



Minutes: Student Publications committee meeting, Sept. 13, 2011

Voting members present: Nora Dethloff, Irving Rothman, David McHam, Julian Jimenez, Jeff Syptak, Norma Vasquez

Ex-officio members present: Delores Crawford, Matt Dulin, Jack Wehman, David Small, Michael Harding, Candy Littleton,

Visitors present: Brian Jensen, Victoria Gbenoba, John Brannen

The meeting began at 4:11 p.m. with Dulin presiding as interim chair.

The first item of business was to hear nominations for the election of chair. Wehman nominated Syptak. No other nominations were given, so Syptak was elected by acclamation. Wehman nominated Jimenez for vice chair. No other nominations were given, so Jimenez was elected by acclamation as well.

Status of *Houstonian* yearbook

Small updated the committee on the yearbook program, which has been put on hiatus. “Abysmal” sales and rising print costs were the primary factors, but he noted that college yearbooks at many major universities were struggling to remain relevant and had been canceled. The rise of social networking was also cited as a cause. With the cancellation, the financial impact was minimal as the program did not operate at a significant loss or profit. He said if there was an regrowth of student support, the yearbook could be restored. ‘

Dulin said yearbook editor-elect Reesha Brown had been reassigned to coordinate all special projects for the Cougar.

Wehman suggested the department establish a “graduation magazine” that keeps the *Houstonian* name and is distributed for free. Syptak recommends a subgroup be formed to look at this and other possibilities. Syptak, Dulin, Harding, Wehman volunteer for the group, and Dulin says he will invite Brown (editor-elect) to join the group as well.

Rothman recommends that whatever new publication is developed ought to have its own staff and office space independent of the Cougar.

Production Report

Dulin reported The Daily Cougar website was a finalist in the Associated Collegiate Press Pacemaker competition, putting it among the nation's best college newspaper websites, he said. Results would be announced in October. He reported his staff was back in the groove of daily production and that Jorge Robles had been promoted to help manage the day ad production efforts. Robles is a senior graphic arts student who will help train new students, Dulin said. His department produced all of the graphic materials associated with the "Get Some Daily" reader campaign, he said.

Advertising Report

Crawford reported that the back-to-school issue was a success and with it also came increased online sales. The last fiscal year ended with more than \$10,000 in online ads sold and she looked forward to more growth in the current year. She said her reps are learning how to sell digital ads as well as print ads and would bring in a Houston Chronicle sales manager (and former Cougar ad salesman) to talk to her students about digital.

After two years in a row of falling revenue, Crawford said she "sees the light at the end of the tunnel" and that with improved printing of special sections with Tristar and better distribution she hoped for increased readership.

Crawford reported that she had developed a student organization advertising plan, including a reduced rate of \$4.75 per inch and offering a free ad in exchange for distribution of the Cougar at events. This coincided with an all-out readership campaign, "Get Some Daily." It includes free giveaways such as pens, USB drives and tote bags.

The addition of the Cougar Calendar to the summer publication schedule was also a success, she said, and would be part of the regular publications lineup next year.

Rothman asked what the impact of cutting Friday papers has had on advertising. No revenue impact has been noticed, Crawford said. Additional revenue should come in from Overtime, a football gameday section, she said.

Small asked if she had set her monthly sales targets. Crawford said she had and would share them with him. The end-of-year goal was to reach around \$500,000 in revenue.

Rothman noted that the back-to-school paper was excellent but that Tuesday readers never saw it, suggesting that the back-to-school paper remain on the racks for two days (Monday and Tuesday) to enhance readership. Crawford said that the paper had been placed on the racks the previous Friday prior to move-in at the residence halls.

Editorial Report

Wehman reported his staff handled the large back-to-school issue well even though they worked under tighter deadlines and had several new staff members. He said he was pleased with everyone's performance overall but that challenges remain with turnover on the copy desk.

He said web traffic and social media were on the increase. His main goal, he said, was to work on hitting a consistent deadline to prove the staff is ready to deal with Tristar's firm deadlines.

Crawford also reported that turnover is an ongoing difficulty also for advertising staff. Syptak recommended more workshops and recruiting be done to get more people involved and increase the chances of more students sticking around.

Financial Report

Littleton distributed the financial report, showing that FY 2011 ended with a negative balance of \$18,000.27, which was covered by fund balance. Expenses had been cut by more than \$120,000 from FY 2010 but ad revenue had fallen by about \$40,000 to \$457,985.95.

New business

Committee membership: Dulin pointed out that the current bylaws state that a voting member should represent the Houstonian staff, but since the yearbook has been suspended, a student voting position remains open on the board. However, in order to change the rules to allow another student, the bylaws must be addressed. This is important because SP staff needs representation on the committee, especially since SGA has three appointed seats, he said.

A subcommittee of Dethloff, Wehman, Jimenez, Sytak and Dulin was formed to look at drafting an amendment or revising the bylaws.

For professional reps, nominations were made for: Richard Cigler, former SP director; Larry Kelley, advertising professor; Mary Reding, alumna and ad rep at Univision; Dwight Silverman, Houston Chronicle tech columnist; Ronnie Turner, alumnus and Chronicle sports writer; and Chris Elliott, alumnus and multimedia journalist, and Jerry Waite, a College of Technology professor. Syptak said he would contact each to determine their interest and eligibility.

Old business

Printing contracts: The bidding process to seek out an off-campus printing vendor was sidetracked since a Universitywide bid was put out to collectively outsource UH printing. The Cougar specifications were included in that bid. Small reported that process may be in limbo. Crawford reiterated that special projects would be printed with Tristar in the meantime. Dulin said this has allowed production and editorial to get used to working with a slightly different system and work out the kinks.

The meeting adjourned at 5:15 p.m.