

ENGI E1112 Departmental Project Report: Computer Science/Computer Engineering

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Abstract

The goal of this project was to manipulate the functionalities of a HP 20b Business Calculator. The main reason in doing this project was to see how an embedded system, such as this calculator, can be adapted to meet certain needs that it was not specifically designed for. This calculator was changed from a normal business calculator to a RPN (Reverse Polish Notation) calculator. The calculator was coded in the C programming language. The source code was given for certain functionalities on the calculator, such as printing on the LCD screen, which were implemented in the rest of the code. Schematics of the calculator keyboard were also used for the design of the projects. Using basic C knowledge, such as loops, pointers, and stacks, the code for projects that led to the building of an RPN calculator was written without the utilization of any C standard libraries. First, code was written so that a word could scroll across the screen. The next projects involved the reading of the keyboard and the entering and displaying of numbers and operands. Finally, the RPN calculator code was written by building upon the code from previous projects. The RPN calculator performs simple arithmetic functions such as addition and multiplication with both negative and positive integers.

1 Introduction

The HP 20b Business Calculator (Figure 1) is a standard business calculator meaning it contains special functions for financial applications and for regular arithmetic operations. Some of the functions include an input/memory key for using the RPN capabilities of the calculator, Other functions include interest conversions and bonds that are especially applicable in finance and business. In these

projects, the main goal was manipulating the code and making it more complex while building on previous code to make a RPN calculator.

Building certain functions on the calculator required knowledge on the software and hardware of the calculator. The calculator code was built and manipulated in the C programming language, which is one of the more low-level programming languages. C was used because the calculator barely has any memory (128 kilobytes of flash memory). Typically, in embedded systems, it is better to use languages that do not have a large memory footprint.

Once a knowledge of the fundamentals of C was attained and the first project was finished, there was a new attempt to gain a better understanding of the hardware of the calculator, especially that of the keyboard so that it could actually be used on the calculator. Other important hardware concepts are that in order to connect to the computer, the calculator uses a USB-JTAG conversion interface (basically USB to Serial Port) and for power, rather than batteries, the calculator uses a power connector to draw power from a wall outlet (the interface was created by Professor Stephen Edwards of Columbia University-Computer Science Department).

2 User Guide

The calculator has a twelve-digit display, of which ten are active. The keyboard also has restricted use, and only the number and primary operation (+, -, /, *, =, INPUT) keys are active. A RPN calculator operates in a manner that is very different than a normal calculator, as it uses postfix notation instead of infix notation. Infix notation is essentially when the operators are placed between the numbers that they are performing the operation on. On the other hand, in postfix notation, the operator comes after the numbers. This means that a simple calculation, such as $2 + 3$, is actually represented as $2\ 3\ +$. This system is actually quite a bit more useful than algebraic notation, as the intermediate results can be checked as one works. Math teachers will even use this form of notation to help to show their pupils how to do calculations [3].

The most important thing to know about RPN is that it uses a LIFO (Last-in-first-out) stack, meaning that each applied operation will only affect the last two numbers entered. For example, if one was to enter $[2]\ [3]\ [4]\ [+]$, the two items remaining would be 2 and 7. If one was to enter a + again, the only remaining number would be 9. The use of this system eliminates the need to use PEMDAS, or be concerned about order of operations, as an operation will always affect the last two items available. This means that calculations such as $(3+5)/(4-2)$ would require fewer keystrokes to enter, as one wouldn't have to type parentheses. This

