

FY2025 SFAC PROGRAM QUESTIONNAIRE

The **News on the Daily**
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 student fee allocation in terms of benefits for students.

As the student-run campus newspaper, The Cougar's mission is not dissimilar to that of a traditional newspaper. We elevate the voices of our campus community, ensure institutional transparency and serve as a "first stop" in the recording of historically significant events. Our mission deviates from traditional media in that we are first and foremost a learning laboratory. In this capacity, we provide all students with a platform through which they may hone their storytelling skills.

First printed in 1927, The Cougar is the only student organization that predates the University. In our near-100 years of existence, The Cougar has covered every aspect of campus life and been a key player in recording the University's history. Our publication has been cited in a variety of research projects and we continue to receive requests for articles from our archives.

Formerly a daily paper, The Cougar's archives provide a day-to-day historical record of close to a century of UH history. Today, we continue to fulfill that role through our bi-weekly print and digital publication. Our articles magnify and preserve the stories of the Cougar community, and we are constantly finding new ways to better serve the students we represent.

Though an evolving media landscape has presented challenges, as a student organization, The Cougar is in a unique position to experiment with different methods of overcoming them. Recently, we have expanded our digital presence to include emerging platforms like Reddit, guerilla marketing through QR codes and an increased focus on our newsletter. In addition our editorial board has placed a special emphasis on two-way communication through the use of Google Forms, feedback requests and open engagement on social media.

This year The Cougar has also made an effort to engage with the student body in ways outside of the scope of traditional reporting. In September of this year, we began hosting weekly "Table Talks." These tabling events generally involve two editorial board members crowdsourcing responses to a question in exchange for free merchandise. The intent is to raise brand awareness and foster an environment where students feel comfortable approaching our reporters.

Internally, The Cougar was also faced with the recent challenge of losing a large portion of its veteran staff — to include our advisor. While turnover is a natural part of any student organization, the relative size of our graduating/departing cohort created the need for an increased emphasis on training/education. To this end The Cougar began hosting a series of "Wednesday Workshops" over the Summer. These workshops were hosted through Teams and later uploaded to Youtube. Topics discussed include: AP style basics, the importance of brevity, ethical reporting, and many others. We also hosted several guest speakers at these workshops including Will Sommer of the Washington Post, Samantha Ketterer and Jen Rice of the Houston

Chronicle. As the school year plods on we have continued to reach out to professional journalists and have at least five more guest speaker events planned for the Fall semester.

This year The Cougar also made several structural changes in order to ensure we are serving the largest number of students with the resources provided to us by SFAC. To this end we dissolved the News Editor 2 position and divided the funds allocated to create two additional assistant editor positions and three more senior staff writer positions. This has allowed The Cougar to expand its paid staff and create more opportunities for students who may not have the requisite experience to serve in an editorial capacity.

As it currently stands, the vast majority of the base funding The Cougar receives from SFAC goes to student worker salaries. Compensating our reporters is not only fair, but also ensures we are able to effectively enforce deadlines and responsibilities. Though we do accept all volunteer writers, it has proven difficult to enforce real expectations on employees working in a strictly volunteer capacity.

Outside of salaries, The Cougar also utilizes one-time SFAC funding to travel to conferences, sports games and networking events. These include the biannual College Media Association conferences, football/basketball playoffs and, most recently, the Texas Tribune Festival in Austin Texas. These events provide our staff with experience, education and networking opportunities that are invaluable in preparing members for the realities of the job market.

