

**Office of Student Publications - SFAC HIGHLIGHT SUMMARY - Budget Cycle FY25**

1. **Did you receive any new funding for this year? If so, how is it being used? Present your budget worksheet.**

Student Publications did not receive any new funding for 2022-2023.

2. **Summarize the usage of your services. What areas/programs saw increases or decreases?**

**Summary:** The Student Publications department provides support and advises the students who produce The Signal, UHCL's student-run digital newspaper and The Spectacle, UHCL's newest student-run magazine.

The Signal is published year-round when classes are in session as a digital newspaper on its website, [www.uhclthesignal.com](http://www.uhclthesignal.com). The award-winning publication serves as a public forum and encourages students, faculty and staff to submit story ideas, articles, creative works, community updates and comments. It also serves as a historical document for the university from the students' perspectives. Until Fall 2020, The Signal was published using a hybrid model of student staff: some paid student workers and some receiving course credit by taking COMM 4655 Media Production. This changed beginning Fall 2020, when Media Production was phased out of the Communication program when the faculty member teaching the class retired.

The Spectacle, UHCL's first print-magazine in 10 years, was launched in Spring 2023. Focused on highlighting life and arts in the greater Houston area, The Spectacle allowed student journalists to apply their learned skillset from the classroom into a publication. The Spectacle has seen success with its first edition-having given out over 800 copies. With the creation of the print magazine, we generated advertising revenue of \$840.00 across 5 paid advertisements.

Student Publications now entirely depends on student journalists, interns, volunteers and contributors for publishable content. In summer 2023, student reporters in Student Publications transitioned to independent contractor positions.

**Increases/Decreases:**

Sixteen students comprised of the Student Publications student journalist team throughout the year: 8 students in Fall 2021 with 7 returners and 1 new student journalist (4 graduated in summer 2021). 11 students were on staff in spring 2023 with 4 returners, 3 new student journalists, and 4 student interns (2 graduated in fall 2023, 1 left for a new job opportunity). In summer 2023, 7 students were on staff with 5 returning from spring 2023 and 2 being a summer intern.

For the 2022-2023 academic year the staff published a total of 142 articles over 14 newsletters for The Signal. Further, The Spectacle magazine was launched in spring 2023, producing 15 content pieces within the magazine over 32 pages.



To compare, for the 2021-2022 academic year the student journalists published a total of 195 pieces over 17 issues, and 14 students comprise the staff throughout the year: 6 students in Fall 2021, 5 returning students in Spring 2022 (1 student left the University) and 11 students in Summer 2022 (3 returning students, 2 students left to complete internships, and 8 new interns from the Communications program joined the team).

The Program Manager and Adviser, Lindsey Humphrey left her role in January 2023 and Dillon Nash stepped into an acting role as a Program Manager and Adviser. With this transition, and a completely new editorial board, learning of processes impacted the number of The Signal issues produced in spring and summer 2023.

In 2021-2022, there were a total of 14 contributed pieces published by The Signal. In 2022-2023, The Signal published 9 contributed pieces and The Spectacle published 5 contributed pieces for a total of 14 contributions across the two publications.

In summer 2023, student journalists in Student Publications participated in 14 student orientations (new student, transfer, and international student orientations). At each orientation, the Student Publications team presented to students to get students involved in Student Publications and participated in the resource fair where they spoke to students and families and got over 100 students interested in The Signal and The Spectacle publications.

The student journalists continue to participate in existing campus engagement opportunities and create new ones-often in collaboration with other DSA departments - to generate student involvement. These efforts include hosting informational sessions about joining Student Publications, Student Orgs Expos, and Welcome Week events. The team had planned to participate in the Chili Cook-Off, however, had to step out of the competition due to COVID-19 concerns that plagued our staff at this time.

### **3. Describe the student satisfaction with your services.**

Though The Signal continues to win many awards that affirm the quality of its publication, that doesn't necessarily translate to readership satisfaction; however, as a digital paper, The Signal is able to monitor views and followers that help determine student satisfaction with the newspaper.

Due to the departure of the Program Manager, the student editor team who have access to the website were not able to track google analytics for site visits to the website. The Acting Program Manager has not been given access to the website, so this information was not able to be collected.

As of October 16, 2023, our social media accounts across various platforms reach the following:

- X (Formerly Twitter): 1,070followers

- Facebook Page: 1,105 likes on The Signal page
- YouTube: 289 subscribers



- Instagram: 830 followers

The Spectacle magazine was a hit with students through the summer orientation season. We have given out over 800 copies since print and have received positive feedback. We also talked to many students at the 3 different orientation programs over the summer about our services and received interest from students who are now attending our meetings to learn more about Student Publications.

