CSE 351

Section 9

Dynamic Memory Allocation
Dynamic Memory

• Dynamic memory is memory that is “requested” at run-time

• Solves two fundamental dilemmas:
  • How can we control the amount memory used based on run time conditions?
  • How can we control the lifetime of memory?

• Important to understand how dynamic memory works:
  • We want to use allocators efficiently
  • Can result in many errors if used incorrectly
Example Program

• Dynamically adds/removes/sorts nodes in a large linked list

• Without dynamically-allocated memory:
  • Use the `mmap()` or equivalent system call to map a virtual address to a page of physical memory
    • This essentially gives you a page of memory to use
  • Use pointer addition/subtraction to segment the page into linked list nodes
  • Manage which regions of the page have been used
  • Request a new page when that one fills up
  • Get fired from your job
  • MESSY! NOBODY DOES THIS!
Example Program

• With dynamically-allocated memory:
  • Use malloc() from the C standard library to request a node-sized chunk of memory for every node in the linked list
  • When removing a node, simply carry out the necessary pointer manipulation and use free() to allow that space to be used for something else
  • Keep your job!

• You will come to love malloc() because it does all the heap management for you...

• ...But for the next week you will hate it, because you are in charge of implementing it
malloc()

• Provided to you by the C standard library using
#include <stdlib.h>

• Programs allocate blocks from the heap by calling the malloc() function
  • The heap is the memory region dedicated to dynamic storage

• How to use malloc():
  • Takes a size_t representing the number of bytes requested
  • Returns a void* pointing to the start of the block or NULL if there was an error

int* array = (int*) malloc(10 * sizeof(int));
freer() free

• Also part of the C standard library
• Programmers also need to be able to “free up” dynamically-allocated memory that they no longer need
• Simply pass free() a pointer to a block received from malloc()
  • Using free() allows for more efficient heap usage
  • Subsequent calls to malloc() will be able to re-use that block
• Double-free
  • This occurs when you free the same block twice
  • It usually results in a segmentation fault
  • We will see why that might occur when we look at how malloc() is implemented
The Heap

• What does the heap look like exactly?
  • Imagine a giant contiguous region of memory
• This region is segmented into free blocks and used blocks
  • The free blocks form an explicit, doubly-linked list
  • To allocate a block, we remove it from the list and return a pointer to it
  • To free a block, we insert it back into the list
Block Header

• Every block has a 64-bit header
• Three of those bits are used for tags
  • LSB is set if the block is currently used (not in the free list)
  • Next bit (to the left) is set if the block preceding it \textit{in memory} is used
  • The third bit is not used
• The upper 61 bits store the size of the block
• This 64-bit value is also referred to as the block’s “sizeAndTags”

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{cccccccc}
  63 & 62 & 61 & 60 & . & . & . & 2 & 1 & 0 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{center}
Free Blocks

• A free block has:
  • A sizeAndTags value on either side of the free space.
  • Pointers to the next and previous blocks in the list
    *Remember, the blocks are not necessarily in address order, so the pointers can point to blocks anywhere in the heap*

• Each free block is a BlockInfo struct followed by free space and the boundary tag (footer)

```c
struct BlockInfo {
    size_t sizeAndTags;
    struct BlockInfo* next;
    struct BlockInfo* prev;
};
```
Used Blocks

- Used blocks only have a sizeAndTags, followed by the payload
- The payload is the actual block of memory returned to a user program that invokes `malloc()`
  ```c
  int* a = (int*) malloc(10 * sizeof(int));
  ```
- This means `a` points to the payload
Putting it All Together

Initial 128-byte heap layout:

- `BlockInfo` * `FREE_LIST_HEAD` always points to the first block in the free list

- The `BlockInfo` for this free block would look like this:
  - `sizeAndTags`: 130 (128 + 0x2)
  - `next`: null
  - `prev`: null

- The `PrecedingUsed` tag is set because the previous block is not free (comes into play when we look at coalescing later)

```
Size: 128, Preceding Used: 1, Used: 0
```
Allocating Blocks

```c
void* a = malloc(32)
```

