

SIGDOC FY '20 Annual Report

Submitted by Daniel P. Richards, SIGDOC Chair

Overview

The ACM Special Interest Group for Design of Communication (SIGDOC) provides a forum for researchers and practitioners of the design of communication, including but not limited to those doing work in information architecture, information design, content management, user experience, user documentation (traditional and user-contributed), as well as governmental, scientific, and public participatory contexts. SIGDOC's overall mission is to: advance the state of knowledge; encourage the research; and support the interdisciplinary practice of the design of communication.

Leadership

The current leadership team is completing its first full year in leadership. Elections were held, led by Dr. Michael Salvo as the Elections Chair, in July of 2019 and our then newly elected Executive Committee successfully transitioned into their leadership roles: Dr. Daniel P. Richards, Chair; Dr. Sarah Read, Vice Chair; and Dr. Susan Youngblood, Secretary/Treasurer. Dr. Emma Rose has successfully transitioned to Past Chair and continues an important advisory role.

The new Executive Committee (EC) made some changes to the Board, namely adding a new line of Access Chair with the appointment of Dr. Sean Zdenek. This Board position helps foreground issues of access in organizational communication, with specific expertise on crafting inclusive and accessible conferences moving forward. This appointment has already help establish a more concrete relationship with SIGACCESS. We have a new member at large, Lisa Dush, a new student representative, Nupoor Ranade, and a new organizational liaison, Lisa Melconcon. Our communications team has stayed intact.

The EC helped lead the organization through two major moments this past year: transitioning our lone conference in October to a virtual event and crafting a response to injustice in light of the murder of George Floyd at the hands of the police, paving the way for future organizational changes. The official statements of each moment can be found on SIGDOC's website (Virtual Event announcement [sigdoc.acm.org/blog/2020/04/29/chairs-statement-on-sigdoc-2020-transition-to-virtual-event/] and Response to Injustice [sigdoc.acm.org/blog/2020/06/12/official-statement-from-sigdoc-a-response-to-injustice/]).

In addition, the new EC will continue with the following strategic priorities for the upcoming year and extending into their three-year term:

1. Update mission and bylaws: The organizations' mission and bylaws will be revisited to ensure they reflect the current focus of the organization and the response to injustice. Once updated, SIGDOC members will vote to approve. Currently, we are collecting feedback from our members on the existing mission statement to assess if and how it should be updated.
2. Conference seating strategy: Over the past year, the board has had a variety of discussions on creating a more formal strategy for choosing conference venues. This

work will continue this year so we can make conference planning sustainable and effective for our members.

3. Broadening participation and attendance: Over the past year, the EC has engaged in several efforts to broaden participation in our SIG and attendance at the conference. Several initiatives are linked to the priorities of our membership, which include ensuring a connection with industry, focusing on the publication of high-quality research in communication design, and focusing on inclusion, equity, and diversity within the organization.
4. Strategic planning: The new executive committee will continue to explore additional initiatives as part of their term, including the new funding line connected to the response to injustice.

SIGDOC Annual Conference 2019

Our flagship conference is our annual SIGDOC conference, which typically takes place in the summer or fall of each year. The SIGDOC 2019 conference took place in Portland, OR, USA from October 4-6. The theme was *Broadening the Boundaries in Communication Design*, inviting scholars, practitioners, and teachers to consider how disciplinary, social, geographic, technical, cultural, and ethical boundaries shape our professional experiences and civic lives in communication design, professional and technical communication (PTC), and user experience (UX), and/or how these boundaries might be questioned, broken down, or reassembled. The conference committee included

- Conference Chair: Julie Staggers, Washington State University
- Local Conference Co-Chairs: Sarah Read, Portland State University and Lars Soderlund, Western Oregon University
- Program Co-Chairs: Tim Amidon, Colorado State University, Ehren Pflugfelder, Oregon State University, and Daniel P. Richards, Old Dominion University
- Student Research Competition Co-Chairs: Jason Swarts, NC State University, and Sonia Stephens, University of Central Florida
- Sponsorship Chair: Jordan Frith, Clemson University
- Accessibility Chair: Sean Zdenek, University of Delaware
- Social Media Manager: Jason Tham, Texas Tech University
- Communications Manager: Luke Thominet, Florida International University
- Website Manager: Adam Strantz, Miami University
- Student Representative: Nupoor Ranade

We had 51 items that were peer reviewed and published in the proceedings, including 39 papers and panel abstracts; 3 poster abstracts; and 9 poster abstracts as part of the Student Research Competition. The 51 items represent the highest number of peer reviewed pieces we have ever published in the proceedings. In all, we had 149 attendees registered for the conference. We saw a robust engagement with graduate and undergraduate students who participated in our Microsoft Student Research Competition.

