CSE 374
Programming Concepts & Tools

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Lecture 9 – C: Locals, lvalues and rvalues, more pointers
The story so far...

- The low-level execution model of a process (one address space)
- Basics of C:
  - Language features: functions, pointers, arrays
  - Idioms: Array-lengths, strings with '\0' terminators
  - Control constructs and int guards
- Today, more features:
  - Local declarations
  - Storage duration and scope
  - Left vs. right expressions; more pointers
  - Dangling pointers
  - Stack arrays and implicit pointers (confusing)
- Next time: structs; the heap and manual memory management (and some hacking)
Storage, lifetime, and scope

• At run-time, every variable needs space.
  – When is the space allocated and deallocated?
• Every variable has scope.
  – Where can the variable be used (unless another variable shadows it)?
• C has several answers (with inconsistent reuse of the word static).
• Some answers rarely used but understanding storage, lifetime, and scope is important.
• Related: Allocating space is separate from initializing that space.
  – Use uninitialized bits? Hopefully crash but who knows.
  – Unlike Java, which zeros out objects, complains about uninitialized locals.
Storage, lifetime, and scope

• **Global variables** allocated before main, deallocated after main. Scope is entire program.
  – Usually bad style, kind of like public static Java fields.
  – But can be OK for truly global data like conversion tables, physical constants, etc.
• **Static global variables** like global variables but scope is just that source file, kind of like private static Java fields.
  – Related: static functions cannot be called from other files.
• **Static local variables** like global variables (!) but scope is just that function, rarely used. (We won’t use them)
• **Local variables** (often called *automatic*) allocated “when reached” deallocated “after that block”, scope is that block.
  – So with recursion, multiple copies of same variable (one per stack frame/function activation).
  – Like local variables in Java.
lvalues vs rvalues

• In intro courses we are usually fairly sloppy about the difference between the left side of an assignment and the right. To “really get” C, it helps to get this straight:
  – Law #1: Left-expressions get evaluated to locations (addresses)
  – Law #2: Right-expressions get evaluated to values
  – Law #3: Values include numbers and pointers (addresses)
• The key difference is the “rule” for variables:
  – As a left-expression, a variable is a location and we are done
  – As a right-expression, a variable gets evaluated to its location’s contents, and then we are done.
  – Most things do not make sense as left expressions.
• Note: This is true in Java too.
Function arguments

• Storage and scope of arguments is like for local variables.
• But initialized by the caller ("copying" the value)
• So assigning to an argument has no affect on the caller.
• But assigning to the space pointed-to by an argument might.

```c
void f() {
    int i=17;
    int j=g(i);
    printf("%d %d",i,j);
}

int g(int x) {
    x = x+1;
    return x+1;
}
```
Function arguments

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- So assigning to an argument has no affect on the caller.
- But assigning to the space pointed-to by an argument might.

```c
void f() {
    int i=17;
    int j=g(&i);
    printf("%d %d",i,j);
}

int g(int* p) {
    *p = (*p) + 1;
    return (*p) + 1;
}
```
Function arguments

- Storage and scope of arguments is like for local variables.
- But initialized by the caller ("copying" the value)
- So assigning to an argument has no affect on the caller.
- But assigning to the space pointed-to by an argument might.

```c
void f() {
    int i=17;
    int j=g(&i);
    printf("%d %d",i,j);
}

int g(int* p) {
    int k = *p;
    int *q = &k;
    p = q;
    (*p) = (*q) + 1;
    return (*q) + 1;
}
```
Pointers to pointers to …

- Any level of pointer makes sense:
  - Example: argv, *argv, **argv
  - Same example: argv, argv[0], argv[0][0]
- But &(&p) makes no sense (&p is not a left-expression, the value is an address but the value is in no-particular-place).
- This makes sense (well, at least it’s legal C):
  ```c
  void f(int x) {
    int*p = &x;
    int**q = &p;
    ... can use x, p, *p, q, *q, **q, ...
  }
  ```
- Note: When playing, you can print pointers with %p (just numbers in hexadecimal)
Dangling pointers

```c
int* f(int x) {
    int *p;
    if(x) {
        int y = 3;
        p = &y; /* ok */
    } /* ok, but p now dangling */
    /* y = 4 does not compile */
    *p = 7;    /* could CRASH but probably not */
    return p; /* uh-oh, but no crash yet */
}
void g(int *p) { *p = 123; }
void h() {
    g(f(7));    /* HOPEFULLY YOU CRASH (but maybe not) */
}
```
Arrays and Pointers

• If p has type T* or type T[ ]:
  – *p has type T
  – If i is an int, p+i refers to the location of an item of type T that is i items past p (not +i storage locations unless each item of type T takes up exactly 1 unit of storage)
  – p[i] is defined to mean *(p+i)
  – if p is used in an expression (including as a function argument) it has type T*
    • Even if it is declared as having type T[ ]
    • One consequence: array arguments are always “passed by reference” (as a pointer), not “by value” (which would mean copying the entire array value)
Arrays revisited

- “Implicit array promotion”: a variable of type T[ ] becomes a variable of type T* in an expression

```c
void f1(int* p) { *p = 5; }

int* f2() {
    int x[3];    /* x on stack */
    x[0] = 5;
    /* (&x)[0] = 5; wrong */
    *x = 5;
    *(x+0) = 5;
    f1(x);
    /* f1(&x); wrong – watch types! */
    /* x = &x[2]; wrong – x isn’t really a pointer! */
    int *p = &x[2];
    return x;    /* wrong – dangling pointer – but type correct */
}
```