

The **Cougar**

Student Fees Advisory Committee

FY 2019 Questionnaire

2018-19 SFAC Questionnaire: The Cougar

- 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 Cougar is threefold: 1) to provide students, faculty, staff and alumni with accurate, relevant news in a timely fashion and through as many media as possible; 2) to serve as a public forum and a voice for the student body, and 3) to function as a practical learning environment for student journalists.

The bigger our campus gets, the greater the need for constant and effective communication. The Cougar is the eyes, ears and voice of the students and provides information regarding issues affecting the campus. It is The Cougar's ongoing goal to provide relevant news and information to students in the most convenient medium for the reader — whether it's in our weekly print edition, monthly lifestyle magazine, online, on social media or provided by email.

Through our different methods of sharing information, The Cougar provides a platform for students to tell stories about the University, ask important questions and engage with the community. As a student-run news organization, The Cougar also gives members practical and relevant experience in journalism, digital media, management and leadership.

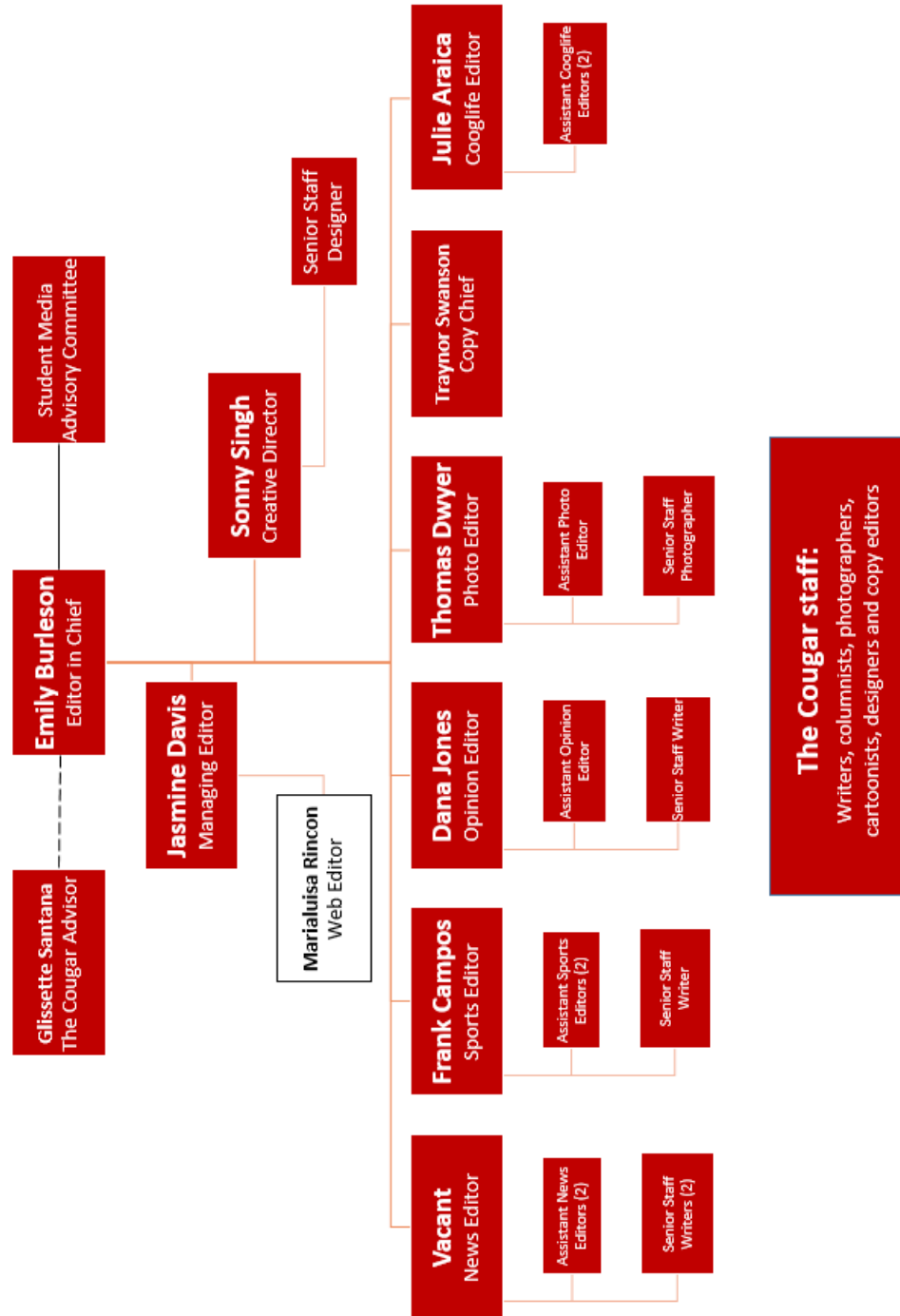
The Cougar and Cooglife, in conjunction with the Center for Student Media, provide students of all majors an integral jumping board from the collegiate environment to the professional world. The paper's visibility has increased throughout campus thanks to a vibrant, compelling weekly print edition with feature stories.

