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| MSU logo.jpg. | REPORT*From the office of the…*Finance Committee |
| TO: | Members of the Student Representative Assembly |
| FROM: | Andrew Bonk, Eric Shingleton-Smith, Selene Florean, and Alexandrea Johnston |
| SUBJECT: | The Silhouette Review and Recommendations |
| DATE: | March 15, 2019 |

Dear Members of the Student Representative Assembly,

Over the past two and a half months, we have been working to evaluate the Silhouette as a business unit of the MSU. The following report outlines our work over the term and our recommendations for improvement.

Sincerely,

Andrew Bonk, Eric Shingleton-Smith, Selene Florean, and Alexandrea Johnston

**Executive Summary:**

Over the 2019 Winter semester the Finance Committee consulted with The Silhouette as well as other major University papers to assess the current and future financial landscape of school newspapers. From these meetings, the committee has compiled a list of recommendations that are to serve as guidance for The Silhouette in light of the impending changes of the Students Choice Initiative.

**Current Financial Status of The Silhouette:**

For the last few years, The Silhouette has experienced a decrease in advertising sales. This decrease, is a result of lost relationships with local businesses. Although there are online advertisements available for purchase, many businesses still prefer printed ads, hindering potential revenue for The Silhouette. Throughout 2016-2017, revenue decreased from $47,000 to $24,000. Additionally, throughout 2016-2017, The Silhouette received $30,000 in revenue from internal and campus networks relationships, however, this stopped in the 2017-2018 financial year, further increasing the Silhouette deficit.  The Silhouette currently runs in a net loss of approximately $127,000. This vastly differs from the deficit of 2016-2017 that was over $76,000, which could be as a result of the lack of advertisement revenue. As such, since The Silhouette is currently operating in a loss, we began to evaluate possible areas of improvement to reverse this trend. We collaborated with the CASE Ad Hoc committee, the VP Finance, the Marketing and Communications Director, Communications Officer, the CFMU and Silhouette Digital Media Specialist, and the Editor in Chief for the Silhouette. An outline of our recommendations can be found below.

**Recommendations:**

1. **Increased collaboration with the Campus and Commercial Partnerships Coordinator**

The Campus and Commercial Partnerships coordinator role is an existing position in the MSU that The Silhouette could utilize to help drive more advertising revenue. Currently there is no formal communication between the Silhouette and this position. The Finance Committee recommends creating a formal business relationship with the Campus and Commercial Partnerships coordinator to help communicate the benefits of promoting through the school paper. Creating an open dialogue between these two parties will allow the Silhouette to better advise the Partnerships position on their offerings. It is also recommended that there are more regular meetings with the Silhouette Board of Publications to ensure that there is a constant open dialogue about issues and weekly operations.

1. **Staff restructuring to focus on more digital content**

Thorough consultations with the CASE Ad Hoc committee, the Silhouette Digital Media Specialist, and the Editor in Chief for the Silhouette, we recommend creating an assistant digital media specialist position for the Silhouette and CFMU. This position’s job description will be similar to that of the digital specialist and the newly added Media Production Coordinator which was recently added to the MSU communications team. The only changes to the latter’s job description is that it reports to and receives projects from the Digital Media Specialist and its role is to provide video content for CFMU and the Silhouette. To create this position, we recommended that the current video editor (8 hours weekly), photo editor (12 hours weekly), and photo reported (6 hours) are amalgamated into this position. It is even recommended that two Assistant Digital Media Specialist positions be created (12 hours weekly). Part of this recommendation stems from the use of creating digital and video content to push use of CFMU and the Silhouette. Another reason is that students are using less printed materials which means a photo reporter position is less essential.

It’s also been noted by the MSU Communications Officer that the majority of reporters have their own photography skills and take their own pictures for their articles. An additional recommendation is to change the current payment structure of Silhouette reporters. Currently, reporters are paid 6 hours/week, however, we recommend switching this to a small honorarium that is received at the end of the year. Additionally, though our conversations with the Western University paper, we discovered this is how their reporters are all paid. Although this was not supported by the Editor-in-Chief, the Finance Committee still believes this is a necessary shift going forward to reduce some of the current deficit in light of impending Student Choice Initiative changes.

1. **Increasing Social Media presence**

It was noted by the Silhouette Editor in Chief that the newspaper had done their first social media giveaway this past year (gift cards, campus store clothing, etc.). This was very successful at increasing engagement towards the business unit. Social media giveaways are practiced frequently by the MSU and its services and are an excellent method at increasing engagement with McMaster students. It’s recommended that the Silhouette implement several more social media giveaways on their Instagram throughout the year. This will greatly improve their social media presence and student engagement, and thus create a stronger stance for online advertisements with business partners.

**Conclusion:**

Ultimately, through our consultations this term, we have identified areas in which the Silhouette can improve in the hopes of reducing their annual deficit. It is believed that through increased collaboration with the Campus and Commercial Partnerships Coordinator, a staff restricting to focus on more digital content and an increased social media presence, the Silhouette can continue to engage with McMaster Students.