

2019-20 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 weekly print edition, monthly lifestyle magazine, online, on social media or through our email edition.

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.

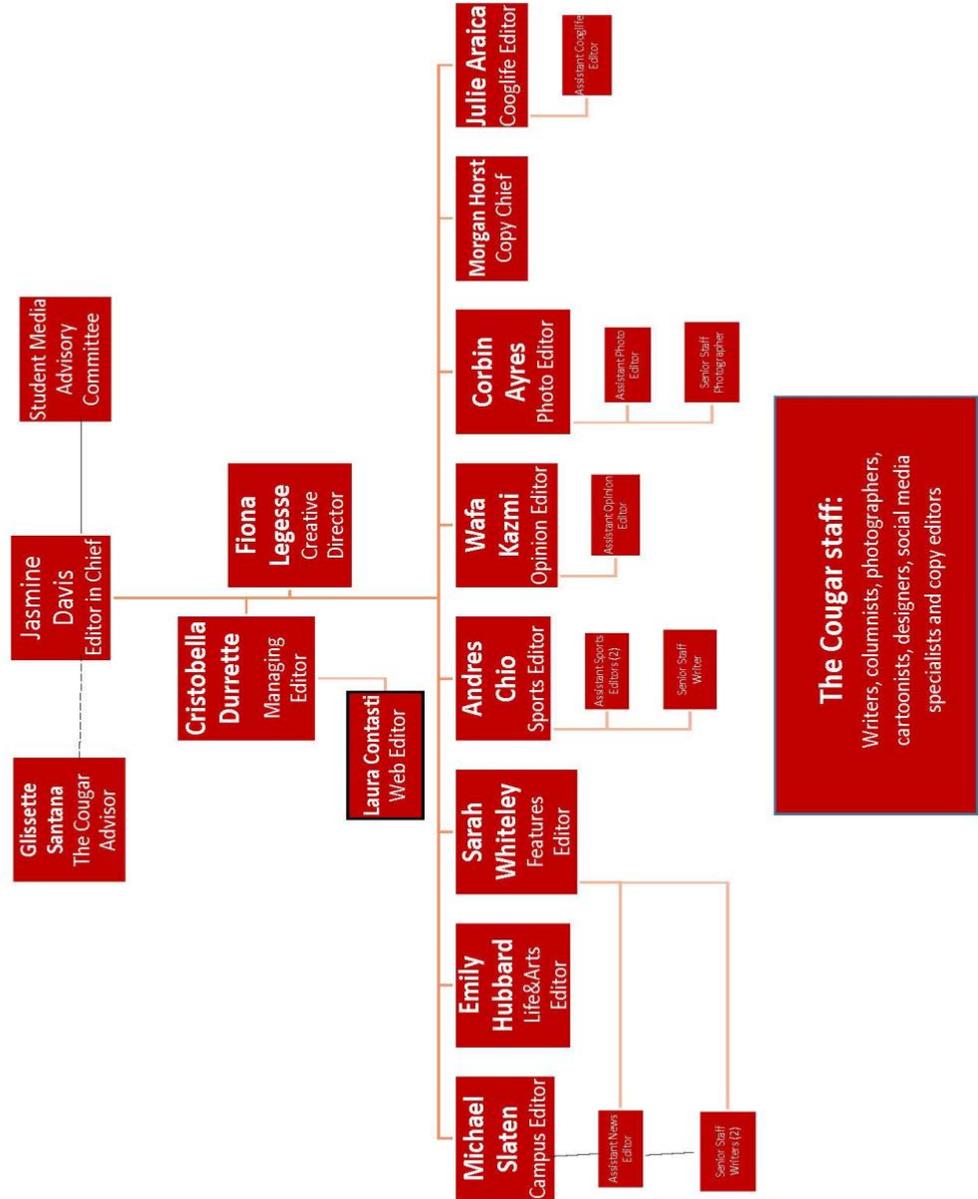
The Cougar and Cooglif, in conjunction with the Center for Student Media, provide students of all majors an integral jumping board from the collegiate environment to the professional world. There is no other place on campus that allows students to play a role in the journalism process from start to finish, 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.

