# THE DAILY COUGAR.

# FY 2015
# SFAC
# Questionnaire

**1. Please provide a one-page executive summary of your questionnaire responses. This summary should include, in brief terms: your unit's mission, how you accomplish your unit's mission, and a justification of your unit's student fee allocation in terms of benefits for students.**

The mission of The Daily Cougar is threefold: to provide students, faculty, staff and alumni with accurate, relevant news in a timely fashion and as frequently as possible; to serve as a public forum and a voice for the student body; and to function as a practical learning environment for student journalists.

By providing our readers a source of news dedicated to the UH community, the Cougar helps them become informed and active with campus. The bigger the campus gets, the greater the need for constant and effective communication. The Cougar becomes the eyes, ears and voice of the students, providing them with information regarding issues affecting the campus. The Cougar is the oldest student organization at the University, and no other organization gives students access to such a broad variety of content from sports, news, life and arts and opinion every day of the week.

In print or online, The Daily Cougar provides a platform for students to tell the stories of the university, ask important questions and engage with the community. By remaining entirely student-run, the Cougar not only gives students a channel through which they can speak to their entire community, but also gives them practical experience in journalism, publishing, digital media and leadership.

As a result of their experiences, The Daily Cougar's members become more prepared for their chosen careers. The organization gives them a chance to hone a variety of skills applicable to a range of professions. It allows students to gain experience in leadership, writing and editing, photography, directing coverage, planning and managing projects, website management, illustrating, software such as the Adobe Creative Suite, and more — all regardless of major or classification. The leadership team, directly funded by student fees, gains a wide variety of skills that cannot be replicated by a classroom or an internship.
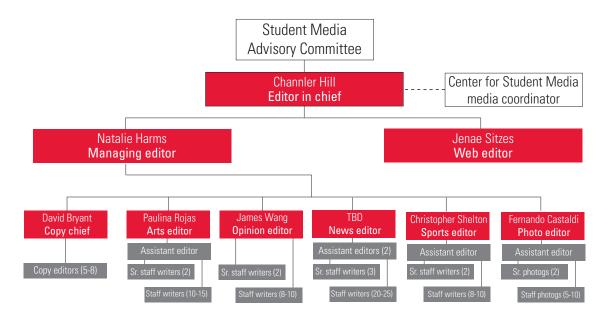
After thriving for generations without direct fee support as a student organization, The Daily Cougar now relies on this critical source of funding to protect the newsroom from the revenue declines that have damaged the publishing industry. The Cougar has seen half of its advertising revenue disappear in five years, much of that from campus departments who used to rely on the paper to carry their message to the student body. The Center for Student Media has crafted a strategy to cut more costs in the print operations of the Cougar and shift the organization into a digital-first mindset, in hopes that the Cougar can find a new sense of balance in these turbulent times for newspapers across the country.

Despite these challenges, the Cougar still serves a vital mission as the only organization focused on providing UH students with information about the university from the student perspective.

With the launch of the Center for Student Media, The Daily Cougar intends to remain an individual organization with expanded collaboration with Student Video Network and Coog Radio to provide students with the skills for careers within the communications field.

**2. Provide an organization chart of your unit. Large units may need to have an overview chart and then more specific charts for each program. Where you have multiple staff in the same position (e.g. counselor, advisor, etc.), note this on your chart. Student employees should be cited on the chart and identified as students.**

# THE DAILY COUGAR.

Student Media
Advisory Committee

Channler Hill
**Editor in chief** - - - - Center for Student Media
media coordinator

Natalie Harms
**Managing editor**

Jenae Sitzes
**Web editor**

David Bryant
**Copy chief**

Paulina Rojas
**Arts editor**

James Wang
**Opinion editor**

TBD
**News editor**

Christopher Shelton
**Sports editor**

Fernando Castaldi
**Photo editor**

Copy editors (5-8)

Assistant editor

Assistant editors (2)

Assistant editor

Assistant editor

Sr. staff writers (2)

Sr. staff writers (2)

Sr. staff writers (3)

Sr. staff writers (2)

Sr. photogs (2)

Staff writers (10-15)

Staff writers (8-10)

Staff writers (20-25)

