Annual Report: University Board for Student Media
2012 - 2013

Board Members:
Voting Members: Dr. William Thorn, Chairman; Mr. Dale Kaser (Provost's office); Mr. Jon Pray (Administrator); Dr. C J Hribal (at-large faculty); Rev. John Laurance, S.J. (Jesuit Community); Ms. Linda Menck (Dept. of Advertising); Ms. Maya Held (Dept. of Broadcast Electronic Comm.); Mr. Greg Borowski (alumni); Mr. Patrick Johnson (Graduate); Brian Keogh (MUSG); Margaret Grace (MUSG); Peter Askamit (MUSG - fall)

Non-voting Members: Dr. Steve Byers (Print & Online Advisor - Fall); Mr. Herbert Lowe (Print and Online advisor - Spring); Ms. Barbara Volbrecht (Radio & TV advisor); Ms. Kimberly Zawada (business mgr.); Michael Andre (technical mgr.); Mr. Andy Boyd (WMUR); Alexandra Engler (Journal); Erin Caughey (Media Interactive); Mr. Anthony Virgilio (Advertising); Mr. Andrew Phillips (Tribune);

The Board undertook a major revision of the structure and roles of student media which began at the end of the 2011-2012 academic year. During the summer of 2012 alumni board member Greg Borowski chaired a committee of student editors and managers who contributed their viewpoints and recommendations to the overall plan produced by the Board's executive committee in May 2012. The subsequent revision, reviewed and discussed by the full board was approved unanimously. The final version created an online news center as the dominant news element in the student media array to be staffed by executive editors who coordinate coverage of news, sports, entertainment, and design in each of the other media: Tribune, Journal, WMUR, and MUTV. An illustration of the new lines of authority and the relationships between news/sports/arts content and the other content produced by MUTV, WMUR, the Journal and the Tribune is attached. In the final analysis, the revision set as a fundamental principles that 1) web production of the news comes first, and 2) all news must be viewed for multi-media opportunities.

In addition, the Board created a reporter pool for younger journalists and for beat reporters to inculcate working in a multi-media context. The pool operates under the direct management of the news center's executive editors, but individuals can be assigned specific stories by the other media. In other words, young reporters do not become members of specific media to embrace but learn to view all stories through a multi-media lens.

To strongly encourage and develop strong reporting on the larger Marquette community, beat reporters will be assigned to weekly contacts of specific parts of the university community and identify newsworthy items and report on them. The
standard beats include each of the colleges, major administrative offices, Senate, Public Safety, Athletics, MUSG, and other parts of the community.

The editors and managers of each of the media retain responsibility for production of their own medium, and they have a leadership team. However, reporting staff lines were transferred to the reporter pool for 2013-2014, and editor lines in the news center were transferred for 2013-2014 from asst. editor and asst. manager lines in the 2012-2013 array.

After the Board approved the 2013-2014 budget in May, the executive committee of the Board reviewed all of the student media payroll to eliminate inequalities.

Another major effort of the Board was the hiring of an outside firm to create a unified website and portal for all of the student media. Mr. Herb Lowe undertook leadership of this task and presented his results to the Board in March. The two finalists from the RFP presented their plan and budget proposals to the Board. The Board, in an emergency meeting in May, unanimously selected Fresh Coast Ventures, a Milwaukee based firm, for the contract. The goal was a working web site by the first week of classes in August.

A series of internal reviews by IT, the University lawyer, and the Office of Finance ensued. The result was a conflict with the Office of Finance about paying the Fresh Coast contract ($14,000) from funds reallocated from the 2012-2013 Student Media Budget. Finance refused to process the purchase order on the grounds that at least half of the work would be done by Fresh Coast in July 2013, i.e. fiscal year 2014. They were immune to various appeals. Thus the contract was not let until the first week of July rather than the first week of June. The full cost of the web site will be taken from the 2013-2014 budget.

Fresh Coast subcontracted the design to a local designer who completed her work in June. The designer and Fresh Coast worked through the summer with the editors and managers of student media on the specifics of the build. As of August 1, the programming is mostly complete, but some refinements and detail programming remain to be completed.

