

The Bioinformatics Open Source Conference (BOSC) 2013

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In July 2013, more than 100 bioinformatics researchers, developers and users of Open Source Software gathered in Berlin, Germany, to attend the 14th Annual Bioinformatics Open Source Conference (BOSC, http://www.open-bio.org/wiki/BOSC_2013, Harris *et al.*, 2013). Since its inception in 2000, BOSC has provided bioinformatics developers with a forum for communicating the results of their latest efforts to the wider research community, and a focused environment for developers and users to interact and share ideas about standards, software development practices and practical techniques for solving bioinformatics problems. BOSC includes a 2 day ‘CodeFest’ preceding the formal conference, which provides a venue for developers to meet in person to work on or plan joint projects (Möller *et al.*, 2013).

The session topics at BOSC 2013 included Cloud and Parallel Computing, Visualization, Software Interoperability, Genome-scale Data Management, a session for updates on ongoing Open Source projects and two new sessions: Open Science and Reproducible Research and Translational Bioinformatics, recognizing the growing use of computational biology in medical applications. Slides from all of the presentations are available on the BOSC Web site, along with some of the posters and video recordings for selected talks, including the keynotes and panel discussion.

Open Science is a movement dedicated to making all aspects of scientific knowledge production freely available for reuse and extension, including scientific data, methods and analyses. In response to the increasing traction that this movement has gained, BOSC 2013 featured a new session devoted explicitly to Open Science. One of the objectives of Open Science is the wider issue of making published research reproducible. Aside from openness in software licensing, this also includes openness of data and unhindered access to scientific papers themselves (Open Access). When researchers can freely access publications and the source code and data that support them, it becomes possible for them to recreate the steps that the authors went

through to reach their conclusions and to then go beyond them. In this way, Open Science not only stands to provide the value of validating published results by recreating them but also to accelerate the pace of scientific discovery, by enabling researchers to more effectively build on the results of previous work, rather than having to reinvent tools and reassemble datasets.

Each day of BOSC traditionally starts off with a keynote talk by a person of influence in Open Source bioinformatics. BOSC 2013’s first keynote speaker was Cameron Neylon, the Advocacy Director for the Public Library of Science, who is a prominent advocate for open science. Neylon discussed the cultural issues that are hindering open science, and spoke about the potential of openness in scientific collaborations for generating impact. Our second keynote speaker was Sean Eddy, a group leader at the Howard Hughes Medical Institute’s Janelia Farm, who is perhaps best known as the author of the HMMER software suite (Eddy, 2011). He discussed how his own experience and practices show that dedicating effort to thorough engineering in tool development—which is often shunned as uninteresting and unpublishable—can be a key to creating a lasting impact.

To stimulate discussion on controversial or multifaceted topics, BOSC includes a panel, in which panelists representing a range of viewpoints, answer questions from the audience. This year’s panel was on Strategies for Funding and Maintaining Open Source Software. To secure continued funding for a software project, researchers must be able to demonstrate its impact. The panelists explored ways to quantify usage of one’s software as a measure of impact. They agreed that traditional publications, and tracking their citations, still play an important role in publicizing and demonstrating the use of one’s software, but they are not the only metric.

With the increasing reliance of more and more fields of biology on computational tools to manage and analyze their data, BOSC seems assured to stay relevant to life science, and thus to life scientists.

Additional Information

Plan to join us for BOSC: 15th Annual Bioinformatics Open Source Conference in Boston, USA, July 11–12, 2014. For

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more information visit http://www.open-bio.org/wiki/BOSC_2014.

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