

**NC State Student Media Board of Directors  
September 2020 meeting minutes**

**Tuesday, Sept. 8, 2020 • 7 p.m.**

*Via teleconference – video of meeting to be posted  
and made part of these minutes by reference.*

Members present: Sarah Gagner, Abi Hearn, Arianna Hinton, Sarah Hartsell, Tyler Dukes, Robbie Williams, Tania Allen, Josh Hyatt, Cameron Motsinger, Cliff Maske, Rachael Davis, Lucas Martin, Elikem Dodor, Laura Mooney, Xenna Smith, Patrick Neal

Absent: Dean Phillips

Others present: Jamie Lynn Gilbert, Ellen Meder, Martha Collins, Zanna Swann, Sam Brohaugh (Chief of Staff and meeting proxy for Student Body President Melanie Flowers)

**CALL TO ORDER AND INTRODUCTIONS**

In the absence of a chair Patrick Neal established a quorum and called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m., and each of the board members present introduced themselves.

**ELECTION OF BOARD OFFICERS**

Abi Hearn nominated Sarah Hartsell as board chair for 2020-2021 with Laura Mooney offering a second, and no other members either offered to serve or nominated another. Sarah was elected unanimously.

Both Abi and Laura offered to serve as vice chairs for the board and briefly outlined their experiences on the board before leaving the main meeting to allow the board to deliberate. After a brief deliberation, the board voted unanimously to name the candidates co-vice-chairs for the academic year, with Tania Allen offering the motion and Robbie Williams providing a second.

Before electing a recording secretary for the meeting, Patrick proposed that the board adopt an informal rule for 2020-2021 whereby the senior leader with the latest time/date stamp on their board report submission would serve as the meeting's recording secretary; in the case of a "tie" (i.e., if two or more senior leaders missed the board report deadline completely) Patrick said the position could be decided by a coin flip or a similar random-chance contest. After a brief discussion, the board did agree to abide by this rule for the year, with Laura and Abi agreeing to fill the post in cases where the latest submitter legitimately cannot serve or where other extenuating circumstances might apply. Once that question was settled, Patrick said the latest submitter for the meeting was Cliff Maske. Cliff did agree to serve as recording secretary of the meeting, but Laura relieved him shortly thereafter as technical limitations prevented him from being able to effectively fulfill the role.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM MARCH 2020 MEETING**

Tyler Dukes moved that the minutes from the board's March 3, 2020 meeting be approved, with Laura seconding. The minutes were unanimously approved. Those minutes were included with the meeting package and are made part of these minutes by reference.

**2019-2020 FISCAL YEAR BUDGET REVIEW**

Jamie Lynn Gilbert said that despite the pandemic and all of the disruptions it entailed, Student Media ended the fiscal year remarkably well. She said Student Media was originally budgeted to be \$25,765 in the red and ended up \$27,775 in the red, meaning the unit as a whole was only really \$2,010 over budget. She said the unit's expenses and income were both at 92% at year's end.

In terms of student fee revenue, Jamie said Student Media received just under \$789,000 total of the \$800,000 budgeted. That's an \$11,000 loss, but still 99% of what the unit was supposed to get, so that was very good news given the way the year ended.

Jamie said Agromeck ended the year with \$12,400 in non-fee revenue, which was about half of its budgeted goal. The goal should, however, have only been \$12,000 since the payment model has changed. Using the accurate figure, Jamie said Agromeck was at 103% of its income goal.

Agromeck spent only 61% of its budget. The bulk of that \$25,000 came from:

- \$16,200 extra budgeted to print the book before the payment model changed.
- \$4,200 in leadership development not spent due to only one student attending ACP/CMA and the summer retreat and workshop being canceled.
- \$3,300 in admin service fees not changed because the book wasn't charged until after the transition to the 2020-2021 fiscal year.

Overall, Jamie said Agromeck ended the year \$11,000 in the black. Payroll was just under \$200 from its budget, so Jamie complimented Agromeck on its good personnel budgeting.

