CSE 351: The Hardware/Software Interface

Section 5

Structs as parameters, buffer overflows, and lab 3
In the previous section, we looked at how integers and pointers were passed as arguments to functions. If we were to pass a struct by value to a function (as in not passing a pointer), how would the compiler use assembly instructions to achieve this? Let’s take a look at an example (see pass_struct.c from the section material).
Buffer overflows

C performs no bounds-checking on array accesses; this makes it fast but also unsafe

What would we need to add to C to support checked array accesses?

For example: int arr[10]; arr[15] = 3;

No compiler warning, just memory corruption

What symptoms are there when programs write past the end of arrays?

Hint: we saw an example of this in lab 0
Stack layout

* As we’ve seen previously, when values are declared on the stack, the compiler shifts %rsp (in x86-64 assembly) to allocate space for them.

* When a function returns, the return instruction pointer indicates where to begin executing again.
Stack layout

* Note that the top of the diagram represents higher addresses, and the bottom is lower addresses.
* To which memory does $d[10]$ refer in this example?
In buffer overflow attacks, malicious users pass values to attempt to overwrite important parts of the stack or heap.

For example, an attacker could overwrite the return instruction pointer with the address of a malicious block of code.
Buffer overflow attacks

C has some inherently unsafe functions that facilitate buffer overflows, including `gets` and `strcpy`

`gets(char* s)` reads from standard input until reaching a newline character (`\n`) or EOF (end of file)

How long should `s` be to contain the entire input string?

`strcpy(char* dest, const char* src)` copies the contents of the `src` string into the `dest` string

What happens if `dest` is smaller than `src`?
Protecting against overflows

As a programmer, you can protect against buffer overflow bugs/attacks by checking buffer lengths and using safer string-related functions

- **fgets**(char* s, int size, FILE* stream) takes a size parameter and will only read that many bytes from the given input stream
- **strncpy**(char* dest, const char* src, size_t n) will copy at most n bytes from src to dest
Protecting against overflows

- Stack canaries
  - At runtime, programs place a (pseudo-)random integer on the stack immediately before the return instruction pointer. If the integer value doesn’t match when the function returns, the program generates a segmentation fault.

- Data execution prevention
  - Some parts of memory (notably the stack) are marked as non-executable. The CPU will refuse to execute instructions from such locations and the program will terminate.
Lab 3: Buffer overflows

- The purpose of lab 3 is to become familiar with how buffer overflow attacks work.
- The various stages of the lab require different types of attacks to achieve certain goals.
- If you have become comfortable with GDB and understanding assembly instructions, you should have no problem.
Lab 3: Buffer overflows

* The exploitable function in lab 3 is called `Gets` (capital ‘G’) and is called from the `getbuf` function.
* `getbuf` allocates a small array and reads user input into it via `Gets`. If the user input is too long, then certain values on the stack within the `getbuf` function will be overwritten...
Lab 3: Buffer overflows

- The first thing to do is to become familiar with the provided tools for the lab.
- To generate malicious strings for testing buffer overflows, use the provided `sendstring` tool. It takes a list of space-separated hex values and translates them to the corresponding Ascii characters.
- Each lab is slightly different as determined by the username given to it; when you run the `bufbomb` binary, you have to pass in “--u [cse-username]”.
- Let’s take a look at how this works.