Dynamic Languages for HPC at LLNL

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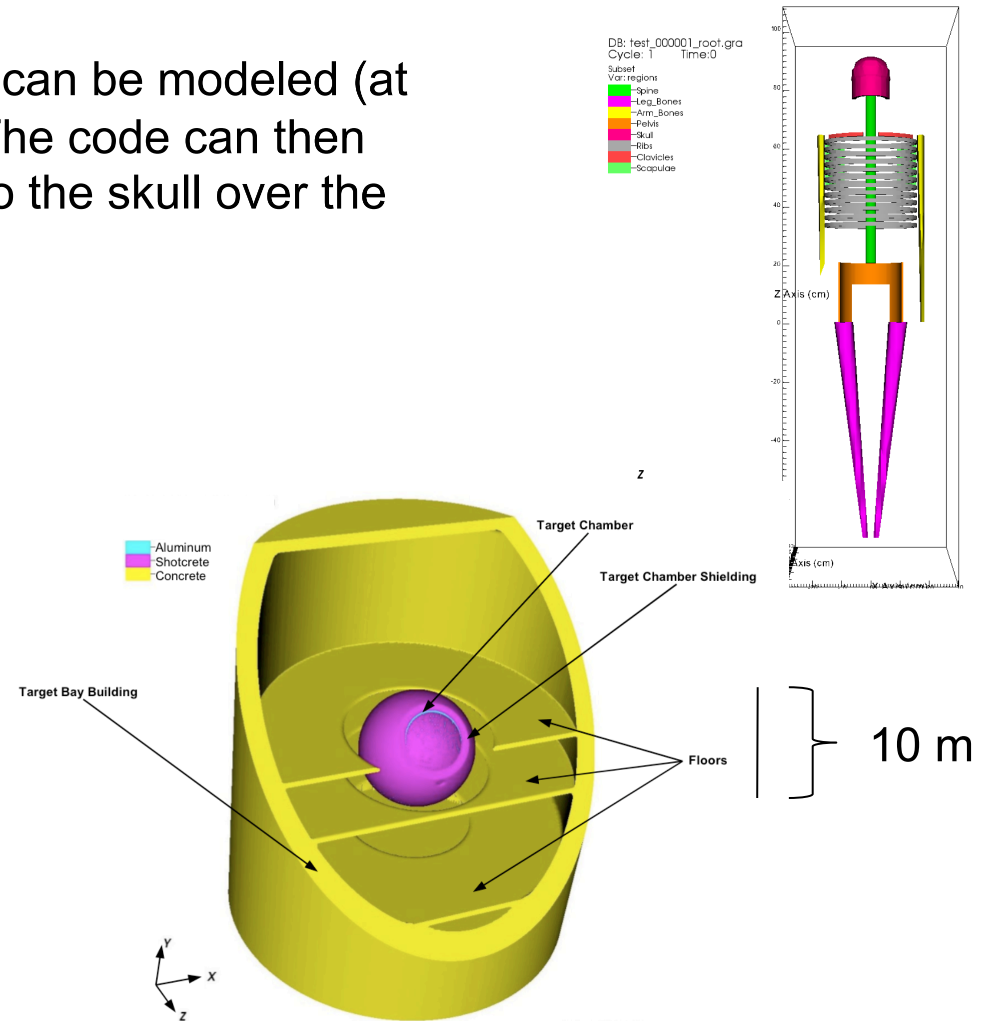
Overview

- Examples of applications that use dynamic languages at LLNL
  - Mercury
  - Kull
- Challenges for dynamic languages in HPC
- Performance of Python at scale in HPC environments
- Future directions for Python in HPC