Jamie said Nubian Message ended the year with just over \$1,500 in non-fee revenue to meet 77% of its goal. She said it is reasonable to think the Nubian could have met its \$2,000 goal had it not been for the COVID-19 pandemic.

Overall, Jamie said Nubian spent 103% of its budget. Payroll was at 149%, which Jamie said can't be allowed to continue for 2020-2021. Otherwise, savings in printing and summer travel made up most of the difference, but the Nubian still ended the year \$1,400 in the red.

Since Roundabout's orientation magazine was pushed to a welcome to campus magazine, it ended up about \$2,000 in the red. Only \$4,600 was spent of the \$21,500 budget, but only \$2,560 in income was deposited since all summer 2019 money went to General Administration.

Technician brought in \$6,500 in June, bringing its non-fee total to \$72,400 and 69% of its goal. With \$20,000+ of that from the Technician 100, Jamie said she believed its non-fee goal of \$52,000 is solid for the current fiscal year.

Technician ended at 106% of its budget with an additional \$11,000 in expenses. That's from \$14,600 in unbudgeted payroll (114% of its budget), offset a bit by \$4,700 in unused leadership development money. Overall, Technician's expenses came in at \$44,600 in expenses over revenue.

Jamie said Windhover did great, spending 91% of its budget and making \$307 from T-shirt sales and a \$150 sponsorship from Arts NC State. Windhover ended up \$2,100 in the black, the biggest section of that from unspent leadership development money.

WKNC was within \$3,000 of its non-fee income goal, which Jamie said it easily would have made from NC State baseball broadcasts had the season not been canceled. She said the station still ended up at 93%, which was outstanding in light of the thousands of dollars of sports broadcast revenue lost to the pandemic.

WKNC only spent 89% of its budget, leaving \$10,700 unspent. The bulk of that was payroll (\$6,700) with the rest in supplies and current services. WKNC ended the year at \$7,100 in the black.

Jamie said Student Media General Administration spent 94% of its budget, for a savings of about \$40,000. That money can be broken down into:

- \$13,000 in temp payroll
- \$5,000 in fixed charges, for a set of Adobe licenses the unit has never been charged for
- \$3,500 in contracted services thanks to savings from WKNC's consulting engineer fees and honoraria unspent from Student Media's quinquennial program review, which was postponed

- due to the pandemic.
- \$22,000 not spent in capital expenses

In the end, Jamie said since General Administration had budgeted to be \$40,000 over at year's end, it ended up only \$3,000 over.

Finally, Jamie said, we ended the year with about \$600 in the Student Media Enhancement Fund and \$23,260 in the Technician Century Fund.

## **SEPTEMBER 2020 BUDGET UPDATE**

Jamie started with a global note on Student Media's admin service fees. They have all be paid, totaling more than \$87,000 for about 9.5% of the current year's budget.

She said Agromeck received its check from Lifetouch from senior portraits commission. That's not budgeted, so it's just icing on our yearbook cake. She said she revised Agromeck's non-fee expectation to \$9,000 to accommodate the increased sales goal from the outside consultant and business office. She said she adjusted the printing budget to match the new income figure. The 2020 book is on sale in the Student Media e-store and there has been one sale.

Jamie said Nubian Message has \$180 in income from a full-page ad by the NC State Christian Faculty/Staff Network in its Welcome Back edition. She said Nubian's payroll is at 24% when we are 17% through the year, and pointed out that continual spending at this rate will cause them to go over budget.

Jamie said \$6,000 was budgeted for the Roundabout welcome to campus issue, and it ended up costing only about \$4,500 so that's good. Roundabout income stood at \$560 as of Sept. 1.

Jamie said Technician's income is at \$1,087, and its payroll is only at 8% so that's great.

Jamie said Windhover has had no notable revenues or expenditures thus far this year.

Jamie said WKNC had booked about \$1,100 in income and payroll was at 14% as of Sept. 1. She said she was keeping an eye on the payroll so the station doesn't go over.

For General Administration, Jamie said 46% of our fee money has been deposited.

Finally, Jamie noted a \$50 donation to the Technician Century Fund.

