

"Cooper Union" New York.





Peter Cooper Monument, New York.



MICHAEL NAGLE FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

A crowd gave Cooper Union's Foundation Building a symbolic hug Tuesday after the East Village college decided to charge tuition.

Cooper Union Won't Be Free, Ending an Era

by Ariel Kaminer
The New York Times
April 23, 2013

The Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art, which is one of the last tuition-free colleges in the country but has been under severe financial strain, announced on Tuesday that for the first time in more than a century it will charge undergraduates to attend.

The decision ends almost two years of roiling debate about an education that was long revered for being “free as air and water,” and stood as the school’s

most distinguishing feature, insulating it until now from concerns about the rising cost of a college degree.

Under the plan adopted by Cooper Union’s trustees, the prestigious college, based in the East Village, will continue need-blind admissions. But beginning in fall 2014, it will charge students based on what the college described as a steeply sliding scale, with those deemed able paying around \$20,000, and many others, including

those “with the greatest needs,” paying nothing. The change would not apply to undergraduates enrolled as of this fall.

“The time has come to set our institution on a path that will enable it to survive and thrive well into the future,” the board chairman, Mark Epstein, said in an announcement to students and faculty members in the college’s Great Hall. “Under the new policy, the Cooper Union will continue to adhere to the vision of Peter Cooper, who founded the institution specifically to provide a quality education to those who might not otherwise be able to afford it.”

Some students wept during the announcement; others left, declaring there was nothing more to hear. “I can’t even process this,” said Ashley Katz, 20, a second-year architecture student from California. “One of my professors came out and said, ‘Drape the whole school in black.’”

After the speech, opponents of the decision gathered outside the Great Hall, where Abraham Lincoln gave one of his most famous speeches, in opposition to the westward expansion of slavery, and staged what they called a walkout.

Cooper Union opened in 1859, endowed by the industrialist Peter Coo-

per with valuable real estate and a mission of educating working-class New Yorkers, at no cost to them. Early on, some students who could afford to pay did so, but no undergraduates have paid for more than 100 years. Along with the nation’s military academies, Cooper Union was among the only remaining schools in the United States that did not charge tuition.

The absence of a tuition bill and the high quality of its instruction have over time changed the college’s identity; today the institution that graduated the architect Daniel Libeskind, the graphic designer Milton Glaser and the artist Alex Katz, and even instructed an inventor named Thomas Edison is one of the most selective colleges in the country. Its three schools enroll about 1,000 art, architecture and engineering students from every location and every station of life, but a budget crisis lately forced the college to wrestle with changes that would once have been inconceivable.

According to Cooper Union’s president, Jamshed Bharucha, it currently operates at a \$12 million annual deficit. The number reflects several factors: expenses that have risen faster than revenues, a growing administrative staff, disappointing fund-raising drives and, most significantly, \$10 million a year in payments on a \$175

million loan the school took out a few years ago, in part so that it could invest money in the stock market. In 2018, an increase in rent from the college's biggest asset, the land under the Chrysler Building, will overtake expenses, but only for a short while, he has said.

Last April, Dr. Bharucha announced that Cooper Union would collect tuition from graduate students, who at present make up a very small fraction of the college's population. He later instructed faculty members to submit proposals for additional revenue streams, a directive that met with mixed results. The faculty at the art school refused to comply; in response, the administration refused to send out early acceptance letters for art school applicants.

Meanwhile, students, faculty members and alumni who advocated for a harder look at Cooper Union's expenses convened large assemblies to demand that the administration open its books. Some staged an occupation of the school's historic Foundation Building.

Many students quickly filed out of the auditorium Tuesday, but others stayed to submit questions to Mr. Epstein. The first one was shouted: "Do you really think it's going to work?"

"Yes we do," he said. "Hopefully forever."

The tuition the school expects to charge is still below that of many prestigious private colleges. At the Rhode Island School of Design, an urban school with a celebrated art program, tuition is \$42,622; at Carnegie Mellon University, which has a highly ranked engineering program, tuition is \$46,670.

Last year, Cooper Union hired a consulting firm to consider the effect of collecting tuition from undergraduates. (Officially the college lists a price of \$38,500 a year, but extends to all students what it calls a full-tuition scholarship.)

The firm advised against reducing the scholarships by more than 25 percent. Anything beyond that, it said, would weaken the applicant pool and arouse expectations for costly amenities that the college does not offer.

But under the plan adopted by the trustees, Cooper Union will reduce those scholarships for some students by as much as 50 percent. Asked why they had exceeded the consultants' recommendation, Mr. Epstein said that at the lower percentage, the college would have to impose tuition across the board, rather than on a sliding scale.

