

# Supplementary Information. Sequenceserver: a modern graphical user interface for custom BLAST databases

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## Supplementary Text

### Technical implementation details

We developed Sequenceserver from scratch rather than basing our work on the NCBI's initial Perl/CGI `wwwblast` wrapper (Tao, 2006) to reduce technical debt (Lehman, 1980). The core of Sequenceserver is written in the Ruby language (Flanagan and Matsumoto, 2008) popular for creating websites (Ruby et al., 2013) and bioinformatics tools (Goto et al., 2010), while JavaScript and HTML/CSS are used for layout and interactions in the web browser. We use preexisting tools and libraries to facilitate development: The lightweight framework Sinatra (Harris and Haase, 2012) is used to create URL endpoints to load the search form and run BLAST searches from the browser. BLAST searches are delegated to the compiled command line version of BLAST (Camacho et al., 2009); we use Ox (<https://github.com/ohler55/ox>) to parse BLAST XML and create the HTML report. Underscore (<http://underscorejs.org/>), HTML5 Shiv (<https://github.com/afarkas/html5shiv>), jQuery (<http://jquery.com/>), jQuery UI (<http://jqueryui.com/>), Webshim (<https://afarkas.github.io/webshim/demos>), and Bootstrap (<http://getbootstrap.com>) libraries create a uniform scripting environment (for dynamic aspects of the user interface) and a consistent look-and-feel (for visual layout) across browsers. The d3 (<http://d3js.org/>) and BioJS (Gómez et al., 2013) libraries are used respectively for generating the graphical overview and the sequence viewing interface. Details regarding versions of the different software libraries are indicated in the source code repository at <https://github.com/wurmlab/sequenceserver>.

### Sustainable software development approach

We followed six software engineering practices to facilitate and accelerate development while increasing robustness, improving the long-term sustainability of the software (Prlić and Procter, 2012; Wilson et al., 2014). First, we used an open source and agile development approach (Shore and Warden, 2007) involving frequent incremental improvements, peer review and frequent deployment on our servers and within the community. Second, we structured the software according to the object-oriented programming paradigm (Weisfeld, 2013) to cleanly separate different parts of code. Third, we followed two important software development principles: “don't repeat yourself” (DRY) leads to fewer lines of code and thus fewer bugs, and makes it easier to read and understand code than if similar commands are repeated in several places (Hunt and Thomas, 2000); “keep it simple, stupid” (KISS) reduces unnecessary complexity and thus lowers risks and leads to higher maintainability (Raymond, 2003). Fourth, we reuse widely established software packages and libraries (see above) to benefit from work done by others. This accelerates our work and reduces the amount of Sequenceserver-specific code, which in turn further reduces the likelihood of adding

