



The **Cougar**

PRINT WEEKLY. DIGITAL DAILY



Student Fees Advisory Committee

FY 2016 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: to provide students, faculty, staff and alumni with accurate, relevant news in a timely fashion and through as many different mediums as possible; to serve as a public forum and a voice for the student body, and to function as a practical learning environment for student journalists.

By providing our readers a source of news dedicated to the UH community and its adapting needs, The Cougar helps them become informed members of both the campus and city's community, things that The Cougar's board members feel naturally intertwine. The bigger our campus gets, the greater the need for constant and effective communication. The Cougar becomes the eyes, ears and voice of the students, providing them with information regarding issues affecting the campus. It is The Cougar's goal to provide relevant news and information to students in the most convenient medium for the reader – as the nature of the journalism industry transitions from one founded on print media to one reliant on digital platforms, so must the organization adapt to most effectively mirror the nature of the professional world.

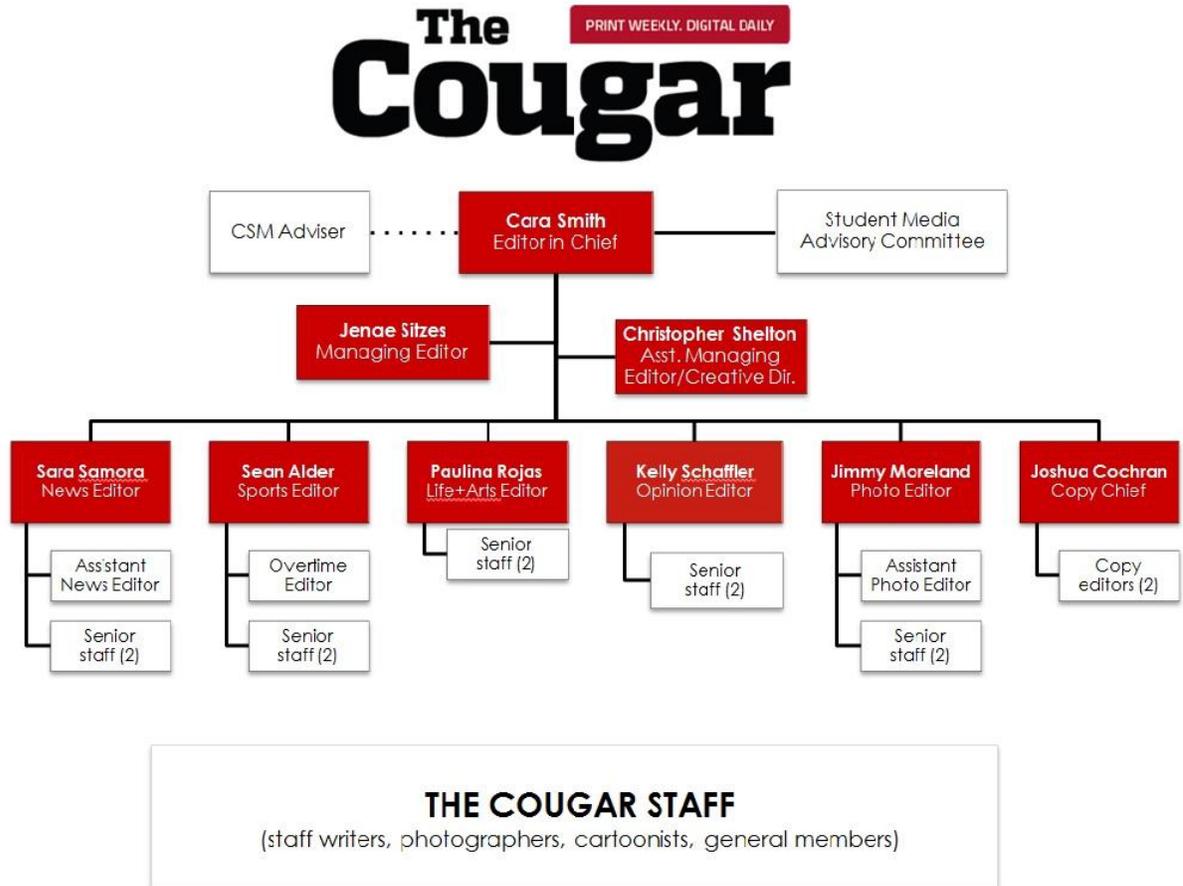
Through our different methods of sharing information, The Cougar provides a platform for students to tell stories about University, ask important questions and engage with the community. By remaining entirely student-run, The Cougar also gives them practical and relevant experience in journalism, digital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