Mr. Epstein argued that the new approach would actually provide greater

financial support to needy students, by allowing the school to subsidize not only their tuition but also the expense of living in New York, which he said drove some qualified students off to better-endowed institutions.

The trustees' vote was originally scheduled to take place last December, with the results to be announced in January. But according to a person familiar with the board's deliberations but not authorized to discuss them, the vote was postponed several times by a substantial minority of trustees who were "turning over every unturned stone," in the hope that they could stabilize the college's finances without charging undergraduate tuition.

The board looked "very, very carefully" at the option of closing one of Cooper Union's three schools, this person said, the only viable way to reduce the faculty without violating the terms of tenure. It also considered shrinking the size of the student body, selling off real estate and trying to hold expenses down. In all cases, the projected savings were not sufficient.

When the vote eventually came about on the broad question of whether to impose undergraduate tuition, this person said, it passed by a significant margin; when the board later voted on a specific tuition plan, it passed with-

out opposition, and only a few abstentions.

Some of the most vocal members of the Cooper Union community have argued that any tuition would alter the essential character of the school.

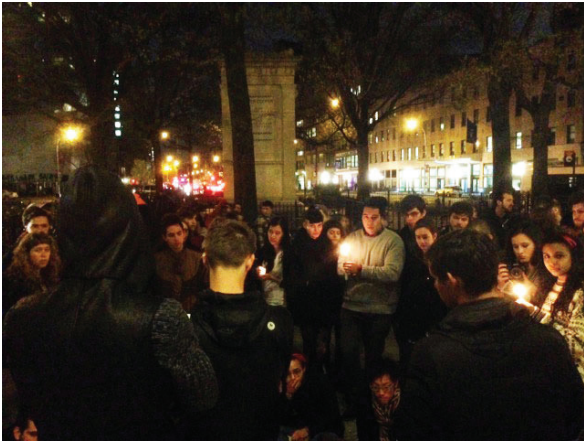
A couple of hours after Mr. Epstein spoke, the group of protesting students and faculty members had swelled to about 200 outside the Great Hall. Someone brought a cardboard sign that said, "50 percent free." Mauricio Higuera, 28, a fourth-year art student, addressed the group: "For 150 years," he said, "this building, these columns, have held a dream, a dream for free education for all. I propose we all join hands and give this institution a big hug, because it needs it." The assembled crowd joined hands and did as he suggested.

Cooper Union Students React to Drastic Tuition Increase

by Mostafa Heddaya

Hyperallergic

April 23, 2013



A group of Cooper Union students holds vigil earlier tonight, in the wake of an announced tuition hike at the formerly free institution

Cooper Union is not reeling in the wake of today's historic board announcement, but it is hurting. The beleaguered institution's decision to scrap its founder's vision for free education was a long time coming, borne on the back of a boom-time cupidity that has crippled many university endowments.

This evening, Hyperallergic sought to get a feel for the student reaction and the way forward, first at a 6pm School of Art Senior Show on the second floor of the Foundation Building, then at 7:45 in Cooper Square, where a candlelight vigil was held in protest of the day's events. The mood at the former event was celebratory—it was,

after all, a senior art show—and students took a break from appreciating the work of their classmates to give the brief reactions listed below. Note that nearly all students declined to be individually photographed.

At the candlelight vigil, attended by a crowd no greater than one hundred, some students distributed leaflets bearing quotations from Peter Cooper on the founding ethos of his college,

stein's "Organizing As if Social Relations Matter."

When we caught up with Gollan later, he emphasized that the assembled group's repudiation of the board's decision represents a new chapter in their activism, "It's a little depressing, but I'm calling it Day One. Because up until this point we've been free education against 'no comment,' and today we're free education against 50%



Specially-made "trustee matchbooks" used to light the candles at tonight's vigil

while others lit candles with specially-made "trustee matchbooks"—a protest symbol at once sardonic and functional. Attendees took turns reading from the Cooper leaflets, and Casey Gollan, 21, read selections from Cindy Mil-

tuition. Which is actually higher than some state schools and SUNY." Our conversation was then momentarily interrupted by a passer-by, who shouted: "Don't go to art school!"

*Cooper Union students speak to Hyperal-
lergic: What's your reaction to the Board's
tuition announcement? How would this
have affected your decision to come to
Cooper Union?*

**DeVonn Francis, 20, member of Arts
Student Council**

My main reaction is a bit of disbelief, a bit of shock, definitely feel as if, in the moment, the institution—insofar as rectifying its financial dire straights—has seen a cop-out on behalf of the Board of Trustees. At the same time I don't think free tuition for the posterity of our school is over. There are a lot of more things we can do, a lot more avenues we have not have previously had the time to take, and I look forward to seeing what solutions we come up with in the future.