In 2016, The Cougar's print edition won the prestigious Pacemaker Award — the highest honor in collegiate journalism. The Cougar is a finalist for this year's award, with winners to be announced on Oct. 27. Cooglif was additionally a finalist for the same award during its first year of publication. Our place in this competitive environment signals that students trained at the Center for Student Media participate in one of the country's top 18 student media programs. With years of recognition from the Society for Professional Journalists and the Texas Intercollegiate Press Association, The Cougar has reached a new level of excellence.

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 2017-2018 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 ... all help advance the mission of The Cougar and the mission of the University of Houston.

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 Initiative 2)**
 - a. **Section editors will be required to upload at least three pieces of content per day including articles, photo galleries, lists, long-form pieces, etc. Half of the content published every day should be produced with short turnaround times, putting an emphasis on breaking news.** Due to an unprecedented rate of staff turnover, this goal was not met across all sections. We will continue to work toward this daily quota goal during FY19, and have worked to refine our training and on-boarding process for new members of the staff so as to minimize stipend leader turnover in the future. With the continuing work of the web editor, we hope to gradually increase the amount of daily coverage featured on our website and social media channels.
 - b. **CSM will train editors and assistant editors in advanced web publishing strategies, search-engine optimization, social media analytics and community engagement.** The Cougar's adviser, in collaboration with stipend leaders of The Cougar, hosted multiple formal and impromptu trainings on these topics. A continuing duty of the web editor is to provide section editors with a weekly analytics digest regarding the performance of our online and social media content. Through this practice, we aim to create an atmosphere of continued learning in the realm of community engagement — a facet of ever-increasing importance in professional newsrooms throughout the country.
 - c. **Have four workshops a semester training editors, assistant editors, staff writers and photographers in topics such as photojournalism, including DSLR and smartphone photography, feature writing, video editing, social media, etc.** This goal was met by regular workshops hosted by The Cougar's adviser throughout the academic term, in addition to weekly editor-led workshops over the summer providing a more in-depth look at these topics and others important to the success of The Cougar, such as culture reporting and breaking news.
 - d. **Editor in chief and the advisor will host two new reporter workshops each semester.** This goal was met as part of The Cougar's push to better prepare staff and editorial board members for their positions on the paper, with the goal being increased retention.
 - e. **Editor in chief and the adviser will host one media professional each month to speak to staff about investigative stories, internships and reporting strategies.** Though multiple media professionals came to The Cougar, the goal of hosting one individual per month was not met.

2. **The Cougar will increase followership/audience on all social media by 25% by August 2018. (DSAES Initiative 5)**
 - a. **Editor in chief will develop at least three social media marketing campaigns with an emphasis on community outreach and engagement.** The execution of this step was delegated to the newly-funded web editor position, but was not accomplished due to high turnover and a primary focus on sharing The Cougar's content.
 - 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.** This goal was met through multiple efforts. First, a joint initiative by the web editor and managing editor led to the creation of a set of social media guidelines that all members of the staff are required to follow. Second, The Cougar's strike policy was re-written to include a provision for a professional, un-biased appearance on all Cougar-affiliated social media. Third, The Cougar's adviser led multiple social media-themed workshops emphasizing the importance of a professional appearance, in addition to using social media as a tool to increase individual followership.
 - c. **Content will be shared across all social media at least two times if still relevant, including The Cougar's sports and Coogliflife accounts.** The Cougar has begun reposting relevant content across social media channels, but has not yet reached the goal of sharing all content twice. In addition to reposting current content, the web editor position has been amended to allow for content central to the University's history to be reposted throughout the year. This semester, that effort included re-sharing our coverage of Hurricane Harvey leading up to the anniversary of the storm.
3. **The Cougar will grow active contributing membership to 80, with an emphasis on recruiting underclassmen. (DSAES Initiative 1)**
 - a. **Emphasize participation between the editorial board and staff with volunteer opportunities.** The Cougar did not reach this goal and does not plan to actively seek out volunteer opportunities in the future.
 - 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.** All new members of The Cougar are now required to attend a training session on journalism basics and Cougar policy with our adviser after they are hired. Additionally, the managing editor is working to develop a position-specific onboarding process, ranging from staff writers to executive student leaders.
 - c. **Host a session of media camp for all members of the organization to participate and learn alongside the editors.** During the Center for Student Media's Media Camp/Edit Camp training sessions, all staff members were invited to attend sessions of their choosing.
 - d. **Encourage participation in growing teams, especially the copy editing team and the graphic design team.** The copy editing team has grown substantially over the last year, now representing one of The Cougar's largest sections in terms of general member participation. While not large in number, the fostering of a team of graphic designers by the Creative Director led to an increase in graphic elements present in The Cougar and provided a pathway to organizational leadership for previously under-represented members of the staff.