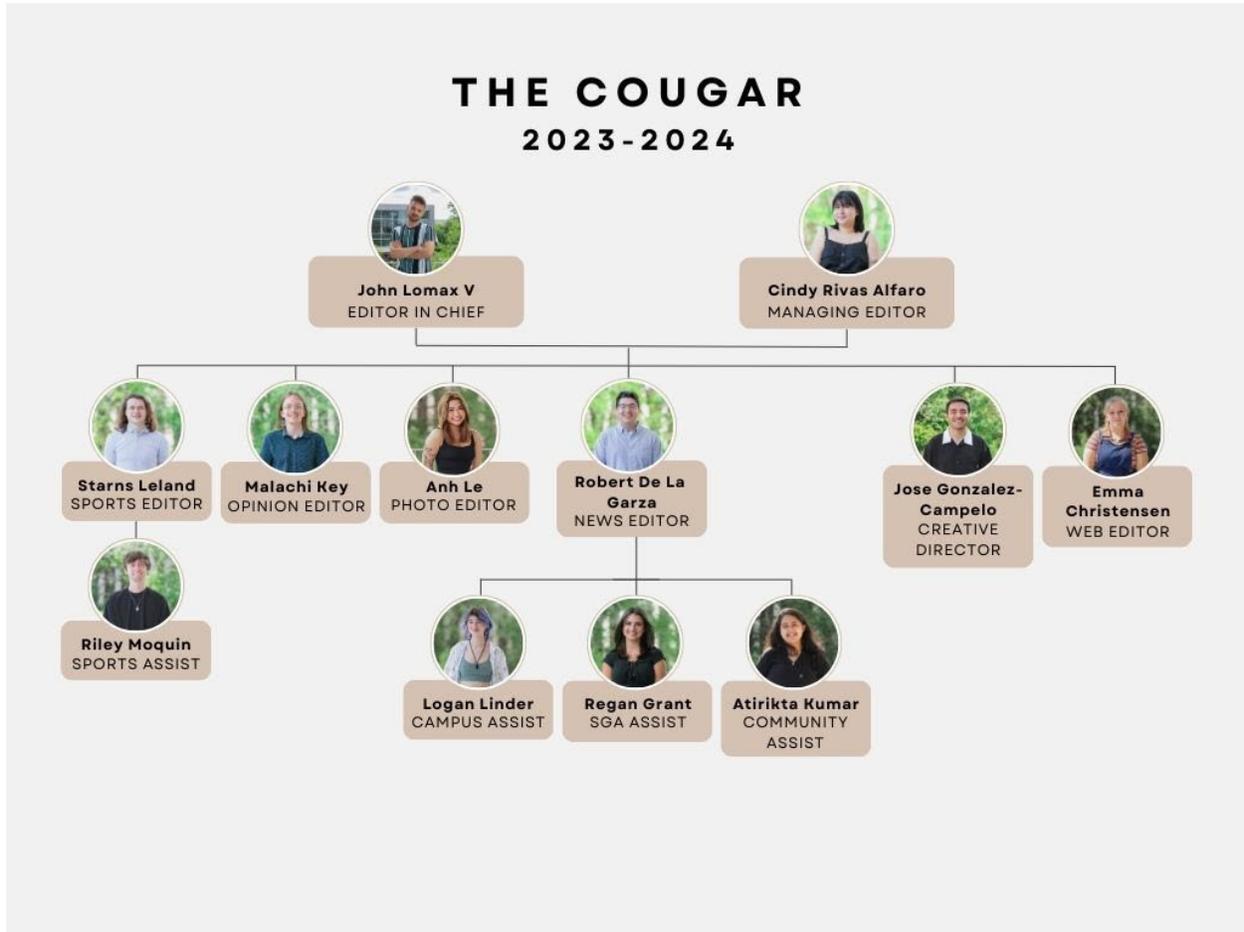
This funding has become all the more crucial for The Cougar in recent years as advertising revenue continues to decline. The past two decades have seen a steep drop-off in the value of both print and digital advertising. Despite this, The Cougar has remained resolute in its role as an impartial publication and has declined to engage in some of the more ethically-questionable practices other outlets have adopted to remain profitable. While this has preserved our integrity, it has also made the organization more dependent on student fee funds.

But the benefit The Cougar provides the student body with is immense. A free and fair press being a cornerstone of modern democracy, The Cougar provides students a platform through which they may exercise their right to free expression. In addition, our reporting also serves to keep the campus community up to date with current events and important information.

The biggest benefit to the student body, however, is our ability to educate them on the importance of journalism. In the same way that part of our mission is teaching young journalists, part of the value The Cougar provides is demonstrating to students the value of honest, community-driven reporting.

With a student population of more than 40,000, UH is now the size of a small city and represents a wide array of beliefs, ethnicities and origins. It is crucial that as we grow, the needs of our students are not swallowed up by the University's size. As long as we continue to exist, The Cougar will serve the student body by ensuring no student's story goes unheard.

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. If your unit falls under the Division of student Affairs, list your unit’s strategic initiatives and action steps identified for the 2022 – 2023 academic year and cite the specific Division of Student Affairs (DSA) Strategic Initiatives and University of Houston Strategic Goals to which they can relate (links below). If your unit does not fall under the division of student affairs, explain, in detail, the strategic plan your unit operated under. Please comment on your success in achieving these strategic initiatives/action steps. If a strategic initiative/ action step changes 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.

