



THE ANU OBSERVER

Meeting of The ANU Observer Board

Date: 27/5/20

Open of Meeting: 1635

Item 1 - Attendance and Apologies

Present: Adelle, Hayley, Tristan, Angus, Sam, Konstantine

Absent:

Item 2 - Acknowledgement of Country

By Konstantinos

Item 3 - Previous Action Items

3.1 Officers to review Role Overviews

3.2 Setting dates/ideas for Zoom/Discord social through a Slack callout.

Decided we will just have an in person social at the earliest possibility.

3.3 Konstantine to order those shirts

Item 4 - Reports

Chair passes to Adelle.

Chair Report: Konstantine Katsanis

Nothing significant has happened since last meeting. We still have not been contacted in regards to SSAF. I think the team is doing well in this challenging time, and our articles lately have received some praise, and some of them a bit of controversy among certain groups. Still, I believe we report within our range and policies. I am looking forward to the campus opening back again and using the office. I think it will benefit all of us by having a common space to meet, work and chat.

Konstantine: I will take it as read.

Moved by Hayley, seconded by Sam. Passes unanimously.

Finance Executive Report: Konstantine Katsanis

Since the last meeting, we've only made two purchases. One was to pay for one of our domain names, anuobserver.com, at Hover. The other payment was a Canberra Times subscription. Other than that, I still have not heard back from Auditing, but I contacted Jules and he informed me that they shouldn't take that long, however, the whole COVID-19 situation may have slowed them down.

Konstantine: Everything is there so I will take any questions.

Tristan: How many people have replied to emails in the past 3 months?

Konstantine: I haven't sent many emails. The only people who haven't is the auditing people.

Sam: How much does the Canberra Times Sub cost?

Konstantine: \$160 I think. I didn't get the premium because it was just newsletters and Sudoku.

Tristan: When is our next SSAF bid? Do we have to worry about it soon?

Konstantine: I think in Semester 1 we had one meeting [about it]. It usually happens a little bit after ANUSA elections.

Angus: Obviously there is a lot less students, so less SSAF money being paid. Will that mean we will have less money?

Tristan: I am going to guess so.

Konstantine: They may cut but I don't know by how much. I have no idea what's going to happen. We actually get the least from all the organisations, I would guess at most 10 grand but I don't want that.

Moved by Tristan, seconded by Sam. Passes unanimously.

Secretary Report: Hayley Hands

I don't have much to report, it is getting to that busy part of the semester and I think most of us are feeling it. I hope everyone has had a chance to look at the role overview policies. I don't feel comfortable passing them unless everyone has at least looked at the ones that apply to themselves, as I was basing some of them on some pretty old documents. I also finished the handover template.

Anthony indicated to me that he was interested in joining the Board but I haven't heard anything else about that. Also I would appreciate it if people could send their reports in a Google Doc/put them straight into the agenda as copying text from word docs/slack (if they are in separate messages) messes with the formatting and leaves timestamps in.

Additionally, I have noticed our Canva storage is 93% full and is struggling to upload images. I think we need to do a bit of a declutter to prevent this from getting worse.

Angus: We published the one for the General Meeting we just had, do they need to be passed by the next GM to be published?

Hayley: Should have them up as a draft by June.

Sam: Who should be [responsible for cleaning the Canva]?

Hayley: Not sure

Tristan: Everything on it is already in the Drive so we can [delete stuff].

Konstantine: I have noticed there is an option to download everything, I don't know if there is a more efficient way to do it.

Actionable: Cleaning up the Canva - Sam

Moved by Tristan, seconded by Angus. Passes unanimously.

Visual Content Executive Report: Tristan Khaw (Late with apologies)

General Report

Frustratingly, my team have been severely underperforming for the last few weeks. Some of that has been on me, I have been very busy with assessments. Some of that is no one's fault - the second half of the semester is always very busy for everyone and not being able to see each other in person is making everyone feel disengaged I think. However, they have both been consistently not responding/responding way too late to my messages and I am at a wit's end.

When the lockdown is lifted, I will put out another hiring ad and contact the prospective members from the start of the term.

Explainers

As above, video explainers have stalled since Charlie has not responded to my inquiry

Documentary Idea

Konstantine came to me with an interesting idea for a documentary about the miscellaneous statues around campus. I think it would be awesome for a project over the long break - some short documentaries, potentially with interviews of the creators (if we can track them down).

Similarly, Hayley has floated the idea of an explainer-esque video series about why the buildings around campus are named the way they are.

