

THE QUEEN'S JOURNAL ADVISORY BOARD

Monday, January 31, 2022

Motion #1 – Call for Chair nominees

Names forward: Yoli Wang, Business Manager

Journal reports

Newsletter

Aysha Tabassum [Editor in Chief]: *The Journal* started running our newsletter campaign, which is the Campus Catch-Up, in 147—so the 2019 and 2020 years. A lot was done by 148's Editors last year to increase engagement with the newsletter including the creation of a subscription popup that appears if you visit the website, which accounts for 71% of the contacts for this campaign. Campus catch-up has 1,129 subscribers. The campaign has gained 261 subscribers and lost 56 subscribers since May 1st. These numbers are very similar to the numbers reported by Volume 148 at this time last year.

The Website

Aysha: We're currently working with the AMS to revamp the QJ website. The website updates are not incurring any cost for *The Journal*. At this point, the work is really reviewing the mock-up for the site, and we plan to send that to VPOPs, Tiana. What we're planning to address is whether we're changing website hosts and how the current host works to see if we're allowed to terminate the contract and move on to a new host. We have a few items for our platform that we'd like to be implemented, like a link to an anonymous feedback form.

Marketing

Aysha: This year *The Journal* has a new marketing position, Social Media Manager. We found this position to be really successful, since it's elevated our brand. Social media is largely where we promote *The Journal*, especially throughout the pandemic. We think future editors should explore evolving the social media manager role into something resembling a marketing coordinator who could be a larger member of the business team.

Multimedia

Aysha: The emphasis has been on *The Journal's* video content as opposed to our podcast—we've had a very irregular publishing schedule for the podcast. However, it's had some collaborations. For instance, with the student-athlete community, we are planning a Sports podcast season and as well an Arts season in collaboration with other editors. However, *The Journal's* podcast presence is definitely slow-growing compared to other content. Perhaps that is the content that is engaged with the least. We are thinking of the Podcast Coordinator position and whether we should continue that into Volume 150.

Analytics

Shelby Talbot [Editor in chief]: As of the time that we prepared this update, we've garnered 830,498 page views since the beginning of our term on our website. We're typically sitting between 2,000 and 3,000 pageviews per day, which is pretty on par with past volumes. We have experienced a 25% decrease in overall page views when compared to total page view this time last year. Recalling last year's J-Board meetings and our transition conversations with Rachel and Matt—who were last year's editors—we're not unhappy with our numbers right now. They explained they saw a significant spike in views every so often because of COVID-19, which was continuing to be unprecedented breaking news at the beginning of their term, so *The Journal* saw a big uptick in readership, and Matt and Rachel did not expect the same numbers this year.

Shelby: We're up 6.2% in page views compared to Volume 147 at this time and 6.13% from Volume 146, which means that we are currently very tightly on track to be the second-fastest volume to reach 1,000,000 pageviews. These close numbers are very meaningful to us because this year we've done some restructuring of the content coming out of *The Journal* to be mindful of the workload of our staff. Historically, *The Journal* has perhaps asked too much sometimes and has been exploitative in terms of the working environment, with paid staff working well over their hours and not being compensated, and volunteer sometimes working full-time for free. We haven't seen a drop in engagement overall, and this is because like we suspected staff in certain sections kind of felt pressure to produce so much content that filler-y pieces were coming out, so it seems like the effort has been better redirected towards quality and not quantity.

Victoria [invited member]: On the question of the burdens on staff I meant to ask this, Aysha, when you mentioned it a moment ago, this anonymous feedback tool that you're looking to implement; who's going to be in charge of monitoring that?

Aysha: Shelby and I were hoping it would be treated as the same as regular grievances and complaints are treated. It would go through the Editors in Chief, and the onus would be on us to respond, if appropriate. But we are planning on sharing feedback with section heads if it pertains to their section. Not so that they respond but just so that they know what kind of feedback is coming in.

Victoria: And what's the thinking behind the anonymity? With the knowledge of the mechanisms of how anonymity works and a lot of it tends to become a sort of venting place as opposed to a place for meaningful conversation and useful feedback. So what was the thinking there?

