# CSE 484 / CSE M 584: Defenses, Software Security, Buffer Overflows

Fall 2022

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# Announcements

- Things Due:
  - Ethics Form: Due today!
  - Homework #1: Due Friday
  - Research Readings (CSE M 584): Due Thursday (and every Thursday thereafter)

# TOWARDS DEFENSES

# Approaches to Security

- Prevention
  - Stop an attack
- Detection
  - Detect an ongoing or past attack
- Response and Resilience
  - Respond to / recover from attacks

- The threat of a response may be enough to deter some attackers

# Whole System is Critical

- Securing a system involves a whole-system view
  - Cryptography
  - Implementation
  - People
  - Physical security
  - Everything in between

- This is because "security is only as strong as the weakest link," and security can fail in many places
  - No reason to attack the strongest part of a system if you can walk right around it.

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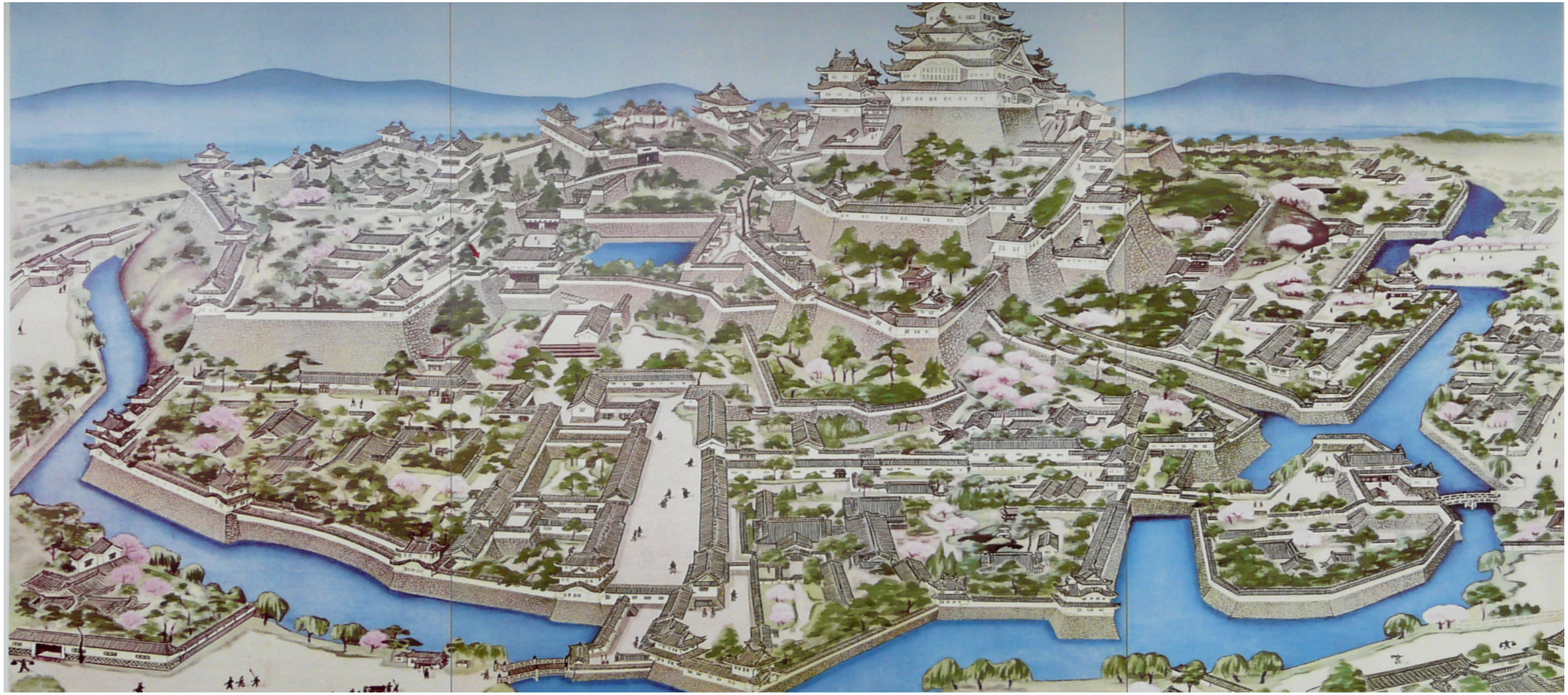
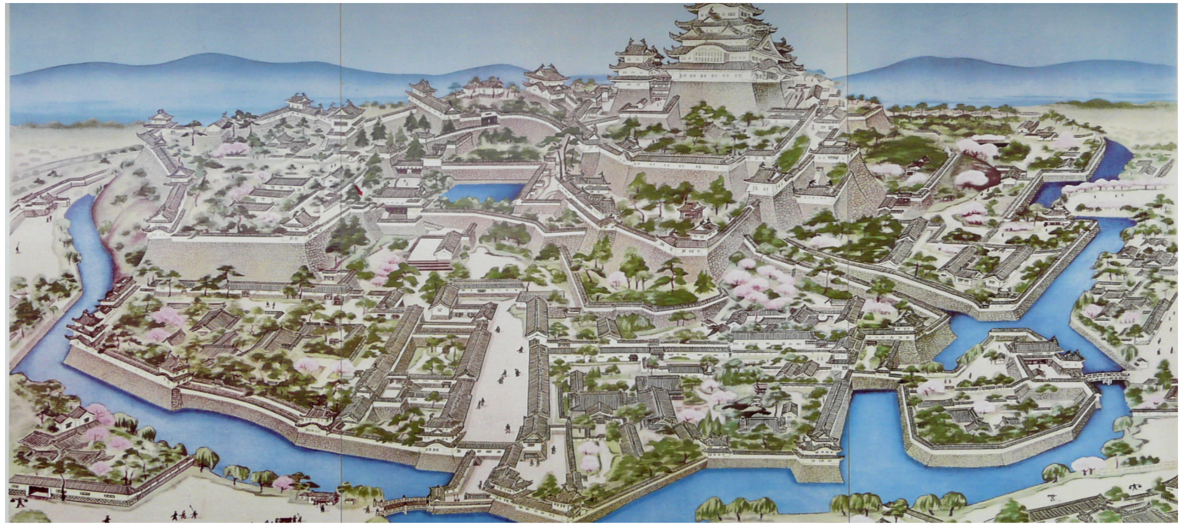
# Attacker's Asymmetric Advantage