Tristan: My team has been really underperforming since the last meeting. I put in requests for meetings and stuff and they just haven't been read full stop. Hopefully once this lockdown is lifted we can hire more people and start them with consistency.

Adelle: If you were planning to hire more people would you want to post a few weeks out before Semester 2?

Tristan: If we can hire them even say a week before uni starts properly, and then just start discussion and training. We really felt it this year when we had to re-hire/re onboard everyone from last year. People didn't know how to do graphics and weren't aware we had cameras etc. We want to get that done before we hit crunch time in O-Week.

Konstantine: Not having many people in the role isn't great, it's the opposite of news I think. When we had a small number of reporters we still managed to do well but it doesn't seem to work for Visual.

Adelle: If you have a small team they have to be committed.

Tristan: I think because [we haven't met up] people aren't engaged. I think when uni goes back with fortnightly 5 and the Instagram it will be [a lot more engaging].

Konstantine: I think that will help put them on a schedule and make it more consistent.

Moved by Adelle, seconded by Angus. Passes unanimously.

News Content Executive Report: Anthony Lotric

It is worth noting that during the week of the 11th to the 17th of May, we did not publish any pieces. This was largely due to the fact that most of our stories are longer term and investigative at the moment. Speaking for myself, I had a number of assignments, which made it difficult for me to source shorter-term stories during this period. We can avoid this in future by having more explainers in the tank ready to go and ensuring that at least one editor is keeping their nose close to the ground to ensure that we pick up on any possible story leads.

We have realised that there are court proceedings that are currently moving forward that could be worth covering. Bec has been doing a good job of checking the court schedules for us, but because of the narrow window of opportunity to show up to these proceedings in person, we should develop a reporting strategy ASAP so that we don't continue to miss them.

As hoped, our Manning Clark Hand article was a success. However, we should only run these more light-hearted articles every few weeks, as it is important that our more serious journalism remains front and centre. They do a good job of breaking things up though and are good fillers for when the news cycle slows down, so they are very much worth publishing. We should keep an eye out for future subjects. I think that we should also expand the different types of this form of article light hearted that we publish – for instance by doing historical retrospectives.

I am happy with how the 'Proctorio Rebutts Criticism, but ANU Students Are Unmoved' was handled, as well as the Proctorio articles that proceeded it. The article was phrased in such a way that we managed to use the Proctorio correspondence effectively, while also giving the response of student activists generous opportunity to respond and rebut. Many other stories have been handled in a similarly adept way, but this serves as a good illustrative example of the great work we have all been doing.

We continue to occasionally experience, or cause, some technical hiccups during SRC live blogs. We have to ensure that there is very clear communication between the person setting up the live blog, and the person posting it. It would also be great if Angus could be available over slack for the duration in case something goes wrong.

Some reporters are still not quite meeting deadline expectations (although really only with relation to being around to accept edits), although it is definitely getting a lot better.

I have noticed that our Facebook descriptions have been getting longer and longer recently. While this is understandable because the web tag has not been working, we need to try to keep it to two sentences whenever possible.

As the Econ article has confirmed, articles that address issues with courses and academic colleges, or which deal with changes to courses and programs, are very popular. We have realised as an editorial team that we should put more effort into finding and developing these articles, as they have a very broad reach. Stu Pol is important to cover, so that we can keep elected officers honest, but it is not relevant to a lot of students.

I have noticed that a few small errors are still getting through our editorial procedure, and I think there are a couple of things we can do to fix this. One, I think we need to bring common errors to the attention of reporters, who do many of the proofs. These include double spaces, inaccurate use of commas and apostrophes, and use of the wrong type of quotation marks. We should also inform them that they don't have to necessarily know how to fix an error that they think they have identified – they can just bring it to the attention of their editor. Also, I think more generally editors should just make edits rather than suggestions when they are making purely grammatical or spelling-based corrections, as there has been at least one instance where it seems that a reporter accidentally rejected such a suggestion rather than accepted it.

On the topic of editors, I think we should make it standard that we leave comments up that were addressed from the first edit rather than removing them once they are addressed so that the second editor is aware of what has been changed. I find this helps me a lot and prevents me from changing things that are a certain way for good reason. To make this work, we should encourage our reporters to respond to all comments in the doc, rather than just correcting them and messaging their editor (although it's good for them to do that too in many instances).