The saving grace of this institution and where it stands are the students that go here and the faculty that give over their time and energy into making us better individuals. Granted, now that we have cut the scholarship by 50% ... I'd probably be in-state in Virginia. It's hard to place it otherwise, it's complicated there are a lot of things that need to be improved in this institution, the only thing that is constant, the saving grace is the relationship that I have with my faculty, the people that push me to make the work that I make.

Maren Karlson, 24, exchange student

I'm from Europe, and in Germany all schools are free, so I feel like this is the only school that's kind of similar. It's really sad. It's weird to me, I would never have been able to go to art school if I had to pay like here in America.

Jose Figueroa, 26

We've been fighting against this for a year now, I'm trying to be very positive about this change. There's something about the student body and the professors combined with the mission makes such an amazing diversity. Our concern is that this will change after they made this decision, it changes the ground rules of what this institution represents. I couldn't have come here under these new rules, the fact that it is free makes it or breaks it, it highlights the fact that this is a merit-based scholarship.

Henderson Peternell, 21

If I hadn't gotten in to Cooper Union I wouldn't be in college. I think it's the same for everybody, people often choose to go to college anyway and it sucks—it's a real blessing to be here. It seems like no matter what the faculty thinks, whatever the student body thinks, the board will do whatever it wants. You feel totally powerless. It's funny that there's such an institution

that's so progressive in one way and so regressive in another way. It's painful, really, for that to be the case. It seems like the same people running this school are the same people that ruined the economy, it's the same group of shitty, money-sucking fuckers.

Lucas Chao, 19

I can say what my professor David Gersten said, "The board broke a promise today, a promise to uphold the mission statement to provide education regardless of socioeconomic background." I think it's a shame that because of mismanagement and a lack of understanding what really holds up this school that the Cooper Union as a model for education in America and the world should have to suffer ...

Off-the-record student, 23

I'm just zonked, I don't know what to say ... It fucking sucks. To be frank everyone is exhausted. Or at least I feel that way.

The Right to Education: Peter Cooper's Vision, and What Its Unraveling Represents

by Rina Goldfield
The Life of the Law
April 26, 2013

A kind of death occurred at noon on Tuesday, April 23 at the Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art. Mark Epstein, the chairman of the school's Board of Trustees, had called a meeting for students and faculty just six hours before. He stood at the front of the school's Great Hall—the hall where Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass gave visionary progressive speeches, where the NAACP held its very first meeting, and where Susan B. Anthony had an office—and announced that the school would begin charging tuition of its undergraduates for the first time in over 150 years. That night, students staged a candlelight vigil while faculty wept over drinks.

Peter Cooper, the founder of the school, was the son of an impoverished hatmaker. He never received a formal education. He later wrote, "I formed a very resolute determination that if I could ever get the means, I would build an institution and throw its doors open at night so that the boys and girls of this city, who had no better

opportunity than I had to enjoy means of information, would be enabled to improve and better their condition." A series of inventions, including the I-Beam and Jell-O, made Cooper a wealthy man. He fulfilled his resolution and opened the Cooper Union in 1859.

Cooper constructed the school's Foundation Building with an empty shaft for another as-yet unfinished invention: the elevator. When the elevator was finally installed, it lifted passengers to the pinnacle of the city. The building stood as the tallest in all of Manhattan and symbolized the school's radical inversion of social hierarchy. At the time, most institutions of higher learning exclusively admitted white males of means. But the Cooper Union awarded degrees completely free of charge to women, immigrants, and other members of society's periphery. Andrew Carnegie, the steel magnate and philanthropist, was a major early funder of the school. Like Peter Cooper, Carnegie believed that "education should be as free as air and

water.” The school hummed on the promise that humans have the right to an education, just as we have the right to breathe.

Perhaps Peter Cooper’s idealism seems quaint in 21st century America. Perhaps the assertion that a spattering of aspiring creatives deserves a free college education sounds like entitlement. Yet no institution of higher learning embodies the ideal of accessible education more than the Cooper Union did. To deride that ideal in this moment of trillion-dollar student debt and skyrocketing tuition is excessively cynical. College sticker prices perpetuate the American wealth chasm and make the American dream—that hope that talent and hard work can forge success regardless of inborn privilege—seem a naive fantasy.

