Caches and Memory-Level Parallelism
Revisiting Processor Performance

- Program Execution Time =
  \[(CPU \text{ clock cycles} + \text{Memory stall cycles}) \times \text{clock cycle time}\]
- For each instruction:
  \[\text{CPI} = \text{CPI(Perfect Memory)} + \text{Memory stall cycles per instruction}\]
- With no caches, all memory requests require accessing main memory
  - Very long latency (discuss)
- Caches filter out many memory accesses
  - Reduce execution time
  - Reduce memory bandwidth
Cache Performance

- Memory stall cycles Per Instruction = Cache Misses per instruction $\times$ miss penalty
- Processor Performance:
  \[ \text{CPI} = \text{CPI(Perfect Memory)} + \text{miss rate} \times \text{miss penalty} \]
- Average memory access time =
  \[ \text{Hit ratio} \times \text{Hit latency} + \text{Miss ratio} \times \text{Miss penalty} \]
- Cache hierarchies attempt to reduce average memory access time
Cache Performance Metrics

- Hit ratio: \#hits / \#accesses
- Miss ratio: \#misses / \#accesses
- Miss rate: Misses per instruction (or 1000 instructions)
  - Miss rate = miss ratio x memory accesses per inst
- Hit time: time from request issued to cache until data is returned to the processor
  - Depends on cache design parameters
  - Bigger caches, larger associativity, or more ports increase hit time
- Miss penalty: depends on memory hierarchy parameters
Memory Hierarchy

- First-level caches
  - Usually Split I & D caches
  - Small and fast
- Second-level caches
  - Usually on-die
  - SRAM cells
- Third-level… etc.? 
- Main memory
  - DRAM cells
  - Focus on density
- Disk
  - Usually magnetic device
  - Non volatile
  - Slow access time
Basic Cache Structure

- Array of blocks (lines)
  - Each block is usually 32-128 bytes
- Finding a block in cache:
  - Offset: byte offset in block
  - Index: Which set in the cache is the block located
  - Tag: Needs to match address tag in cache
Associativity

- Set associativity
  - Set: Group of blocks corresponding to same index
  - Each block in the set is called a *Way*
  - 2-way set associative cache: each set contains two blocks
  - Direct-mapped cache: each set contains one block
  - Fully-associative cache: the whole cache is one set

- Need to check all tags in a set to determine hit/miss status
Example: Cache Block Placement

- Consider a 4-way, 32KB cache with 64-byte lines
- Where is 48-bit address 0x0000FFFFFAB64?
  - Number of lines = cache size / line size = 32K / 64 = 512
  - Each set contains 4 lines ⇒ Number of sets = 512/4 = 128 sets
  - Offset bits = \( \log_2 (64) \) = 6: 0x24
  - Index bits = \( \log_2 (128) \) = 7: 0x2D
  - Tag bits = 48-(6+7) = 35: 0x00007FFFFD
Types of Cache Misses

- Compulsory (cold) misses: First access to a block
  - Prefetching can reduce these misses
- Capacity misses: A cache cannot contain all blocks needed in a program - some blocks are discarded then accessed
  - Replacement policies should target blocks that won’t be used later
- Conflict misses: Blocks mapping to the same set may be discarded (in direct-mapped and set-associative caches)
  - Increasing associativity can reduce these misses
- For multiprocessors, coherence misses can also happen
Non-Blocking Cache Hierarchy

- Superscalar processors require parallel execution units
  - Multiple pipelined functional units
  - Cache hierarchies capable of simultaneously servicing multiple memory requests
    - Do not block cache references that do not need the miss data
    - Service multiple miss requests to memory concurrently
  - Revisit miss penalty with memory-level parallelism
Miss Status Holding (Handling) Registers

- MSHRs facilitate non-blocking memory level parallelism
- Used to track address, data, and status for multiple outstanding cache misses
- Need to provide correct memory ordering, respond to CPU requests, and maintain cache coherence
- Design details vary widely between different processors
  - But basic functions are similar
Cache & MSHR Organization

- Paper Fig 1: block diagram of cache organization
- Main Components:
  - MSHR: One register for each miss to be handled concurrently
  - N-way comparator: Compares an address to all block addresses in MSHRs (N = #MSHRs)
  - Input Stack: Buffer space for all misses corresponding to MSHR entries
    - Size = #MSHRs x block size
  - Status update and collecting networks
- Current implementations combine the MSHR and input stack
MSHR Structure

- Each MSHR contains the following information:
  - Data address
  - PC of requesting instruction
  - Input identification tags & Send-to-CPU flags: Allows forwarding requested word(s) to the CPU
  - Input stack indicators (flags): Allows reading data directly from input stack
  - Partial write codes: Indicates which bytes in a word has been written to the cache
  - Valid flag
  - Obsolete flag: either info is not valid or MSHR hit on data in transit
MSHR Operation

- On a cache miss, one MSHR is assigned
  - Valid flag set
  - Obsolete flag cleared
  - Data address saved
  - PC of requesting instruction saved
  - Appropriate send-to-CPU flags set and others cleared
  - Input identification tag saved in correct position
  - Partial write codes cleared
  - All MSHRs pointing to the same data address purged

- Optimal number of MSHRs: paper figure 2
Reducing Cache Misses

- Cache misses are very costly
- Need multiple cache levels with
  - High associativity or/and victim caches to reduce conflict misses
  - Effective replacement algorithms
  - Data and instruction prefetch
    - Preferably with multiple stream buffers
- More details in tomorrow’s class
Reading Assignment

- T.F. Chen and J.L Baer, “Effective Hardware-Based Data Prefetching for High-Performance Processors,” IEEE Transactions on Computers, 1995 (Skim)