4. **The Cougar will improve the quality of work and increase multimedia production. (DSAES Initiative 1)**
- a. **Increase staff collaboration with CoogTV 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 print or multimedia project per semester that resonates with the UH community.** Nearly every member of The Cougar’s editorial board produced an in-depth feature during the 2017-18 term. The focus of this goal has since broadened to include the facilitation of projects that resonate with the UH community, such as the creation of special topic-centric issues of the newspaper.
 - c. **Workshops will be held for the entire Cougar staff in specific topics such as photojournalism, opinion writing, storytelling, editing, social media and analytics.** These workshops were held by our adviser in the form of “brown bag” lunchtime trainings, in addition to multiple trainings held by executive members of the editorial board over the summer.

4. Please discuss the means that you are using 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 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 and Cooglif in FY 2016-17 and FY 2017-18.

Content Production and Readership: The Cougar

2016-2017	Articles published	Online views	2017-2018	Articles Published	Online views	Diff +/- articles	Diff +/- views
September	198	94,190	September	157	120,981	-41	+26,791
October	234	77,726	October	145	64,533	-89	-13,193
November	173	79,395	November	115	41,105	-58	-38,290
December	52	42,410	December	17	24,744	-35	-17,666
January	112	64,012	January	79	32,222	-33	-31,790
February	179	77,090	February	98	45,322	-81	-31,768
March	147	89,914	March	95	49,604	-52	-40,310
April	107	69,087	April	85	41,427	-22	-27,660
May	31	36,849	May	27	33,556	-4	-3,293
June	1	21,872	June	26	26,679	+25	+4,807
July	3	19,372	July	13	26,215	+10	+6,843
August	90	49,828	August	72	35,034	-18	-14,794

	1,327	721,745		929	541,422	-398	-180,323
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Much of the decrease in articles published, and subsequent page views, between FY2016-17 and FY2017-18 can be attributed to the massive change in age demographic among members of The Cougar’s editorial board. For the majority of 2016-2017, no fewer than half of the Editorial Board at The Cougar was comprised of seniors who had both years of experience in multiple roles at The Cougar and numerous prominent journalism internships on their resumes. After their graduation in May 2017, The Cougar experienced a sort of generational gap in organization leadership — even the most veteran remaining members of the board had significantly less leadership and journalism experience. The 2017-18 Editorial Board made it a goal to recruit more freshman so this generational gap could be prevented in future boards, but still the remaining stipend editors were ill-equipped to train the influx of underclassmen student journalists as a result of the lost expertise. The Cougar experienced high turnover, especially in the news section, due to the significantly younger staff’s lesser ability to provide enough training and mentorship to groom student journalists to perform in adherence to expectations for stipend editors. However, heavy underclassmen recruitment efforts by that board have left the 2018-19 stipend board with staff members in all levels of classification.

Content Production and Readership: Cooglife

2016-2017	Articles published	Online views	2017-2018	Articles Published	Online views	Diff +/- articles	Diff +/- views
September	25	2,795	September	27	2,923	+2	+128
October	32	3,711	October	38	3,411	+6	-300
November	34	3,366	November	20	2,169	-14	-1,197
December	4	2,136	December	11	2,119	+7	-17
January	10	2,257	January	17	1,675	+7	-582
February	26	3,754	February	31	2,864	+5	-890
March	25	2,522	March	24	3,072	-1	+550
April	14	2,198	April	21	3,314	+7	+1,116
May	10	1,528	May	5	2,390	-5	+862
June	4	1,417	June	4	2,396	0	+979

July	0	916	July	6	2,294	+6	+1,378
August	7	1,395	August	6	3,671	-1	+2,276
	191	27,995		210	32,298	+19	+4,303

Since the start of Cooglif in Fall 2015, page views on Cooglif.com have risen steadily due to an increase in production and an emphasis on online-exclusive content.