I attended the Cooper Union School of Art from 2005–2010. The education I received there felt handmade, bearing the love and imperfections that accompany handmade objects. The facilities were often ramshackle and the classes often unstructured, but the absence of student debt created space to pursue knowledge for its own sake. Granted this precious gift, we students pushed ourselves and one another with a rambunctious thirst. Grades didn’t matter; ideas did. We worked, we drank, and then we worked some

more. I often slept under my studio desk while artists around me worked till dawn.

This morning, three years after graduating, I sit in a cooperative house with Christhian Diaz, one of my best friends and another Cooper Union alumnus. We sip coffee and he shows me new photographs of grassy fields and protests. He tells me about arriving at the Cooper Union as a broke undocumented immigrant. He tells me how he confessed his plight to a professor. The professor hired him on the spot as an assistant, despite not needing help. This was the promise of the Cooper Union: we would support each other in our pursuit of knowledge and art, regardless of money.

But money caught up with this rare bloom of idealism, as tends to happen. The school took out a \$175 million loan to help construct a new building in 2006. Then the financial crisis hit. In 2011, a new college president proposed charging tuition to dam the school’s \$16 million annual losses. Students, alumni, and faculty revolted, arguing that the full-tuition scholarships were the school’s one priceless commodity. They staged occupations and penned protests and presented the president with a “Happy Resignation Day” cake. And then came Tuesday’s

last-minute meeting. Tuition appears sealed.

The new building is a useless atrium encased in a silver skin. If the school's Foundation Building symbolizes the progressivism of the 19th century, the new one reflects the superficial greed of the 21st. The allure of a glittery and expanded infrastructure blinded the Board of Trustees from recognizing the hazards of loans and hedge fund investments. Panting to keep up with our ever-expanding neighbors NYU and Columbia, the school's richly compensated leaders took foolhardy risks. Now, lower and middle-class students must pay for those leaders' mistakes. Sound familiar? Tuition at Cooper Union is symptomatic of the bigger trend of transferring liability from those at the top to those at the bottom, of which the gold-parachute-lined and regulation-thin 2008 bailout is another egregious example.

Niki Logis, the terrifying and brilliant Cooper Union professor of sculpture, instructed my freshman 3D Design class to make art as though our hair was on fire.

"HAIR ON FIRE! HAIR ON FIRE!" I remember her barking on at least one occasion.

Flaming hair is the level of urgency demanded to be an artist and an ide-

alist. Letting go of both artistry and idealism is easy, but the Cooper Union bucked cynicism—and realism, perhaps—to add oxygen to those flames. Its commitment to education as a right is an anachronism today. Yet relics like this school move our democracy forward and keep its spark alight.

The Tragedy of Cooper Union

by Felix Salmon

Reuters

April 29, 2013

This time last year, I wrote about the pressure that public companies face to grow at all costs, and how destructive that pressure can be. Growth is, weirdly, inimical to longevity: if you want something to last for a very, very long time, then what you really want to create is something large—but not huge—and which doesn't need to grow at all. The world's oldest companies are nearly all family-owned affairs; they're big enough to keep those families well-off, and they tend to produce goods or services for which there is a steady demand across the centuries. (Hotels, for instance, or wine.)

Peter Cooper understood this well. A wealthy man, he owned a lot of land in Manhattan—including the land underneath what is now the Chrysler Building—and he knew that land would, literally, produce healthy rents in perpetuity. A philanthropist, Cooper knew exactly what he wanted those rents to be spent on: he created the Cooper Union, a college with the defining characteristic that it would charge its students nothing. It was—and is—a noble cause. And in the early days, its trustees quite literally bought

into that cause: they helped out with its endowment, and covered its deficits in years where it lost money.

Cooper understood that free education doesn't really scale. If you're charging, then extra students provide extra income which can pay for extra teachers and administrators and buildings. But if you're giving education away for free, then it's imperative that you operate strictly within your means. The only way to grow is if you persuade some new generations of wealthy benefactors to contribute their own money or land. But at Cooper Union, that hasn't happened for many decades.

As a result, Cooper Union has always been an extremely special educational institution, the kind of place where a little went a very long way. The faculty was not well paid; the facilities were bare-bones. But the students were fantastic, because Cooper could pick the very best of the very best. And the college's overriding social mission engendered a huge amount of loyalty and love for the institution, as well as being reflected deep in its curricula. Here's Sangamithra Iyer, for instance:

When I graduated from Cooper, in 1999, I received a scholarship for a master's program in geotechnical engineering at UC Berkeley. That summer, a major earthquake devastated Turkey. The first day of classes, the first thing one professor said was that Turkey smelled "like 40,000 dead people" and that "engineers who know that smell do their work a lot differently than those who don't." It was this sense of social responsibility that led me to pursue engineering, but also to leave it from time to time. A Cooper education freed me from debt, and allowed me the freedom to pursue purpose, not profit-driven endeavors. Its Union, for me, not only united the arts and the sciences but also was about making connections between the technical, the political, and the social.

