

Gateway Student Journalism Society

Meeting Minutes

August 16 2023

Opening

The regular meeting of the Gateway Student Journalism Society was called to order at 7:05 p.m. online and in-person by Emily WILLIAMS.

Present:

TEELING, Katie

WILLIAMS, Emily

BROOKS, Sam

SMITH, Jonas

FLAMAN, Levi

THIESSEN, Nathan

POLENCHUK, Lily

CRAIG, Lee

Absent:

DAUM, Evan

FASSONE, Lale

JICKLING, Sophie

KURANI, Danny

Approval of the Agenda

Moved by TEELING.

Seconded by CRAIG.

There are no votes in opposition.

Approval of Minutes

Moved by TEELING.

Seconded by FLAMAN.

There are no votes in opposition.

Reports to the Board

TEELING presents the Editor-in-Chief report.

TEELING explains that July and the beginning of August have been busy with two resignations. She says POLENUCHUK has been hired as Managing Editor, and now hiring for news is ongoing. She adds that Aprajita Rahman has been hired as Staff Reporter. She says staff is in the process of hiring an Opinion Editor. She says she's met with the Students' Union executive team to talk about Opinion Report Cards, and has been reaching out to journalists for workshops. She says that the Academic Staff Union of the University of Alberta (ASUUA) signed a four month ad deal, and Metro Cinema has signed their contract. She says the financial review has begun, and her and POLENUCHUK are figuring out a new training plan. She says she and SMITH have been working on clubs fair, and she has been working with Marketing and Outreach Coordinator Isabable Yue on stickers and merch. She says she's met with the president of the Indigenous Students' Union, which went well and the president wants to meet with the team. She says she's meeting with Erin O'Neill, director of Campus Food Bank, to talk about their relationship with The Gateway and coverage. She adds that she has met with each UASU executive.

SMITH presents the Executive Director (ED) report.

SMITH explains that the deal with AASUA will result in ads throughout fall. He says he has been working on the print edition, and that there are many ongoing discussions for ad deals.

WILLIAMS asks about the timeline for print.

TEELING replies that it will be sent for printing on the 28th, and layout days will happen the Thursday and Friday before.

CRAIG asks how many copies of the newspaper are being printed.

TEELING replies 3,000, with 16 pages.

SMITH continues that for DFU planning, discussions are ongoing. He says that he will be doing a lot of the photo work for this print edition, and along with TEELING he is lining up what photos are needed.

POLENUCHUK presents the Managing Editor report.

POLENCHUK explains that she's only been in the role for three days, but that the previous Managing Editor, Katie O'Connor, wrote one before she left. She says view count for July 2023 was 22,887, a decrease of 19.62 per cent from July 2022. She says the top article for July 2023 was Olivia O'Neill's opinion article about ChatGPT and plagiarism, which was published in late February this year. She says that Katie O'Connor left a farewell message on the August report.

CRAIG presents the Finance Committee report.

CRAIG explains that although the finance committee has the financial reports on QuickBooks, some things aren't fully updated. She says that TEELING has been working on getting their bookkeeper, Cindy, to update everything in a timely manner, but that these are repeated and historic issues. CRAIG continues, saying that TEELING has a plan to get Cindy to update everything, but if the plan doesn't work, they'll look for a new bookkeeper.

TEELING says that she will provide Cindy with one more chance to get everything sorted out, with a firm deadline, and if it doesn't work, she and SMITH will find someone new.

WILLIAMS asks if Cindy has started the year-end financial review.

TEELING says she isn't sure, but will check in with Cindy in the morning.

WILLIAMS presents the HR Committee report.

WILLIAMS explains that the HR committee has not met and there were plans to meet after this meeting, but there are not enough people to decide on a chair. She said the goal is to meet in September.

WILLIAMS presents the Governance Committee report.

WILLIAMS explains that the committee has not yet met and it's complicated as the two staff resignations sat on that committee.

For discussion:

WILLIAM presents the selection of a new board secretary.

TEELING motions to nominate POLENCHUK.

Seconded by FLAMAN.

There are no votes in opposition.

WILLIAM presents DAUM's motion, who is absent, to create a DFU subcommittee.

TEELING reads an email from DAUM that says there should be a separate subcommittee that is more tactical in nature. He suggests it includes board members and staff, with 6-8 people.

TEELING says that this was brought up at a DFU meeting and how it might not be possible for staff to be on one.

