

How student media leaders are chosen

I put out a call on the College Media Association Listserv asking media directors who chose their leaders. I said only that we were thinking of changing things up. Here are the methods and responses.

— The pub board interviews and chooses leaders. (5)

- Oregon State University
- University of South Carolina
- Iowa State University
- Georgia Southern University
- Louisiana State University

— The student staff votes and the pub board considers student staff input when choosing leaders. (2)

- Savannah College of Art and Design
- Virginia Commonwealth University

— The student staff elects its leaders outright. (2)

- San Francisco State University
- University of Vermont

— The adviser interviews and chooses leaders. (2)

- Valencia Community College, Orlando, Florida
- Doane University, Crete, Nebraska

I've been adviser at a community college where I chose the editor-in-chief and at a university where I wasn't involved at all because students elected their own leaders. I've included my systems below.

Oregon State University — Board interviews and selects leaders

- Accept applications for newspaper EIC, magazine EIC, TV station Manager and FM Station Manager
- Student Media Advisory Board decides agreed-upon questions ahead of the interviews.
- At April Board meeting, applicants give 7-minute presentation to the board followed by 10 minutes of Q&A
- After all the applicants for a given position, board closes for executive session to discuss.
- Board reopens to public and casts their written vote. Votes are tallied by board chair and confirmed by director. Selected applicant is then announced in the meeting.
- Wash, rinse, repeat for all of the other student leader positions.

— Steven Sandberg, Assistant Director of Student Media, Orange Media Network / Oregon State University

University of South Carolina — Board interviews and selects leaders

All four of our media organizations are governed by a board. The leaders of each are considered executive student leaders and they apply and are then interviewed by the board. The voting members are made up of four students and three faculty members.

— Sarah Scarborough, Director of Student Media, University of South Carolina

Iowa State University — Board interviews and selects leaders

The Iowa State Daily Board always picks its editor in chief for the summer and editor in chief for the fall/spring at its April board meeting, which is always been scheduled for the first or second week of April.

Each candidate is asked to create his or her strategic plan to tell the board what he or she would do if the board elected that person editor in chief for summer or editor in chief for fall/spring. These strategic plans come after those interested in applying have had many — or some — long conversations with me when I was editorial adviser, about what they wanted to accomplish during their tenure. These topics ranged from doing more depth journalism to providing readers with more features and profiles to creating a video desk and adding a managing editor to oversee that desk (and provide training for those who wanted to do video) to doing more podcasts and providing training for people who wanted to do podcasts and/or specific coverage or better coverage of multicultural students and celebrating the diversity of students at Iowa State to better photography — and all kinds of other things that we needed to get better at to become a better news organization that serves the people of Iowa State University and Ames, Iowa.

In addition, each candidate provided their resume with three recommendations, including their academic record with grade-point average and classes they have taken and are going to take in the next semester.

These strategic plans, resumes and recommendations and academic records were provided to the Pub Board the Monday after spring break, which was usually the third Monday in March, so the board would have time to read and digest what each of the editor in chief candidates wanted to accomplish, what they had done at the Daily and elsewhere and their academic record.

I considered my job as editorial adviser was to make sure that each candidate presented himself or herself as the best candidate for the job. We talked about what they wanted to accomplish and how to do that and how to sell their strategic plans and who their recommendations would be, etc.

And since I was an integral part in getting each editor in chief candidate prepared, I did not vote even though I was on the Pub Board. I also didn't vote because I was usually asked a lot of questions about which candidate would be the best, and I considered it my job to provide my perspective.

Each candidate appeared before the Pub Board to tell its members what he or she would do as editor in chief and why they were the best person to be selected for the job.

Then the Pub Board would discuss the candidates and vote on which candidate they thought was best. And I say the Pub Board would vote — all Pub Board members would vote except me — as editorial adviser — and the Pub Board member who was representing the Student Government, and they didn't vote because the editor in chief would be in charge of Student Government coverage, and we didn't want there to be any problems with Student Government voting for the editors in chief.

— *Mark Witherspoon, adviser (just retired), Iowa State Daily*

Georgia Southern University — Board interviews and selects leaders

We have a student-majority board made up of:

- Current EICs (6)
- One current student staff member selected by EICs
- One non-staff student I usually get from Our Office of Multicultural Affairs
- Four-five (I think) faculty members, mostly from journalism or adjacent areas
- One professional staff member not from my office

I'm the chair and only vote in case of a tie (which has never happened)

A benefit of having a bunch of EICs with relatively small staffs is that quite often there's only one candidate, and they're supported by their whole staff.

I also think it's important that any board not be allowed to turn EIC interviews into "I want you to cover my sacred cow" sessions. Our meetings are 1) presentations by the applicants 2) exactly the same questions (agreed upon by board in private after presentations) presented to each candidate in private. The adviser vets the questions beforehand, and they cannot be "Will you cover this?"

