

## 2020-21 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. In our unique position, we can show the best of the University, or ask it to do better.

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.

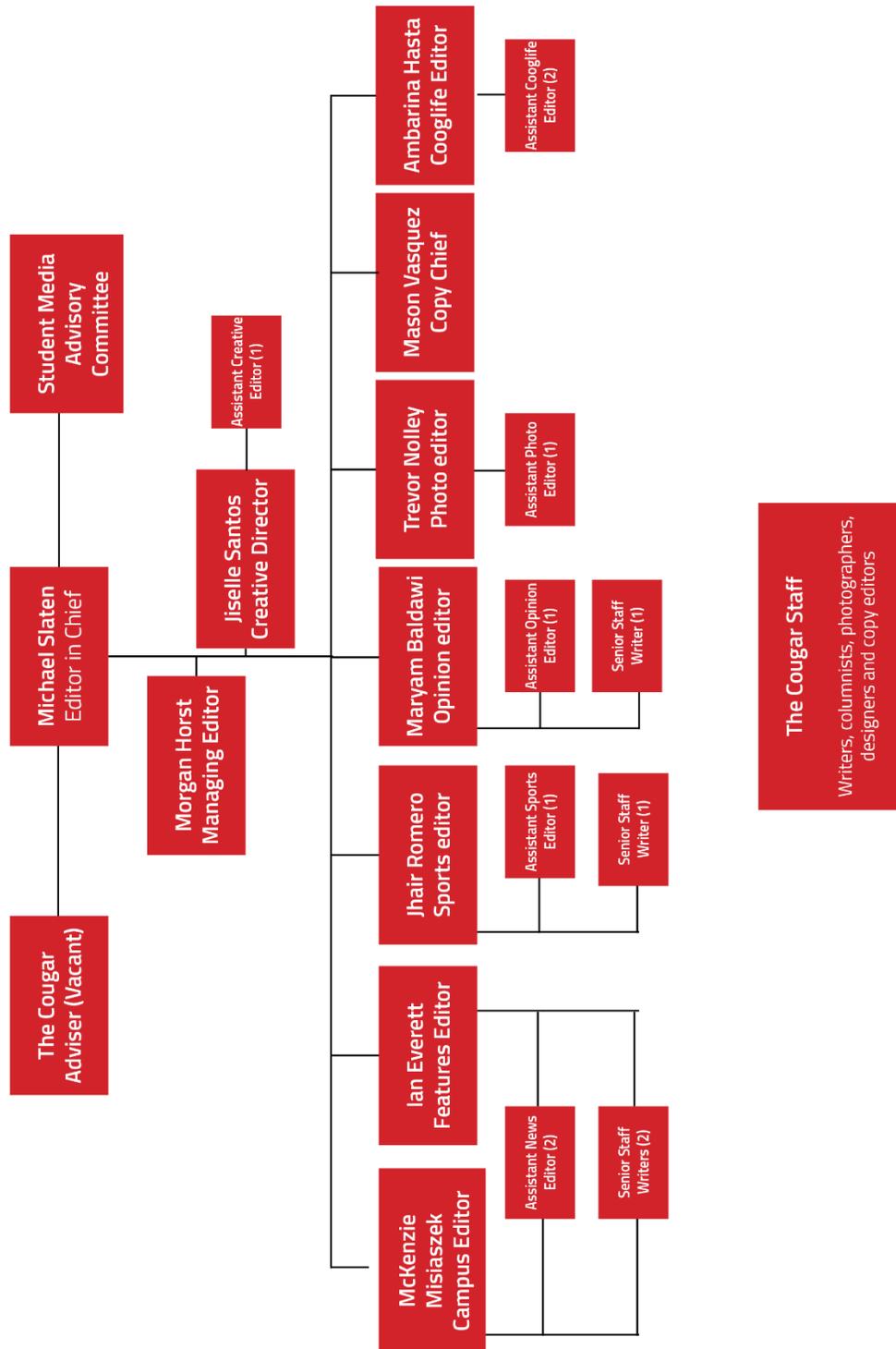
The Cougar and Cooglife, in conjunction with the Center for Student Media, provide students of all majors an integral jumping board from the collegiate environment to the professional world. There is no other place on campus that allows students to play a role in the journalism process from start to 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. Many professional media members in Houston and throughout the nation got their start working and learning at The Cougar.

The Cougar in recent years has consistently been recognized with awards, including the Pacemaker, the highest honor in collegiate journalism, and by the Society for Professional Journalists and the Texas Intercollegiate Press Association.