# Attacker's Asymmetric Advantage



- Attacker only needs to win in one place
- Defender's response: Defense in depth

# From Policy to Implementation

- After you've figured out what security means to your application, there are still challenges:
  - Requirements bugs and oversights
    - Incorrect or problematic goals
  - Design bugs and oversights
    - Poor use of cryptography
    - Poor sources of randomness
    - ...
  - Implementation bugs and oversights
    - Buffer overflow attacks
    - ...
  - Is the system **usable**?

# Many Participants

- Many parties involved
  - System developers
  - Companies deploying the system
  - The end users
  - The adversaries (possibly one of the above)
- Different parties have different goals
  - System developers and companies may wish to optimize cost
  - End users may desire security, privacy, and usability
  - Different users/stakeholders may have different needs
  - The relationship between these goals is quite complex (e.g., will customers choose features or security?) (e.g., are there “non-obvious” stakeholders?)

# Better News

- There are a lot of defense mechanisms
  - We'll study some, but by no means all, in this course
- It's important to understand their limitations
  - "If you think cryptography will solve your problem, then you don't understand cryptography… and you don't understand your problem" -- Bruce Schneier

# SOFTWARE SECURITY

# Bugs, Vulnerabilities, and Exploits

- Bug
  - Not working quite right
- Vulnerability
  - A malfunction that can be used for an adversary's goals
- Exploit
  - The mechanical set of operations to make use of a vulnerability

# Adversarial Failures

- Software bugs are bad
  - Consequences can be serious
- Even worse when an intelligent adversary wishes to exploit them!
  - Intelligent adversaries: Force bugs into "worst possible" conditions/states
  - Intelligent adversaries: Pick their targets

# Memory Corruption Bugs

- Buffer overflows bugs: Big class of bugs
  - Normal conditions: Can sometimes cause systems to fail
  - Adversarial conditions: Attacker able to violate security of your system (control, obtain private information, ...)
- Stack, Heap both possibilities

