

University of Michigan Board for Student Publications

Minutes of the March 16, 2026 Board Meeting

Board members present: Jewel Gopwani (Chair), Jillian Berman, Geoff Gagnon, Ann Marie Lipinski, Kyle Nowels, and Walter Middlebrook

Board members absent: John Copeland and Ann Marie Aliotta and Robin Luce-Herrmann

The Michigan Daily was represented by: Edith Pendel, Zachary Ajluni, and Cici Copenhaver

The Gargoyle was represented by: Sabrina Barnes and Xolo Hernandez-Herrera

SHEI Magazine was represented by: Grace Donnelly and Erin Casey

The Michiganensian was represented by: Sydney Lount and Gabriella Noble

The Student Publications Staff was represented by: Kathy Ciesinski, Dave Richmond, and Ben Widdison

Others Present: None

Chair Jewel Gopwani called the meeting to order at 5:35

Minutes

A motion to approve the January 12, 2026 meeting minutes was made by Geoff, seconded by Kyle, and passed without dissent.

Public Comments: None

Publication Updates

SHEI Magazine - Reporting by Grace and Erin

- Working on the Winter Print Issue, entitled “Desiderium.” Topics are intentional and inventive, consistent with editorial goals for the year
- Photography collaboration with Uplift Ann Arbor underway
- Landed a free venue for the launch event through a photography trade arrangement with a new Ann Arbor venue; the trade was reviewed and contract terms confirmed to protect students’ portfolio rights and ensure appropriate credit
- Collaborated with GetUp Vintage for the February Digital release, which was extremely successful; GetUp Vintage has agreed to be a clothing partner for future projects
- Executive board applications are closed; interviews are in progress this week. Applicant pool was smaller than hoped, but expected to be sufficient for exec board; broader business board recruitment will follow
- Internal merch order is complete
- First professional development networking call held with approximately 50 members and a Calvin Klein marketing professional; call was well-received and the series will continue
- Prepared for Giving Bluesday with an alumni newsletter and internal communications
- Planning for board transition and F26-W27 objectives underway

Discussion: Board discussed the venue photography trade arrangement, noting the importance of contract documentation for all trade and advertising agreements. The Hub’s Opportunity Hub was mentioned as a resource for fashion-specific internship funding for interested students. The importance of reader transparency regarding trade arrangements was also noted.

The Michiganensian - Reporting by Sydney and Gabby

- All yearbook pages and proofs have been fully submitted; the print deadline was met and the book will not be delayed. Staff is now working on spring and summer coverage for next year

- E-Board interviews are taking place this week for an Associate Copy Editor, an Associate Design Editor, and two Head Photo Editors. The team hopes one of these hires can begin training toward the EIC role next semester
- Preparing for the annual banquet on Wednesday, April 22
- Working on the commencement slideshow; student leaders were asked to share the senior photo submission form with seniors on their staff (up to 5 photos per student, deadline in April)
- Return to Staff form completed; nearly all non-seniors are returning, reflecting strong staff retention
- Yearbook sales strong: 1,800 books ordered this year compared to 1,600 last year, driven by improved marketing and a fix to the senior portrait partner's ordering system from the prior year
- Sold out of commemorative ads
- Hired a new social media manager; in the process of hiring two new Assistant Business Managers
- Grad Extravaganza began today; student publication leaders were asked to recruit staffers for available shifts, especially Wednesday morning openings. All shifts are paid at \$10/hour
- Attended the ACP Spring Conference in San Francisco and received the Pacemaker Finalist award; also attended leadership, design, and business sessions

Discussion: Walter asked about the increase in yearbook orders. Sydney and Kathy explained the increase was due to improved marketing and the resolution of a prior-year ordering glitch with the senior portrait partner. Kathy reinforced the importance of all student pub leaders supporting Grad Extravaganza shifts through April, as the effort benefits all of Student Publications.

