



# SimFaaS: A Performance Simulator for Serverless Computing Platforms

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**Abstract:** Developing accurate and extendable performance models for serverless platforms, aka Function-as-a-Service (FaaS) platforms, is a very challenging task. Also, implementation and experimentation on real serverless platforms is both costly and time-consuming. However, at the moment, there is no comprehensive simulation tool or framework to be used instead of the real platform. As a result, in this paper, we fill this gap by proposing a simulation platform, called SimFaaS, which assists serverless application developers to develop optimized Function-as-a-Service applications in terms of cost and performance. On the other hand, SimFaaS can be leveraged by FaaS providers to tailor their platforms to be workload-aware so that they can increase profit and quality of service at the same time. Also, serverless platform providers can evaluate new designs, implementations, and deployments on SimFaaS in a timely and cost-efficient manner.

SimFaaS is open-source, well-documented, and publicly available, making it easily usable and extendable to incorporate more use case scenarios in the future. Besides, it provides performance engineers with a set of tools that can calculate several characteristics of serverless platform internal states, which is otherwise hard (mostly impossible) to extract from real platforms. In previous studies, temporal and steady-state performance models for serverless computing platforms have been developed. However, those models are limited to Markovian processes. We designed SimFaaS as a tool that can help overcome such limitations for performance and cost prediction in serverless computing.

We show how SimFaaS facilitates the prediction of essential performance metrics such as average response time, probability of cold start, and the average number of instances reflecting the infrastructure cost incurred by the serverless computing provider. We evaluate the accuracy and applicability of SimFaaS by comparing the prediction results with real-world traces from Amazon AWS Lambda.


## 1 INTRODUCTION


There is very little official documentation made publicly available about the scheduling algorithms in public serverless computing platforms. However, many works have focused on partially reverse engineering this information through experimentations on these platforms (Wang et al., 2018; Figiela et al., 2018; Lloyd et al., 2018). Using the results of such studies and by modifying their code base and thorough extensive experimentation, we have come to a good understanding of the way modern serverless frameworks are operated and managed by the service providers. In this work, we plan to use this information to build an open and public performance simulator<sup>1</sup> for modern

serverless computing platforms with a high degree of flexibility, fidelity and accuracy.

In serverless computing platforms, computation is done in function instances. These instances are completely managed by the serverless computing platform provider and act as tiny servers for the incoming triggers (requests). To develop a comprehensive simulator for serverless computing platforms, we first need to understand how they work underneath and are managed.

The simulator presented in this work is written in *Python*. The resulting package can easily be installed using `pip`<sup>2</sup>. The source code is openly accessible on the project Github<sup>3</sup>. The documentation is accessible on Read the Docs<sup>4</sup>. For more information, interested

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<sup>1</sup>A simulator focusing on the performance-related key metrics and aspects of the system.

<sup>2</sup><https://pypi.org/project/simfaas/>

<sup>3</sup><https://github.com/pacsclab/simfaas>

<sup>4</sup><https://simfaas.readthedocs.io/en/latest/>

readers can check out our Github repository, which provides links to all of our artifacts as well as easy-to-setup environments, to try out our sample scenarios.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows: Section 2 describes the system simulated in SimFaaS in detail. Section 3 outlines the design of SimFaaS with the most important design choices and characteristics. Section 4 lists some of possible use cases for SimFaaS. In Section 5, we present the experimental evaluation of SimFaaS, validating the accuracy of the simulator. Section 6 gives a summary of the related work. Finally, Section 7 concludes the paper.

## 2 SYSTEM DESCRIPTION

In this section, we introduce the management system in serverless computing platforms, which has been fully captured by the serverless simulator presented in this paper.

**Function Instance States:** according to recent studies (Mahmoudi and Khazaei, 2020a; Mahmoudi and Khazaei, 2020b; Wang et al., 2018; Figiela et al., 2018; Mahmoudi et al., 2019), we identify three states for each function instance: *initializing*, *running*, and *idle*. The *initializing* state happens when the infrastructure is spinning up new instances, which might include setting up new virtual machines, unikernels, or containers to handle the excessive workload. The instance will remain in the *initializing* state until it is able to handle incoming requests. As defined in this work, we also consider *application initializing*, which is the time user's code is performing initial tasks like creating database connections, importing libraries or loading a machine learning model from an S3 bucket as a part of the *initializing* state which needs to happen only once for each new instance. Note that the instance cannot accept incoming requests before performing all initialization tasks. It might be worth noting that the *application initializing* state is billed by most providers while the rest of the *initializing* state is not billed. When a request is submitted to the instance, the instance goes into the *running* state. In this state, the request is parsed and processed. The time spent in the *running* state is also billed by the serverless provider. After the processing of a request is over, the serverless platform keeps the instances warm for some time to be able to handle later spikes in the workload. In this state, we consider the instance to be in the *idle* state. The application developer is not charged for an instance that is in the *idle* state.