As a result of their experiences, The Cougar's members become more prepared for their chosen careers. The organization gives them a chance to hone in and develop a variety of skills applicable to a vast range of professions, both in and out of media. It allows students to gain experience in leadership, writing and editing, photography, planning and managing projects, website management, illustrating, social media, page layout, and more. The leadership team, directly funded by student fees, gains a wide variety of skills that cannot be replicated by a classroom or an internship. Also, it's becoming increasingly expected of graduates seeking a job in journalism to have experience at their college publication. The Cougar, in addition to the Center for Student Media's other publications, provides this integral jumping board from the collegiate environment to the professional world.

After thriving for generations without direct fee support as a student organization, The Cougar now relies on this critical source of funding to protect the newsroom from the revenue declines that have damaged the publishing industry. These fees are also critical for The Cougar to remain a competitive and desirable student organization on a campus where 70 percent of its students receive need-based financial aid. We seek to provide compensation for the tireless hours of hard work and selfless dedication that our organization's members put in place for this organization, which is founded on providing a priceless service to the University.

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.



3. List your unit's strategic initiatives and action steps identified for the 2013-2014 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. Improve coverage of the UH community. The administration made an effort in developing connections in niche areas of the university through the newly-implemented beat system, used in News, Sports and Arts, as well as seeking out stories that resonated with The Cougar's active alumni readership, such as alumni profiles and stories about businesses founded by UH alum. Expanding the scope of The Cougar's coverage while not sacrificing any UH coverage is a direction the last administration looked toward, and it's something that the current administration seeks to continue.

a. The Editor in Chief will meet regularly with representatives from University Relations, the Student Government Association, the Staff Council and the Faculty Senate to discuss general ideas for coverage of the University as a whole. The previous Editor in chief met regularly with the Student Government Association President, and the University's faculty senate provided insight. The Student Media Advisory Committee met regularly with University relations.

b. Editors of news, sports and arts will establish focused areas of coverage called beats and assign writers to keep in contact with sources from within those beats. The previous editor in chief enacted the beat policy for News and Sports, which helped writers develop professional connections within their beat.

Beats for the News section include administration, Student Government Association, the C.T. Bauer School of Business, Blaffer Art Museum, the Conrad N. Hilton College of Hotel and Restaurant Management, the creative writing program, politics, city, crime, research, Counseling and Psychological Services, the Wellness and Recreation Center, the Health Center and more. Sports' beats included men's basketball, women's basketball, volleyball, football, tennis, track, men's golf, women's golf, soccer, swimming & diving and cross country.

c. Editors will receive training on how to make requests of the University and other state institutions under the Texas Public Information Act. TPIA is a powerful tool for any member of the public who wants to be informed, and it is important for any Texas journalist to be familiar with its use, and all members of The Daily Cougar's editorial board received training on how to access public information under the Texas Public Information Act during an Edit Camp session provided by the Center for Student Media.

d. Continue building our online presence. The Cougar will commit to updating the website with new content seven days a week while class is in session, and weekly during semester breaks. The previous administration accomplished this, publishing content seven days a week throughout academic periods. All sections were held to this standard. The Cougar's web presence

grew last year, as the organization implemented a Twitter page, Instagram, Tumblr, Google+ and began using our pre-existing YouTube account.