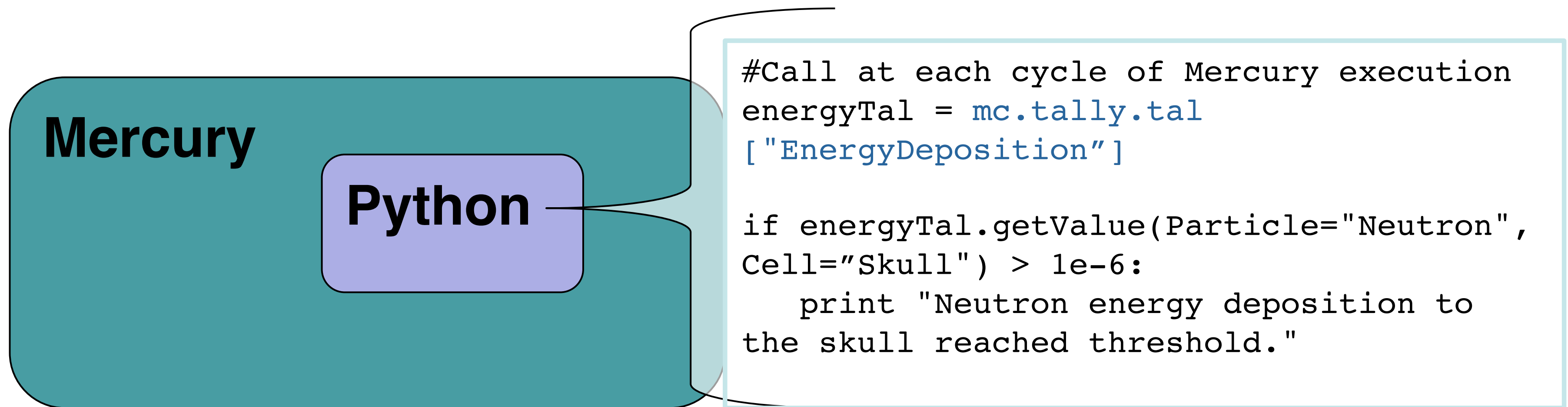
Mercury is a general-purpose parallel Monte Carlo particle transport code written in C++

Health physics: a “phantom” human can be modeled (at right) and placed in a scenario. The code can then determine neutron deposition in to the skull over the course of a simulation

At right, the National Ignition Facility target chamber is modeled. This model was used in Mercury to simulate neutron deposition into the surrounding facility walls and evaluate the hazards correspondingly



A Dynamic Language was added to the existing code to simplify the software development cycle

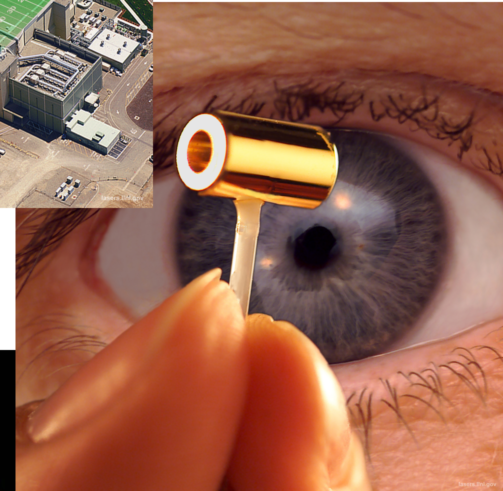


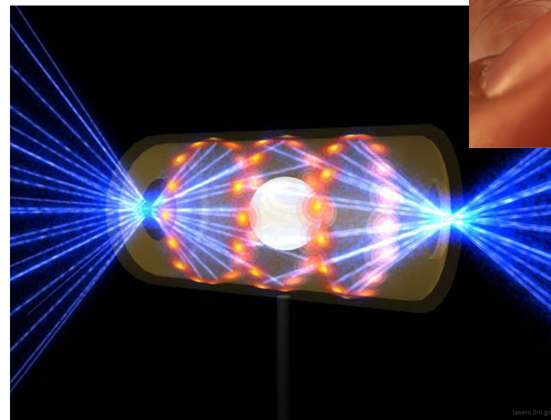
The Mercury application ***embeds*** Python to make it easier to test and validate the software.

Goal: replace the majority of compiled C++ testing with Python scripts for shorter compile times and faster development cycle