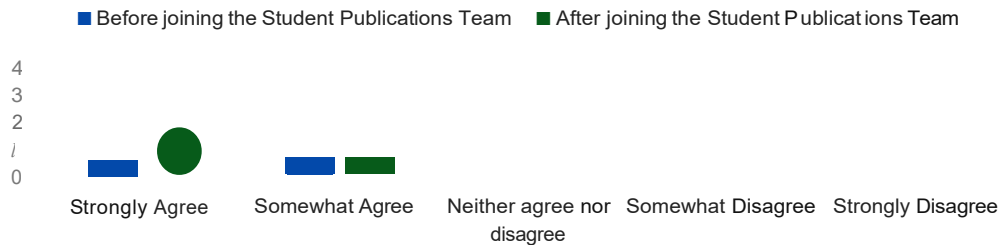
**4. What has your department done to increase or improve seNices? Specifically, what did you learn in your assessment that is impacting your seNices now?**

With the departure of the Program Manager in January 2023 and a brand-new team of student editors, a lot of the Spring semester was spent trying to learn processes and find momentum in running both The Signal digital newspaper and The Spectacle magazine. Through learning in the Spring semester, the student journalist team and Adviser were able to get into a rhythm by the summer and into the fall semester.

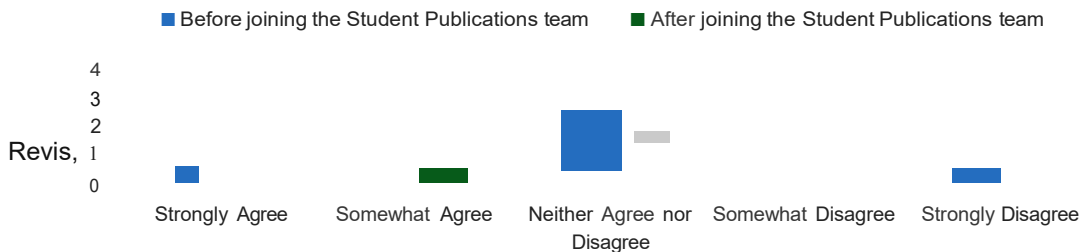
One change that was made to improve services in the department was to revamp the former student employment positions into independent contractor positions. This brought the department into compliance with the University of Houston system. Each student journalist now operates as an independent contractor.

While we did not have access to assessments completed by the previous Program Manager for this cycle, we were able to launch an assessment to assess our student journalists on staff in the summer of 2023. Through this assessment we wanted to know if our student journalists had increased their confidence as student media professionals and their understanding of sound journalistic practices since being on staff in Student Publications. Two graphs are shown below with the results of that survey. The results collected tell us that student journalists are entering the Student Publications team with a knowledge base in student journalism but are continuing to grow while on the team. Through further assessment and more student participation in the surveying, a clearer picture will be painted that showcases the growth of students through being on staff in the department.

I am confident in my skills as a student media professional.



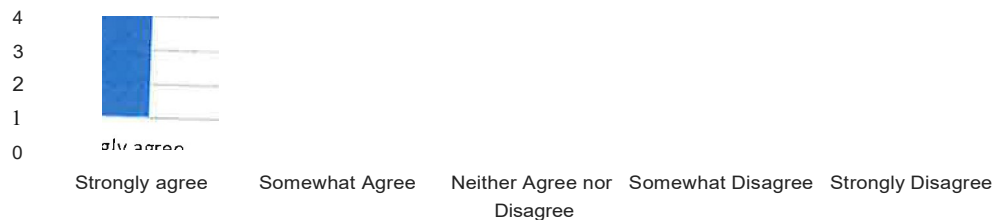
I am confident in my understanding of sound journalistic practices.





We also looked at the impact of college media conferences on the student journalists who attended the conferences to see. Per the graph below, the data showed that the student journalists who have attended national conferences while on the team have benefited from this opportunity. We will continue to offer this service to student journalists on staff at The Signal.

If you attended a conference, did you feel it had a positive impact on your professional development as a student journalist?



