SIGDOC FY'13 Annual Report
July 2012 - June 2013
Submitted by: Liza Potts, Chair and Rob Pierce, Past Chair

Overview

ACM SIGDOC Purpose and updates

The Association for Computing Machinery (ACM) Special Interest Group (SIG) on the Design of Communication (DOC) — ACM SIGDOC — emphasizes the design, development, and delivery of communication for computer-mediated information products and systems. SIGDOC fosters the study and publication of processes, methods, and technologies for communicating, designing, developing, and delivering these artifacts. Members include technical communication professionals, usability specialists, information architects, software engineers, educators, researchers, web designers, system developers, computer scientists, information technology professionals, and managers responsible for researching, producing, and/or supervising the creation of user interfaces, information architecture, technical materials, websites, and social media.

2013 has been a year of ongoing but successful change for SIGDOC - a year where great steps forward have been made. In March of 2013, in the SGB EC viability review, SIGDOC received a two year approval, citing the positive steps that had been taken over the past year. Acting as interim chair to address the challenges needed for a quick turnaround in the direction of how the SIG had been led, some difficult but effective changes that were deemed necessary were made.

Over the past year, the leadership kept the members updated and informed through the members email list, the website, and the quarterly newsletter.

SIGDOC continues to be a small but vital and vibrant community in ACM, and our two year viability approval was received with positive encouragement about the steps we've taken to help ensure and promote the ongoing health, visibility, and growth of SIGDOC. This is a wonderful result and bodes well for our current stability and ongoing potential for an improved future under the newly elected board and beyond.

Annual Board meeting

Many constructive discussions and decisions were made in the annual board meeting that was held in Seattle before the start of the 2012 conference. Discussion and steps focused on new leadership, membership growth and fiscal policy were discussed, reviewed, and executed and additional plans made for the future. The ongoing dialog for reaching decisions on changes has included current board members, former leaders, and key members at large.

In addition to discussing some of the next steps to be taken, we discussed our by-laws and updated them and submitted the update to ACM. The updates becoming official is still in progress by ACM at the time of this writing.

Membership growth, which increased (17.6%) last year, remained stable, and plans made last year to curb costs were successful.

New leaders

Following a number of years where there have been the same leaders a new board is now in place as of July 1 for the next two years. They've already begun to initiate steps that should help make the activity level, visibility, and relevance of SIGDOC move forward.

ACM SIGDOC Mission Statement
http://sigdoc.acm.org/about/

SIGDOC's mission is to advance the state of knowledge, encourage the research, and support the interdisciplinary practice of the design of communication.

The ACM Special Interest Group for Design of Communication provides a forum for researchers and practitioners of the design of communication, including information architecture, information design, user assistance, help, and documentation (traditional and user-contributed) as well as technology that supports and enhances communication, including blogs, forums, chat, and wikis.

The mission of SIGDOC includes:
- encouraging interdisciplinary problem solving related to the [user-centered] design of informational communication

- promoting the application of theory to practice by connecting member contributions from research and industry
- studying and encouraging emerging modes of communication across organizations
- promoting the professional development of communication designers
- providing avenues for publication of research and exchange of best practices
- supporting the research and development of communication and processes, including applications, networks, and services

SIGDOC emphasizes the following areas of special interest to its members:
- design and evaluation methodologies that improve communication, such as user-centered and activity-centered design, participatory design, contextual design, and usability studies
- types of designed communication, including interface elements, information design, information architecture, documentation, and user assistance
- project management and content management as it relates to communication design projects
- qualitative and quantitative studies of how communications are designed and used
- practices, research, and theories relevant to any of these areas

What is Design of Communication?

Until 2003, ACM SIGDOC focused on documentation for hardware and software. With the shift in focus from documentation to the "design of communication," SIGDOC better positioned itself to emphasize the potentials, the practices, and the problems of multiple kinds of communication technologies, such as Web applications, user interfaces, and online and print documentation.

SIGDOC focuses on the design of communication as it is taught, practiced, researched, and theorized in various fields, including technical communication, software engineering, information architecture, and usability.

