Lecture 4

- HW #1 due on Monday Oct 6th (to be done individually)
- Today:
  - Finish up control flow
  - Functions in MIPS

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An Example Function: Factorial

```c
int fact(int n) {
    int i, f = 1;
    for (i = n; i > 0; i--)
        f = f * i;
    return f;
}
```

```
# Original code snippet
int fact(int n) {
    int i, f = 1;
    for (i = n; i > 0; i--)
        f = f * i;
    return f;
}
```

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Slides adapted from Josep Torrellas, Craig Zilles, and Howard Huang
Register Correspondences

- $zero  $0  Zero
- $at   $1  Assembler temp
- $v0-$v1 $2-3  Value (return from function)
- $a0-$a3 $4-7  Argument (to function)
- $t0-$t7 $8-15  Temporaries
- $s0-$s7 $16-23  Saved Temporaries Saved
- $t8-$t9 $24-25  Temporaries
- $k0-$k1 $26-27  Kernel (OS) Registers
- $gp   $28  Global Pointer Saved
- $sp   $29  Stack Pointer Saved
- $fp   $30  Frame Pointer Saved
- $ra   $31  Return Address Saved

Functions in MIPS

- We'll talk about the 3 steps in handling function calls:
  1. The program's flow of control must be changed.
  2. Arguments and return values are passed back and forth.
  3. Local variables can be allocated and destroyed.
- And how they are handled in MIPS:
  - New instructions for calling functions.
  - Conventions for sharing registers between functions.
  - Use of a stack.
Control flow in C

- Invoking a function changes the control flow of a program twice.
  1. Calling the function
  2. Returning from the function
- In this example the main function calls fact twice, and fact returns twice—but to different locations in main.
- Each time fact is called, the CPU has to remember the appropriate return address.
- Notice that main itself is also a function! It is called by the operating system when you run the program.

```c
int main()
{
    ...
    t1 = fact(8);
    t2 = fact(3);
    t3 = t1 + t2;
    ...
}
```

```c
int fact(int n)
{
    int i, f = 1;
    for (i = n; i > 1; i--)
        f = f * i;
    return f;
}
```

Control flow in MIPS

- MIPS uses the jump-and-link instruction jal to call functions.
  - The jal saves the return address (the address of the next instruction) in the dedicated register $ra, before jumping to the function.
  - jal is the only MIPS instruction that can access the value of the program counter, so it can store the return address PC+4 in $ra.

```
jal Fact
```

- To transfer control back to the caller, the function just has to jump to the address that was stored in $ra.

```
jr $ra
```

- Let’s now add the jal and jr instructions that are necessary for our factorial example.
Data flow in C

- Functions accept **arguments** and produce **return values**.
- The **blue** parts of the program show the actual and formal arguments of the fact function.
- The **purple** parts of the code deal with returning and using a result.

```c
int main()
{
    ... t1 = fact(8);
    t2 = fact(3);
    t3 = t1 + t2;
    ...
}

int fact(int n)
{
    int i, f = 1;
    for (i = n; i > 1; i--)
        f = f * i;
    return f;
}
```

Data flow in MIPS

- **MIPS uses** the following conventions for function arguments and results.
  - Up to four function arguments can be “passed” by placing them in argument registers $a0$-$a3$ before calling the function with jal.
  - A function can “return” up to two values by placing them in registers $v0$-$v1$, before returning via jr.
- These conventions are not enforced by the hardware or assembler, but programmers agree to them so functions written by different people can interface with each other.
- Later we’ll talk about handling additional arguments or return values.
A note about types

- Assembly language is untyped—there is no distinction between integers, characters, pointers or other kinds of values.
- It is up to you to “type check” your programs. In particular, make sure your function arguments and return values are used consistently.
- For example, what happens if somebody passes the address of an integer (instead of the integer itself) to the fact function?

The big problem so far

- There is a big problem here!
  - The main code uses $t1$ to store the result of fact(8).
  - But $t1$ is also used within the fact function!
- The subsequent call to fact(3) will overwrite the value of fact(8) that was stored in $t1$. 
Nested functions

- A similar situation happens when you call a function that then calls another function.
- Let’s say A calls B, which calls C.
  - The arguments for the call to C would be placed in $a0-$a3, thus overwriting the original arguments for B.
  - Similarly, jal C overwrites the return address that was saved in $ra by the earlier jal B.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A: ...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td># Put B's args in $a0-$a3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jal B # $ra = A2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A2: ...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>B: ...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td># Put C's args in $a0-$a3, # erasing B's args!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jal C # $ra = B2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B2: ...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| jr $ra # where does # this go???

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>C: ...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>jr $ra</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Spilling registers

- The CPU has a limited number of registers for use by all functions, and it’s possible that several functions will need the same registers.
- We can keep important registers from being overwritten by a function call, by saving them before the function executes, and restoring them after the function completes.
- But there are two important questions.
  - Who is responsible for saving registers—the caller or the callee?
  - Where exactly are the register contents saved?
Who saves the registers?

- Who is responsible for saving important registers across function calls?
  - The caller knows which registers are important to it and should be saved.
  - The callee knows exactly which registers it will use and potentially overwrite.
- However, in the typical “black box” programming approach, the caller and callee do not know anything about each other’s implementation.
  - Different functions may be written by different people or companies.
  - A function should be able to interface with any client, and different implementations of the same function should be substitutable.
- So how can two functions cooperate and share registers when they don’t know anything about each other?

The caller could save the registers...