2. Strengthen organization and increase campus presence. The Cougar will work to strengthen a tradition of excellence and build its reputation among student organizations. To that end, these steps must be taken:

a. Update the staff handbook and ensure it includes all editorial policies, guidelines and procedures, which will be given to all members, new and returning. The former editor updated the staff handbook and constitution to reflect the growing needs of the industry. The former administration also wrote a social media policy based on the American Society for News Editor's policy, which outlines exactly what editors are and are not permitted to do on their personal social media accounts, as well as how to treat The Cougar's house account. The handbook has already been updated in this current administration, as has the staff handbook and Constitution to reflect the addition.

b. Commit to having a presence at key organizational fairs and large events for recruiting and community interaction. One of the previous administration's key focuses was to increase the organization's visibility on campus. For the first time, The Cougar became a regular fixture at the PGH walkway throughout the semester, as well as at Cougar Carnival, Cat's Back and other campus-wide organization fairs.

c. Host a town hall meeting on a focused campus issue with a connection to news coverage. The board was not able to plan this event because of the time devoted to editorial and design planning committees for The Cougar's switch from a daily to weekly print publication.

d. Host an SGA presidential candidate debate in Spring 2014 in partnership. The Cougar's SGA presidential candidate debate, hosted in the Farish Hall Kiva Room and moderated by professor Simon Bott, attracted about 100 attendees and received positive feedback through The Cougar's live-tweeting and social media promotions. The Cougar also published an expansive breakdown of each of the four presidential candidates, detailing the issues important to each candidate's political party, as well as to individual candidates. The coverage proved itself as a compliment to the debate. Copies of The Cougar's coverage were passed out to students in attendance. Student Video Network's video team also provided on-site video interviews.

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.

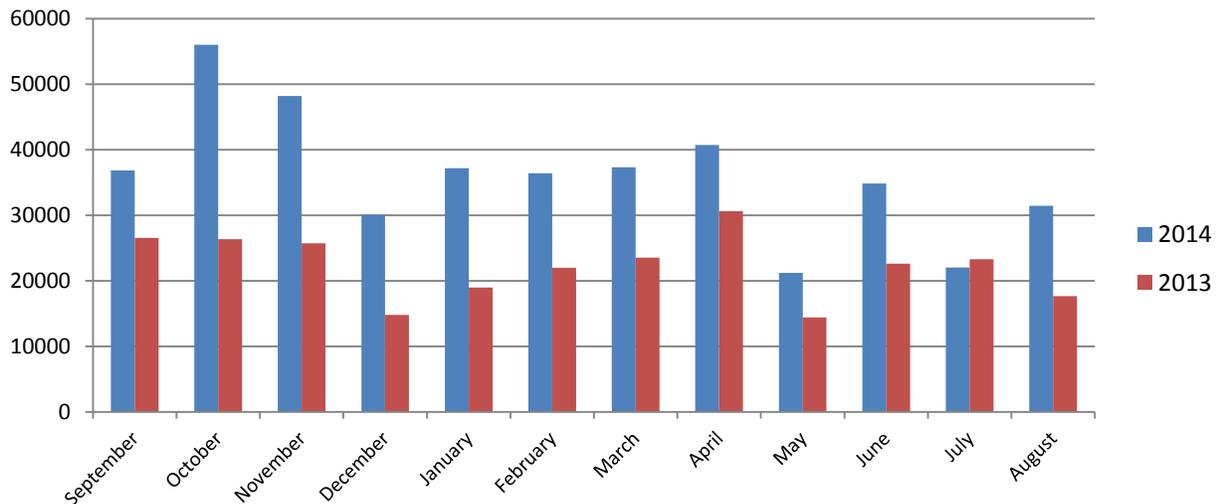
The Cougar uses a variety of data-tracking sources to stay in-tune with our audience’s behavior, media trends and medium preferences, including industry-standard Google Analytics and WordPress stats.