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 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.** This goal was not completely met. Sports was able to upload frequent content all year, News was to a lesser extent, but Opinion was never able to. Sports had one consistent editor all year, however News and Opinion cycled through many editors. News was still able to upload a fair amount of content, but unfortunately opinion wasn't able to. Having a consistent editor in each position is a challenge for many college newspapers. The Features Editor was also not able to upload at least three web-exclusive features throughout each week, due to having to help fill in when the campus editor was vacant.
  - b. **CSM will continue to train editors and assistant editors in advanced web publishing strategies, search-engine optimization, social media analytics and community engagement.** Editors were trained these skills twice a year during media camp by CSM.
  - 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.** Section editors for The Cougar developed their own training in these categories and trained other members of the organization.
  - d. **Editor in chief and the adviser will host two new reporter workshops each semester.** One new reporting workshop was held 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.** Media professionals were brought in at the beginning of the fiscal year, however they stopped as the year progressed due to low attendance. This new fiscal year, we are attempting to do this less frequently, but with bigger names so more people will attend. Next month Houston Chronicle UH Athletics beat writer Joseph Duarte will join us.

- 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. **This goal was met.**

**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.** The Cougar developed the “Summer Summary” email campaign this past summer to help keep people visiting our website, which drove great traffic. The Cougar’s social media marketing materials were also given a refreshed look.
- 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.** The Cougar’s staff social media were well monitored to ensure each had a professional social media presence while representing the organization. A social media guide was created to help new editors know what is acceptable.
- c) **Content will be shared across all social media at least two times if still relevant, including The Cougar’s sports and Cooglife 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.** While not every story was shared twice, The Cougar often posted stories more than once on social media. Particularly with Instagram, The Cougar looked at what other newspapers did to keep it active and engaging. Because of this, Instagram saw the most growth of any social media run by The Cougar.
- d) **The Cougar will develop a consistent voice and brand across social media channels.** The Cougar’s social media was given a refreshed look, and posts on each platform were tailored to different audiences.
- 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.** While social media specialists were hired and had begun training, this new position was never able to be filled for a long period of time, so the goal was not met.

**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.** Each section consistently provided individual feedback to staff writers. This was done several times a month.
- 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.** The Cougar’s adviser frequently trained the staff on journalism ethics and the basics of journalism.
- c) **Host a session of media camp for all members of the organization to participate and learn alongside editors.** Media camps were held twice a year by CSM, training new and returning editors several skills important to fulfilling their job duties.

- d) **Encourage participation in growing teams, especially the graphic design and social media management team.** The Cougar hired an assistant creative editor to help start a graphic design team, which held a few members throughout the year. The social media management team was never fully implemented.

**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.** The Cougar, CoogTV and Coog Radio collaborate frequently. Several members are a part of all three organizations, and The Cougar for certain stories will team up with either CoogTV or Coog Radio to more well-rounded, multimedia stories.
- 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.** This goal was not met by each editor. The sports editor produced a 2,000-word feature on the success of the women's golf team, and the campus and photo editors wrote an in-depth piece on Elizabeth's Warren time at the University.
- 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.** While some members of The Cougar already had these specialized skills, other editors were not trained.
- d) **Workshops will be held for the entire Cougar staff in specific topics such as photojournalism, opinion writing, storytelling, editing, social media and analytics.** This goal was completed. The Cougar's editors along with the adviser trained these skills to members.
- 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).** Several members of the editorial board took these free online classes to better themselves. Other editors took courses in the Valenti School of Communication, even when not required for their degree plan.

- 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 importance as compared to others that you might pursue. Where data exist, discuss the number of persons and/or unique students 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 2017-18 and FY 2018-19.

### Content Production and Readership: The Cougar

2017-18	Articles Published	Online Views	2018-19	Articles Published	Online Views	Diff +/- articles	Diff +/- views
September	157	120,981	September	79	45,784	-78	-75,197
October	145	64,533	October	143	63,275	-2	-1,258
November	115	41,105	November	115	41,971	0	866
December	17	24,744	December	9	25,532	-8	788
January	79	32,222	January	60	33,502	-19	1,280
February	98	45,322	February	85	37,383	-13	-7,939
March	95	49,604	March	67	44,591	-28	-5,013
April	85	41,427	April	74	41,108	-11	-319
May	27	33,556	May	9	29,218	-18	-4,338
June	26	26,679	June	32	39,878	6	13,199
July	13	26,215	July	30	30,688	17	4,473
August	72	35,034	August	67	50,355	-5	15,321

The Cougar saw significantly less articles published in 2018-2019 compared to the prior years and had less visits to thedailycougar.com. The large decrease year over year in September is due to deeply sad stories that were published by the paper, which received lots of attention. The Cougar struggled with staff turnover, making it difficult throughout the year to have consistently published content, which lowered our online views. In the summer, The Cougar took a new look at how to get more people visiting thedailycougar.com and began a strong push promoting stories on social media and with email campaigns. Every story was pushed at least one time or more on Twitter and Facebook. The Cougar saw success from that, and views in the summer were up significantly, and continue to this day.

