Caches and Prefetching
Impact of Cache Misses

- Cache misses are very expensive
  - Blocking cache: severely reduce performance
  - Non-blocking cache: instruction stalls in ROB, can prevent instruction issue
  - Paper table 1-1
- Discuss tradeoff between associativity and hit time
  - Direct-mapped cache: fast access time, more conflict misses
  - Set-associative cache: slower access, fewer misses
- In Jouppi’s paper, techniques were proposed to reduce misses in a direct-mapped cache
  - Baseline miss rate: Table 2-2
  - Performance: Figure 2-2
In direct-mapped caches, conflict misses represent a significant percentage:
- Average: 39% for D-cache, 29% for I-cache
- Paper Figure 3-1

Miss Cache: Small cache placed between the L1 and L2 caches
- Provides additional associativity without increasing hit time in common case
- Fully associative cache containing 2-5 lines
- On a miss, data is returned to both L1 cache and miss cache
- Organization in Figure 3-2

Results: Paper figure 3-3
- More effective for D-cache than I-cache (discuss)
Victim Caching

- Disadvantage of Miss Cache: data redundancy
  - Needs at least two lines to be effective
- Victim Cache: On a miss, replacement victim line is placed in the victim cache
  - Provides additional associativity without increasing hit time in common case
  - Even a single line can be effective
  - Always an improvement over miss caching
  - Organization in Figure 3-4
Victim Caching (Cont.)

- Results: Paper figure 3-5
  - More effective for D-cache than I-cache
- Impact of cache size on victim cache performance: Paper figure 3-6
- Impact of cache line size on victim cache performance: Paper figure 3-7
Prefetching

- Bringing lines to the cache before being requested
  - Can reduce compulsory and capacity misses
- Requests to next level of cache are either:
  - Demand misses: fill request due to cache miss
  - Prefetch: fill request in anticipation of data request
- Instruction and data access patterns are different (discuss)
Prefetching Definitions

- **Timeliness**: Did the prefetch arrive early enough to avoid a miss
  - Even if miss is not totally avoided, miss latency is reduced
- **Prefetch Hit**: Prefetched line that was hit in the cache before being replaced (miss avoided)
- **Prefetch Miss**: Prefetched line that was replaced before being accessed
- **Prefetch rate**: prefetches per instruction (or 1000 inst.)
- **Accuracy**: Percentage of prefetch hits to all prefetches
- **Coverage**: Percentage of misses avoided due to prefetching
  - $100 \times \frac{\text{Prefetch Hits}}{\text{Prefetch Hits} + \text{Cache Misses}}$
Classification of Prefetched Lines

- **Useful Prefetch**
  - Prefetch hit before being replaced
  - Results in avoiding a cache miss

- **Useless Prefetch**
  - Prefetch is replaced before being accessed (prefetch miss)
  - Downside: Increases demand for cache bandwidth

- **Harmful Prefetch**
  - Prefetch is replaced before being accessed AND
  - Prefetch replaces a line that is requested later (cache pollution)
  - Results in an additional cache miss
Simple Prefetching Alternatives

- **Prefetch always**
  - Prefetch after every reference
  - Leads to significant demand on resources for next level in cache hierarchy

- **Prefetch on miss (Also called one block lookahead)**
  - On a miss, we prefetch the next sequential line as well
  - Cuts #misses in a sequential stream in half
  - We can also implement N-block lookahead

- **Tagged Prefetch**
  - Each block has a tag status bit associated to it
  - On a prefetch, tag bit set to zero
  - On a hit, tag bit set to 1 (indicating prefetch hit)
  - When a block’s status bit changes from 0 to 1, net block is prefetched
Stream Buffers

- Tagged prefetch may not be timely if cache lines are consumed faster than they are prefetched
- Need to start prefetching before a tag status bit transition takes place
- Stream buffer organization: Paper figure 4-2
Stream Buffer Operation

- On a cache miss
  - Stream buffer prefetches successive lines starting at the miss address
  - As each prefetch is sent out, we allocate an entry in the stream buffer and set available bit to false
  - When prefetch data returns, it is placed in buffer entry; available bit set to true
  - Prefetch lines are stored in the stream buffer not the cache to avoid cache pollution

- On a cache miss and buffer hit
  - Data loaded from stream buffer in one cycle
  - All buffer entries shift by one, new line prefetched to vacant entry

- On a non-sequential miss
  - Stream buffer flushed
  - Prefetching starts from new miss address (even if miss is present in another stream buffer entry)
Stream Buffer Performance

- Performance: Paper figure 4-3
- More successful for instructions compared to data
- Multi-way stream buffer addresses data streams
  - Organization: Paper figure 4-4
  - Performance: Paper figure 4-5
- Sensitivity to cache size: Paper figure 4-6
- Sensitivity to cache line size: Paper figure 4-7
Reading Assignment

- Midterm exam on Monday
  - Open notes, book, calculator
  - No laptops, PDAs or cell phones/blackberries 😊
- Wednesday’s readings:
  - David B. Papworth, "Tuning the Pentium Pro Microarchitecture," IEEE Micro 1996 (Skim)