**Cold/Warm Start:** as defined in previous work (Lloyd et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2018; Figiela et al., 2018), we refer to a request as a *cold*

*start* request when it goes through the process of launching a new function instance. For the platform, this could include launching a new virtual machine, deploying a new function, or creating a new instance on an existing virtual machine, which introduces an overhead to the response time experienced by users. In case the platform has an instance in the *idle* state when a new request arrives, it will reuse the existing function instance instead of spinning up a new one. This is commonly known as a *warm start* request. Cold starts could be orders of magnitude longer than warm starts for some applications. Thus, too many cold starts could impact the application's responsiveness and user experience (Wang et al., 2018). This is the reason a lot of research in the field of serverless computing has focused on mitigating cold starts (Lin and Glikson, 2019; Bermbach et al., 2020; Manner et al., 2018).

**Autoscaling:** we have identified three main autoscaling patterns among the mainstream serverless computing platforms: 1) *scale-per-request*; 2) *concurrency value scaling*; 3) *metrics-based scaling*. In *scale-per-request* Function-as-a-Service (FaaS) platforms, when a request comes in, it will be serviced by one of the available idle instances (*warm start*), or the platform will spin up a new instance for that request (*cold start*). Thus, there is no queuing involved in the system, and each cold start causes the creation of a new instance, which acts as a tiny server for subsequent requests. As the load decreases, to scale the number of instances down, the platform also needs to scale the number of instances down. In the *scale-per-request* pattern, as long as requests that are being made to the instance are less than the *expiration threshold* apart, the instance will be kept warm. In other words, for each instance, at any moment in time, if a request has not been received in the last *expiration threshold* units of time, it will be expired and thus terminated by the platform, and the consumed resources will be released. To enable simplified billing, most well-known public serverless computing platforms use this scaling pattern, e.g., AWS Lambda, Google Cloud Functions, IBM Cloud Functions, Apache OpenWhisk, and Azure Functions (Wang et al., 2018; Van Eyk et al., 2018). As *scale-per-request* is the dominant scaling technique used by major providers, in this paper, we strive to simulate the performance of this type of serverless platform.

In the *concurrency value scaling* pattern (Google Cloud Platform Inc., 2020), function instances can receive multiple requests at the same time. The number of requests that can be made concurrently to the same instance can be set via *concurrency value*. Figure 1 shows the effect of concurrency value on the autoscal-

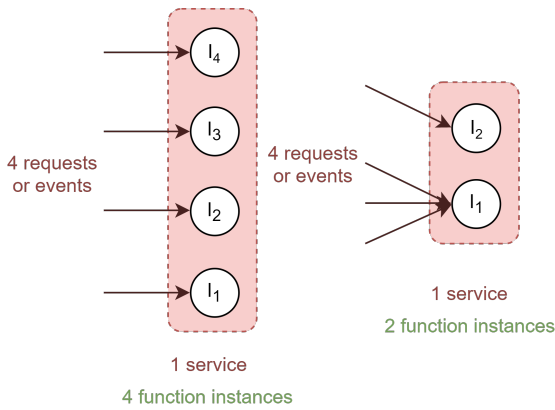


Figure 1: The effect of the concurrency value on the number of function instances needed. The left service has a concurrency value of 1, while the right service has a concurrency value of 3.

ing behaviour of the platform. It is worth noting that the scale-per-request autoscaling pattern can initially be seen as a special case of *concurrency value scaling* pattern where concurrency value is set to 1. However, due to its popularity, importance, and fundamental differences in their management layer, we classify them into separate categories. Examples of this scaling pattern are Google Cloud Run and Knative.

*Metrics-based scaling* tries to keep metrics like CPU or memory usage within a predefined range. Most on-premises serverless computing platforms work with this pattern due to its simplicity and reliability. Some of the serverless computing platforms that use this pattern are AWS Fargate, Azure Container Instances, OpenFaaS, Kubeless, and Fission.

The simulator proposed in this work considers only the platforms that use the scale-per-request pattern due to their importance and widespread adoption in mainstream public serverless computing platforms.

**Initialization Time:** as mentioned earlier, when the platform is spinning up new instances, they will first go into the initialization state. The initialization time is the amount of time it takes since the platform receives a request until the new instance is up and running and ready to serve the request. The initialization time, as defined here, is comprised of the platform initialization time and the application initialization time. The platform initialization time is the time it takes for the platform to make the function instance ready, whether a unikernel or a container and the application initialization time is the time it takes for the application to run the initialization code, e.g., connecting to the database.