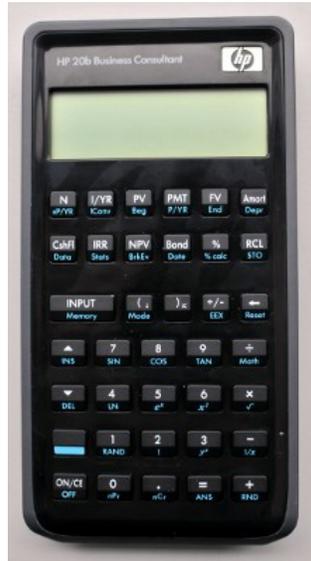


Figure 1: The HP 20b (Image courtesy of Professor Edwards)

calculation, for example, would simply be [3] [5] [+] [4] [2] [-] [/]. The keystroke saving effect is proportional to the complexity of the calculation, as it is dependent on the number of parentheses that won't need to be typed. This calculator allows for the simultaneous storing of up to seven numbers, which is enough to complete nearly any calculation with an economical use of keystrokes.

3 Social Implications

The demonstration of the manipulation of the calculator functionality can have some major social implications. The project has proved that with the necessary materials and a relatively simple knowledge of programming, a small device's functions can be changed to something completely different with a very basic knowledge of programming. Moreover, it proves the power of computer science, as, even for such a small device, which has barely any memory and an extremely weak processor, and without the implementation of any C standard libraries, an RPN calculator was still possible to build using basic C programming tools. In a social context, people, with a little computer science and programming knowledge, can modify simple devices and machines to perform new revolutionary functions and make important tools. Essentially, the development of this project has one major social implication in that it showed us that little devices can be changed to perform new things because of the power of computer science.



Figure 2: JTAG and power supply on the HP 20b (Pictures courtesy of Professor Edwards)

4 The Platform

Central to the project is the HP 20b calculator – the platform for our custom firmware. The key features of the HP 20b that make it ideal for this project are its freely available software development kit and schematics. At its core, the HP 20b is simply an LCD display and keyboard connected to an Atmel AT91SAM7L128 processor, each to be described in further detail below. In order to communicate with the HP 20b, and to allow custom firmware to be implemented and tested, Professor Edwards installed a JTAG header and a power connector to the back of each calculator (Figure 2).

4.1 The Processor

The Atmel AT91SAM7L128 processor is a member of the 7L series of microcontrollers, designed for low power and including 128 kilobytes of flash memory, a small amount for running typical programs. This makes the C programming language ideal for this platform (see sections 5 and 6). Central to our project’s goals is the processor’s system controller, which was modified (through software) to leave certain peripheral components of the processor unpowered, saving energy. A block diagram of the processor can be found in Figure 3. The majority of the peripherals shown were unused and left unpowered. A detailed technical description of the AT91SAM7L128 can be found on Atmel’s website. [1]