# BUFFER OVERFLOWS

# A Bit of History: Morris Worm

- Worm was released in 1988 by Robert Morris
  - Graduate student at Cornell, son of NSA chief scientist
  - Convicted under Computer Fraud and Abuse Act,
    - 3 years probation and 400 hours of community service

- Worm was intended to propagate slowly and harmlessly measure the size of the Internet
- Due to a coding error, it created new copies as fast as it could and overloaded infected machines
- $10-100M worth of damage (in 1988)

# Morris Worm and Buffer Overflow

- One of the worm's propagation techniques was a buffer overflow attack against a vulnerable version of `fingerd` on VAX systems
  - By sending special string to finger daemon, worm caused it to execute code creating a new worm copy

Buffer overflows remain a common source of vulnerabilities and exploits today!

(Especially in embedded systems.)

# Attacks on Memory Buffers

- Buffer is a pre-defined data storage area inside computer memory (stack or heap)
- Typical situation:
  - A function takes some input that it writes into a pre-allocated buffer.
  - The developer forgets to check that the size of the input isn't larger than the size of the buffer.
  - Uh oh.
    - "Normal" bad input: crash
    - "Adversarial" bad input : take control of execution

# Stack Buffers


- Suppose Web server contains this function

```
void func(char *str) {
        char buf[126];
        ...
        strcpy(buf,str);
        ...
    }
```

- No bounds checking on strcpy()
- If str is longer than 126 bytes
  - Program may crash
  - Attacker may change program behavior

# Example: Changing Flags


- Suppose Web server contains this function

```
void func(char *str) {
        byte auth = 0;
        char buf[126];
        ...
        strcpy(buf,str);
        ...
    }
```

- Authenticated variable non-zero when user has extra privileges
- Morris worm also overflowed a buffer to overwrite an authenticated flag in fingerd

# Memory Layout

- Text region: Executable code of the program
- Heap: Dynamically allocated data
- Stack: Local variables, function return addresses; grows and shrinks as functions are called and return

# Stack Buffers

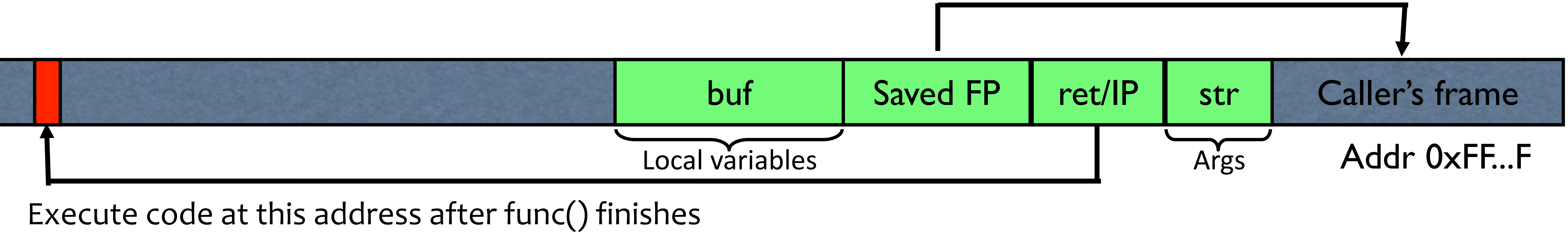
- Suppose Web server contains this function:

```
void func(char *str) {
     char buf[126];
     strcpy(buf,str);
}
```

Allocate local buffer
(126 bytes reserved on stack)

Copy argument into local buffer

- When this function is invoked, a new frame (activation record) is pushed onto the stack.



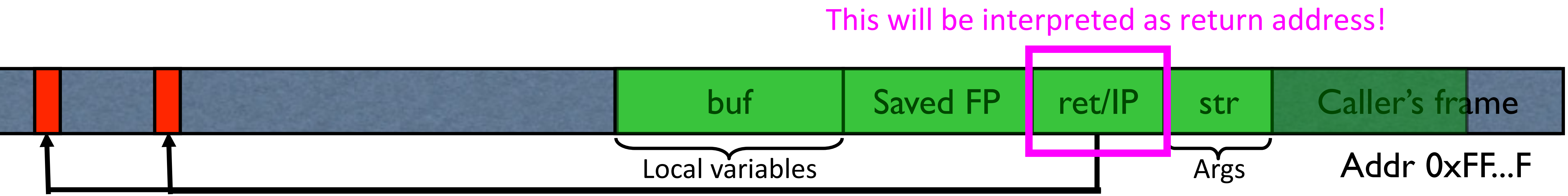
# What if Buffer is Overstuffed?