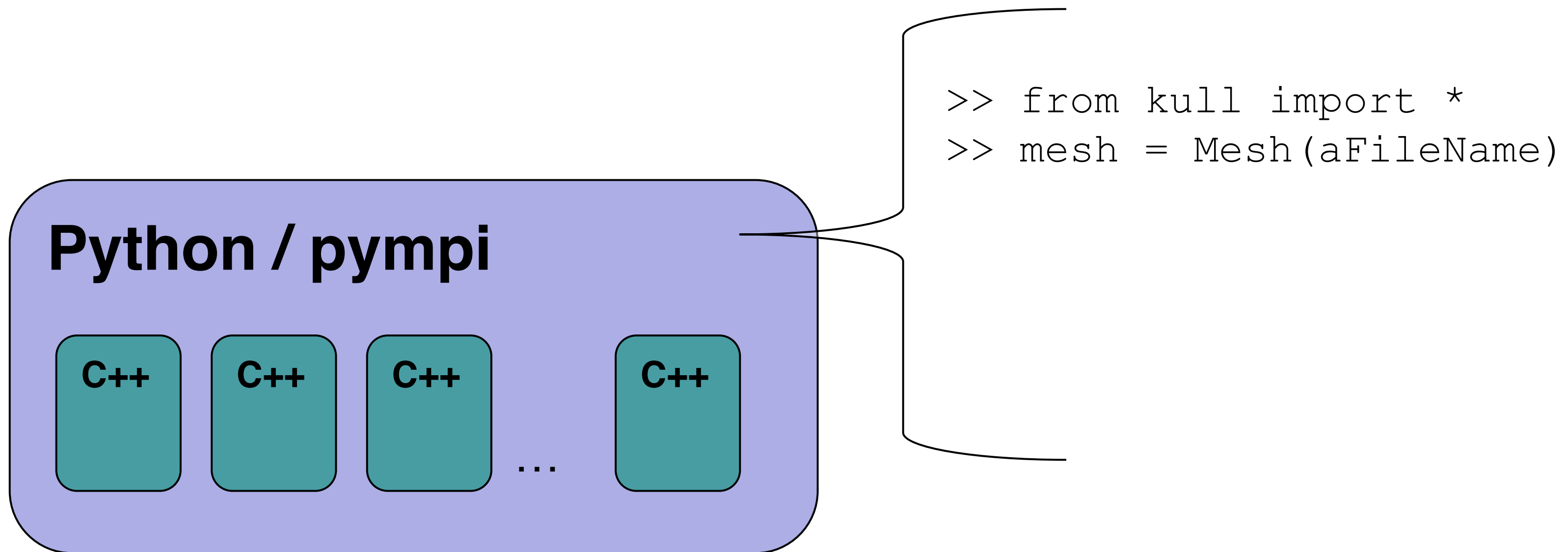
Kull is an inertial confinement fusion simulation application

- Massively parallel C++/Python code for inertial confinement fusion
- ~300,000 lines of C++
- Wrapped and exposed to Python via SWIG
- Uses MPI and pympi for parallel communication at C++ and Python layers (respectively)





In Kull, the dynamic language is “front and center” and the static language components are compiled, then imported at runtime



The Kull application ***extends*** Python to provide a “steerable” simulation code.

Pros:
flexibility, “it’s just Python”, “like a duck” interface compliance, easy to write tests

Cons:
High costs (maintenance, compile time, etc.) paid for binding technology
Ex: ~350K lines of code, 1.7 mil lines of generated wrapper code.

Challenge: automatic binding technologies (e.g. SWIG) incur performance penalties when calling in to other language

Example: SWIG wrapping of basic C++ member function:

```
static PyObject *_wrap_Ship_getKind(PyObject *self, PyObject *args, PyObject
*kwargs) {
  PyObject *resultobj;    Ship *arg1 = (Ship *) 0 ;
  int result;
  PyObject * obj0  = 0 ;
  char *kwnames[] = {        "self", NULL    };

if(!PyArg_ParseTupleAndKeywords(args,kwargs,(char
*)"O:Ship_getKind",kwnames,&obj0))
  goto fail;
if ((SWIG_ConvertPtr(obj0,(void **) &arg1,
  SWIGTYPE_p_Ship,SWIG_POINTER_EXCEPTION | 0 )) == -1) SWIG_fail;
  result = (int)(arg1)->getKind();
{
  PyObject *module = PyImport_ImportModule("demo");
  if (module != NULL) {
    PyObject *function = PyObject_GetAttrString(module, "enumOutConverter");
    if (function != NULL) {
      PyObject *enumModule = PyImport_ImportModule("demo");
      if (enumModule != NULL) {
         resultobj = PyObject_CallFunction(function, "Osis", enumModule, "Ship",
```

