

FY2024 SFAC Program Questionnaire

The **News on the Daily**
Cougar

STUDENT FEES ADVISORY COMMITTEE (SFAC)

FY2023 PROGRAM 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 can be broken down into three parts: 1) to provide the UH community including students, faculty, staff and alumni with accurate and consistent news in an effective matter; 2) to represent and act as a public voice student body; and 3) to provide learning opportunities and environments for all interested students.

As the University of Houston's student newspaper, The Cougar fills an important role of documenting history in the making while reporting important news to the campus community, the city of Houston, and the country as a whole.

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 is a space for all members to gain practical and relevant experience in journalism and communications, as well as develop as leaders.

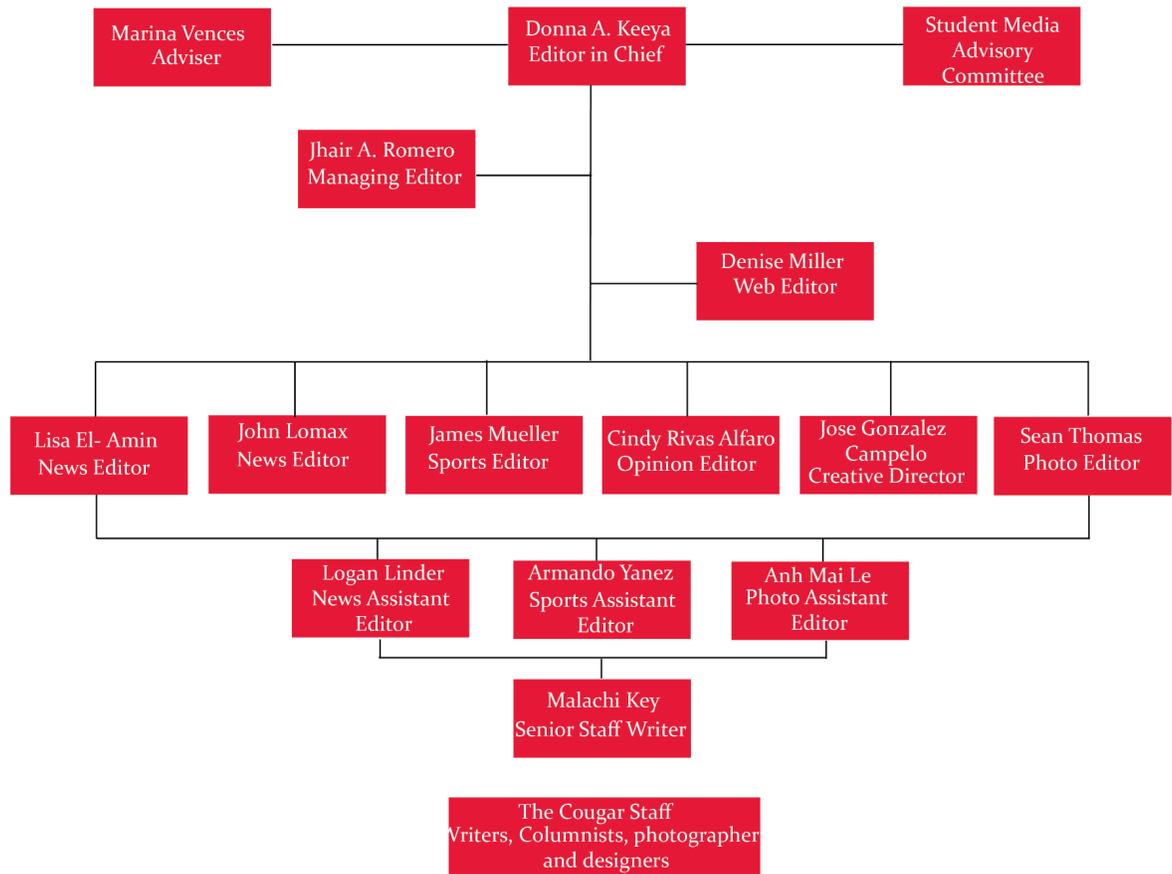
The Cougar, as a branch of the Center for Student Media, is open to UH students of all majors to participate in all creation processes of a student newspaper. Paralleling all aspects of a real-world newsroom, members of The Cougar will gain valuable skills to help push them further in their careers. The paper's visibility has increased throughout campus, with editorial board members tabling weekly to distribute our biweekly print issues.