**Response Time:** the response time usually includes the queuing time and the service time. Since we are addressing the scale-per-request serverless computing platforms here, there is no queuing involved for the in-

coming requests. Due to the inherent linear scalability in serverless computing platforms (Lloyd et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2018; Figiela et al., 2018), the distribution of the response time does not change over time with different loads.

**Maximum Concurrency Level:** every public serverless computing platform has some limitations on the number of function instances that can be spun up and in running state for a single function. This is mainly due to ensuring the availability of the service for others, limiting the number of instances one user can have up and running at the same time. This is mostly known as the *maximum concurrency level*. For example, the default maximum concurrency level for AWS Lambda is 1000 function instances in 2020 for most regions. When the system reaches the maximum concurrency level, any request that needs to be served by a new instance will receive an error status showing the server is not able to fulfill that request at the moment.

**Request Routing:** in order to minimize the number of containers that are kept warm and thus to free up system resources, the platform routes incoming requests to new containers, and it will use older containers only if all containers that are created more recently are busy (McGrath and Brenner, 2017). In other words, the scheduler gives priority to newly instantiated idle instances using priority scheduling according to creation time, i.e., the newer the instance, the higher the priority. By adopting this approach, the system minimizes the number of requests going to older containers, maximizing their chance of being expired and terminated.

### 3 THE DESIGN OF SimFaaS

This section discusses the design of the novel Function-as-a-Service (FaaS) platform simulator (SimFaaS) proposed in this work. SimFaaS was created by the authors as a tool for simplifying the process of validating a developed performance model and allowing accurate performance prediction for providers and application developers in the absence of one. SimFaaS mainly targets public serverless computing platforms. There are several built-in tools for visualizing, analyzing, and verifying a developed analytical performance model. In addition, we added tools that can accept custom state encoding and generate approximations for Probability Density Functions (PDF) and Cumulative Distribution Functions (CDF) from the simulations, which can help debug several parts of a given analytical performance model.

The proposed simulator can predict several QoS-related metrics accurately like cold start probability,

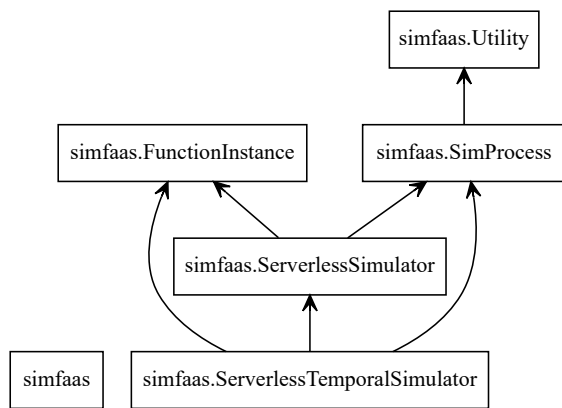


Figure 2: The package diagram of SimFaaS. Each square represents a class in the package and arrows represent dependency.

average response time, and the probability of rejection for requests under different load intensities, which helps application developers understand the limits of their system and measure their SLA compliance without the need for expensive experiments. In addition, it can predict the average number of running server count and total server count, which helps predict the cost of service for the application developer and the infrastructure cost incurred by the serverless provider, respectively.

Figure 2 outlines the package diagram of SimFaaS, showing the dependency between different modules. The *Utility* module provides helper functions for plots and calculations. The *SimProcess* module will help simulate a single process and allows for comparisons with the optional analytical model provided as a function handle to the module. The *FunctionInstance* module provides the functionality of a single function instance. The main simulation with an empty initial state is provided by the *ServerlessSimulator* module. Finally, *ServerlessTemporalSimulator* module performs simulations similar to *ServerlessSimulator* module, but with added functionality allowing customized initial state and calculation of simulation results in a time-bounded fashion.

### 3.1 Extensibility and Ease of Use

SimFaaS has been developed entirely in Python using an object-oriented design methodology. In order to leverage the tools within the package, the user needs to write a Python application or a Jupyter notebook initializing the classes and providing the input parameters. In addition, the user has the option to extend the functionality in the package by extending the classes and adding their custom functionality. Almost every functionality of classes can be overridden to allow for

modification and extensions. For example, the arrival, cold start service, and warm start service processes can be redefined by simply extending the *SimProcess* class. We included deterministic, Gaussian, and Exponential processes as examples of such extensions in the package. Examples of such changes can be found in the several examples we have provided for SimFaaS. In addition, the user can include their analytically produced PDF and CDF functions to be compared against the simulation trace results.

The simulator provides all of the functionality needed for modelling modern scale-per-request serverless computing platforms. However, we created a modular framework that can span future types of computational platforms. To demonstrate this, we extended the *ServerlessSimulator* class to create *ParServerlessSimulator*, which simulates serverless platforms that allow queuing in the function instances but have a scaling algorithm similar to scale-per-request platforms.