Last year, The Cougar's print edition won the prestigious Pacemaker Award, the highest honor in collegiate journalism. In its first year of publication, Cooglife was a finalist for the same award. Our place in this competitive environment signifies that students trained at the Center for Student Media participate in one of the country's top 18 student media programs. With years of recognition from the Society for Professional Journalists and the Texas Intercollegiate Press Association, The Cougar has reached a new level of excellence.

As the website and social media continue their importance for breaking news and exclusives, the weekly print issue delves deeper into issues with in-depth stories, photos and graphics.

Student fees help maintain and grow a rich tradition of student journalism that dates back to the University's founding. The Cougar is the only organization on campus that provides students with the foundation needed to succeed in the journalism field. Despite these challenges, The Cougar still serves a vital mission as the only organization focused on providing UH students with information about the University with accuracy and consistency while adhering to ethical standards, directly from the student perspective.

- 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.



3. **List your unit's strategic initiatives and action steps identified for the 2016-2017 academic year and cite the specific Division of Student Affairs and Enrollment Services (DSAES) Strategic Initiatives and University of Houston Strategic Goals to which they relate (links below). 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 Cougar's strategic initiatives of improving the journalistic quality, expanding our campus and city outreach, redirecting editors' main focus to online content and improving workflow all help advance the mission of The Cougar and the mission of the university.

1. The Cougar will increase web page views by 10% by increasing coverage across the board, raising the total number of articles published online. (DSAES Initiative 2)

a. Reassign Managing Editor to be primarily in charge of web content, creation and planning; shift Assistant Managing Editor to serve as a primarily print editor. The Assistant Managing Editor role shifted to that of a Creative Director, who helped plan, layout and critique The Cougar's weekly print and Cooglife's monthly print, with some involvement in the website. The Managing Editor played little role in print each week and focused on planning and publishing online coverage.

b. Section editors will be required to upload at least three pieces of content per day, including articles, photo galleries, lists, long-form pieces, etc. The Sports and Opinion sections were each required to publish three pieces of content each day, and the News section was required to publish four. Expectations were made abundantly clear to editors, who understood that meeting the daily quota was an integral part of their jobs at The Cougar. With few exceptions, this goal was met.

c. CSM will train editors and assistant editors in advanced web publishing strategies and search-engine optimization. The Cougar's adviser and editorial leadership ensured that all editors were aware of search-engine optimization guidelines and industry standards through brown-bag workshops and sessions as part of Media Camp, which occurs each semester. Guidelines in advanced web publishing, including WordPress plug-ins, were introduced during the fall and spring Media Camps.

d. Have four workshops a semester training editors, assistant editors, staff writers and photographers in topics such as photojournalism, including DSLR and smartphone photography; feature writing; video editing; social media; etc. The Cougar's adviser held at four workshops each semester that highlighted these topics and continued this discussion at Edit Camp.

e. Editor in chief and the adviser will host one new reporter workshop every month. New reporter workshops, which occurred at least twice each semester, covered the basics of news writing and best practices in interviews, as well as an introduction to journalistic ethics.

f. Editor in chief and the adviser will host one media professional each month to speak to staff about investigative stories, internships, etc. Media professionals who visited The Cougar included an admissions counselor at Columbia University's journalism program; John

Harden, a data journalist at the Houston Chronicle; Sam Khan, an alumnus of The Cougar who writes for ESPN; Gary Fineout, an Associated Press reporter who covers Florida; and representatives from Community Impact, many of whom are alumni of The Cougar and others.

