Function Calls

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COS 217

Reading: Chapter 4 of “Programming From the Ground Up”
(available online from the course Web site)

Goals of Today’s Lecture

• Finishing introduction to assembly language
  ◦ EFLAGS register and conditional jumps
  ◦ Addressing modes

• Memory layout of the UNIX process
  ◦ Data, BSS, roData, Text
  ◦ Stack frames, and the stack pointer ESP

• Calling functions
  ◦ Call and ret commands
  ◦ Placing arguments on the stack
  ◦ Using the base pointer EBP

Detailed Example

```
count=0;
while (n>1) {
  count++;
  if (n&1)
    n = n*3+1;
  else
    n = n/2;
}
```

```
movl %edx, %eax
andl $1, %eax
je .else
jmp .endif
.else:
.endif:
sarl $1, %edx
movl %edx, %eax
addl %eax, %edx
addl %eax, %edx
addl $1, %edx
addl $1, %ecx
```

```
movl $0, %ecx
```

```
loop:
  cmpl $1, %edx
  jle .endloop
  jmp .loop
.endloop:
  movl $0, %ecx
```
Setting the EFLAGS Register

- **Comparison cmpl** compares two integers
  - Done by subtracting the first number from the second
    - Discarding the results, but setting the eflags register
  - Example:
    - `cmpl $1, %edx` (computes %edx – 1)
    - `jle .endloop` (looks at the sign flag and the zero flag)

- **Logical operation andl** compares two integers
  - Example:
    - `andl $1, %eax` (bit-wise AND of %eax with 1)
    - `je .else` (looks at the zero flag)

- **Unconditional branch jmp**
  - Example:
    - `jmp .endif` and `jmp .loop`
Main Parts of the Program

• Break program into sections (.section)
  ○ Data, BSS, RoData, and Text

• Starting the program
  ○ Making _start a global (.global _start)
    – Tells the assembler to remember the symbol _start
    – … because the linker will need it
  ○ Identifying the start of the program (_start)
    – Defines the value of the label _start

• Exiting the program
  ○ Specifying the exit() system call (movl $1, %eax)
    – Linux expects the system call number in EAX register
  ○ Specifying the status code (movl $0, %ebx)
    – Linux expects the status code in EBX register
  ○ Interrupting the operating system (int $0x80)

Function Calls

• Function
  ○ A piece of code with well-defined entry and exit points, and a well-defined interface

• “Call” and “Return” abstractions
  ○ Call: jump to the beginning of an arbitrary procedure
  ○ Return: jump to the instruction immediately following the “most-recently-executed” Call instruction

• The jump address in the return operation is dynamically determined

Implementing Function Calls

P: # Function P
...
  jmp R  # Call R
Rtn_point1:
...
Q: # Function Q
...
  jmp R  # Call R
Rtn_point2:
...
R: # Function R
...
  jmp ???  # Return

What should the return instruction in R jump to?
Implementing Function Calls

P: # Proc P
movl $Rtn_point1, %eax
jmp R # Call R
Rtn_point1:
...

Q: # Proc Q
movl $Rtn_point2, %eax
jmp R # Call R
Rtn_point2:
...

R: # Proc R
...
jmp %eax # Return

Convention: At Call time, store return address in EAX

Problem: Nested Function Calls

P: # Function P
movl $Rtn_point1, %eax
jmp Q # Call Q
Rtn_point1:
...

Q: # Function Q
movl $Rtn_point2, %eax
jmp R # Call R
Rtn_point2:
...
jmp %eax # Return

• Problem if P calls Q, and Q calls R
• Return address for P to Q call is lost

Need to Use a Stack

• A return address needs to be saved for as long as the function invocation continues
• Return addresses are used in the reverse order that they are generated: Last-In-First-Out
• The number of return addresses that may need to be saved is not statically known

• Saving return addresses on a Stack is the most natural solution
Stack Frames

- Use stack for all temporary data related to each active function invocation
  - Return address
  - Input parameters
  - Local variables of function
  - Saving registers across invocations

- Stack has one Stack Frame per active function invocation

High-Level Picture

- At Call time, push a new Stack Frame on top of the stack
- At Return time, pop the top-most Stack Frame

main begins executing

\[
\text{main's Stack Frame}
\]
main begins executing
main calls P

main begins executing
main calls P
P calls Q

main begins executing
main calls P
P calls Q
Q calls P
main begins executing
main calls P
P calls Q
Q calls P
P returns

main begins executing
main calls P
P calls Q
Q calls P
P returns
Q calls R
Q calls R
R returns
main begins executing
main calls P
P calls Q
Q calls P
P returns
Q calls R
R returns
Q returns
0
%ESP
main’s Stack Frame
P’s Stack Frame
Bottom

main begins executing
main calls P
P calls Q
Q calls P
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Q calls R
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Q returns
P returns
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main’s Stack Frame
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Function Call Details

- Call and Return instructions
- Argument passing between procedures
- Local variables
- Register saving conventions

Call and Return Instructions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instruction</th>
<th>Function</th>
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<tr>
<td>pushl src</td>
<td>subl $4, %esp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>movl src, (%esp)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>popl dest</td>
<td>movl (%esp), dest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>addl $4, %esp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>call addr</td>
<td>pushl %eip</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>jmp addr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ret</td>
<td>pop %eip</td>
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%ESP before Call

%ESP after Call

Old EIP
Call and Return Instructions

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Return instruction assumes that the return address is at the top of the stack.

