BSA Technology Committee Report
2012-2013

Submitted by Chris Martine, Bucknell University, Committee Chair

The first year of the Tech Committee has been a somewhat slow one, in part because I moved to a new institution just after the 2012 Botany meeting. That said, we did manage to offer some support to the BSA staff and get started on a couple of initiatives. We are looking forward to a productive second year as we further define the role that we will take in/for the Society.

Activities:

- Review of botany.org, including soliciting comments from members.
  - Summarized below
- Review of and support for tech-related BSA activities including efforts related to Twitter, Facebook, the conference website, and the conference app.
  - Suggested addition of sharing buttons on all Botany 2013 abstracts (i.e. Facebook, Twitter, etc.) – now in place
  - Provided/solicited comments on conference app during Beta test phase
- Co-sponsor of discussion session at Botany 2013: Open access, reputation metrics, and the future of academic publishing: Perspectives from the “author side” and the “publisher side.”

Review of www.botany.org

Summary of comments

Committee members M. Moore (Oberlin), N. Wickett (Northwestern), and C. Martine assigned website review to each our lab groups (largely undergraduate students, but also grads and post-docs). Participants were asked questions related to the following ideas (plus others, depending on the lab):

As a student/postdoc, are you able to find out about what the society offers to you?
Are you able to locate student opportunities/programs?
Are you able to locate opportunities for grad school and/or employment?
If you were not a member (or are not, yet) would the website make you want to be one?
Are you able to find the info for becoming one?
From a design perspective, how user friendly is the site?
How current is the design... and does that affect your user experience?

A few themes appeared on a majority of the comments:

- Current design is out of date, not attractive and not especially welcoming
  - But many like the color images used in the header
- The amount/quality of resources available through the site is impressive and seemingly comprehensive (when you know where to look), but the entry experience is problematic
- On the whole, users are able to find what they need and they consider the site navigable, but they are a bit overwhelmed with the amount of info/material they are hit with when they open the home page.
  - One student commented that they just felt like closing it up again because there was “just too much going on.”
- A search field for the site would be helpful
- Students find the current conference logo design to be unattractive and “old-looking”
  - Some suggested having it redone by a graphic designer or opening up the option to the membership as an annual contest.
- Careers in botany page is a great resource, but could be more useful if it was searchable and sortable (i.e. a user could sort by “graduate opportunities” and only see those)
- The Twitter feed is a nice addition, but the current form is obtrusive.
- In its current form, the website would likely not inspire younger people to become members – but it also doesn’t dissuade people who already want to be members from joining.
Selected specific comments: Design

Could the website be in a font other than Cambria, and maybe have some diversity of fonts? That would make the design look a little more interesting.

Some of the header images are pretty light-colored, and make it hard to read the "Botanical Society of America" text

The font in the top navigation bar "home - membership - publications - etc" could be a little larger

I kind of like the way the site is laid out. It seems easy enough to navigate. The only thing is it would be nice to be able to search the website with a keyword-type search box.

Home page:
- The top of the page looks really nice, I like the changing color image
- The big black side bars on the page are pretty ugly
- The front page of the website could be nicer/less cluttered
- The text at the top of the page (on the color image) should adapt to the color of the image displayed. Bright images make it very hard to read the banner
- The drop down menus are a nice thought, but are tough to navigate
- A search bar would be awesome

From a design perspective, how user friendly is the site? Fairly unfriendly, but not impossible to navigate. A large amount of unnecessary information is present at the bottom of each page (see image), This information is great on the home page, but not really necessary on every sub-page of the website
How current is the design... and does that affect your user experience?
The design is not current, the little triangle symbol for recycled electrons at
the bottom of the page is quite nostalgic of 90’s websites. I would not
spend time browsing the site if I just came across it, and it is fairly difficult
to find some of the information that I was looking for above. All in all, I
would probably rate the experience a 5/10.

I think the homepage is what you should focus on in terms of
updating. The only color is at the top of the page, whereas the rest of the
text on the page and throughout the website is mostly green, purple, and
black fonts. If you look at National Geographic's website
(www.natgeo.com) the focus of their homepage is a colorful photograph
with a concise amount of text description below it. These photos scroll so
there's always something different to look at when you visit.

Also on NatGeo's website, you don't have to scroll down to see links to
social media like Facebook and Twitter, as well as cool links to
articles. On Botany.org, the links to the articles are all the way at the
bottom of the page. In my opinion, if you want to get people excited about
botany, present them with a number of fascinating articles and pictures
right away so they'll want to keep navigating the site.

Undergrad comments in black, postdoc comments in red

What improvements could be made with respect to the website layout?

Twitter feed has a lot of words missing on the home page

Under the HOME tab, the "About BSA" and "Mission & Objectives" links are the
same; do you need both?

The "Student Chapter of the Botanical Society" Section; not much posted, if
anything at all, for any of the chapters

Check links in the "Awards" Section: The "BSA Public Policy Award" link for
students doesn't work; Also need to change the dates to reflect this year

Twitter section is rather big, can be cut down possibly to make more room for the
bulletin.

There's lots of links and information on this site- should have a search bar.
There's something else I can't quite put my finger on. Might be that there's too
much information on one page or maybe the inconsistency of the layout style per
page
Twitter-- it's a good feature, but it could be more condensed, I think it would be better in the side frame instead. Also, on my screen in both Firefox and Chrome (Mac), links and hashtags in the twitter section appeared white and therefore invisible.

**Selected specific comments: Content**

The tweets are pretty heavily emphasized-- maybe the homepage would be better designed if there were a separate news section that drew from the tweets, and then said something at the bottom like, "to get updates like these, follow XXXXX on Twitter!"