Overall, Jamie said, the unit's total income started off more or less on pace with last year. Non-fee income was at 2%, versus 3% on Aug. 1, 2019. Fee income was at 11% on Aug. 1, versus 13% of the unit's fee income by this time in 2019. Non-fee income was at 6% for Sept. 1, 2019, while it is now at 4%. Fee income was at 44% on Sept. 1, 2019, while we are at 46% now. Jamie said that since the unit receives more in student fees than from non-fees, our total income was actually at 39% right now while we were at 36% total this time last year.

In the discussion that followed, Xenna Smith asked about the budgeting process with regard to payroll and how that was determined for each organization. Jamie said that the senior leaders generally consulted with their advisers on any proposed payroll increases and then she and Patrick did their best to incorporate their wishes into the budgets they put forth to the university.

Tyler asked for clarification of Roundabout's finances, as he said it appeared the magazine had run a loss on its welcome back edition. Jamie said Roundabout didn't get its own project number until September of 2019, which was after all of last year's orientation edition revenue had been booked to General Administration, which was Roundabout's previous home, budgetarily speaking, so it was complicated, and the nature of that transition gave a misleading picture of Roundabout's fiscal

situation. Zanna and Patrick added that sales for the welcome back edition had actually gone better than expected, with some 12 pages (between \$14,000 and \$15,000 worth) of advertising sold, and none of the money from on-campus departments (which represented the vast majority of the sales for that piece) was reflected on the budget report. Zanna it generally takes a month or two for interdepartmental transfers to show up in the university's accounting system.

## **STATE OF STUDENT MEDIA 2020-2021**

Patrick said he decided to read a prepared statement for this year given everything that was going on. That statement is attached here and included as part of these minutes by reference.

In the discussion that followed, Tyler asked Patrick and the senior leaders how they had balanced in-person and remote work, and each student leader outlined their strategies: an all-remote strategy at Nubian Message, Windhover and Roundabout; an optional in-person model at WKNC; hybrid remote-and-in-person models at Technician and Agromeck; and an in-person model in the Student Business and Marketing Office. All of the leaders also described the various precautions they were taking with regard to social distancing, disinfecting work stations and the like.

Tyler followed up with questions about Technician's "e-edition," which is essentially a print edition that is posted online but not actually printed. Tyler questioned the use of human resources on such an endeavor. In the discussion that ensued, Rachael Davis, Ellen Meder and Patrick said they had much the same debate about launching the e-edition before ultimately moving forward with it, saying that foregoing any kind of print production process would make resumption of the real thing maximally difficult. In the end, Tyler recommended that Technician continue to evaluate that endeavor moving forward, and Ellen said she would gather some analytics and share them with the board.

## **STUDENT MEDIA CONSTITUTION REFERENDUM**

Patrick said the Student Senate had passed a resolution placing Student Media's updated constitution on the fall Student Government elections ballot. He said that the resolution ultimately passed without any discussion and only one dissenting vote.

## **REPORT ADDENDA**

September board reports for all of the organizations were included with the meeting package and are included as part of these minutes by reference.

Addenda included the following:

- Cameron Motsinger said that while Agromeck would continue its class ring partnership with Balfour, Agromeck staff members would not be tabling with the class ring reps, as this year Balfour was doing its ring consultations by appointment only, but she said that they would have flyers and other information about the yearbook on hand at their table. She said Agromeck was still planning on doing senior portraits and working to procure a space to hold those.
- Lucas Martin said that the Student Business and Marketing Office was concentrating solely on the transition from print to digital for Technician and Nubian, and said the media consultants had had some success selling underwriting for WKNC. Otherwise, he said the main foci of his team would be the new Technician newsletter in the immediate near term and outdoor advertising immediately thereafter.
- Elikem Dodor said that since submitting her board report, the Nubian Message staff had met and decided to retain its biweekly schedule for its online-only approach this semester. She said that would start next week.
- Cliff Maske said that given the uncertainty of Roundabout's print schedule, he planned to focus on building a website and then deciding whether to break new content there instead of just in e-editions of its print product.
- Rachael said the "welcome" email for its newsletter had gone out Monday to 35,502 recipients, which represents every student email address listed in the student directory. Of those, she said

18,812 people had opened the newsletter and only 314 had unsubscribed. Ellen encouraged members of the board to subscribe.