Staff writers (8-10)

Staff photogs (5-10)

Stipend positions (paid from SFAC funds)      Voucher positions (paid from revenue)

**3. List your unit's strategic initiatives and action steps identified for the 2012-2013 academic year and cite the specific Division of Student Affairs Strategic Initiatives and University of Houston Strategic Goals to which they relate. Please comment on your success in achieving these strategic initiatives/action steps. If a strategic initiative/action step changed during the year, please note this and explain. Also, list any new strategic initiatives/action steps, the rationale for the addition, and comment on your success in achieving these items.**

The Daily Cougar was not a directly fee-funded entity in 2012-13 and thus did not report goals for SFAC for FY 2013. However, The Daily Cougar accomplished a variety of organizational improvements listed below.

1. **Began compiling The Daily Cougar Staff Handbook.** After years without updates, the editor and managing editor began compiling job descriptions, policies, ethical guidelines and other information for the staff into one handbook. Moving forward, all editors in chief will be responsible for working with The Daily Cougar adviser to update and maintain the handbook and ensure it is distributed among the staff.
2. **Organized weekly section editor meetings.** The previous editor in chief initiated ongoing meetings with section editors to provide direct feedback and encouragement and develop strategies for improvement. This practice is expected to continue. In addition, section editors are highly encouraged to meet weekly with the adviser for additional guidance and feedback.
3. **Established daily content meetings.** Every day at 5:30 p.m., the editorial board gathers to outline the next day's print edition and discuss online content and updates on projects, challenges and accomplishments. This has helped improve communication and allows the editorial board to collectively review progress and points for improvement and compare the Cougar to its national peers.
4. **Transitioned the front page into a competitive work ground by featuring content from all sections.** Typically reserved for news content only, the front page was opened up for other stories to be showcased when deemed appropriate. Sports and Life + Arts both had opportunities to put their content out front in order to present a more lively and attractive print edition that would appeal to a wider group of students.
5. **Collaborated with Student Video Network to produce a video version of The Daily Cougar Man on the Street.** SVN produced two pilot project videos for The Daily Cougar, which were co-branded by both organizations and posted to The Daily Cougar website.
6. **Added a Friday email edition to bring The Daily Cougar back to five days of daily news distribution.** By requiring editors to produce at least five days per week, the organization was able to distribute a Friday email edition for the first time. This strategy will remain in place, but a football-focused email will be used during the fall. This ensures the Cougar actively presents its coverage to readers throughout the week and enforces a digital mindset.
7. **Redesigned thedailycougar.com to be cleaner, more photo-driven and formatted for all mobile devices.** The Daily Cougar dedicated much of Summer 2013 to overhauling its website with the assistance of the Center for Student Media. The student leaders identified a need for a more modern online presence and used reader surveys to help guide this process.
8. **Adapted to a smaller print design and updated templates.** In Fall 2012, Student Publications (now the Center for Student Media) assisted with a size reduction in the Cougar for cost savings. The student leaders played an active role in the redesign of the print edition, guiding the process to create a revitalized look sure to appeal to the student audience. The Cougar staff had to learn new templates and adjust their approach to designing the print edition.

**4. Please discuss the means that you are utilizing to evaluate both your success in achieving the aforementioned strategic initiatives and/ or action steps and their importance as compared to others that you might pursue. Where data exist, discuss the number of persons served by each of your programs and any assessment measures and/or learning outcomes used to evaluate program success. Please provide the method for collecting these data.**

The Daily Cougar employs a range of evaluation methods to measure and guide its efforts in achieving its threefold mission of generating news and information for the UH community, serving as a voice for the student body and developing student media leaders.

**Print and online content production and audience usage**
The Daily Cougar tracks its output, audience, and coverage in a variety of ways that help student leaders make decisions about how steer the organization to best serve the community.

This chart shows an increase in The Daily Cougar's overall content production, evidence of the Cougar's goal to cover a broad range of events and topics of interest to the UH community. Online statistics here are pulled from WordPress, thedailycougar.com's content management system.

