



# The **Cougar**

PRINT WEEKLY. DIGITAL DAILY



**Student Fees Advisory Committee**

# **FY 2017 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 different 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, new monthly magazine, online, on social media or email.

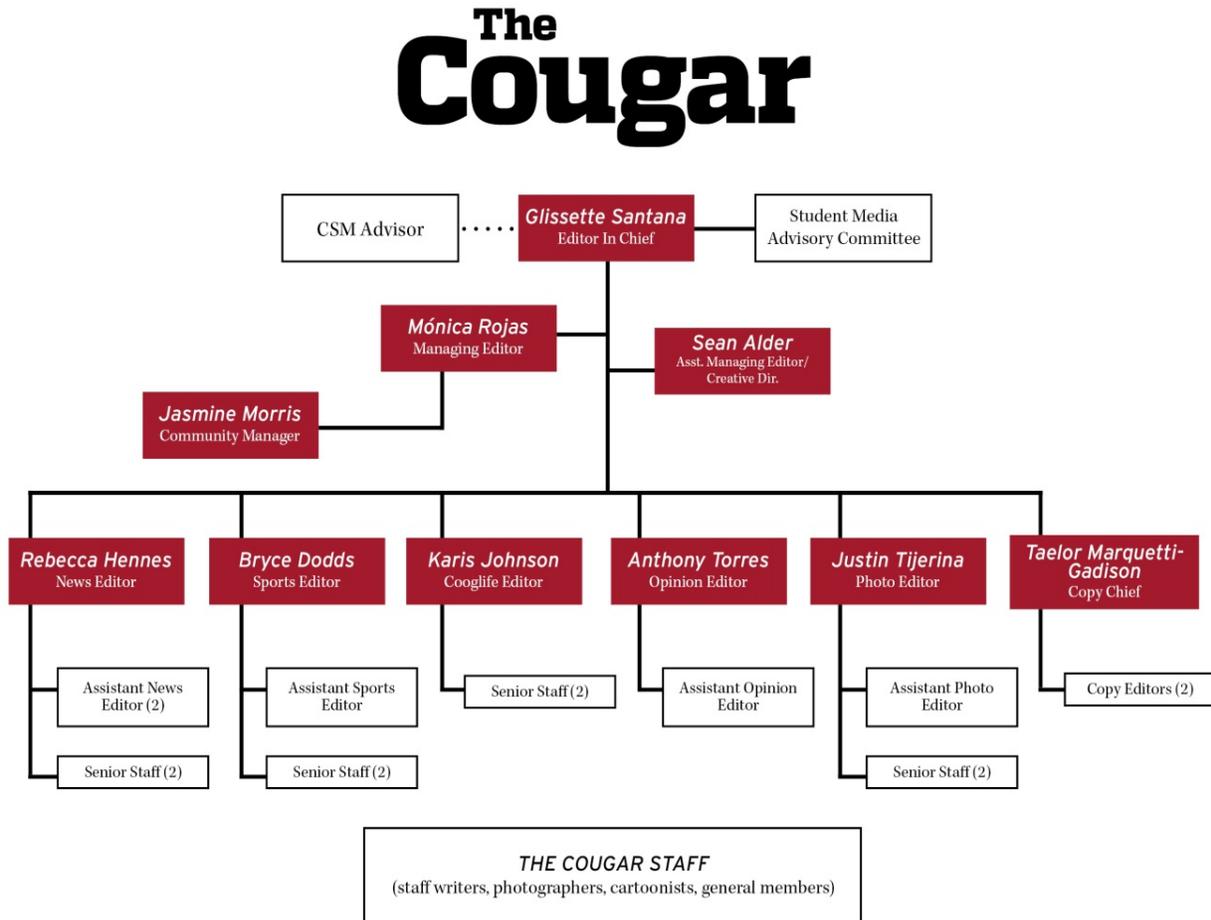
Through our different methods of sharing information, The Cougar provides a platform for students to tell stories about the University, ask important questions and engage with the community. As a student-run news organization, The Cougar also gives its members practical and relevant experience in journalism,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