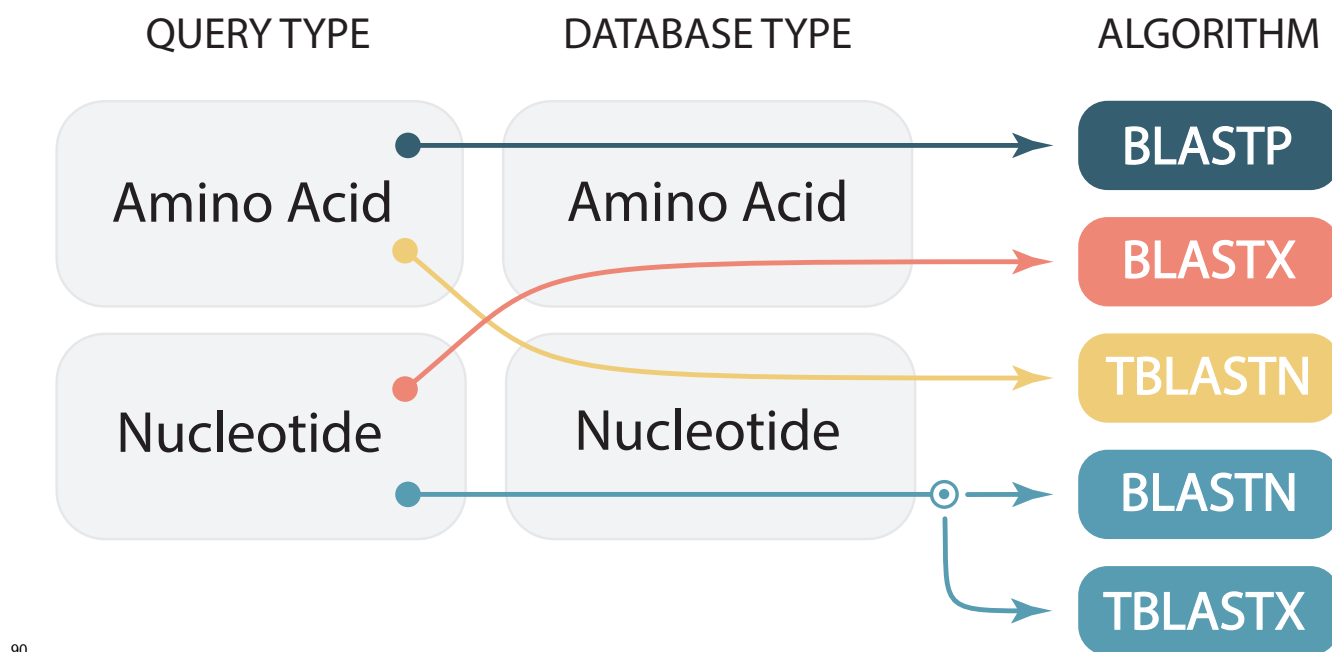
44 bugs (Sametinger, 1997). Fifth, we implemented unit and integration tests (Ammann and Offutt, 2008)  
45 for many parts of Sequenceserver's code, and use continuous integration (<https://travis-ci.org/>) to ensure  
46 these tests are automatically run whenever a change is made to the code, thus increasing the likelihood and  
47 speed of detecting errors. Sixth, we use automatic code checkers including rubocop ([https://github.com/  
48 bbatsov/rubocop](https://github.com/bbatsov/rubocop)) and w3 validator to ensure that our code respects relevant style guides and development  
49 principles. Such respect of style standards (e.g., names of variables and methods, code structure and  
50 formatting) makes code more accessible to others than if we had chosen no or different conventions  
51 (Martin, 2008; Wurm, 2015). Finally, we use the Code Climate platform (<http://codeclimate.com>) for  
52 automated reviews of code quality.

## 53 **User centric design of graphical user interface**

54 To ensure a fluid user experience that increases researcher productivity, we designed Sequenceserver around  
55 eight modern user interface design principles. First, the interface contains only essential information to  
56 minimize distractions for the user. Second, the information is laid out in a clear and hierarchically structured  
57 manner. As part of this, we paid special attention to typography, using typefaces specifically designed for  
58 legibility and aesthetics on electronic devices (Roboto and Open Sans). Third, we used automation where  
59 possible to minimize the amount of decisions the user must make. For example, we limit the choices  
60 for algorithm selection based on query type and databases selection – this is because only a single basic  
61 BLAST algorithm is possible for all cases except for nucleotide-nucleotide search (Figure S1). Fourth, we  
62 use interactive visual feedback and cues for step-by-step discovery of the workflow. For example, the BLAST  
63 button remains disabled until the user has provided query sequence(s) and selected target databases. If  
64 the user tries to click the BLAST button while it is disabled, a tooltip indicates that a required input  
65 is missing. Similarly, the selection of protein databases is automatically disabled if the user has already  
66 selected a nucleotide database (and *vice versa*). Fifth, we remain consistent and contextual with regards  
67 to user interaction. For example, notification of detection of sequence type does not depend on how the  
68 query sequence was provided. This notification is shown below the query sequence input field – where the  
69 user is likely to look after query input – instead of using a global designated notification area or displaying  
70 pop-up windows that can be disruptive or are ignored. Similarly, a “clear query” button is shown only after  
71 the user has provided query sequence(s) and is positioned where a user is likely to look for it. Sixth, we try  
72 not to let the advantages of a graphical interface and efforts to create an easily accessible user experience  
73 limit the scope of what the user can do. For example, all possible advanced BLAST search options can  
74 be entered via a generic input field. Similarly, tooltips over report download links are only shown after the  
75 mouse pointer has hovered for at least 500ms. This delay means most users will not be bothered by tooltips  
76 after they have used the interface a few times. Seventh, we exploit intuitive human notions of colors. For  
77 example, if the user erroneously tries to combine nucleotide and amino acid sequences in the query, the  
78 query input-area is gently highlighted using a red border to indicate an error. At a different level, in the  
79 graphical overview shown for each query, the color of each hit indicates its strength, with stronger e-values  
80 being darker. Finally, the wording of error messages is similar to an informal human conversation to create  
81 empathy and familiarity, which may also clarify that Sequenceserver is built by a community of scientists.