While the name change for the DOC portion of SIGDOC has created some degree of less clarity in the scope of SIGDOC, the mission continues to be the same and has never been more relevant to computing machinery. The previous notion of "documentation" in both academia and industry has changed more to "communication" and "user technologies." The name change accurately reflects the realities of current changes in the practices around technical communication – whereas writers used to create hard-copy documents ("DOC") they now design, develop, and deliver user assistance (and other forms of information, including documentation), and commonly do this for many different languages.

The newer name for what DOC represents is a good reflection of the real world of current technical communication and of how both industry and academia have modified their scope and definition of former technical communication and computer science departments.

For example, at Indiana University, Bloomington, where SIGDOC 2009 took place, there is now a School of Informatics in which Computer Science is a department. Similarly, at the University of Washington, where the 2012 conference takes place in October, the school's technical communication department was renamed to Department of Human Centered Design & Engineering (HCDE). The focus of this school is on designing and building innovative technologies and systems - research, design, and engineering interactions between humans and technology. Technical writing is currently a certificate program and a fraction of the department's faculty and students.

Design of communication in SIGDOC is far more relevant to informatics and human centered design and engineering than is just documentation or technical communication.

In industry, job titles were and still are changing. For example, technical writing involves so much more than writing. Technical writing is more commonly known as information development and documentation is now just one form of user assistance. Former documentation groups work in user technologies groups which includes designers and usability professionals.

So, while the spectrum of subject areas for "design of communication" is broad, and not always completely clear and fixed to all parties, it does in fact encompass the multidisciplinary aspect of what is most definitely NOT just documentation anymore, and as such makes SIGDOC an important and relevant group in ACM.

The past 5 years have seen the discussion and forum for this discussion broaden. We've had presentations, panels, newsletter articles, and columns on this topic, and like the Talmud, it is healthy to NOT be pinned down as a fixed entity. SIGDOC Conference attendees seem to agree.

ACM SIGDOC Officers

Rob Pierce, IBM Rational Software, USA   Chair

Liza Potts, Michigan State University, USA   Vice-Chair

Kathy Gossett, Iowa State University, USA   Secretary/Treasurer, 2013 Program Chair

Jen Riehle, NC State University, USA   Information Director

Sarah Egan Warren, NC State University, USA   Student Chapter Officer

Michael Albers and Liza Potts, USA   CDQ Editors

Michael Albers, East Carolina University, USA   Graduate Competition Chair, 2013 General Chair,

                                                      2012 Poster Sessions Chair

Carlos J. Costa, ISCTE, Portugal   EuroSIGDOC Chair and 2012 Program Co-Chair

Aristides Protopsaltis, Serious Games Institute,   UK European Representative

Mark Zachry, University of Washington, USA   2012 General Chair

Clay Spinuzzi, University of Texas at Austin, USA   2012 Program Chair, and Member-at-Large

David Novick, University of Texas at El Paso,   USA Senior Academic Representative

Jason Swarts, North Carolina State University,   USA Academic Representative

Kathy Haramundanis, Hewlett Packard Company, USA   Senior Industry Representative

Gerianne Bartocci, Intuitive Co., PA, USA   Industry Representative

Junia Anacleto, UFSCar, Brazil   South American Representative

Manuela Aparicio, Adetti/ ISCTE, Portugal   European Representative

Brad Mehlenbacher, NC State University, USA   Past Chair

Scott Tilley, Florida Institute of Technology, USA   Member-at-Large

Irene Frawley, ACM HQ, USA   ACM Program Coordinator

Conferences

ACM SIGDOC 2012 Conference Summary

The ACM SIGDOC 30th International Conference on Design of Communication was held in Seattle, Washington on October 3-5, 2012. (http://sigdoc2012.org) and included collaboration and support from University of Washington.

The conference was the most profitable in several years, and as in previous conferences, attendees cite the size as an attractive aspect of the conference and how it nurtures closer communication between attendees (Total Attendance: 73; Surplus of $9,682).

The conference included a broad range of papers but was small enough to encourage lively conversations and collaborations. The conference attracted attendees from the University of Washington and the Seattle area as well as its usual mix of academics and industry professionals from several different countries.