### 3.2 Support for Popular Serverless Platforms

SimFaaS includes simulation models able to mimic the most popular public serverless computing platforms like AWS Lambda, Google Cloud Functions, IBM Cloud Functions, Apache OpenWhisk, Azure Functions, and all other platforms with similar autoscaling. We have also performed over one month of experimentation to demonstrate the validity of the simulation results extracted from SimFaaS.

To capture the exogenous parameters needed for an accurate simulation, the following information is needed:

- **Expiration Threshold** which is usually constant for any given public serverless computing platform. According to our experimentations and other works (Shahrad et al., 2020; Mikhail Shilkov, 2020), in 2020, this value is 10 minutes for AWS Lambda, Google Cloud Functions, IBM Cloud, and Apache OpenWhisk, and 20 minutes for Azure Functions. For other serverless computing platforms, experimentation is needed by the users. The use of a non-deterministic expiration threshold is also possible by extending the *FunctionInstance* class.
- **The arrival process** which can rather safely be assumed as an exponential for most consumer-facing applications. However, other applications might use a deterministic process, e.g. cron jobs, or other types like batch arrival. The user can use one of our built-in processes or simply define their own.
- **The warm/cold service process** can be extracted

by measuring the response time from monitoring the workload response time for cold and warm requests. By default, SimFaaS uses exponential distribution for this process but can be overridden by the user by passing any class that extends the *SimProcess* class. We have provided Gaussian and fixed-interval distributions as part of the package to demonstrate this.

## 4 SAMPLE SCENARIOS FOR USING SimFaaS

In this section, we will go through a few sample use cases for the serverless platform simulator presented in this work. For more details, a comprehensive list of examples can be found in the project Github repository<sup>5</sup>.

### 4.1 Steady-state Analysis

In this example, we use the SimFaaS simulator to calculate the steady-state properties of a given workload in scale-per-request serverless computing platforms. In SimFaaS, the workload is only characterized by arrival rate, service time (warm start response time), and the provisioning time (the amount of time to have a cold start instance get ready to serve the request), which are easily accessible through experimentation and any monitoring dashboard. The only information needed to characterize the serverless computing platform is the expiration threshold, which is the amount of time it takes for the platform to expire and recycle the resources of an instance after it has finished processing its last request. This value is usually constant and the same for all users of the serverless computing platform. To run a simple simulation, we can leverage the *ServerlessSimulator* class and run the simulation long enough to minimize the transient effect and let the system achieve the steady-state.

Table 1 shows a set of example simulation parameters with the default exponential distribution both for the arrival and service time processes. Note that instead of using exponential distributions, the user can pass a random generator function with a custom distribution to achieve more accurate results for specific applications. As can be seen, the system can produce QoS-related parameters like the probability of cold start or rejection of the request for a given arrival rate, which can help the application developer analyze and find the limits of the system. In addition, the appli-

<sup>5</sup><https://github.com/pacslab/SimFaaS/tree/master/examples>

Table 1: An example simulation input and selected output parameters. The output parameters are signified with a leading star (\*).

Parameter	Value
Arrival Rate	0.9 req/s
Warm Service Time	1.991 s
Cold Service Time	2.244 s
Expiration Threshold	10 min
Simulation Time	10 <sup>6</sup> s
Skip Initial Time	100 s
*Cold Start Probability	0.14 %
*Rejection Probability	0 %
*Average Instance Lifespan	6307.7389 s
*Average Server Count	7.6795
*Average Running Servers	1.7902
*Average Idle Count	5.8893

cation developer can also use the average number of running servers as an important measure for the cost of their service that can be used for setting different configurations of services that the function relies on, e.g., the database concurrent connection capacity (Amazon Web Services Inc., 2020). Besides, information like the average server count can produce an estimate for the infrastructure cost incurred by the serverless provider. The serverless provider can use SimFaaS as a tool to analyze the possible effect of changing parameters like the expiration threshold on their incurred cost and QoS for different scenarios.

Another way the proposed simulator can be leveraged is for extracting information about the system that is not visible to software engineers and developers in public serverless computing platforms like AWS Lambda or Google Cloud Functions. This information could facilitate research for predicting cost, performance, database configurations or other related parameters. For example, we can find out the distribution of instance counts in the system throughout time in the simulated platform for input parameters shown in Table 1, which is shown in Figure 3. This information can help researchers develop performance models based on internal states of the system with very good accuracy, which is otherwise not possible in public serverless offerings. To further analyze the reproducibility of our instance count estimation using the parameters in Table 1, we ran 10 independent simulations and generated our estimation of average instance count over time for each run. Figure 4 shows the average and 95% confidence interval of our estimation over those runs. As can be seen, our estimation

converges, showing less than 1% deviation from the mean in the 95% confidence interval.