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

2017: 7,354 2018: 7,560* (+2.80%)

Twitter followers

2017: 11,668 2018: 12,710* (+8.93%)

Instagram followers

2017: 1,635 2018: 1,657 (+1.35%)

*2018 totals reflect the creation of an additional Facebook and Twitter page for the sports section @thecougarsports

Email subscriptions & open rate

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

Email subscribers

2017: 4,265 2018: 4,329 (+1.50%)

Open Rate (proportion of email issues actually read)

2017: 25.06% 2018: 22.63% (-9.70%)

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

2017: 15.64% 2018: 13.23% (-15.41%)

- 5. Please discuss any budget or organizational changes experienced since your last (FY2019) 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 January, The Cougar added (SFAC) the Features Editor position in an effort to alleviate strain on the News Editor, whose title transitioned to “Campus Editor.” The Features Editor absorbed the print duties of the News section and as a result, mitigated turnover in the Campus Editor position. The end goal for the addition of this stipend editor is to increase content production in the News section by allowing the Campus Editor to focus on daily and breaking news coverage — a facet of the position that was previously put on the back burner Sunday through Tuesday in favor of weekly print production. Once the duties of the Features Editor have been fully fleshed-out, we expect to increase total News production by more than 10 stories per week.

- 6. If your unit concluded FY2018 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 2019-2020 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.

- 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, Sports and Opinion section editors will be required to upload at least three pieces of content per day, including articles, photo galleries, lists, long-form pieces, etc. Half of the content published every day should be produced with short turnaround times, putting an emphasis on breaking news. The Features Editor will be responsible the News section in the weekly print edition, in addition to publishing at least three web-exclusive features throughout each week.
 - b. CSM will continue to train editors and assistant editors in advanced web publishing strategies, search-engine optimization, social media analytics and community engagement.
 - c. The Cougar will host four workshops a semester training editors, assistant editors, staff writers and photographers in topics such as photojournalism, including DSLR and smartphone photography, feature writing, video editing, social media, etc.
 - d. Editor in chief and the adviser will host two new reporter workshops each semester.
 - e. Editor in chief and the adviser will host one media professional each month to speak to staff about investigative stories, internships and reporting strategies.
 - f. 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.
- 2. The Cougar will increase followership/audience on all social media by 20% by August 2019. (DSAES Resources Initiative)**
 - a. Editor in chief and managing editor 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, including The Cougar's sports and Coogliflife accounts. The editor in chief and the managing editor will increase audience engagement by studying the social media of successful student newspapers at other universities.
 - d. The Cougar will develop a consistent voice and brand across social media channels.
 - e. The Managing Editor will recruit and nurture a staff of social media specialists who will assist in posting content and engaging with our audience across social media platforms.
- 3. The Cougar will grow active contributing membership to 80, with an emphasis on recruiting underclassmen. (DSAES Student Success Initiative)**

- a. Emphasize increased participation between the editorial board and newspaper staff by requiring editors to provide individualized feedback to contributing staff members at least once per semester.
- 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 a session of media camp for all members of the organization to participate and learn alongside editors.
- d. Encourage participation in growing teams, especially the graphic design and social media management team.

4. The Cougar will improve the quality of work and increase multimedia production. (DSAES Resources Initiative)

- a. Increase staff collaboration with CoogTV and Coog Radio in order to learn general skills of both video and radio, and how to integrate audio and video into online articles. Moving forward, CSM-wide collaboration on The Cougar's end will include both collaborative storytelling of certain events and topics, in addition to skills-sharing events between the organizations. These skills-shares will allow members of the stipend board in all three organizations to learn writing, videography and audio production from the other organizations, since the time constraints of being a stipend leader in any of the three often prevent student leaders from learning outside skills.
- b. Each editor will be required to produce at least one in-depth print or multimedia project per semester that resonates with the UH community.
- c. Each member of the editorial board will be required to specialize in at least one form of multimedia, ranging from videography to the production of interactive graphics.
- d. Workshops will be held for the entire Cougar staff in specific topics such as photojournalism, opinion writing, storytelling, editing, social media and analytics.
- e. The Editor in chief will encourage members of the editorial board and staff to continue their learning outside the classroom by making use of external training opportunities (free online journalism trainings, google tools trainings, advice from other student editors).

- 5. Recognizing that the potential to generate additional Student Service Fee income for FY2020 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 FY2020 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.

- 6. 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.

7. 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.