- Xenna said that she and her staff are working on an additional short-form publication, a “zine,” focusing on the black artistic community at NC State. She said a committee would be working on fine-tuning the concept and that she would update her fellow student leaders as the project solidified.
- Laura said that WKNC had hired a new program director, Molly Dubois, since they submitted their board report, and that the Molly would begin work as soon as she cleared the university’s approval process. Jamie added that the station’s “dump button,” which allows an eight-second delay for DJs to censor problematic content, had been replaced.

## **ADJOURN**

There being no need for an executive session, Laura moved to adjourn the meeting with Tyler seconding the motion. The board voted unanimously to adjourn at 8:56 p.m.

# State of Student Media 2020-2021

*Remarks delivered by Patrick Neal, Director of Student Media Advising, to the NC State Student Media Board of Directors at its regular meeting Tuesday, Sept. 8, 2020.*

Folks, this is usually the part of the meeting where Jamie and I would give a general overview of this year's budget, note any big changes from last year and get on with the rest of the meeting. But this is such an unusual year that I thought I'd actually prepare written remarks and read from them tonight, because there's a lot for all of us to think about, and I wanted to make sure I covered as much of it as I could. I will make sure a copy of these remarks is included with the meeting minutes so our recording secretary won't have to worry about taking notes and can just listen along with their fellow student leaders.

We do, of course, have a budget for this year, but I'm not sure how useful it is to get into the specifics of it, as circumstances have already thrown it into chaos. In February, back before the pandemic, we submitted a 2020-2021 budget that saw the unit as a whole running a planned deficit of about \$30,000. Once the pandemic hit, and our students never came back from Spring Break, the state university system issued new guidance lowering estimates for enrollment, for fee collections, and a variety of other variables. At that time, the DASA Budget Office didn't even ask us anything, they just plugged in the lower numbers into the original budget we gave them and re-submitted it on our behalf. That gave us a budget deficit of over \$70,000. Jamie subsequently took that budget, sharpened her pencil, and was able to get us back to what we thought was a good budget under the circumstances, one that reduced our planned deficit from \$70,000 to \$50,000. That included cutting both expenses and expected revenues.

In many respects, even that "revised-revised-revised" budget is out the window now, even though we're less than a month into the semester. The full-year printing budgets for Nubian Message, Roundabout and Technician will throw it off by tens of thousands of dollars on the expenditure side, and on the revenue side we had budgeted several thousand dollars in outdoor advertising sales that almost surely won't happen now. And that's just two examples. So regardless of what happens or what we do, the end of the fiscal year will look nothing like what we projected.

In pointing that out, I don't want anyone to get the impression that we can just throw up our hands and spend money any way we want. Quite the opposite is true: we need to be more careful than we've ever been when it comes to spending money on anything. There's hardly any money for swag in anyone's budget, at least as compared to years past. Our travel budget is a fraction of what it has been normally, simply because all of our conferences will be virtual this year. There are examples like that in everybody's budget.

But I did want to point out some big things of note from a budget standpoint.

First of all, while we were forced to cut almost all of our planned capital expenditures – these are big, expensive things like computers, camera equipment, projects like painting WKNC's tower – there were two that we kept despite the year's uncertainty.

One is card access readers for all of the suite doors. Our student leaders and staff have probably noticed that there have been facilities workers in the building this week; that's what they're working on. We

kept this because we had already put it off by a year due to circumstances beyond our control and, pandemic or no pandemic, we still need them just as much as we needed them last year – and given the general state of public discourse in the country right now, probably more so. You can read in Elikem’s board report about an email threat she received before classes even started. Thankfully that appears to be some racist crank from out of state, but that doesn’t mean that we don’t all need to be vigilant about our personal safety and the security of our spaces, this year and always. You’re in high-profile, public-facing positions, and crazy, angry people can develop crazy, angry fixations. The card access readers are just one more way to try and make sure everyone stays safe, and that no one is in our spaces who shouldn’t be there. We were also charged for the materials we ordered in last year’s budget, so we figured it would be best to pay for the installation costs sooner rather than later. The remainder of that work should come in at between \$8,000 and \$9,000.

