

**Annual SIGDOC Report**  
**Kathy Haramundanis, ACM SIGDOC Chair**  
**July 1, 1997 – June 30, 1998**

During this past year SIGDOC has been engaged in several activities to serve the needs of the technical communications community.

\* We have given awards to the highly regarded industry practitioner Tom Landauer, a pioneer in the areas of usability and cognitive psychology, areas that are of critical importance to the technical communicator, and to Adobe Systems, for their outstanding products that are used by virtually all technical communicators. Landauer received the prestigious SIGDOC Rigo award, given for exceptional and long term contributions by an individual, and Adobe received our Diana award, given to a corporation or institution. SIGDOC also gave an award to the winner of our graduate student contest for the best paper submitted from students in a graduate program; the winner this year, from a field of participants across the US was Rita Vick. Her paper was published in our journal, the Journal of Computer Documentation.

\* Several papers from our annual conference were exceptional this year. While it is not possible to include them all here, perhaps the most important papers were Nicole Ummelen's new research paper on "Declarative Information in Software Manuals: What's the Use?" and Jonathan Price's summary paper on "How Electronic Outlining Can Help You Create Online Materials." Ummelen addressed the question of whether declarative information in user manuals had value, an often disputed question. She conducted two experiments for different user situations and different types of tasks, and consistently found that declarative information in user manuals is very useful and has positive long term learning effects. Price showed that new tools are making the use of outlining and interactive revising more useful and effective for most writers. Several other papers addressed the use of technology in enhancing the products that technical communicators produce. Our conference is uniquely interactive with opportunities for personal networking not possible at larger, more heavily attended conferences. Industry experts and presenters can actually find time to talk with attendees between sessions and during social activities.

\* Our graduate student competition is fairly new to the SIG and has attracted students to our conference and increased the innovative ideas that are discussed in the community. We are hoping to extend the competition by encouraging students from a broader spectrum of technical communications schools to participate.

\* We have progressed with new initiatives in the membership and journal development areas. We have begun an outreach program to engage other societies who have similar interests and hope to bring them into our conference and become members. We have honed our mission statement, updated the information that is part of the ACM SIG brochure, and tried out a SIG slogan. All SIG officers are encouraged to bring in new board members, and people interested in working with the SIG. We have expanded our editorial board to include an industry practitioner and expert in usability, Dennis Wixon. Our journal editor TR Girill, continues to do an outstanding job. We have been extremely lucky in an exceptional Executive Board including our past chair Nina Wishbow and the current Vice Chair Stephanie Rosenbaum, whose enthusiasm and support have been instrumental to our success this past year.

\* Our key issues for the SIG are increasing our membership and finding additional member services that are of interest to the membership. We are encouraged by the opportunity to reduce our membership rates as provided by ACM for the coming year, and we have made the Members Plus program available to our membership, in addition to free access to the ACM Digital Library SIGDOC section for our members. The Members Plus program provides a copy of the current year proceedings to members.

\* Our web site (URL: [www.acm.org/sigdoc](http://www.acm.org/sigdoc)) remains a key component of our SIG, with frequent updates and online registration for our conference.

\* We have collaborative agreements with our IEEE counterpart, PCS, and are running our 1998 conference in parallel with them. We plan to run the next two conferences also in collaboration with PCS. We also plan to execute collaborative agreements with other ACM SIGs who have similar or overlapping interests.

\* We have begun planning for our next conferences three years in advance, and hope to extend this to five years. Long term planning for officers, new members, journal development, and new member services remain goals for the future.