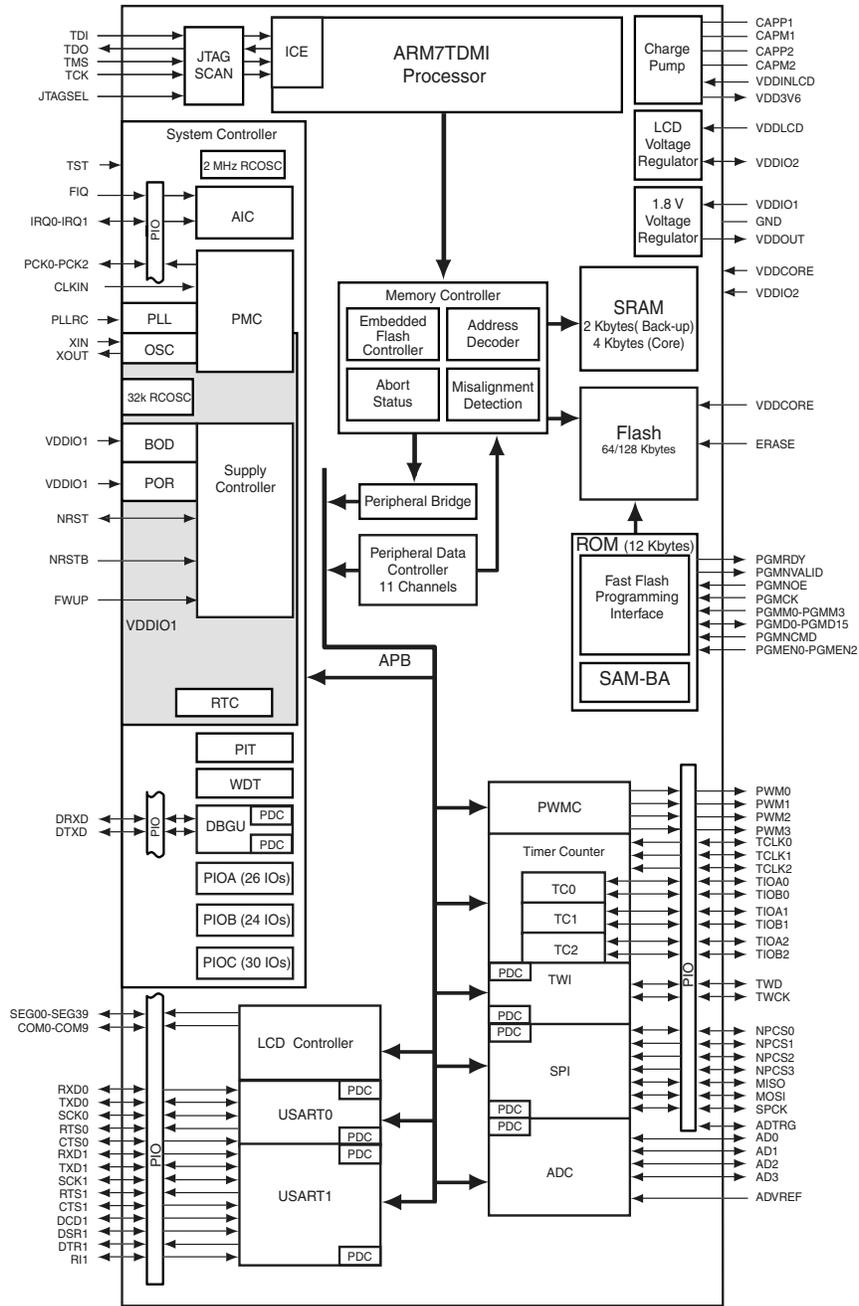


Figure 3: The AT91SAM7L128 microcontroller [2]

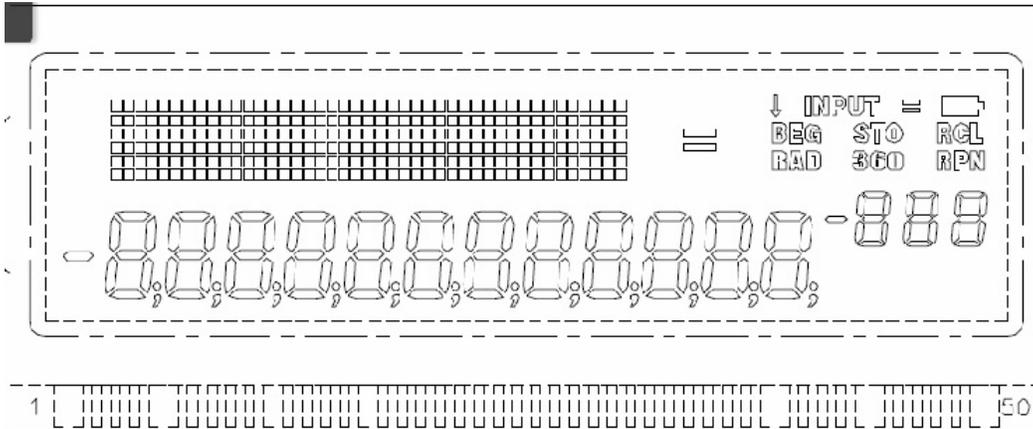


Figure 4: Layout of the HP 20b LCD display [2]