The other big project we kept was the outdoor advertising kiosks. For one, once we talked to the fabricator here on campus we realized construction wasn’t going to be nearly as expensive as we’d thought – in fact, they’re building them for about \$12,000, or less than half of what we set originally set aside, so that was an offer we couldn’t really refuse. Second, demand for those panels is, if anything, stronger than we’d ever guessed. About three weeks ago I sent a note out to my fellow DASA directors and the communication liaisons in all the departments just letting them know that we’d be taking over that business Sept. 1, and that if they were interested they should write us. Within 48 hours we received serious inquiries from NC State Athletics, the Gregg Museum, Student Health, Campus Enterprises, the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, the Counseling Centers, Prevention Services, the McKimmon Center, NC State LIVE, Poole College of Management, and Electrical and Computer Engineering. And that’s just on campus; we haven’t even reached out to off-campus businesses yet. Of course, that was two days before classes went online, foot traffic dropped off to nothing on campus everyone’s marketing plans changed accordingly, but the interest is clearly there. When our students return, we need to be ready and looking sharp, and I think we will be. The kiosks are being built right now; I went over late last month and took some photos of the frames that I’ll share to the board listserv when I sent out the draft minutes from this meeting. I don’t have a firm ETA, but it won’t be long. Once they’re done, we plan to get them installed, try to sell some panels, and otherwise use that space to market our own groups.

Beyond those two big capital expenditures, the only other big expenditure categories that I’m really concerned about are the payrolls at the two newspapers. We simply can’t let them get out of hand like they did last year. So beginning this year, here’s what I’m going to do: If it becomes clear that any group is going to exceed its payroll for the year, I’m going to pull together a called meeting of this board, and we’re all going to have a long talk about it. At that point it will be up to the board to decide what happens next. So to our student leaders all I can say is please don’t put yourselves or your staff members in that position.

So, in summary, unless one specific, catastrophic scenario unfolds – and I’ll touch on that momentarily – we should be OK from a budget standpoint this year, even though our end-of-the-year budget won’t look anything like what we originally planned. Someone had asked last year about the Media Reserve Fund. Years like this are why we have it, and we’re fortunate to have built up such a healthy reserve over the years. It’s our “rainy day fund,” and it’s for sure raining, but we’ve got enough to last until the sun comes out again.

At least we do unless something happens to our fee funding. This is the worst-case scenario I mentioned. Let me describe how it might unfold:

Let's say present trends continue or, God forbid, take a turn for the worse, and NC State has online-only classes in the spring. Now, you all have seen what a contentious debate we've had regarding refunds for things like housing and dining. What if that spotlight of student frustration turns toward student fees? I could certainly see it happening. In fact, I'd be surprised if it DOESN'T happen. If we don't reopen more or less normally in January, I expect students to start asking things like "Why should I pay for a fitness center I won't be on campus to use? Why should I pay for a Student Health Center that I won't be on campus to visit? Why should I pay a transit fee for busses I won't be here to ride? Why should I pay for UAB concerts that won't happen?"

These are all really good, valid questions. I know I'd certainly be asking them if I were a student. And if and when you approach that story from a coverage standpoint, it's going to be an interesting ethical dilemma for us all, because if those students get what they ask for, and don't pay fees in the spring, I simply don't know what happens then. I don't think anyone does, from Randy Woodson on down. Are you ready to write an editorial with the big headline "REFUND OUR FEES" knowing that if those fees go away, Student Media as we know it today may not survive?

