



## **WLU Student Publications Board of Directors Meeting Minutes**

December 10<sup>th</sup>, 2020 | Remotely, via Zoom

**Attendance:** Aaron Hagey (President and Publisher), Arshy Mann (Board Member), Emily Crump (Board Member), Jade Hosick (Board Member/Vice Chair), Victoria Marshall (Board Member/Secretary), Care Lucas (Executive Director), Rosalind Horne (Board Member)

**Absent:** Keegan Gingrich (Board Member/Treasurer)

**Gallery:** Kurtis Rideout (Advertising Manager)

### **1. Call Meeting to Order**

Call to Order at 6:04 p.m.

### **2. Approval of Agenda**

**Motion:** Jade Hosick

**Second:** Emily Crump

All in favor, motion passes. The agenda is approved.

\*\*\* note that an amendment to the agenda was made by Aaron Waitson prior to the meeting (via email) that Agenda item 9 would become an in-camera session, adding the adjournment as the 10<sup>th</sup> agenda item. The agenda approved in this meeting is the amended agenda \*\*\*

### **3. Approval of minutes (August 31<sup>st</sup>, 2020)**

**Motion:** Rosalind Horne

**Second:** Jade Hosick

\*\*\* note that the approval of the minutes from August 31<sup>st</sup> was erroneously omitted and was done at the end of today's meeting prior to adjournment \*\*\*

### **4. Chair's Report**

#### **Publication updates:**

- All publications have done exceptionally well given the pandemic-related challenges they have faced in the past year
- The Cord has wrapped up with its 2020 production schedule, but may continue to release holiday-related stories online to maintain reach with its audience

- The Keystone's cover is now fully designed, and production for that will now focus on inner contents
- Radio Laurier has continued to attract significant levels of volunteerism and has many promising new programming ideas
  - RL will keep working to fill its existing programming schedule in the new year
- Blueprint has stood out notably this year and has significantly increased its outreach via social media and is the most consistent of all departments in its publishing
- Across all departments, volunteerism has been maintained well and department heads and volunteers have been adapting well to the virtual work environment
  - Socializing remains a challenge but this was a challenge the organization anticipated given the circumstances
  - Importance of the holiday party as a key aspect of this will be discussed later in the meeting
  - Reflection on strengths and weaknesses in 2020 will be encouraged for staff, as well as goal-setting for 2021

#### **WLUSU Elections**

- Historically strong relationship between WLUSU and WLUSP has been recovered and maintained this year, and WLUSP will remain the primary outlet for WLUSU election coverage in 2021
- Note the different election format due to the university closures and virtual learning environment; challenges were anticipated but still important to note
- Meeting with the SU will occur in the coming weeks to discuss WLUSP's role in debate moderation and election event schedule
  - The Cord and Radio Laurier will assist in hosting these debates: The Cord is assisting with the Presidential and Directorial debate coverage, and Radio Laurier is facilitating interviews for the Presidential and WLUSU Board of Directors candidates
- Impartiality remains extremely important to WLUSP during the election and the organization's coverage of it

#### **WLUSP Holiday Party**

- As a key element to volunteer and staff appreciation, the annual holiday party will continue (in an online format)
- Significant budget funds were saved as a result of the shift from in-person to online (no venue or beverage fees)
- Care Lucas and Maneesha Suresh (Human Resources Manager) are working on volunteer appreciation gifts that will be mailed out to volunteers
  - Mugs with holiday candies/small gift cards are a potential option but the unprecedented cost of postage may result in an alternative plan of action
  - This will be addressed outside of the Board meeting, but the budget will be kept in mind

### **5. Executive Director's Report**

#### **Operations and office updates**

- Access to the office is available on a needs-only basis for WLUSP staff (note: not department heads as all publications are worked on remotely)
- All other operations of the organization will continue remotely until reevaluation of alternatives is prompted by shifts in public health guidelines
- In the event of another lockdown or grey zone declaration in Waterloo Region, access to the office may change; this is in the hands of WLU and Waterloo Public Health
- This may impact the taking of graduation photos, and in the event of such a declaration, WLUSP will be in contact with Lifetouch and preexisting photo appointments will be rescheduled

