Researcher-Facing call, 2019-10-10

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Topic: **An Expansion of User Support Services for the Research Computing Group at the University of Colorado Boulder**

Presentation by Shelley Knuth, University of Colorado, Boulder

Overview: In any research computing (RC) environment, the role of the user support group is a combination of education, consulting, and outreach. As this role is the most public-facing of a research computing group's team, it is important to ensure an excellent level of support is provided to users. The Research Computing group at the University of Colorado (CURC) Boulder maintains a large-scale computing cluster with several hundred active users, among other services, and has done so since 2011. The user support group at CURC provides a variety of services intended to support these users. This paper describes those services the CURC group provides, as well as explores the various ways that these services have been improved in 2018-19. The impact on users is also assessed.

PLEASE NOTE THAT WE WOULD LIKE TO RECORD THIS CALL!

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Notes from the call:

- Encore presentation from PEARC19
- University User Support Group: 12 total people
- Primary cluster “Summit”; condo cluster is Blanca. Also has large scale storage and other offerings
- NSF MRI grant from a few years ago: University of Colorado Boulder (67%) partnership with Colorado State University (23%), RMACC (10%)
- Have added office hours
- They do a fair amount of outreach
    - Graduate students largest population of users so lots of graduate events
    - Year of RC celebrating 10 years
- Have about 730 active users.

- Big overhaul in last year on support
- Trainings
    - Intro to Python - 8 week stretch, in-person & online
    - Allows opportunity to make people aware of RC group
    - Fundamentals of HPC -- 6 course series
    - And New User seminar each month
    - Up on GitHub.com, OK to use just give attribution: ~~https://github.com/ResearchComputing/Python_Fall_2019~~ {update: not working anymore: newer one seems to be https://github.com/ResearchComputing/Python_Spring_2020 - WP, 20210224}
- Office hours
    - Not well attended at first
    - Moved to joint OH on main part of campus with multiple groups (including the Libraries)
- Revamped account request / creation process
    - Automated a # of processes
    - Less email going back & forth
- Allocations
    - Every allow to run w/o allocations, but have lower priority. Allocations will grant higher priority on systems
    - Revamped process to streamline and assist process via templates
    - Time to approval is shorter; and more fruitful interactions: understand better what users want
- Documentation
    - Moved from Drupal to ReadTheDocs
    - Integrates with GitHub and uses Issues, doc review, and committee to make updates

- Collaborations
    - CU / CSU
- User Analytics
    - Mostly physics & engineering users
    - Mostly grad students
    - Most jobs are single node and/or single core, so adjust QoS to handle these

Zoom chat:

(Note: many of the questions posed below were answered during the call)

Do you share the materials?
Is that python class a for-credit class, or non-credit?
Do you encourage containerization to allow your clients to install their own software?
What kind of containers do you teach?
How many Python sessions a week? How long is each session? I am interested in the curriculum
https://github.com/ResearchComputing/Final_Tutorials
https://github.com/ResearchComputing/Python_Fall_2019 ?
Are allocations per user?
most likely the transition was during the summer so not everyone may no be around
Who are on your committee to read/approve allocations?
No outside faculty members?
Hard to get faculty to commit to committees
do you preempt jobs?
did you choose to do live online classes vs. recorded videos? How do you track your drop in consults from office hours?
what are the challenges with online courses via Zoom for example?
Do you provide general desktop support to researchers as well, or are your support services focused/limited to research computing things?
In my (limited) experience, MRI grants are good for funding hardware, but don't cover support for very long. Are CU & partners committed to support for the life of the cluster? (for staff, software licenses, electricity, etc.)
a student employee couldn't do that?
what is the lifetime of your cluster?
Do you survey users - before/after training?
Sorry … I was trying to ask if you use student employees to help with training for example to help with chat, etc?
Did you try office hours online in Zoom?
For live training, what is your seating capacity? Do you ever end up with full sessions?
many active users do you support on average? (I want to add to notes.)

What single factor to you use to justify face-to-face versus online methods for connecting/consulting with clients?

Do you go to them or do they come to you?

A lot of users are more comfortable with a physical face-to-face