- Memory pointed to by str is copied onto stack…

```
void func(char *str) {
        char buf[126];
        strcpy(buf,str);
}
```

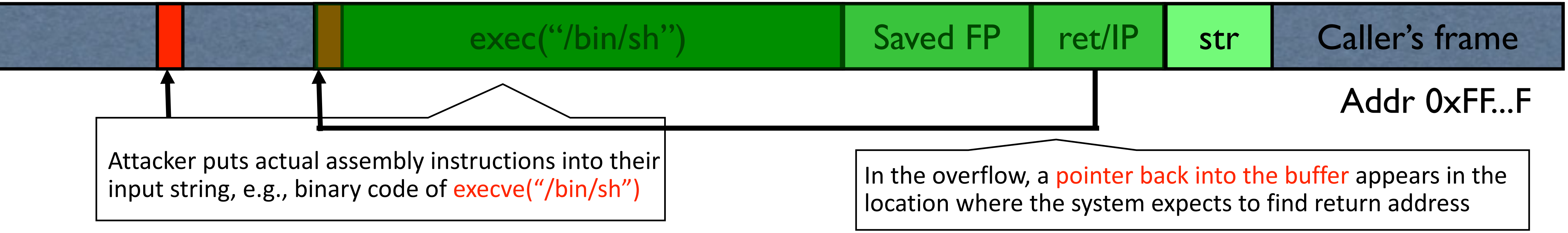
strcpy does NOT check whether the string at *str contains fewer than 126 characters

- If a string longer than 126 bytes is copied into buffer, it will overwrite adjacent stack locations.



# Executing Attack Code

- Suppose buffer contains attacker-created string
  - For example, str points to a string received from the network as the URL




- When function exits, code in the buffer will be executed, giving attacker a shell **("shellcode")**
  - Root shell if the victim program is setuid root

# Buffer Overflows Can Be Tricky…

- Overflow portion of the buffer must contain correct address of attack code in the RET position
  - The value in the RET position must point to the beginning of attack assembly code in the buffer
    - Otherwise application will (probably) crash with segfault
  - **Attacker must correctly guess in which stack position his/her buffer will be when the function is called**

# Problem: No Bounds Checking

- strcpy does <u>not</u> check input size
  - strcpy(buf, str) simply copies memory contents into buf starting from *str until "\0" is encountered, ignoring the size of area allocated to buf
- Many C library functions are unsafe
  - strcpy(char *dest, const char *src)
  - strcat(char *dest, const char *src)
  - gets(char *s)
  - scanf(const char *format, … )
  - printf(const char *format, … )

# Does Bounds Checking Help?

- strncpy(char *dest, const char *src, size_t n)
  - For strncpy (unlike strcpy), no more than n characters will be copied from *src to *dest
    - Programmer has to supply the right value of n
- Potential overflow in htpasswd.c (Apache 1.3):

```
strcpy(record,user);
strcat(record,":");
strcat(record,cpw);
```

Copies username ("user") into buffer ("record"), then appends ":" and hashed password ("cpw")

- Published fix:

```
strncpy(record,user,MAX_STRING_LEN-1);
strcat(record,":")
strncat(record,cpw,MAX_STRING_LEN-1);
```