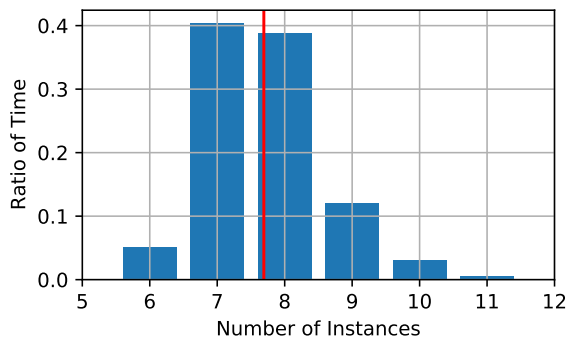


Figure 3: The instance count distribution of the simulated process throughout time. The y-axis represents the portion of time in the simulation with a specific number of instances.

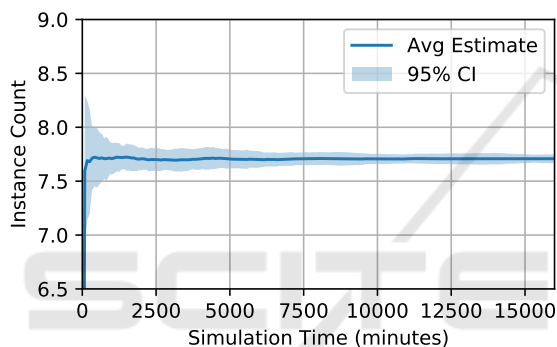


Figure 4: The estimated average instance count over time in 10 simulations. The solid line shows the average of simulations and the shaded area shows the 95% Confidence Interval (CI).

## 4.2 Transient Analysis

Although the steady-state analysis of the serverless computing platform's performance can give us the long-term quality of service metrics, the application developer or the serverless provider might be interested in the platform's transient behaviour. A transient analysis simulation can provide insight into the immediate future, facilitating time-bound performance guarantees. Besides, it can help serverless providers ensure the short-term quality of service when trying new designs.

Previous efforts have been made to develop performance models able to provide transient analysis of serverless computing platforms (Mahmoudi and Khazaei, 2020b). However, there are inherent limitations to such performance models, like the absence of batch arrival modelling and being limited to Markovian processes. SimFaaS doesn't have such limitations and can help both application developers and serverless

providers gain insight into the transient aspect of the performance of serverless computing platforms.

## 4.3 What-if Analysis

Due to the inherent highly-dynamic infrastructure of serverless computing platforms, there are very few tools from the performance engineering methodologies and analysis that can be used in the emerging serverless technologies. Because of this inherent lack of tools and resources, serverless computing platforms were forced to use trial and error through implementation to analyze their new designs for making performance and efficiency improvements. There have been previous studies that proposed analytical performance models for serverless computing platforms (Mahmoudi and Khazaei, 2020a; Mahmoudi and Khazaei, 2020b), but these methods have limitations like only supporting Markovian processes, limiting their applicability in a number of scenarios.

One major benefit of having an accurate serverless platform simulator is the ability to perform what-if analysis on different configurations and find the best-performing settings for a given workload. Implementation and experimentation to gather similar data is both time-consuming and costly, while using the proposed simulator makes the data collection much faster and easier. Figure 5 shows an example of such an analysis for different values for the *expiration threshold* in the system. Different workloads running on serverless computing platforms might have different performance/cost criteria. Using what-if analysis powered by an accurate performance model, one could optimize the configuration for each unique workload. Similar examples can be found in the project examples.

## 4.4 Cost Calculation

Performing cost prediction under different loads in cloud computing is generally a very challenging task. These challenges tend to be exacerbated in the highly dynamic structure of serverless computing platforms. Generally, there is a broad range of possible costs for a given serverless function, including computation, storage, networking, database, or other API-based services like machine learning engines or statistical analysis. However, all charges incurred by serverless functions can be seen as either per-request charges (e.g., external APIs, machine learning, face recognition, network I/O) or runtime charges billed based on execution time (e.g., memory or computation). Per-request charges can be calculated using only the average arrival rate. However, runtime charges may differ under different load intensities due to the difference in cold start prob-

ability. Using the proposed simulator, users can get an estimate on the cold start probability and the average number of running servers, which are necessary for cost estimation under different load intensities.

In addition to the average running server count, which helps estimate the cost incurred by the application developer, the average total server count is linearly proportional to the infrastructure cost incurred by the serverless provider. Thus, using the proposed simulator, both developer charges and infrastructure charges incurred by the provider can be estimated under different configurations, which can help improve the platform by studying the effect of using different configurations or designs without the need to perform expensive or time-consuming experiments or implementations.

