The Cougar

Student Fees Advisory Committee

FY 2018 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 Cougar is threefold: 1) to provide students, faculty, staff and alumni with accurate, relevant news in a timely fashion and through as many mediums 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's other organizations, provides to 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.

This year, both The Cougar and Cooglife are finalists for the Pacemaker Award, which is largely considered the top student journalism award in the nation. Our place in this competitive environment signifies that students trained at the Center for Student Media participate in one of the country's top 30 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.

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.
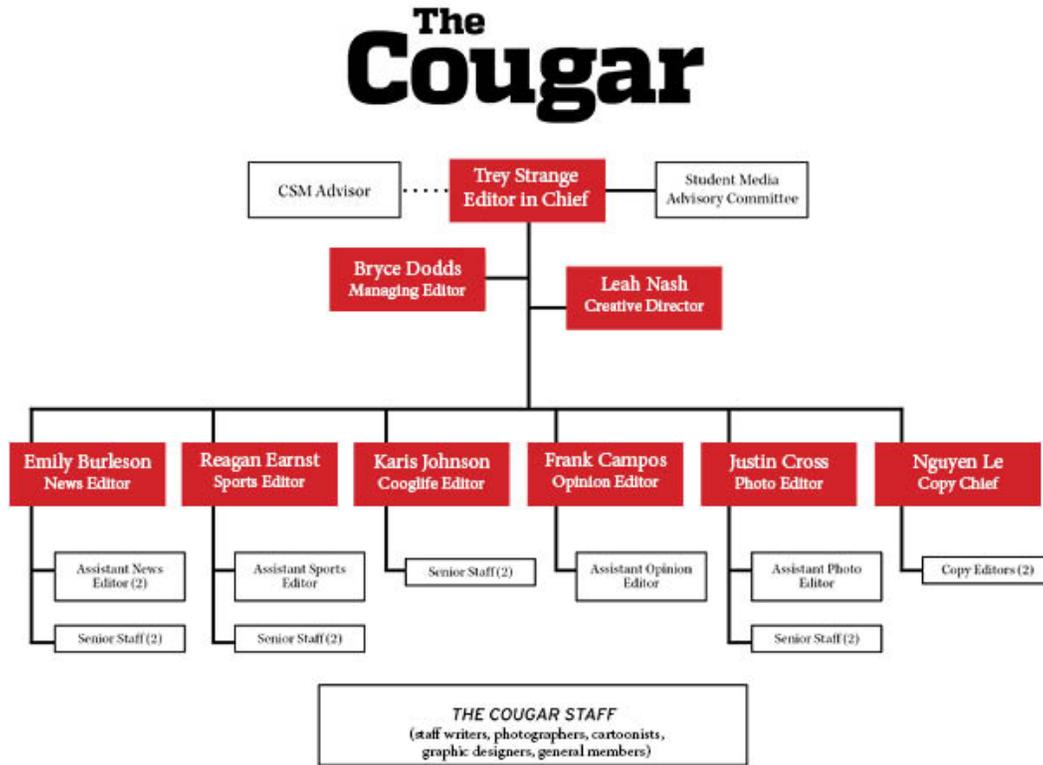
All staff members in red are paid through student stipends provided by SFAC.

3. List your unit's strategic initiatives and action steps identified for the 2015-2016 academic year and cite the specific Division of Student Affairs and Enrollment Services 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 Cougar's strategic initiatives with links to DSAES initiatives will be notated. 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 expand its campus and city outreach initiatives.** The 2015-2016 board helped to create Student Media Wednesdays with Coog Radio and CoogTV (the Student Video Network) in which students handed out the paper outside and inside the Student Center South and around the surrounding walkway. Additionally, the creation of Cooglife distribution parties gave out the magazine and prizes like shirts, bags, photos, food and other promotional materials in collaboration with Houston sponsors.

   a. **Develop an editorial position dedicated to The Cougar's social media presence, marketing campaigns, outreach coordination and event planning.** The editorial board created the Community Manager position, but SFAC did not fund the base augmentation request for the 2016-2017 year. The role was absorbed by the Editor in Chief.