# In-Class Activity

Canvas -> Quizzes -> Oct 3

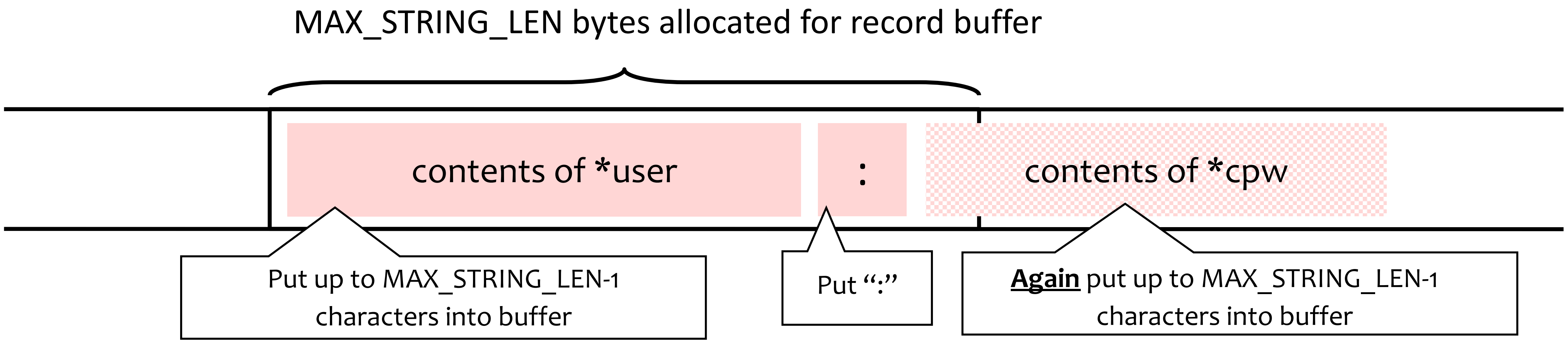
*(This is the first one that will be graded.*

*Reminder that you have 5 “freebies” for the quarter.)*

# Misuse of strncpy in htpasswd "Fix"

- Published "fix" for Apache htpasswd overflow:

```
strncpy(record,user,MAX_STRING_LEN-1);
strcat(record,":")
strncat(record,cpw,MAX_STRING_LEN-1);
```



# What About This?

- Home-brewed range-checking string copy

```
void mycopy(char *input) {
      char buffer[512]; int i;

      for (i=0; i<=512; i++)
          buffer[i] = input[i];
 }

 void main(int argc, char *argv[]) {
      if (argc==2)
         mycopy(argv[1]);
 }
```

# In-Class Activity

Canvas -> Quizzes -> Oct 5

# Off-by-One Overflow

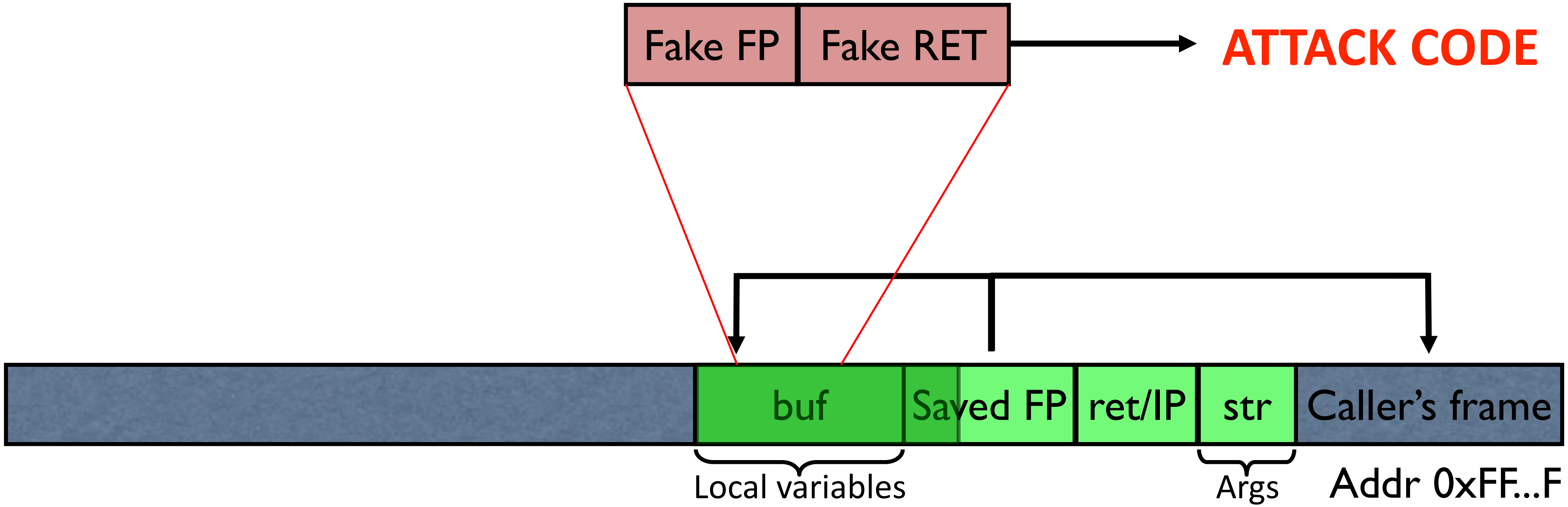
- Home-brewed range-checking string copy

```
void mycopy(char *input) {
     char buffer[512]; int i;

     for (i=0; i<=512; i++)
         buffer[i] = input[i];
 }

 void main(int argc, char *argv[]) {
     if (argc==2)
        mycopy(argv[1]);
 }
```