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

As our website and social media platforms continue to publish breaking news and exclusives, The Cougar has been verified on Twitter. This was a monumental step in internationally recognizing The Cougar as a reliable news source.

Student fees help The Cougar remain relevant on campus to build future journalists and successful Cougar alumni. Beyond creating informative content for the campus community, The Cougar builds professional development skills for its members, along with being the gateway to learning how newsrooms operate. The process of making both the online and print newspapers develop better readers and journalists.

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 2021-2022 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 (links below). 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.

DSAES Plan: (http://www.uh.edu/dsaes/about/strategic_plan.html)

UH Goals: (<http://www.uh.edu/mission/>)

The Cougar’s strategic initiatives of improving journalistic quality, expanding our

campus and city outreach, redirecting editors' main focus to online content and improving workflow all help advance the mission of The Cougar and the mission of the University.

1. The Cougar will increase web page views by 10% by increasing coverage across the board, raising the total number of articles published online. (DSAES Student Success Initiative)

- 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.
Both goals for News and Sports were consistently met, but Opinion lagged behind because of a high turnover rate in the section's editor positions. Weekend content was frequently posted on thedailycougar.com and The Cougar's social media pages. Weekly instead of daily quotas have been implemented and have helped manage the load of The Cougar's editors.
- 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.
The Cougar hosted several workshops with various reporters and editors throughout the year and many touched on the topics of headline writing and driving readership up.
- Section editors will hold monthly meetings with their writers to keep them engaged with the organization and train them.
Section editors regularly met with their staffers. These meetings ranged from workshops, which trained the writers on topics such as interviewing and newswriting, to socials, which helped keep staff members engaged with the organization.
- The editor in chief and the adviser will host new reporter workshops at the beginning of each semester.

This goal was met as The Cougar hosted several workshops with media professionals throughout the year.

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. All stories posted on thedailycougar.com were posted to The Cougar's social media accounts to be shared with readers. The email edition was published every weekday, and sports newsletters were sent out on days of major sporting events, including weekends.

The Cougar will increase followership/audience on all social media by 10% by August 2022, with increasing email edition subscribers by 5%. (DSAES Resources Initiative)

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.

This goal was met. The readership survey conducted by The Cougar's advertising partner found the group of students who most read The Cougar and where the newspaper can improve.

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.

All staff members were trained on social media usage in a workshop hosted by The Cougar and a former adviser.

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 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.

This goal was met for The Cougar's main and sports account, but not the Cooglife accounts. Followership on The Cougar's main and sports social media accounts grew as we changed our strategies to emulate other successful student publications.

The Cougar will continue to develop a consistent voice and brand across social media channels.

The Cougar's brand was recently revamped, and our social media strategy has completely changed to better fit the audiences we serve.

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.

This goal was met on our online and print platforms.

The Cougar will grow active contributing membership to 80, with an emphasis on recruiting underclassmen. (DSAES Initiative 1)

- 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. Although this goal was not met, The Cougar did participate in several recruitment events geared to underclassmen hosted by our fellow student organizations that yielded a large number of members.
- 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 Center for Student Media and The Cougar helped develop a more efficient way to introduce new members into the organization.

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.

This goal was met. All three Center for Student Media organizations gathered for media camp

each semester to discuss these topics.

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.

Monthly meetings were held for News and Sports, but troubles in Opinion kept us from meeting this goal completely. The Cougar did meet its goal of hosting open houses for current and potential new members.

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

This goal was met as The Cougar made its print production more efficient.

b. Editors will give feedback to their writers at monthly section meetings and show them how they can improve their reporting.

This goal was met for News and Sports, but not in Opinion as the section struggled with turnover issues.

c. The Cougar will cross promote work done by other CSM organizations

This goal was met on online and print platforms

- Editors will be required to write an in-depth piece each semester that will have months of planning and reporting behind it
This goal was not met in the spring semester due to the coronavirus pandemic forcing The Cougar to focus on COVID-19 coverage, leaving little time to work on in-depth stories.
- Find ways for CSM organizations to cover together.
This goal was not met as the three Center for Student Media organizations have varying audiences with little overlap.

