

The **News on the Daily** Cougar

FY2022 SFAC Program Questionnaire

2021-22 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 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.

As our campus and student body expand, the need for constant and effective communication increases. 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 biweekly print edition, online, on social media or through our email edition. In our unique position, we can show the best of the University, or ask it to do better.

Through these mediums, The Cougar provides a platform for students to share stories about the University, ask important questions and engage with the UH community. As a student-run news organization, The Cougar also provides a space for its members to gain practical and relevant experience in journalism, digital media, management and leadership.

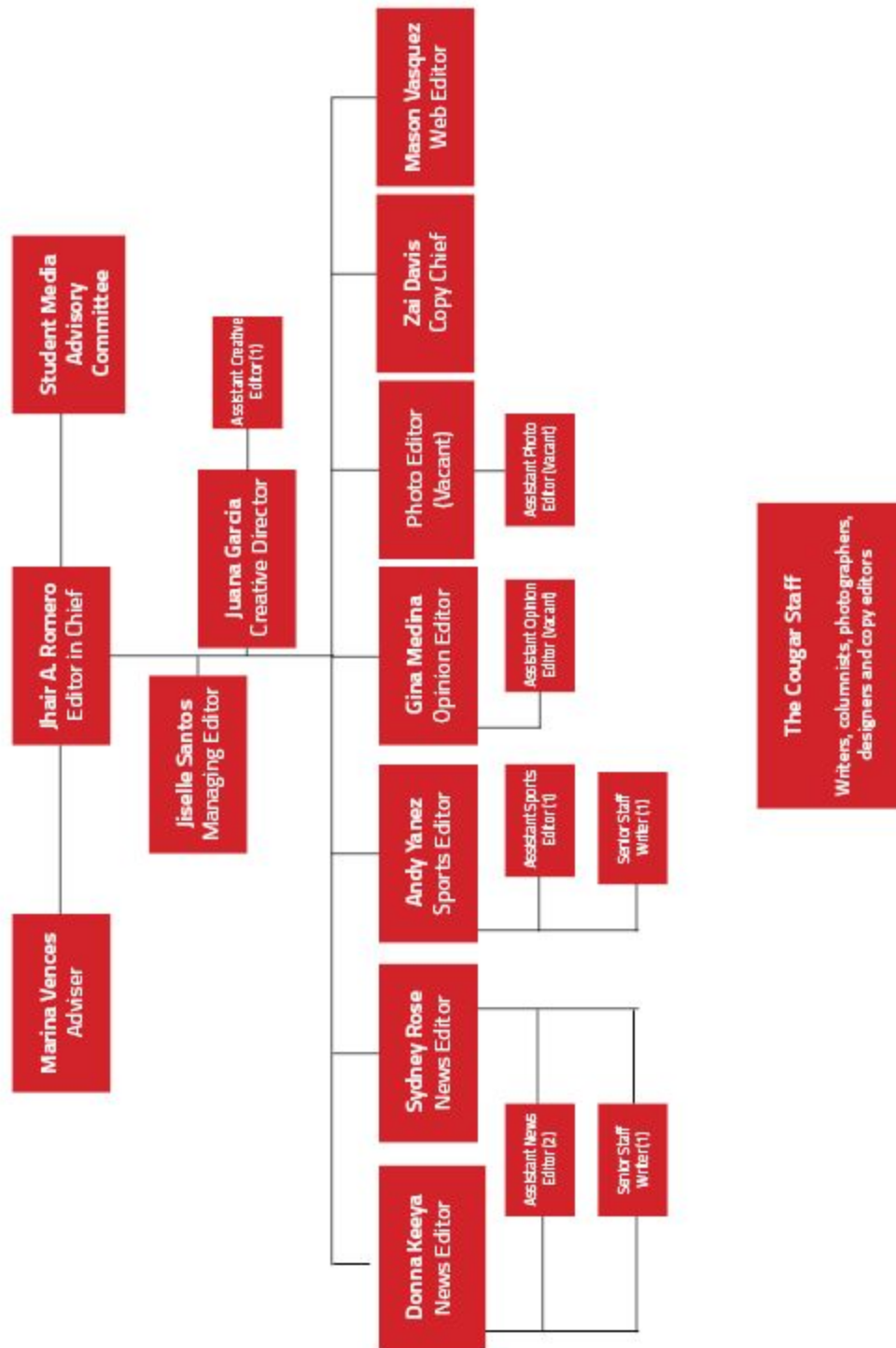
The Cougar, in conjunction with the Center for Student Media, provides students of all majors an integral jumping board from the collegiate environment to the professional world. There is no other place on campus that allows students to play a role in the journalism process from start to finish, with a real audience dependent on the results. The paper's visibility has increased throughout campus, thanks to a vibrant, compelling weekly print edition with feature stories. Many professional media members in Houston and throughout the nation got their start working and learning at The Cougar.