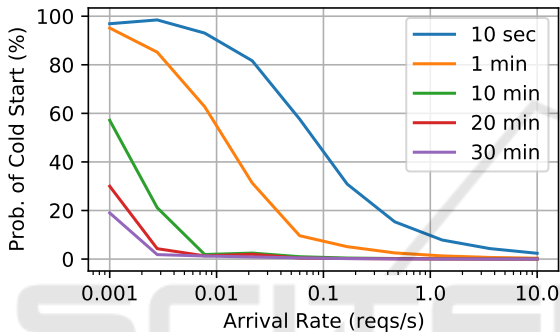


Figure 5: Cold start probability against the arrival rate for different values of the expiration threshold for the workload specified in Table 1. SimFaaS can ease the process of conducting experiments with several configurations to find the best performing one.

## 5 EXPERIMENTAL EVALUATION

To show the accuracy of the proposed simulator, we performed extensive experimentations on AWS Lambda and showed that the results were in tune with the results from SimFaaS. The experiments are above one month of running benchmark applications on AWS Lambda and are openly accessible on Github<sup>6</sup>. All of our experiments were executed for a 28-hour window with 10 minutes of warm-up time in the beginning, during which we do not record any data. The workload used in this work was based on the work of Wang et al. (Wang et al., 2018) with minor modifications. Our workload is openly available in our Github repository<sup>7</sup>. For the purpose of experimental validation, we used a

<sup>6</sup><https://github.com/pacslab/serverless-performance-modeling/tree/master/experiments/results>

<sup>7</sup><https://github.com/pacslab/serverless-performance-modeling>

combination of CPU intensive and I/O intensive workloads. During the experimentation, we have obtained performance metrics and the other parameters such as cold/warm start information, instance id, lifespan, etc.

### 5.1 Experimental Setup

In our AWS Lambda deployment, we used the *Python 3.6* runtime with 128 MB of RAM deployed on the *us-east-1* region in order to have the lowest possible latency from our client. Note that the memory configuration won't affect the accuracy of the simulation as the results depend on the service time distribution, which captures the effect of changing the memory configuration. For the client, we used a virtual machine with 8 vCPUs, 16 GB of memory, and 1000 Mbps network connectivity with single-digit milliseconds latency to AWS servers hosted on Compute Canada Arbutus cloud<sup>8</sup>. We used Python as the programming language and the official *boto3* library to communicate with the AWS Lambda API to make the requests and process the resulting logs for each request. For load-testing and generation of the client requests based on a Poisson process, we used our in-house workload generation library<sup>9</sup>, which is openly accessible through PyPi<sup>10</sup>. The result is stored in a CSV file and then processed using Pandas, Numpy, Matplotlib, and Seaborn. The dataset, parser, and the code for extraction of system parameters and properties are also publicly available in our analytical model project's Github repository<sup>11</sup>.

### 5.2 Parameter Identification

We need to estimate the system characteristics to be used in our simulator as input parameters. In this section, we discuss our approach to estimating each of these parameters.

**Expiration Threshold:** here, our goal is to measure the expiration threshold, which is the amount of time after which inactive function instance in the warm pool will be expired and therefore terminated. To measure this parameter, we created an experiment in which we make requests with increasing inter-arrival times until we see a cold start meaning that the system has terminated the instance between two consecutive requests. We performed this experiment on AWS lambda with the starting inter-arrival time of 10 seconds, each time increasing it by 10 seconds until

<sup>8</sup>[https://docs.computecanada.ca/wiki/Cloud\\_resources](https://docs.computecanada.ca/wiki/Cloud_resources)

<sup>9</sup><https://github.com/pacslab/pacswg>

<sup>10</sup><https://pypi.org/project/pacswg>

<sup>11</sup><https://github.com/pacslab/serverless-performance-modeling>

we see a cold start. In our experiments, AWS lambda instances seemed to expire an instance exactly after 10 minutes of inactivity (after it has processed its last request). This number did not change in any of our experiments leading us to assume it is a deterministic value. This observation has also been verified in (Mikhail Shilkov, 2020; Shahrads et al., 2020).

**Average Warm Response Time and Average Cold Response Time:** with the definitions provided here, warm response time is the service time of the function, and cold response time includes both provisioning time and service time. To measure the average warm response time and the average cold response time, we used the average of response times measured throughout the experiment.

### 5.3 Simulator Results Validation

In this section, we outline our methodology for measuring the performance metrics of the system, comparing the results with the predictions of our simulator.

**Probability of Cold Start:** to measure the probability of cold start, we divide the number of requests causing a cold start by the total number of requests made during our experiment. Due to the inherent scarcity of cold starts in most of our experiments, we observed an increased noise in our measurements for the probability of cold start, which led to increasing the window for data collection to about 28 hours for each sampled point.

**Mean Number of Instances in the Warm Pool:** to measure the mean number of instances in the warm pool, we count the number of unique instances that have responded to the client's requests in the past 10 minutes. We use a unique identifier for each function instance to keep track of their life cycle, as obtained in (Wang et al., 2018).

