CSE341: Programming Languages
Lecture 10
ML Modules

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Modules

For larger programs, one “top-level” sequence of bindings is poor
– Especially because a binding can use all earlier (non-shadowed) bindings

So ML has structures to define modules

```
structure MyModule = struct bindings end
```

Inside a module, can use earlier bindings as usual
– Can have any kind of binding (val, datatype, exception, ...)

Outside a module, refer to earlier modules’ bindings via
```
ModuleName.bindingName
```
– Just like `List.foldl` and `String.toUpper`; now you can define your own modules

Example

```
structure MyMathLib = struct
  fun fact x = 
    if x=0 
    then 1 
    else x * fact(x-1)
  val half_pi = Math.pi / 2
  fun doubler x = x * 2
end
```

Namespace management

• So far, this is just namespace management
  – Giving a hierarchy to names to avoid shadowing
  – Allows different modules to reuse names, e.g., `map`
  – Very important, but not very interesting

Optional: Open

• Can use `open ModuleName` to get “direct” access to a module’s bindings
  – Never necessary; just a convenience; often bad style
  – Often better to create local val-bindings for just the bindings you use a lot, e.g., `val map = List.map`
    • But doesn’t work for patterns
    • And `open` can be useful, e.g., for testing code

Signatures

• A signature is a type for a module
  – What bindings does it have and what are their types
• Can define a signature and ascribe it to modules – example:

```
signature MATHLIB = sig
  val fact : int -> int
  val half_pi : real
  val doubler : int -> int
end
structure MyMathLib :> MATHLIB = struct
  fun fact x = ...
  val half_pi = Math.pi / 2.0
  fun doubler x = x * 2
end
```
In general

- Signatures

  ```signature SIGNAME =
  sig types-for-bindings end```

  - Can include variables, types, datatypes, and exceptions defined in module

- Ascribing a signature to a module

  ```structure MyModule :> SIGNAME =
  struct bindings end```

  - Module will not type-check unless it matches the signature, meaning it has all the bindings at the right types
  - Note: SML has other forms of ascription; we will stick with these [opaque signatures]

Hiding things

Real value of signatures is to to hide bindings and type definitions

– So far, just documenting and checking the types

Hiding implementation details is the most important strategy for writing correct, robust, reusable software

So first remind ourselves that functions already do well for some forms of hiding...

Example

Outside the module. `MyMathLib.doubler` is simply unbound

– So cannot be used [directly]
– Fairly powerful, very simple idea

```
signature MATHLIB =
sig
  val fact : int -> int
  val half_pi : real
end

structure MyMathLib :> MATHLIB =
struct
  fun fact x = …
  val half_pi = Math.pi / 2.0
  fun doubler x = x * 2
end
```

A larger example [mostly see the code]

Now consider a module that defines an Abstract Data Type (ADT)

– A type of data and operations on it

Our example: rational numbers supporting `add` and `toString`

```
structure Rational1 =
struct
datatype rational = Whole of int | Frac of int*int
exception BadFrac
(*internal functions gcd and reduce not on slide*)
fun make_frac (x,y) = …
fun add (r1,r2) = …
fun toString r = …
end
```

Library spec and invariants

Properties [externally visible guarantees, up to library writer]

– Disallow denominators of 0
– Return strings in reduced form ("4" not "4/1", "3/2" not "9/6")
– No infinite loops or exceptions

Invariants [part of the implementation, not the module’s spec]

– All denominators are greater than 0
– All `rational` values returned from functions are reduced
More on invariants

Our code maintains the invariants and relies on them

Maintain:
- `make_frac` disallows 0 denominator, removes negative denominator, and reduces result
- `add` assumes invariants on inputs, calls `reduce` if needed

Rely:
- `gcd` does not work with negative arguments, but no denominator can be negative
- `add` uses math properties to avoid calling `reduce`
- `toString` assumes its argument is already reduced

A first signature

With what we know so far, this signature makes sense:
- `gcd` and `reduce` not visible outside the module

```
signature RATIONAL_A = 
sig
datatype rational = Whole of int | Frac of int*int
exception BadFrac
val make_frac : int * int -> rational
val add : rational * rational -> rational
val toString : rational -> string
end
structure Rational1 :> RATIONAL_A = ...
```

The problem

By revealing the datatype definition, we let clients violate our invariants by directly creating values of type `Rational1.rational`
- At best a comment saying “must use `Rational1.make_frac`”

```
signature RATIONAL_A = 
sig
datatype rational = Whole of int | Frac of int*int
exception BadFrac
val make_frac : int * int -> rational
val add : rational * rational -> rational
val toString : rational -> string
end
structure Rational1 :> RATIONAL_A = ...
```

