CSE 374
Programming Concepts & Tools

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Fall 2017

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)
• Later: structs; the heap and manual memory management
Storage, lifetime, and scope

• At run-time, every variable needs space & has a lifetime
  – 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 and 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** lifetime 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
  - With recursion, multiple copies of same variable (one per stack frame/function activation)
  - Like local variables in Java
Ivalues vs rvalues

• In intro courses we are usually fairly sloppy about the difference between the left side of an assignment and the right (e.g., different meanings of x in “x=x+1;”). 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

• 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) {
    *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 (i.e., addresses, i.e., locations in memory) 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 */
}
```