

Research Computing Advisory Committee (RCAC)

Minutes May 9, 2011 (taken by Erik Deumens)

Present: Paul Avery, Mike Conlon, Erik Deumens, Rob Ferl, Lauren McIntyre, Sanjay Ranka

HPC Committee as a subcommittee

The HPC Committee has a specific function to monitor and guide the operation of the HPC Center and set policies for it. It has been active for 5 years. The RCAC discussed and then decided to make that committee a subcommittee reporting to the RCAC with the task to continue this function. Some members of the HPC Committee are also members of the RCAC.

HPC Center hires

The HPC Center is now actively interviewing people for two high-level people who are IT experts but also science experts. One position will specifically support computational biology research, and the other will support the Sunshine Grid New Florida Clustering award with a focus on application and storage support. We hope that the new people will start working around June 1st.

During the search process an excellent candidate for the application and storage position, Yu Fu, came forth after the application window was closed. He is currently working on a CMS grant to Prof. Avery. The HPC Center and Prof. Avery agreed to take on Yu Fu as a member of the HPC staff, which is something the candidate really wanted, and to explore the details of how to have a staff member of the HPC Center be paid some fraction of FTE by a grant.

The committee discussed many details related to such an arrangement. These will be explored and formulated in the coming weeks.

Data Life Cycle subcommittee

Previous discussions in the RCAC, the strategic plan for IT, and discussions in recent weeks between Erik and various stakeholders in research computing on campus have clearly indicated the importance of data life cycle management to modern research. This includes hardware for storage, performance for moving data, reliability for keeping the data, policies and procedures for managing the data. The RCAC discusses and decides that a task force or subcommittee should be created to investigate this issue and formulate a strategy and recommend a plan of action to the RCAC. The Data Life Cycle (DLC) committee will include members from the RCAC as well as others who can bring their expertise to the matter. Erik will set up the committee and invite an initial set of members.

Implementation plan

The task in front of the RCAC is to formulate an implementation and operation plan to realize the strategic goals set out in the new IT plan. Erik has submitted a first and very preliminary draft to the committee prior to this meeting.

As part of the previous discussion on the HPC Center staff, the items under 3.b and 6.c regarding staff for consulting services who are partially paid off grant funds was discussed extensively. The results will be included in the next revision of the plan.

Time was too short for an in-depth discussion on the structure of the plan or other items.

Sanjay suggested that a list be composed of a few (3 to 6) research scenarios and researcher profiles to help guide the formulation and prioritization of the services that Research Computing should try to provide. Erik will make an initial list before the next meeting.

Other items

Members bring up a few issues that the committee should consider:

- Mike: There is no universal strategy or policy on how to manage standard data owned by people, such as documents, proposals, etc, even apart from the large sets of observational or simulation data. How can we ensure that data is consistently backed up? Maybe RCAC can formulate this as a need, even if research computing will not implement it. It seems more like a task for infrastructure.
- Mike: There are many things that people do now to get their jobs done that would cause major problems with IT staff if they knew about it. How can we proactively help create an environment where problems are solved, instead of one where barriers are created without safe passageways? “UF is a thousand points of no”.
- Mike: Many activities need a webserver. Amazon Elastic Cloud offers a secure server for free. To create one at UF takes effort and money.
- Lauren: One action item can be that we explore and document appropriate use of Cloud Computing to conduct University business. Mike confirms: Harvard authorized the use of Cloud Computing for HIPAA compliant work.

Next meeting will be May 16 at 9:30 am.