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To Whom It May Concern:

Re: Software Stewardship for Geosciences

I am writing to express my strong support for the above-mentioned proposal by Gil et al to develop infrastructure (both social and technical) to support better stewardship of geoscience software. Computing is as important to 21st Century science as telescopes were in the 19th Century and particle accelerators in the 20th. However, most scientists are still never taught how to design, build, maintain, validate, and share software productively. In our experience, the mixed delivery model included in this proposal, which combines an introduction to common-core skills with more targeted training in domain-specific material, is the most effective way for researchers to learn what they need to know as efficiently as possible.

Software Carpentry will therefore work with the proposers to deliver a series of intensive workshops on software skills for research scientists throughout the lifetime of the project. Our aim is to teach researchers (usually graduate students) basic computing concepts and skills so that they can get more done in less time, and with less pain. Our usual two-day curriculum includes version control, task automation, testing, and modular program developmentl; we're funded by the Sloan Foundation and Mozilla, and two independent assessments in the spring of 2012 confirmed that what we're doing actually helps scientists be more productive.

We commit to teaching the “common core” of task automation, version control, structured program development, and software testing over two days, two or more times a year, and to accommodate 20-40 learners per workshop. We will arrange the instructors and supply all the open source software and open license learning materials required; the only cost to the project will be the instructors' travel and accommodation. We will also work with the proposers to translate these materials into self-directed learning materials usable through the GeoCamp portal they describe in their proposal, and to explore ways to leverage real-time collaboration through the web to deliver an improved learning experience (e.g., through online office hours and one-to-one problem-solving sessions).

I believe that projects like this one will not only advance our understanding of the planet we live on, but also serve as an exemplar for scientists in other domains. I look forward to helping them accomplish their goals.

Sincerely,

Dr. Gregory V. Wilson
Project Lead, Software Carpentry