



REPORT

From the offices of the...

Campus Media Ad-Hoc Committee

TO: Student Representative Assembly Members
FROM: Campus Media Ad-Hoc Committee
SUBJECT: Report on Findings and Recommendations: *The Silhouette*
DATE: February 6, 2022

To the members of the Student Representative Assembly:

In April 2021, this committee was charged with the task to figure out a way to ensure there was a more cohesive bond between the campus media outlets under the McMaster Students Union. All three parties, *The Silhouette*, *93.3 CFMU*, *MSU*, entered into these talks with a little hesitancy and pre-talk jitters.

Historically, neither the *Sil* nor *CFMU* has had the best relationship with the MSU and vice versa. We're all likely aware of one or more hot drama stories, playing out in a battle of "he said, she said". All of this is to say that, trust had to be established very early on, and we can confidently say that this trust has been rebuilt.

A lot of sacrifice, time, and patience with one another has been spent over the last 9 months discussing options for the future of the *Silhouette*. We, as a committee, are pleased to say we have finalized our recommendations and are proud to be presenting them to you today.

We are proposing a restructure of the *Silhouette* with the addition of a full-time support role for the service, *Executive Editor*. We would be pivoting the student-opportunity position, Editor-in-Chief, to a part-time manager due to the criticism that many past EICs have had, including the current, that there is not enough support. We are also proposing a restructure of two main branches of the service, online and production, amalgamating into Multimedia. This is in-line with other media outlets, and with the evermore dying print industry, a necessity for the *Silhouette* to continue pushing into the digital media world.

With the current restructure plan, we are proposing to pause hiring on a few positions that have become redundant with current service operations and with where the *Silhouette* will be going to follow trends of media. These positions include Managing Editor, Photo Editor and Features Reporter.

These changes will be explained in further detail later in this report.

Mandate:

Each time we examined a new idea, we ensured that it met the mandate of this committee. We had to ensure that we were looking at emerging trends in the media industry, how closely are CFMU/Sil working together, and what challenges do these services face.

We established that media is currently moving towards quicker content that readership can spend a maximum of two minutes digesting. Whether this be in short format articles or TikTok/Instagram Reels — to be frank, nobody is reading 700-1000 word articles anymore. This is something that both *CFMU* and *The Silhouette* established at the beginning of the year and have been creating content following these guidelines.

In the past, *The Silhouette* and *CFMU* worked together on a Welcome Week video project, through their shared Digital Media Specialist position. Throughout the year; however, they had little interaction. Aside from the Ad-Hoc Committee, the Editor-in-Chief, along with the Programming Director and Administrative Director have called almost every week since the start of May to talk about what each service was up to, areas for collaboration, and about media trends. To date, CFMU and Sil have created two collaborative roundtable discussion videos called *MacDiscussions* on the return to campus for both fall and winter terms, the *Silhouette* has given CFMU a dedicated page in the print publication, CFMU has allowed the *Sil* to return on-air, resurrecting an old show called *The Silhouette: Off The Pages*, but more importantly, a sense of comradery and trust has been established between our two organizations. Our teams are currently trying to identify even more areas to collaborate this semester.

Major challenges that the *Silhouette* currently faces are a lack of full-time support and guidance (which the *MSU SUSTAIN* report on the service also identified), lack of advertising, visibility on campus, and not enough time to push the service in a different direction due to the yearly change of staff members.

What We Tried & How We Got Here:

Throughout the course of this committee, we have examined the following options for the *Silhouette*

- A direct and complete merger with 93.3 CFMU
 - While it was unclear as to what the exact structure would look like, *The Silhouette* would be placed under CFMU Radio Inc; however, CFMU stressed they would make major changes to the *Sil* in order to assimilate it into 93.3 CFMU, likely cutting jobs in the process.
- Creating an assistant to the SOP Editor-in-Chief
 - This would be similar to the Executive Assistant position for the MSU. This would be great if the Editor-in-Chief was always on top of their duties and proactive with advancing the *Sil*; however this is not always the case, thus rendering the Executive Assistant more as a secretary.
- Continuing the service operations as is

- When the *Sil* has ups, their high. When it has downs, they're low. With the ever-changing media landscape, the service cannot simply continue to operate the same way it has over the last 92 years.

We spent weeks going through each iteration of the above ideas, and each time we encountered the same issue. The issue of guidance and support solely dedicated to the newspaper.

After many hours of consultations with other campus publications *Western Gazette*, *The Sheaf* (University of Saskatchewan), *The Eyeopener* (Ryerson University), *The Canadian University Press*, both traditional and new media organizations, *CBC Hamilton*, *CBC: The National*, *Narcity Media* and *BBC News*, we arrived at the idea of *Executive Editor*.