The Michigan Daily - Reporting by Zach and Edith

- Website homepage redesign underway: a new featured video widget, a rotating carousel of top articles, and a recommended commentary section have been designed. The layout has been condensed and the newsletter signup moved to the footer. The product team has handed off to the engineering team, with implementation expected within 3-4 weeks
- Ad placement and Google Ads/Newspack integration remain an open question; staff is working with Newspack to gain more control over ad placement and content standards. Web team will discuss Title II digital accessibility requirements, which take effect approximately April 25, at their next standing meeting
- Preparing for coverage of the 2026 midterm elections: the News section plans to attend political rallies and state party conventions; the Opinion section has reached out to candidates from local to federal levels for endorsement interviews, with a goal of completing all interviews by end of the academic year
- The Design section has produced striking visuals; highlighted work includes a front cover for a Focal Point investigative piece on a former UM Medicine dean and a Michigan in Color Valentine's Day spread
- Giving Bluesday video completed and submitted; it will be linked in the follow-up
- Editors' retreat held in Port Clinton, Ohio on February 28; managing editors participated in bonding activities, a Jeopardy session, and a trip to the local lighthouse
- Planning a collaborative print edition with the Michigan Times (UM-Flint) and Michigan Journal (UM-Dearborn); the Flint paper recently returned after a hiatus. The edition is structured to minimize burden on the smaller campuses while promoting a sense of shared university identity. Flint does not currently have page designers, so the Daily would handle design for their content
- FY'27 budget first draft is complete and under review by Kathy, Kim, and Dave

- Marketing and creative teams are actively working on Baby Ads; a third targeted message was sent to parents using a new @umich.edu address. Sales team has begun outreach to clients for the graduation issue
- Applications for summer sales account executives will open this week

Discussion: Board members asked about ad placement in the redesigned website. The collaborative edition with Flint and Dearborn generated discussion about potential content-sharing, crossword syndication, and linking of campus papers within the Daily's website. Geoff confirmed this type of multi-campus collaboration has not been done before to anyone's knowledge. The idea of leveraging board or alumni involvement in story review for sensitive investigative pieces was also raised (see Operations Committee discussion below).

The Gargoyle - Reporting by Sabrina and Xolo

- Issue 3, themed "Gargoyle Museum," has been published. It was a fully all-color issue; the centerfold was foregone due to an abundance of submissions. The issue explored dimensions of museum themes including history, information distribution, and artifacts
- Issue 4, "Gargland: The High Fantasy & Social Critique Issue," is solidly underway; rough drafts are due on Tuesday. The issue will be glossy and full color with a larger page count. All pieces will contribute to collective worldbuilding of a shared fantasy world, with social and political satire encouraged; fairy tale content explicitly excluded
- Leadership outlook has improved since the last meeting; strong candidates are being considered for next year's leadership. The Gargoyle constitution is being reviewed and updated
- Alumni visit from "Uncle Gil," who brought pizza and contributed ideas for the high fantasy issue
- Triple Threat: Holy Trinity event planned for Easter weekend at Vale co-op, in collaboration with MEMCO (Michigan Electronic Music Collective) and WCBN (campus radio station). The Gargoyle's contribution is limited to zine printing costs; a poster team is working on event promotion. The zine may include a ticket element for a special drink
- Social media initiatives underway
- Print funding for the last issue was secured through donor support after CSG challenges
- Merch is underway
- Giving Bluesday preparations complete, with thanks to Dave and Ben for their support
- FY'27 budget draft completed and under review by Kim, Dave, and Kathy
- Looking ahead to Issue 4, the Triple Threat zine, and the leadership transition including formal transition documents and constitutional updates

Discussion: Board asked how often the Gargoyle holds events; this Triple Threat collaboration is the most formal event co-presentation in recent memory. The Gargoyle's financial contribution is limited to zine printing. Board suggested a link to Issue 3 be included in the follow-up materials for out-of-town board members.

Committee Reports

Operations Committee

Professional Staff: Kathy Ciesinski

Board Members: Jewel Gopwani, Geoff Gagnon, Walter Middlebrook

- Three board members' terms expire in June: Jillian Berman and Geoff Gagnon (first terms) and Jewel Gopwani (second term). All three have expressed interest in renomination. A vote is planned for the April meeting to allow full board participation

- The board discussed the possibility of establishing a co-chair or vice chair position to provide leadership continuity. Board members interested in serving as chair, co-chair, or vice chair were asked to contact Jewel or Kathy before the April meeting
- Media insurance: Kathy and Jewel met with a contact recommended by Robin to discuss media insurance options. The conversation arose from a legal matter involving a Daily article earlier in the year. Discussion covered types of coverage available, the role of the University's Office of General Counsel (OGC), and whether university coverage would extend to publications given their editorial independence. Relevant resources mentioned include FIRE (Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression), SPLC (Student Press Law Center), and MPA
- Walter will reach out to Penn State to learn how they handle media insurance. Kathy will contact other independent student media organizations for comparison.
- Jillian suggested exploring whether an alumni attorney could provide informal pre-publication review for sensitive investigative pieces, clarifying this would not constitute legal advice. Zach noted the Daily currently uses FIRE as a resource and has an internal process for verifying sourcing and attribution. FIRE does have a retainer available for partial legal fee coverage
- Ann Marie Lipinski noted she is working to schedule a meeting with the Focal Point team, potentially as soon as this Sunday

