

Research Computing Advisory Committee

Minutes Jul 6, 2014 (taken by Erik Deumens)

Present: Paul Avery, Erik Deumens, Hannah Norton, Laurie Taylor

Discussion

Information Technology Strategic Plan

This committee was formed in 2010 by the CIO and it was immediately tasked to contribute to a IT strategic plan for 2011-2014. Now we are requested to contribute to an updated and extended IT strategic plan for 2014-2020. The committee worked on rewording and enhancing the draft.

Digital Humanities report from ITHAKA R+S

Sophia Accord submitted the following report from the organization Ithaka S+R at <http://www.sr.ithaka.org/research-publications> and download the report "Sustaining the Digital Humanities: Host Institution Support beyond the Start-Up Phase" SR_Supporting_Digital_Humanities_20140618f.pdf

This organization is highly respected for the quality of its work. The report is relevant because it presents a careful analysis of the state of Digital Humanities in the US based on a wide and then detailed survey of practices at universities.

Erik gave an overview of the report. The committee then discussed the content and the issues raised by it. Erik made a rebuttal of the central thesis in the report, namely that the problem facing the Humanities is special and unusual.

Physicists and engineers in the early 70 realized the power of computers to help perform complex computations. They made the commitment to dedicate a significant fraction of their effort to learn how to use these machines, often 30% to 50% of their academic effort. They developed tools to make use of computers and did not obtain special funding to do this work: They justified the activity and the cost of equipment indirectly with the outcome obtained with the calculations.

Fast forward 40 years: Now biologists, physicists, engineers, chemists are seeing the potential value of going beyond pure computational algorithms and exploring large amounts of data using these algorithms. For example, to study the atomic characteristics of superconductors or to investigate differences or similarities in gene sequence of collections of organisms. Then the issues of creating databases, making them accessible to collaborators, getting support from IT to maintain the web servers and to build the network infrastructure appear just as in the digital humanities projects. The science and engineering communities do not have any better luck in getting support from funding agencies in building and maintaining this infrastructure.

The committee feels that an outreach activity inspired by this report to the humanities departments culminating in a one day event, e.g. Research Computing Day in early October, could help engage and focus the entire campus on this important problem. The day would focus on this issue across campus from humanities, to life sciences, to engineering. We will coordinate with the

- Digital Humanities Working Group
- Research Computing Advisory Committee
- Informatics Institute Steering Committee

Organization

Next meeting will be on Monday August 5, 2014 at the usual location in NPB 2205 from 1:30 – 2: 30 pm.