February 7, 2014
Agenda item E

Activity reports
from the
Interim Director, Advisers,
and
Student Editors & Managers
for each media unit

Frank Serpas III
Michael Brick
CJ Salgado
Curt Yowell
Jaclyn Kachelmeyer
Ian Reese
Nick Mehendale
Laura Wright
Shabab Siddiqui
Joe Aragon
February 4, 2014

As Texas Student Media undergoes a change in leadership and contemplates its relationship with the Moody College of Communication, I’m grateful for the support and feedback provided by TSM’s many constituencies: students, staff members, Board members, administrators, alumni, business partners, college media peers; it’s great that so many people care! If I haven’t had a chance to speak with you yet, I apologize, and hope we can get together soon.

The mechanics of the Director position are new to me, but I believe I have a good handle on the issues facing TSM. The 2014-2015 operating budget is the biggest topic to tackle, but quotidian tasks require attention as well.

The first thing I did in my new role was to revamp the Daily Texan Editor-In-Chief application form. It may seem a mundane task, but having witnessed unnecessarily messy EIC certifications in past years, I wanted to ensure that the qualifications on the form match those in the TSM Handbook. However, I didn’t have the purview to change any of the qualifications, even if they are unclear. Specifically, I ask that the Board address the media law competency qualification, in order to (at a minimum) reflect the curriculum changes in the School of Journalism.

The forms for the TSM Board student positions didn’t need much work, but unfortunately we received no applications, perhaps due to the spasmodic start of the semester precipitated by a couple of snow days. Because engaged student representation on the Board is vital to TSM’s wellbeing, I ask that the Board extend the application deadline and convene for a brief candidate-certification meeting on Tuesday, February 11, so that the student body may have a chance to elect its Board proxies.

A confluence of factors leaves the Cactus at a crossroads. The future of the yearbook medium has been cloudy for a while, and it seems a certainty that this year’s annual output will be a departure from past products. Though the budget climate is unfavorable, I aver that 120 years of history (and a consistent record of contributing to the TSM Reserve in years gone by) have earned Cactus a better fate then to slip quietly into cyberspace. There will be a book this year; we have yet to determine exactly what it will contain and where it will be printed.

TSM is currently operating at less than full strength. Joan Bowerman, a longtime employee of the Advertising Department, retired at the end of the semester. Flu bugs have sidelined a number of co-workers. I appreciate the extra effort I’m seeing throughout the building, with particular kudos due to Texas Student TV Station Manager Ian Reese for assuming a more-than-full slate of responsibilities. He’s taken the lead in assembling the Live Remote Broadcast System approved by the Board in the fall; the future support required for this resource will be addressed in the budget and in the Texas Student TV Station Manager selection process in April.
As the budget process begins, I will endeavor to provide transparency and impart enough knowledge so that hard decisions can be made on the basis of good information. I would prefer to have had more time to prepare my preliminary budget presentation (not until the afternoon of Friday, January 31 did *DEFINE, UT’s financial mainframe, officially recognize my Director status), but the problems facing TSM have been germinating for years. The migration of audiences to online platforms has negatively impacted print publications throughout the world; The Daily Texan is not immune to this phenomenon.

I maintain that the difficulty TSM is experiencing in monetizing its traditional products does not reflect poorly upon the quality of work; I feel that students at The Daily Texan (and the other media units) are upholding the standards of excellence set by their forerunners. Though we do our students a disservice if we excessively insulate them from market forces dictating a need to accede to audience demands, I believe in the pedagogical value of maximizing student autonomy. Jeopardizing TSM’s values while chasing an uncertain payday risks undoing the hard-earned elimination of Prior Review (and possibly failing to solve TSM’s financial problems, to boot).

At the same time, TSM has the responsibility to make business decisions that fall outside the ambit of student content control. Because TSM’s financial trajectory is unsustainable, staying on the current course is not an option. My recommendation is to print the Texan weekly throughout the year. Doing so will save expenses related to printing and delivery, liberate energy that can be devoted to the Texan’s online manifestation, and reboot the perception of the print product.

