

LISA 2011 Conference  
Boston, USA  
December 4-9, 2011

Report to NUUG for HiOA Funding

Oslo, Norway  
January 15, 2012

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# 1

## LISA 2011 Conference Report

### 1.1 Introduction

This is a report on behalf of nine (9) master students in the field of “Network and System Administration”, attended LISA 11’ conference took place in Boston, US, December 4-9, 2011. The attendance was made possible with the funding granted from NUUG.

### 1.2 Background Information

All of the students attended the conference are second year (5th graders) master students, studying at the “Network and System Administration” master program of the University of Oslo. The program is held in cooperation with Oslo University College<sup>1</sup>.

USENIX LISA Conference is one of the most popular system administration conferences, taking place every year in a different state of the United States supported by huge sponsors like Google, Oracle, Microsoft, Facebook and others. This conference is one of the most suitable for students of this master program as its subject is exactly in the same field. One can even tell by comparing the name of it with the title of the master program. **LISA** stands for **L**arge **I**nstallation **S**ystem **A**dministration.

### 1.3 Students Attended

Nine (9) students attended the conference with all of their expenses covered. This is possible as Oslo University College has a deal with the conference organizers and the students are voluntary working part time for the conference. As an exchange, they get free accommodation from USENIX and unlimited access to the conference sessions. Flight tickets and some other expenses were covered by the NUUG grant.

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<sup>1</sup><http://www.uio.no/english/studies/programmes/nsa-master/>

The students attended in alphabetical order of their first name:

- Dankun Du
- Evangelos Tasoulas
- Gang Cheng
- Meaza Taye Kebede
- Nishes Joshi
- Santosh Maharjan
- Shahab Bakhtiyari
- Sudhir Pandey
- Yared Berhanu Woldegiorgis

## 1.4 Topics in The Conference

The conference had three different kind of sessions.

**Training Sessions** that professionals gave lectures in different fields of system administration. This was mostly configuration training and how to setup existing solutions. The training sessions were mostly Linux oriented.

**Technical Sessions** it was mostly about discussions in new ideas and research topics in system administration.

**Workshops** provided training but in an interactive way. Trainees in the workshops had their own laptops and they were working together with the instructor.

Most of the students attended training sessions and some technical sessions. Topics like how to setup OpenVPN servers, Configuration management systems (CFEngine and Puppet), advanced file systems (ZFS), Linux clustering and high availability, Virtualization for cloud infrastructure (VMware and XEN), IPv6, advanced Linux security features (using SELinux) and a lot more was covered. It was impossible for each of us to follow all of them as there were nearly 10 booths with sessions at the same time, for 8 hours every day.

These are topics discussed mostly in the training sessions but there were mainly 4 keywords recycling a lot this year both in the training and the technical sessions.

**DevOps** as wikipedia article writes, *is an emerging set of principles, methods and practices for communication, collaboration and integration between software development (application/software engineering) and IT operations (systems administration/infrastructure) professionals*<sup>2</sup>.

Developers work in their own way (trying to implement new features and break things) while Operations needs stability and they don't want to change things they work. DevOps is mostly principles of how to reduce the gap of communication and cooperation between Development and Operations. Because of this one could say that it is mostly a business and not a technological issue that DevOps comes to solve.

**Configuration Management** is an old term in the field of system administration gaining popularity now with the extra need for automation and compliance as the systems are more and more complicated.

**IPv6** discussions was mostly about the shift from IPv4 to IPv6. This is something not happening as fast as expected even though the IPv4 addresses have already depleted.

**Cloud Infrastructure** and issues as more applications are moving to the "Cloud". Legal issues and technical problems arise with the geographic distribution of the data and computing power. These two (data and CPU) also needs to be near at the moment as the network speed is not mature enough to handle the huge amount of data over distance. Many organisations return back to local cloud solutions to deal with these challenges.

#### 1.4.1 Working for the Conference

The students had to work part time for the conference. This was not any technical work related to the system administration field, but support for the accomplishment of the conference itself. Stuffing bags with vendor materials for the attendees, folding T-shirts, distributing tutorials and printed material, badge pick-up, door monitoring and other things. This made all of the students a part of the conference staff and pretty much every attendee would talk to us later simply because we served them at least once in the registration process so they knew us.

This helped to improve communication skills a lot and learn new social and technical expressions since we had to deal with some native English speakers, experts in the field of our studies. Better communication was achieved even between the classmates as we had to share rooms, work and do activities together. This helped to get to know each other better.

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<sup>2</sup><http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/DevOps>

## **1.5 Social Life and Other Topics**

The conference also had a social face. The sessions would start at 9AM and finish at 5PM every day, but after that, the known as BoFS (Birds of Feather Sessions) would take place. People with similar thoughts and ideas would gather and discuss. Even later in the evening, companies promoting their reputation would invite people to drink a free beer or eat an ice cream and socialise. This gave us the chance to discuss about technical stuff, or other issues concerning our future job with people dealing with them already. Some students reported that they even got advices for their coming master thesis.

The exhibition of the vendors was a also a good part for learning. Exhibitors would show their state of art products and treat you in a professional manner. Of course they are companies and we are potential future customers for them, but knowing what is hot in the field at the moment is a good step forward.

### **1.5.1 Life Outside of The Conference**

The conference was held on December 4-9, 2011. We were in Boston from December 2-10, 2011. Even if the conference schedule was very busy, we still had some free hours for some sightseeing, shopping, night life or other personal things each of us wanted to do. Our cultures differ since we are all from different countries and all of us differ a lot from the American culture. Trips in other parts of the world always have to offer something new in the personality of a person, although this might be interpreted differently in different characters.

## **1.6 Conclusion**

For most of the students attended this conference, was their first time in a conference. LISA is one of the biggest conferences in the field of System Administration, so this gave us a positive impact and a first touch with people from the enterprise. It was interesting to see how the real world deals with arguments discussed in the class before. 9 students with different technical and social background attended this conference. The level of the different sessions sometimes was either low or high but this is also a good indication for a personal assessment to know our weak points and work with them harder. Furthermore, it is always good to see how theory works in reality and what are the concerns of the system administrators out there.