### **Strategic plan**

- The strategic plan was shifted from a 5-year span to 2 years (until 2022) as the pandemic has brought an element of unpredictability that would make planning for 5 years potentially impractical
- Short-term thinking remains key to keeping proactive goals in mind and responding as best as possible to situations outside the organization's control
- This shift in mindset has also prompted WLUSP to address pandemic policy creation as a part of the strategic plan
- Audits to WLUSP's adherence to AODA (Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act) and DEI (Diversity and Equity Initiatives) have been completed recently as a part of this plan
- Advertising Manager Kurtis Rideout is working on a strategic plan for advertising with a focus on digital outreach, web advertising and marketing as well as SEO and data analytics

### **Grant opportunities**

- The Community Edition was granted \$17, 803 in funding from the Department of Canadian Heritage in September as a part of Canada's COVID-19 emergency support fund
  - This allowed TCE to hire a student advertising assistant with this grant money as opposed to the Canada Summer Jobs program, which was the initial plan
- WLUSP has applied to a grant program through the City of Waterloo to cover the costs of hosting community events — amount granted could be as high as \$750 if application is approved
  - Care Lucas is finalizing this application and potential uses for it may be discussed with the Board at a later time

### **Advertising and marketing updates**

- Advertising Manager Kurtis Rideout has been working on implementing Google adsense to collect analytics on advertising in hopes of building WLUSP's foundation in online (non-traditional) advertising

- Adapting to this has been a challenge but so far the organization is responding well to the challenges
- Google analytics will also be used to monetize web content
- Care and Aaron will be meeting with social media staff and publication department heads in the coming weeks to further WLUSP's digital marketing strategy
  - This is done in hopes of increasing digital traffic to publications, especially The Cord (advertising has shifted most significantly with this publication with the absence of print)

### **The Community Edition**

- Print distribution for TCE remains a challenge given the fast-paced changes in COVID-19 guidelines
- Quite a few local businesses have been happy to distribute issues with purchases or make them available to customers as was done before the pandemic, but this could change with the implementation of another lockdown
- As a result of this, the focus of TCE production will shift to digital content; print circulation is dropped to 1500 copies until demand and opportunities for further distribution increase

### **6. Strategic Plan Draft**

- Note that today's discussion of the Strategic Plan focuses on the Draft included in the meeting materials and Advertising Manager Kurtis Rideout's plan for advertising specifically

### **Strategic plan draft**

- Overall goal of the plan to help WLUSP "grow and adapt" to changing environments, especially with the unprecedented pandemic-related challenges it's faced in 2020
  - Specific goal to gain a 30% audience increase by January 2022
- Many values remains the same: volunteer retention/recruitment, accessibility as well as marketing/outreach/advertising remain core goals, with focuses on mental health and digital content production being newer ideas to integrate
  - Engagement and outreach will also be key. WLUSP is aiming to increase volunteer outreach by September 2021 and create 3 new sources of revenue/fundraising by April 2021
  - A 3-year action plan on accessibility and mental health for volunteers is proposed to be completed by May 2021
  - Note that on-campus outreach activities proposed are subject to change depending on the University's COVID-19 protocols for September 2021
    - Should this impact the drafted plan, alternatives like webinars will be utilized

- Selling merchandise via Shopify is a new opportunity for revenue: pins (a big hit among conference-goers at NASH 2020), t-shirts, mugs, etc.
  - WLUSP website will also come to include donation platform
- The Board has no notable concerns with the Draft, although it is noted that plans are subject to change due to the pandemic and may be revisited at a later time

