STUDENT FEES ADVISORY COMMITTEE

FY 2012

Program Questionnaire

Prepared by

DEPARTMENT OF STUDENT PUBLICATIONS

October 25, 2010

STUDENT FEES ADVISORY COMMITTEE (SFAC)
FY2012 PROGRAM 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.*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Our unit's mission in brief

Our mission is to encourage editorial focus on the complexity of the UH community and its impact on students, staff, faculty and other groups, including the general public. Because the Student Publications student staff reflects the academic and cultural diversity of the UH community, coverage of news and events in our publications reflects the issues and concerns of the university community as well.

Accomplishing our mission

We strive to foster an open and objective environment among The Daily Cougar student staff that stresses its role as a conduit for the flow of free speech and a forum for the clarification of public issues and ideas. We also strive to work with students in a learning environment where the canons and ethics of journalism are practical matters. We recruit students from across campus through our Web site, e-mail blasts, promotional materials, and employment ads in the print edition.

How we justify our SFAC money in terms of benefits for students

Our benefits are two-fold: We provide a learning laboratory for our student staff, and we serve a public service role for the community as a provider of news and information. Our continual goal is to give students a real-world print and online production environment that provides relevant news and information to the University community in the most timely and accurate manner possible. The print edition is delivered to approximately 65 locations around campus on each day The Daily Cougar is published, and the online edition is updated at least five days a week during regular publication.

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, custodian, etc), note this on your chart. Student employees should be cited on the chart and identified as students.*

3. *List the objectives that you provided with your 2010-2011 SFAC request. Please comment on your success in achieving these objectives. If an objective changed during the year, please note this and explain. Also, list any new objectives, the rationale for the addition, and comment on your success in achieving these objectives.*

A. To put us in line with industry trends and make our product more accessible to more people, 2010-2011 will be a year of innovations to our online approach. By going independent with our Web hosting and content management, we will be able to exploit an open field to explore new strategies and tools for disseminating news, information and opinion produced by students.

> **Comment:** We successfully re-launched The Daily Cougar on an independent content management system, allowing us to control all advertising coming from online (previous vendor did not allow this), as well as presentation of editorial content. We also successfully launched an online classifieds product through our partner CampusAve that has started bringing in additional revenue.

B. We will maintain a strong core print product to serve the campus community. We will strive to balance the need to increase revenues, keep costs low and still produce high-quality content that makes the paper a valuable asset to the community.

> **Comment:** Our production department has streamlined the layout process and developed a new design to give the newspaper a fresh look, while speeding up the process of producing the paper each night.

C. We will help foster an alumni organization with the aim of supporting Student Publications with guidance, mentorships for students and possibly financial support for SP initiatives or scholarships.

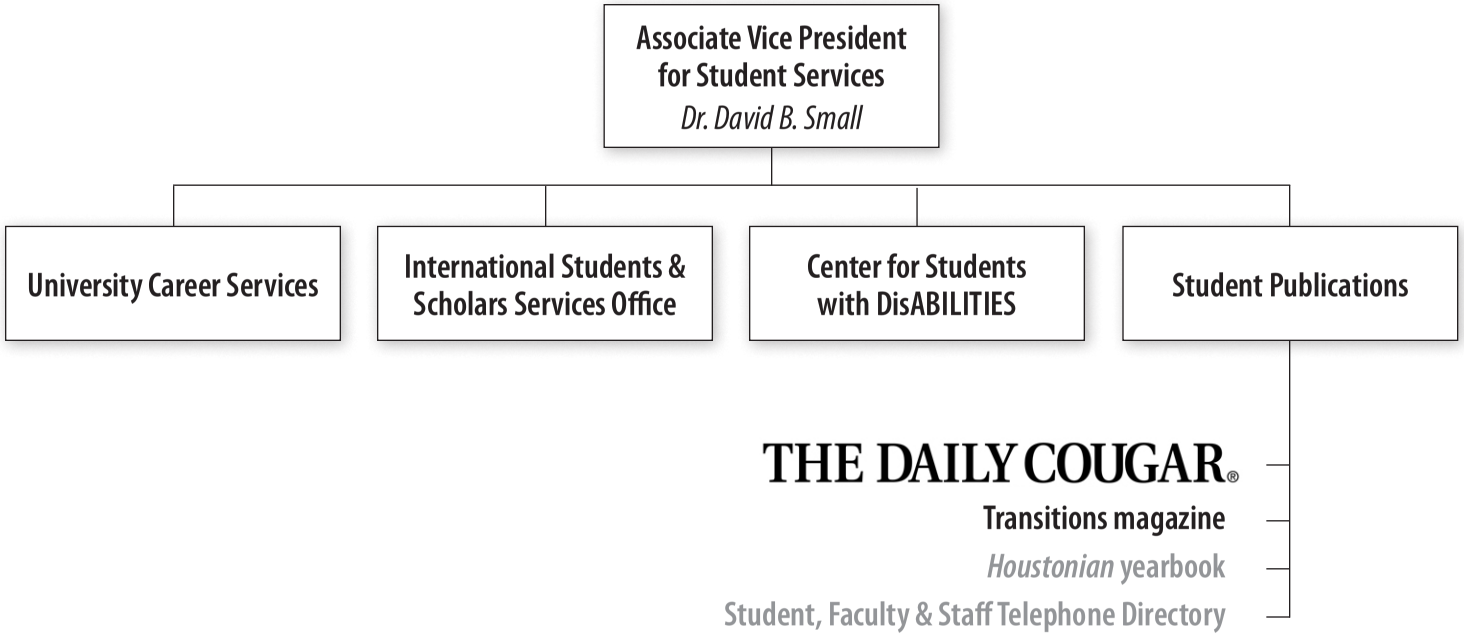
> **Comment:** We have not yet had the opportunity to fully engage in this initiative as this fiscal year is underway. The process of reaching out to alumni and developing a contact list is ongoing.