Aysha: Our main thought process was from how students of colour and queer students were more willing to give feedback to an outlet that would not have to attach their name and face to. We are hoping that it would come with a better way to inform our EDII practices.

Victoria: I would just encourage you to think about you know the mental health of the person who is going through that, just because you're giving people the opportunity to come at you without a face or a name. It might be for the editors that are going through that inbox quite a difficult task if there's something that becomes inflammatory or a story that really hits a nerve, where you're getting a lot of feedback.

Aysha: Of course, thank you.

Summer pageviews

Shelby: Like Volume 148, we saw a big increase in pageviews in the summer. The increase in our summer page views between May 1st and September 1st was up 57.97% from Volume 147. This is because our Senior News Editor was publishing off-cycle news stories outside of our three scheduled issues for the summer months. We ensured that our Senior News Editor was being paid for the extra work that she was doing over the summer and thus extra content was limited to what she squeezed into her hours that were contracted pretty much exclusively focused on those summer press weekends, whereas the previous news editor was working for free and not being paid in the summer despite technically being a paid role. Something that we're thinking about exploring is advocating to have the Senior News Editor's contract formally extended over the summer so they can do this work for Volume 150 or potentially Volume 151 because it really does boost engagement, but it's really important to compensate them fairly.

SGPS fee

Shelby: Unfortunately, this month *The Journal* was not able to secure enough nomination signatures for QJ's \$3.00 mandatory SGPS fee to appear on the ballot for reestablishment this winter. Despite reaching out to professors and departments and TAs and asking our staff—one of whom this year is a graduate student—to help us reach out and using social media and then personally emailing almost 900 graduate-level students, we were only able to collect 92 of 100 necessary signatures. In the transition with the next editors, we intend to walk them through how we strove to engage with SGPS students this year. They will have to be prepared to operate without this part of QJ's typical income next year, but we do hope that the resumption of in-person activities, if they continue into next year, will be helpful because circulating some clipboards in some graduate-level classes is perhaps a more effective way to gather signatures. This news is most discouraging when considering conversations we had about exploring institutionalizing a process to hire graduate-level students at *The Journal* because they do pay a mandatory fee. We were hoping to at least start the process of establishing something like Walkhome wherein a certain small percentage of our staff could be SGPS students, but because SGPS will no longer have a *Journal* fee next year this is something we may have to leave up to the next editors, which is disappointing.

Print

Shelby: While Volume 148 intended to follow the same print schedule as in 147, which was once every two weeks, lockdowns reduced the number of issues we were able to print in 147 to a number that's much closer to ours currently. This year *The Journal* prints once a month and circulates 1,500 copies on campus. The printed issues are 16 pages long. Also once a month, to

ensure staff are familiar with InDesign to assemble print issues, we publish one 12-page digital “print” issue on the website. Overall, QJ has a pretty ambiguous relationship with print right now; print ads are our most lucrative one-off sales, but printing does come at a greater cost to *The Journal*. We hope to work on having an analysis of the success of the printing of *The Journal* prepared for the incoming editors to use to inform their decisions.

EIC election

Shelby: The process for the election for *The Journal's* Editor in Chief for Volume 150, will have officially begun as of Wednesday, when the all-candidate's meeting will take place. The election will conclude on February 18th when the results are announced.

Lyn Parry [AMS General Manager]: I was just curious, can someone speak to the conversion rate of when you're talking to a customer and they're looking for print ads or maybe you're cold calling and you're trying to get someone to sign up for print advertising—if they find print too expensive are you able to convert to the digital?

Yoli Wang [Business Manager]: We do encounter that kind of problem in real life but most of them don't tend to convert to the digital version of the print issue. We usually suggest they go for the online advertising option because the digital issue is not going to be printed and distributed on campus. But if it's not printed then they tend not to choose that option.

Lyn: Do you think COVID has created challenges for you in this regard?

Yoli: Yeah, that's what I will be talking about.