**Mean Number of Running Instances:** we calculate this metric by observing the system every ten seconds, counting the number of in-flight requests in the system, taking the average as our estimate.

**Mean Number of Idle Instances:** this can be measured as the difference between the total average number of instances in the warm pool and the number of instances busy running the requests.

**Average Wasted Capacity:** for this metric, we define the utilized capacity as the ratio of the number of running instances over all instances in the warm pool. Using this definition, the ratio of idle instances over all instances in the warm pool is the wasted portion of capacity provisioned for our workload. Note that this value is very important to the provider as it measures

the ratio of the utilized capacity (billed for the application developer) over the deployed capacity (reflecting the infrastructure cost).

### 5.4 Experimental Results

Figure 6 shows the probability of cold start for different arrival rates extracted from the simulation compared with real-world results. As can be seen, the results match the performance metrics extracted from experimentations. The results show an average error of 12.75%, while the standard error of the underlying process for the experiments over 10 runs totalling 28 hours is 10.14% showing the accuracy of the results obtained from the simulation. Figures 7 and 8 show the average number of instances and the average wasted capacity (in *idle* state) for the simulation and experiments with Mean Absolute Percentage Error (MAPE) of 3.43% and 0.17%, respectively.

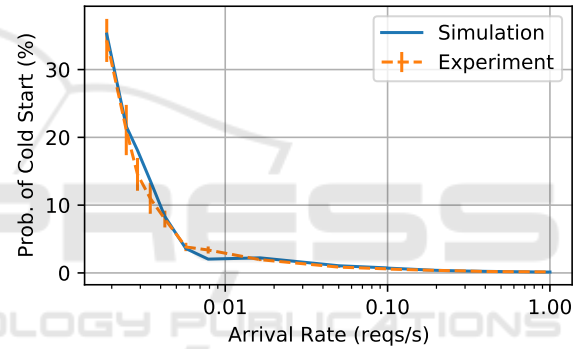


Figure 6: Probability of cold start extracted from simulation compared with real-world experimentations on AWS Lambda.

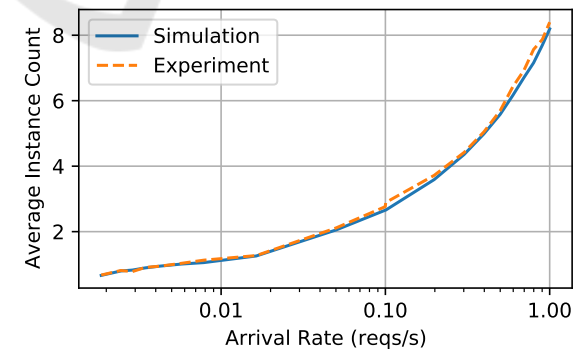


Figure 7: The average number of instances extracted from simulation compared with real-world experimentations on AWS Lambda.



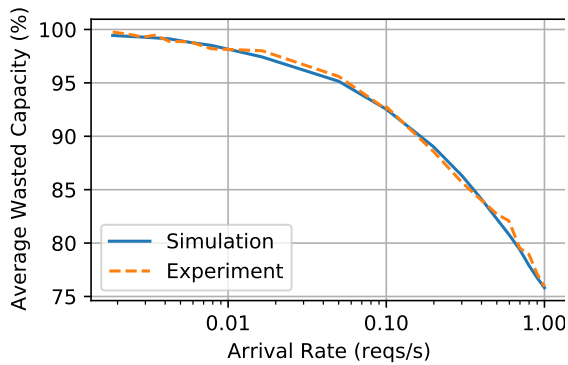


Figure 8: Average wasted resources extracted from simulation compared with real-world experimentations on AWS Lambda.

## 6 RELATED WORK

Many recent works in the area of serverless computing platforms have focused on studying and finding ways to improve the performance of serverless computing platforms (van Eyk and Iosup, 2018; Manner et al., 2018; Manner, 2019; Boza et al., 2017; Abad et al., 2018; Jeon et al., 2019). However, to the best of the authors’ knowledge, none have been able to predict or simulate comprehensive performance or quality of metrics characteristics for a given workload. In this section, we will go through the most related recent works in the prediction of the performance or quality of service for serverless computing platforms.

Some of the previous studies have focused on developing comprehensive performance models for steady-state and transient analysis of a given workload (Mahmoudi and Khazaei, 2020a; Mahmoudi and Khazaei, 2020b). However, the proposed models impose several limitations on the arrival and service time processes and cannot handle batch arrivals. These limitations render the developed performance model unusable for many types of workloads, especially for batch and analytics workloads. The serverless performance simulator proposed in this work can handle any type of arrival or service time process and can be adapted to future emerging serverless computing management models with less manual effort.