4.2 The LCD Display

Critical to our purposes was an understanding of the calculator’s LCD display. Figure 4 shows the layout of the HP 20b’s LCD. The LCD consists of 15 seven-segment displays, 12 large and 3 small, with periods and commas between each, as well as two one-segment negative signs. In the upper right of the LCD there are displays reserved for specific calculator functions; these were left unused. Professor Edwards provided us with a library of functions to easily manipulate the calculator’s LCD. These initially included the following: *lcd_init()*, a function that prepares the LCD to be written to; *lcd_put_char7()*, a function that places a character A-Z, 0-9 in one of the 15 specified displays; and *lcd_print7()*, a basic string printing function. Eventually two more functions were added: *lcd_print_int()*, which prints an integer instead of having to convert it to a character and *lcd_print_int_neg()*, which performs the same function except for negative integers.

4.3 The Keyboard

As a part of the project we examined the components of various types of keyboards, attempting to understand their underlying mechanisms. Doing this revealed a shared basic design between most keyboards, the HP 20b’s is no exception. Keyboards in general work by assigning each key to a point of intersection in a matrix of wires. When a key is pressed, the two wires that overlap at that point are shorted together, causing low voltage if the line is set to high. In order to test for a pressed key, a column (or row) is set high, and then each row (or

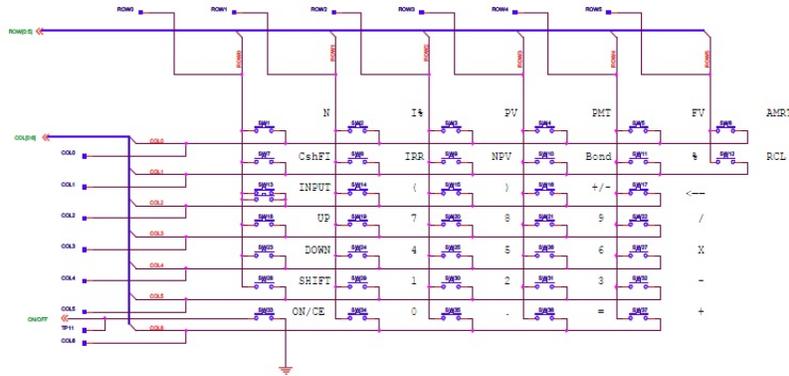


Figure 5: Layout of the HP 20b keyboard [2]

column) is tested. A low row (or column) the represents a pressed key, whose row and column is known. The HP 20b applies this same principle when testing for a pressed key. The keyboard layout is shown in Figure 5, although what is typically labeled a row is labeled a column in the schematic, and vice versa. Code for our implementation of a key-press testing algorithm can be found in Section 6.2.

5 Software Architecture

The final RPN calculator has a variety of interacting pieces of software, each with its own specific purpose and function. The most important of these include the LCD library, the Keyboard library, the Assembly library, and the software to be executed (RPN functionality, in our case). Each of them will be described below.

5.1 Assembly Library

The Assembly library is our lowest-level software interface with the HP 20b's processor. Functions and resource allocation calls are written in assembly and stored in the HP 20b's internal memory. Code written in C by developers is compiled into assembly language and interpreted here, sending low-level instructions to the processor and memory. All C libraries and functions are extensions of the functionality of the Assembly library.

5.2 LCD Library

The LCD library is a compilation of C functions that can manipulate what is displayed on the HP 20b's LCD screen. It serves as a window into the Assembly Library code written in C can use the functions here to easily display characters,

integers, and strings on the LCD. Also defined in the LCD Library is the specific character set used; which LCD segments light up for the letter A, for example.

5.3 *The Keyboard Library*

The Keyboard Library is at the core of our software architecture, transferring and interpreting information when a keyboard key is pressed. Functions in the keyboard library give software written in C the ability to collect information about the state of the keyboard, as well as providing explicit instructions to the processor on how to determine if a key is pressed and which specific key it is. Functions defined in this library are called in the highest software layer, and compiled in the Assembly Library which translates them into keyboard voltages; a detailed description of this process and the algorithm used can be found in Section 6.2.