It is very common for student media organizations to have a full-time staff member to support student-staff — in fact, *the Silhouette* seems to be the odd one out with not having any full-time staff members. These full-time roles do anything from advertising, providing historical knowledge, university affairs, hiring, budgetary/financial duties, down to supporting staff, acting as a body of historical knowledge and sometimes as HR.

Our Recommendation:

Currently, Editors-in-Chief are expected to be an expert in Canadian Press Style, media law, finance, marketing, and human resources while just have graduating university. That's a lot to expect of anybody.

We have divided the current role amongst the *Executive Editor* and *Editor-in-Chief PTM* to ensure the *Silhouette* is still student-led, but will also have historical knowledge and guidance to fall back on — something that past *Sil* Editors have not always had at their disposal. While the current Editor-in-Chief reports to the General Manager of the MSU, this has proven to be not enough support for a service that employs 14 paid staff members, 10 staff volunteers and upwards of 25+ contributors, not to mention all of the hats they have to wear.

Executive Editor will act in the capacity as a mentor to the *Editor-in-Chief*, helping to train the new hire each summer, instead of the duty falling on the outgoing EIC who likely has started another opportunity and is not being paid for the training. *Executive Editor* will also help the incoming *Editor-in-Chief* with training the part-time staff, setting a plan for the year, laying out the summer Pride edition of the *Silhouette*.

When it comes to the school year, much of the *Executive Editor's* responsibilities will be to support the *Editor-in-Chief* and the part-time staff. They will also be responsible for gathering advertising revenue for the *Silhouette*, building trust amongst our clients to encourage repeat business. The *Executive Editor* will also be a voting member of the *Silhouette* Board of Publication. In the second semester, the *Executive Editor* will set the

budget for the next fiscal year, and start hiring for the new *Editor-in-Chief* which they will chair.

We've spent a lot of time consulting with current *Silhouette* staff members and past *Editors-in-Chief* and *Managing Editors* of the *Silhouette*. We've found that the best way for this to work is to ensure that *Executive Editor* and *Editor-in-Chief* are colleagues, rather than one being the boss of the other. These checks and balances can be found with something as simple as a co-signing authority in which neither can make a purchase without the other, or that they are both on the *Sil Board of Pub*. It is important to note that the *Executive Editor* will not have interaction with the Editorial side of the paper for that is the role of the *Editor-in-Chief*. This is how we keep the *Sil* a student-led newspaper, and we do not wish for that to change.

While respect to pausing the hiring of certain positions, a large part of the *Silhouette's* goal this year has been to create a revenue stream that offsets the cost of the service; however, much of the cost comes from labour. It is not financially responsible of the service, nor the MSU, to spend student money on positions that do not contribute to the overall service at the moment. With the rise in social media, but also the ability for reporters to take high quality images with their cellphones, the role of Photo Editor is no longer necessary. During the 2020-2021 academic term, the *Silhouette* did not hire a Photo Editor due to the risk that COVID-19 brought, but also due to the fact that there were no events. The service heavily relied on Instagram photos, Creative Commons-licensed photos, and obtaining imagery from interviewees. We have seen this continue during the 2021-2022 academic year due to its ease of access for the reporter. Should the reporter find themselves needing photos, they are typically at the event or conference anyways, so they typically take the photos. It should be noted that both *CBC* and *Narcity Media* employ this method of having the reporter both write the story and provide the imagery. A dedicated Photo Editor is no longer needed as a result. We have created a Photo Assistant volunteer position that will still allow students the experience of being a newspaper photographer, but due to the low volume of photo requests, will not allow for the redundancy of paying a salaried position. When it comes to Features Reporter, as stated earlier in this report, media trends point to a maximum two minute attention span, and thus nobody is reading 700-1000 word articles anymore. For this reason, we are recommending *the Silhouette* pause the hiring of this role indefinitely. Finally, Managing Editor, although a crucial role to the Editorial team, will be filled by the *Editor-in-Chief PTM*. *The Silhouette* will be providing more enhanced editing training to its Section Editors and Reporters, but all content has to go through the *Editor-in-Chief*. As many of the non-Editorial tasks will be taken on by the *Executive Editor*, this change makes sense, and thus eliminates the redundant overlap that would exist between Managing Editor and *Editor-in-Chief*.

In addition to these suggestions we will be tasking the *Silhouette* Board of Publication to be monitoring these changes and creating metrics for success that can be revisited

regularly. The intent will be to have clear actionable pieces and constructive criticism to continue the efforts made this year.

We thank you for your time, and should you have any questions about this report, please reach out to president@msu.mcmaster.ca or eic@thesil.ca.