Times: 1000 Initial Keys, 100,000 ops, 80% Member, 10% Insert, 10% Delete

Implementation	Number of Threads			
	1	2	4	8
Read-Write Locks	2.48	4.97	4.69	4.71
One Mutex for Entire List	2.50	5.13	5.04	5.11
One Mutex per Node	12.00	29.60	17.00	12.00

Locality

- **Temporal locality**: frequently-accessed items will continue to be accessed in the future
 - Theme: **repetition is common**
- **Spatial locality**: nearby addresses are more likely to be accessed soon
 - Theme: **sequential access is common**
- Why do we care?
 - *Shared-memory programs with good locality run faster than programs with poor locality*

Caching effects

- **Caching**
 - Keep frequently-used stuff in faster memory
- **Cache line**
 - Single unit of cached data
- **Cache hits/misses**
 - Was data in cache? (if so, hit; if not, miss)
- **Cache invalidation**
 - Writes to one cache can render another cache out-of-date
- **False sharing**
 - Unnecessary cache invalidation

Multithreading summary

- Shared memory parallelism has a lot of benefits
 - Low overhead for thread creation/switching
 - Uniform memory access times (**symmetric** multiprocessing)
- It also has significant issues
 - Limited scaling (# of cores)
 - Requires explicit thread management
 - Requires explicit synchronization (**HARD!**)
 - Caching problems can be difficult to diagnose
- Core design tradeoff: synchronization **granularity**
 - Higher granularity: simpler but slower
 - Lower granularity: more complex but faster