DSA: uh.edu/dsa/about/strategic-planning/2019-2023/

UH Goals: uh.edu/about/mission

- 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 20 pieces of content weekly, while Opinion will be required to upload 15 columns weekly.
 - 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

This goal was not met. Unfortunately, due to the high amount of staff turnover, The Cougar was forced to redirect its efforts to focus on training, workshops and awareness. Technical issues also played a role, as the thedailycougar.com was built in 2008 and had received little in the way of updates until recently. Over the Summer and during the early weeks of the Fall semester, The Cougar worked with the CSM to improve the website's performance and we have since seen a ~20% spike in views. Despite this, year-to-year The Cougar is down roughly 25% on views.

- 2) The Cougar will increase followership/audience on all social media by 10% by August 2023, 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.
 - 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.

Not only did The Cougar meet this goal, in many respects we exceeded it. Our Instagram page has increased its following by 14%, and thanks to our partnership with Media Mate, the newsletter more than doubled in subscribers from about 4,000 to 9,000 subscribers. We have also expanded our presence to Reddit, where we were recently granted the responsibility of moderating the University of Houston subreddit. Finally, since focusing the Web Editor position to be entirely dedicated to social media management, we have begun branching out to platforms like TikTok.

The Cougar has and will continue to emphasize and train its staff on professional social media conduct.

- 3) The Cougar will grow active contributing membership to 200, with an emphasis on recruiting underclassmen.
 - 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 not fall out of participating. The Cougar also will have an open house each semester to let possible new members learn about the organization.

This goal was also met — with a slight addendum. We decided it would be a better use of our resources to focus our marketing campaign during the early fall semester as opposed to summer when few students are on campus.

Various campus resources and events, to include Weeks of Welcome and Cats Back, assisted The Cougar in growing membership and interest among lower classmen. Our campaign utilized flyers, stickers and the marquee above the Starbucks in the SCS to generate awareness. In addition, dissolving the news editor 2 position allowed us to employ 6 students to lower-classmen level positions, further increasing our staff size.

The Cougar was present at both media camps hosted by the CSM and has also begun hosting bi-weekly all staff meetings in addition to weekly editorial board and content meetings.

- 4) The Cougar will improve quality of reporting and continue to find ways to collaborate with other Center for Student Media 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.
 - 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

This goal was met. A concrete feedback process has been developed where writers receive a copy of their article with all edits made via google docs. Recently we also debuted the Morning Roar in collaboration with Coog Radio. The Morning Roar is a news radio show hosted every Thursday at 9 a.m. by Cougar managing editor Cindy Rivas Alfaro.

4. Please list your 2024-2025 strategic initiatives and action steps in priority order and if operating under the DSA, cite the specific Division of Student Affairs Values and University of Houston Strategies Goals to which they relate. If your unit does not operate under the DSA, reference the strategic plan your unit operates under. Larger units may wish to group responses by subprograms. 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.

- Articulate how KPIs are tracked and how/when your unit utilizes them to measure progress towards your goals. Are there any deficiencies in your ability to measure your KPIs? If so, explain why.
- Identify the milestones laid out on the path to achieving the long-term goals you have laid out. How do these milestones contribute to your unit's ability to hold itself accountable to the long-term goals?
- In your response, identify who (besides the department director) is responsible for each milestone in the plan and for measuring each KPI you have identified.

1. **Coverage Expansion:** The Cougar will prioritize timely and efficient coverage and increase the total number of articles published by 20% by Oct. 1 2024.
 - a. The managing editor and editor in chief will draft and introduce an updated disciplinary process as part of The Cougar Staff Handbook.
 - i. This will include an automatic strike process for missed deadlines and failure to submits.
 - b. The news section will continue refining and expanding the community, campus and SGA beats. Each beat will recruit two volunteer writers to work with paid staff to develop their reporting skills.