Jasnit Pabla [Invited member]: For those who are opting to advertise digitally are we providing them with metrics after the fact of how many views an ad has gotten?

Yoli: Yes, they tend to ask for numbers especially clickthrough rate and impression rate, and we do provide them.

Yoli: Since the beginning of May, we have done several really impressive things: we revised the rate card and we reviewed the design to look more straightforward, and a lot of clients are really satisfied with the result. Our social media presence has been growing and I see some potential in that, for example changing our Instagram account into a business account.

Revenue

Yoli: In terms of the revenue, we have earned \$22,930 in total. A large portion of that revenue is for web advertising which is around \$13,000 to \$14,000 right now. And for Lyn's question earlier, our local print advertising revenue is only at \$2,600 right now. It's a lot better compared to our last volume which was—if the budgeting number was correct—only around \$120. Our goal is \$7,000 and we're far from achieving that due to COVID and students not being on campus.

Advertising

Yoli: When contacting local clients, they notice the social media marketing rates and they tend to choose to advertise through Instagram or Facebook over traditional media. We'd like to maintain our brand image as professional as possible so right now we're not going towards social media advertising, but that is an area that we need to explore. I believe that our budget for the web this year is around \$8,000 or \$9,000 and right now we're at \$13,000 which is way above our budget.

AMS reports

Website

Tiana Wong [Vice-President (Operations)]: It's really nice to see that we were able to include *The Journal's* website as part of the overall AMS website restructuring because all of our websites are quite outdated. Aysha and Shelby have seen the piloted site currently and they had some thoughts so we're working to edit those and have that ready. Our IT team will work with Aysha and Shelby, part of this agreement is that we will have continual teaching hours and support available so future generations of teams have external support if they need help with anything.

Victoria: *The Journal* over the past number of years has had multiple long-form websites. The microsites for longer pieces of journalism are usually interactive and give staff, particularly production staff, really good opportunities to sink their teeth into the design aspects of journalism. I believe those sites are currently offline or at least archived and are not accessible in their current form for the new website. Is there going to be some sort of functionality that allows that or will there be a new project? It could be good to get that archive of stories whereas the past websites have just disappeared, which obviously is not good from an institutional memory perspective.

Tiana: All of the information that's currently archived within *The Journal* site is being transferred over and they'll have access to all of that so it'll be up to a conversation with Aysha and Shelby about how they want that displayed and hosted.

Aysha: If everything can be hosted under one site that would be the best way to go

Financials

Tiana: In terms of the budget, at the end of November we were falling a little bit short in revenue from donations that we budgeted for. I do think COVID had a huge impact on that and something to look at moving forward would be focusing on that donation through tapping into the alumni network and running more in-person fundraising events. Shelby touched on losing that *Journal* fee. We really did do all we could and unfortunately, we did fall short on that nomination minimum even with the entire AMS supporting and trying to get those signatures. The problem is we don't have that direct tie to the SGPS students. Usually, SGPS itself is the one to help us promote those things but, in this case, because it was their referendum, they weren't able to do any promotion on our behalf. That fee out of all of our combined AMS and SGPS fees

represents 12% of the student fees that *The Journal* receives. It is possible to go back through either the fall or winter referendum to get the feedback for the following year. One more thing is part of those financials that I'm reporting on includes the subsidy Lyn has filed for us which is the Canadian Emergency Wage Subsidy, which has helped us a little bit on our bottom line the last filing.

Lyn: It is actually for October when you get six months to file so we're just waiting to file that last period but that program is coming to an end, so we'll be on our own after that.

Shelby: Just as a quick point of information: we did have a fundraising Rep who was with us over the summer who then had to take a step back from *The Journal*. We had no success in hiring another fundraising Rep so Yoli absorbed that role within her portfolio.

Lyn: Shelby have you formed any kind of relationship with Queen's advancement? They can help promote some kind of a program for you. I know that's what Rachel and Matt did in their year or maybe the year before.

Shelby: I think it was the year before and then during that time, all those roadblocks with advancement simply because the funds weren't properly allocated or advertised when they were collected.