- Searches the free list for a block big enough
- The first (and only) block is 128 bytes, which will work
- Bad implementation: return a 120-byte payload (8-byte header)
- Good implementation: split off 40 bytes, return a 32-byte payload

Note: “a” does not point to sizeAndTags! Points to payload, or where the “next” pointer would be stored in the BlockInfo
Allocating Blocks

```c
void* b = malloc(16)
```

- Only needs a block of $16 + 8 = 24$ bytes, but if we were to free this block in the future, we would need at least $32$ bytes to create a free block.
- The minimum block size is $32$ bytes
Allocating Blocks

```c
void* c = malloc(48)
```

- `FREE_LIST_HEAD = null`
Freeing Blocks

\texttt{free(b)}

- Inserts block b into the beginning of the free list
- Notice how the tags in the block after needed to be updated

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{freeing_blocks}
\caption{Freeing Blocks}
\end{figure}
Freeing Blocks

\texttt{free(c)}

- Is this what the heap should look like at the end of \texttt{free(c)}?
Coalesce Free Blocks

When we have multiple free blocks adjacent to each other in memory, we should coalesce them.

• Coalescing basically combines free blocks together
• Bigger blocks are always better; a large block can satisfy both large and small `malloc()` requests
Lab 5

Implement `malloc()` and `free()`

• Before you start to feel overwhelmed...

• We give you many functions already including:
  • `searchFreeList()`
  • `insertFreeBlock()`
  • `removeFreeBlock()`
  • `coalesceFreeBlock()`
  • `requestMoreSpace()`
Implementing `malloc()`

- Figure out how big a block you need
- **Call** `searchFreeList()` to get a free block that is large enough
  - **NOTE:** If you request 16 bytes, it might give you a block that is 500 bytes
- Remove that block from the list
- Update size + tags appropriately
- Return a pointer to the payload of that block
Implementing `free()`

- Remember, the pointer you are passed is to the payload
- Convert the given used block into a free block
- Insert it into the free list
- Update size + tags appropriately
- Coalesce if necessary by calling `coalesceFreeBlock()`
Macros

• Pre-compile time “find and replace”

• Define constants:
  • \#define NUM_ENTRIES 100
    • OK

• Define simple operations:
  • \#define twice(x) 2*x
    • Not OK
    • twice(x+1) becomes 2*x+1
  • \#define twice(x) (2*(x))
    • OK
  • Always wrap in parentheses; it’s a naive search-and-replace!
Macros

• Why macros?
  • “Faster” than function calls
    • Why?
  • For malloc
    • Quick access to header information (payload size, valid)

• Drawbacks
  • Less expressive than functions
  • Arguments are not typechecked, local variables
    • This can easily lead to errors that are more difficult to find
Some Provided Macros

• **UNSCALED_POINTER_ADD**\((p,x)\)
  Add without using “pointer arithmetic”

• **UNSCALED_POINTER_SUB**\((p,x)\)
  Subtract without using “pointer arithmetic”

• **MIN_BLOCK_SIZE**
  The size of the smallest block that is safe to allocate

• **SIZE**\((x)\)
  Gets the size from ‘sizeAndTags’

• **TAG_USED**
  Mask for the used tag

• **TAG_PRECEDING_USED**
  Mask for the preceding used tag

• There are more. Don’t forget to use them!
Running the PreProcessor

- Run gcc with the -E switch
- Executes all preprocessor instructions
  - Lines that start with\
    - `#include`
    - `#define`
    - `#ifdef`
    - etc
- Outputs as a c file
  gcc -E -P foo.c > bar.c
Starter code

• We’ll now go through some of the starter code included in the assignment

• If you are struggling to understand where to get started, read through `coalesceFreeBlock()`
  • If you can understand this function, you will understand everything

• Make sure you use the provided macros
  • They work, so it will help minimize bugs
  • More readable code