At the conference, we presented Dr. Samantha Blackmon as 2019 Rigo Award Winner. Dr. Blackmon also gave a keynote address. The local keynote address was given by Megan

Bigelow, in her talk: “2019 State of the Community Survey Results: Current Tech Power Structures are Defining Diversity and Inclusion.” Megan is the founder and board president of Portland Women in Tech (PDXWIT), a 501c3 nonprofit. Her inclusion helped us fulfill our mission of connecting industry to academia in communication design.

We saw robust attendance at our series of professional development workshops and our Super Meetup, held at Jama Software in downtown Portland. The ignite talks at the meetup consisted of both academics and practitioners in the field:

- Erin Grace, Epiq
- Ron Bronson, 18F
- Mo Nishiyama, Oregon Health Sciences University (OHSU)
- Rebecca Walton, Utah State University
- Michele Simmons, Miami University

The research that our members are presenting at our conference continues to address salient and cutting-edge issues and themes in the fields of communication design, user experience, and technical communication. The 2019 conference closed with the following:

Total Revenue: **\$27,698.05**
Total Expenses (with allocation): **\$29,152.37**
Allocation: **\$4021.02**
Surplus/Loss: **(\$1454.32)**
Paid Attendance: **149**
Actual Attendance: **149**

Awards and Grants

At the 2019 conference, SIGDOC awarded the Rigo Award, which celebrates an individual’s lifetime contribution to the field of communication design, to Dr. Samantha Blackmon. Dr. Samantha Blackmon is an Associate Professor of Rhetoric and Composition at Purdue University in West Lafayette, IN. She is a gamer of more than 4 decades and studies rhetoric at the intersection of video games and identity politics. She is also the co-founder of the *Not Your Mama’s Gamer* podcast and blog and the Editor-in-Chief of *NYMG*, a middle state Feminist Game Studies journal. She is currently an Xbox MVP. Her work is wide-ranging, covering technical communication, writing pedagogy, literacy studies and critical game studies. Her groundbreaking work critically examines gaming to analyze how queer and people of color are represented in the gaming community and how these users navigate the predominantly white cis online environment of gaming. Her work and mentorship of students have paved the way for inclusive design of gaming spaces.

SIGDOC awarded its Best Paper award to Rachel Atherton and Alisha Karabinus, for their paper titled “Professional Practice, Amateur Profile: Mapping Amateur Game Design Communities.” The abstract is as follows:

Previous research indicates amateur game design communities, which often mirror professional practices, are fruitful spaces for research in professional and technical communication. Before crossing into these spaces, however, researchers and practitioners must understand the makeup of these communities, which may cater to marginalized populations in ways the games industry does not. In this study, we used

the International Game Developers' Association's Developer Satisfaction Survey as a base for our own surveys of three amateur game design communities. In mapping these communities, we found that each mirrored the games industry in several categories, but that each community displayed unique differences that necessitate a variety of approaches to conducting research in or on such sites.

This paper connected well with Dr. Blackmon's work.

In 2019-2020, we awarded two Career Advancement Research Grants, each for \$1200.

The awardees were:

- "Ideals and Realities: Exploring Usability in Born-Digital Scholarship," *Rob Grace and Jason Tham (Texas Tech University)*
- "Social Media Article Visualizer Project," *Stephen Carradini (Arizona State University)*

Communication Design Quarterly

Our newsletter, *Communication Design Quarterly*, continues to contribute valuable, peer-reviewed articles that are shared broadly. In 2018, Derek G. Ross took over as Editor in Chief of the publication. Since then, *CDQ* has increased its editorial board from 9 to 48, located internationally, all of whom are experts in some facet of communication design. This increases both our reach, and our ability to thoroughly and professionally address article reviews. He has also made various changes to editorial policies including special issues and length, which are available through our website, which is maintained and updated regularly by Website Manager, Adam Strantz.

In Fall 2018, *CDQ* moved to an Online First model of publication which allowed us to ensure that cutting-edge research is made available in a timely fashion. Non-special issue articles will be published individually on our website as they are edited and processed, then collected into quarterly journals for archival. We currently have a steady pipeline of submitted articles that are under review. *CDQ*'s Online First model allows academics and practitioners to interact with cutting-edge research as soon as it is released.

In 2019, *CDQ* revised its policies to include a clear statement on Inclusivity and Data Visualization, and began a WhitePaper series created and produced by *CDQ*'s Editorial Assistants and Interns, the first of which, *Accessibility in Journals*, is available from our new "research and teaching tools" component of the *CDQ*'s website.

In 2020, *CDQ* will introduce a new podcast series, curated and edited by Dr. Ed. Youngblood, which is designed to promote key articles and increase awareness of the publication.

The current editor and the previous editor have repeatedly raised the issue of the need for funding to support *CDQ*. SIGDOC is committed to supporting the editors and their work in producing this publication. For this year, we will consider how to continue to support the work of making *CDQ* a high-quality publication.

