December 3, 2009

Dr. Mark A. Musen
Professor of Medicine and Computer Science
Stanford University
251 Campus Drive, Room X-215
Stanford, CA 94305-5479

Dear Mark,

Ontolog (a.k.a. Ontolog Forum) is an open, international, virtual community of practice devoted to advancing the fields of ontology, ontological engineering, and semantic technology, and advocating their adoption into mainstream applications and international standards. Ontolog brings together a community of hundreds of members who participate actively in regularly scheduled webinars, special projects, and annual "summits" designed to advance the organization's goals. Being a volunteer organization, Ontolog benefits tremendously from the involvement of members affiliated with leading institutions from around the globe. As such, we support all efforts that bring strong value to the community.

Being co-conveners of the Ontolog Forum, we are keenly aware of the importance of work in ontology to e-science broadly and to biomedicine in particular. The work of the National Center for Biomedical Ontology (NCBO) is urgently needed to drive pressing projects in ontology archiving, ontology dissemination, and semantic data integration. Members who participate in Ontolog's vibrant online discourse frequently point to the NCBO's technologies as vivid examples of how novel computational approaches can enable ontologies to have a palpable role in transforming the life sciences as well as healthcare in this country.

The Ontolog Forum has been very grateful for the extensive webinars and panel discussions that members of the NCBO have offered to us as part of your dissemination activities over the years. Ontolog participants particularly value the work of the NCBO because your center retains a cutting-edge, computational approach while, at the same time, seeking very practical and useful results for the biomedical community that you serve.

In 2007, Ontolog, in cooperation with the National Institute for Standards and Technology, convened its annual "ontology summit" on the topic of Open Ontology Repositories (OOR's). More than 100 scientists spent three months online and later convened in Gaithersburg to discuss the requirements of

open archives of ontology content for access over the Internet. During this meeting, the NCBO BioPortal was identified as a comprehensive, real-life example of what an Open Ontology Repository might look like. The OOR community (which is now incubated within the Ontolog collaborative work environment) is extremely grateful that NCBO subsequently made a version of its BioPortal software available to us for shared experimentation. Michael Dean at BBN and Michael Gruninger at the University of Toronto, among others, have made extensive investigations of BioPortal as part of the OOR community's efforts to understand better how the NCBO's work might be enhanced to meet the requirements of communities beyond biomedicine. For example, we know that the effort to use BioPortal as infrastructure for the open repository of oceanography ontologies required by the Marine Metadata Initiative has been particularly promising.

In 2010, the Ontolog/NIST Ontology Summit will focus on the question of training the next generation of ontological engineers. The work that you are taking on as part of our steering committee and that Prof. Barry Smith is leading as one of the Summit's co-chairs has been extremely exciting to us and to all of Ontolog. We appreciate that NCBO has an important dissemination mission and we are delighted that your center has chosen to partner with Ontolog on so many occasions, leading to outstanding opportunities for our two communities.

NCBO has become so central to the OOR initiative and to the broader mission of the Ontolog Forum that it is impossible for any of us to imagine that your Center might ever go away. You have created a model for how semantic technology can be applied in e-science and have demonstrated very convincingly how biomedical research and practice can be enhanced by the use of structured representations of scientific knowledge. Your center has shown tremendous impact in just four years, and we and the rest of the Ontolog community are eagerly awaiting the contributions that you and your colleagues will certainly make during the next phase of your center's work.

Sincerely,

ONTOLOG, co-conveners

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