Lyn: I think it was more confusion. It ended up being fine, the organization was looking for some kind of an endowment and in that case, we weren't conducting the advancement program consistent with what an endowment would be, but the advancement program went out and said, "Hey we need some money basically to support us in our operating costs," and alumni and others paid into it. We had just a lack of information, but I think that's still a very reasonable place to go. It doesn't require too much effort other than just connecting with someone in the advancement department. I don't know whether you have a connection there but I'm sure Tiana and I can maybe help.

Shelby: Absolutely. Yoli, do we have a current connection with advancement?

Yoli: No.

Lyn: Oay, we can get that to you

Discussion Period/Statements By Members

Shelby: On the agenda, the first thing would be talking about is some of our long-term goals for *The Journal* that hopefully will persist beyond our time as editors. Our priority is to leave *The Journal* a better and safer place for our staff and the people that we report on. We want the paper to be a place where students *want* to work and are respected and compensated fairly. We want the content to be ethical, inclusive, and meaningful, particularly since *The Journal* has a long history of exploiting and ignoring underserved groups with a particular emphasis on people of colour. So, one thing we want to explore is integrating *The Journal's* BIPOC Advisory

Board mechanism into *Journal* policy, if possible, because we think it's important that this mechanism be institutionalized.

Tiana: I think those are great long-term goals Aysha and Shelby. I'm curious if you could expand a little bit more in terms of to what degree that mechanism you would think would be included in the policy or hope to have included in the policy

Shelby: These roles have only recently been formally introduced as paid hired positions. We've observed that some positions that existed in *The Journal* kind of evolve and phase in and out, but we think this is something that perhaps would be best integrated into policy.

Aysha: Essentially, they are technically editorial staff and consult on any stories across any section that pertain to race and racialization. We look for students in these positions who have extensive EDII knowledge or expertise just to make sure we're staying up to date on terminology make sure that we're able to maintain a diverse array of sources and treat them in a sensitive and kind way. it would be in the policy statement that there will be at least one board member every year hired by the Editor in Chief.

Shelby: Because these positions were somewhat informally adopted last year in the sense that they had to receive honoraria through a backpay approval process, the transition between last year's board and this year's board was a bit messy. The discussion point is that we want to further institutionalize ethical reporting at *The Journal*.

Jasnit: How does it work on a daily basis and what are you guys doing to make sure that this board—especially if it ends up just being one person— isn't incredibly overwhelmed with work on a consistent basis? If their role is to contribute in another way, overwhelming them with one thing might kind of take away from that experience with *The Journal*. I would like to know how, on a day-to-day basis, this person is operating, or members of the board are operating.

Aysha: The reason that Shelby and I are talking about reducing the number of members is that at the moment they are splitting the workload of one to two editorial members. None of the members of the BIPOC Advisory Board hold any other position on the editorial staff so their sole focus is taking on these stories specifically pertaining to racialization. The stories that go to them are determined by the section head or the EIC if they feel a story should be reviewed by the board. It is a very focused role of we would hope that we would have kind of the funding three-person board but in the future, in policy, even if the board can't support a full board that there must be at least one member on it.

Shelby: We would say in terms of the day-to-day, early in this role, weeks would go by where we don't have an article that is specifically in need of review with the board. As *The Journal's* reporting continues to grow there will only continue to be more pieces that having that extra layer to look at would be extremely valuable. Right now—not kind for lack of diversity in our coverage, but in terms of people outside of a certain identity with reporting on stories—there's certainly less work this year than it needed to be split between the three people as of right now. Ideally, it would be wonderful to have three people at any given time if that's within our budget.

Jasnit: Do you think maybe the reason why they're not using the Board may be because staff have had good supplementary training? If you guys are doing a really strong amount of ethical reporting like training workshops, I think maybe one person would make a lot more sense so I can see that it might become a very irregular position. Can this person outside of just being on the Board do other things and maybe engage the rest of the team in other ways?