The Cougar, in addition to the Center for Student Media's other publications, provides students 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 that is much better than its daily counterpart. With recognition from the Society for Professional Journalists and the Texas Intercollegiate Press Association, The Cougar is maintaining a level of excellence that has never previously been achieved. With the website used as a means of 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, 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 2014-2015 academic year and cite the specific Division of Student Affairs 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.**

**1. Transition into a digital-first organization. (DSAES Initiative 1)** The 2014-15 board restructured daily workflows and posted new content seven days a week during the fall and spring semesters. Office hours were established for both section and assistant editors to ensure consistent online publication.

**a. Shift editors' focus from print to online publication with restructured daily workflows.**

The previous editor in chief, along with the managing editor, established a system of budgeting, or planning stories for publication, to ensure that section editors were getting content up on the website in an accurate and timely manner.

**b. Ensure posting of fresh content seven days a week during the fall and spring semesters.**

The previous editor in chief implemented a quota for content, giving each section editor a goal to accomplish for the day. News, Sports and Life & Arts were required to publish a minimum of three pieces of content daily. Opinion was required to publish two pieces of content daily.

**c. Create a "speed team" focused on publishing campus news to the site throughout the day.**

In the event of breaking news, a system was established to contact a closing editor for editing and immediate publishing.

**d. Establish office hours for section editors to ensure consistent online publication.** The previous administration accomplished this, enforcing a consistent duty schedule and daily deadlines. Section editors were required to hold office hours for a minimum of 15 hours within the newsroom, while assistant editors were required to have 10.

**e. Engage more staff members in social media management (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram).**

The previous administration allowed section editors to publish tweets and commentary on Cougar social media platforms with permission of the managing editor. Examples include live-tweeting a football game and running commentary of on-campus events (SGA meetings, for example) that would be re-tweeted/posted by The Cougar account.

**f. Collaborate with Coog Radio and SVN to increase multimedia productions.** Collaboration between the three organizations was increased throughout the previous administration. A radio show was produced by Coog Radio and aired every Wednesday covered information in the print issue that came out earlier that day and rolling commentary and promotion of upcoming on-campus and city events. Collaboration with SVN resulted in helping with media coverage for their weekly news program, @UH.

**g. Offer more customized email editions based on areas of interest and sending frequencies.**

The previous administration published a daily email edition in addition to an Overtime email edition, which exclusively promoted football coverage and commentary.

**h. Utilize web-heavy publication model to provide staff members with greater digital skills.** The previous administration accomplished this. Every section editor and assistant was trained to efficiently use WordPress, the backend of The Cougar's website. Editors also have knowledge of other digital plugins, such as StoryMap and StoryForm.

**2. Implement an innovative weekly print publication. (DSAES Initiatives 1 & 2)** The Cougar implemented a print weekly, digital daily template following the recommendations of the Student Media Advisory Committee. Goals set forth by previous administrations, however, were not accomplished.

**a. Follow the recommendations set forth by the Student Media Advisory Committee's workgroups on design and content.** Steps were taken to re-design The Cougar to distinguish it from previous volumes of the publication with the help of steps established by SMAC. Graphic designers lead the design overhaul and the previous editor in chief led the revitalization of print content to be more in-depth, feature based content.

**b. Develop calendar to plan cover story for each print issue at the start of each semester.** A calendar was developed in the last semester of the previous administration to plan and curate cover story contenders with the help of the editorial board. Fall semester cover stories were chosen by the Creative Director based on content running in sections for that week.

**c. Develop calendars for sections to plan their print editions at the start of each semester.** Calendars for sections to plan their print editions were not implemented until March of the spring semester.

**d. Develop print production workflow monitored by the managing editor.** Print workflow was monitored by the managing editor, with print production days pre-planned for the Sunday and Monday before each print edition was published.

**d. Create a "depth team" focused on producing longer-form enterprise and profile pieces.** A "depth team" was not created. The previous editor in chief encouraged longer-form enterprise and profile pieces, including one that tackled the issue of self-harm and another that profiled a long-time staff member. No plan was established for a depth team.