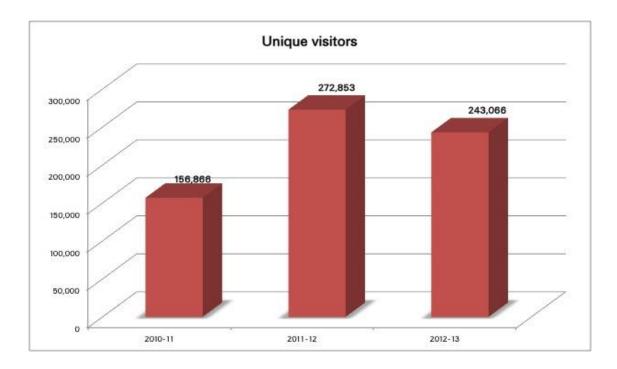| | 2011-12 | | | 2012-13 | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Articles published | Online views | Print editions | Articles published | Online views | Print editions |
| **August** | 143 | 41,655 | 9 | 90 | 51,269 | 4 |
| **September** | 252 | 75,728 | 19 | 214 | 80,925 | 18 |
| **October** | 252 | 104,647 | 18 | 278 | 75,244 | 23 |
| **November** | 213 | 94,070 | 18 | 223 | 65,413 | 18 |
| **December** | 39 | 43,720 | 3 | 95 | 40,916 | 6 |
| **January** | 154 | 50,148 | 9 | 164 | 52,157 | 11 |
| **February** | 206 | 79,531 | 17 | 231 | 56,333 | 16 |
| **March** | 181 | 100,679 | 14 | 217 | 55,970 | 13 |
| **April** | 244 | 84,523 | 19 | 293 | 69,292 | 17 |
| **May** | 4 | 30,244 | 1 | 51 | 37,063 | 1 |
| **June** | 72 | 38,384 | 4 | 98 | 62,774 | 4 |
| **July** | 63 | 38,272 | 4 | 110 | 61,338 | 5 |
| **Total** | **1,813** | **780,625** | **135** | **2,064** | **708,694** | **136** |

Note: An "article" refers to a single item posted to the website. It also includes photo galleries and videos posted separately from articles. All of the posts are staff-generated, except for guests columns or letters to the editors submitted by members of the UH community.

**Google Analytics**

In addition to its own internal tracking, The Daily Cougar uses the industry standard in online traffic measurement, Google Analytics, to gather detailed information about its online readership. Important takeaways from this data: our local readership is growing, and we are increasingly being viewed on mobile devices.
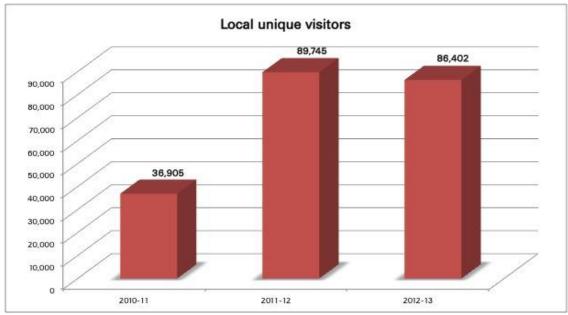
<div align="center"><b>Unique visitors</b></div>