D. We will improve our department's approach to recruiting and outreach. We will contact high school journalism programs to inform them of opportunities at SP and will look to build a presence in the orientation program on campus.

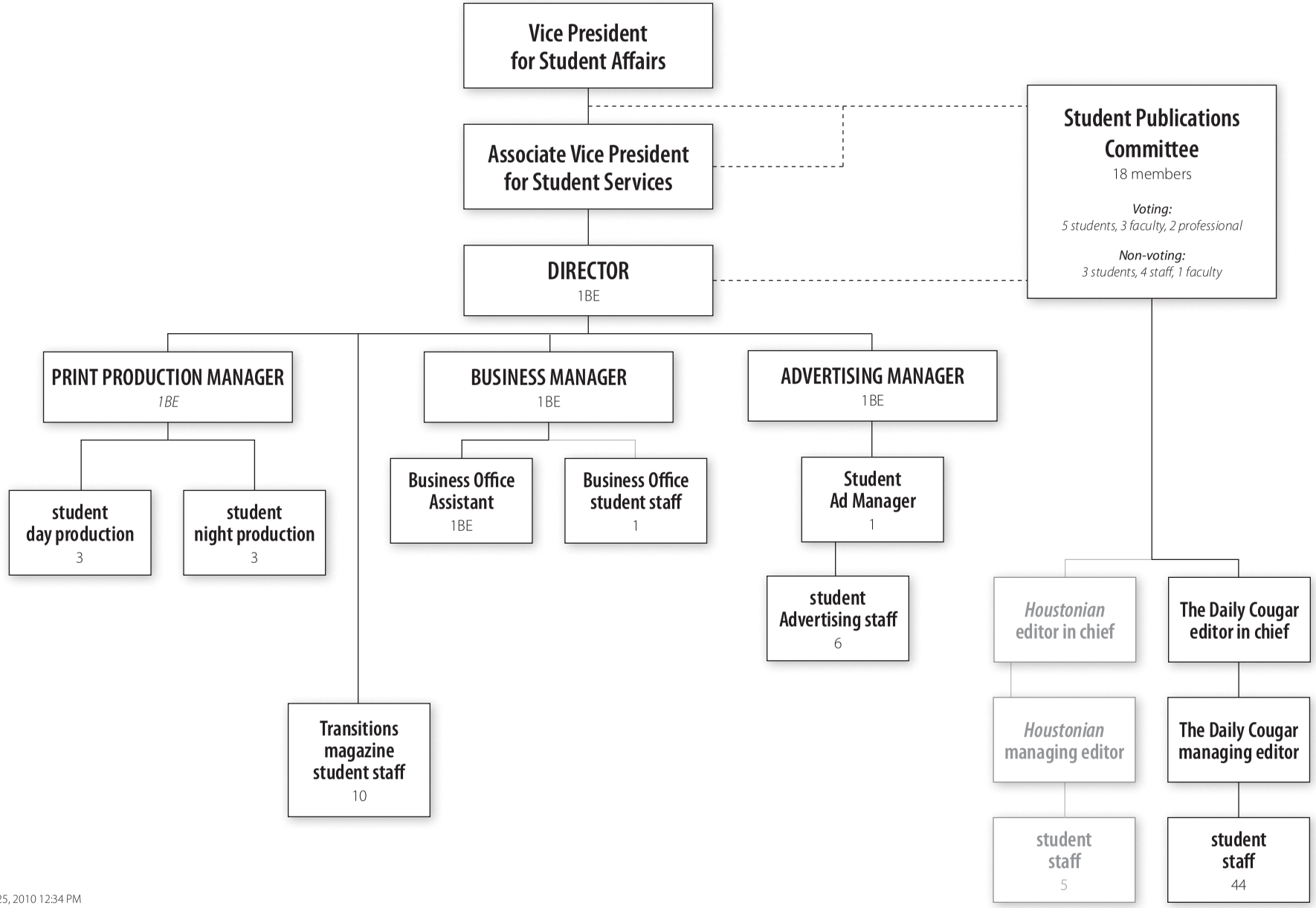
> **Comment:** We have made contact with many local high school programs and have invited some to tour our newsroom. We utilized the College of Liberal Arts mailing list to recruit writers, photographers and editors this semester with great success.