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*)"O:Ship_getKind",kwnames,&obj0))
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  result = (int)(arg1)->getKind();
{
  PyObject *module = PyImport_ImportModule("demo");
  if (module != NULL) {
    PyObject *function = PyObject_GetAttrString(
    if (function != NULL) {
      PyObject *enumModule = PyImport_ImportModu
      if (enumModule != NULL) {
         resultobj = PyObject_CallFunction(function, "OsIs", enumModule, "Ship",
```

Declare temporaries

Parse input and set to temp variables

Import module, call function, clean up, and handle any error conditions

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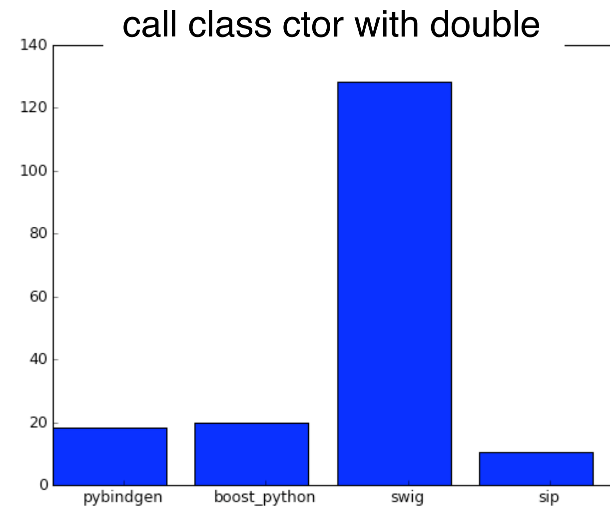
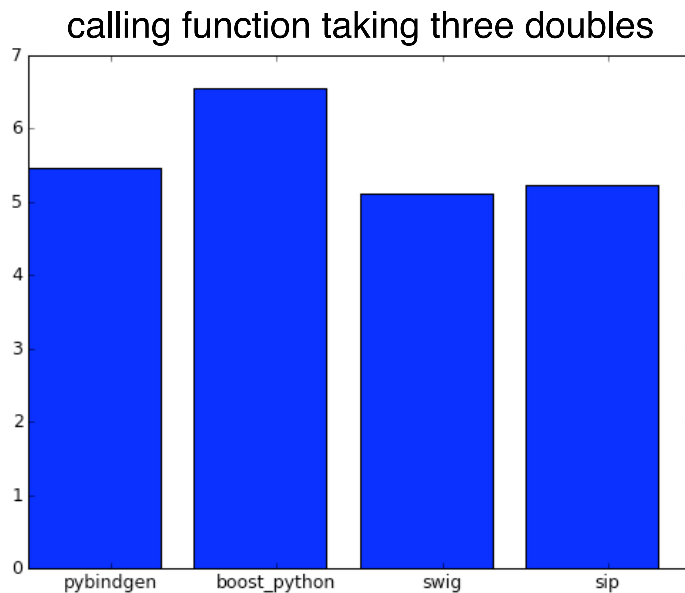
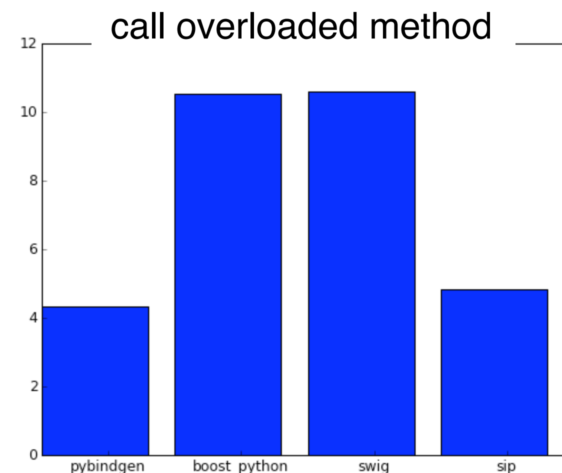
For performance intensive applications, it is often a good idea to profile the performance of the wrapping technology in various scenarios.







Challenge: interfacing Python with MPI must be done carefully to avoid performance penalties at scale.

Example: pympi collective operations may cause problems at large proc. counts on the BG/P system

Dawn Scaling Study

Time (s/cycle): 0, 200, 400, 600, 800, 1000, 1200, 1400

No. of Processor (x 1024): 0, 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30, 35

- CycleTime(new hypre)
- Hypre(new)
- Difference
- CycleTime(default hypre)
- Hypre(default)
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Non-numerical work (i.e. mostly Python) takes more time than the tuned linear solvers! ☹

Questions that we care about and don't know the answers to…

- How can we minimize the performance penalty of binding technologies for existing codes in static languages?
- Which technology has the best interface to MPI?
- Will micro-kernels for computational nodes evolve to meet the needs of dynamic languages? (e.g. CNK for Blue Gene)?
- Will embracing a dynamic language for an application exclude us from running on certain kinds of hardware? (e.g. Roadrunner)?
- Can Python evolve to overcome the limitations of the GIL (global interpreter lock)? What kinds of concurrency solutions will be available in Python? Or some other dynamic language?
- Can we leverage the dynamic nature of Python to adapt our application to use emerging technologies (e.g. pyOpenCL, Theano, etc.)?
- Would it be better to develop in a purely dynamic language and then optimize on the bottlenecks (using Cython, pybindgen, BPL, etc)?

References

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- Hans Petter Langtangen, "Python Scripting for Computational Science." Third Edition. Springer Publishing. 2009.
- Cython users group on Google Groups for wrapping technology benchmark results:

  http://groups.google.com/group/cython-users/browse_thread/thread/9503bd9468f92447