This data shows The Daily Cougar's website draws from a large reader base. The Cougar has stabilized after the large growth seen in 2011-12 and attracts more than 200,000 individuals on a yearly basis.
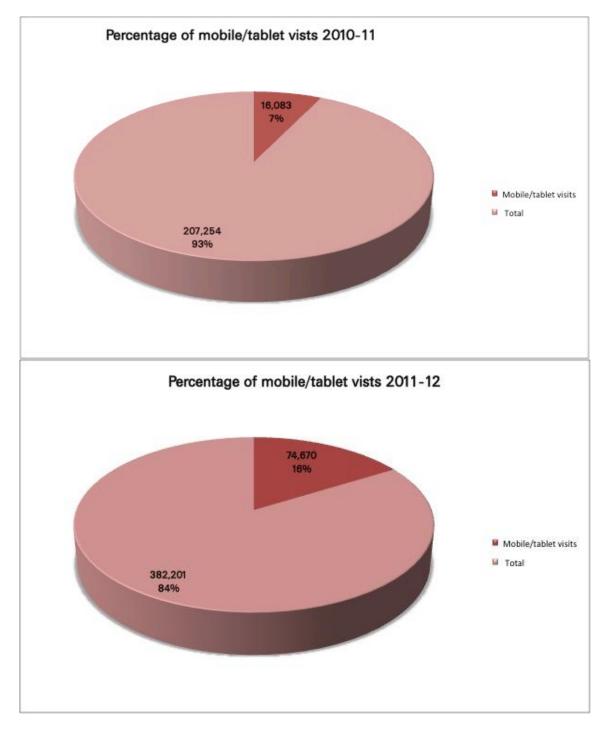
Unique visitors
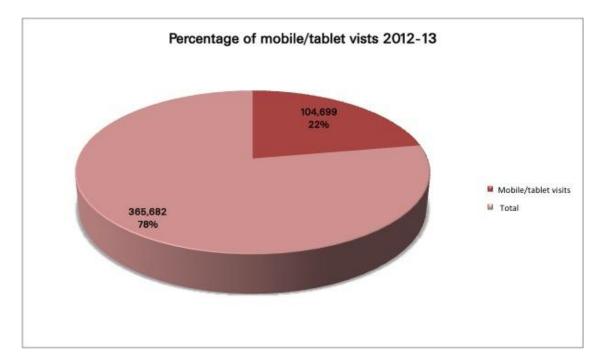
**Local unique visitors**

This metric counts Web traffic from the Greater Houston area (defined as Houston, Sugar Land, Bellaire, Missouri City, Pearland, Alief and Humble). Considering that a majority of the UH community resides in this region, the Cougar views this as a highly important metric. Strong showings in this category reaffirm to the editors that their digital content appeals to the UH audience. This measure proves less prone to the skewing that could occur by relying on "viral" posts that attract large audiences of non-loyal readers.



Local unique visitors

**Ratio of traffic from mobile/tablet devices**

The Daily Cougar decided to redesign its website during the summer of 2013 largely in an effort to improve the web-friendliness of the site. The student leaders of the Cougar have noted and made efforts to respond to the growth in traffic from mobile and tablet devices.

## Percentage of mobile/tablet vists 2010-11

16,083
7%

207,254
93%

- Mobile/tablet visits
- Total

## Percentage of mobile/tablet vists 2011-12

74,670
16%

382,201
84%

- Mobile/tablet visits
- Total

Percentage of mobile/tablet vists 2012-13

**Email edition**

For three years, The Daily Cougar has had some form of email subscription. It is now a major distribution vehicle for the news, reaching more than 2,800 inboxes every day.
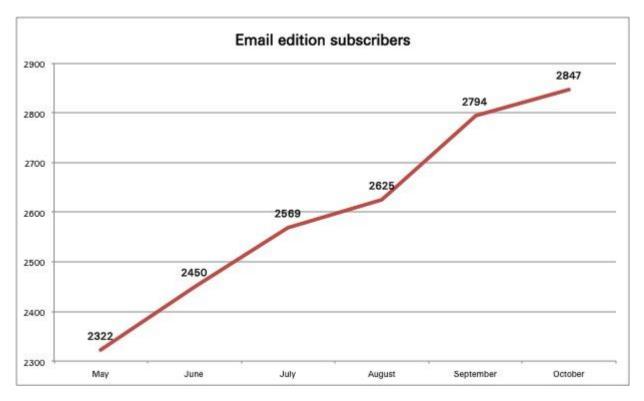
The Daily Cougar's readership surveys show 70 percent of respondents have an interest in receiving news and information in this manner. In response to that desire, The Daily Cougar implemented a Friday email edition and, with the assistance of the Center for Student Media, redesigned its email edition over the summer to place a stronger emphasis on visuals, news with wide appeal and compatibility with mobile devices.

The Daily Cougar's email management system, Constant Contact, provides student leaders with information about the number of email subscribers, changes in email subscription base, percentage of emails opened by recipients, percentage of recipients who click on links within the emails and the stories and topics that generate the most interest.