— *David Simpson, Georgia Southern University*

Louisiana State University — Board interviews and selects leaders

We've utilized a media board for years, The board consists of some Manship school faculty members, local professionals, student government appointees and staff members across

campus. We select new leaders twice per year (fall and spring), except for the yearbook so we have continuity throughout the book.

Our board is 15 members and I find it to be a bit bigger than I'd like, I think 9 members is a better size but that's me. It works well for the most part and gives you some separation if and when someone needs to be removed for performance issues.

— *John Friscia, Director of Student Media and Broadcast Engineer for KLSU at Louisiana State University*

Savannah College of Art and Design AND Virginia Commonwealth University

- The student staff votes, vote tallies are given to the board, and then the board selects leaders

Student Media board, that's faculty, staff, students and alumni. The students involved in the org also get to vote and have that vote reported to the board. (At my last job, the students' vote was kind of an electoral vote on the board in case of a tiebreaker.)

I organize and accept applications and share them with the board, the board requests interviews with their selected candidates, which we organize, and then the board interviews, discusses and votes. I am in the meetings for logistics and if people have clarifying specific factual questions (like a budget expense total or the date of an event), but generally do not answer opinion questions.

In both places, I like that I have no say. I'm the adviser no matter who are the editors or managers, so it's nice to not have any kind of doubt or cloud on that relationship from the start.

— *Jessica Clary, director of student media
Virginia Commonwealth University, 2021-present;
SCAD, 2010-2021*

San Francisco State University — Student staff votes and elects leaders

1) Applicants submit applications and then appear at a candidates' forum. They each give a 2-minute speech and then take questions from the staffs. We combine the process for magazine and newspaper, which are sister publications, (and occasionally an applicant for EIC of one publication is selected for the other publication).

2) The staff members present for the forum vote for EIC of each publication and their votes count as one vote toward the final selection. Staff members are also encouraged to write letters of support.

3) The Editor Selection Committee, made up of outgoing EICs, MEs and visual/photo editors, as well as advisers for the two publications, interviews each candidate for the two EIC positions. All candidates get the same questions for 30 minutes, but if there's extra time we sometimes do some follow-up questions.

4) The Editor Selection committee votes and the vote from the staff counts as another vote toward that total.

5) The chosen candidates are then offered the position and they set up the process of selecting other editors.

— *Rachele Kanigel, Professor, Journalism Department, Faculty adviser, Golden Gate Xpress, San Francisco State University*

The University of Vermont— The student staff elects leaders

This was my (Chris Evans') job from 2006 to 2020. I had three groups: a newspaper of 100 staffers, a radio station of 80 DJs, and a TV station of about 20 members.

- **Newspaper:** The staff as a whole would elect section leaders—news editor, opinion editor, copy chief, etc.—and then the 10 to 12 section leaders would hear presentations from the applicants for editor-in-chief and managing editor, and then they would vote after much discussion. The EIC/ME would then work with the elected section leaders.
- **Radio:** All student leaders submitted their applications to the whole station, made presentations at a station meeting, took questions, and then the whole staff voted.
- **TV:** Same as radio.

— *Chris Evans, Student Media Adviser, University of Vermont*

Valencia Community College, Orlando — Adviser interviews and selects top leader

This was my (Chris Evans') job from 2004 to 2006. I had a newspaper that was also an academic class. I interviewed and selected applicants for editor-in-chief.

Having been in a position both to select the leader and having the students select the leader, I saw many more advantages to the latter. I'm happy to share.

— *Chris Evans, Student Media Adviser, University of Vermont*

Doane University, Crete, Neb. — Adviser interviews and selects leaders

At Doane, the adviser chose the editor in chief from student applications and after interviewing candidates - much like the real world. The rationale was that the adviser would need to work closely with the EIC throughout the year and that the adviser would need the EIC to be trustworthy. The adviser chose only the EIC. The EICs then chose their staffs. It worked for us for 22 years before I retired.

To me, having students elect an EIC is a recipe for disaster. While I understand the rationale, I would fear it would become a popularity contest, which is not necessarily the correct way to choose a supervisor. In few instances does that happen in the commercial world.

I understand the rationale for pub boards selecting the EIC but Doane's philosophy is that the Pub Board would be the arbitrator between the EIC and the adviser, if needed. It was never needed in that role while I was adviser. It also served as a "Court of Appeals" should an EIC be fired by the adviser. That happened once, when the yearbook EIC failed to meet final deadline on the yearbook. I fired her. She appealed. The pub board, a majority of which are students, supported the firing. The Pub Board wished to be neutral in the hiring of EICs in case it needed to act in the future.

It worked well at Doane. But Doane is a lot smaller than Illinois.

— David Swartzlander, Retired Associate Professor of Practice in Journalism, Ex-Adviser, *The Doane Owl*, 1014 Magazine and Doaneline