The Cougar in recent years has consistently been recognized with awards, including the Pacemaker, the highest honor in collegiate journalism, and by the Society for Professional Journalists and the Texas Intercollegiate Press Association.

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.**



- 3. List your unit's strategic initiatives and action steps identified for the 2019-2020 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. 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 Student Success Initiative)

- a. News and Sports will be required to upload 15 pieces of content weekly, while Opinion will be required to upload 10 columns weekly. Upload content on the weekend instead of just Monday-Friday will help drive traffic to thedailycougar.com. Weekend traffic is about half of what it is during the week. Also requiring editors to meet a weekly quota of content instead of daily will allow them to stress less every day if they don't have three stories, which will help turnover. The opinion section will be required to upload less than the news and sports section, because that section requires several more staff writes to be a part of it than News and Sports to meet their content goals.**

Both goals for News and Sports were consistently met, but Opinion lagged behind because of a high turnover rate in the section's editor positions. Weekend content was frequently posted on thedailycougar.com and The Cougar's social media pages. Weekly instead of daily quotas have been implemented and have helped manage the load of The Cougar's editors.

- b. The Cougar will host a workshop each semester to have more effective headline writing, which is one of the biggest indicators of traffic to our websites.**

The Cougar hosted several workshops with various reporters and editors throughout the year and many touched on the topics of headline writing and driving readership up.

- c. Section editors will hold monthly meetings with their writers to keep them engaged with the organization and train them.**

Section editors regularly met with their staffers. These meetings ranged from workshops, which trained the writers on topics such as interviewing and newswriting, to socials, which helped keep staff members engaged with the organization.

- d. The editor in chief and the adviser will host a new reporter workshops at the beginning of each semester.**

This goal was met as The Cougar hosted several workshops with media professionals throughout the year.

- e. The editor in chief and managing editor will ensure stories are shared on social media throughout the day, in addition to older content that is still relevant. The email edition will also be published Monday-Friday in addition to any major sporting events on the weekends.**

All stories posted on thedailycougar.com were posted to The Cougar's social media accounts to be shared with readers. The email edition was published every week day, and sports newsletters were sent out on days of major sporting events, including weekends.

2. The Cougar will increase followership/audience on all social media by 10% by August 2020, along with increasing email edition subscribers by 5%. (DSAES Resources Initiative)

- a. The marketing interns hired by our advertising partner Media Mate will develop a readership survey on social media to figure out who our audiences are and where we can grow.**

This goal was met. The readership survey conducted by The Cougar's advertising partner found the group of students who most read The Cougar and where the newspaper can improve.

- 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.**

All staff was trained on social media usage in a workshop hosted by The Cougar and a former adviser.

- c. Content will be shared across all social media at least two times if still relevant, including The Cougar's sports and Cooglife accounts. Stories that are attracting more attention will be shared more, to better capitalize on that. The editor in chief and the managing editor will increase audience engagement by studying the social media of successful student newspapers at other universities.**

This goal was met for The Cougar's main and sports account, but not the Cooglife accounts. Followership on The Cougar's main and sports social media accounts grew as we changed our strategies to emulate other successful student publications.

- d. The Cougar will continue to develop a consistent voice and brand across social media channels.**

The Cougar's brand was recently revamped, and our social media strategy has completely changed to better fit the audiences we serve.

- e. The Cougar will promote its email edition on its social media platforms monthly. We will also incentivize students to sign up for it by promoting it in our print edition and our mail home edition to freshmen, The First Roar.**

This goal was met on our online and print platforms.

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

- a. The Cougar will have a marketing campaign next summer to explain to underclassmen, what The Cougar is and how they can become a part of it.**

Although this goal was not met, The Cougar did participate in several recruitment events geared to underclassmen hosted by our fellow student organizations that yielded a large number of members.

- 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.**

The Center for Student Media and The Cougar helped develop a more efficient way to introduce new members into the organization.