   b. **Continue the production of The Cougar News Show with CoogRadio and expand collaboration with Student Video Network for their production of "@UH."** While @UH continued to produce regular content in collaboration with The Cougar, the radio show did not. Instead, the Cooglife radio show became a source of collaborative lifestyle content between the radio station and the newspaper. Cooglife also developed a widely popular show on CoogTV about students and campus activities that directly correlated with stories in the monthly print edition.

   c. **Host an annual town hall meeting, where the UH student body can engage in a public dialogue with a prominent city/state figures(s).** The board did not host a town hall meeting with city/state figures; instead, focus was shifted the Republican Debate, which The Cougar covered and fact-checked with multiple stories online, in print, and on social media.

   d. **Require all Board members (section editors and closing editors) to maintain a professional social media presence on Twitter and any other social networks deemed important to the industry by the Editor in Chief and the Managing Editor. Editors can utilize Hootsuite in posting professional Tweets and content shares.** The closing editors stressed the importance of social media like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to all staff members and editors, and they encouraged members to share their work. Editors also experimented with reporting via Snapchat for some stories during the year.

e. **Establish a "Texas politics" beat, covering city, state and national politics, to fall under the supervision of the News editor.** The news desk did not establish a Texas politics beat. Politics were widely covered in the Opinion section.

f. **Integrate interactive opportunities for attendees of the annual Student Government Association presidential debate.** The staff hosted the debate, which was live-streamed, in the Student Center Theater and students sent questions for candidates via Twitter and through notes gathered by editors at the debate.

g. **Require section editors to participate in five outreach initiatives per semester (Street Team shifts, PGH tabling, passing out Overtime at tailgate, etc.)** Section editors were required to attend all outreach initiatives, which bolstered the engagement of students with the organization.

2) **The Cougar will restructure editors' primary focus to the online publication.** The editorial board successfully completed the transition to an "online-first" mentality toward news reporting and story publishing, as this is how most UH students get their news.

a. **Section editors will be required to upload three pieces of content per day, including articles, photo galleries, lists, long form pieces, etc. (excluding Opinion).** The expectation to publish three stories a day was established at Edit Camp, and all editors understood this. If editors repeatedly failed to publish enough to meet quota, it was grounds for termination.

b. **Train editors and assistant editors in search-engine optimization and web publishing strategies during Edit Camp.** The Editor in Chief and the adviser collaborated to teach every member of the editorial board how to optimize their stories for search engines and how to present a story in The Cougar's style and up to the Cougar's standard on the web.

c. **Train editors and assistant editors (and staff writers, photographers) in basic photography skills during Edit Camp and the general training session provided for staffers of The Cougar. Include basic DSLR and "smartphone" photography.** The adviser trained the editorial board in Edit Camp in using a DSLR and basic photography skills, including using their smartphone. The adviser also held four workshops in the fall and a series of photojournalism seminars to improve the quality of work published.

3) **The Cougar will improve the quality of work produced by student journalists.** The Editor in Chief worked to improve quality of work by imposing a three-strike rule, under which students who submitted several subpar works would be removed from their position as writers in the organization.

a. **Host a twice-yearly workshop for The Cougar's entire staff to introduce them to the fundamentals of journalism and its principles.** The adviser and the CSM director hosted two workshops for students once in the summer and once in the winter. The director also facilitated a workshop with the American Copy Editor's Association.

b. **Each editor will be required to produce one in-depth investigative piece per semester that resonates with the UH community and its alumni audience.** In-depth feature stories included long-form pieces about a brewery, a new beer garden, a statistical analysis on Division 1 athletics schools and their conferences, a coffee shop that fights human trafficking, a multi-media showcasing of diversity in the city, and a student who raises awareness for suicide prevention after attempting it herself.

c. **Train all photographers on the industry standard, Adobe Photoshop. Also, train assistant photo editor and senior staff photographers on basic video capabilities.** The adviser trained the editorial staff in editing according to photojournalism standards. The photo editor worked with CoogTV to produce video content for CoogTV shared on The Cougar's social media.

d. **Consult to utilize the unique professional perspective that the Student Media Advisory Committee gives for guidance and direction on The Cougar's large-scale endeavors.** SMAC met bimonthly in the fall and spring semesters. They helped to create Cooglife magazine and helped to decide between candidates for the next year's executive leadership.