Other measures deserve consideration, but the potential impact (on TSM’s finances, its service to audiences, and its ability to educate students) of any “game changers” (e.g., exploration of the sale of the broadcast licenses or prospective changes to the means by which TSM earns advertising revenue) won’t be known soon enough to inform the budget that must be locked in at the UT Budget Office by April 2.

The relationship with the Moody College of Communication figures to play a role in addressing TSM’s financial situation, particularly regarding fundraising, but the effect of TSM’s position within the UT administrative organizational chart is still unclear.

Any particular proposed change will negatively impact a subset of TSM stakeholders; it’s important to recognize that failing to change our bearing will result in everyone’s worst fears coming true: TSM will simply become unable to function. I propose that we make a virtue of necessity by stepping toward the future.

Frank Serpas III
Interim Director, Texas Student Media
From Michael Brick:

* The Daily Texan's core journalism is growing stronger with a new emphasis on aggressive coverage of breaking news and investigative reporting. Tightly focused on news of interest to the UT community, our reporters, photographers and videographers are pressing hard on the tough questions of the day. When a fire on campus prompted a misguided evacuation, our reporters swarmed the scene, following up with tough policy questions. Our lead enterprise reporter unearthed an intriguing split between the political donations made by faculty members and regents. And most impressively, our news team broke the scoop about TSM's move to the communications school, complete with exclusive follow-up reports on the secretive university politics behind the move (more detail is available on my advisor's blog, Talking Texan).

* The web site redesign team has successfully transitioned to new leadership. A detailed calendar is in place for the page-by-page modernization of the web site.

* Over the winter break, our journalists proved the strength of our online journalism. While the print schedule was suspended, they provided great coverage of Mack Brown's resignation and traveled to Seattle to chronicle the volleyball team's tournament run. Thanks to an assist from Ian Reese of TSTV, The Texan's coverage of the big legislative showdown between Bill Powers and his antagonists was augmented with a video livestream.
Advertising Department
TSM Board Meeting: 02/07/14

The advertising team is currently focused on: Housing Fair, Fashion Alley, general sales into The Daily Texan, Travesty, TSTV and donations toward the KVRX pledge drive. Everyone is excited about the annual Housing Fair which will be held on Wednesday, February 19th from 11:00am-4:00pm outside in the Gregory Gym Plaza. The upcoming housing fair event has been filling up nicely and the Olympic theme will be a fun theme for our clients to stage their areas. A big thanks goes to Carter Goss and Lindsey Hollingsworth for planning the event and the entire team for making it a success by securing their clients.

I would like to thank: Ted Sniderman, Rohan Needel, Daniel Hublein and Michael Gammon for all of their contributions and assistance during the selection process involved prior to submitting creative which will be reviewed and judged during the CNBAM convention (College Newspaper Business & Advertising Managers) in March.

Michael Brick has done a great job communicating the comic expectations, getting his team invested and ensuring advertising is involved. Lindsey Hollingsworth has done an exceptional job of handling the logistics involved to plan the event at the Staple! Independent Media Expo and negotiating a partnership with them to ensure we are a sponsor: http://staple-austin.org/

The team is helping with the pledge drive and working on officially securing the venue for the pledge drive conclusion. The annual KVRX pledge drive is scheduled for February 7th-21st. There are multiple ways to donate. Listeners may call in during programming, go online to KVRX.org and click the pledge drive button or donate in person at the HSM building.

Michael Gammon and his team have been working closely with Curt Yowell and his Digital Associate, Shihan Huang. Shihan is redesigning the Longhorn Life website so it will be more user friendly, especially to readers who use mobile devices. The redesign will appeal to advertising clients who want up-to-date methods for reaching their target audiences. The launch is scheduled for May 2014. They have also revamped the "look" of Longhorn Life to create more consistency in the design of the print product. They have completed the first issue of the semester revolving around a Local Music theme.