So hide more

Key idea: An ADT must hide the concrete type definition so clients cannot create invariant-violating values of the type directly

Alas, this attempt doesn’t work because the signature now uses a type `rational` that is not known to exist:

```
signature RATIONAL_WRONG = 
sig
exception BadFrac
val make_frac : int * int -> rational
val add : rational * rational -> rational
val toString : rational -> string
end
structure Rational1 :> RATIONAL_WRONG = ...
```

Abstract types

So ML has a feature for exactly this situation:

In a signature:
```
type foo
```
means the type exists, but clients do not know its definition

```
signature RATIONAL_B = 
sig
type rational
exception BadFrac
val make_frac : int * int -> rational
val add : rational * rational -> rational
val toString : rational -> string
end
structure Rational1 :> RATIONAL_B = ...
```

This works! (And is a Really Big Deal)

Nothing a client can do to violate invariants and properties:
- Only way to make first rational is `Rational1.make_frac`
- After that can use only `Rational1.make_frac`, `Rational1.add`, and `Rational1.toString`
- Hides constructors and patterns – don’t even know whether or not `Rational1.rational` is a datatype
- But clients can still pass around fractions in any way
Two key restrictions

So we have two powerful ways to use signatures for hiding:

1. Deny bindings exist (val-bindings, fun-bindings, constructors)
2. Make types abstract (so clients cannot create values of them or access their pieces directly)

(Later we will see a signature can also make a binding’s type more specific than it is within the module, but this is less important)

A cute twist

In our example, exposing the Whole constructor is no problem

In SML we can expose it as a function since the datatype binding in the module does create such a function

- Still hiding the rest of the datatype
- Still does not allow using Whole as a pattern

Signature matching

Have so far relied on an informal notion of, “does a module type-check given a signature?” As usual, there are precise rules…

structure Foo :> BAR is allowed if:

- Every non-abstract type in BAR is provided in Foo, as specified
- Every abstract type in BAR is provided in Foo in some way
  - Can be a datatype or a type synonym
- Every val-binding in BAR is provided in Foo, possibly with a more general and/or less abstract internal type
  - Discussed “more general types” earlier in course
  - Will see example soon
- Every exception in BAR is provided in Foo

Of course Foo can have more bindings (implicit in above rules)

Equivalent implementations

A key purpose of abstraction is to allow different implementations to be equivalent

- No client can tell which you are using
- So can improve/replace/choose implementations later
- Easier to do if you start with more abstract signatures (reveal only what you must)

Now:

Another structure that can also have signature RATIONAL_A, RATIONAL_B or RATIONAL_C

- But only equivalent under RATIONAL_B or RATIONAL_C (ignoring overflow)

Next:

A third equivalent structure implemented very differently

More interesting example

Given a signature with an abstract type, different structures can:

- Have that signature
- But implement the abstract type differently

Such structures might or might not be equivalent

Example (see code):

- type rational = int * int
- Does not have signature RATIONAL_A
- Equivalent to both previous examples under RATIONAL_B or RATIONAL_C
More interesting example

```ml
structure Rational3 =
  struct
    type rational = int * int
    exception BadFrac
  fun make_frac (x,y) = ...
  fun Whole i = (i,1) (* needed for RATIONAL_C *)
  fun add ((a,b)(c,d)) = (a*d+b*c,b*d)
  fun toString r = ... (* reduce at last minute *)
end
```

Some interesting details

- Internally `make_frac` has type `int * int -> int * int`, but externally `int * int -> rational`
  - Client cannot tell if we return argument unchanged
  - Could give type `rational -> rational` in signature, but this is awful: makes entire module unusable – why?
- Internally `Whole` has type `'a -> 'a * int` but externally `int -> rational`
  - This matches because we can specialize `'a` to `int` and then abstract `int * int` to `rational`
  - `Whole` cannot have types `'a -> int * int` or `'a -> rational` (must specialize all `'a` uses)
  - Type-checker figures all this out for us

Can’t mix-and-match module bindings

Modules with the same signatures still define different types

So things like this do not type-check:

- `Rational1.toString(Rational2.make_frac(9,6))`
- `Rational3.toString(Rational2.make_frac(9,6))`

This is a crucial feature for type system and module properties:

- Different modules have different internal invariants!
- In fact, they have different type definitions
  - `Rational1.rational` looks like `Rational2.rational`, but clients and the type-checker do not know that
  - `Rational3.rational` is `int*int` not a datatype!