**Current subscribers:** 2,846
**Average open rate:** 32.1%
**Average click rate:** 33.3%

**Publishing industry average open rate:** 19%
**Publishing industry average click rate:** 21%
(according to Constant Contact)

**Email edition subscriber growth in last six months**



**Content analysis**

The Daily Cougar maintains a sharp editorial focus on the University community. As such, it is no surprise that UH dominates its coverage. Content analysis data, compiled by the Center for Student Media's central office, provides editors evidence of their focus on the community and has assisted leaders in instilling this focus among the staff.
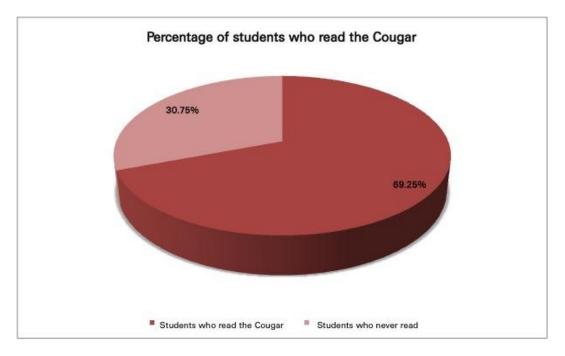
A direct example of this comes from Life + Arts. The senior leadership of The Daily Cougar noticed a lack of campus focus on Life + Arts, which was backed up by the data showing only 57 percent of Arts articles related to UH. The editor's presentation of this data and consistent feedback during the weekly meeting with the section editor resulted in much greater coverage of UH's vibrant arts scene and a stronger focus on on-campus student events.
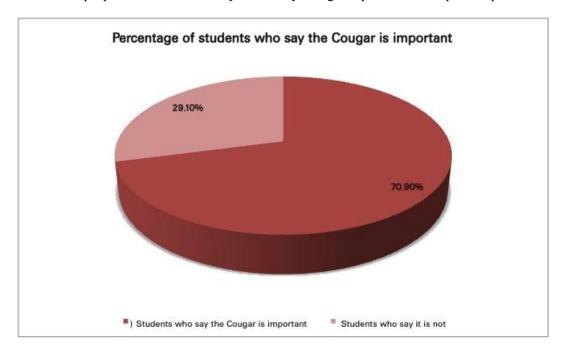
| Fall 2012 | Total print stories | Percentage related to UH | Spring 2013 | Total print stories | Percentage related to UH |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| News | 215 | 87% | News | 227 | 96% |
| Opinion | 74 | 35% | Opinion | 80 | 28% |
| Sports | 110 | 100% | Sports | 114 | 98% |
| Life and Arts | 140 | 57% | Life and Arts | 114 | 72% |

**Readership data**

The Center for Student Media coordinates a yearly survey of a random sample of the student population to inquire about readership of The Daily Cougar. The CSM shares these data with student leaders of The Daily Cougar to guide their strategic planning processes.

Nearly 70 percent of students reported reading the Cougar at least occasionally, with only 30 percent saying they never read.

**Percentage of students who read the Cougar**

30.75%

69.25%

■ Students who read the Cougar  ■ Students who never read

An similar proportion of students say The Daily Cougar represents an important part of the University.

**Percentage of students who say the Cougar is important**

29.10%

70.90%

■) Students who say the Cougar is important  ■ Students who say it is not

**Local, state and national recognition**

**National recognition**
- ➢ Columbia Scholastic Press Association (Digital publications competition)
- ● First place, David Haydon, entertainment reviews for digital media
- ● Second place, Joshua Mann, breaking news for digital media
- ● Second place, James Wang and Nick Bell, personal opinion off-campus issues for digital media
- ● Second place, Patrick Larose, entertainment reviews
- ● Third place, Brianna Leigh Morrison, single sports photograph for digital media
- ● Third place, Emily Chambers and Amanda Scott, photo slideshow for digital media
- ● Third place, The Daily Cougar staff, news online design website for digital media
- ● Certificate of merit, Christopher Shelton, news feature for digital media
- ● Certificate of merit, Andrew Pate, sports commentary for digital media
- ● Certificate of merit, Andrew Pate, sports news for digital media
- ● Certificate of merit, Christopher Shelton, sports news for digital media
- ● Certificate of merit, Andrew Pate, sports features for digital media
- ● Certificate of merit, Christopher Shelton, sports features for digital media
- ● Certificate of merit, Christopher Shelton, sports features for digital media
- ● Certificate of merit, Laura Gillespie, entertainment reviews for digital media
- ● Certificate of merit, The Daily Cougar staff, typography overall look of entire website for digital media, thedailycougar.com