Fresh Coast reported on August 15 that the web site will not be fully operational until September.

A significant decline in advertising revenues in the first semester raised the prospect of a major budget deficit for the fiscal year. Dr. Thorn met with Mel Austin and Jay Kutka in early January to review the budget situation and its implications. Subsequently, the executive committee met with Mel Austin to review the situation and discuss options. The situation was laid out to the full Board at its February meeting, and discussion of ways to reduce the remaining budget expenditures in order to avoid a budget deficit for the fiscal year including cutting travel, reducing color printing and the number of pages in the Tribune to 8 - 12 for the balance of the year. The Tribune editors and staff initiated a social media campaign accusing the Board of trying to destroy the Tribune by holding it to 8 pages for the balance of the semester. The digital donnybrook led to a formal statement posted on the Student Media portion of the Senate web site explaining
the facts relative to the misrepresentations. A committee of student editors and Board members subsequently combed through the budget to reduce all non-essential costs. The advertising department was able to generate sufficient additional revenue, and the issue melted away.

The Palermo situation in which federal immigration officials ordered them to fire undocumented employees and which boiled into a public conflict with Voces de la Frontiera over unionization came to the Board through a complaint of seriously biased Tribune reporting on both the situation and a public meeting on campus.

While the original reporter was fired for incompetence, an immediate online apology did not satisfy the public relations representative of Palermo's because the original errors occurred in the print edition. A Board committee listened to the complaint of the public relations representative in May, and Steve Byers undertook an investigation which will be brought to the first Board meeting of 2013-2014.

In addition, the executive committee will draft a proposal for a new standing committee on professional standards. This will set the new committee as the publicized point of contact for complaints about reporting and other problems in student media. The recommendations include a form on professional standards to which all staffers must subscribe by signature, a process for handling complaints, and a disciplinary system which will be worked out with the Office for Student Affairs disciplinary system. This proposal will come before the Board at its first meeting in 2013-2014.

The Board also selected the 2013-2014 editors and managers for student media:

News Center Editor in Chief: Erin Caughey
    Executive Editor, News: Carolyn Portner
    Executive Editor, Sports: Ben Greene
    Executive Editor, Arts & Entertainment: Peter Setter

Advertising Manager: Natalie Kaufman
Journal Editor: Rebecca French
MUTV Manager: Francesca Reed
Tribune Editor in Chief: Tessa Fox
WMUR Manager: Hannah McCarthy

Dr. William Thorn, Chairman
3 attachments
Rumors abound that the Board is cutting the Tribune's size (in some postings it is the whole budget) in half. Most of the reports are misleading because they ignore the basic facts: advertising revenues have fallen far short of this year's target, and the student media budget is headed for a major deficit unless immediate steps are taken to cut expenses and generate additional advertising revenue.

As it has in the past and will continue to do, the university provided a subsidy for student media which, when coupled with advertising revenue funds student media, including the Tribune. This year's subsidy was $150,000.00, but the low ad revenues have led to substantial spending beyond revenue.

The largest single budget expense after student payroll is the Tribune printing bill. Thus, the first and most obvious option was to cut the number of Tribune pages to bring them more in line with the volume of advertising. Each page printed without sufficient advertising to cover its cost increases the deficit.

A standard in the industry is to use the advertising volume in each issue to determine the number of pages. Historically the Tribune needed sufficient advertising to cover the cost of each 2-page increment beyond its 8-page base.

The ratio of advertising volume to the size of the Tribune remains one of a variety of alternatives, perhaps in combination, that the Board will consider in its effort to balance the budget.

The student media budget is completely separate from that of the College of Communication. The recent gift of $8.5 million to the College was earmarked for specific initiatives and projects specified by the donor.

As the Board continues to work on balancing the budget, it will continue to explore options with students. Suggestions are welcome.
Attachment B: The New Structure with lines of authority

[Diagram of a student media organization structure with lines of authority]
Attachment C: Relationship Between News Center and Content of Each Medium