SMITH says that staff can't talk or know about certain aspects of the DFU campaign, and realistically the only staff that could be a part of it is SMITH or Isabella. He thinks that if this were to pass he should chair the subcommittee as Isabella is new, and his vision is that it would take place before finance committee on the same day, and it would be a discussion of what the actual DFU team has been working on in the previous month, and input and suggestions. He says that DAUM brought up that people knowledgeable with experience in DFU campaigns could be brought for discussion.

WILLIAMS clarifies that there is a preliminary campaign team that has met every week so far, but thinks this is potentially an interesting way to bring in some more board members that want to be involved and garner more feedback.

WILLIAMS opens the floor for discussion.

CRAIG asks if Lochlann was the head of the committee last year.

WILLIAMS confirms that he was, but he was a volunteer.

CRAIG asks how information would be kept separate from staff.

WILLIAMS said that Adam LAchaz wrote a formal letter of separation between the news team and the campaign team. Staff had a general idea but leading up to it, they did not participate except for the Business Unit. She says Adam straddled both sides, but she thinks that this time TEELING would focus on election coverage and WILLIAMS would be more involved in the DFU. She says SMITH would be the person that speaks to both sides and all committees.

SMITH says that if there is a DFU subcommittee, another beneficial aspect is it would channel all major discussion into that section, so people on the DFU team can answer board member questions that staff on the board can't know.

CRAIG asks how much time is left till the DFU.

WILLIAMS replies it's the first week of March.

BROOKS says that he thinks the motion is driven out of concern, and as a board member that isn't involved in the day-to-day operations of The Gateway, there isn't a well-communicated plan. He says he understands the want for a sub-committee, but also doesn't want to undermine staff at The Gateway. Says if there isn't really direction or a plan from management, he would be very interested in being on a subcommittee as suggested.

WILLIAMS said that last time the board wasn't as involved, and perhaps mistakes would've been caught if they were and the specifics of the campaign are good to get feedback on. She says this is one way of doing it but there are other ways, such as asking for a campaign manager report at board meetings each month. She offers this as an alternative, as there are some committees already struggling to meet.

TEELING says it's beneficial to have a subcommittee especially if SMITH is willing to chair it.

WILLIAMS says that although there is no formal motion, a motion to create the sub-committee could be made.

BROOKS says the board could vote yes or no now to having this committee, and if it passes have a subsequent vote by email for who should be on the committee

FLAMAN says he isn't opposed to the creation of a board, but the terms and reference should be laid out before the creation of a committee.

WILLIAMS proposes to send out an email to create the committee, and then after members can nominate themselves.

WILLIAMS presents on the DFU amount.

WILLIAMS explains that this is what the campaign team has been thinking for the fee amount that should be run on. She says that this has been contentious, and this presentation is meant to give an idea about the conversations that the campaign team has had and board members will have the opportunity to provide feedback. She explains that the campaign team has started consultations, worked on mission statements, has done fee amount research, and readership survey analysis. She says that the team is aware the last two campaigns lost and that The Gateway is able to operate on less than pre-2020. She says that the campaign team was wondering if decreasing the fee will help, who should be charged, how much is needed, and if enrollment growth could impact the budget. She says that the amount of student revenue that

could be brought in depends on multiple factors such as how much is charged, part-time students, if the fee is opt-outable, and if a spring fee is brought in. She says many student fees are moving in the opt-outable direction. She gives background on how much was charged previously: \$2.50 in 2002, increasing due to inflation and ending at \$3.54. She says that part-time students have been charged the full amount, differing from other student fees. For the spring fee, she says that the charge used to be \$0.54 because The Gateway still offers services. She says if the fee is opt-outable, based on previous advice a 15 per cent out-out rate can be expected. She says that failure is possible, as seven DFU's have failed in the last 10 years, and The Gateway has been two of them. She says the campaign team has looked at trends which show that no fee under \$2 has failed in the last 10 years, and there seems to be a correlation between price and vote percentage. She says that the current climate at the U of A is very cost adverse, which was shown through comments in the readership survey. She says that a percentage of campus see fees as one more additional cost when tuition and cost-of-living is already expensive. She presents her research, four different visions for four different fees. She adds that Lochlan Kerr's research on price psychology shows that the dollar amount matters, and the \$2-3 distinction is the significant amount. She says smaller cent amounts matter less, but being close to a round number makes people tend to round. She says that the campaign team was wondering if it should be an even number, but based on what Kerr found you don't want the fee rounded. She shows that for \$2.50 cents, The Gateway would generate roughly \$187,000 assuming 15 per cent opt-out, a graduate student win, and a \$10,000 spring fee. She clarifies that the campaign team wants to charge a graduate student fee. In this scenario, she says that the spring fee is a guess because the number of spring students is unknown, and the estimate is based on the previous fee of \$0.54, and that there could be potential revenue. For \$2.60, she says The Gateway would get 195k, for \$2.90 in the same scenario, the revenue would be \$216,000, closer to the revenue previously, and for \$3.52, the revenue would be \$253,000. She says the next question is how much revenue is needed. She shows that The Gateway used to bring in close to \$300,000, including the fee and different revenue avenues. She says that current operation is running on half, and to run current expenses with current fees alone it would cost a \$2.10 fee, assuming no spring fee, that there's a 15 per cent opt-out, and a graduate student loss. She says that The Gateway has been operating on less than it would like, resulting in a much smaller staff, and she shows what might be needed for a sustainable organization.

