

Research Computing Advisory Committee (RCAC)

Minutes October 3, 2011 (taken by Erik Deumens)

Present: Richard Deason, Erik Deumens, Rob Ferl, Eric Ford, Lauren McIntyre

Discussion

Three agenda items were discussed as listed in

<http://www.it.ufl.edu/governance/advisorycommittees/documents/RCAC-AgendaFall2011.pdf>

Accountability: grant tracking.

There is a clear need to connect the activities of UF Research Computing and the HPC center to research activities on campus, including grant funded research.

One way that has been suggested to collect this information, is by asking faculty to fill out a brief survey once a year. Another is to use the grants database maintained by DSR.

Dr. Ferl suggested that using the PeopleSoft project number or the chart field string is now the best way to get to this information. With a spreadsheet of chart field strings, DSR can generate a spreadsheet with PI name, project title, start date, ending date, funding agency, grant amount.

It is brought up by several members that it is important to build a funding stream for all activities, even if the amounts are small or zero. Then the chart field string is a natural way to get to information that shows the funded projects being supported. This also avoids asking PIs to fill out lengthy surveys.

Accountability: staff evaluation and service evaluation

If a staff member is paid by a grant for some fraction of an FTE, then it is clear that that PI should have the same fraction of input on the annual evaluation of the PI.

The HPC Center opens a problem or project ticket for every request that goes beyond a simple question. This provides a basis for tracking how much effort is being spent on any project by any staff member.

For staff members who are 1.0 FTE in the HPC Center, another mechanism is needed. An annual survey to the faculty whose research groups are supported by these staff members will quickly establish the tradition and credibility that UF Research Computing values their input in the evaluation process of the staff and

wants to ensure that they perform to standards that are known and well defined. The surveys should be different for faculty and graduate students.

These **expectations must be managed** carefully and communicated to the user community in advance so that the survey has a basis that it refers to and does not become a vague inquiry.

In addition, UF Research Computing must clearly set the expectations for the services it will provide. This will avoid users becoming frustrated with staff for not doing something, which they are not expected to be doing.

The survey should clearly indicate a section that pertains to the services provided by the HPC Center and gather the user feedback on those as distinct from feedback on the performance of staff members.

Unified and convenient services

There is a need with researchers for relatively simple services, such as web servers with access to data, possibly password protected, group wiki's, source code repositories, etc. Many departmental IT shops no longer offer these, CNS offers the tools, but a lot of system work remains with the users. Thus many groups still buy a server and dedicate a graduate student to maintain it. Keeping up with security patches of all software involved is a concern and is not a negligible task. Not every research group has the talents in their team to do a good job with these tasks.

The committee sees that a well-defined service offered by UF Research Computing makes sense, even if some of the infrastructure is provided by others, like CNS, or Google Groups. UF Research Computing should explore and scope a set of services and work out a cost structure and price to offer it.

Next meeting will be of the RCAC HPC sub-committee on Oct 17 at 1:30 pm in NPB.