The biggest challenge The Cougar faces now is getting people to visit the website on the weekends. Stories, except for sports, usually aren’t published on the weekend. Social media pushes also aren’t as successful on the weekend.

### Content Production and Readership: Cooglif

2017-18	Articles Published	Online Views	2018-19	Articles Published	Online Views	Diff +/- articles	Diff +/- views
September	27	2,923	September	10	4,037	-17	1,114
October	38	3,411	October	11	3,810	-27	399
November	20	2,169	November	21	3,184	1	1,015
December	11	2,119	December	1	2,943	-10	824
January	17	1,675	January	12	3,524	-5	1,849
February	31	2,864	February	8	3,756	-23	892
March	24	3,072	March	12	2,850	-12	-222
April	21	3,314	April	7	3,177	-14	-137
May	5	2,390	May	0	2,365	-5	-25
June	4	2,396	June	1	2,245	-3	-151
July	6	2,294	July	1	2,130	-5	-164
August	6	3,671	August	0	2,717	-6	-954

Coogliflife in the past year focused more on reporting feature stories, which is why the number of articles published went down. Online viewership remained solid despite this.

### **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

**2018:** 7,560\* **2019:** 7,448 (-1.5%)

#### Twitter followers

**2018:** 12,710\* **2019:** 13,031 (+2.5%)

#### Instagram followers

**2018:** 1,657 **2019:** 1,789 (+7.96%)

Facebook saw a decrease in followers due to infrequent posting on the platform, and the summer lull where many people unlike our page. The Cougar's Twitter gained followers due to cross promotion between @TheDailyCougar and @TheCougarSports, which serve different audiences. The Cougar's Twitter accounts also received frequent updates. Instagram saw the biggest increase because it had never been regularly updated before. The Instagram was delegated to the photo editor to update, which allowed it to have frequent, engaging content.

### **Email subscriptions & open rate**

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

#### Email subscribers

**2018:** 4,329 **2019:** 4,269 (-1.4%)

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

**2018:** 22.63% **2019:** 23.30% (+2.9%)

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

**2018:** 13.23% (-15.41%) **2019:** 13.28% (+.37%)

More emphasis was placed last year writing email subjects to draw readers in. The email edition was not actively marketed, so it lost subscribers through people unsubscribing like any marketing list.

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.

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The Cougar created an assistant creative editor. This has helped The Cougar make more interesting graphics, when a photo wouldn't be the best way to illustrate the story. The position was created to help the creative director fulfill more art requests for stories.

In May, The Cougar lost its (SFAC) web editor position. While the web editor did alleviate the duties from the editor in chief and managing editor for putting stories on social media and creating the email edition, The Cougar's numbers did not increase with a person dedicated to doing that.

- 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 and Sports will be required to upload 15 pieces of content weekly, while Opinion will be required to upload 10 columns weekly. Upload content on the weekend instead of just Monday-Friday will help drive traffic to thedailycougar.com. Weekend traffic is about half of what it is during the week. Also requiring editors to meet a weekly quota of content instead of daily will allow them to stress less every day if they don't have three stories, which will help turnover. The opinion section will be required to upload less than the news and sports section, because that section requires several more staff writes to be a part of it than News and Sports to meet their content goals.
- b) The Cougar will host a workshop each semester to have more effective headline writing, which is one of the biggest indicators of traffic to our websites.
- 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 new reporter workshops at the beginning of each semester.

- e) The 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. The email edition will also be published Monday-Friday in addition to any major sporting events on the weekends.
2. The Cougar will increase followership/audience on all social media by 10% by August 2020, 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 all social media at least two times if still relevant, including The Cougar's sports and Cooglife accounts. Stories that are attracting more attention will be shared more, to better capitalize on that. 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 continue to develop a consistent voice and brand across social media channels.
    - e) 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 our mail home edition to freshmen, The First Roar.
  3. The Cougar will grow active contributing membership to 80, with an emphasis on recruiting underclassmen. (DSAES Initiative 1)
    - 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 now fall out of participating. The Cougar also will have an open house each semester to let possible new members learn about the organization.
  4. The Cougar will improve the quality of reporting and continue to find ways to collaborate with other CSM 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

**8. Recognizing that the potential to generate additional Student Service Fee income for FY2021 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 FY2021 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.

**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.**

The Cougar receives revenue from print and online advertising generated by the CSM. 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.

**10. 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.

We, through the power of the press, can tell stories about the University with great reach.