FLAMAN asks if there is math on how she arrived at \$2.10. He says he did the math but not including the scenario with the opt-out and grad student win, and he came to \$1.20 per semester.

WILLIAMS says that can be checked at the end of the meeting as she doesn't have the information on her. She continues that the wish list includes a separate A&C Editor, two additional staff reporters, existing salary expenses with a 10 percent increase, a webmaster and visuals budget, software, printing cost for a quarterly print edition, and other existing costs. She says the total comes to \$163,332. She mentions that staff are being paid the same as in 2019, and

this wishlist is based on previous experiences and some consultation. She explains that in theory the \$2.50 fee could comfortably fund this wishlist, however this hinges on winning the graduate student fee. She says if it loses, instead of bringing \$187,000, it would bring in \$152,000. She says there's a potential to only afford a slightly expanded Gateway, but some campaign members feel that is a risk worth taking. She adds that enrolment growth has already started benefiting with the U of A's enrolment goal for 2026.

TEELING explains where the campaign team is at, saying that it is currently thinking of setting the fee at \$2.60. She says staff, stakeholders, and many groups have been consulted, and the general feeling is that going under \$2.50 is too low, but going over \$3.00 is too high for comfort. She says it has been contentious but the majority has settled with \$2.60. She adds that considerations are being made toward the cents.

WILLIAMS says that she's had her own biases with not undermining The Gateway.

FLAMAN says that he thinks, rather than aiming for the bare minimum, The Gateway should aim higher and make a case as to why this isn't a cost or expense, but an investment in students' campus experience. He says that from the wishlist, with the additional staff, that's great, but there used to be a sports editor. He says that it would be great, for example, to highlight the great athletics at the U of A. He thinks a lot of dissent to The Gateway came from the string of articles in poor taste, but with new first-years coming in and second/third years that started off online, that creates a blank slate. He says that there is an affordability crisis, but APIRG won charging \$3.50, Campus Recreation passed with \$4.70, and he wonders if they provide as much as a newly invigorated campus media source.

WILLIAMS says that there are people on the campaign team who went through the previous two losses and have a negativity bias there, and are worried that charging too much is a risk.

TEELING continues that based on consultations it changes drastically: some said \$5.00, others said \$1.50. She says it seems pretty random, but a lot of people on the campaign are worried that too high of an amount will tank The Gateway.

WILLIAMS adds that there is the feeling that The Gateway can't lose. She says that there is the feeling of not risking that and needing to pass this year.

BROOKS says that he wants to echo the comments of going big or going home. He says the research is great and something that is valuable, but he wonders what APIRG does for the average undergraduate student, in comparison to The Gateway. He says his whole point is that the message being an essential part of campus life, maybe there's something to be said about going bold, emphasizing the opt-out and making the choice: do you want to fund campus

journalism or not? He says turning it into a value question that affects the university experience could be very motivating, and he says he would not be afraid of having a high rate.

WILLIAMS says she thinks it's tough because she sat on the high-end, and that the people who ran the last two campaigns think this kind of talk is idealistic. She says it's hard to know where to go from here with this split.

FLAMAN says that if the trendline was steeper he'd agree. He says that although the future can't be predicted, a lot is dependent on the operational capacity of the campaign team. He says that the support was there once and it can get there again.