5.4 *Program Layer*

The highest-level software to be run occurs in this layer, which consists of a program written in C that calls functions from the Keyboard and LCD Libraries. The majority of user functionality occurs in this layer; in our final example, this consisted of RPN functionality. Detailed descriptions of our program's functionality can be found in Section 6.

6 **Software Details**

In this section, include cleaned-up listings of every bit of code you wrote for this lab (only include the declarations for the library code I wrote) and explain how they work, your motivations for them, whether you would do anything differently, etc.

6.1 *Lab 1: A Scrolling Display (Figure 6)*

The first assignment required the design of a system to scroll a message across the calculator LCD screen. Our code consists of primarily of only the main function and a helper function called *strlen*. *strlen* is designed to find the length of a string by iterating through its characters until it reaches a string terminating character. Our main method is composed of two loops, contained within an external infinite loop. The first loop iterates through each character of the string, printing it to the screen, and wrapping back to the beginning when it has exceeded the screen's width. This allows messages exceeding the screen's width to be printed, but may cause the message, when read at a given point in time to be unable to be read properly. A second loop, referred to as a do-nothing loop creates a lag in the processing that provides a delay, allowing the screen to refresh at a rate that will allow for the message to be read. An external counter continually shifts the column to which it starts printing, causing the message to move across the screen.

```

#include "AT91SAM7L128.h"
#include "lcd.h"

#define DELAY 50000
#define COLUMNS 12

int strlen(const char *s) {
    int n;
    for(n=0; *s!='\0';s++) n++;
    return n;
}
int main() {
    lcd_init();

    char test[] = "test";
    int len = 0;
    len = strlen(test);
    int x=0;

    for(;;) {
        int i, j;

        for(i = x ; i < len + x; i++) {
            lcd_put_char7(test[i - x],i%COLUMNS); }

        while(j<DELAY) { j+=1; }
        lcd_print7("          ");
        j=0;
        x++;
    }

    return 0;
}

```

Figure 6: Code for Lab 1 Solution

```

#include "AT91SAM7L128.h"
#include "lcd.h"
#include "keyboard.h"

int main()
{
    lcd_init();
    *AT91C_WDTC_WDMR = AT91C_WDTC_WDDIS;

    keyboard_init();

    for (;;)
    {
        if(keyboard_key()!=0)
            lcd_print7(keyboard_key());
        else
            lcd_print7("          ");
    }
    return 0;
}

```

Figure 7: Code for Lab 2 *main.c*

6.2 Lab 2: Scanning the Keyboard (Figure 7)

To scan the keyboard, one must begin by setting all of the rows and columns to the same value. This means that all columns will return the same value when read and any columns that are different will return a slightly different value. In the case of the calculator, the values were either high (1) or low (0), and when checking rows, a low value was required for a positive result. To find a match, one must set the column to low, and then set the row to low, and look for intersections, in which the low setting of the row isn't cancelled out by the high setting of the column. In practice, this process is carried out through two nested loops, an external one that iterates through the columns, and an internal one that iterates through the rows. At the start of the external loop, the column the loop is on is set high, and then each row is checked to determine if it is low. If a low value is found, the column is set back to high, and the key code of the key pressed is returned.

```

const char keyboard_keys[NUM_COLUMNS][NUM_ROWS] = {
    {'N', 'I', 'P', 'M', 'F', 'A'},
    {'C', 'R', 'V', 'B', '%', 'L'},
    {'\r', '(', ')', '~', '\b', 0},
    {'\v', '7', '8', '9', '/', 0},
    {'\n', '4', '5', '6', '*', 0},
    {'S', '1', '2', '3', '-', 0},
    { 0, '0', '.', '=', '+', 0}};

int keyboard_key()
{
    int i, j;
    for(i = 0; i < COLUMNS; i++)
    {
        keyboard_column_low(i);

        for(j = 0; j < ROWS; j++)
        {
            if(!keyboard_row_read(j))
            {
                keyboard_column_high(i); //Resets the current column
                return keys[i][j];
            }
        }

        keyboard_column_high(i);
    }

    return 0;
}