82 **Supplementary Figure and Tables**

83 **Figure S1. Automatic BLAST algorithm selection.** BLAST includes five basic algorithms  
 84 (right column). Arrows indicate how Sequenceserver automatically selects an appropriate BLAST  
 85 algorithm based on the sequence types of the query (left column) and selected databases (middle  
 86 column). For the first three combinations of query and database types, only one algorithm is possible.  
 87 The circle indicates that for nucleotide query and nucleotide database, the user can choose between  
 88 BLASTN and TBLASTX.



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**Table S1. Research using Sequenceserver**

Interplay of chimeric mating-type loci impairs fertility rescue and accounts for intra-strain variability in <i>Zygosaccharomyces rouxii</i> interspecies hybrid ATCC42981	Bizzarri et al., 2019
A genome-wide association study of non-photochemical quenching in response to local seasonal climates in <i>Arabidopsis thaliana</i>	Rungrat et al., 2019
<i>Taraxacum kok-saghyz</i> (rubber dandelion) genomic microsatellite loci reveal modest genetic diversity and cross-amplify broadly to related species	Nowicki et al., 2019
Developmental expression and evolution of hexamerin and haemocyanin from <i>Folsomia candida</i> (Collembola)	Liang et al., 2019
Disentangling the mechanisms of mate choice in a captive koala population	Brandies et al., 2018
Evidence for sexual reproduction: Identification, frequency, and spatial distribution of <i>Venturia effusa</i> (pecan scab) mating type idiomorphs	Young et al., 2018
<i>Pseudomonas fluorescens</i> group bacterial strains are responsible for repeat and sporadic postpasteurization contamination and reduced fluid milk shelf life	Reichler et al., 2018
Complete pathway elucidation and heterologous reconstitution of <i>Rhodiola salidroside</i> biosynthesis	Torrens-Spence et al., 2018
Evolution of the shut-off steps of vertebrate phototransduction	Lamb et al., 2018

De novo draft assembly of the <i>Botrylloides leachii</i> genome provides further insight into tunicate evolution	Blanchoud et al., 2018
Whole-genome sequence of the metastatic PC3 and LNCaP human prostate cancer cell lines	Seim et al., 2017
Fire ant social chromosomes: Differences in number, sequence and expression of odorant binding proteins	Pracana et al., 2017
Ecological genomics for the conservation of dwarf birch.	Borrell, 2017
Transcriptomic discovery and comparative analysis of neuropeptide precursors in sea cucumbers (Holothuroidea)	Suwansa-ard et al., 2018
High-throughput genotyping analyses and image-based phenotyping in <i>Sorghum bicolor</i>	McCormick, 2017
Bacteriocins of non-aureus staphylococci isolated from bovine milk	Carson et al., 2017
Naturally occurring high oleic acid cottonseed oil: Identification and functional analysis of a mutant allele of <i>Gossypium barbadense</i> fatty acid desaturase-2	Shockey et al., 2016
3D sorghum reconstructions from depth images enable identification of quantitative trait loci regulating shoot architecture	McCormick et al., 2016
A workflow for studying specialized metabolism in nonmodel eukaryotic organisms	Torrens-Spence et al., 2016
Transcriptomic identification of starfish neuropeptide precursors yields new insights into neuropeptide evolution	Semmens et al., 2016
Multi-species sequence comparison reveals conservation of ghrelin gene-derived splice variants encoding a truncated ghrelin peptide	Seim et al., 2016
Characterization of a second secologanin synthase isoform producing both secologanin and secoxyloganin allows enhanced <i>de novo</i> assembly of a <i>Catharanthus roseus</i> transcriptome	Dugé de Bernonville et al., 2015
Identification and heterologous expression of the chaxamycin biosynthesis gene cluster from <i>Streptomyces leeuwenhoekii</i>	Castro et al., 2015
Discovery of sea urchin NGFFFamide receptor unites a bilaterian neuropeptide family	Semmens et al., 2015
Comparative analysis reveals loss of the appetite-regulating peptide hormone ghrelin in falcons	Seim et al., 2015
Reconstructing SALMFamide neuropeptide precursor evolution in the phylum Echinodermata: Ophiuroid and crinoid sequence data provide new insights	Elphick et al., 2015
Molecular biology approaches in bioadhesion research	Rodrigues et al., 2014
Discovery of a novel methanogen prevalent in thawing permafrost	Mondav et al., 2014
Neuropeptides and polypeptide hormones in echinoderms: New insights from analysis of the transcriptome of the sea cucumber <i>Apostichopus japonicus</i>	Rowe et al., 2014
Discovery of a novel neurophysin-associated neuropeptide that triggers cardiac stomach contraction and retraction in starfish	Semmens et al., 2013
The evolution and diversity of SALMFamide neuropeptides	Elphick et al., 2013
The protein precursors of peptides that affect the mechanics of connective tissue and/or muscle in the echinoderm <i>Apostichopus japonicus</i>	Elphick, 2012

