

RESEARCH CENTER FOR INTEGRATIVE AND COMPUTATIONAL BIOLOGY

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The aims of the research center for integrative and computational biology are (1) investigating fundamental principles of various biological phenomena based on the method of integration of computational science and biology; (2) establishing new methodologies for integrative biology; and (3) providing the new technology and knowledge to researchers. Our final goal is to establish a new bioscience that includes methods originally utilized in different fields: informatics, mathematics, and biology.

I. Research activity

The research center for integrative and computational biology was founded in 2001 in a time of rapid progress in modern biology. The success in world wide genome projects has provided a huge amount of new information on genes, leading to expectations of advances in the development of new medicines for intractable diseases, the exploitation of new cultivated plants resistant to noxious insects, and so on. In addition, it is the object of present-day biology to research higher-order phenomena that are constructed from complex interactions between many genes. To grapple with these questions, it is essential to decipher huge amounts of gene information, and to derive the essence for the biological behavior of cells or organisms.

Mathematical and computational sciences have strong capacities for dealing with these questions. Computational methods make it possible to process ever-increasing amounts of data. Hypothetical experiments (including the evolution of past organisms) based on mathematical or computational models make it possible to consider conditions which are impossible in real experiments. We are continuing to research higher-order phenomena in biology by using mathematical or computational methods, and to develop new methodology for studying such complex phenomena.



Figure 1. A laboratory room for computational studies

For example, integrative methods are especially important in understanding pattern formation in development. Morphological difference between species is an important research focus of the current developmental biology. What is the mechanism responsible for the difference of morphogenesis between species? Theoretical studies are useful in identifying candidates of cell or gene interaction that are likely to be responsible for the systems in real organisms. This method gives us an integrative understanding for the behavior of complex systems in biology, including gene regulatory networks.

II. Collaboration activity

Interaction between researchers is essential to make the best use of mathematical and computational methods for experimental biology. The theoretical methods provide testable predictions which the experimental biologists are able to investigate before returning the results to the theoreticians for the next round of predictions. By repeating these predictions and tests, the integrative methods are continually developed. The research center for integrative and computational biology has continued to enhance interaction between theoretical biologists and experimental biologists.

The center provides equipment such as cluster machines and Unix-based machines for computation and experiments. Members can also use computational equipment at the Research Center for Computational Science in Okazaki. The center also provides experimental equipment for collaborations with experimental biologists.



Figure 2. A cluster machine

In 2005, we held a symposium on March 8-9 entitled "Mathematical and Computational Approaches to Biology." Dozens of researchers studying mathematical, computational, or experimental biology participated. The center is dedicated to encouraging young researchers who can use these methods for continued research into complex biological phenomena.