2. The Cougar will increase followership/audience on all social media by 20% by August 2017. (DSAES Initiative 5)

a. Editor in Chief will develop at least three social media marketing campaigns with an emphasis on community outreach and engagement. Although the web editor position was implemented early, this goal was not met. Emphasis was placed on ensuring all articles published by The Cougar were posted on social media as the first step in increasing our audience.

b. Editors, assistant editors and senior staff will be trained to maintain a professional social media presence on Twitter and any other social media deemed applicable by the Editor in Chief and Managing Editor. The Cougar's editorial leadership developed an updated and comprehensive set of guidelines for social media usage which details suggestions for a professional, unbiased presence and any social media conduct that would be grounds for termination at The Cougar.

c. Content will be shared across all social media at least two times if still relevant. We implemented this policy in Fall 2017, the first semester The Cougar had a dedicated web editor, and are beginning to repost relevant content regularly.

3. The Cougar will grow active contributing membership to 80. (DSAES Initiative 1) Contributing membership was increased to 50 from roughly 40 the year before.

a. Emphasize increased participation between the editorial board and staff with volunteer opportunities. The Cougar did not reach this goal and does not plan to actively seek out volunteer opportunities in the future.

b. Partner with CSM to create a streamlined membership process that ensures all students learn journalism ethics and Cougar policies, and gain basic skills before starting work. All new members of the staff are now required to attend a training on journalism basics and Cougar policy with our adviser after they are hired.

c. Host a session of media camp for all members of the organization to participate and learn alongside the editors. During the Center for Student Media's Media Camp/Edit Camp training sessions, all staff members were invited to attend any sessions they wished.

d. Encourage participation in growing teams, especially the social media team, marketing team, and copy editing team. With the removal of the Community Manager position, the social media team did not continue, and the Editor in Chief absorbed the duties of that team. Early implementation of the Web Editor position, which managed social media and email editions for The Cougar, allowed for growth in that area. The copy editing team maintained its scope and responsibilities. The marketing team's responsibilities were absorbed by CSM. The addition of a new team of graphic designers managed under the Creative Director allowed for more membership from a variety of academic programs and greater frequency and variety of graphic elements in the newspaper and Cooglife.

4. The Cougar will improve the quality of work and increase multimedia production. (DSAES Initiative 1)

a. Increase staff collaboration with the Student Video Network and Coog Radio in order to learn general skills of both video and radio, and how to integrate audio and video into online articles. During media camp, hosted in May, all incoming members of The Cougar, Coog Radio and Coog TV were required to learn the basic skills utilized by the other organizations. The Cougar taught basic news writing and AP Style to members of Coog TV and Coog Radio, and in turn, The Cougar were educated on basic videography, audio recording and equipment usage. During these lessons, emphasis was placed on the availability of studio space and equipment resources to members of The Cougar. At least one of the following media camp sessions brought members of all three organizations together to discuss covering the same events via all three mediums. As a result of these lessons, multiple members of The Cougar now produce a podcast with the help of Coog Radio, and weekly section budgets are shared with the News and Sports Producer at Coog TV.

b. Each editor will be required to produce at least one in-depth multimedia project per semester that resonates with the UH community and its alumni audience. Some editors, but not all, completed multimedia projects. The assistant photo editor created a video and story package that profiled an entrepreneur in the Third Ward who started Fruit Life, a fruit stand; he also published a photo essay about Third Ward residents who work at the University. The opinion editor published a photo essay detailing the lives of homeless Houstonians at a tent city near campus.

c. A strike system will be enforced to proactively catch fact, grammar and spelling errors before they are published and a "report error" link will be added to all online stories. We did not add a "report error" link to our stories. Each story is edited by a section editor, a copy editor, the copy chief and a closing editor before it is published, with few exceptions. If a fact error goes undetected by these editors initially, the closing editors will issue a prompt correction for the piece. The email address for the primary editor contact is listed at the bottom of each print and web story, and readers are free to report errors here. A strike system was enacted as a disciplinary measure within the organization.

d. Workshops will be held for the entire Cougar staff in specific topics such as photojournalism, opinion writing, storytelling and editing. Our adviser held multiple workshops, including photojournalism, storytelling and editing throughout the year. In addition, the photo editors held a workshop for all staff members in the spring, discussing event photography, smartphone photography, low light photography and the basics of photojournalism. The news section held a similar workshop for all writers in the spring, in addition to multiple workshops on basic news and feature storytelling.