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Return instruction assumes that the return address is at the top of the stack.

Input Parameters

- Caller pushes input parameters before executing the Call instruction.
- Parameters are pushed in the reverse order:
  - Push Nth argument first
  - Push 1st argument last
  - So that the first argument is at the top of the stack at the time of the Call.
Input Parameters

- Caller pushes input parameters before executing the Call instruction
- Parameters are pushed in the reverse order
  - Push Nth argument first
  - Push 1st argument last
  - So that the first argument is at the top of the stack at the time of the Call

### Before Call

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<th>%ESP</th>
<th>Arg N</th>
<th>Arg ...</th>
<th>Arg 1</th>
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### After Call

<table>
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<th>%ESP</th>
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<th>Arg N</th>
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Callee can address arguments relative to ESP: Arg 1 as 4(%esp)

### Before Return

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Input Parameters

- Caller pushes input parameters before executing the Call instruction.
- Parameters are pushed in the reverse order:
  - Push Nth argument first
  - Push 1st argument last
  - So that the first argument is at the top of the stack at the time of the Call

After the function call is finished, the caller pops the pushed arguments from the stack.

Base Pointer: EBP

- As Callee executes, ESP may change.
- Use EBP as a fixed reference point to access arguments and other local variables.
- Need to save old value of EBP before using EBP.
- Callee begins by executing:
  `pushl %ebp`
  `movl %esp, %ebp`

After popping arguments, the caller pops the pushed arguments from the stack.
Base Pointer: EBP

- As Callee executes, ESP may change
- Use EBP as a fixed reference point to access arguments and other local variables
- Need to save old value of EBP before using EBP
- Callee begins by executing
  
  ```
  pushl %ebp
  movl %esp, %ebp
  ```

- Regardless of ESP, Callee can address Arg 1 as 8(%ebp)

Base Pointer: EBP

- Before returning, Callee must restore EBP to its old value
- Executes
  
  ```
  movl %ebp, %esp
  popl %ebp
  ret
  ```

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- Executes
  
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  movl %ebp, %esp
  popl %ebp
  ret
  ```

Local variables of the Callee are also allocated on the stack.

- Allocation done by moving the stack pointer
- Example: allocate two integers
  - subl $4, %esp
  - subl $4, %esp
  - (or equivalently, subl $8, %esp)

- Reference local variables using the base pointer
  - -4(%ebp)
  - -8(%ebp)
Use of Registers

- Problem: Callee may use a register that the caller is also using
  - When callee returns control to caller, old register contents may be lost
  - Someone must save old register contents and later restore

- Need a convention for who saves and restores which registers

GCC/Linux Convention

- Caller-save registers
  - %eax, %edx, %ecx
  - Save on stack prior to calling

- Callee-save registers
  - %ebx, %esi, %edi
  - Old values saved on stack prior to using

- %esp, %ebp handled as described earlier

- Return value is passed from Callee to Caller in %eax

A Simple Example

```c
int add3(int a, int b, int c)
{
    int d;
    d = a + b + c;
    return d;
}

int foo(void)
{
    return add3( 3, 4, 5 );
}
```
A Simple Example

```c
int add3(int a, int b, int c){
    int d;
    d = a + b + c;
    return d;
}
```

In general, one may need to push callee-save registers onto the stack

```
# Add the three arguments
movl 8(%ebp), %eax
addl 12(%ebp), %eax
addl 16(%ebp), %eax

# Put the sum into d
movl %eax, -4(%ebp)

# Return value is already in eax
# In general, one may need to pop callee-save registers

# Restore old ebp, discard stack frame
movl %ebp, %esp
popl %ebp

# Return
ret
```

A Simple Example

```c
int foo(void) {
    return add3( 3, 4, 5 );
}
```

In general, one may need to push callee-save registers onto the stack

```
# No need to save caller-save registers either

# Push arguments in reverse order
pushl $5
pushl $4
pushl $3

# Return value is already in eax

# Restore old ebp and discard stack frame
movl %ebp, %esp
popl %ebp

# Return
ret
```

Conclusion

- Invoking a function
  - Call: call the function
  - Ret: return from the instruction

- Stack Frame for a function invocation includes
  - Return address,
  - Procedure arguments,
  - Local variables, and
  - Saved registers

- Base pointer EBP
  - Fixed reference point in the Stack Frame
  - Useful for referencing arguments and local variables