Daniel Hublein, Michael Gammon and their staff have been instrumental in helping with multiple projects including: working with The Daily Texan staff on The Daily Texan Comic Special, School of Ecology 2014 Fashion Program, assisting Curt and Nathan to create the look of how "sponsored content" will be displayed on The Daily Texan website for the native advertising project and developing multimedia content for the Longhorn Life brand and to increase web presence.

After over 25 years of service Joan Bowerman has retired. We are saddened to see her go, but are thankful for all her years of service at Texas Student Media and the University of Texas at Austin. Anyone who knew her was aware of her quick-witted nature and resistance to praise, regardless of the situation as she felt she was just doing her job. Joan, we wish you the best and hope you enjoy many sunny days out on the lake and amazing snow when skiing in Canada! Thank you Joan for everything you’ve done for Texas Student Media, you will be missed!

Hook'em & Sell'em!!!

CJ Salgado
Advertising Adviser
The TSM Digital Team has news student team members working on web and digital projects this semester. The projects include decreasing bounce rates on the websites, leveraging social media, updating online advertising options and more.

We continue to find ways to harness Google Analytics. Student digital manager Nathan Beddome worked to implement Google Tag Manager so that we may easily create custom tracking codes. The project will be beneficially in terms of audience engagement.

Graduate student Shihan Huang is working on a capstone project focusing on responsive web design. The project will be beneficial to all of TSM.

We implemented a process to ensure proper archiving of the TSM digital assets. The project involves guidance and assistance from UT Libraries staff - the experts in this field.

We continue to find challenges in recruitment for web development. We made significant progress beginning with last semester. Having web development as part of the educational experience provides challenges and opportunities. The good news is our work to strengthen partnerships on campus, in the business community, and with students and student groups has set us up for long-term success in terms of the web and digital presence of the TSM media Properties.

TSM students have created the first ever Drupal Student Group. The group is officially registered with the Office of the Dean of Students.
To the Board:

Hello and Happy New Year!

The New Year is always a time for fresh starts, and that is exactly what Cactus needs: a fresh start. In this board report I will be frank about where we are, where we are coming from, and where we need to go. As Frank, I believe, phrased it, the Cactus is having (yet another) existential crisis. I was up front in my answers to the Board last November about just how hard hit we were by Orientation shortcomings and wage cuts. Those obstacles are not the only ones. Without any contracts in place for publishing, photo studios, or ad sales, we have no infrastructure in place beyond my eight-person staff to produce a full-fledged book, even if we had content. But, to be quite honest, we don’t have that. With maybe 1-2 reporters and 2-3 photographers picking up assignments last year, only a small percentage of our spread topics even stood a chance of being covered, yet without the incentive of pay, my editors and I had no way to ensure these assignments would ever get turned in—almost none of them did. This was not the fault of my staff members or myself, and I cannot blame volunteer photographers and writers when they get no reward for their hard work. Rather, this problem stems mostly from the crumbling infrastructure of Cactus. With no advisor and no publishing company to support us and supply resources or at least know-how, we have very little to work with. But we tried, tried to the point of grades dropping and important responsibilities being put to the side for the sake of Cactus and the sake of TSM. Finally, after getting our official book sale count from orientation and spring 2013 registration in November, it was starting to feel like time to throw in the towel. No one wants to cut Cactus, sure, but very few people have been making supporting Cactus a priority either. (Shout out to CJ and Ted in advertising for their offers of help and support last semester.) We would normally have near 1000 books sold by this point. We are at roughly 275. That is drastic. There is no way to sell 1500 books in total by the end of the year. That is a fact.