4) **The Cougar will streamline its workflow to increase speed and efficiency of content production.** Workflow charts were created for the both The Cougar and Cooglife to articulate expectations and improve communication. The charts helped the students meet deadline quicker and increased turn-around time on stories.

a. **Creative Director assigns page layouts and works directly with section editors in their page designs and regular print features.** The Creative Director and the Editor in Chief assigned pages to section editors. Section editors were responsible for designing their pages, but when they needed help, the Creative Director, Managing Editor, and the Editor in Chief would take over.

b. **Section editors required to have a cover story planned out for each print issue two weeks in advance, including the submission of art/graphics requests that are applicable at the time.** Cover stories were planned one week in advance, with some major features given priority for two– or three–week periods.

c. **Managing editor enforces the implementation of the beat system in News, Sports and Life & Arts.** The Managing Editor enforced the beat system in News and Sports. Life and Arts transitioned to Cooglife, which did not require a beat system, although some writer did write in beats.

5) **Increase The Cougar's digital subscribers by 100% by August 2016 and maintain an open rate of 25-30 percent.** The Cougar increased its digital subscribers by only 3%.

a. **Assign street team or members of the news staff to set up tables at the Student Center and PGH to gather email addresses in exchange for prize giveaways at least six weeks out of the year.** The Cougar did not assign a street team, but members of the news team did set up tables at the Student Center every Wednesday to hand out the paper.

Cooglife also hosted parties each month, in which students handed out the magazine.

b. **Aggressively promote email subscriptions through social media and home page ad placements. Request banner placement on AccessUH twice per year to promote sign-ups with a sweepstakes promotion.** The Cougar did promote email subscriptions through social media or request a banner on AccessUH.

c. **Incorporate content from SVN/CoogTV and Coog Radio into the email subscription to add interest and drive traffic to our media partners.** The Cougar has incorporated CoogTV and Coog Radio content increasingly into their email editions

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 important as compared to others that you might pursue. Where data exists, 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 when it still had a Life+Arts section in FY 2014-2015 and of The Cougar and Cooglife in FY 2015-2016.

Content production and readership

FY 2014-2015	Articles published	Online views	FY 2015-2016	Articles Published	Online views	Diff +/- articles	Diff +/- views
September	183	98,528	September	195	93,629	+13	-4,899
October	252	101,896	October	269	119,652	+17	+17,756
November	221	132,222	November	222	98,546	+1	-33,676
December	64	40,905	December	96	62,496	+32	+21,591
January	78	57,448	January	55	49,357	-23	-8,091
February	170	98,195	February	176	86,673	+6	-11,522
March	157	96,102	March	173	71,401	+16	-24,701
April	186	111,617	April	182	93,964	-4	-17,653
May	61	55,708	May	88	78,012	+17	+22,304
June	75	60,663	June	52	60,869	-23	+206
July	57	48,777	July	55	63,972	-2	-15,195
August	78	59,285	August	137	93,320	+59	+34,035
TOTAL:	**1,582**	**961,346**		**1,700**	**948,499**	**+118**	**-12,847**

Content production increased because of the new work flow system, a stronger emphasis on digital and strict adherence to the quota system. The difference of views can be attributed to the creation of Cooglife, which in the beginning was a print-focused publication and had a website that was a work in progress. It has since refocused to gain a larger digital presence.

