

MINUTES: Student Publications Meeting – February 3, 2010

Voting members present: Farrokh Attarzadeh, Mila Clark, Reyes Ramirez

Ex-officio members present: Dick Cigler, Matt Dulin, David Small, Ronnie Turner, Kenneth Fomunung

The meeting was called to order at 4:09 p.m.

There being not a quorum present, the chair announces that the meeting will be used for reports only.

In the Advertising report submitted in writing, Delores Crawford reported a slow start to the year, including missing one day of publication when a press malfunction occurred. She reported that February should show some improvement.

David Small commented that nationally the advertising picture is much the same, with revenue falling across the board. He said Student Publications was making plans to cut costs in order to deal with the shortfall.

Dick Cigler said that most of the ads from the first edition, which was not printed because of the malfunction, were rescheduled in later editions, but that \$980 in revenue was lost. He said this amount would be offset by the Printing Plant's next bill to the department.

Cigler then explained what steps the department was taking to trim spending. He said that readers would see more bundled inserts and fewer extra sections to reduce the number of set-up and insertion charges from the Printing Plant. He also said he worked out an agreement with the Plant's managers to print the paper later in the morning so that the press operators could be assigned other tasks around the plant. Up until now the Cougar was essentially paying 100% of their salaries, he said, because their only job was to print the paper. The paper now should hit the stands between 9 a.m. and 9:30 a.m. each morning.

Farrokh Attarzadeh asked how many copies of the paper were picked up every morning. Cigler said that of around 8,500 copies printed, about 90 percent were being picked up during the first week of school.

Other proposed cuts include reducing the summer print run from twice a week to once a week and cancelling Friday publication during the regular semesters.

Cigler said that these and other spending cuts totaling \$75,000 will still not be enough to make the budget for the year, and so the department would be asking for a \$100,000 one-time funding allocation from the Student Fees Advisory Committee.

Cigler said that turnover in the sales department might have contributed to the shortfall in revenue. Advertising was given a revenue target of \$725,000, an increase of \$50,000 over the previous year, Cigler said. One idea he said he is considering is hiring professional salespeople to bring in new revenue.

Fomunung asked whether it was feasible to only publish the Cougar online. Cigler said there simply wasn't enough revenue generated online to support the whole department, adding that this is the case for nearly all newspapers.

Small suggested that the committee formally endorse the proposed cuts. Cigler pointed out that without a quorum the committee could not make such a statement, but encouraged all members to attend the SFAC hearing to show their support.

Cigler said the department had successfully moved into the UC Satellite and extended thanks to Elwyn Lee, Small and Keith Kowalka for getting the department the best-available location for the new office.

Fomunung pointed out the the UC Transformation project might have plans for a new Daily Cougar office.

In the Houstonian report, Matt Dulin reported that the new staff was on schedule to meet its first deadlines and that pages would be made available online for viewing. The next focus was on photo week, which would take place at the Career Services office — the only location available for a full week event. He said he was confident the new staff would complete the book on schedule and that the committee would see a return to a more traditional staff structure for next year's book.

In the Daily Cougar Production report, Dulin said his energy was focused on launching the new online version of the paper, scheduled for Feb. 15, 2010. He said the new design would be much more attractive and user friendly and that the archive tools would be much more useful. He said the blogging and commenting features will be greatly improved, which he said should encourage people to participate in the site.

Attarzadeh asked how much beta testing had been done or will be done on the site before launch. Dulin said that only he and Aaron Alexander, the developer, had done extensive testing and that much of it will be done on-the-fly once the site is live.

In the Editorial report, Ronnie Turner said staffing levels were acceptable, with most of the key positions filled. The only exception, copy chief, he said, was being filled by himself. He said he hired a blogs editor in anticipation of new responsibilities coming from the new Daily Cougar Web site and that he had retained a Web editor to handle the daily task of keeping the site updated.

He reported that his express-deadline schedule has had some success but that editors still struggle with writers meeting their deadlines. He said he is committed to making the schedule work, which he said should help cut costs if all deadlines are met.

Among the topics of coverage coming up, Turner said: Black history, SFAC hearings, the gubernatorial race, SGA elections.

Reyes Ramirez pointed out that the Cougar ran two articles about deans that were out of date and one included a Facebook profile photo, which he said was inappropriate.

Fomunung said that fundraising efforts for Haiti were mentioned in the paper but that a link was not provided to give readers access to the Web site where they could donate. In the future, he said, editors should include this information with articles so that readers can get involved.

Small also reminded Turner that Frontier Fiesta should be covered well by the Cougar staff. Dulin said the yearbook was dedicating several spreads to that event.

In announcements, Attarzadeh brought three points to the committee: that the Undergraduate Research program needed more attention; the Cougar should dedicate coverage to determine how college-specific fees are spent; and that the University would be hosting the 2011 ASEE-SW conference.

The meeting adjourned at 4:57 p.m.