Research Computing Advisory Committee
Minutes April 2, 2012 (taken by Erik Deumens and Eric Ford)

Present: Paul Avery, S. Balachandar, Reed Beaman, Mike Conlon, Erik Deumens, Rob Ferl, Eric Ford, Laurie Taylor

Reports

Customer satisfaction survey (Deumens)

A user satisfaction survey was carried out in February with the assistance of Academic Technology and using the Survey Monkey software and site. The survey was designed to be very short with a few extra questions for PIs and faculty sponsors about whether they had bought compute nodes or storage through the HPC Center. The total number of responses was 191 out of 631, 30% response rate. We had 62 PIs respond and 129 researchers, who are graduate students, postdoctoral associates, and other scientists.

The overall rating showed that the customers are quite satisfied with the services provided by the HPC Center. There was an opportunity to leave detailed responses about individual staff members and these responses were also positive. We received open comments, questions and suggestions and most of these were also positive. A few questions were asked for services and improvements that we have been in the process of implementing and they have since been made public, like the long-term storage options, or will be announced soon, like shorter queue-times for parallel jobs requesting 64 or more cores.

Problem ticket analysis (Deumens)

The analysis of the problem tickets showed significant activity, but did not reveal many details about the types of tickets or their average time to closure or any correlation between particular staff members and the tickets they worked on. This was caused by the fact that the ticket tracking system had not been configured to produce such reports. This has been done now so that analysis in the future will provide more insight.

Annual performance appraisals (Deumens)

The above information was used as partial input for the annual performance evaluation of the Research Computing staff. As a new policy in all of Central IT, the performance evaluations have been recalibrated starting this year so that a job well done results in an evaluation of "achieves".

Central IT is also near the end of a yearlong process, in collaboration with UF Human Resource Department, of updating the job classifications in line with national standards as defined by the research company Gartner. This reclassification and the new standards for appraisal are part of the effort to make the performance evaluation and the process for raises and promotions fairer, more transparent, and more accountable.

The committee expressed strong concerns about the reclassification of positions in central IT. The concern is that when all IT positions are reclassified with descriptions that match positions that are tracked by national research that the salary ranges will prove to be higher than what UF pays. This information can then be used to justify raising the salaries of IT staff at UF. However, this will increase the discrepancy that already exists between IT workers on campus and non-IT workers like, for example, lab scientists. This will increase tension among UF employees.

The committee members also pointed out that the current system replaced a previous system in order to address some problems with the previous system. We would like to make sure that the people making these changes are aware of the problems with the previous system and have thought of ways to prevent them from reoccurring.
- There is a need for flexibility to hire people with expertise in rapidly emerging areas for which there may not be preexisting position title. Getting HR to add a new job title in a timely fashion is impractical.
- It must be possible to promote people, so that people with key expertise, skills and experience can be retained, rather than be pushed to leave if they want better pay.
- It must be possible to pay people with key expertise and skills more than their manager without making them a manager.

Digital Humanities Day (Taylor)
The Center for Humanities and Public Sphere and the libraries are organizing a day to increase awareness of the impact and possibilities of new digital technologies in the humanities. The first day will be Thursday April 26 and the day after will see a set of field trips, including one to the Larsen Hall machine room where the majority of the HPC Center servers and storage systems are housed. Rob Ferl offers to make a tour to the ICBR labs an option for the field trip participants. The event will be announced among other places on the UFIT News site http://www.it.ufl.edu/news.

Research Computing Day (Deumens)
The planning for Research Computing Day with a focus on research data is advancing.

SSERCA (Deumens)
The Sunshine State Education & Research Computing Alliance is now fully formed with a governance structure and bylaws. See http://www.sserca.org for more details. The original group of 5 (FSU, UCF, UF, UM, USF) has accepted FAMU as an affiliate at the March SSERCA Summit in Tallahassee and is in the process of inviting four institutions for membership or affiliate status. The infrastructure is being built out to give researchers at universities in the state an edge in their research activities and proposals.

Discussion
NSF has two solicitations out that are of interest to researchers who have a lot of data:
- **NSF 12-541 Campus Cyberinfrastructure – Network Infrastructure and Engineering (CC NIE)** calls for proposal to improve connectivity to regional

networks and requires a group of research projects that need the improved connection as justification.

- **NSF 12499 Core Techniques and Technologies for Advancing Big Data Science & Engineering (BIGDATA)** was announced March 29 at a public event by the President of the United States.

All members should alert colleagues about this and ask them to notify Erik Deumens if they are engaged in collaborative research and interested in supporting this.

UF received a call to participate in the Virtual School of Science and Engineering. See http://www.vscse.org/callforsites.html for details. Contact Erik Deumens if you or your students are interested in participating. To participate does not cost any dollar amounts, but it does require dedication of staff time and a room with teleconference capability.

The meeting schedule for the summer of 2012 is now posted on the website http://www.it.ufl.edu/governance/advisorycommittees/researchcomputing.html.

Next meeting will be of the DLC subcommittee on April 16 at 1:30 pm in NPB 2205.