**Table S2. Public community websites using Sequenceserver**

Reference / description	URL
Dieterich et al., 2007. Genomic resources for the nematode, <i>Pristionchus pacificus</i>	<a href="http://pristionchus.org">http://pristionchus.org</a>

Amborella Genome Project, 2013. Amborella genome database	<a href="http://amborella.uga.edu">http://amborella.uga.edu</a>
Chiu et al., 2013. Spotted wing fly-base	<a href="http://spottedwingflybase.org">http://spottedwingflybase.org</a>
Petrillo et al., 2015. JRC GMO-amplicons: Database of amplicon sequences related to genetically modified organisms	<a href="http://gmo-crl.jrc.ec.europa.eu/jrcgmoamplicons/db_scans/blast">http://gmo-crl.jrc.ec.europa.eu/jrcgmoamplicons/db_scans/blast</a>
Kirmizoglou and Promponas, 2015. LCR-eXXXplorer: Explore low complexity regions in protein sequences	<a href="http://repeat.biol.ucy.ac.cy/fgb2/gbrowse/swissprot/">http://repeat.biol.ucy.ac.cy/fgb2/gbrowse/swissprot/</a>
Brandl et al., 2016. Planmine: Data and tools to mine planarian biology	<a href="http://planmine.mpi-cbg.de">http://planmine.mpi-cbg.de</a>
Mun et al., 2016. Lotus-base: Resources, tools, and datasets for the model legume <i>Lotus japonicus</i>	<a href="http://lotus.au.dk">http://lotus.au.dk</a>
Liew et al., 2016. ReefGenomics: Genomic and transcriptomic data for marine organisms	<a href="http://reefgenomics.org">http://reefgenomics.org</a>
Shen et al., 2016. Y1000+ project: Initiative to sequence 1000 wild yeasts	<a href="http://y1000plus.wei.wisc.edu">http://y1000plus.wei.wisc.edu</a>
Nakagawa and Takahashi, 2016. gEVE: Database of genome-based endogenous viral elements	<a href="http://geve.med.u-tokai.ac.jp">http://geve.med.u-tokai.ac.jp</a>
Janies et al., 2016. EchinoDB: Database of orthologous transcripts from echinoderms	<a href="http://echinodb.uncc.edu">http://echinodb.uncc.edu</a>
Louro et al., 2016. Assembled transcriptomes of sea bass and sea bream	<a href="http://sea.ccmr.ualg.pt:4567">http://sea.ccmr.ualg.pt:4567</a>
Hane et al., 2016. Lupin genome portal: Genome assembly and annotations for the narrow-leafed lupin	<a href="http://lupinexpress.org">http://lupinexpress.org</a>
Challis et al., 2016. Lepbase: Lepidopteran genome database	<a href="http://lepbase.org">http://lepbase.org</a>
Zhu et al., 2017. CottonFGD: Cotton functional genomics database	<a href="http://cottonfgd.org">http://cottonfgd.org</a>
Hill et al., 2017. Hopbase: Database for genomics of <i>Humulus lupulus</i> (hop)	<a href="http://hopbase.org">http://hopbase.org</a>
Torres et al., 2017. LeishDB: Database for leishmania genomic information	<a href="http://leishdb.com">http://leishdb.com</a>
Naas et al., 2017. BLDB: Beta-lactamase database	<a href="http://bldb.eu:4567">http://bldb.eu:4567</a>
Elsik et al., 2018. Hymenoptera genome database	<a href="http://hymenopteragenome.org">http://hymenopteragenome.org</a>
Hagen et al., 2018. Bovine genome database	<a href="http://bovinegenome.org">http://bovinegenome.org</a>
Meng et al., 2019. CircFunBase: A database for functional circular RNAs	<a href="http://bis.zju.edu.cn/CircFunBase/">http://bis.zju.edu.cn/CircFunBase/</a>
Ravindran et al., 2018. Daphnia stressor database: Gene expression database for <i>Daphnia</i>	<a href="http://www.daphnia-stressordb.uni-hamburg.de/dsdbstart.php">http://www.daphnia-stressordb.uni-hamburg.de/dsdbstart.php</a>
Gene expression database for <i>Alvinella pompejana</i> , and <i>Platynereis dumerilii</i>	<a href="http://Jekely-lab.tuebingen.mpg.de">http://Jekely-lab.tuebingen.mpg.de</a>
EFISH Genomics 2.0: web portal for electric fish genomic resources	<a href="http://efishgenomics.integrativebiology.msu.edu">http://efishgenomics.integrativebiology.msu.edu</a>
NBIGV, Non-B cell derived immunoglobulin variable region database	<a href="http://nbigv.org">http://nbigv.org</a>
iBeetle-base: Database of <i>Tribolium</i> RNAi phenotypes	<a href="http://ibeetle-base.uni-goettingen.de">http://ibeetle-base.uni-goettingen.de</a>
Cacao genome database	<a href="http://cacaogenomedb.org">http://cacaogenomedb.org</a>
Ant genomes, predicted transcripts and proteome	<a href="http://antgenomes.org">http://antgenomes.org</a>
<i>Aplysia</i> transcriptome	<a href="http://aplysiagenetools.org:4567">http://aplysiagenetools.org:4567</a>
Ash tree genome	<a href="http://ashgenome.org">http://ashgenome.org</a>
Asparagus genome project	<a href="http://asparagus.uga.edu">http://asparagus.uga.edu</a>
Dwarf birch genome project	<a href="http://birchgenome.org">http://birchgenome.org</a>
Fallon et al., 2018. Firefly genome database	<a href="http://blast.fireflybase.org">http://blast.fireflybase.org</a>
Genome, predicted transcripts and proteins of tardigrades	<a href="http://blast.tardigrades.org">http://blast.tardigrades.org</a>