In (Bortolini and Obelheiro, 2019), Bortolini et al. used experimentations on different configurations and serverless providers in order to find the most important factors influencing the performance and cost of current serverless platforms. In their study, they found low predictability of cost as one of the most important drawbacks of serverless computing platforms. Using simulators like what we proposed in this work can help improve the predictability of the cost

of a given workload under different load intensities. Hellerstein et al. (Hellerstein et al., 2018) addressed the main shortcomings present in the first-generation serverless computing platforms and the anti-patterns present in them. They showed that current implementations are restricting distributed programming and cloud computing innovations. Eyk et al. (Van Eyk et al., 2018) found the most important issues surrounding the widespread adoption of FaaS to be sizeable overheads, unreliable performance, and new forms of cost-performance trade-off. In their work, they identified six performance-related challenges for the domain of serverless computing and proposed a roadmap for alleviating these challenges. Several of the aforementioned shortcomings of serverless computing platforms can be mitigated by predicting the cost-performance trade-off using serverless simulators.

Eyk et al. (van Eyk and Iosup, 2018) investigated the performance challenges in current serverless computing platforms. They found the most important challenges in the adoption of FaaS to be the remarkable computational overhead, unreliable performance, and absence of benchmarks. The introduction of an accurate simulator for function-as-a-service offerings could overcome some of these shortcomings. Manner et al. (Manner et al., 2018) investigated the factors influencing the cold start performance of serverless computing platforms. Their experiments on AWS Lambda and Azure Functions show that factors like the programming language, deployment package size, and memory settings affect the performance on serverless computing platforms. In a later study, Manner et al. (Manner, 2019) describe the importance of an accurate simulator for Function-as-a-Service (FaaS) products. They mention how scaling, cold starts, function configurations, dependent services, network latency, and other important configurations influence cost-performance trade-off. In their work, they propose a simulation framework for a cost and performance simulator for serverless computing platforms. In this platform, they suggest extracted mean values from experiments as inputs to the performance model in order to calculate different properties.

Boza et al. (Boza et al., 2017) introduced a model-based simulation for cloud budget planning. In their work, they perform cost simulation for using reserved VMs, on-demand VMs, bid-based VMs, and serverless computing for a similar computing task. In their work, the serverless computing simulation is overly simplistic for performance modelling researchers and lacks several important details. In this work, we focus solely on performance simulation of serverless computing platforms, but with more details in mind, which seems necessary for the simulator to be leveraged by the per-

formance research community, application developers, and serverless providers.

Abad et al. (Abad et al., 2018) mainly considered the problem of scheduling small cloud functions on serverless computing platforms. As a part of their evaluations, they implemented a SimPy-based simulation for their proposed scheduling method. Although this work shows promise of rather accurate serverless computing simulations, their focus is on scheduling tasks while ignoring several details of interest for performance modelling. In this work, we strive to fill this gap by providing the performance modelling research with the proper tooling necessary for high-fidelity performance models of serverless computing platforms. Jeon et al. (Jeon et al., 2019) introduced a CloudSim extension focused on Distributed Function-as-a-Service (DFaaS) on edge devices. Although the DFaaS systems hold a great promise for the future of serverless computing, it doesn't allow simulation for the mainstream serverless computing platforms.

## 7 CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

In this work, we presented SimFaaS, a simulator for modern serverless computing platforms with sufficient details to yield very accurate results. We introduced a range of tools available for performance modelling researchers giving them insights and details into several internal properties that are not visible for users in public serverless computing platforms. We reviewed some of the possible use cases of the proposed simulator and showed its accuracy through comparison with real-world traces gathered from running benchmark applications on AWS Lambda.

SimFaaS enables performance modelling researchers with a tool allowing them to develop accurate performance models using the internal state of the system, which cannot be monitored on public serverless computing platforms. Using SimFaaS, both serverless providers and application developers can predict the quality of service, expected infrastructure and incurred cost, amount of wasted resources, and energy consumption without performing lengthy and expensive experimentations. The benefits of using SimFaaS for serverless computing platform providers could be two-fold: 1) They can examine new designs, developments, and deployments in their platforms by initially validating new ideas on SimFaaS, which will be significantly cheaper in terms of time and cost compared to actual prototyping; 2) They can provide users with fine-grain control over the cost-performance trade-off by modifying the platform parameters (e.g., *expiration*

*threshold*). This is mainly due to the fact that there is no universal optimal point in the cost-performance trade-off for all workloads. By making accurate predictions, a serverless provider can better optimize their resource usage while improving the application developers' experience and consequently the end-users.

As future work, we plan to extend SimFaaS to include new generations of serverless computing, in addition to adding several billing schemas in order to predict the cost of running workloads on the serverless platform. We are also aiming to maintain SimFaaS by the members of PACS Lab<sup>12</sup> to add new features offered by serverless providers.

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