The selection of links and pictures at the bottom of the homepage seems a little random, and the gifs below are a little distracting. I think those links-- like the women in science, the planting science, etc - could be better organized under a "you might also be interested in: " or a "look what other cool things BSA members are doing" section on the website, or even an explicitly designated area on the home page. The TED talks and botany blogs would probably go better along with the Botany in the News Section in a new section that could be called "Botany in the Media" or something.

The "careers in botany" section could be more highly emphasized-- if that were the header of the bottom right section on the home page, rather than the "students' corner," it would be a little more visible. Also, are only students looking for jobs? It seems like the careers section should be separate from the student's section.

I'm not that into things being "corners;" maybe "Student Resources" would be a better title-- it could even be a tab on the top navigation bar: "For Students," or something. Also, under the Students' Corner, there is text that reads "some Careers Ideas"-- probably that should be "Some Career Ideas."

The link to the Plant Science Bulletin at the bottom seems kind of out of place/lonely-- if it's going to be there, maybe it should be with other publications in a publications box? Otherwise it just kind of comes out of nowhere.

The header "plan now to be part of this event" at the top of the home page, above the meeting logo, kind of comes out of nowhere-- the conference could be more clearly labeled as a conference/meeting, rather than just an "event."
There are a lot of botanist testimonies, it seems like-- from students and professionals alike. Is there a separate section just for these, or are they only accessible on the home page? There could be a section like "people in botany" or something that aggregates these, and distinguishes them by student testimonies, "how i got into botany," "why my job is great," etc. The stories could also be linked to from other pages that are relevant, or could subsume some of the other sections into it-- like the women in science, and some of the student resources about choosing careers. So, the student resources section and women in science section could be their own pages that link to the stories on the "people in botany page," or could be subsections of the "people in botany" page.

The "Resources" tab just seems to be a catch-all for things that don't have a better place, or for things that the BSA is working on putting together-- these "resources" could be labeled instead as teaching resources, BSA-created botanical information, links to botanical information, etc.

As a student, are you able to find out about what the society offers to you? Yes, but that requires navigating the drop down menus/reading large paragraphs of text. A page dedicated to undergraduate/graduate students would be really useful.

Are you able to locate opportunities for grad school and/or employment? I was able to find opportunities for employment, I imagine it would be really useful to have a sort function here in order to only look through appropriate postings (eg. I might be interested in a post doctoral position, but not in being a lab assistant; as far as I could tell all postings were mixed together). I could not find an area dedicated to posting graduate school opportunities.

If you were not a member (or are not, yet) would the website make you want to be one? I probably would not be interested in looking at the website if I were not a member/interested in becoming one. The website (as is) would not encourage me to become a member if I were not already interested. That being said, It wouldn't turn me away if I were interested.

Are you able to find the info for becoming one? Yes, Information for becoming a member is plentiful and easily accessed! This is definitely a well put together portion of the website.

In my opinion, it was not hard to find information I was looking for, such as what the Botanical Society offers me as a student, how to get involved,
etc. A "search" function would be helpful but the tabs at the top are pretty thorough.

The Internet has become such an integral part of society now, and it will only continue to increase its role. It's the best and easiest way to reach a younger generation and to get them interested in plants and this organization. To me, as an avid internet user and college student, it's a no-brainer that revamping the website would be a great long term investment for the BSA

What specific information is relevant to you? Was it easy to find? How can we make it more accessible to you?

The Botany Blogs as well as the current publications could be useful for my research this summer (the blog "Moss Plants and More"). All are linked and easy to find.

I would come to the website to learn more about plants and their evolutionary history and for that I can use the publications or some of the sites on the suggested websites page. Publications were easy to find being on the front page and on the drop down menu. The websites were also pretty easy to find.

The link to the conference website was readily available, so that was good. For other times of the year, what is the focus of the website? There are a ton of great links in the header, but some are buried in the hierarchy of menus, and many people may not know that they exist. Would it be possible to have a rotating "featured page" on the front page? That way people may come across the site at different times and see a little snippet of a former meeting, one of the awards, or the outreach links, etc.

Is there information that you would like to see that is not on the website?

If you want to expand who uses the website, you could put up gardening tips or something that would capture the interest of those not in the science field.

The publications can be free to the public, but that is doubtful. They can also add more of them. General knowledge can be found on other websites but general/specific knowledge on different groups of plants (liverworts, mosses) and their characteristics (reproduction, structure) would be helpful all on one website. Also, doesn’t really show me a list of careers I can pursue, which is what I wanted.

None that I can think of, there are a lot of resources if you know that they are there!
Is there information available to you that you weren't expecting?

I really liked/was surprised that experiment procedures are posted for younger students

May want to rename them in the "outreach" section; I wouldn't have known that there are experiment ideas there without having explored all of the links

Wasn't expecting the amount of resources posted on this site; good source of research for students

Stuff in the bulletin (news portion and TED), seemed interesting. The twitter portion I also wasn’t expecting.

It was nice to find the "Botany in the news" and "Botany blogs" links, but once again, they seem hidden at the bottom of the screen.

What are the positives and negatives, in general and specific to your needs, about the website?

The amount of information through this website could be very useful, but each web page is very busy with almost too much information.

If I was searching for something specific it would be hard to find

Plenty of useful and interesting information all over the site. With respect to my needs- the positive is they have information I’m looking for and they can help me find it, however it’s not directly on the site. It would be helpful if it’s all in one place

The website is fairly clean looking and has a lot of information relatively easily, but could use a little reorganization to emphasize these strengths.