**State/local recognition**
- ➢ Texas Interscholastic Press Association
- ● Individual Overall Excellence, Designer of the Year: Andres Garcia
- ● First Place, Opinion/Editorial Page Design: Lucas Sepulveda
- ● First Place, Sports Page Design: Joshua Siegel
- ● Second place, Sports Page Design: Christopher Shelton
- ● Second place, Special Edition/Section: Andrew Pate and Christopher Shelton
- ● Second place, Sports news story: Andrew Pate
- ● General Website Excellence: The Daily Cougar staff, third place
- ● Third place, Feature photo: Harrison Guy
- ● Honorable mention, Page One Design: Daniel Renfrow
- ● Honorable mention, Sports column: Andrew Pate
- ● Honorable mention, Ad design: Andres Garcia

- ➢ Lone Star Awards
- ● Second place, overall student newspaper

**5. Please discuss any budget or organizational changes experienced since your last (FY2014) SFAC request, their impact on your programs, and your reason for implementing them. SFAC recognizes that some programs did not receive the funds that they requested, that some programs were impacted by additional expenses after the conclusion of the budget cycle, and that some programs may be ahead of or behind their self-generated income projections. In addition, if your unit concluded FY2013 with a Fund 3 addition to Fund Equity, please describe the conditions which caused the addition.**

**Major budget changes**
Since The Daily Cougar's last request, the organization officially separated from the Student Publications department (now the Center for Student Media). With that change, The Daily Cougar gained its own operating budget separate from the Center for Student Media. As part of the separation, the Cougar earns 50 percent of all revenues generated through the print and online advertising that appears in the Cougar. The differences between the approved and projected budgets are explained here.

- Income: Revenue projections have been adjusted to $111,500 from $142,000, reflecting The Daily Cougar's share of the national advertising loss.
- Printing and distribution: The original estimate of $99,000 is being readjusted to $103,000. Cost savings have been realized in printing but have been offset by an increase in distribution spots. Increasing distribution from 75 to 82 drops increased the printing bill by $2,135.
- Editorial Salary: The projected editorial budget of $15,000 was based off FY 2012 expenses in that category. Since then, online production has increased, necessitating an expansion in the editorial budget by an estimated $5,000.
- Insurance: The insurance the Cougar is required to carry will increase to $2,343 from $1,980.

These changes and others will be addressed in the Cougar's one-time and base-allocation requests.

**Organization changes: Senior staff, Web editor and copy chief**
Thanks to the support of SFAC beginning this fiscal year, The Daily Cougar was able to further develop its editorial board and staff. In addition to the appointment of assistants per section, section editors select two senior staffers who write at least two stories per week and assume greater responsibility. A promotion to these senior-level positions and a slight pay increase for these writers creates added incentive for staff writers to be more proficient writers and more active, enterprising reporters. These senior staffers tackle more complex issues that affect large portions of the student body and serve as mentors and role models for less experienced staffers. The Cougar's content improves, and the staffers see more efficient paths to leadership roles and enter these positions better equipped to handle the challenges due to greater training. The student body benefits from pieces that display more research and more interviews and sees expanded coverage of substantive issues with great impact.

In an effort to emphasize digital media, the Assistant Managing Editor's job description was restructured to focus on the online aspects of The Daily Cougar. The web editor maintains thedailycougar.com, social media, the campus calendar and the email edition. In an effort to balance this restructured position, a copy chief position was created to serve as the organization's editing expert. Instead of scheduling two copy editors each night, the editorial team now schedules the copy chief and one copy editor. This system has allowed for greater focus on the editing process and more "reads" per story, ensuring the UH community receives a product with fewer errors and crisper writing.