```

Figure 8: Code for Lab 2 *keyboard.c*

The key code is obtained by using the number of iterations to match the key to a value in an array of possible keys. To test that our function worked, we created an infinite loop in main, and continually called it, printing the result if a key was pressed, and clearing the screen if no key was pressed.

6.3 Lab 3: Entering and Displaying Numbers (Figure 9, Figure 10, Figure 11, Figure 12)

In order to store and display entered numbers, one must create a listener function that polls for keyboard activity, and then send the results back to a function for processing. We implemented this by having a function continually scanning the keyboard, and then when a key was pressed, adding the character represented by the key code to a *string* containing the numbers entered so far. At the end of each scanning cycle, the current state of the *string* was printed, allowing the user to see what they had entered. Once the user had finished entering digits, and pressed an operation, the *string* was converted into a number and was stored along with the operation in a *struct*. A second method called *intToStr* converted the integer to a *string*, allowing the final number, and the operation that caused its return, to be printed to the screen.

In this section, there were several edge cases that needed to be handled, as it was dealing with user input, which can be relatively unpredictable. One of the first cases that was encountered was a user pressing an operation without any number having been entered. This case was handled by returning the maximum possible integer value, which served as an error message, and as an indicator that no key had been pressed. There was also the case of a user entering more digits than could be displayed on the screen. This case was handled by discarding any user input after the screen had been filled, which seemed to be the best manner of following the Principle of Least Surprise.

6.4 Lab 4: An RPN Calculator (Figure 13, Figure 14, Figure 15, Figure 16)

The fourth lab combined the code used in the second and third lab to create a fully functional RPN calculator. The design that was used was built on top of the existing code, and added a new library called "operations". In the operations library, a LIFO *stack* was implemented to handle the storage of the entries. It consisted of an array and a pointer, with a maximum limit of seven entries, and was essentially an aggregate data structure. The three primary accessor methods of a *stack*, *push*, *pop*, and *peek* were implemented as functions in the operations library, and operations were performed through the utilization of these each of these functions. *Push* places an item at the top of a *stack*, *pop* retrieves an item,

```

#include "AT91SAM7L128.h"
#include "lcd.h"
#include "keyboard.h"

char *intToStr(int number)
{
    //Stores string after function return
    static char str[COLUMNS + 1];
    int column = LCD_7_COLUMNS - 4;
    do {
        str[column--] = number % NUM_BASE + '0';
        number /= NUM_BASE;
    } while (number);
    while (column >= 0) str[column--] = ' ';

    return str;
}

int main()
{
    // Disable the watchdog timer
    *AT91C_WDTC_WDMR = AT91C_WDTC_WDDIS;

    lcd_init();
    keyboard_init();

    struct entry key;
    keyboard_key_entry(&key);

    char* str = intToStr(key.number);
    str[COLUMNS - 1] = key.operation;
    lcd_print7(str);

    return 0;
}

```

Figure 9: Code for Lab 3 *main.c*

```

// Maximum value an integer can hold
# define INT_MAX 2147483647
// Base used by numbers entered
# define NUM_BASE 10
//Number of columns to print to
#define DIGIT_COLUMNS LCD_7_COLUMNS - 4

void keyboard_key_entry(struct entry *result)
{
    char num[COLUMNS];
    char prevKey;
    int pos = DIGIT_COLUMNS;
    int i, prevPos;

    //Fills printable columns to remove junk data
    for(i = 0; i < COLUMNS; i++)
    {
        num[i] = ' ';
    }

    for(;;)
    {
        int input = keyboard_key();
        char key = (char) input;

        if((key == '+' || key == '*' || key == '/' || key == '-'
            || key == '=' || key == '\r') && key != prevKey)
        {