- c. **Host two media camps for section editors to learn skills to fulfill their jobs and also meet Coog Radio and Coog TV members to start the conversations on how best to collaborate.**

This goal was met. All three Center for Student Media organizations gathered for media camp each semester to discuss these topics.

- d. **Hold monthly meetings in each section to help keep members engaged with the organization and now fall out of participating. The Cougar also will have an open house each semester to let possible new members learn about the organization.**

Monthly meetings were held for News and Sports, but troubles in Opinion kept from meeting this goal completely. The Cougar did meet its goal of hosting open houses for current and potential new members.

4. The Cougar will improve the quality of reporting and continue to find ways to collaborate with other CSM organizations. (DSAES Initiative 1)

- a. **Plan print editions two weeks ahead of time, so writers can start on stories earlier and have more in-depth reporting**

This goal was met as The Cougar made its print production more efficient.

- b. **Editors will give feedback to their writers at monthly section meetings and show them how they can improve their reporting.**

This goal was met for News and Sports, but not in Opinion as the section struggled with turnover issues.

- c. **The Cougar will cross promote work done by other CSM organizations**

This goal was met on online and print platforms

- d. **Editors will be required to write an in-depth piece each semester that will have months of planning and reporting behind it**

This goal was not met in the spring semester due to the coronavirus pandemic forcing The Cougar to focus on COVID-19 coverage, leaving little time to work on in-depth stories.

- e. **Find ways for big stories each CSM organization will cover to work together on reporting.**

This goal was not met as the three Center for Student Media organizations have varying audiences with little overlap.

- 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 and/or unique students 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. If available, please provide program benchmarking data from comparable institutions.**

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 in FY 2018-19 and FY 2019-20.

Content Production and Readership: The Cougar

2018-19	Articles Published	Online Views	2019-20	Articles Published	Online Views	Diff +/- Articles	Diff +/- Views
September	79	45,784	September	121	52,509	42	6,725
October	143	63,275	October	137	54,963	-6	-8,312
November	115	41,971	November	114	87,185	-1	45,214
December	9	25,532	December	59	32,222	50	6,690
January	60	33,502	January	99	48,296	39	14,794
February	85	37,383	February	155	81,914	70	44,531
March	67	44,591	March	100	53,036	33	8,445
April	74	1,108	April	69	38,921	-5	37,813
May	9	29,218	May	62	35,627	53	6,409
June	32	39,878	June	79	73,562	47	33,684
July	30	30,688	July	67	39,744	37	9,056
August	67	50,355	August	75	39,967	8	-10,388
Total	770	443,285		1,137	637,946	367	194,661

The Cougar saw a significant jump both in the number of articles published and view counts in 2019-20 compared to 2018-19. This can be attributed to an overhaul in how the staff works to maximize efficiency. Among the changes has been the addition of new editorial board positions and a revamping of our internal procedures to make things work smoother. The jump in traffic also shows The Cougar's continued improvement in content and strategy. The spikes in the number of articles and views in March through July can be attributed to The Cougar's efforts to keep the UH community informed during the coronavirus pandemic.

The biggest challenge The Cougar now faces is continuing this success with the cuts in one-time funding due to the coronavirus pandemic. However, we recognize the current financial situation the University is in because of the pandemic.

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

2019: 7,266 **2020:** 7,317 (+7%)

Twitter followers

2019: 13,031 **2020:** 13,632 (+4.6%)

Instagram followers

2019: 1,789 **2020:** 2,105 (+17.6%)

As The Cougar's sports Facebook account was discontinued because it proved to be inefficient in sharing content, included are statistics for The Cougar's main Facebook account. Because of a consistent publishing schedule and more engaging content, The Cougar's Facebook following grew. The Cougar's Twitter platforms gained followers due to cross promotion between @TheDailyCougar and @TheCougarSports, which serve different audiences. @TheCougarSports on Twitter grew dramatically because of an improved social media strategy. @TheDailyCougar on Twitter also received frequent updates. Instagram saw the biggest increase because it had never been regularly updated before. The

Instagram was delegated to the photo editor to update, which allowed it to have frequent, engaging content.

