Growl...Roar...Are We Ready for Tiger? Review of the Current Climate and Changes to be Implemented for the 2007 AP CS Exam

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Reg Hahne, Marriotts Ridge High School
Cay Horstmann, San Jose State University
David Reed, Creighton University
Agenda

- Current State of APCS
  Dave Reed
  Creighton University

- APCS and Java 5
  Reg Hahne
  Marriotts Ridge High School

- New Case Study
  Cay Horstmann
  San Jose State University
Current State of APCS

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Chief Reader for AP CS
APCS Exam Count

2005: 13,924 A + 5,097 AB = 19,021 exams

2004: 14,337 A + 6,077 AB = 20,414 exams

*note:* not as dramatic a drop as most colleges have experienced, but still cause for some concern

147 readers graded the exams during a week in June
- roughly 45/55 college-to-high school ratio
- 2005 introduced table leaders to the reading hierarchy
  - 1 CR, 2 ELs, 16 QLs, 17 TLs, 111 Readers
Grading issues with Java

all questions are designed with the APCS Java subset in mind
- however, solutions that utilize constructs/classes outside the subset are NOT penalized (unless the question specifically forbids it)
- likewise, code based on Java 5 is NOT penalized

as in previous years, some minor errors are ignored when grading
- e.g., missing semicolons, = instead of == , case discrepancies

  e.g., no penalty if fail to downcast when accessing a collection
  ```java
  String customer = waitlist.get(0);  instead of
  String customer = (String)waitlist.get(0));
  ```

TEACHERS: ADVISE STUDENTS TO STAY WITHIN THE SUBSET!
with Java, object-oriented techniques are emphasized
- all problems utilized class design and/or implementation
- most problems utilized Java collections, class/method use
- A2 (Ticket Design), A3 (ZigZag Fish), AB1 (Salmon) utilized inheritance

students did reasonably well, with some confusion on OOP concepts
- **common error:** not recognizing when inherited data/methods could be used
  - e.g., overriding parent class instance variables & methods
  - e.g., attempting to access private data from parent class instead of calling super
- **common error:** attempting to reimplement existing functionality
  - e.g., given `minNode` method on tree, but try to implement from scratch

**TEACHERS: CONTINUE TO EMPHASIZE OOP & ABSTRACTION!**
Design Questions

each exam included a question involving class/data structure design

- A2 (Ticket Design) involved designing/implementing classes in a hierarchy
- AB2 (Postal Codes) involved designing/analyzing/using a data structure

student performance was mixed

- A2 was lowest mean, despite similarity to 2004 design question
- AB2 absolute mean was reasonable, especially given its open-endedness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Mean Score</th>
<th>% of 0/-</th>
<th>Mean w/o 0/-</th>
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<td>A1 (Hotel Res.)</td>
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<td>A2 (Ticket Design)</td>
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<td>20.1%</td>
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<td>A3 (ZigZag Fish)</td>
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<td>A4 (Impr. Grades)</td>
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<tr>
<td>AB2 (Postal Code)</td>
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<td>5.80</td>
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<tr>
<td>AB3 (Succ Nodes)</td>
<td>3.13</td>
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<td>3.73</td>
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<td>AB4 (Exp. Aliases)</td>
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<td>13.4%</td>
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</table>

TEACHERS: BE AWARE OF "DESIGN" IN ITS VARIOUS FORMS!
Java Collections

Java Collections are used extensively
- A1: array, ArrayList
- A4: array
- AB2: Set, Map
- AB3: binary search tree, recursion
- AB4: Set, Map, Queue

students knew Collection classes much better
- common error on A: confused access on arrays and ArrayLists
- common error on AB: not knowing access efficiency (HashSet vs. TreeSet)

but AB students had MAJOR troubles with AB3
- typically, tree traversal and recursion are difficult topics on the exam
- this year was especially difficult – extra links introduced, nontrivial algorithm

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<td>13.4%</td>
<td>6.40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

'AB' TEACHERS: DON'T FORGET LINKED STRUCTURES & RECURSION!
student performance on MBCS questions was excellent overall

- A3 (ZigZag) had MANY blanks, but 2\textsuperscript{nd} highest mean if throw these out
  - suggests many A students did not know MBCS at all, but those that did were fine
  - knowledgeable students recognized similarity to DarterFish in the Appendix

- AB1 (Salmon) had highest mean
Comparison with Recent Exams

- A exam performance was comparable to 2004 & previous exams
- AB exam performance was better, closer to previous exams

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>APCS A Exams</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>APCS AB Exams</th>
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<tr>
<td>4 (Well qualified)</td>
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<td>12.5%</td>
<td>13.8%</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 (Qualified)</td>
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<td>19.8%</td>
<td>15.2%</td>
<td>15.0%</td>
<td>26.5%</td>
<td>24.5%</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 (Possibly qualified)</td>
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<td>9.3%</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
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<td>33.1%</td>
<td>34.2%</td>
<td>16.2%</td>
<td>14.0%</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
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</table>
Reg Hahne
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AP CS Development Committee Member
Why modify the AP subset?