E. Training of professional staff and students will continue to be a priority to keep everyone productive and engaged in the process of innovating.

STUDENT SERVICES DIVISION ORGANIZATIONAL CHART



DEPARTMENT OF STUDENT PUBLICATIONS ORGANIZATIONAL CHART



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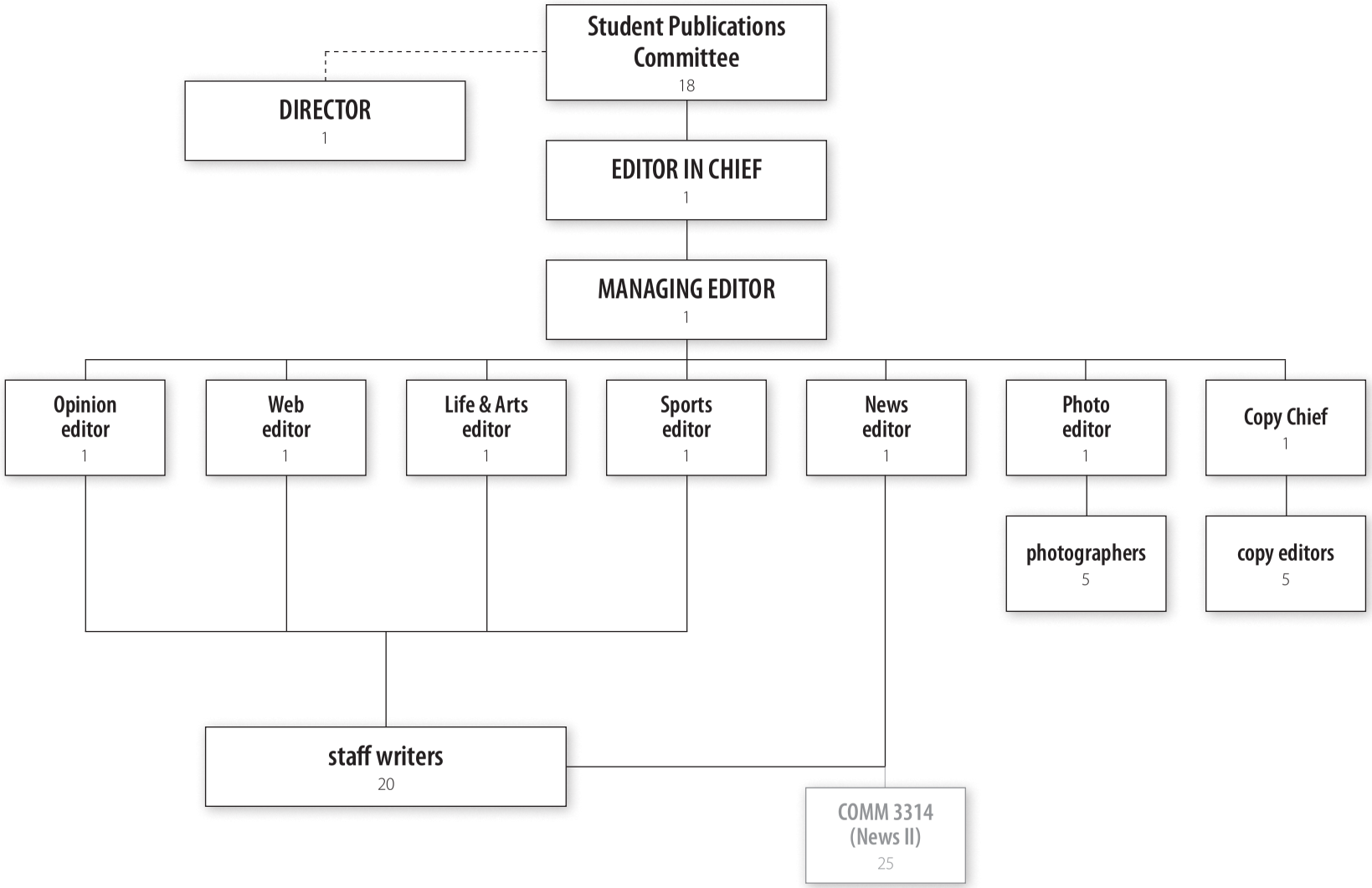
DEPARTMENT OF STUDENT PUBLICATIONS

