April 25, 2019

Hardware and Operations Spring SUG Committee Report

The Hardware and Operations Committee held an extraordinary meeting on March 5th in addition to its normal meeting at Spring SUG. This report summarizes both meetings.

- Storage expansion for increased capacity, reduced cost per byte, and use of sensitive data

    - The storage systems purchased with the Owens cluster are working well, but are becoming full. While it is possible to increase their capacity, it is not possible to update their software to handle sensitive data, such as HIPAA data (medical records).   New storage with appropriate software must be purchased and integrated.

    - Three vendors offered possible solutions with mixtures of high-performance/high-cost and lower-performance/lower cost components. Overall costs ranged from less than the previously-budgeted $1.3 million to over $2 million.

    - The Committee discussed these options in two meetings with the OSC staff. Many viewpoints were represented, including use of sensitive data. The Committee and OSC staff agreed that a modest budget overrun is justified by the unexpected need to make a new purchase (rather than an expansion) and by an additional role for the new storage in a separately-budgeted Research Data Archive.

    - The Committee recommended one of the solutions proposed by IBM ("IBM #4") at a price of $1.5 million.

- Customer messaging during service outages

    The Committee discussed several options for OSC staff to inform customers during service outages. There is a clear tension between detailed messaging (allowing customers to understand system behavior and plan their own work) and OSC staff effort to resolve the outage. We discussed appropriate frequency and content of E-mail messages to customers, as well as web and "message of the day" notices.   We agreed on basic philosophy and expect follow-on discussions based on future experience.

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