CRAIG says that it wasn't a handful of articles that people didn't like, but one, and the thing that alarms people is such a small thing that can have such a great impact. She says she understands both sides, but the people who actually vote on campus need to be considered. She says that helping people understand why journalism is important, and it comes down to who votes and how you get your vote out.

WILLIAMS adds that CJSR passed with 51 per cent last time, and that DFU's are failing more than they used to, but when they pass it's tight.

POLENCHUK says that among her second-year peers, many don't know what The Gateway is and she agrees with CRAIG that getting out the vote is important to focus on. She says she thinks the risk is too great to run a high DFU and that it's important to pass this year.

SMITH says that in earlier DFU meetings, it was said that future Gateway staff won't be mad if The Gateway doesn't win a \$5.00 fee, because they'll be happy if it exists period. He says the higher fees would be great, but hitting that range prices out certain groups of people. He says that keeping in mind the state of journalism in the world, it's a lot safer and smarter to go into it with a mindset of survival.

WILLIAMS says that efforts to increase fees have a hard time, but people have done it. She says that the tricky thing is the high stakes, but it's hard to know how much the price actually matters. She says that the \$2-3 threshold probably matters, but isn't sure beyond that.

FLAMAN says that he doesn't know if CJSR is as close of a comparator as a lot of it is music and entertainment, and they get a lot of funding from outside sources. He says they market themselves as the community radio station. He says that in comparison The Gauntlet charges \$4.50.

TEELING says that the fees different student papers charge really differ, for example the Western Gazette charges \$18.00 a year, while other places are in the \$1.00 range. She says it really depends on the atmosphere of the campus.

FLAMAN says that there is a whole population of first-year students that can be advertised to.

WILLIAMS says that the campaign plans to be really stellar, but the recognition of the different conditions in 2016 is there. She says that the U of A is really disengaged, news is blocked on Instagram, and it's a hostile media environment, which are all barriers. She says a lot of young people think the media should be free, and some people don't understand why it can't all be volunteer-based. She says these are industry world problems, and it's a matter of recognizing that.

FLAMAN says that having the opt-out option works in favour, as some students would think that they don't want to pay it themselves but not take the opportunity away from others. He says a lot of it could come down to utility as well.

TEELING says that everyone here knows how good the content is, but there are many barriers such as Bill C-18 that may be impossible to tackle along with the campaign in a year. She says that the environment is now worse which is concerning.

BROOKS wonders about other student papers and DFU's and what kind of campaigns they launched. He says he still firmly thinks amount doesn't matter, and in the ranges and amounts considered it's easy to make the case that it is affordable but also opt-outable. He says he wants to know much more about what other campaigns did right and wrong.

TEELING says she's reached out to papers that lost their campaigns. She says there is voter apathy all over university campuses, which has affected campaigns.

WILLIAMS says this happened to the HUB Mall fee.

THIESSEN comments on the Google Meet that securing the DFU is a matter of survival and securing the short term for the long term should be the focus.

WILLIAMS says that the goal is to have a plan laid out in September/October, with everything locked in in November, so there aren't many board meetings left.

BROOKS wonders what WILLIAMS wants the board to do with this information.

WILLIAMS says that there is no current call to action and she's just looking for discussion. Says at some point there should be a formal board motion on the fee amount, but it's hard to know how to go about that.

CRAIG says that the board should first set up the terms of the subcommittee and then see what the plan will be for the campaign. She says that a call for action for board members could be to start thinking about people on campus to reach out to that non-staff board members know.

WILLIAMS says that an email vote will be sent out, and if passed, a DFU subcommittee that would hopefully meet 1-2 times before the next board meetings will be put together.

FLAMAN says that since sharing volunteers between multiple sides is allowed, and if there are some campaigns willing to share volunteer resources, that could be helpful.

WILLIAMS says that can be thought about, but we need to be careful because there is a perception that the campaign is the same as reporters. She says sharing volunteers could create perceptions of conflicts of interests. She adds that CJSR is someone they've collaborated with in the past, but they're hard to get in touch with. She says The Gateway has a decent capacity of bringing in volunteers.

BROOKS says if CJSR is up for renewal at the same time, the campaign could make it a theme of supporting campus media. He says that with this kind of campaign, people at CJSR could have a lot of advice.

Adjournment

BROOKS motions to adjourn.

TEELING seconds.

The board unanimously votes to adjourn.

The meeting is adjourned at 9:01.

Minutes submitted by: Lily Polenchuk