- c. Section editors will host meetings every other week in order to foster a collaborative team environment.
 - d. Section editors will schedule and make public four hours each week in which they will be in-office and available for live edits.
 - e. The editor in chief will schedule monthly listening sessions for community leaders and individuals to express their concerns. These sessions will be advertised ahead of time through social media and in the closest print edition.
 - f. The editor in chief will send out a monthly reminder to journalism faculty to remind them to forward any outstanding students to The Cougar.
 - g. With the University's transition into the Big 12, an added emphasis will be placed on sports to expand its coverage. The Sports editor will utilize the sports Twitter account to promote engagement and expand the section's writer base. Three volunteer writers will be assigned to cover sports that have fallen to the wayside. Understanding the infeasibility of traveling to every sport's away games, efforts will be made to reach out to athletics representatives to alleviate limitations. They may include a private livestream or e-broadcast, or any other method of providing enhanced coverage to sports aside from basketball, football and baseball.
- 2. Digital Focus:** The Cougar will continue to prioritize a digital-first approach to journalism and increase the number of subscribers to its digital newsletter by 10%.
- a. The editor in chief will work with Media Mate in any way possible to ensure The Cougar has access to incoming freshman cohort's university email addresses.
 - b. The managing editor will work with the web editor to find new ways to raise the newsletter's open rate and subscriber base. The two will meet monthly with Media Mate to discuss possible methods for achieving this.
 - c. The creative director will design promotional and marketing materials with an emphasis on the newsletter.
 - d. At least one giveaway per semester will be conducted through the newsletter.
 - e. The web editor will send out a weekly poll alongside Monday's newsletter. The poll will close after Friday's newsletter, and the results will be published the following Monday.
- 3. Learning Laboratory:** To foster professional development, The Cougar will host no fewer than five professional journalists for workshops each semester. These workshops will be open to all staff and recorded for those unable to attend.
- a. It will be the responsibility of the editor in chief to coordinate potential guest speakers.
 - b. Should a speaker's stature permit it, and with permission, the web editor will promote the event ahead of time on social media and open the meeting to all UH students.
 - c. The managing editor will send one print issue a semester to a Society of Professional Journalists representative or recognized print publication for review and critique. Should none be available, a professor at the Valenti School of Communications will be contacted.
 - d. At both College Media Association conventions, each attending member will be expected to get the contact information of one professional journalist at the

convention. Upon returning, this information will be collected by the editor in chief and the individuals contacted for guest speaking opportunities.

- 4. Foster External Collaboration:** The Cougar has historically lacked in its coverage of the UH system outside of UH. Efforts will be made to improve coverage of satellite campuses, such as Sugar Land, alongside collaboration with other system publications such as The Signal.
 - a. The editor in chief, managing editor and advisor will explore the feasibility of creating a dedicated Sugar Land reporter position.
 - i. Barring this, the managing editor will establish contact with an individual or student organization on campus and meet monthly to discuss the Sugar Land campus community's concerns.
 - b. The editor in chief will set up a monthly meeting with the editor in chief of the Signal to explore potential opportunities for collaboration or cross promotion.
 - c. As the largest university in the Houston area, The Cougar should take a lead role in fostering inter-collegiate editorial collaboration. At least once per semester, the editor in chief will contact the student leaders of each Houston-area university to explore the potential for a Houston student media leadership council.

5. 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 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 this data. If your unit holds events, please provide revenue sources breakdown of each revenue stream including but not limited to the number of:

- Tickets sold/number of attendees recorded
- Merchandise
- Concessions sold/distributed
- Revenue generated from these sales

As with most media outlets, The Cougar's best quantitative measures for evaluating engagement include site views, social media following, and newsletter open rate. While website difficulties and staff turnover have resulted in an overall decrease in total views, our Instagram following has increased by 14% and we have gained 5,000 new subscribers to our newsletter — which has an open rate as high as 83% with an average of 56%.

Community feedback, corrections and criticism also play a key role in evaluating a publication's performance. This year, Media Mate conducted a survey that found that 56% of students were satisfied with The Cougar's coverage. This is corroborated by the number of comments posted on articles published to thedailycougar.com. In just the fall semester alone, The Cougar has received 22 comments from audience members. This is in comparison to 0 for the years of 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022.

Finally, we recently began collecting rough data on our print edition's performance. Unfortunately, resource limitations and other constraints have made it difficult to collect reliable data. Paid writers and editors are currently responsible for delivery of our print every wednesday. Limitations on hours and general time constraints already encountered in the course of their normal jobs make tracking print inventory difficult, if not impossible. That being said we have started to "eyeball" racks during delivery to identify those with extremely low traffic.

These measures are, of course, imperfect. Website views have proven to be especially unreliable as they tend to spike when stories of external interest are published — meaning they are not being read by our audience but have matriculated into the greater media sphere. Social media engagement too, has been deceptive. For example, our X account is our largest with over 12,000 followers. However, recent instability on the platform has resulted in little to no engagement.