THE DAILY COUGAR EDITORIAL DEPARTMENT



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4. *Please discuss the means that you are utilizing to evaluate both your success in achieving the aforementioned objectives and their importance as compared to other objectives that you might pursue. Where data exist, discuss the number of persons served by each of your programs and the satisfaction level of those served. Please provide the method for collecting these data.*

The Daily Cougar is critiqued every day by our diverse readership base. Our readers never fail to let us know about our shortcomings whenever they write, call of visit us when they have a concern about the stories they read in the Cougar. Additionally, our production manager (a former Cougar editor-in-chief and professional copy editor/page designer) also provides ongoing criticism, guidance and training to editorial staff.

Revenue is tracked on a monthly basis comparing against our sales goals and last year's performance. Expenditures are also tracked on a monthly basis.

The online edition of The Daily Cougar utilizes Google Analytics and a WordPress statistics module to measure traffic. We do not yet have complete data for Fall 2010, but we are averaging about 50,000 pageviews per month during our daily publication cycle. Between 80 and 90 percent of visits come from off campus, suggesting the site is a popular way students as well as alumni and community members to stay in touch with the campus. Most visitors are from the Houston area. One area of reader growth has been on social networks Twitter and Facebook. Between the two, roughly 2,000 people are receiving regular updates from the newspaper and are interacting with editors.

We would like to run a readership survey in the next year to give us more information about our readers and their preferences so we can better serve them with our coverage and advertising content.

5. *Please discuss any budget changes from your last (FY2010) 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 FY2009 with a Ledger 3 Fund Equity balance, please describe the conditions which caused the fund balance.*

We continue to experience challenges meeting our revenue expectations. We ended FY 2010 with $719,993 in budgeted revenue (ad sales plus SFAC base funding), but thanks to the $100,000 one-time funding approved by this committee last year, we were able to maintain regular operation. In FY 2009, our revenue was $817,576, so the decline was clearly precipitous.

We've sustained the loss of revenue not only from advertising declines but also from the loss of the Student, Faculty and Staff Telephone Directory, which last year earned $6,000. The directory is no longer supported by the administration.

We have made significant cuts to our expenses, including a 43% cut to hourly student payroll compared to last year. A slightly later printing schedule allowed us to lower the cost of daily publication. Additionally, with the retirement of our director, we will apply the remainder of his salary as a savings.

6. *Please list your 2010-2011 objectives in priority order. Larger units may wish to group your response by subprogram. Under each objective, state the specific programs, activities, and/or services that you plan to implement to meet your objectives.*

A. Our first priority is to stabilize our advertising revenue stream and possibly turn around the decline, while adapting to the changing media landscape.
    a. We will continue to make strides to build our online edition both in terms of dynamic content and advertising, with the goal of increasing online audience, interaction and revenue.
    b. A comprehensive readership survey would help us develop better content and advertising programs in order to meet the needs and expectations of our audience.

B. We will maintain a strong core print product to serve the campus community. We will put an emphasis on staff training and development to improve the quality of the editorial content and the experience gained by our students.

C. We will reach out to alumni with the aim of seeking guidance, developing student mentorships and possibly seeking financial support for SP initiatives or scholarships.

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.)?*

Approximately 65% of our revenue base comes from sales of print advertising. We have made strides to expand online advertising, print sales are the primary driver of revenue for our department.

8. *Please describe any overlap between your unit and any other unit(s) providing services to students and the rationale for the overlap.*

There is no overlapping with other units at this time.