

SIGDOC Annual Report

July 2004 – June 2005

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ACM SIGDOC's focus is the design of communication for computer-mediated information products and systems. SIGDOC fosters the study and publication of processes, methods, and technologies for communicating and designing communication artifacts such as printed documents, online text, and hypermedia applications.

FY'05 was my second year as Chair of SIGDOC. It was also a year of continuing transition for the SIG as a whole. Historically, SIGDOC was primarily composed of technical writers. This was reflected in the original meaning of "DOC" in SIGDOC: [computer] documentation. More recently, the broader interpretation of "DOC" to refer to all aspects of the design of communication has attracted a more interdisciplinary audience.

SIGDOC still has many members with a technical communication background. However, current trends suggest that our active members are increasingly coming from areas such as software engineering, computer science, information technology, Web developers, and human-computer interaction. This has been reflected at recent SIGDOC conferences, which I believe is a healthy development for the SIG, as it represents a larger group of potential members.

The 2004 Conference

The annual SIGDOC conference took place October 10-13, 2004 in Memphis, TN. The theme of SIGDOC 2004 (www.sigdoc.org/2004) was "The Engineering of Quality Documentation." The conference was a great success. There was a smaller group of about 40 people this year, but what they lacked in numbers that more than made up for in enthusiasm. The technical program, led by the Program Chair, Shihong Huang of Florida Atlantic University, was excellent. The program was full of engaging discussions and interesting presentations, three separate workshops, and the Rigo and Diana awards. The conference program is available online at www.sigdoc.org/2004/program.

The social events and local arrangements, managed by Michael Albers of the University of Memphis, were also superb. Equally important, the 2004 conference (like the 2003 conference before it) was fiscally sound, creating a small surplus against expenses. This is a trend that future SIGDOC conferences should strive to continue.

I received many compliments from people who attended the conference, and these comments reflected very well on the efforts of the SIGDOC 2004 organizing committee, and the SIGDOC organization as a whole. As always, the conference Proceedings were published by ACM Press and are available online through the ACM Digital Library.

News and Notes

I attended two ACM SGB meetings in Chicago during 2004-2005. SIGDOC was not under review during this time. I found several issues pertinent to the future of SIGDOC, such as projected income from the digital library and its affect on minimal balance requirements.

As with many other SIGs, SIGDOC continues to suffer from a slow decline in membership. We have tried to address this decline by continually improving the SIGDOC Web site (www.sigdoc.org) and pro-actively encouraging potential new members to join the SIG and attend the conference. The new interpretation of the SIG's "DOC" acronym is also an aid in this task, since it helps attract interest from non-traditional sources, such as computer science departments.

The SIGDOC Web site now has a complete listing of all the past conferences, back to the start of the SIG in 1982. Where possible, links to the existing conference Web sites have been made available. Direct links to the conference proceedings in the ACM digital library are also provided. This has the potential to become a valuable historical resource for all SIGDOC members.

SIGDOC's fiscal status remains sound. However, the drop in membership, coupled with the lower number of participants at the annual conference, continue to force the SIGDOC's Executive Board to carefully manage our finances in a prudent manner.

2005 and Beyond

Planning for the 2005 annual conference is nearly complete. SIGDOC 2005 marks a new milestone in the SIGs history: for the first time ever, the SIGDOC conference will be held in Europe – in Coventry, UK from Sept. 21-23. The theme of SIGDOC 2005 is "Documenting & Designing for Pervasive Information." As the Web site for the conference states (www.sigdoc.org/2005):

Pervasive computing delivers information technology into new environments for new purposes – in everyday products, in implanted and wearable devices, in global sensor networks, and in micro-machines. Innovation is needed, both to describe and document these systems, and to understand and exploit their potential for information gathering and retrieval. SIGDOC is a multi-disciplinary forum, bringing together communicators, information designers, computer scientists and others. We now invite these communities to propose and report the research that will produce this innovation.

For the 2006 conference, a set of leadership candidates has been identified. A small set of possible locations has also been selected. Details concerning the 2006 conference will be made public at the 2005 conference in Coventry.

For the 2007 conference, the General Chair and Program Chairs have both been selected, as well as the conference location. David Novick of the University of Texas at El Paso has agreed to serve as the General Chair for SIGDOC 2007. He'll be working with Clay Spinuzzi of the University of Texas at Austin, who will serve as the Program Chair. The conference will be held in El Paso, Texas, using on-campus facilities provided by the University of Texas at El Paso.

With these plans already in place for the next two years, I feel that SIGDOC is well positioned for continued success in 2005 and beyond.