With this realization, my staff and I sat down and decided to think about the future of Cactus. Tired of seeing it barely scrape by year after year in a manner unsustainable for the long term, we envisioned a Cactus caught up to the modern age, once again what those hip young cool kids—or at least some segment of the UT population—wanted to have. How could we keep Cactus around not just for one, five, or ten years, but another 120 years? The answer lies, quite obviously, in digital. But digital is a tough world for a yearBOOK. What would that even look like? What technology do we need to make that happen? Before Jalah left, I ran through some of these dilemmas and ideas with her. She was on board with the idea of not producing a book this year and using the rest of the semester to shift to a digital format if approved by the board. For us to go digital, we need to do it right and take the time to rebrand ourselves, build a proper website, update our Adobe CS technology, recruit a much larger staff. However, I have hesitations about the purpose of a yearbook (to document life in all aspects of UT for the year in a format that will stand the test of time) being adequately fulfilled by a well-maintained website with content added almost daily and a downloadable interactive PDF version of the book, which is what my staff and I are looking at now. I met with Ryan Rinaldi of Walsworth Publishing very recently to discuss our options as a small coffee table book sold to only 300 people. The meeting was fruitful to say the least and has given Cactus two options for the future, or maybe a combination of both.

Option one: Cactus makes the full switch digital. My staff and I spend the next four and a half months working out the kinks in our new, almost-ready-to-roll-out website, recruiting
people interested in learning graphic design and digital publishing (both budding industries and the direction many magazines are now taking, definitely an important educational avenue for TSM), learning the newer versions of CS6 or some comparable online program for creating digital spreads, and rebranding Cactus as no longer a book but a website-digital book combo that people should follow throughout the year and then download the “best-of” at the end of each semester. There are many pros to this idea. Not only would we brought up to modern times, there is potential to reconnect with the student body, learn a new and relevant publishing style, save on printing fees, and cut out the printing costs and contract chaos altogether. However, what will the University put on its shelves each year? A USB with a PDF on it no one can flip through? Is that concern worth potentially stunting the growth of Cactus over? These are the questions Cactus is wrestling with currently. Of course, a change in the way our media exists demands Board input, though a digital format is in no way (as far as my reading of the Trust implies) a break from the regulations of the Trust. Also of concern are the repercussions of not printing a book this year and having a gap in the record, etc., which leads me to option two.

Option two: Cactus gets cut in half from about 400 pages to a little under 200 pages. It becomes a coffee table book: simple, beautiful, minimalist, mainly pictures with a small caption and/or related quote. This would still capture the essence of life at UT in that year, but in less detail than our current yearbook or than a website and digital book combo. We could make this kind of yearbook with the little content we have this year, not having to forgo printing altogether. We would likely be able to afford this despite only selling 300 books thanks to Walsworth’s generosity and support. Walsworth is a huge part of why Cactus has made it to print these past ten years, offering generous kick-backs if we sell a certain number of book. They would be willing to offer us an affordable contract for print if we work with them as a pilot program for an app that would accompany the yearbook. While I do not have the full-fledged details on this app at the time of writing this, the general idea of it sounds promising for both maintaining the spirit of Cactus as a book while also giving us a way in to the digital, modern age. However, to do this, we need to get a one-year emergency contract through our bureaucracy at lightning speeds since we are already at least 6 months behind due to the failure of the RFP to go anywhere at all last semester.

The future of Cactus is not a matter of trimming here and there on the 2014-2015 budget over the next few months. It demands immediate attention by the Board and decision by my staff and all of the relevant TSM components. Whether option one or two or a combo of both, it will change the way we operate this semester and allocate our budget. It may require an update in our software or the regular payment of monthly website fees. Cactus is too important to this University, to UT’s history, and to UT’s future to place on the back burner yet again.

Thank you for all of your hard work with TSM and for your consideration of the recommendations I put forth in this Board report.