Botulinum neurotoxin database	<a href="http://bontbase.org">http://bontbase.org</a>
eplant.org: Sequenced genomes of all plants to facilitate comparative genomic studies	<a href="http://eplant.org:4567">http://eplant.org:4567</a>
FusoPortal: A Fusobacterium genome and bioinformatic repository	<a href="http://fusportal.org">http://fusportal.org</a>
NCHU fish genome database	<a href="http://lep-fish.nchu.edu.tw:4567">http://lep-fish.nchu.edu.tw:4567</a>
Fish genome database	<a href="http://brcwebportal.cos.ncsu.edu:4567">http://brcwebportal.cos.ncsu.edu:4567</a>
MarpolBase: Genome database for the common liverwort, <i>Marchantia polymorpha</i>	<a href="http://marchantia.info">http://marchantia.info</a>
MitoFun: A curated resource of complete fungal mitochondrial genomes	<a href="http://mitofun.biol.uoa.gr">http://mitofun.biol.uoa.gr</a>
Oat genome	<a href="http://oatgenomeproject.org">http://oatgenomeproject.org</a>
Spiny mouse transcriptome	<a href="http://spiny mouse.erc.monash.edu">http://spiny mouse.erc.monash.edu</a>
Measles, mumps, and rubella viruses database and analysis resource	<a href="http://mmrdb.org">http://mmrdb.org</a>
Whole-genome sequence of the metastatic PC3 and LNCaP human prostate cancer cell lines	<a href="http://ghrelinlab.org">http://ghrelinlab.org</a>
10.1093/dnares/dsz003 Genome database for Iberian ribbed newt	<a href="http://inewt.nibb.ac.jp:8111">http://inewt.nibb.ac.jp:8111</a>
Crop genomics lab's BLAST server	<a href="http://plantgenomics.snu.ac.kr">http://plantgenomics.snu.ac.kr</a>
Exome of Kronos durum wheat and Cadenza bread wheat mutants	<a href="http://wheat-tilling.com">http://wheat-tilling.com</a>
Gene expression analysis and visualisation for wheat	<a href="http://wheat-expression.com">http://wheat-expression.com</a>
Fungal genomics	<a href="http://fungalignomics.science.uu.nl">http://fungalignomics.science.uu.nl</a>
Stazione Zoologica Anton Dohrn	<a href="http://glossary-blast.bioinfo.szn.it">http://glossary-blast.bioinfo.szn.it</a>
Georgia State University	<a href="http://db.cbn.gsu.edu:4568">http://db.cbn.gsu.edu:4568</a>
Desplan Lab ( <i>Drosophila</i> developmental biology)	<a href="http://desplan-lab.bio.nyu.edu">http://desplan-lab.bio.nyu.edu</a>
Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation	<a href="http://hieracium.csiro.au">http://hieracium.csiro.au</a>
Institute of Cytology and Genetics of Siberian Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences	<a href="http://seqserver.sysbio.cytogen.ru">http://seqserver.sysbio.cytogen.ru</a>
Taiwan Agricultural Genomics Resource Center	<a href="http://tagrc.org:4568">http://tagrc.org:4568</a> , <a href="http://tagrc.org:4569">http://tagrc.org:4569</a>

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