

SPECIAL PAPER

The organizers of this year's Pacific Symposium on Biocomputing received the following request:

Subject: Late paper for PSB re: World Trade Center informatics
Date: Sun, 8 Sep 2002 21:52:45 -0400
From: Howard Cash <howardc@genecodes.com>
To: <psb@SMI.Stanford.EDU>

I would not presume to propose a late submission for a paper to a conference if this were not such an extraordinary circumstance. My team has been in charge of developing the informatics tools for doing DNA identification of remains of those killed at the World Trade Center. Using non-standard development techniques under truly extraordinary pressures, we have developed a large integrated software system under contract to the City of New York for combining STR, mtDNA and SNP data to a large number of remains at various levels of compromise from decomposition and heat denaturing. It is not in any way an exaggeration to say that nothing like this system had ever been attempted before.

When we started this project, we agreed to a very strict level of confidentiality. As the anniversary approaches, I have been given permission to present the scientific details on this software development project in professional journals and/or conferences, provided, of course, that no identifying information is presented or published. I believe the PSB is an appropriate venue to first present this information.

If the organizers are willing to consider this, despite the fact that the deadline has passed, I would be happy to provide an abstract. I regret that I was not able to make this proposal before this time.

Sincerely,
Howard Cash
President

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Following receipt of this message, the organizers quickly decided that it would be in the best interests of our meeting and of society at large to consider the publication of this paper - if the quality of the work met the PSB standards, and if the content of the paper proved to be commensurate with the goals and objectives of the meeting.

A draft of the paper was received on Monday, September 23, 2002. This paper not reviewed in the usual way by anonymous referees, but instead was critically evaluated by the organizers. We concurred that the paper by Cash and co-workers is a fascinating and PSB-appropriate paper of quality, offering significant results in aspects of both program development methodology and algorithm approaches to a meaningful bioinformatics problem. We therefore concluded that the paper should be published.

The following paper by Cash, Hoyle, and Sutton is an extraordinary demonstration that bioinformatics is not only a captivating intellectual pursuit, but can also be of critical importance to the broader society.

Russ Altman
Keith Dunker
Larry Hunter
Teri Klein