Sincerely,
Jaclyn Kachelmeyer

Editor-in-Chief, Cactus Yearbook
Texas Student TV
February Board Report

• New staff members/positions for Spring 2014 are working hard to promote station improvements and the recruitment effort. With more dedicated individuals, we are able to continue and complete projects involving web upgrades, studio technology improvements, and peer content critique/workshops.
  o A new template has been applied to the TSTV development site and is currently being adjusted for changes in content and layout. Our Webmaster is also fine-tuning the live 24/7 web streaming system that is currently available on texasstudenttv.com. (No excuse to not watch now)
  o Our operations director is working on training modules that will be available to all volunteers so that the transition between new and old equipment is as seamless as possible.
• Purchasing for the Live Remote Broadcast system is close to 95% complete. We are about 60%-75% complete with the construction of the entire system and have conducted preliminary testing to work out the best workflow for the operators running the equipment.
  o Quite a few events have already been booked around the completion of this system (which we expect to have ready for volunteer training by the end of February). Our productions team is beginning to canvas university departments, programs, and state agencies that may be interested in productions work with this gear.
  o The mobile journalism unit within this live remote upgrade should also be available for TSM wide training sometime in late February/early March.
  o Getting this new equipment to TSTV and exposing volunteers to these new resources has been a big morale boost and has helped spark many new creative projects/opportunities that will help students enrich their learning experience here at TSM. I’m thankful for the opportunity to develop this system that is massively increasing the potential TSTV has as a television station and production house.
• Our spring general meeting was held on January 30. We had a good turnout and are beginning to embark on the 3-week TSTV training period we offer to all of our new and old volunteers.
• A production is underway with TRC that should bring in about $11,000 in revenue (after wages) for the station. We will be shooting for this production through the 14th of February.
• We are slowly retrofitting our studio for HD playback and transmission.
  o The Tech Services department in the College of Communication recently donated 3 projectors to TSTV that can be used for media effects in studio or as video playback monitors for studio audiences (total value of around $5,000).
• All producers have been trained on FCC guidelines as well as station specific and public access broadcast rules.

As always, I’m looking forward to another semester here at TSM.

Ian Reese
Texas Student TV
Station Manager
To the TSM Board of Trustees,

We’ve been keeping busy, over the past couple of months at the Travesty.

- As of the time of this Board Meeting, we will be right in the midst of promoting our new issue as always. But beyond our print issue, we are focusing more and more on online content at the Texas Travesty. Over the break, we began to develop an infrastructure to allow for more regular, often topical content. Number of views and audience engagement has increased exponentially because of these measures. We plan on maintaining this cycle of regular content into the next semester and beyond.

- In an effort to draw in more students and members of the Austin community, we are planning a screening of the cult movie The Room to be shown in the Union Theater on February 22nd. We have already gotten permission from the creators of the movie to show it for free. Screenings of the movie sell out in many different venues across the country, so we have reason to believe that there will be a substantial turnout and thus substantial opportunity to promote our brand and distribute our issues.

- Partnership with other TSM entities have grown as well with the Travesty partnering up with KVRX show Sports Page to help provide content in the form of humorous news stories for them to comment on during the program.

- With elections coming up, we are getting our dummy candidate ready. The idea this year being an oil baron and his son (think There Will Be Blood) trying to gain control of the University so that they can dig for the oil they believe lies under certain buildings. We are looking into hosting our own debate for the candidates. It would be a great opportunity for satire, and it would help to create more involvement amongst students in University life.

Best,

Nick Mehendale

*Editor-in-chief of Texas Travesty*
To: The Texas Student Media Board of Trustees  
From: Laura Wright, Editor-in-Chief, The Daily Texan  
Board Report, February 1, 2014

Internal achievements:
- Hired a new editorial board and 20 new columnists
- Re-wrote the Daily Texan Employee Handbook and ensured that new policies were made available online for readers.
- Wrote a handbook of editorial board procedures
- Met with Interim Director Frank Serpas to discuss TSM’s budget situation
- Set up a town hall for Texan staffers to speak with myself and managing editor Shabab Siddiqui about the Texan’s long-term plan