```

Figure 10: Code for Lab 3 *keyboard.c*

```

result->operation = key;
int val = 0;
int numDigits = DIGIT_COLUMNS - pos;
if(pos == DIGIT_COLUMNS)
    val = INT_MAX;
else
    for(i = 1; i <= numDigits; i++) //Iterates through
        number string, converting digits to their
        numerical values
    {
        if(num[pos + i] != ' ')
        {
            int digit = num[pos + i] - '0';
            for(j = 0; j < numDigits - i; j++)
                digit *= NUM_BASE;
            val += digit
        }
    }
result->number = val;
break;
}
else if((key >= '0' && key <= '9') && key != prevKey)
{
    if(pos == DIGIT_COLUMNS) //Places digit in the first
        column on first run
    {
        num[pos] = key;
        prevPos = pos;
        pos--;
    }
}

```

Figure 11: Code for Lab 3 *keyboard.c* (Continued)

```

    else
    {
        for(i = pos + 1; i <= DIGIT_COLUMNS; i++) //Shifts
            numbers on the screen back one space
        {
            char temp = num[i];
            num[i - 1] = temp;
        }
        num[DIGIT_COLUMNS] = key;
        prevPos = pos;
        pos--;
    }
}

//Printing
if(pos != DIGIT_COLUMNS && pos != prevPos && input != -1)
    lcd_print7(num);

//Stores the current key to prevent a single keypress from
entering multiple numbers
if(input == -1)
    prevKey = ' ';
else
    prevKey = (char) input;
}
}

```

Figure 12: Code for Lab 3 *keyboard.c* (Continued)

```

#include "AT91SAM7L128.h"
#include "lcd.h"
#include "keyboard.h"
#include "operations.h"

int main()
{
    struct entry entry;
    struct stack stack;
    stack.pointer = 0;
    // Disable the watchdog timer
    *AT91C_WDTC_WDMR = AT91C_WDTC_WDDIS;

    lcd_init();
    keyboard_init();

    for(;;)
    {
        keyboard_get_entry(&entry);
        if(entry.number != INT_MAX)
            push(&stack, entry.number);
        performOperation(&stack, entry.operation);
        lcd_print_int(peek(&stack));
    }

    return 0;
}

```

Figure 13: Code for Lab 4 *main.c*

```

#ifndef _OPERATIONS_H
# define _OPERATIONS_H

# define MAX_STACK_NUMBERS 7

struct stack {
    int numbers[MAX_STACK_NUMBERS];
    int pointer;
};

// Adds an item to the top of the stack
extern void push(struct stack *, int item);

// Returns the item at the top of the stack, and decrements
// the pointer
extern int pop(struct stack *);

// Returns the item at the top of the stack
extern int peek(struct stack *);

// Checks if there is room in the stack (true = room)
extern int valid(struct stack *);

// Perform the indicated operation on the stack
extern void performOperation(struct stack *, char op);

#endif

```

Figure 14: Code for Lab 4 *operations.c* (Continued)

```

#include "operations.h"
#include "lcd.h"

void push(struct stack *stack, int item) {
    //Places the item at the pointer then increments the
    pointer
    if(valid(stack))
        stack->numbers[(stack->pointer)++] = item; }

int pop(struct stack *stack) {
    //Decrements the pointer then retrieves the number at that
    index
    return stack->numbers[--(stack->pointer)]; }

int peek(struct stack *stack) {
    //Retrieves the top number in the stack
    return stack->numbers[stack->pointer - 1]; }

int valid(struct stack *stack) {
    int hasRoom = 0;
    if(stack->pointer < MAX_STACK_NUMBERS)
        hasRoom = 1;
    return hasRoom;
}