Online unique visitors/users

Pageviews measures activity on the site, but the number of users gives an idea of actual audience reach.
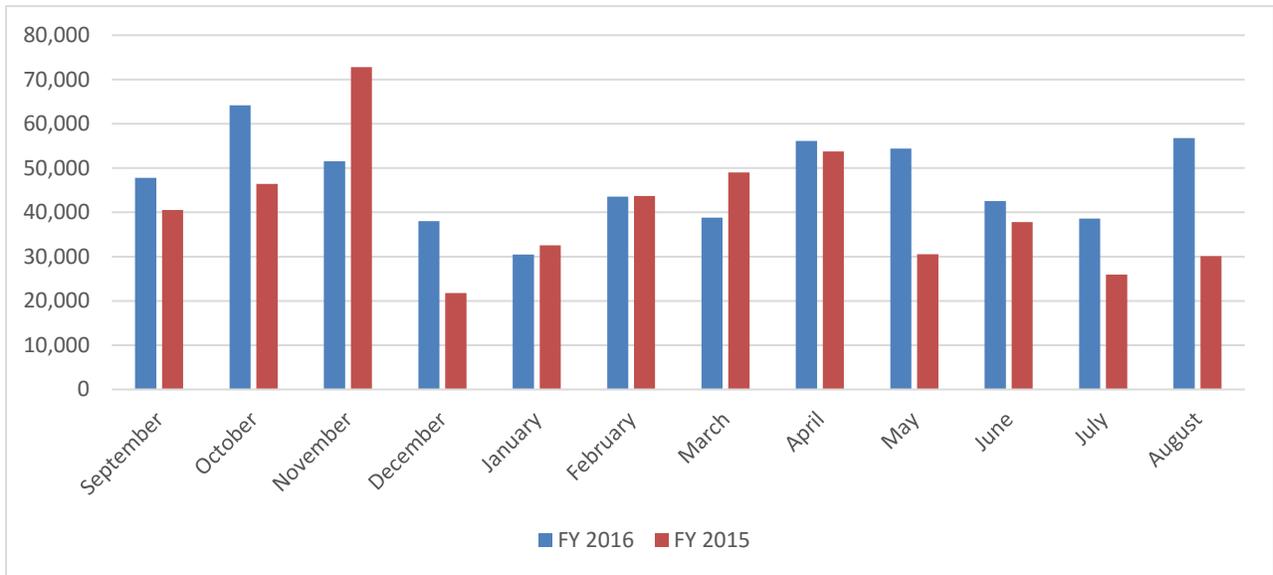
Social media followership

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 includes The Cougar and Cooglife)
2015: 4,273   2016: 9,368   (+119.2%)

Twitter followers (2016 includes The Cougar and Cooglife)
2015: 8,405   2016: 10,812   (+28.7%)

Email subscriptions & open rate

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

Email subscribers
FY 2015: 4,290   FY 2016: 4,403   (+3%)

Open Rate (proportion of email issues actually read)
FY 2015: 30.2% FY 2016: 24.8%   (-17.9%)

Click Rate (proportion of email readers that click to visit an article)
FY 2015: 26.6% FY 2016: 16.2%   (-39.1%)

5. Please discuss any budget or organizational changes experienced since your last (FY2017) 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 FY2016 with a Fund 3 addition to Fund Equity, please describe the conditions which caused the addition.

The Cougar did not have any budgetary changes since their last request.

6. Please list you 2017-2018 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 specification steps (programs, activities, services, policies/procedures, etc.) that you intend to implement to accomplish your stated initiative.

The Cougar's strategic initiatives with links to DSAES initiatives will be notated. 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.
   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.
   c. CSM will train editors and assistant editors in advanced web published strategies and search-engine optimization.
   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.
   e. Editor in chief and the adviser will host one new reporter workshop every month.
   f. Editor in chief and the adviser will host one media professional each month to speak to staff about investigative stories, internships,

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.
   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.

3. **The Cougar will grow active contributing membership to 80. (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 social media team, marketing team, and copy editing team.

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.
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.
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.
d. Workshops will be held for the entire Cougar staff in specific topics such as photojournalism, opinion writing, storytelling and editing.

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.

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 and to explore feasibility of signing up more print subscribers.

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 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 a daily deadline that no other student organization experiences. Collaboration with the Student Video Network and Coog Radio also strengthen our partnerships within CSM and allow for more dynamic content to be published from all three organizations.