Ultimately, The Cougar's best measure is more qualitative than quantitative. In recent years The Cougar's reporting has exposed unethical practices within the campus community. In 2019, Cougar alumni Jhair Romero exposed a UH professor as having a history of sexual misconduct. And again last year, when the Cougar reported on the Student Government President's extensive controversial changes to the election code.

Looking forward, The Cougar should explore once again hiring a delivery service that can provide clean data on the popularity of its print edition. Print is the only medium that ensures our reporting serves the campus community exclusively.

6. If your unit concluded FY2023 with a Fund 3 addition to Fund Equity in excess of \$5,000, please describe the conditions which cause the addition and provide a line-item identification of the budgetary sources(s) of the addition (I.e., lapsed salary, conference travel, etc.).

No funding was returned.

7. Recognizing that the potential to generate additional Student Service Fee income for FY2025 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 5.0% in your total FY2025 base Student Service Fee budget request and provide a line-item explanation of where budgetary cuts would be made.

Seeing as the lion's share of The Cougar's allocated funding currently goes to student stipends, The Cougar would accommodate a 5% reduction in its overall budget by removing one full-time editorial board position. The board is currently staffed with a skeleton crew relative to most other major universities' news rooms, and any reduction in our overall budget would directly negatively impact our ability to report on and serve the campus community.

8. Please discuss any budget or organizational changes experienced since your last year (FY2024) 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.

This year, two major changes were made to the organizational structure of The Cougar. The first was the removal of the news editor 2 position. While two editors provides immense value, it can often be difficult to ensure both work collaboratively. It also created additional institutional inertia because major decisions had to be approved by both editors. With that in mind, and with a desire to involve more students and at lower levels of experience, the decision was made to dissolve the position and reallocate those funds to create an additional assistant editor position and three additional staff writer positions.

Not only has this allowed us to involve more students, but it has also created a more defined upward trajectory. Outstanding volunteer writers are promoted to senior staff writers, then to assistant editors and finally to section editors and upward.

In addition, with the introduction of a third assistant editor, The Cougar was able to divide news into three distinct sections: SGA, community, and campus. This way, writers are able to develop deeper relationships with the individuals that make up their particular beat. Ideally, this will foster a more comprehensive community-based approach to journalism.

The Cougar also adjusted the Web Editor's responsibilities to focus solely on social media content. Previously, the position was considered a closing editor and was expected to have comprehensive knowledge of journalism, grammar and style. This presented a challenge in hiring in addition to a very broad scope of responsibility for a single student. Now, the web editor is charged with producing social media content across six platforms while also maintaining a unified student-friendly tone across all accounts.

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.

- **If applicable, what can be done to increase donations, sponsorship sales, and other revenue streams? Please answer each separately.**

The only other additional funding source available to The Cougar is ad revenue. The Cougar currently generates ad dollars through the sale of space in its print, digital, and physical stand locations on campus.

10. Does your unit generate revenue? (Please do not address donations in this question) If your unit does not generate revenue, respond "not applicable. If so:

- Provide your unit's P&L statement for the current fiscal year and trailing five-years showing all revenue streams for your unit.
- Provide line-item data for each revenue stream.
- For each revenue stream, provide an explanation of the nature of the revenue and briefly articulate the successes and failures for each line item.

The Cougar generates additional revenue through the sale of digital and physical advertising space. To facilitate this, The Cougar, through the CSM, has partnered with an external advertising agency called Media Mate. Media Mate markets a portfolio of collegiate publications to various advertisers and manages the sale and coordination of The Cougar's advertising.

The Cougar is constantly working with Media Mate to find novel approaches to marketing The Cougar's ad space. Recently, The Cougar has begun hosting on-campus events where advertisers who purchase a print ad are eligible to come on campus and market their products to college students. With the recent growth of the newsletter, The Cougar also has seen renewed interest in its newsletter ad space, alongside an uptick in social media ads purchased on our Instagram account.