- support the teaching of Computer Science
- new features will make question writing easier
- new features will make question answering easier
- adopt college trends as we move to Java 5.0

Clearer simpler code that supports self-documenting entities
What you Need to Know (Testable)

- how to use generic collections such as `ArrayList<E>`
- the "for each" loop (enhanced for loop)
- the `Stack`, `Queue`, and `PriorityQueue` types from the `java.util` package

The AP interfaces (Stack, Queue, PriorityQueue) are no longer required
What you Don’t Need to Know (non-Testable)

- boxing/unboxing
- `Scanner` class
- type-safe enumerations
- static imports
- variable number of arguments to methods (varargs methods)
- `printf` (formatting output)
- and many other Java 5.0 enhancements

All useful, but not testable
**Generic Collections**

```java
ArrayList<City> cityList;
Map<Location, City> cityLocator;
```

- no guesswork as to the type of `Object` in the given collection
- you may be able to use `ArrayList` earlier in your course, as casting is eliminated

```java
City firstCity = cityList.get(0);
// no (City) cast required
```

**Stick to the basics, avoid defining your own generic types**
“For Each” Loop

City[] cities = ....;

// traditionally
for (int i = 0; i < cities.length; i++)
{
    City c = cities[i];
    System.out.println(c.getName());
}

//Java 5.0
for (City c : cities)
    System.out.println(c.getName());

Less room for indexing errors
// iterating through a Set
Set<City> citySet = ...;
for (City c : citySet)
    System.out.println(c.getName());

// iterating through a Map
Map<Location, City> cityLocator = ...;
for (Location loc : cityLocator.keySet())
{
    City c = cityLocator.get(loc);
    ...
}

Iterate through objects of any class that implements the Iterable interface
Additional Interfaces

- Queue interface

- Queue implementation
  
  use the Queue interface and instantiate it with a LinkedList

  ```java
  Queue<Customer> waitingCustomers = new LinkedList<Customer>();
  ```

Only the interfaces and the classes of the standard Java library will be required
Changes in Method Names

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>old</th>
<th>new</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>peek</td>
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<td>peekFront</td>
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<tr>
<td>enqueue</td>
<td>add</td>
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<tr>
<td>dequeue</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>removeMin</td>
<td>remove</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Use conceptual stack, queue and priority queue data structures
Stack and PriorityQueue Usage

- use the Stack class provided in the Java API

```
Stack<Customer> waitingCustomers = 
    new Stack<Customer>();
```

- use the PriorityQueue class provided in the Java API

```
PriorityQueue<Customer> waitingCustomers = 
    new PriorityQueue<Customer>();
```

Use conceptual stack, queue and priority queue data structures
A word of Caution

- stacks, queues and priority queues always refer to the conceptual data structure
  e.g. don’t add to the middle of a queue

- students who carry out operations in a free-response question that are incompatible with the conceptual nature of a data structure may not receive full credit

Use conceptual stack, queue and priority queue data structures
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AP CS Development Committee Member
Lessons Learned from MBS

- visual framework is very motivating
- classes were flexible; supported many exam questions
- teachers took advantage of extension points
- complexity was a drawback

**themes for new case study**

- continuity
- simplicity
- testability
- extensibility
Overview

- framework derived from MBS (GNU license!)
- 10 testable classes/interfaces (MBS had 14)
- simplified API: easier to remember, easier to formulate questions
- layers: use framework at multiple points in your course
- much easier to add your own classes
Layer 1: Objects

turtle-like graphics: bug drops flowers

direct manipulation (like in BlueJ)

Can be used as early motivation for objects
Layer 2: Inheritance

- uses template method, like \texttt{Fish.act}

- override methods to define how critters find neighbors
  - find neighbors
  - process neighbors
  - find candidates for move locations
  - select a move location

- clean and simple behavior, less randomness than MBS
Layer 3: Data Structures

- little change from MBS
- uses generics
- \( \text{Grid}\langle E \rangle \) similar to \( \text{Map}\langle \text{Location}, \ E \rangle \)
- can contain any type, not just \text{Locatable}
- \text{AbstractGrid} example of abstract class
- AB Material
Testability

- **Bug** subclasses lend themselves to multiple choice questions:
  
  e.g., "Which pattern does MysteryBug produce?"

- **Critter** subclasses are easily understood
  
  e.g., no confusing breed/die issues

- **Grid** useful for a wide variety of questions
Extensibility

- to add new actor, simply supply subclass and GIF image
- image is colored and rotated automatically
- easy to do game worlds (e.g. Memory, Sudoku)
- extensions are optional
An Extension - Sudoku

Click on a tile to select a value between 1 to 9.
Note: starting tiles appear darker and cannot be changed.
Schedule

- code and narrative finalized at APCS Development Committee winter meeting

- "Fresh Eyes" review Spring 2006
  - sign up at http://gridworld.info

- open to the public Fall 2006
- first used in 2008 exam

- as always, schedule may change...
  - watch AP mailing list, AP Central for announcements