**3. Improve the visibility of the organization. (DSAES Initiative 2)** Visibility of the organization was increased through social media outlets and a street team that helped distribute the print issue every Wednesday and Thursday.

**a. Create marketing and distribution position focused on promoting events and special publications, organizing in-person distribution of print edition and encouraging membership.** A street team, managed by the Activities Coordinator of The Cougar, was created to increase in-person distribution of the print edition. The Cougar also increased marketing efforts by holding events at the school of communication, Cougar Village II and attending Cat's Back, Weeks of Welcome, Winter Wonderland and Cougar Carnivals.

**b. Organize Cougar members to pass out weekly print edition twice a week.** The initiative was not accomplished. The street team handled most of the distribution of print editions.

**c. Maintain presence at organizational fairs, orientation events and other student-focused events.** The Cougar maintained a presence at job fairs, Cougar Carnival, Weeks of Welcome, Cat's Back and tabling throughout the school year.

**d. Promote events Cougar will host to foster greater engagement across campus.** The Cougar hosted the Student Government Association presidential debate, as well as events at the School of Communication and Cougar Village II. It also hosted an event in honor of missing journalist Austin Tice and the Coogliflife launch party.

**4. Strengthen the organization's role as the voice of the student body. (DSAES Initiative 1)**

Initiatives were taken to publish a weekly editorial providing an informed stance on an issue with a suggested solution or support with no success. Some investigative projects on issues affecting the UH community were also overlooked, as well as hosting town hall events to provide access to prominent UH leaders.

**a. Publish a weekly editorial providing an informed stance, a suggested solution or support for an issue important to the UH community.** Steps were taken to publish a weekly editorial, but came up short. Not all editorials were related to the UH community.

**b. Produce investigative projects on issues affecting the UH community at least once per semester.** The Cougar published a series of articles problems with the opening of TDECU Stadium and it not being finished on time.

**c. Host town hall events to provide access to UH leaders prominent in current campus events.** A town hall event was not hosted.

**d. Facilitate a debate among SGA presidential candidates in Spring 2015.** A debate was successfully hosted by The Cougar for the three SGA presidential candidates in the Law Center in Spring 2015. At least 60 students attended and provided questions for the candidates in a Q&A portion.