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 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.

Every other Friday, members of The Cougar's editorial board gather to read and review the latest print edition in order to assure we are making and improving the

highest quality news product to serve the UH community. From the weak areas that are identified in these meetings, the editorial board creates training sessions to improve on them. In the past The Cougar has continued to try to foster improvement in our content by sending issues to local professional journalists to take into account their feedback during story development. On the campus level, The Cougar frequently consults with Valenti School professors working in the journalism realm when making critical decisions. Student, alumni, faculty and professional journalists' opinions were all taken into account when rebranding The Cougar's logo to reflect a more modern look.

In order to make our newspaper more personable, The Cougar prioritizes personal and iconic newspaper sections in our print issues, including an advice column currently called "Dear Denise," a horoscope section and our highly beloved crossword puzzles and sudoku.

5. Please discuss any budget or organizational changes experienced since your last (FY2023) 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.

Last year, The Cougar requested a one time request of \$6,536.25 for conference travel for FY22 as well as a base budget addition or one time request of \$6,609.31 for FY23 for the role of a second news editor.

At the College Media Association conference, staff members were able to make valuable networking connections from student journalists all over the country. Our organization was also able to meet world-respected journalists from The New York Times and journalists who broke out the story against Harvey Weinstein and essentially started the #MeToo movement. The conference included educational sessions, for example data analysis hosted by Google, that all developed priceless journalism skills for staffers to take with them into their future careers.

Although the second news editor position (previously titled the features editor) was approved as a one time and has been a one time request in the past, the role has significantly improved the quality and quantity of news content produced, allowed more members to be active and proper, and helps keep The Cougar's editorial board as a whole.

6. If your unit concluded FY2022 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.).

No funding was returned.

- 7. Please list your 2023-2024 strategic initiatives and action steps in priority order and cite the specific Division of Student Affairs and Enrollment Services Values 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 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)

Action Steps

- 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.

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)

Action Steps

- 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.

The Cougar will grow active contributing membership to 200, with an emphasis on recruiting underclassmen. (DSAES Initiative 1)

Action Steps

- 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.

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 .

The Cougar will improve quality of reporting and continue to find ways to collaborate with other Center for Student Media organizations. (DSAES Initiative 1)

Action Steps

Plan print editions two weeks ahead of time, so writers can start on stories earlier and have more in-depth reporting.

Editors will give feedback to their writers at monthly section meetings and show them how they can improve their reporting.

The Cougar will cross promote work done by other CSM organizations.

Editors will be required to write an in-depth piece each semester that will have months of planning and reporting behind it.

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 FY2024 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 3.5, 5.0 or 7.5% in your total FY2024 base Student Service Fee budget request and provide a line-item explanation of where budgetary cuts would be made. A spreadsheet has been created to assist in this process. Please

include a copy of the spreadsheet with your questionnaire submission.

- If The Cougar were to receive a 3.5 percent base budget reduction, we would cut \$2,442 in printing and postal charges by no longer mailing out any copies of The Cougar.
- If The Cougar were to receive a 5 percent base budget reduction, we would cut \$2,500 in printing and postal charges by no longer mailing out any copies of The Cougar. Additionally, we would cut \$791 in events/marketing/programming costs and no longer buy materials to table, market ourselves, or host events.
- If The Cougar were to receive a 7.5 percent base budget reduction, we would cut \$2,500 in printing and postal charges by no longer mailing out any copies of The Cougar. Additionally, we would cut \$2,437 in events/marketing/programming costs and no longer buy materials to table, market ourselves, or host any events.

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. 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.

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.

No other student organization has any comparable services to The Cougar. The Cougar serves to create news content that is diverse and well rounded for its large demographic of current and former UH students, and the greater Houston community. The Cougar works around daily and hourly deadlines to make online content and biweekly print issues that no other student organization experiences. By working closely with other Center for Student Media entities, The Cougar, Coog TV and Coog Radio are all able to make dynamic content to serve our audiences.