

The Logistics of Running an AccessGrid Based Seminar Series on a National Level

Individual Presentation

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Anyone that has hosted a large scale AccessGrid seminar involving 10 to 15 sites knows that it has its challenges. Maintaining a 'production' standard of quality while managing the realtime distribution of powerpoint slides, tens of video feeds, webcasting, and archiving is extremely difficult. Add to this 5 timezones and it becomes clear that the road to a successful event is fraught with an inconceivable number of potholes and pitfalls. Over the past 3 years, we have hosted over 90 of these seminars and have lived to tell the tale. Along the way we have learned a great deal about managing both the administrative and technological aspects of such an event. In this talk I will discuss our experiences of hosting the WestGrid Seminar Series and the Coast to Coast Seminar Series and try to offer some advice for other groups planning on attempting such a series.

For this talk, I will focus on 5 main topics that will cover all of the vital aspects of managing a distributed lecture series. These topics are history, administration, technical details, problems and resolutions, and finally future directions.

History

To give perspective, one first has to understand the initial goals of these series' and the expectations of those involved. These expectations are an extremely important aspect of running such a series and need to be clearly defined. I will discuss the details of both of the series' and offer some statistics on the number of sites involved and the number of presenting sites.

Administrative Aspects

One of the most difficult aspects of running a seminar series involves the administration and promotion aspects. From arranging for the speakers, to booking the required venues and personnel, to creating and distributing advertising for the event, this aspect of a seminar series can be the difference between success and failure.

Technical Details

Increasing scale creates issues in all aspects of collaboration. With the WestGrid and Coast to Coast series, we have had to overcome many technical issues in order to create consistent and dependable quality. Some of the details I will discuss are the benefits of using a VNC reflector to better distribute the slides to the participants, the creation of a web front end to better manage the VNC reflector, our webcasting/archiving setup, the use of 'out of band' text chat to manage the event, and the preparation, organization and importance of the local technical representatives and how tasks are distributed.

Problems/Issues/Resolutions

Along the way, we've encountered a range of issues and problems. From technical to administrative, we have needed to address issues in every aspect of series management. While some were technical in nature, the larger and more difficult problems to address involved the communications between all involved parties.

Future Directions

While I will address the future plans of these particular series', I also plan on offering thoughts on how we can expand these to become truly global. By utilizing the QA infrastructure to ensure quality and leveraging the RSS capabilities built into the AccessGrid venueclient, we could offer seminars on a global level.