**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.

**Content production and readership**

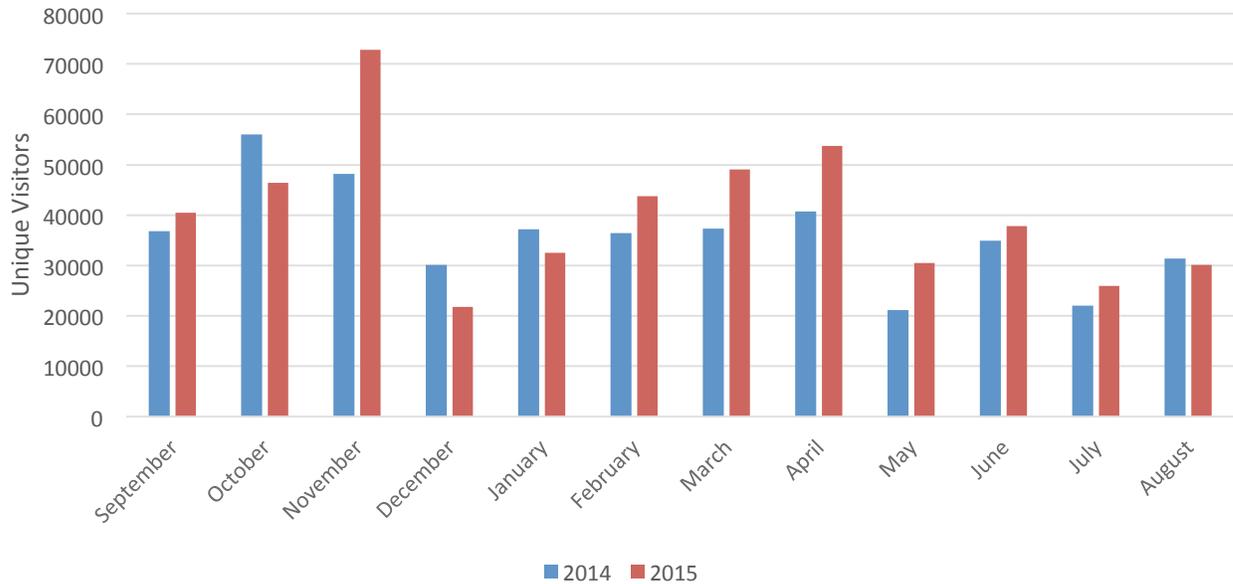
<b>2013-2014</b>	<b>Articles published</b>	<b>Online views</b>	<b>2014-2015</b>	<b>Articles Published</b>	<b>Online views</b>	<b>Diff +/- articles</b>	<b>Diff +/- views</b>
September	388	116,309	September	203	119,447	-185	3,138
October	439	135,025	October	252	120,683	-187	-14,342
November	309	110,420	November	221	154,315	-88	43,895
December	109	63,726	December	64	54,576	-45	-9,150
January	281	84,774	January	78	74,836	-203	-9,938
February	345	96,196	February	170	114,564	-175	18,368
March	295	90,173	March	273	112,603	-22	22,430
April	362	105,260	April	331	139,247	-31	33,987
May	60	53,997	May	50	70,312	-10	16,315
June	91	74,676	June	69	74,957	-22	281
July	62	54,849	July	55	64,410	-7	9,561
August	121	73,672	August	112	75,009	-9	1,337
<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>2862</b>	<b>1,059,077</b>		<b>1878</b>	<b>1,174,959</b>	<b>-984</b>	<b>115,882</b>

Content production was reduced because there was no longer a daily print product creating a need for more content. Despite the reduced content production, online readership increased for the year because of an emphasis on breaking news.

In literally every digital audience measurement tool we use, The Cougar reached more people than ever before.

## Online unique visitors/users

Pageviews measures activity on the site, but the number of users gives an idea of actual audience reach. In all but one month, The Cougar exceeded last year's unique visitor count.



## 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.

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### Facebook followers

2014: 3,729      2015: 4,273      (+14.5%)

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### Twitter followers

2014: 7,103      2015: 8,405      (+18.3%)

## Email subscriptions & open rate

A key component of the print-weekly, digital-daily strategy is maintaining an active subscription base through email. While open rates fell slightly the overall subscriber base increased by a third in 2014-15.

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### Email subscribers

2014: 3,246      2015: 4,290 (+32%)

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### Open Rate (proportion of email issues actually read)

2014: 30.8%      2015: 30.2% (-1.9%)

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

2014: 28.1%      2015: 26.6% (-5.3%)

**5. Please discuss any budget or organizational changes experienced since your last (FY2015) 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 FY2014 with a Fund 3 addition to Fund Equity, please describe the conditions which caused the addition.**

The Cougar's account was credited with \$61,004 in Fund Equity from generated revenue; however, this amount was originally supposed to be credited to the CSM account. After actual expenses were accounted for, The Cougar carried forward \$55,468 into the CSM FY 16 budget and contributed \$13,464 to the CSM reserve cost center.

Of unused SFAC funds, the Cougar returned \$254.59 to the SFAC Fund Equity. This reflects unused an unused portion of the one-time funds provided by SFAC to cover the loss of national advertising.

**6. Please list your 2016-2017 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 pageviews 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 two workshops a semester training editors, assistant editors, staff writers and photographers in photojournalism, including DSLR and smartphone photography.
- 2. The Cougar will increase followership/audience on all social media by 20% by August 2017. (DSAES Initiative 5)**
  - a. Community Manager 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 50. (DSAES Initiative 1)**
  - a. Emphasize increased participation between the editorial board and staff with volunteer opportunities, staff prizes, etc.
  - 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. 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, 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.