**6. Please list your 2014-2015 strategic initiatives and action steps in priority order and cite the specific Division of Student Affairs and Enrollment Services Strategic Initiatives and University of Houston Strategic Goals to which they relate. Larger units may wish to group responses by subprogram. Under each strategic initiative, please state the specific action steps (programs, activities, services, policies/procedures, etc.) that you intend to implement to accomplish your stated initiative.**

To align The Daily Cougar to the new direction recommended by the Daily Cougar Business Model Task Force and the Center for Student Media, the organization must make significant changes in how it produces content online and in print while continuing to make strides in improving its campus presence.

The Daily Cougar's strategic initiatives bear strong ties to the DSAES Strategic Initiatives, specifically the following initiatives:
- Initiative I: Create new opportunities for student success through learning, engagement and discovery.
- Initiative II: Actualize and leverage the fiscal, human, technological and facility resources that enhance the student experience.
- Initiative III: Foster the creation of a global learning community that actualizes and embraces inclusion while preparing students to become active citizens.
- Initiative VI: Create and engage in strategic partnerships.

The Cougar's strategic initiatives with links to DSAES initiatives will be notated.

**Strategic initiative 1:** Transition into a digital-first news organization
- Shift editors' focus from print to online publication with restructured daily workflows
  - Initiatives I and II
- Ensure posting of fresh content seven days a week during fall and spring semesters
  - Initiatives I, II and III
- Create a "speed team" focused on publishing campus news to the site throughout the day
  - Initiatives I, II and III
- Establish office hours for section editors to ensure consistent online publication
  - Initiatives I and II
- Engage more staff members in social media management (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram)
  - Initiatives I and II
- Collaborate with Coog Radio and SVN to increase multimedia productions
  - Initiatives I, II and VI
- Offer more customized email editions based on areas of interest and sending frequencies
  - Initiatives I and II
- Utilize Web-heavy publication model to provide staff members with greater digital skills
  - Initiatives I and II

**Strategic initiative 2:** Implement an innovative weekly print publication
- Follow the recommendations set forth by the Student Media Advisory Committee's workgroups on design and content
  - Initiatives II and VI
- Develop calendar to plan cover story for each print issue at start of each semester
  - Initiatives I and III
- Develop calendar for sections to plan their print editions at start of each semester
  - Initiatives I and III
- Develop print production workflow monitored by managing editor
  - Initiative II

- Create a "depth team" focused on producing longer-form enterprise and profile pieces
  - Initiatives I, II and III

**Strategic initiative 3:** Improve the visibility of the organization
- Create marketing and distribution position focused on promoting events and special publications, organizing in-person distribution of print edition and encouraging membership
  - Initiatives I and III
- Organize Cougar members to pass out weekly print edition twice a week
  - Initiatives II
- Maintain presence at organizational fairs, orientation events and other student-focused events
  - Initiatives I and III
- Promote events Cougar will host to foster greater engagement across campus
  - Initiatives I and III

**Strategic initiative 4:** Strengthen the organization's role as the voice of the student body (Initiatives I and III)
- Publish a weekly editorial providing an informed stance, a suggested solution or support for an issue important to the UH community
- Produce investigative projects on issues affecting the UH community at least once per semester
- Host town hall events to provide access to UH leaders prominent in current campus events
- Facilitate a debate among SGA presidential candidates in Spring 2015

**7. What are the other possible sources of funding available to your unit and what efforts are being made to access them (e.g. grants, donations, etc.)? If you receive funds from other sources, please briefly describe the source, purpose, and duration of the funding and report the amounts received in the appropriate rows/columns on the SFAC Spreadsheet.**

Until 2013, The Daily Cougar relied solely upon advertising revenue to fund its operations, with fiscal management handled by the Department of Student Publications (now the Center for Student Media).

In FY 2014, the proposed budget includes a 50% allocation of advertising revenue generated by the Center for Student Media sales team and run in The Daily Cougar's print and online offerings. This compensates the organization for the space used in print and online and is used to cover the costs of printing, the subscription with the Constant Contact email management system, salaries for non-stipend student leaders, student support salaries, travel and miscellaneous expenses.

**8. Please describe any services that are similar to yours and/or any overlap between your unit and any other unit(s) providing services to students and the rationale for the overlap.**

There are no other organizations or departments in the University that do what The Daily Cougar does on the scale on which we do it.