11. Does your unit raise money from donors and sponsors? If your unit does not receive donations or sponsorships, respond "not applicable." If so:

- Identify key staff members responsible for development and seeking sponsorships.
- Provide financials for the current fiscal year, as well as the trailing five fiscal years including:
 - An analysis of your development activities. Include a breakdown of the nominal quantity of donors donating \$20m+, \$10m+, \$5m+ \$1m+, \$500k+, \$100k+, \$50k+, \$25k+, \$10k+, \$5k+, \$1k+, \$100+. Provide this both in terms of lifetime contributions and annual contributions.
 - An analysis of your sponsorship activities. Include a breakdown of total sponsorship dollars and identify your top twenty-five (25) sponsorship deals.

Though generally speaking, The Cougar largely does not collect donations or sponsorships. That being said, last year The Cougar sold several sweatshirts to raise additional funds for non-SFAC supported conference travel. The sales totalled to roughly \$600.

12. 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.

At first glance it may seem that there are many other departments that overlap with The Cougar's mission. Virtually every college and department has some form of newsroom, blog or other outlet through which they disseminate information to the public.

However, one crucial distinction between these organizations and The Cougar is that The Cougar is the sole publication that is both student-run and committed to the principles of unbiased, ethical reporting. While department blogs and newsletters may use the term "news" they do not practice journalism — they practice public relations.

Almost all of these publications are also beholden to the University. Meaning the administration can set guidelines and pull articles should they fail to comply with University marketing guidelines. The Cougar, on the other hand, is beholden only to the truth. Note this does not mean we can publish whatever we want. As journalists, we are held accountable through defamation and slander laws. This creates a self-correcting situation wherein, should we publish an article that is inaccurate, it will be duly corrected by our community. If these corrections go unheeded, then they will be addressed in a court of law.

There are also other student media organizations such as CoogRadio and CoogTV. Apart from focusing on other mediums (radio and television, respectively) neither of these two USOs place the same focus on journalism that The Cougar does. CoogTV, while they do operate a news team, focus broadly more on the production of digital media to include: skits, shorts and other non-news based content. Similarly, CoogRadio also largely emphasizes Life and Arts style content. The Cougar has traditionally been considered as the primary platform for students interested in pursuing journalism.

13. What percentage of department M&O is allocated to marketing?

- Please detail your comprehensive marketing strategy towards the student body including metrics used to measure the effectiveness of the marketing strategy.
- How much revenue is allocated towards the marketing strategy?

A small portion of the funds leftover after students' stipends are deducted is used to help shore up the purchase of merchandise and branded Cougar materials. Roughly eighty-five percent of the funds allocated by SFAC are used to compensate our student stipend leaders.

14. If any of your funding from the student service fee goes to your general operating fund, please detail where any student service fees you received went and what they were spent on as well as future intentions if granted. Otherwise please respond "not applicable".

Not applicable.

15. How does your unit contribute to campus culture and improve the student experience? How is the effectiveness of these contributions measured by your unit if at all? What else can your unit do going forward to continue to improve your contribution to the student experience?

- Does your unit contribute to turning students into coogs for life?

As the student newspaper, The Cougar is crucial to fostering an inclusive and vibrant campus culture. Through our reporting, The Cougar gives voice to the various communities that make up the UH diaspora. In doing so, not only does The Cougar encourage current students to engage with University culture, it also serves as a one-stop-shop for prospective students and graduates to stay up to date on campus news.

Currently, The Cougar uses a variety of metrics to measure its effectiveness. Views, social media following and newsletter open rate all serve to inform staff of the publications performance. Last year, The Cougar also worked with Media Mate to conduct a readership study to measure audience engagement. Of the 800 respondents, 56% said they read The Cougar. Of the 44% who said they do not, 58% cited not knowing it existed as the primary reason for not reading The Cougar — signaling the need for additional awareness/marketing on campus to ensure students are aware of our publication.

With that in mind The Cougar has identified three key areas in which it can better serve the student population:

- 1. Awareness:** Based on the results of the readership survey, The Cougar has determined that brand awareness remains an issue with our audience. This year, in addition to signage/leafleting already conducted, The Cougar will continue to expand its presence on campus through marquee advertisements, table talks and other avenues.
- 2. Community Engagement:** Being that the University community comprises a variety of ethnicities, cultures and backgrounds, The Cougar should continue to engage with various campus leaders and representatives to ensure the needs of these communities are being met.
- 3. Brand Unity:** Over the years, The Cougar has used a variety of different visual styles and logos to represent the publication. This has undoubtedly contributed to the publication's issues with recognition and awareness. This year, the editorial board will draft and implement branding guidelines to ensure The Cougar's visual appearance remains consistent.