Asynchronous Programming
Under the Hood

Georgia Tech

Week 6
How to Implement Event Dispatchers

- Recall:
  - Record registered callbacks in a data structure (easy)
  - Wait for an event to happen (easy)
  - Call the callbacks when it happens (easy)

- What’s the problem?
Example:

Building an Event Dispatcher to Handle Timer Callbacks

```python
import time
import javax.swing as swing

class Timer:
    def __init__(self):
        self.callbacks = []

    def registerCallback(self, callback):
        self.callbacks.append(callback)

    def waitForEvent(self):
        while 1:
            time.sleep(5)
            for cb in self.callbacks:
                cb()

def myCallback():
    now = time.localtime(time.time())
    print "The time is now %02d:%02d:%02d" % (now[3], now[4], now[5])

if __name__ == '__main__':
    disp = Timer()
    disp.registerCallback(myCallback)
    disp.waitForEvent()
    swing.JFrame("I'm running!").show()
```

Record callback functions in a list

In a loop, sleep for 5 seconds, wake up, then fire all of the callbacks
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    def registerCallback(self, callback):
        self.callbacks.append(callback)

    def waitForEvent(self):
        while 1:
            time.sleep(5)
            for cb in self.callbacks:
                cb()

    def myCallback():
        now = time.localtime(time.time())
        print "The time is now " + str(now[3]) + ":" + str(now[4]) + "." + str(now[5])

if __name__ == "__main__":
    disp = Timer()
    disp.registerCallback(myCallback)
    disp.waitForEvent()
    swing.JFrame("I'm running").show()
```

The Problem: the `waitForEvent()` method has to block waiting for the timer to expire.

The method never returns control back to the main program.
Building Event Dispatchers

- There are actually two problems with the previous code
  1. Any code that calls `waitForEvent()` hangs, because the `waitForEvent()` method blocks indefinitely
  2. The way `waitForEvent()` is implemented, it can only wait for one kind of thing (time.sleep()). While the method is blocked waiting on the timer to expire, it wouldn’t be able to block waiting for other kinds of events (mouse, etc.)
First Solution: Multi-Way Polling

- A technique to let you block waiting for *multiple* sources of activity at the same time
- In Unix: select(), poll()
- Depends on operating system-level support
  - Only recently appeared in Java
  - Not available in current version of Jython
- So we won’t talk about it any more!
Second Solution: Threads

- What you’d like to do is have a way for the main program to keep running while the event dispatcher does its own thing
- Threads
  - Separate flow of execution in your program
  - Has its own “position” in the program
- Using threads to implement event dispatchers
  - Your past programs have been “singly threaded”: one main thread
  - “Multi threaded”: one thread can block waiting on an event to occur without affecting the main thread
  - Need to wait on more than one thing? Use another thread!
- This is basically how the Swing event dispatcher works
Example: A Threaded Event Dispatcher

```python
import time
import thread
import threading
import javax.swing as swing

class Timer:
    def __init__(self):
        self.callbacks = []
        self.thread = threading.Thread(target=self.waitForEvent)
        self.thread.start()

    def registerCallback(self, callback):
        self.callbacks.append(callback)

    def waitForEvent(self):
        while 1:
            time.sleep(5)
            for cb in self.callbacks:
                cb()

    def myCallback():
        now = time.localtime(time.time())
        print "The time is now " + str(now[3]) + ":" + str(now[4]) + ":" + str(now[5])

if __name__ == "__main__":
    disp = Timer()
    disp.registerCallback(myCallback)
    swing.JFrame("hello").show()
```

Make a new thread to execute code
Start it running. Make it execute the waitForEvent() method forever.

The second thread starts when the Timer is created. No need to call waitForEvents() here.
Example: A Threaded Event Dispatcher

```python
import time
import thread
import threading
import javax.swing as swing

class Timer:
    def __init__(self):
        self.callbacks = []
        self.thread = threading.Thread(target=self.waitForEvent)
        self.thread.start()

    def registerCallback(self, callback):
        self.callbacks.append(callback)

    def waitForEvent(self):
        while 1:
            time.sleep(5)
            for cb in self.callbacks:
                cb()

    def myCallback():
        now = time.localtime(time.time())
        print "The time is now " + str(now[3]) + ":" + str(now[4]) + ":" + str(now[5])

if __name__ == "__main__":
    disp = Timer()
    disp.registerCallback(myCallback)
    swing.JFrame("hello").show()
```

Now the **timer thread** is executing here...

While the **main thread** executes here!
A Word of Caution...

- Be careful about the data that threads modify!
- You want to ensure that two threads can never modify the same data at the same time
- An example from the real world (from Lorenzo Alvisi):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jack</th>
<th>Jill</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Look in fridge, out of milk</td>
<td>Look in fridge, out of milk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leave for store</td>
<td>Leave for store</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arrive at store</td>
<td>Arrive at store</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buy milk</td>
<td>Buy milk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arrive home, put milk away</td>
<td>Arrive home, put milk away</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Oh no!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“Milk” and “Fridge” are the shared data structures in this example
Solution: Locks

- Scary CS term:
  - Locks provide a way to synchronize threads
  - Read: they make sure only one thread at a time is running in code that mucks with data that is used by multiple threads

- Create a new lock object you’ll use to protect a region of code that shouldn’t be mucked with by multiple threads at the same time:
  - self.lock = threading.Lock()

- Acquire the lock before reading or writing data that might be accessed by another thread:
  - self.lock.acquire()

- Release the lock when you’re done:
  - self.lock.release()
import threading, time, random

class Counter:
    def __init__(self):
        self.count = 0;

    def increment(self):
        self.count = self.count + 1
        return self.count

counter = Counter()

class Worker:
    def __init__(self, name):
        self.thread = threading.Thread(target=self.run)
        self.thread.start()
        self.name = name

    def run(self):
        for i in range(10):
            value = counter.increment()
            time.sleep(random.randint(10, 100) / 1000.0)
            print self.thread.getName(), "finished", value

for i in range(10):
    w = Worker(i)
import threading, time, random

class Counter:
    def __init__(self):
        self.count = 0;

    def increment(self):
        self.count = self.count + 1
        return self.count

counter = Counter()

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for i in range(10):
    w = Worker(i)
import threading, time, random

class Counter:
    def __init__(self):
        self.lock = threading.Lock()
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    def increment(self):
        self.lock.acquire()
        value = self.count = self.count + 1
        self.lock.release()
        return value

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class Worker:
    def __init__(self, name):
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for i in range(10):
    w = Worker(i)
Another Word of Caution...

- You have to synchronize just enough code to make it safe
  - If you don’t synchronize enough, you’ll get hard-to-track errors
  - If you synchronize too much, you do away with the advantage of threads in the first place (only one thing’s running at a time)
- Good practice: use different locks to protect different resources
  - Gives maximum concurrency
- Worse case: **deadlock**
  - You can use locks in a way that prevents any code from running!
  - Happens when you are using more than one lock:
    - Thread 1 holds Lock A, and is trying to acquire Lock B
    - Thread 2 holds Lock B, and is trying to acquire Lock A
    - Neither can progress
Why Learn About Threads?

- If *everything* you do has an event-based programming model, you probably don’t need to know about threads
  - But not everything has this model...
- Without events, you’ll often have to write code that *blocks* waiting on something to happen
  - Put it in a thread, and keep the rest of your program going
  - Can “wrap” this in an event dispatcher to make it look like any other event source (like the Timer class)
- Examples of things that might block:
  - Network I/O: Reading from the network is even slower. Plus, the other guy might never respond.
  - Waiting for some time to pass. See the Timer class before.
- Threads are necessary for things like this!