Aysha: On top of the editing, the Board does have that maintenance aspect in the transition of our terminology or style guides. This year the board has actually had a lot less to do than last year and we think that's partly because Shelby and I have a special interest in reporting on these communities, so we have been maintaining the style guides on our end. We also appreciate that future editors might have different priorities or might not have the knowledge, so we're hoping that in the policy we can have it so that Board members can take on that responsibility.

Victoria: I'm just wondering if there's an opportunity to get at a lot of the different things that you seem to be interested in through a more condensed process. A couple of years ago UofT's student paper implemented a public editor. The idea of the public editor is partly that mechanism for feedback that I think you're looking for with the anonymous feedback channel. This is someone who isn't directly part of the day-to-day editorial step, but they are there to take in feedback and bring it to the editorial team. They can advise on a number of matters, where their job is to keep up to date on best practices in journalism. It might be worth reaching out to UofT if you're interested to see if that's something that fits with what you're looking for.

Tiana: I feel like I don't have a clear grasp of the mechanisms of the BIPOC Board. I feel like I was hearing some conflicting thoughts around reducing the number of individuals on the board but also trying to increase or continue to report on marginalized and represent marginalized communities Queens or in our community in general, so if you're looking to increase one it would also maybe increase the work of the one person you would like to remain on the Board. I think before we would look into institutionalizing anything or putting anything in policy we would have to have a broader conversation about structuring the board first to kind of know what you're putting into policy.

Lyn: Picking up from what Jasnit said, it would be really great if that training could be institutionalized. I was sort of going through a bunch of the student newspapers and other newspapers trying to see what their policies look like because it's completely out of my world and a lot of them have very different ways of doing things. They may have an equity statement or a diversity statement, more of a statement on what you believe are your principles and then your main policy takes you through how you enact those statements, so maybe a combination of some of that.

Tiana: One more quick point, I want to know a little bit more about how the Board's operating this year because I would also worry that if you reduce it to one individual you put that individual in a place to be tokenized. The policy is very long-term so if you're identifying that one person as the person that everyone in *The Journal* would use to go over any sort of articles that you think should be going through a BIPOC Advisory Board, and that person maybe isn't hasn't gotten the correct training they might feel—not just tokenized—but in a position that they can't actually make those decisions on behalf of the entire *Journal* in the future.

Aynsha: When it was first introduced in 148 the Board did give more advice on policy and really focused more on institutional knowledge, like terminology in our style guides. 149, this year, we were kind of experimenting with having them act as editorial staff. But if we were to consider putting this into policy, we would want to return to that primary function in 148 where their primary role would be to advise on underlying policy.

Shelby: We also wanted to see how feasible it would be to continue the work that happened in volume 148 to update journal policy and address perhaps irrelevant pieces of policy and introduce policy that is lacking. Too much of *The Journal's* policy is out of date and simply is irrelevant to its current operations. And we are falling behind, as Lyn mentioned, compared with other student newspapers when it comes to institutionalizing formal practices for ethical reporting.

Lyn: As you know, there's the very broad high-level statement that comes through the corporate bylaws, and there's a whole section on *The Journal* because of the editorial autonomy. I think the conversation about if anything has to change, I think that's a broader conversation with the Board of Directors and the Governance Committee. I think that would be a good place to start because sounds like there's a lot that can be done by *The Journal* that doesn't necessarily need board approval. Our secretary Laura would be really helpful. She's a real policy guru.

Victoria: I was gonna say a similar point. I think your idea around defining things like how you use anonymity is very overdue is a really good idea. I would encourage you guys to do sort of a jurisdictional scan if you're interested to see what the style guides student newspapers and other major newspapers are doing

Shelby: That's really helpful, thank you.

Lyn: If you need a checklist or you need a guide to help people learn how to manage their way through it, you can have an internal guide but you don't have to make that your policy statement.

Victoria: Not everything has to be policy, a lot can be training, where, if you feel that there are gaps, sometimes the answer isn't writing a new rule it's about having more resources and putting it together in an accessible place for future editors and future staffers. You don't necessarily need to run everything through as many filters when your staff is empowered to know how to handle themselves in different situations.

Question Period

No further questions

Adjournment of the Journal Board.