- One possibility is for the caller to save any important registers that it needs before making a function call, and to restore them after.
- But the caller does not know what registers are actually written by the function, so it may save more registers than necessary.
- In the example on the right, frodo wants to preserve $a0, $a1, $s0 and $s1 from gollum, but gollum may not even use those registers.

```
frodo: li  $a0, 3
   li  $a1, 1
   li  $s0, 4
   li  $s1, 1
   # Save registers
   # $a0, $a1, $s0, $s1
   jal  gollum
   # Restore registers
   # $a0, $a1, $s0, $s1
   add  $v0, $a0, $a1
   add  $v1, $s0, $s1
   jr    $ra
```
...or the callee could save the registers...

- Another possibility is if the callee saves and restores any registers it might overwrite.
- For instance, a gollum function that uses registers $a0$, $a2$, $s0$ and $s2$ could save the original values first, and restore them before returning.
- But the callee does not know what registers are important to the caller, so again it may save more registers than necessary.

```
gollum:
  # Save registers
  # $a0 $a2 $s0 $s2
  li $a0, 2
  li $a2, 7
  li $s0, 1
  li $s2, 8
  ...
  # Restore registers
  # $a0 $a2 $s0 $s2
  jr $ra
```

...or they could work together

- MIPS uses conventions again to split the register spilling chores.
- The caller is responsible for saving and restoring any of the following caller-saved registers that it cares about.

```
$t0-$t9  $a0-$a3  $v0-$v1
```

In other words, the callee may freely modify these registers, under the assumption that the caller already saved them if necessary.
- The callee is responsible for saving and restoring any of the following callee-saved registers that it uses. (Remember that $ra is “used” by jal.)

```
$s0-$s7  $ra
```

Thus the caller may assume these registers are not changed by the callee.
- $ra is tricky; it is saved by a callee who is also a caller.
- Be especially careful when writing nested functions, which act as both a caller and a callee!
Register spilling example

- This convention ensures that the caller and callee together save all of the important registers—frodo only needs to save registers $a0$ and $a1$, while gollum only has to save registers $s0$ and $s2$.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>frodo:</th>
<th>gollum:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>li $a0$, 3</td>
<td>li $a0$, 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>li $a1$, 1</td>
<td>li $a0$, 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>li $s0$, 4</td>
<td>li $a2$, 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>li $s1$, 1</td>
<td>li $s0$, 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

# Save registers
# $a0$ and $a1$
# $s0$ and $s2$
jal gollum
...# Restore registers
# $a0$ and $a1$
# $s0$ and $s2$
add $v0$, $a0$, $a1$
add $v1$, $s0$, $s1$
jr $ra$

How to fix factorial

- In the factorial example, main (the caller) should save two registers.
  - $t1$ must be saved before the second call to fact.
  - $ra$ will be implicitly overwritten by the jal instructions.
- But fact (the callee) does not need to save anything. It only writes to registers $t0$, $t1$ and $v0$, which should have been saved by the caller.
Where are the registers saved?

- Now we know who is responsible for saving which registers, but we still need to discuss where those registers are saved.
- It would be nice if each function call had its own private memory area.
  - This would prevent other function calls from overwriting our saved registers—otherwise using memory is no better than using registers.
  - We could use this private memory for other purposes too, like storing local variables.

Function calls and stacks

- Notice function calls and returns occur in a stack-like order: the most recently called function is the first one to return.
  1. Someone calls A
  2. A calls B
  3. B calls C
  4. C returns to B
  5. B returns to A
  6. A returns

- Here, for example, C must return to B before B can return to A.
Stacks and function calls

- It’s natural to use a **stack** for function call storage. A block of stack space, called a **stack frame**, can be allocated for each function call.
  - When a function is called, it creates a new frame onto the stack, which will be used for local storage.
  - Before the function returns, it must pop its stack frame, to restore the stack to its original state.
- The stack frame can be used for several purposes.
  - Caller- and callee-save registers can be put in the stack.
  - The stack frame can also hold local variables, or extra arguments and return values.

The MIPS stack

- In MIPS machines, part of main memory is reserved for a stack.
  - The stack grows downward in terms of memory addresses.
  - The address of the top element of the stack is stored (by convention) in the “stack pointer” register, $sp$.
- MIPS does not provide “push” and “pop” instructions. Instead, they must be done explicitly by the programmer.
**Pushing elements**

- To **push** elements onto the stack:
  - Move the stack pointer $sp$ down to make room for the new data.
  - Store the elements into the stack.
- For example, to push registers $t1$ and $t2$ onto the stack:
  ```
  sub $sp, $sp, 8
  sw $t1, 4($sp)
  sw $t2, 0($sp)
  ```
- An equivalent sequence is:
  ```
  sw $t1, -4($sp)
  sw $t2, -8($sp)
  sub $sp, $sp, 8
  ```
- Before and after diagrams of the stack are shown on the right.

**Accessing and popping elements**

- You can access any element in the stack (not just the top one) if you know where it is relative to $sp$.
- For example, to retrieve the value of $t1$:
  ```
  lw $s0, 4($sp)
  ```
- You can **pop**, or “erase,” elements simply by adjusting the stack pointer upwards.
- To pop the value of $t2$, yielding the stack shown at the bottom:
  ```
  addi $sp, $sp, 4
  ```
- Note that the popped data is still present in memory, but data past the stack pointer is considered invalid.
Summary

- Today we focused on implementing function calls in MIPS.
  - We call functions using jal, passing arguments in registers $a0-$a3.
  - Functions place results in $v0-$v1 and return using jr $ra.
- Managing resources is an important part of function calls.
  - To keep important data from being overwritten, registers are saved according to conventions for caller-save and callee-save registers.
  - Each function call uses stack memory for saving registers, storing local variables and passing extra arguments and return values.
- Assembly programmers must follow many conventions. Nothing prevents a rogue program from overwriting registers or stack memory used by some other function.