GPU Teaching Kit

Accelerated Computing

Module 14 – Efficient Host-Device Data Transfer

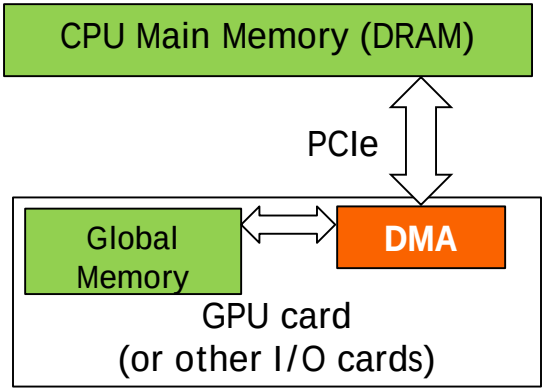
Lecture 14.1 - Pinned Host Memory

Objective

- To learn the important concepts involved in copying (transferring) data between host and device
  - Direct Memory Access
  - Pinned memory

CPU-GPU Data Transfer using DMA

- DMA (Direct Memory Access) hardware is used by `cudaMemcpy()` for better efficiency
  - Frees CPU for other tasks
  - Hardware unit specialized to transfer a number of bytes requested by OS
  - Between physical memory address space regions (some can be mapped I/O memory locations)
  - Uses system interconnect, typically PCIe in today's systems



Virtual Memory Management

- Modern computers use virtual memory management
  - Many virtual memory spaces mapped into a single physical memory
  - Virtual addresses (pointer values) are translated into physical addresses
- Not all variables and data structures are always in the physical memory
  - Each virtual address space is divided into pages that are mapped into and out of the physical memory
  - Virtual memory pages can be mapped out of the physical memory (page-out) to make room
  - Whether or not a variable is in the physical memory is checked at address translation time

Data Transfer and Virtual Memory

- DMA uses physical addresses
  - When `cudaMemcpy()` copies an array, it is implemented as one or more DMA transfers
  - Address is translated and page presence checked for the entire source and destination regions at the beginning of each DMA transfer
  - No address translation for the rest of the same DMA transfer so that high efficiency can be achieved

- The OS could accidentally page-out the data that is being read or written by a DMA and page-in another virtual page into the same physical location

Pinned Memory and DMA Data Transfer

- Pinned memory are virtual memory pages that are specially marked so that they cannot be paged out
- Allocated with a special system API function call
- a.k.a. Page Locked Memory, Locked Pages, etc.
- CPU memory that serve as the source or destination of a DMA transfer must be allocated as pinned memory

CUDA data transfer uses pinned memory.

– The DMA used by cudaMemcpy() requires that any source or destination in the host memory is allocated as pinned memory

– If a source or destination of a `cudaMemcpy()` in the host memory is not allocated in pinned memory, it needs to be first copied to a pinned memory – extra overhead

– `cudaMemcpy()` is faster if the host memory source or destination is allocated in pinned memory since no extra copy is needed

Allocate/Free Pinned Memory

- `cudaHostAlloc()`, three parameters
  - Address of pointer to the allocated memory
  - Size of the allocated memory in bytes
  - Option – use `cudaHostAllocDefault` for now
- `cudaFreeHost()`, one parameter
  - Pointer to the memory to be freed

Using Pinned Memory in CUDA

- Use the allocated pinned memory and its pointer the same way as those returned by `malloc();`
- The only difference is that the allocated memory cannot be paged by the OS
- The `cudaMemcpy()` function should be about 2X faster with pinned memory
- Pinned memory is a limited resource
  - over-subscription can have serious consequences

Putting It Together - Vector Addition Host Code Example

```
int main()
{
   float *h_A, *h_B, *h_C;
…
   cudaHostAlloc((void **) &h_A, N* sizeof(float),
      cudaHostAllocDefault);
   cudaHostAlloc((void **) &h_B, N* sizeof(float),
      cudaHostAllocDefault);
   cudaHostAlloc((void **) &h_C, N* sizeof(float),
      cudaHostAllocDefault);
…
   // cudaMemcpy() runs 2X faster
}
```

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