Content production and readership

2012-2013	Articles published	Online views	2013-2014	Articles Published	Online views	Diff +/- articles	Diff +/- views
September	214	80,925	September	388	116,309	174	35,384
October	278	75,244	October	439	135,025	161	59,781
November	223	65,413	November	309	110,420	86	45,007
December	95	40,916	December	109	63,726	14	22,810
January	164	52,157	January	281	84,774	117	32,617
February	231	56,333	February	345	96,196	114	39,863
March	217	55,970	March	295	90,173	78	34,203
April	293	69,292	April	362	105,260	69	35,968
May	51	37,063	May	60	53,997	9	16,934
June	98	62,774	June	91	74,676	-7	11,902
July	110	61,338	July	62	47,849	-48	-13,489
August	121	55764	August	121	73672	0	17,908

Online unique visitors/users

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



Social media followership

Facebook followers

2013: 2,946 2014: 3,729 (+26.5%)

Twitter followers

2013: 5,286 2014: 7,103 (+34.3%)

Email subscriptions & open rate

Email subscribers

2013: 2,574 2014: 3,246 (+26.1%)

Open Rate (proportion of email issues actually read)

2013: 32.1% 2014: 30.8%

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

2013: 33.3% 2014: 28.1%

Note: Additional readership metrics and discussion have been provided in the supplemental report to SFAC about Cougar Readership and Revenue.

5. Please discuss any budget or organizational changes experienced since your last (FY2014) 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 FY2013 with a Fund 3 addition to Fund Equity, please describe the conditions which caused the addition.

The Cougar's budget was impacted during the transition from the old Student Publications department budget to the new Center for Student Media budget model, which houses each media unit in separate budget codes. These expenses, totaling \$36,199.50, have been identified on the spreadsheet as "CSM Transitional Expenses." Moving forward, these expenses will be charged to the correct account for Center for Student Media.

In addition, \$11,142.61 in printing costs fell into FY 2014 but were originally budgeted to be paid in FY 2013. As these printing costs were paid late, the charges affected the FY 14 actual printing total. This overage has been separated and identified on the budget spreadsheet as "FY 13 Printing Carryover."

These two budget changes were covered by CSM revenue fund equity, which is indicated in The Cougar's income section of the budget spreadsheet.

6. Please list your 2014-2015 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.

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.

- i) Develop an editorial position dedicated to The Cougar's social media presence, marketing campaigns, outreach coordination and event planning.
- ii) Continue the production of The Cougar News Show with CoogRadio and expand collaboration with Student Video Network for their production of "@UH."
- iii) Host an annual town hall meeting, where the UH student body can engage in a public dialogue with a prominent city/state figures(s).
- iv) 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.
- v) Establish a "Texas politics" beat, covering city, state and national politics, to fall under the supervision of the News editor.
- vi) Integrate interactive opportunities for attendees of the annual Student Government Association presidential debate.
- vii) Require section editors to participate in five outreach initiatives per semester (Street Team shifts, PGH tabling, passing out Overtime at tailgate, etc.)

2) The Cougar will restructure editors' primary focus to the online publication.

- i) Section editors will be required to upload three pieces of content per day, including articles, photo galleries, lists, long form pieces, etc. (excluding Opinion).
- ii) Train editors and assistant editors in search-engine optimization and web publishing strategies during EditCamp.
- iii) 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.

3) The Cougar will improve the quality of work produced by student journalists.

- i) Host a twice-yearly workshop for The Cougar's entire staff to introduce them to the fundamentals of journalism and its principles.
- ii) Each editor will be required to produce one in-depth investigative piece per semester that resonates with the UH community and its alumni audience

- iii) Train all photographers on the industry standard, Adobe Photoshop. Also, train assistant photo editor and senior staff photographers on basic video capabilities.
- iv) 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.

4) The Cougar will streamline its workflow to increase speed and efficiency of content production.

- i) Creative Director assigns page layouts and works directly with section editors in their page designs and regular print features.
- ii) 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.
- iii) Managing editor enforces the implementation of the beat system in News, Sports and Life & Arts.

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

- i) Assign street team or members of the news staff to set up tables at the UC and PGH to gather email addresses in exchange for prize giveaways at least six weeks out of the year.
- ii) 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.
- iii) Incorporate content from SVN/CoogTV and Coog Radio into the email subscription to add interest and drive traffic to our media partners.

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 now 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.

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 worldwide 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 meets daily and is held to a daily deadline that no other on-campus organization experiences.