

Indiana U researchers launch social networking and research management tool for scientists

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Indiana University researchers have introduced Laboratree, a web-based solution to the complex problems of scientific collaboration.

Designed to streamline research and enhance collaborative social networking for the science community, Laboratree will enable scientists to securely manage research papers and data, organize groups and projects, send group messages, author blogs, and customize personal and group profiles – all online.

Indiana University School of Medicine informatics researchers have developed the Laboratree Research Management System to facilitate day-to-day research activities in a way that addresses the culture of scientific collaboration, eliminates barriers to entry, and uses the familiar structure of social networking to enable research.

"My thinking is that we should actually try to do things with a social network – that is, we should consider the social network the model by which we do things," said Sean Mooney, Ph.D., assistant professor of medical and molecular genetics, who developed Laboratree with colleagues at the Center for Computational Biology and Bioinformatics.

At Laboratree, people become "colleagues" by invitation and are enabled to connect – and more importantly, to collaborate. Scientists create groups for their labs and manage individual projects, each with their own

unique profile, and every colleague has an individual profile to access any part of his or her network.

The software grew out of a desire for tools to solve organization, collaboration, messaging, and document control issues in his own lab, Dr. Mooney said.

In addition to professional social networking, collaborators can upload documents to Laboratree, where colleagues can view, download, edit, and manage research papers and data. Colleagues will have access to all versions of a document, tracking edits made, while an intuitive check-in, check-out system eliminates conflicting changes.

Laboratree implements the recently developed OpenSocial platform, which offers a self-organizing approach to understanding the relationships between people and organizations. Using OpenSocial means software applications and tools by others can be plugged in to Laboratree, freely exchanged between social networks that have incorporated the new platform.

Mooney said the system is still in development and people interested in learning about and testing the system are encouraged to register at <http://laboratree.org/>.

Source: Indiana University

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