This will copy **513** characters into buffer. Oops!

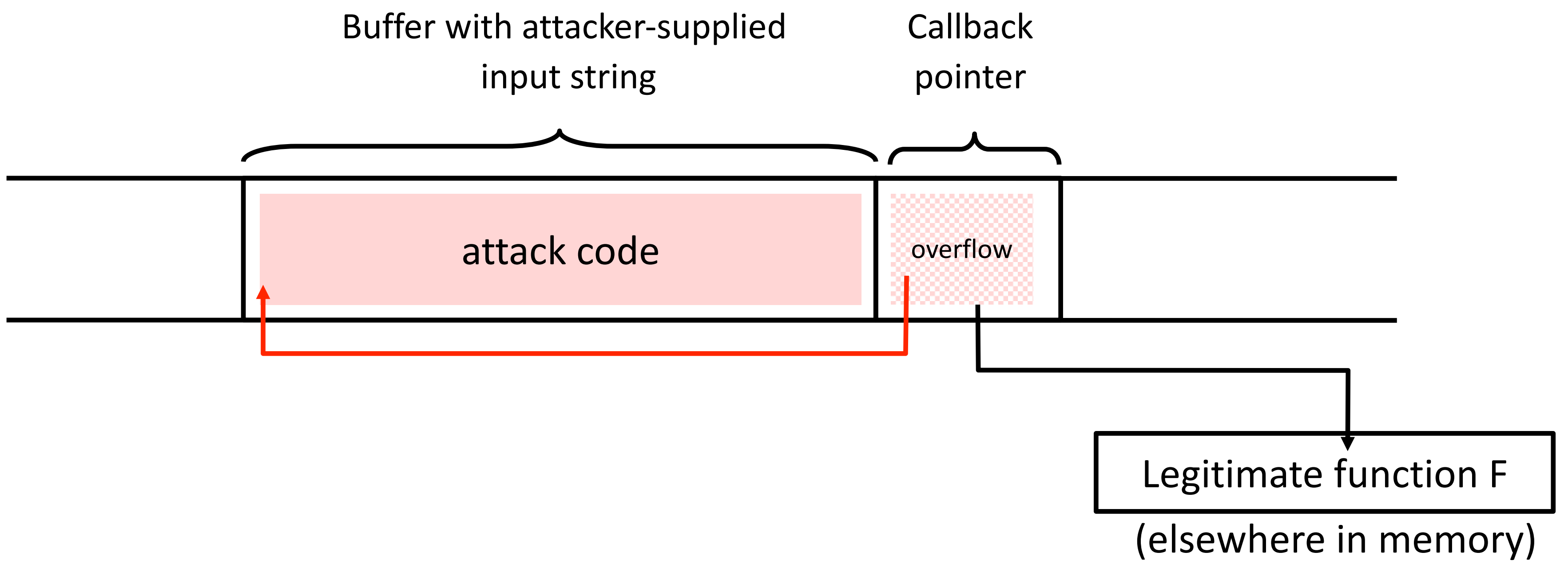
- 1-byte overflow: can't change RET, but can change pointer to previous stack frame…

# Frame Pointer Overflow



# Another Variant: Function Pointer Overflow

- C uses function pointers for callbacks: if pointer to F is stored in memory location P, then one can call F as (*P)(... )



# Other Overflow Targets

- Format strings in C
  - We'll walk through this later
- Heap management structures used by malloc()
  - More details in section
  - Techniques have changed wildly over time

- These are all attacks you can look forward to in Lab #1 ☺