



Minutes: Student Publications committee meeting, November 18, 2010

Voting members present: Irving Rothman, David McHam, Jack Wehman, Travis Hensley, Reyes Ramirez, Casey Wooten, Farrokh Attarzadeh, Jeff Syptak

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

The meeting began at 4:00 p.m. with Chairwoman Estrada addressing the committee that Vice President for Student Affairs Elwyn Lee had approached her with concerns that the controversy regarding the election of a student editor to the chairmanship would cause problems for the department at its Student Fees Advisory Committee hearing. Estrada said she volunteered to resign in order to prevent any problems, but a resignation letter was never submitted.

She said she would leave it to the committee whether to allow her to continue to conduct the meeting or to step down until the issue regarding the bylaws was resolved.

McHam questioned who made the original complaint and why. Ramirez stated that he made the original protest because the bylaws were unclear what would happen in the case of tie, where the chairman would be asked to break the tie, yet would have no voting rights if he or she were a student editor (ex-officio). This complaint was also brought to the attention of the SGA President, then Lee, who made his concerns known.

McHam stated that the protest should never have reached that level and that the committee had repeatedly asserted it had legitimately elected Estrada at its first meeting. McHam said that the issue has now drawn the interest of the VP into rewriting the committee's bylaws. Ramirez agreed that this was problematic and that he did not wish to see administrators rewriting the bylaws.

Attarzadeh motioned to allow Estrada to continue conducting business as chair. McHam seconded and there were no objections.

Regular business began at 4:10 p.m. Ramirez proposed an amendment to the minutes to clarify that he did not oppose the appointment of Richard Cigler as a professional rep, only that the committee should wait until he was in fact retired before voting.

Production Report

Dulin reported his department was functioning well under the new editorial workflow and was helping train editors in InDesign and other production tools. He said he was operating with a reduced staff in order to keep costs under control.

Yearbook Report

Estrada reported that an effort to shoot portraits at every college on campus had mixed results. Turnout was low despite several e-mail blasts and posters at several buildings where the shoots took place. She also said there was some bad communication between offices, and the locations provided by various colleges were not ideal. They photographed students in the Law School, College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences, and College of Education.

Advertising Report

Crawford reported the successful publication of a new special section called Health 411, and showed the "Whose House" pullout featured in the Basketball Preview. She said the Gift Guide, Grad Guide and Holiday Hot Spots sections would help finish the year.

She reported that November's revenue was higher than last November, which is a sign that ad declines may have turned a corner, she said.

Syptak asked what was being done to include organizations in the paper's advertising. Crawford said they were launching a new program in which organizations get a free ad in exchange for distributing newspapers at their event. She also said that ad rates for student organizations are significantly lower.

Rothman asked what strategies were being implemented to grow advertising of local businesses such as grocery stores and retail. Crawford said that UH's commuter demographic makes it very difficult to target local businesses as students come from all around the city. She said that local revenue was higher than campus in October: \$14,000 compared to \$10,000.

Editorial Report

Keever reported that the staff was focused on finishing the year meeting deadlines and preparing staff members for the next semester. He noted that activity on twitter and Facebook had grown significantly in the last semester and had generated useful feedback for the newspaper staff.

Old business

The committee appointed Casey Wooten, a reporter for the Houston Business Journal, to a one-year term as professional rep.

New business

Jack Wehman, the only candidate, was elected editor in chief of The Daily Cougar for the Spring 2011 semester.

Estrada was asked to read aloud the e-mail that was sent by Lee to the faculty members of the SPC. It read as follows:

Dear Professors Rothman, McHam, and Attarzadeh,

For several years now I have been concerned about various aspects of Student Publications. Last year, the sudden request from Student Publications from the Students Fees Advisory Committee (SFAC) provoked hostility and a call for change by SFAC, the entity that allocates a significant part of the Student Publications budget. Developing a plan that would put the publications on a firm financial footing proved to be very difficult. Some expenses were cut, but not enough. And raising revenues through advertising is challenging in the current economic climate. Eventually, a multi-layered plan was put forth that had several components: (1) savings from the Director's salary (those duties will be divided among the remaining staff, (2) a realistic and reduced projection of advertising revenues, (3) continuous monitoring and review of existing expenses, and (4) a request that SFAC fund at least one of the professional staff salaries. Though SFAC displayed disappointment and even hostility during the budgeting process, the Final Report submitted to the President revealed new allocations to Student Publications. That Final Report has not been approved by the President yet.

In addition to SGA, the Student Government Association, has expressed concern and dissatisfaction in the Daily Cougar. They want early morning delivery of the paper, and more coverage of student events. The first issue was addressed when Student Publications requested from SFAC the additional money to pay for the early morning delivery. We are exploring different printing companies that might be able to give us a better price on printing and delivering in the morning.

What to cover, of course, is within the purview of the student editors. SGA made an additional point concerning whether an ex-officio member of the committee could service as chair. Their argument is well grounded; however, the by-laws are very unclear and ambiguous. In order to avoid an unnecessary dispute, the current Chair has indicated that she will step down so that this issue can be resolved through a revamping of the By-Laws. I hope to put together a committee of stakeholders to draft a revision of the by-laws to clarify who can be the Chair and to clarify several other glaring points that are unclear or have not been followed. (e.g. appointments by the Chancellor).

This afternoon, a staff member from Student Publications will undoubtedly have to chair the meeting since I understand the vice-chair is running for a position, possibly Daily Cougar Editor. If I can, I will try to attend that meeting.

After discussion, McHam motioned to commission a subcommittee on the bylaws to prepare a report of recommended revisions at the next SPC meeting. Hensley seconded. It was decided that the subcommittee should have representation of each constituency: faculty, SP staff and SGA. David McHam, Patricia Estrada and Reyes Ramirez were appointed.

The meeting adjourned at 5:10 p.m.