

MINUTES: Student Publications Committee Meeting – September 16, 2010

Voting members present: Farrokh Attarzadeh, Irving Rothman, David McHam, Jack Wehman, Travis Hensley

Ex-officio members present: Dick Cigler, Matt Dulin, David Small, Matt Keever, Patricia Estrada, Delores Crawford, Candy Littleton

The meeting began without a quorum at 4:05 p.m.

ADVERTISING REPORT

Delores Crawford reported that August was a successful month both in terms of revenue and hiring and training new ad reps. She said she was confident in her team to keep performing well for September and was preparing for the semester's special sections. The ad department is adding a new special section to the fall lineup, a health-oriented section that will aim to tap into Houston's medical and health businesses and deliver good health-related information to readers. That section was slated for an October release.

Irving Rothman arrived at this time, restoring quorum to the meeting.

PRODUCTION/HOUSTONIAN

Matt Dulin reported that the 2010 yearbook was finally coming to a close and that the target release was Nov. 1. He said that the project hit some snags during the summer, when staff members either lost touch or left town. Despite the slowdowns, the 2011 yearbook staff had begun work on next year's book.

Dulin said that he had implemented a new production system for The Daily Cougar that has reduced the nighttime hourly payroll by about half. By training the editors in page layout with InDesign and creating an easy-to-use template system, Dulin said he shifted the burden of page production to the editorial staff, giving them a greater amount of control over the presentation of their sections. The night production team is now focused on processing the pages, fixing technical errors and making them print-ready according to the printer's specifications. They also export all the content for the website. Under the previous system, the production worker did all layout duties plus the final processing, usually an 8-10 hour shift. Now they work about 4-5 hours each night at the end of the process, he said. The new system has been accepted well by most editors and Dulin said he would work closely with them to monitor how it's working.

Future projects coming up include an update to thedailycougar.com to make it run faster and improve its design, he said.

EDITORIAL

Matt Keever said he was excited about the new system and that it appears to be working fine, with most editors adapting well to the software. He said they also realize that this system is giving them an added skill that is required by most newsrooms.

Keever said he has been emphasizing the use of social media to increase online readership of the website. Between Twitter and Facebook, the newspaper now has close to 2,000 fans/followers, he said. He uses those contacts to get feedback on the paper and to drive hits to thedailycougar.com. He said the website has been getting 10,000 pageviews a week.

Asked whether he thought the Cougar will ever become an online-only publication, Keever said it's not likely in the near future. He said that the more likely scenario he imagines will be a reduced print run with more content being produced online. Over time, he said, online and mobile will be the preferred format.

Asked if there was an iPhone app in the works for the Cougar, Keever said the online version of the site already is mobile-friendly across all devices. Jack Wehman added that he was interested in developing a mobile application for the Cougar on the Android platform.

Noting the presence of a quorum, Cigler moved the meeting to the election of the chair. In a call for nominations, Patricia Estrada and Jack Wehman were selected.

Reyes Ramirez, a visitor, commented that publication editors could not be elected to the chairmanship under SPC bylaws. But the consensus of the board was that this was a regular practice.

In a vote, Estrada and Wehman were tied. They agreed to serve two half-terms: Estrada in the fall and Wehman in the spring.

Before closing, Cigler called for nominations of professional reps. Names and information would be sent to the chairwoman prior to the next meeting, set for Oct. 14.

The meeting adjourned at 5:10 p.m.