```

Figure 15: Code for Lab 4 *operations.c*

```

void performOperation(struct stack *stack, char op) {
    if(stack->pointer == 1 && valid(stack)) return; //Prevents
        operations with one value in stack
    switch(op) {
        case '+': {
            push(stack, pop(stack) + pop(stack));
            break;
        } case '-': {
            int temp = pop(stack);
            push(stack, pop(stack) - temp);
            break;
        } case '/': {
            int temp = pop(stack);
            push(stack, pop(stack) / temp);
            break;
        } case '*': {
            push(stack, pop(stack) * pop(stack));
            break; }
    }
}

```

Figure 16: Code for Lab 4 *operations.c* (Continued)

removing it from the top of the *stack*, and *peek* retrieves an item, without removing it from the top of the *stack*. When an operation is given, it, along with the *stack*, is sent to the operations library, where the top two items of the *stack* are popped, the operations is performed, then they are pushed back into the *stack*. The system then displays the result of the calculation, or the top item of the *stack*, in the case of return, through the peek method.

This implementation is relatively robust, but there were several edge cases that needed to be accounted for during testing. The most important was handling overflow when more than the maximum number of entries were being added to the *stack*. This was handled by discarding any numbers added once the *stack* reached its maximum height. Another key implementation concern was dealing with the pressing of the +/- button, after an operation had been entered, or return had been pressed. It was determined that if only the item from the *stack* was present on the screen, it should be made negative, and if any other numbers had been entered, they should be made negative. There was also the case in which an operation was entered without a number being pressed, as in 3 4 + +. This was handled by discarding numerical information if the maximum possible integer value was given. It as ensured that this value could never be entered on the calculator by adding a hard cap to the greatest number that could be entered. The final case that had to be accounted for was if an operation was attempted with nothing in the *stack*, or if there was only one item in the *stack*. In either case, no operation would be performed, but if a number were present with the operation, it would be treated as a return. This meant that both [2] [INPUT] and [2] [+] were valid inputs that both would produce the same changes in the *stack*.

7 Lessons Learned

This course taught us about the power of embedded programming, and the meaning of hacking. It introduced us to a simple device, and showed us that within its functionality there lay endless possibilities for expansion. It illustrated the ability of a system to be completely repurposed with a simple change in its source, and proved to us that many everyday objects are actually computers at their core. But, not everything about this course was focused around the boundless array of functionality that can be added to everyday objects, there was also a good portion of the course dedicated to showing us the necessity of designing quality software. This portion of the course was perhaps the most beneficial, as it allowed us to see the errors in our methodology, allowing them to be corrected before becoming habit. However, as in all things, communication was necessary. We learned about the inherent challenges and struggles in programming in a group in which there

were a variety of skill levels. We also learned that a seemingly simple problem can have nearly endless complexity, and an outside perspective is sometimes required to point out flaws in the logical structure in which we had become so entangled. Most importantly of all, this course illustrated the potentially dramatic effects of a populous realizing that everyday devices can be modified to have dramatically different feature sets, and hopefully ignited a passion within us all to go out and modify, create, repurpose, and redesign.

8 Criticism of the Course

This course was one of the most interesting and fun courses that most of us took this year, and nearly every aspect was enjoyable. However, there were a couple of minor gripes that seemed to persist within our group. One member felt that more time should have been allotted to learning about the C programming language, as it is difficult to pick up for someone without any prior programming experience. Another felt that MatLab may not be necessary for Computer Science majors, as they will learn other more powerful languages later, and will most likely use Mathematica if they are planning on doing any work with mathematics. Yet a third felt that a proper development environment, with a simulator might be a better fit for the type of development we were doing. It would allow for simple errors to be easily debugged, and may allow for faster course progression. Overall though, criticisms were at a low for Professor Edwards himself, as his teaching style was quite enjoyable, and often times hilarious.

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