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 Cougar uses a variety of data-tracking sources to stay in-tune with our audience's behavior, media trends and medium preferences, including industry-standard Google Analytics and WordPress stats. The following stats are of The Cougar and Cooglife in FY 2015-16 and FY 2016-17.

Content production and readership: The Cougar

2015-2016	Articles published	Online views	2016-2017	Articles Published	Online views	Diff +/- articles	Diff +/- views
September	182	106,425	September	198	94,190	+16	-12,235
October	246	129,002	October	234	77,726	-12	-51,276
November	203	107,699	November	173	79,395	-30	-28,304
December	82	66,535	December	52	42,410	-30	-24,125
January	55	55,500	January	112	64,012	+57	+8,512
February	169	82,203	February	179	77,090	+10	-5,113
March	157	66,701	March	147	89,914	-10	+23,213
April	161	87,278	April	107	69,087	-54	-18,191
May	75	73,594	May	31	36,849	-44	-36,745
June	44	57,030	June	1	21,872	-43	-35,158
July	51	60,808	July	3	19,372	-48	-41,436
August	117	88,566	August	90	49,828	-27	-38,738
	1,542	981,341		1,327	721,745	-215	-259,596

Much of the decrease in page views in Fall 2016 can be blamed on one thing: football. The previous fall, The Cougar reached record page views during its coverage of Tom Herman's peak season with UH. Many new editors were hired in January, leading in increases in early Spring 2017. During Summer 2017, editors were not required to publish stories on a daily or weekly basis in order to focus on summer classes and internships. With the addition of the Web Editor position, we expect to see an increase in page views over the coming months and will continue to track these metrics throughout the year. In September 2017 (not featured above), The Cougar had 20,000 more views than September 2016.

Content production and readership: Cooglife

2015-2016	Articles published	Online views	2016-2017	Articles Published	Online views	Diff +/- articles	Diff +/- views
September	13	1,320	September	25	2,795	+12	+1,475
October	16	2,423	October	32	3,711	+16	+1,288
November	19	1,272	November	34	3,366	+15	+2,094
December	14	982	December	4	2,136	-10	+1,154
January	0	687	January	10	2,257	+10	+1,570
February	7	3,085	February	26	3,754	+19	+669
March	16	1,700	March	25	2,522	+9	+822
April	21	2,145	April	14	2,198	-7	+53
May	13	1,273	May	10	1,528	-3	+255
June	8	1,613	June	4	1,417	-4	-196
July	4	854	July	0	916	-4	+62
August	20	2,273	August	7	1,395	-13	-878
	151	19,627		191	27,995	+40	+8,368

Since the start of Cooglife in Fall 2015, pageviews on Cooglife.com have risen steadily due to an increase in production and an emphasis on online-exclusive content.

Social media followership

Social media continues to be a source of audience and engagement, and continued growth in this area demonstrates effective use of these tools.

Facebook followers

2016: 6,294 2017: 7,354 (+14%)

Twitter followers

2016: 10,400 2017: 11,668 (+11%)

Instagram followers

2017: 1,635

Email subscriptions & open rate

A key component of the print-weekly, digital-daily strategy is maintaining an active subscription base through email.

Email subscribers

2016: 4,403 2017: 4,265 (-3.2%)

Open Rate (proportion of email issues actually read)

2016: 26.26% 2017: 25.06% (-4.6%)

Click Rate (proportion of email readers that click to visit an article)

2016: 16.05% 2017: 15.64% (-2.6%)

- 5. Please discuss any budget or organizational changes experienced since your last (FY2018) 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 the spring, The Cougar created the Web Editor position because the organization lacked a quality candidate to fill the position of Copy Chief. This editor absorbed the duties and stipend of the Copy Chief in addition to taking charge of The Cougar's web and social media presence. This change resulted in increases in audience engagement, online views and email edition subscriptions. The Web Editor helped facilitate greater understanding of who, when and how people read The Cougar. In FY 2018, The Cougar now has both a Copy Chief and a Web Editor, as allotted by SFAC funds.

