July 31, 2012

Mr. Josh Greenberg
Sloan Foundation
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Mr. Greenberg,

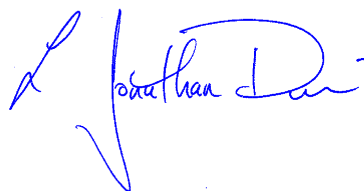I write in enthusiastic support of Mozilla's Software Carpentry project.

Our centre, SciNet, is a national facility for computational science, and we support over one thousand users across Canada who make use of our resources for performing research in countless disciplines.

One of the greatest barriers facing computational research – particularly in increasingly important disciplines like life sciences and digital humanities – is a lack of knowledge of basic computational thinking skills in students entering graduate school. We've come to rely on Mozilla's Software Carpentry boot camps, and the enormous amount of work Dr. Wilson has done on the pedagogy of teaching responsible software development to young scientists, to ensure that the current generation of early-career researchers can reach their full potential. We have seen the "boot camp plus online tutorial" model greatly increase the sophistication and productivity of many of our new users. The value of this mode of training cannot be overstated.

We are further excited about the new directions that Mozilla is proposing to take the project. A more advanced follow-up course teaching young scientists how to connect their science to the web – reading data sets, executing analyses, and publishing the results online – will enable a new generation of researchers to enable "Science as a Service" and allow interactive, examinable, replicatable research to thrive online. And working with non-scientists, using web and data visualization technologies to engage a larger community of potential citizen scientists in this endevour is an enormously important outreach move which will benefit both science and society.

We at SciNet greatly look forward to engaging with, and benefiting from, the Software Carpentry project and its new endevours in the coming years.

Thank you for your time,

Jonathan Dursi, Ph. D.,
HPC Computational Science Specialist