Email subscriptions & open rate

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

Email subscribers

2019: 4,269 **2020:** 4,151 (-1.4%)

Open Rate (proportion of email issues actually read)

2019: 23.3% **2020:** 24.4% (+4.7%)

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

2019: 13.28% **2020:** 13.5% (+1.7%)

More emphasis was placed on making the email edition more personable and engaging, which is why open rates and click rates increased. The email edition was not marketed as much as it could have been, so it saw a slight decrease in subscribers.

- 5. Please discuss any budget or organizational changes experienced since your last (FY2021) 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.**

Because of the newspaper's shift to a bi-weekly print product, The Cougar restructured the news section. Instead of a campus editor and features editor, there are now two news editors that split print and online responsibilities. This has worked and has helped The Cougar grow its online readership as our digital platforms expand.

Under the new operations, The Cougar also brought back the web editor position to focus solely on our digital platforms. Under The Cougar's new organizational structure, which alleviates some of the pressure put on the editor in chief and managing editor, web views and social media presence and following have skyrocketed.

- 6. If your unit concluded FY2020 with a Fund 3 addition to Fund Equity 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 2021-2022 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.**

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

Action Steps

- a News and Sports will be required to upload 15 pieces of content weekly, while Opinion will be required to upload 10 columns weekly. Upload content on the weekend instead of just Monday-Friday will help drive traffic to thedailycougar.com.
- b The Cougar will host a workshop each semester to improve headline writing as well as improve use of search engine optimization to expand its online reach.
- c Section editors will hold monthly meetings with their writers to keep them engaged with the organization and train them.
- d The editor in chief and the adviser will host a workshop with a journalist or other media professional at least once a month during the academic year.
- e The web editor will ensure stories are shared on social media throughout the day, in addition to older content that is still relevant. The daily email edition, curated by the web editor, will be published Monday-Friday, and a weekly edition will be sent on Saturday. In the Game newsletters, curated by the sports editor, will be sent on the day of major sporting events.

9. The Cougar will increase followership/audience on all social media by 10% by August 2021, along with increasing email edition subscribers by 5%. (DSAES Resources Initiative)

Action Steps

- a The marketing interns hired by our advertising partner Media Mate will develop a readership survey on social media to figure out who our audiences are and where we can grow.
- 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 Twitter and Facebook at least two times if still relevant, including The Cougar's sports accounts. Stories that are attracting more attention will be shared more, to better capitalize on that. One piece of content a day will be shared on Instagram. The web editor will increase audience engagement by studying the social media of successful student newspapers at other universities.
- d The editor in chief and managing editor will ensure staff members actively share The Cougar's content on their professional social media accounts to further drive social media engagement within the student body.
- e The Cougar will continue to develop a consistent voice and brand across social media channels.
- f The Cougar will promote its email edition on its social media platforms monthly. We will also incentivize students to sign up for it by promoting it in our print edition and The First Roar, our mail home edition to first-year students.

10. The Cougar will grow active contributing membership to 100, with an emphasis on recruiting underclassmen. (DSAES Initiative 1)

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- a The Cougar will have a marketing campaign next summer to explain to underclassmen, what The Cougar is and how they can become a part of it.
- 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 two media camps for section editors to learn skills to fulfill their jobs and also meet Coog Radio and Coog TV members to start the conversations on how best to collaborate.

- d Hold monthly meetings in each section to help keep members engaged with the organization and now fall out of participating. The Cougar also will have an open house each semester to let possible new members learn about the organization .
- 11. The Cougar will improve the quality of reporting and continue to find ways to collaborate with other Center for Student Media organizations. (DSAES Initiative 1)
Action Steps
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 - b Editors will give feedback to their writers at monthly section meetings and show them how they can improve their reporting.
 - c The Cougar will cross promote work done by other CSM organizations.
 - d Editors will be required to write an in-depth piece each semester that will have months of planning and reporting behind it.
 - e Find ways for big stories each CSM organization will cover to work together on reporting.

- 8. Recognizing that the potential to generate additional Student Service Fee income for FY2021 base funding is extremely limited and recognizing that it is likely that some units will not be allocated the new base budget and/or one-time funds requested. Please provide a narrative of how your unit would accommodate a reduction of 5% in your total FY2021 base Student Service Fee budget request and provide a line-item explanation of where budgetary cuts would be made.**

Since the majority of funds allocated to The Cougar by SFAC fund our stipend student editors, we would have to cut an editorial position funded by SFAC in order to accommodate a 5 percent reduction in our base budget.

- 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. 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.

We, through the power of the press, can tell stories about the University with great reach.