6. If your unit concluded FY2017 with a Student Service Fee (SSF) Fund 3 addition to the SSF Reserve in excess of \$5,000, please describe the conditions which caused the addition and provide a line-item identification of the budgetary source(s) of the addition (i.e. lapsed salary, conference travel, etc.).

We did not have an excess of \$5,000.

- 7. Please list your unit's 2018-2019 strategic initiatives and action steps in priority order and cite the specific Division of Student Affairs and Enrollment Services Values and University of Houston Strategic Goals to which they relate. Larger units may wish to group responses by subprogram. Under each unit strategic initiative, please state the specific action steps (programs, activities, services, policies/procedures, etc.) that you intend to implement to accomplish your stated initiative.**

1. The Cougar will increase web page views by 10% by increasing coverage across the board, raising the total number of articles published online. (DSAES Initiative 2)

a. Section editors will be required to upload at least three pieces of content per day, including articles, photo galleries, lists, long-form pieces, etc. Half of the content published every day should be produced with short turnaround times, putting an emphasis on breaking news.

b. CSM will train editors and assistant editors in advanced web publishing strategies, search-engine optimization, social media analytics and community engagement.

c. Have four workshops a semester training editors, assistant editors, staff writers and photographers in topics such as photojournalism, including DSLR and smartphone photography, feature writing, video editing, social media, etc.

d. Editor in chief and the adviser will host two new reporter workshops each semester.

e. Editor in chief and the adviser will host one media professional each month to speak to staff about investigative stories, internships and reporting strategies.

2. The Cougar will increase followership/audience on all social media by 25% by August 2018. (DSAES Initiative 5)

a. Editor in Chief will develop at least three social media marketing campaigns with an emphasis on community outreach and engagement.

b. Editors, assistant editors and senior staff will be trained to maintain a professional social media presence on Twitter and any other social media deemed applicable by the Editor in Chief and Managing Editor.

c. Content will be shared across all social media at least two times if still relevant, including The Cougar's sports and Coogliflife accounts

3. The Cougar will grow active contributing membership to 80, with an emphasis on recruiting underclassmen. (DSAES Initiative 1)

a. Emphasize increased participation between the editorial board and staff with volunteer opportunities.

b. Partner with CSM to create a streamlined membership process that ensures all students learn journalism ethics and Cougar policies, and gain basic skills before starting work.

c. Host a session of media camp for all members of the organization to participate and learn alongside the editors.

d. Encourage participation in growing teams, especially the copy editing team and the graphic design team.

4. The Cougar will improve the quality of work and increase multimedia production. (DSAES Initiative 1)

- a. Increase staff collaboration with CoogTV and Coog Radio in order to learn general skills of both video and radio, and how to integrate audio and video into online articles.
- b. Each editor will be required to produce at least one in-depth print or multimedia project per semester that resonates with the UH community.
- c. Workshops will be held for the entire Cougar staff in specific topics such as photojournalism, opinion writing, storytelling, editing, social media and analytics.

- 8. Recognizing that the potential to generate additional Student Service Fee income for FY2019 base funding is extremely limited and recognizing that it is likely that some units will not be allocated the FY2019 base budget augmentations and/or one-time funds requested. Please provide a narrative of how your unit would accommodate a reduction of 5% in your total approved FY2018 base Student Service Fee budget and provide a line-item explanation of where budgetary cuts would be made.**

Unfortunately, in order to accommodate a reduction of 5 percent, we would have to cut \$2,491.65 from the Student Leadership Stipend line on our budget, meaning we would have to cut an editorial board position funded by SFAC.

- 9. 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.**

The Cougar receives revenue from print and online advertising generated by the CSM sales team. These funds have been included on The Cougar's budget spreadsheet. The Cougar must not only satisfy SFAC requirements but also the demands of advertisers, who need a newspaper that is widely read by UH students in print and online to deliver a return on their investment of advertising. CSM is in the process of reaching out to UH alumni to ask for donations.

10. 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 is no other student organization that does what The Cougar does. The Cougar is held responsible by a diverse and widespread readership to produce an original product online in addition to a nationally competitive print product once a week that caters to hundreds of thousands of readers every year. The Cougar is held to daily and hourly deadlines that no other student organization experiences. Collaboration with CoogTV and Coog Radio also strengthen our partnerships within CSM and allow for more dynamic content to be published from all three organizations.