External achievements:
- Spoke on behalf of the Texan’s recruiting efforts at Student Engineering Council, Liberal Arts Council and Business Council, placed recruiting ads for the Texan in newsletters of Social Work council, Natural Sciences council and Communications Council
- Spoke to members of the press about the Texan’s move to the College of Communication and the controversy over the use of the term “pro-abortion” in a headline
- Met with Dean Rod Hart to discuss the Texan’s move to his college and the possibility of a town hall to address staffers’ concerns about the relocation
- Lobbied student government, unsuccessfully, to maintain the clause in their election code that necessitates advertising in the print Texan. Though I spoke with members of the assembly and executive about the different pricing options available to them, the relatively high cost of advertising in the Texan — either in print or online — caused them to vote to remove the Texan from their election procedures. The loss of revenue from this change is relatively miniscule, but the implications in terms of student involvement with the print product are worth noting.

In the next month, I hope to facilitate conversations between Texan staff, Texan student managers, interim director Frank Serpas, the TSM board and the College of Communication about the next steps for the Daily Texan.

I also hope to address my concerns about TSM’s move to the college. These concerns include:
- Clarifying the role of college faculty in TSM operations
- Clarifying and making transparent the process by which the next TSM director will be chosen (and to what extent students will be involved in the process)
- Clarifying the role the college with play in supplying TSM with funding

At this point, these concerns have been addressed on numerous occasions, but only in the form of verbal answers from administrators. I would like to see a clear and concrete plan for how the transition will unfold in writing by the time I leave my office.
Best Regards,

Laura Wright, Editor-in-Chief, The Daily Texan
Dear Texas Student Media Board of Trustees:

I hope you all are doing wonderfully since the last meeting. I plan to do an oral board report today, so below is my outline for that:

- **End of tryouts**
  - Number of applicants
  - Department head retention
- **Online strategy**
  - Online content: department heads in charge
  - Website development recruitment
  - Curt and Nathan’s team: Google+, Tweet timing, analytics
- **Inserts**
  - First Pitch, Comics
- **Over the break**
  - Livestreaming w/ TSTV
  - Charlie Strong, NCAA Final Four, Alamo Bowl
- **Lots of good stuff to cover this semester**

Please let me know if you have any questions, as I would be happy to receive your feedback.

Thank you for your time,

Shabab Siddiqui
To The TSM Board,

Already, 2014 has become one of KVRX’s busiest years to date. A lot of things are changing at TSM, and at KVRX specifically. We are looking to make some big steps forward this semester though, something we look forward to trying to do. We also have a lot of room for improvement, and we are beginning to build the staff for next year when much of my staff will no longer be at KVRX.

Our first and most important project is Pledge Drive 2014, which begins February 7th and runs until February 21st. Our goal this year is $9,170. Already, we are working from a worse place than last year due to a lack of premium gifts that we use as incentives for people to donate. We are compensating for this, however, by taking a new approach to listener donations: membership rewards. This year we are starting a program in which if listeners donate upwards of a certain dollar amount, currently set at $91.70, they will become a “Member” of the KVRX community base, in which they will receive normal pledge drive premiums and also continued benefits throughout the year until the 2015 Pledge Drive. This includes free access to KVRX concerts for the year, a monthly newsletter, and continued premium rewards as the year goes on, not simply once they’ve donated. We hope this will engage our audience throughout the year in a spirit of giving and community, and we believe we have the complete ability to make good on all of our promises and rewards. We believe this will set the seeds to make future Pledge Drives more and more successful.

Pledge Drive is our main focus right now, but as always we continue to look to improve our site. We are currently in talks with different students who are very interested in jumping on board and working with us. Their enthusiasm and skill is very encouraging, and I believe once we have more time to focus on the site after Pledge Drive, we will reach our goals. We are also looking to SXSW in March as an opportunity to network and expand our brand. We are setting up show opportunities, interviews, coverage, in-studios, and more, all of which will make for a busy and exciting spring break.

In the midst of many changes at TSM and many big things in KVRX’s future, we are facing a lot of challenges as a radio station. I believe our team is strong though, and we will be able to take on these challenges as opportunities to make a better radio station.

Thank You,
Joe Aragon
KVRX Station Manager