This year's conference had what was the most well attended and vibrant poster session of the past ten years and set a new example of how to manage such sessions in future conferences. In particular, it was held during its own time block during one of the days and thus was attended by almost all conference attendees and provided a vibrant forum for discussions and networking.

The SIGDOC 2012 Conference Committee:

- Conference Chair: Mark Zachry, University of Washington – Seattle
- Program Chair: Clay Spinuzzi, University of Texas, Austin
- Posters Chair – Stewart Whittemore, Auburn University
- Experience Reports Chair – Huatong Sun, University of Washington – Tacoma

The program committee had 46 members comprising many academic and industry representatives from several different countries. For more information, see http://sigdoc2012.org/conference-committee/.

The conference call for papers attracted a wide range of papers, experience reports, workshops, and posters on the design of communication and games, organizational contexts, social media, the future of documentation, accessibility, interface design, and learning (http://sigdoc2012.org/attending-sigdoc/conference-program/).

This was the second year that the conference did not produce a printed version of the conference proceedings. This change is similar to what other SIGs and organizations have done and seems to be a prudent change.

The *Proceedings of the 30th Conference on Design of Communication* (ACM Press) were made available as a download to conference attendees and is also available in the ACM-DL (Digital Library).

Awards

Gerhard Fischer – Rigo award winner

Gerhard Fischer was voted by the board as this year's winner for his research on new conceptual frameworks and new media for learning, working, and collaborating; human-computer interaction; design; domain oriented design environments; distributed cognition; universal design (assistive technologies); and socio-technical environments.

Planning for future conferences

To stem potential loss of opportunity for existing members to attend the annual conference, changes were made to promote more domestic conference activity. A new leader to help with student chapter creation was also appointed, and gave a presentation at the 2012 conference.

- ACM SIGDOC 2013, to be held in September at East Carolina University, in, Greenville, NC. This domestic location was agreed upon once we decided that the annual conference needed to be kept closer to where the majority of SIGDOC members reside.

Chapters

SIGDOC has active chapters and plans are in progress for new regional and student chapters. Efforts are currently underway for establishing new AsiaSIGDOC and LatinAmerica chapters as well as new student chapters at Michigan State and Iowa State.

EuroSIGDOC: ACM SIGDOC European Chapter http://eurosigdoc.acm.org/

EuroSIGDOC has now hosted workshops on Open Source and Design of Communication in Lisbon, Portugal for the past several years. (http://eurosigdoc.acm.org/osdoc2010/ , http://eurosigdoc.acm.org/osdoc2011/ , http://eurosigdoc.acm.org/osdoc2012/, http://eurosigdoc.acm.org/osdoc2013/

Additional efforts are underway for a EuroSIGDOC event to be held in the Netherlands in 2014.

Programs and Services

Many efforts that were begun last year are now completed for addressing the need for an immediate call to action based on the most recent SIGDOC viability review.

Next steps are currently focused on the new leadership promoting other activities such as:

- New information director enhancing the website and other social computing channels of communication

- Continued promotion of the new journal-like newsletter

- Ongoing availability of all back issues in the DL

- Efforts to expand membership contributions to the various activities

SIGDOC sponsored a women's luncheon in this year's ATTW conference to help promote women in technology and in technical communication as well as to increase its own visibility. And SIGDOC continues to support DocEng2012 and other relevant ACM SIG conferences as requested.

In addition to annual conferences, maintaining a website and publishing a quarterly newsletter, ACM SIGDOC is also actively engaged in various social media spaces (for example, Facebook, LinkedIn, Slideshare, Twitter, and Wikipedia).

Membership

ACM SIGDOC Membership

ACM SIGDOC began FY 2012 with 187 members and grew to 220 members.

This was the first membership increase in several years and indicated a significant increase (17.6%) for 2012 membership growth despite dwindling membership over several previous years also seen in similar organizations. It was largely due to a one time email offer to all previous members to join at a discounted rate.

In FY 2013, total members =224 as of June 30.2013. This is a modest 3% growth in membership but a second year in a row of increasing membership. New leaders, sponsorships, and growth initiatives will work on continuing membership growth.