Next meeting: Friday, May 15 at 3:30 pm via Zoom

Finance Committee

Professional Staff: Kathy Ciesinski, Kim Tackett, Dave Richmond

Board Members: Jillian Berman, Robin Luce-Herrmann, Kyle Nowels

- No committee meeting was held between board meetings
- FY'27 budget drafts have been received from publications and are under review. Kathy, Kim, and Dave have provided initial feedback; additional input is forthcoming as new FY'27 cost rates become available. Kathy will reach out to Finance Committee members to determine whether a formal review meeting is needed or whether written feedback will suffice

Next meeting: No specific date set; primary focus will be on FY'27 budgets

Development Committee

Professional Staff: Kathy Ciesinski, Ben Widdison

Board Members: Ann Marie Aliotta, John Copeland, Kyle Nowels

- Giving metrics continue to rise year-over-year. As of March 12, 2026: number of gifts up 18.9% (439 to 541), number of donors up 15.7% (285 to 338), and annual giving up 31.3% (\$102,700 to \$134,877). Total giving reflects a decrease in percentage terms due to a \$100,000 bequest realized in FY25; underlying performance remains strong and outpaces university-wide averages
- The university's recurring gifts match program has been renewed for FY27. Currently 24 donors are participating, with an expected match of \$6,700 and new monthly revenue of approximately \$1,930
- A stewardship matrix has been developed (with significant assistance from Kyle Nowels) to systematize recognition practices at varying donor levels; additional recognition elements are in development and will roll out in coming months
- Giving Bluesday is Wednesday, March 18. Participating publications include The Gargoyle, The Michiganensian, The Michigan Daily, SHEI Magazine, and the Office of Student Publications. Board members have been added to all communications for each publication
- Lapsed donor outreach is underway; lists of prior-year donors who have not yet given this year are being prepared for targeted contact

- The committee is exploring text-based donor outreach through a company called Get Thru, which offers a channel used by peer development operations
- Discussion of whether board members could serve as signatories on select donor acknowledgment letters, particularly at the time of the annual Scholarship and Awards Brunch

Next meeting: Tuesday, April 28 at 11:30 am; lunch location TBD

GM Report

- Save the date for the annual scholarship and awards brunch: Sunday, August 30 (the earliest fall date the brunch has been held). Scholarship application review timelines will be adjusted accordingly. Kathy will reach out to returning reviewers and extend invitations to new board members interested in participating
- Eight Michigan Daily students attended the College Media Association (CMA) conference in New York City over spring break: four from News, three from Arts, and one from Opinion. Sessions covered newsroom leadership, student press law, and multimedia content. Attendees also had the opportunity to tour the New York Times (via lottery). All students funded through various Career Enhancement Funds are expected to submit written takeaways within a few weeks of returning
- Sydney and Gabby represented the Michiganensian at the ACP Spring Conference in San Francisco, where they attended design and business sessions, received the Pacemaker Finalist award, and gained insights on yearbook pricing models at peer institutions and staff retention strategies
- The board discussed encouraging conference attendees to present takeaways to their broader staff, such as at weekly management desk meetings, to maximize the ripple effect of donor-funded attendance
- Financial data was shared with the board. The cash balance remains healthy. A cap and gown order of approximately \$160,000 is expected to draw down the balance, with sales revenue from Grad Extravaganza and April events anticipated to offset that. Kathy will discuss quasi-endowment contributions with the Finance Committee to maintain interest earnings without risking a negative balance

New Business: None

A motion to adjourn was made by Kyle, seconded by Geoff, and passed without dissent.
Chair Jewel Gopwani closed the meeting at 7:

Actions Taken:

Motion to approve the January 12, 2026 meeting minutes: Geoff Gagnon

Seconded by: Kyle Nowels

The motion passed without dissent.

Motion to adjourn: Kyle Nowels

Seconded by: Geoff Gagnon

The motion passed without dissent.

Next Meeting Date: Monday, April 13, 2026

Respectfully submitted,

Kathy Ciesinski

General Manager, Office of Student Publications