Engagement with recent content shows how engaged *CDQ*'s readership is. From 8.1, released in 2020:

- Article 1, Roth Miller et al.'s "Social media in professional, technical, and scientific communication programs" already has 42 downloads.
- Stephens and Richards's "Story mapping and sea level rise" has 31.

These numbers are significant. While our most downloaded article, Pflugfelder's "Big Data, big questions" has 1459 downloads, that piece was published in 2013. That people are regularly visiting SIGDOC's digital library and downloading our materials shows the value of this publication.

New Program and Organizational Work

As part of our response to injustice, we have committed to the following:

- **Learning.** We are prioritizing our efforts to learn about anti-racism especially in the context of the design of communication, the history of design, and documentation. We encourage SIGDOC members to do the same. This summer we will be taking part in the "21-Day Racial Equity Challenge" by MLPP and reading *Race After Technology: Abolitionist Tools for the New Jim Code* by Ruha Benjamin, *Design Justice* by Sasha Costanza-Chock, and *Technical Communication After the Social Justice Turn: Building Coalitions for Action* by Rebecca Walton, Kristen R. Moore, and Natasha N. Jones. We invite you to join us.
- **Re-Envisioning.** We are revising existing bylaws, policies, as well as guidance on editorial work and conference planning through the lens of justice and anti-racism in collaboration with the SIGDOC Board and our membership. We will report our progress at the 2020 SIGDOC Conference in October.
- **Investing.** We are dedicating funds to support justice-centered and anti-racist work:
 - *Immediate:* We are focusing the two 2020-2021 Career Advancement Research Grants (\$2400 total) to specifically fund projects that actively work to dismantle systemic injustices or create new visions of equity and justice. The CFP will be released in October at the 2020 SIGDOC Conference, with a submission deadline of November 30th.
 - *Sustainable:* We are allocating a permanent annual budgetary line item of \$2000 dedicated to supporting justice-centered initiatives in the design of communication. This line item will support the organization to purposefully dedicate resources of the organization to do justice-centered work. We will convene a session at the 2020 SIGDOC Conference to gather input from members to discuss how to use these funds.
- **Publishing.** *Communication Design Quarterly*, our organizational publication, will examine and revise our review guidelines as needed through the lens of justice, antiracism, and inclusion in collaboration with the Editorial Board. Editor in Chief Derek Ross will report our progress at the 2020 SIGDOC Conference in October.
- **Re-Centering.** We are calling on the SIGDOC community to re-center their work around anti-racist practices. For academics, this could mean engaging in antiracist sourcing and citation practices. For industry practitioners, this could mean engaging in a more diverse array of community stakeholders. We include ourselves as the Executive Committee, as well as the Conference Committee, SIGDOC Board, and the Website and Social Media Teams, in this call.

The key component (underlined) to these commitments is the new permanent budgetary line dedicated to support justice-centered initiatives in communication design. We are currently seeking feedback about the shape and scope of this new program by the Board and eventually our membership body.

Social Media

Our social media reach continues to expand. We have divided our Facebook presence into an official ACM SIGDOC page that communicates news and events and SIGDOC Forum, where members can share CFPs and discuss timely topics.

Membership

As SIGDOC continues to rebuild, the leadership team is developing strategic plans for reviving membership in SIGDOC. As of November 2019, our membership is 196, which is an increase of 39 from last year at this time. We very nearly met our goal of 200 members by 2020, and still might achieve this by conference time. Our strategic plan is to increase membership to 250 by 2022.

Upcoming Conference

We have moved our 2020 conference to an entirely virtual event. The event will still be “hosted” by the University of North Texas local co-chairs, and it will take place synchronously and asynchronously from October 5th through 9th. The events include video presentations by presenters, workshops and discussion sessions over Zoom, podcast episodes, social media engagement, keynotes, and a virtual meetup connecting industry with academia. As is usual, there will be a variety of technical workshops and a variety of panels and paper presentations.

Future Plans

We have identified the following issues and plans that will occupy our time over the next 2-3 years:

- *Virtual conferences.* We are leaning towards a virtual event for SIGDOC 2021, but we are open to the idea of having a host city or multiple host cities available in case things take a positive turn in regard to our current pandemic.
- *Conference siting.* Given the pandemic, we have to postpone our work a bit on developing a framework for soliciting conference siting applications.
- *Revise bylaws.* Our bylaws are out of date and we wish to update them to reflect our current practices and values.
- *Connecting to industry.* For the first time, the 2019 proceedings had a new genre called “Industry Insights” that solicited write-ups of presenters in industry. We hope to use these relationships to continue to expand our membership and readership. In this light, we are still committed to community partnerships through the development of a Community Liaison position on the board, whose responsibility would be to do outreach for community partners and solicit and program at least one community-driven panel.

In addition to these new strategies, we will continue working with Women in Technical Communication and supporting the Microsoft Student Research Competition.