CSci 5271
Introduction to Computer Security
Web security, part 1
Stephen McCamant
University of Minnesota, Computer Science & Engineering

Outline
The web from a security perspective
SQL injection
Announcements intermission
Web authentication failures

Once upon a time: the static web
- HTTP: stateless file download protocol
  - TCP, usually using port 80
- HTML: markup language for text with formatting and links
- All pages public, so no need for authentication or encryption

Web applications
- The modern web depends heavily on active software
- Static pages have ads, paywalls, or “Edit” buttons
- Many web sites are primarily forms or storefronts
- Web hosted versions of desktop apps like word processing

Server programs
- Could be anything that outputs HTML
- In practice, heavy use of databases and frameworks
- Wide variety of commercial, open-source, and custom-written
- Flexible scripting languages for ease of development
  - PHP, Ruby, Perl, etc.

Client-side programming
- Java: nice language, mostly moved to other uses
- ActiveX: Windows-only binaries, no sandboxing
  - Glad to see it on the way out
- Flash and Silverlight: most important use is DRM-ed video
- Core language: JavaScript

JavaScript and the DOM
- JavaScript (JS) is a dynamically-typed prototype-OO language
  - No real similarity with Java
- Document Object Model (DOM): lets JS interact with pages and the browser
- Extensive security checks for untrusted-code model

Same-origin policy
- Origin is a tuple (scheme, host, port)
  - E.g., (http, www.umn.edu, 80)
- Basic JS rule: interaction is allowed only with the same origin
- Different sites are (mostly) isolated applications
GET, POST, and cookies

- **GET** request loads a URL, may have parameters delimited with ?, &, =
  - Standard: should not have side-effects
- **POST** request originally for forms
  - Can be larger, more hidden, have side-effects
- **Cookie**: small token chosen by server, sent back on subsequent requests to same domain

User and attack models

- "Web attacker" owns their own site (www.attacker.com)
  - And users sometimes visit it
  - Realistic reasons: ads, SEO
- "Network attacker" can view and sniff unencrypted data
  - Unprotected coffee shop WiFi

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Relational model and SQL

- Relational databases have **tables** with rows and single-typed **columns**
- Used in web sites (and elsewhere) to provide scalable persistent storage
- Allow complex **queries** in a declarative language SQL

Example SQL queries

- SELECT name, grade FROM Students WHERE grade < 60 ORDER BY name;
- UPDATE Votes SET count = count + 1 WHERE candidate = 'John';

Template: injection attacks

- Your program interacts with an interpreted language
- Untrusted data can be passed to the interpreter
- Attack data can break parsing assumptions and execute arbitrary commands

SQL + injection

- Why is this named most critical web app. risk?
- Easy mistake to make systematically
- Can be easy to exploit
- Database often has high-impact contents
  - Eg, logins or credit cards on commerce site

Strings do not respect syntax

- Key problem: assembling commands as strings
- "WHERE name = '$name';"
- Looks like $name is a string
- Try $name = "me' OR grade > 80; --"
Using tautologies
- Tautology: formula that's always true
- Often convenient for attacker to see a whole table
- Classic: OR 1=1

Non-string interfaces
- Best fix: avoid constructing queries as strings
- SQL mechanism: prepared statement
  - Original motivation was performance
- Web languages/frameworks often provide other syntax

Retain functionality: escape
- Sanitizing data is transforming it to prevent an attack
- Escaped data is encoded to match language rules for literal
  - E.g., \n and \t in C
- But many pitfalls for the unwary:
  - Differences in escape syntax between servers
  - Must use right escape for context: not everything's a string

Lazy sanitization: whitelisting
- Allow only things you know to be safe/intended
- Error or delete anything else
- Short whitelist is easy and relatively easy to secure
  - E.g., digits only for non-negative integer
- But, tends to break benign functionality

Poor idea: blacklisting
- Space of possible attacks is endless, don't try to think of them all
- Want to guess how many more comment formats SQL has?
- Particularly silly: blacklisting 1=1

Attacking without the program
- Often web attacks don't get to see the program
  - Not even binary, it's on the server
- Surmountable obstacle:
  - Guess natural names for columns
  - Harvest information from error messages

Blind SQL injection
- Attacking with almost no feedback
- Common: only "error" or "no error"
- One bit channel you can make yourself: if (x) delay 10 seconds
- Trick to remember: go one character at a time

Injection beyond SQL
- XPath/XQuery: queries on XML data
- LDAP: queries used for authentication
- Shell commands: example from Ex. 1
- More web examples to come
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Note to early readers

This is the section of the slides most likely to change in the final version.
If class has already happened, make sure you have the latest slides for announcements.

Per-website authentication

Many web sites implement their own login systems
+ If users pick unique passwords, little systemic risk
  - Inconvenient, many will reuse passwords
  - Lots of functionality each site must implement correctly
  - Without enough framework support, many possible pitfalls

Building a session

HTTP was originally stateless, but many sites want stateful login sessions
Building by tying requests together with a shared session ID
Must protect confidentiality and integrity

Session ID: what

Must not be predictable
- Not a sequential counter
Should ensure freshness
- E.g., limited validity window
If encoding data in ID, must be unforgeable
- E.g., data with properly used MAC
- Negative example: crypt(username || server secret)

Session ID: where

Session IDs in URLs are prone to leaking
- Including via user cut-and-paste
Usual choice: non-persistent cookie
- Against network attacker; must send only under HTTPS
Because of CSRF (next time), should also have a non-cookie unique ID

Session management

Create new session ID on each login
Invalidate session on logout
Invalidate after timeout
- Usability / security tradeoff
- Needed to protect users who fail to log out from public browsers
Account management
- Limitations on account creation
  - CAPTCHA? Outside email address?
- See previous discussion on hashed password storage
- Automated password recovery
  - Usually a weak spot
  - But, practically required for large system

Client and server checks
- For usability, interface should show what's possible
- But must not rely on client to perform checks
- Attackers can read/modify anything on the client side
- Easy example: item price in hidden field

Direct object references
- Seems convenient: query parameter names resource directly
  - E.g., database key, filename (path traversal)
- Easy to forget to validate on each use
- Alternative: indirect reference like per-session table
  - Not fundamentally more secure, but harder to forget check

Function-level access control
- E.g. pages accessed by URLs or interface buttons
- Must check each time that user is authorized
  - Attack: find URL when authorized, reuse when logged off
- Helped by consistent structure in code