If that discussion starts happening as I expect it will, I don't know what will happen, but I do take solace in two things:

Number one, if the university didn't collect student fees for one semester, there are much bigger departments than us that will be in FAR deeper crisis than we could ever fathom. They don't have a big reserve like we do, and they'll be losing hundreds of dollars a student, not the \$26.25 we stand to lose. I can't believe the university would let those departments collapse – it couldn't really – so I just have to have faith that whatever is done to bail them out would bail us out as well. That's sort of a pitiful thought to hang your hopes on, but that's the sort of year it could turn out to be.

But number two – and be with me here – we are different from those departments. There is absolutely no reason we can't fulfill our ethical and fiduciary responsibilities to give the students what they've paid for, pandemic or no pandemic. Technician and Nubian Message are still here, still reporting the news and speaking truth to power every single day. WKNC is still on the air 24/7/365. There will still be an Agromeck and Windhover this year. And while Roundabout may not have another print edition this year, it will give Cliff and his staff a chance to build out their digital assets to a level comparable to our other groups. And not only that, think of all the opportunities we continue to offer students who come and work with us. You are all still giving the people their money's worth, folks, and as long as you continue to do so, you will be in an enviable position compared to fee-funded organizations that have to depend on brick, mortar and buses to render their services.

The only thing that can truly derail us is the same thing that's derailed everything else at NC State this year, and that is, of course, this damn virus. I have been extremely gratified to see everyone wearing their masks, keeping their distance, washing their hands, wiping things down, all those things we're supposed to be doing. But while we can control what happens within our walls, we can't control what happens out in the rest of the world, and that's what scares me. To my knowledge – and that phrase is doing a lot of work here – only two Student Media students have tested positive, but under certain circumstances just one positive result can shut a group down, possibly for a couple of weeks. That's why

it's so important that we stay vigilant in Witherspoon, and that's why it's so important you impress upon your staff members the importance of being safe when they're away from Witherspoon, too. If they absolutely, positively can't resist doing risky things, they we need to either figure out a way for them to work remotely or they need to step away until there's a vaccine and everybody's been vaccinated.

There are some other challenges that will be unique for this year. Recruitment is a big one. We lost in-person Orientation and all the usual in-person info fairs that normally happen during Wolfpack Welcome Week, so of course our recruiting has been way off just like everyone else's. While we have done really well coping with that so far in the fall, it worries me for the spring and it REALLY worries me for next year. You all appear to have really good players on your respective teams right now, but this has made all of our benches thin. That's why targeted nontraditional recruitment is going to be so important this year, and once we get new recruits in here we need to do everything we can to keep them engaged. And that's not going to be easy, because it's hard enough to keep oldtimers with two or three years under their belts engaged under these circumstances, much less someone who comes in without a clue what's going on.

Speaking of engagement, I entered this year apprehensive about how well we'd do keeping our respective audiences engaged, but now that the year has started I'm not as worried about that as I was previously. Technician's new newsletter is a wonderful thing on that front. I believe WKNC's listenership is just as strong as it was pre-pandemic if not more so. All of our groups have done a good job of it, really.

But as well as we've done so far, I'm still a bit worried about how our newspapers and the yearbook are going to deal with what I expect to be a vast content desert, at least in terms of visual imagery. All the seasonal touchstones we have on the calendar every year – sporting events, homecoming, campout, Packapalooza, the Krispy Kreme Challenge, concerts, theatrical performances, all those types of things – may not happen this year, or at least not in the ways they've happened in the past. Those events have accounted for a substantial percentage of our photographs in years past. We've got to figure out what's going to go in all those empty spaces, and we've got to do it fast because moveout is officially over, and this campus is now a vast, empty place.

So these are my thoughts and worries. I hate to sound so dark, because we really have had a great start to the year, and if I'd had to pick a group of students leaders to navigate this year with I don't think I could have assembled a stronger team from top to bottom. But just as you all have professional obligations to your readers and listeners, I have a professional obligation to worry about you all. So if you continue to take care of them, please rest assured that myself, the professional staff and the board will do our collective best to take care of you.

So I've spoken enough. I'd like to take this opportunity to open the floor for discussion and hear any questions or concerns you may have.