

## BSA IT Report, March 2022

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### Botany Conference

Significant time was spent this fall reviewing different systems we could use for the conference to handle both virtual and hybrid conference formats. Although Johanne and Steve did most of the preliminary inquiries, I was involved with later stages of evaluation and review with the vendors. Although we found a likely candidate in X-CD, there were significant unknowns remaining and we judged it too late and too risky to proceed with it so close to our target date to start accepting abstract submissions. So, we decided to stick with abstract submission via our existing app – with alterations – and Pathable for the virtual component for one more year. The modifications made this winter to prepare for abstract submission included:

- Storage of abstract submitter's career level
- Reformatting of the abstract confirmation email
- Elimination of formatting restrictions for the abstract body
- Ability to select a preference between a live or virtual presentation

### CiviCRM

Our version of CiviCRM is getting to be quite old. In early fall, I started the process of upgrading it – for all of our societies – to the most recent version. This was all straight forward and seemed to be successful until actual testing began, when it was discovered that it would only work for administrators. After consulting with former BSA IT staff Toby Lounsbury, who wrote the custom extensions that allows it to do what it does, we determined that these latest versions of CiviCRM had quite a bit of code streamlined that consequently stopped loading utilities the developers believed only administrators would use. As a consultant, Toby said he would need to investigate the issue but didn't think it would be a big problem to resolve. Unfortunately for us, Toby had just become a new parent and was completely overwhelmed. He hasn't been able to get to it since then, although he has committed to diving into it this weekend, March 5-6.

### BSA Awards system

Four societies are successfully using this system and several of them at this very moment. Recent improvements that have not yet been deployed to the live sites – pending “quiet moments” when they aren't being used:

- A function to randomly assign evaluators to applications. While this function hasn't been deployed, we are using it where needed by copying the data to my local Mac, running it on the development copy, and pasting the data back to the live site. Not elegant, but functional.

- We have had increasing issues of RAM usage on the sites, and this issue has been fixed in the development version. For now, we are just allocating more RAM to these sites as needed.

I serve as a resource for the staff and volunteers of all four societies that paid into using this system. Mostly, they are operating it smoothly on their own, but I handle the periodic request for assistance.

This winter, I spent time preparing and deploying the awards portal for the Society for Economic Botany and they are now using it for their grad student research award and assisted our staff with making changes to BSA and sectional award application forms. The awards system is also deployed in a slightly different way for committee applicants, and that was updated and deployed by the December 1 deadline.

### Botany 360 Calendar Creation

In order to facilitate the Botany360 initiative, I installed and modified a Calendar module for our web site system. While the basic calendar system was simple and quick, there were tons of cosmetic changes, adding a search function that better suited our needs, category browsing changes, and setting default values to make sure our data entry is consistent.

### Botany.org

Slow work has been proceeding on this. A key feature of the new site will be a responsive design that will allow our content to be properly displayed on mobile devices. “Responsive” means “responsive to the size of the screen a given device is using”. In order for this to work correctly, our existing content needs to be reviewed via some sort of responsive site to verify that it is readable, and reformatted if it is not. To that end, I have been working on a responsive version of our current design. When installed it will be a small step forward toward our goal, and will better support mobile devices while the “real” new design is being implemented.

### Election Systems

Last year, spammers discovered that our existing election/ballot system could be hijacked as a means to deliver spam to random people. It could only be prevented by either requiring voters to log in first, or by implementing a CAPTCHA function for it. Logins weren’t desirable, (since it can deter our members from voting) and after discovering that there were issues with implementing a CAPTCHA system, I adapted a forms package for our site into a useful ballot for the SEB to handle their election. With our elections coming up, I am adding features to it that we’ve wanted for a while:

- Simplifying configuration so that simple things like typos by the developer (me!) won’t break things

- Putting the candidates in random order so that the first one listed isn't favored
- Integrating candidate bios into the form so that they are clickable next to the candidate's name in a popup. Currently it's on a completely different page somewhere.
- Adding validation so that items with limits ("select no more than 3 candidates") are actually enforced. Currently it's just advice.