### **Kurtis' Advertising Proposal**

- 3-point circular method proposed:
  - Goal to generate data from Google adsense, analytics, etc.; create audience-focused content based on those analytics; promote to new readers (and repeat)
  - Some techniques learned from former ED Bryn Ossington, who has experience/success in growing WLUSP's outreach previously
- One main goal is to stop relying on presumed readership — instead of assuming WLU students already read and utilize our publications, we need to actively seek new ways to engage them
  - Identifying readership habits is key to this, and using analytics over a longer period of time will assist with habit identification
- New shift to the digital focus
  - Partially related to the pandemic, but it is always useful to be thinking in a forward manner and opening the organization up to new online opportunities
- Concerns and things to keep in mind:
  - Use of sponsored content is an ethical “grey area” in journalism, and this should be kept in mind when discussing partnerships/ad opportunities
  - However, we can sponsor our own content without ethical concerns
  - Promoting general WLUSP content within the organization's preexisting and newly-proposed online platforms will be crucial to outreach going forward
- No Board-level concerns with this proposal — The Board is in agreement that digital marketing is a positive step forward for the organization

### **7. Approval of the Nomination Package**

- Like with other topics on the agenda, pandemic-related concerns have impacted the nomination process for WLUSP's elections
- Due to potential lockdowns in Brantford and Waterloo around the time of the election, the in-person drop-off requirements for nomination packages will be nullified
  - This will be amended within the nomination package to make it clear for candidates
- Candidate photos are also flexible in their format as a result — since staff photographers/EICs normally responsible for taking photos will not be able to, alternatives can be discussed:

- Care Lucas proposes candidates submit headshots with consistent/similar backgrounds (e.g. white or neutral colour, similar to how they would be taken in the office)
- Emily Crump suggests taking Zoom headshots since the app allows you to change your background (a humorous and pandemic-appropriate option)
- It is also discussed that candidates may still forego the photo submission if they choose
- The Board concludes that perfect consistency in candidate photos is not realistic given the circumstances and that any professional headshot or Zoom photo will be accepted
- Submission date for the nomination package originally proposed as January 8<sup>th</sup>
  - Victoria Marshall raises that WLU has now extended its winter break until January 11<sup>th</sup>, with concern that while the university is closed/students are on holiday the deadline may be forgotten about; Jade Hosick agrees
  - The Board discusses extending the deadline by one week and proposes to extend it to January 15<sup>th</sup>
  - Aaron Waitson approves the extension and will update it in documents available to applicants
- WLUSP's AGM date will be discussed via email or meeting in January, remaining nomination and election events will be organized once this date has been set

## **8. Discussion and Approval of Policy Amendments**

- Some policy amendments may arise from the Vice Chair's performance review of the President, Chair & Publisher
- Possibility of pandemic policy may also be discussed at a later time
- Members of the Board who volunteered for the policy subcommittee may meet before or during January to discuss potential policy amendments after considering some conclusions from the Vice Chair's report and considering the Strategic Plan Draft
- Note the time allocated for policy amendments was slightly shortened during this meeting to allow for the addition of the in-camera session

## **9. In-Camera Session: Vice Chair's conducting of Performance Review for President, Chair & Publisher**

- To discuss the review of Aaron Waitson, conducted by Vice Chair Jade Hosick, the Board goes in-camera. Aaron Waitson leaves the meeting temporarily. No further minutes will be recorded until the Board moves out of camera and to the next agenda item.

\*\*\* note that an amendment to the agenda was made by Aaron Waitson prior to the meeting (via email) that Agenda item 9 would become the in-camera session, adding the adjournment as the 10<sup>th</sup> agenda item\*\*\*

**Additional discussion:**

- Aaron Waitson returns to the meeting and reminds the Board that it omitted the approval of the minutes from August 31<sup>st</sup>. As noted above, Rosalind Horne and Jade Hosick vote to approve the minutes, and all members are in favour — the minutes are approved prior to adjournment.

**10. Adjournment**

**Motion to adjourn:**

**Motion:** Arshy Mann

**Second:** Jade Hosick

All in favor, motion passes. The meeting is adjourned.

\*\*\*\*\* Last official entry \*\*\*\*\*