The editorial team has had to learn how to deal with investigative stories in a way that we had not experienced before over the last couple of months. As in the case of the CISA article, we have to be willing to cut our investigations short when there are developments and then assign follow up articles (which can often be even better as the original article can be a way of getting more sources to talk). We also have to continue finding the right balance between editorial oversight and reporter autonomy – although I think we have been doing reasonably well on that front.

There was a minor issue with the Econ article where I felt that we had not provided sufficient right of reply to the University. While it was a borderline case (we did ask them generally about student complaints about the course, just not about the specific student complaints we sourced), and there was no negative blowback, we have to always take time as editors to consider whether we have provided sufficient information for a fair right of reply when making any sort of allegations. I think we should develop an editorial procedure to ensure this occurs.

All in all, we have been doing good work over the last month. I think we are cultivating a great set of motivated reporters that are becoming committed to Observer and upholding our standards. While policies, regulations and procedures are very important, nothing can replace a good institutional culture, which is what I think we have developed so far this year.

Sam: I can speak to this and Adelle can add anything on the end. Anthony first raises the week we had no content, there was quite a few articles about things going through the courts but the website was unreliable and we couldn't find a whole lot.

Adelle: We were looking for something to come out of AGM but it got pushed to Monday for appropriate right of reply.

Sam: We have started working on more explainers, we are thinking of a few others to put out on weeks where there isn't a whole lot of news. We shouldn't have any weeks without content again but in case we do we've got the explainers good to go. Manning Clark Hand was really good, Adelle's comedy genius is paying off. I think I'll take the rest as read. We had, as I'm sure we saw in all-editors, there was a bit of conflict between Anthony and Tristan. As Tristan said, these times aren't ideal and we understand that Tristan is struggling at the minute so I think at the beginning of the week if Tristan lets us know at the start of the week if graphics can't be done, as we understand he is under a lot of pressure.

Moved by Tristan, seconded by Angus. Passes unanimously.

Web Administrator Report: Angus Brooks

I have very little to report.

Recently I have been quite busy with University assessment and work, and as such have mainly been focussed on maintaining Observer systems (eg. issuing new system logins, essential system maintenance, and emergency fixes when something breaks), rather than major projects and system overhauls.

An incident occurred last week when our ANUObserver.org domain name was temporarily suspended. This occurred as some records had not been properly updated when I stepped into this role. Fortunately it occurred at a time that minimised disruption. I apologise for this occurring - I'm putting in processes to make sure it doesn't happen again, and will include notes in my 'Observer systems information' document that I'm preparing to avoid it happening when Observer has a new Web Executive and team.

Angus: I won't speak to my report.

Konstantine: You asked me last week if something was paid, a domain or?

Angus: Yeah it was a domain.

Konstantine: Hover, right? Yeah usually it is automatic. I am glad I found out it was on my personal card because I don't want to be paying that next year.

Angus: The accounts were linked to Michael asking him to update his account, that's why the website stopped working.

Moved by Tristan, seconded by Hayley. Passes unanimously.

Item 5 - Items for Decision

5.1 Role Overviews

Item 6 - Items for Discussion

6.1 Accessing Office after COVID

Hayley: Can we make it an actionable to email all the necessary people about accessing office?

Angus: Worth having a discussion about what the use of the office will look like after COVID. Most res halls aren't returning so a lot of people might not be in Canberra.

Tristan: The equipment should be kept in office. We have shown Zoom Board meetings work well but maybe team meetings could be hybrid.

Angus: I'm hearing the ANU is still going to be very cautious about office space and that they want their staff to continue working from home. At the very least I think we will have to be looking at how many people will be allowed in the space at one time with 4 square metres. It might be awhile until we can have big collaborative discussion in person.

Tristan: Should we allocate money to hand sanitiser?

Konstantine: I think with masks and gloves we still need to maintain social distancing.

Tristan: When we open the office again we should collapse some of the tables.

Angus: I'd guess we'd get access back in mid-late July. Visual team can't work from home so they should have priority.

Adelle: We'll also have to see how many of our Officers are coming back to Canberra.

Angus: We could contact trace by just having everyone open the door with their own ID.

Tristan: Or we could have a Slack channel where people could put it in a time stamped way.

Hayley: I can update COVID procedure.

6.2 Stakeholder Relations (Confidential Item)

6.2.1 Confidential item submitted by Hayley

6.3 Team Relations (Confidential Item)

6.3.1 Confidential item submitted by Konstantine

Item 7 - Other Business

Item 8 - Recall Actionables

8.1 Actionable: Cleaning up the Canva - Sam

8.2 Fixing up COVID procedure for office transition

8.3 Shirts

Meeting closed at 1754