Moving forward into 2023-2024, we will be assessing the following outcomes which will help us to make further improvements to the services our department offers UHCL students building on some of the things we learned in the past assessment cycle:

- Students on staff in Student Publications will increase confidence as a student media professional.
  - Increasing our student journalists confidence in their abilities is incredibly important to the current team in Student Publications as it will help our students grow and obtain jobs in their career field of choice in the future.
- Students who attend student media conferences will report positive impact on their professional development as a student media professional.
  - We want to continue to gather data on the impact that professional student media conferences have on our students. This information will help us continue to assess if we need to request future funding to aid in our travel to national or regional conferences.
- Student journalists will develop an understanding of why students join the Student Publications team to effectively retain student journalists on staff and recruit potential journalists.
  - As we continue to redefine our department, we want to continue to put recruitment and retention efforts of student journalists at the forefront of the work we are doing. Through surveying our student journalists, we will create a recruitment and retention plan each semester that includes 2 recruitment and 2 retention opportunities each semester to help us better understand why students are interested in joining the team in our department.



Revised 8/8/23

- Gain a baseline understanding of the perceptions of The Signal digital newspaper by the UHCL campus community.
  - Through this survey, we hope to gain a baseline understanding of how our digital newspaper is perceived by our campus community. As we aim to redefine our department in this new era, we want to make sure the look, feel, and content of our publications are in line with what our audience wants.

**5. Describe any new initiatives for the current year.**

For the upcoming year, Student Publications has three main goals and initiatives. The first goal is to create a standard training camp program for student media staff members in Student Publications. To do this, assessment of current staff professional development and training will take place to get a baseline understanding of what content is needed for the training camp. Once training topics are identified, the content will be created and the Adviser will reach out to potential collaborators to present training materials (ex. Faculty in the Communications department, colleagues in the Division of Student Affairs or University Advancement, or colleagues in student media at UH System sister campuses. We hope to host the first training camp in August 2024.

The second new initiative is to update and modify the existing student media handbook in Student Publications. The current handbook has not been updated in many years, so an update to modernize the handbook is a goal of the department. We hope to connect with UH system sister campuses in fall 2023 to see what their student media handbooks look like with a completion goal of Spring 2024.

Our third goal is to look at peer institutions to identify department names and department missions of like departments that do student media work. With this information, we will be able to see what other campuses are identifying their student media offices as and could potentially update our department's name in the future. We aim to conclude our research in December 2023.

**6. What challenges or opportunities do you foresee for the current year and next year?**

When it comes to challenges, Student Publications continues to lack the staffing resources that **will** aide in the department achieving success in the completion of reaching the goals and initiatives set for the upcoming year.

Much like the previous year, recruiting new students to join the team in Student Publications remains a never-ending challenge for student media, but especially as student engagement remains low post-pandemic. Our team of student journalists *never* have a shortage of ideas; the biggest challenge they face is having an adequate student journalist team that isn't already overwhelmed that can follow through with those ideas.

We continue to see a challenge in producing quality publications with a rotating team of student journalists. The workload can be intense with a steep learning curve, which is likely to increase

Revised 8/8/23

as we onboard a new Program Manager/Adviser and all new team of student journalists in Spring 2023 as the current team graduates this fall.

As far as opportunities, the Student Publications team sees opportunities in the creation of intentional recruitment and retention programming efforts to not only recruit new student journalist team members but to also retain the student journalists on our team. Another opportunity that we want to continue to take advantage of is the fact that a lot of the students interested in Student Publications are not Communications majors, so we want to continue to cultivate building relationships outside of the typical major that works in this department.

**7. Did you have funds swept at the end of FY23? If so, how much and why?**

Yes, Student Publications had \$27,252 swept at the end of FY23. Due to the Program Manager leaving in January 2023, we had salary savings that was returned to the reserve. Although we returned salary savings, we spent \$42,521 in Maintenance and Operations with a base budget of \$22,046. This tells us that while we did not utilize all the salary savings, without it, we would have not been able to do as much as we did this year to enhance the department.

**8. Are you requesting new funding? One-time or Base? Present your budget request for next year and rationale.**

Yes, we are requesting one-time funding for FY2024-2025 in the amount of \$5,000 for a new conference table and chairs for the department.

Currently, Student Publications does not have a conference table for their staff and production meetings. 4 desks/tables are pushed together to make a makeshift conference table for the team to meet together. Over this past year, the team has taken pride in the cosmetic changes of the department. A new window wrap to market the department, a glass door to create a more inviting environment and new window shades that liven up the space have been installed. To further elevate our space and to create a space that students want to spend time in and a space that we can be proud of, we would like to request this money to purchase the conference table and 12 chairs.

The benefits:

- The space will be more inviting to students and provide a space for student journalists to gather to conduct business.
- 51% of college students say that furniture conditions intensify the impact on their ability to focus and learn. (<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2022/11/22/survey-campus-facilities-impact-student-success>) The current furniture within Student Publications is at least 25 years old.

