Qualifications for TSM student leadership positions
April 29, 2014

In the attached spreadsheet, each type of student leadership position at TSM is in a column, with similar qualifications for the positions (as currently listed in the TSM Handbook) organized by row. If a cell is white, the qualification cannot be waived; a gray cell indicates that a qualification can be waived (and a black cell means there’s no qualification in that category).

Beyond the qualification criteria listed in the TSM Handbook, the current versions of all student leadership positions’ applications require submission of a transcript, a resume, and a letter of interest. The applications for all of the appointed positions require two letters of recommendation. In addition, two samples of work are asked of Cactus EIC, Travesty EIC, and Texan ME applicants. Texan EIC applicants are told to submit “up to 3” samples of work and “3 or more” letters of recommendation.

In my experience at TSM, the Board selects students for the appointed positions largely on the basis of the candidates’ histories with the relevant media units, their plans (written letters of interest plus oral presentations/responses at the Board meeting), and feedback from advisers and student incumbents. For better or worse, the qualifications are often seen as “getting in the way” of the selection process. While some qualifications are (seemingly arbitrarily) immutable, others are waived routinely, making for clumsy vetting.

At the risk of eliminating criteria that are in place for a good reason, the simplest course of action would be for the Board to set a low bar for applicants to the appointed positions, trusting itself (and future Boards) to choose the right person from the candidate pool. Note that many of the existing qualifications are tailored to increase the likelihood of the selection of a media unit “insider,” which (depending on your point of view) is either a prudent measure designed to guarantee candidates with the necessary prerequisites, or a symptom of unhealthy insularity.

The tension between inside-expertise and outside-accountability is most acute with respect to the Texan EIC position, for which the Board only certifies candidates; the UT student body makes the selection during the campus-wide elections. The student Board members are also meant to be elected, but in recent years it’s been rare for interested students to be denied a spot on the Board via defeat at the polls (most candidates run unopposed or are appointed by the Board to fill vacancies).

These are some of the issues the Board should keep in mind as it considers changes to the TSM Handbook regarding qualifications for the student leadership positions.

Frank Serpas III
Interim Director, Texas Student Media