

**Services & Activities Fee Annual Program Review**

Program Name: The Observer  
Program Manager: Jennifer Green (temporary)  
Fiscal Year: 2021

1. In what ways does your program support CWU students? Please be specific, yet concise.

The student newspaper informs students across campus and on satellite campuses about news, events and trends that directly impact them. The Observer interviews people of interest and decision-makers whose work affects all CWU students. The Observer aims to represent and speak to college students and provide a critical and independent student voice on campus.

2. What are your specific program goals or learning/operational objectives? How are you assessing the effectiveness of your program in achieving those targets?

- Provide experience for student writers, photographers, videographers, designers and web/social media/marketing managers.
- Provide a critical and independent student-led newspaper for the campus community.
- Assessments: We assess the course quarterly to see how we can improve the learning experience. We assess the product regularly to see how we can improve what we are providing to the campus. We evaluate and measure interactions on social media and our website, as well as distributed copies of the print newspaper, to improve how we reach our target audiences. We monitor feedback on social media, our website and via emails to hear how our readers react to our content, and we respond accordingly. We attend conferences and submit student work for regional and national recognition, regularly winning accolades which confirm we are competing with much bigger journalism programs and putting out quality publications.

3. What is the overall purpose of your program and what service(s) does your program provide?  
a. Are there overlaps or intersections with other university programs who have a similar purpose or service?

- Provide experience for student writers, photographers, videographers, designers and web/social media/marketing managers.
- Provide a critical and independent student-led newspaper for the campus community to report about news, people, events and trends that directly impact students.
- We overlap with programs that send us students to work on Observer beyond our own Media & Journalism students. These regularly include Graphic Design (Art), Photography, English, Professional & Creative Writing, Public Relations, Communication Studies, Digital Marketing and other students.

4. How does your program align with the purpose of S&A funding? *“Supporting cocurricular and extracurricular activities and programs participated in by students in the furtherance of their education.”*

The Observer’s tagline is “By the Students, For the Students.” S&A funding guarantees not just the publication’s long-term viability, but also its independence from control or interference from faculty, staff or administration. Our Media & Journalism program sets out to train students in every aspect of the media and journalism fields, and the basics of creating a newspaper (or magazine or video news) and their companion websites from scratch on a daily basis is the bread and butter of our program. Our program teaches and our student media exercise the First Amendment of the Constitution of the United States, and we represent the only profession explicitly protected by it. S&A funding allows the exercise of this crucial protection and learning around it.

5. How does your program support CWU’s mission and goals? (<https://www.cwu.edu/mission/>)

1. Prepare students for enlightened, responsible, and productive lives – The Observer teaches journalism and media skills, but it also teaches teamwork, responsibility, accountability and credibility. Students gain valuable skills and knowledge to lead fulfilling lives. The Observer also indirectly teaches students advanced media literacy, a necessary skill in today’s world of mis- and dis-information.

2. To produce research, scholarship, and creative expression in the public interest – The Observer stories are based on fact rather than scholarship, but the reporting process naturally involves research and even sometimes scholarship. Creative expression comes in the interviewing process, the writing, the photography, the graphic design and the online marketing of the newspaper. Students also write personal opinions for the newspaper and sometimes we have cartoonists on staff. News is always in the public interest in a democracy, as is the need to help educate an informed citizenry.

3. To serve as a resource to the region and the state through effective stewardship of university resources. –The Observer is a basic and necessary public forum for student expression on campus. Anyone across the state or region interested in independent news about CWU can access The Observer in print or online.

6. Please provide detailed information regarding who utilizes your program? (*Students, faculty, staff, community? Specific demographic information? Class standing, gender, ethnicity, transfer, campus location, etc.*)

Students studying Media & Journalism, Graphic Design (Art), Photography, English, Professional & Creative Writing, Public Relations, Communication Studies, Digital Marketing, Liberal Studies and more put together the newspaper. Students, faculty and staff have access to The Observer in print and online. Most of the students involved in the class are juniors or above (not all – sometimes we attract first-years and sophomores). Those accessing The Observer are of all

demographics and the newspaper makes an effort to represent and speak to a diverse campus community.

7. How many unique CWU students utilize your program or services?
  - a. How do you gather these metrics?
  - b. If you do not, what is preventing you from getting that data and how are you determining usage by CWU students?

We publish 700 copies of the newspaper every week. Our website had almost 22,000 users in the month of January. Our social media accounts have thousands of followers (2,193 on Twitter, 3,087 on Facebook and 1,142 on Instagram). To give an example, we had 17.9k impressions on Twitter and an average of 616 impressions per day in January alone. We use metrics to capture this interactions.

8. Are there any current vacant positions in your program?

Yes – the Student Media Business Manager role.

9. Given the budget reductions taking place and continuing for the remainder of the funding cycle, please tell us what specific impacts those reductions have had on your program compared to what was originally planned and including in your initial base funding request.

We have to request funding from the Dean's office in advance of any purchases. This has so far (fortunately) not created any interference with student journalists' independence, but it's not an ideal situation. Tightening our belts has meant less appetite for asking for funds to send students to conferences, which is essential learning that complements our own program.

10. Are there any circumstances or challenges that are currently impacting your ability to use your base funding allocation this year?

Still hiring for a Student Media Business Manager.

11. What growth or increases would you like to see in your program in the future?

We are mostly satisfied with the funding The Observer receives. We are continually looking to improve the design of the paper in order to engage students even more with our print product,

so ways to grow our appeal to Graphic Design students (eg, more paid positions) would be helpful.