Information Technology Resources Advisory Committee (ITRAC) Meeting

December 1, 2014 – 11:00 a.m.

Millican Hall 395

Minutes

Introduction and Initial Business

Joel Hartman called the meeting to order. The first item of business was approval of the minutes for the October ITRAC meeting. Richard Hartshorne administered the approval process and the minutes were approved by a unanimous vote. Mostafa Bassiouni accepted to take the minutes of the meeting.

Presentation on UCF High Performance Computing, Brian Goldiez

STOKES, a high performance computing cluster, initially came to UCF as a resource in 2007 and was subsidized by UCF in 2012. The STOKES cluster has 3500 computer cores and 160 TB of disk storage.

Stokes is managed by a small (lean) group of administrators, primarily Brian Goldiez and Paul Wiegand, who

- Set up accounts for faculty and students,
- Assist in preparing research proposals,
- Sit in committees,
- Perform research outside UCF,
- Conduct their own HPC

Applications: STOKES is used for computational intensive tasks including research in the areas of computer vision, nanotechnology, turbine design, optics, bioinformatics, and molecular modeling.

Impact: The STOKES center has enabled faculty in the UCF research community to utilize its computational resource individually and in collaboration with other institutions. In particular, the STOKES center is collaborating with SSERCA (Florida's Sunshine State Education and Research Computing Alliance) for sharing and cycling expertise. Researchers using the STOKES cluster get access to XSEDE (Extreme Science and Engineering Discovery Environment) that scientists can use to interactively share computing resources, data, and expertise.

Any faculty involved in computational intensive research is encouraged to submit a Computational Resources Allocation Request in order to get a fair allocation of STOKES usage. Upon processing the request, the faculty will be allocated a reasonable number of cores and a specified period of utilization (e.g., 3 cores with 80,000 CPU hours/month) so that access by others is not unduly compromised. Although the center does not offer long term storage, it allows users to purchase their own storage.

Currently, the STOKES center is working on a plan to expand its user base, provide increased support for HPC research, and offer attractive buy-in for faculty. Faculty are encouraged to contact Brian Goldiez with any questions about the use of the STOKES cluster.

Online Thesis and Dissertation Defenses, Ross Hinkle

The College of Graduate Studies (CGS) is currently investigating the feasibility of colleges offering and supporting online thesis and dissertation defenses. This topic has received mixed reaction; some departments are opposing the concept of online thesis and dissertation defenses in their disciplines while other departments are quite in favor of online defenses. The Graduate Council Policy Committee has been requested to investigate the issue of online thesis and dissertation defenses and formulate the appropriate policy. One of the questions being investigated is whether it is appropriate to allow a graduate student to defend at a distance. There is a recognition that the online mode of defense is not suitable for certain subject areas but is also highly feasible for other subject areas.

Ross Hinkle indicated that there has been no decision made on this issue and that CGS would like to prepare to move forward with a careful investigation before changing the policy on thesis and dissertation defenses. One aspect of this investigation is to look at what other universities were doing. Another effort in this investigation is to invite Joel Hartman and Tom Cavanagh to an upcoming meeting of the Graduate Council Policy Committee to talk about the technology for online thesis and dissertation defenses and give a demonstration of the available software and video conferencing systems that can support online defenses.

Tom Cavanagh added that online defenses are very appropriate for online graduate programs at UCF such as the master in digital forensics and online nursing degrees.

Joel Hartman answered questions about the technological feasibility of online defenses and stated that the available distance learning systems that can be used for online defenses are quite reliable and can provide different modes of communication, for example, committee members joining from different locations can securely evaluate the student and conduct the vote in a private mode inaccessible to the student and the public. One question that needs to be addressed is the capacity of existing facilities to handle a large number of defenses, especially near the end of term when many are schedules over a short period of time.

VPN Access to Library Resources, Athena Hoeppner

The UCF VPN tunnel can be used to provide access to articles and databases available at the UCF Library website, but does not work when clicking on a link outside the tunnel, e.g., the URL link of an article contained in an email message.

There is a workaround to solve this problem using EZ proxy and LibX – a browser plugin that can make it possible to send any link through UCF EZproxy. The single sign-on NID credential to systems across campus also works for all Library accounts and systems including EZproxy.

Immediately after the meeting, Athena Hoeppner sent an email to the ITRAC Committee with a write-up explaining the steps for VPN users. The following is text about LibX from this write-up.

To make links use the UCF Libraries' EZproxy, install the LibX plugin for Firefox and Chrome. Right click any link to send it through the proxy on the fly. LibX is a boon for anyone who frequently uses links to UCF Library subscription from email, RSS, and the open web.

Adding GTAs into Canvas Courses, Mostafa Bassiouni

Concern: some departments hire undergraduate TAs and there seems to be no TA or FERBA training for undergraduate students similar to the training provided to graduate students.

Joel Hartman addressed this concern and informed the committee that there are online courses administered by the Registrar Office for TA and FERBA training for undergraduate students. Questions about these courses should be addressed to the Registrar Office (Brian Boyd).

Future Meetings

Joel Hartman asked for suggested topics to be discussed in future meetings. Larry West suggested the topic of Software License Management & Associated Policies. There was agreement to meet twice in the Spring semester; a Doodle Poll will be used to determine the specific dates and times of the two meetings.