Membership brochure made available on our Website:
http://sigdoc.acm.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/sigdocBrochure-press.pdf

Website

The SIGDOC web site continues to become a more dynamic information portal for the SIG and has a new communications director in 2013 – Guiseppe Getto. This site offers a collaborative environment for member contributions with current enhancements planned and underway by Guiseppe. It also has updated and improved history, mission statement, and membership benefits sections, in part to try attracting more people to join SIGDOC (http://sigdoc.acm.org/join/) in addition to encouraging existing members to volunteer (http://sigdoc.acm.org/members/get-involved/).

The SIGDOC Board continued to focus on strategies for addressing membership numbers and the number of volunteers. We continue to aim at encouraging greater student/campus involvement, to establish international collaborations and membership, and to reach out to the broader communities of writers, information engineers, technical communicators, and information technology professionals working with information. Sponsoring a luncheon at the ATTW conference and providing information about ACM SIGDOC was one example of making strategic efforts at increased visibility and growth.

ACM SIGDOC Publications

The ACM SIGDOC quarterly newsletter is made available on the SIG website and as of 2012 is also available in the ACM digital library.

Release of the newsletter is announced each quarter via the ACM SIGDOC members' listserv and is available in general via the ACM SIGDOC website (http://sigdoc.acm.org/publications/newsletter/). Archived versions of all past newsletters are also available in pdf format on the ACM digital library.

For the available past newsletters on the ACM digital library, see the Table of Contents tab from here:
http://dl.acm.org/citation.cfm?id=J1351&CFID=125274874&CFTOKEN=16792716

Communication Design Quarterly

New in 2012 is a much enhanced journal-like format for our newsletter, and renamed to the Communication Design Quarterly. There are now three editions of this newer format.
See, http://sigdoc.acm.org/publications/

This new publication offers members and potential members the opportunity to read or contribute additional articles of value in the diverse fields comprising the design of technical communication.

Key issues for next 2-3 years

Key Issues for ACM SIGDOC in coming year include:

- Support the development of new (regional and student) SIG chapters (such as EuroSIGDOC), and develop policies for managing them effectively and for increasing SIG chapter activities. Having a student chapter leader has helped these efforts.

- Better connections between the SIGDOC website and other social computing sites can help create a larger community.

- Serve the needs of our current members and find ways to increase our membership by attracting new members, volunteers, and board officers. Good efforts were made in 2012 and lessons were learned that should help continue to drive future improvements.

- Promote Communication Design Quarterly (CDQ), our redesigned and much more robust newsletter for cutting edge research in the design of communication.

- Nurture publication of papers in newer focus areas both for theory and practice such as learning resources and design of communication for a wider diversity of audiences and contexts in terms of culture, language, education, and economic resources.

- Continue to generate and act on ideas for improving our visibility. For example:

  o Let's build up a history page for ACM SIGDOC to increase our visibility! We are looking for a contributor to help work with ACM to create a new SIGDOC History page from this ACM history page:

http://historywiki.acm.org/sigs/Main_Page Who would like to begin creating a new page for SIGDOC? (historywiki.acm.org/sigs/SIGDOC)

- o Spread the news that the SIGDOC 2013 call for presentations is now available at: http://sigdoc.acm.org/2013/

- o Spread the news that the International Conference on Information Systems and Design of Communication (ISDOC2013), a SIGDOC European Chapter event, was recently approved by ACM and this workshop will be held in Lisbon on July 11. See http://eurosigdoc.acm.org/isdoc2013/index.html

- o SIGDOC member Scott Tilley is now an ACM Distinguished Lecturer. See http://dsp.acm.org/view_lecturer.cfm?lecturer_id=3D4483#lecturer_id#

At the ACM SGB in March, I was struck by how successful some of the SIGs are—they have ongoing support and stability due to a wider based of contributors who keep their SIG vital and relevant to their research and practice. One of the other SIGs with a relatively small membership got a positive viability review in part, I believe, because their perceived reach is far wider than their membership. While both our SIG and theirs have about 200 members, they (SIGSAM) have various group lists that people can join from their SIG web site with a total population of over 5000 members amongst those communities. So, while they do not have membership revenue and conference results so very different from SIGDOC, they do have a much broader visibility that is part of their community. I believe that we clearly have an opportunity to do something similar to that in the upcoming years.