While the Cooper Union ethos never left the students or the faculty, however, it did seem to desert a significant chunk of the Board of Trustees and the administration. Starting as long ago as the early 1970s, the board started selling off the land bequeathed by Cooper, not to invest the proceeds in higher-yielding assets, but rather just to cover accumulated deficits. Cooper hated debt and deficits, but that hatred was not shared by later administrators, who would allow debts to accumulate—bad enough—until the only solution was to sell off the college's patrimony, thereby reducing the resources available for future generations of students. If you visit Astor Place today,

the intersection once dominated by the handsome Cooper Union building, the main thing you notice are two gleaming new glass-curtain-walled luxury buildings, one residential and one commercial, both constructed on land bought from Cooper Union.

Then, when you turn the corner and look at what hulks across the street from the main Cooper Union building, you can see where a huge amount of the money went: into a gratuitously glamorous and expensive New Academic Building, built at vast expense, with the aid of a \$175 million mortgage which Cooper Union has no ability to repay.

The bland name for the building is a symptom of the fact that Cooper's capital campaign, designed to raise the money for its construction, was a massive flop: no one gave remotely enough money to justify putting their name on the building. It's also a symptom of the fact that no one on the board had any appetite for naming it after George Campbell, the main architect of the scheme which involved going massively into debt in order to construct this white elephant.

Campbell, pictured grinning widely in a now-notorious 2009 *WSJ* article, claimed that Cooper was a financial success story when in fact it was on the verge of collapse. He's the single big-

gest individual villain in the Cooper story, and it's a vicious irony that Cooper's latest Form 990 shows him being paid \$1,307,483 in 2011—*after* he left Cooper's presidency. (Cooper Union explains that the amount represents six years of "deferred compensation/retention payments," but the timing couldn't be worse.)

Campbell's enablers and cheering squad were a small group of trustees, many of them Cooper-trained engineers gone Wall Street, who had so internalized the ethos of the financial world that it never occurred to them that they shouldn't be constantly trying to get bigger and better and shinier. Campbell was paid \$668,473 in his last year at Cooper—he was one of the highest-paid college presidents in the country, despite running a naturally small institution with serious space and money constraints. Board-member financiers enabled his dreams of growth and glory, hoping that some of the glamor from the newly-revitalized institution would reflect back on themselves. Naturally, when the whole project turned out to be a disaster, they scurried ignobly off the board as fast as they could.

The turnover on the board continues: the latest Form 990 alone shows six trustees—Marc Appleton, Robert Aquilina, Judith Rodin, Moshe

Safdie, William Sandholm, and Philip Trahanas—resigning their posts over the course of the year. And if you look at the current list of trustees, you'll see there have been other resignations since then: Douglas Hamilton, Vikas Kapoor, Audrey Flack, Stanley Lapidus, Giorgiana Slade, Cynthia Weiler, and Ronald Weiner. That's 13 resignations in the course of just over two years; the entire board has only 22 members.

For an institution which was founded to exist in perpetuity, this kind of board turnover is decidedly worrying, especially since it was the board which decided and announced that Cooper Union will start charging tuition. If this board is just passing through, with precious little aggregate tenure or institutional memory, the legitimacy of that decision is surely greatly reduced.

What's more, a weak board puts extra power in strong presidents—and both the current president, Jamshed Bharucha, and his predecessor, George Campbell, seem to have been able to persuade the board to implement anything they wanted to do. Bharucha is no fan of Campbell, for obvious reasons, but in many ways the two well-paid presidents are quite similar. I recently obtained a highly-unofficial transcript of the September 2012 board meeting, where Bharucha

was far from despondent or apologetic about the fact that Cooper's board felt as though it was being forced to choose between charging tuition and closing down entirely. "Turning adversity into opportunity is really an opportunity that very few institutions have," he said, before talking about something called "a vision process." Later, he comes out with this:

I resonate very much to future-oriented thinking about higher education. I assure you that I will be guiding the institution to embrace these technologies and we're not going to be trapped in the past. I think if we get over this hump there will be so much opportunity... I think we can lead... We don't have a global brand. We've got to build that global brand.

Similarly, the trustees' statement includes worrisome language like this:

Maintaining the highest standards of excellence means that we must constantly aim to improve through investment. We must engage in a continuous process of strengthening our academic programs, our faculty, and the clarity of our academic reputation. The institution will invest in our programs and our faculty to ensure that we always are, and are regarded as, equal to the best.

This is emphatically *not* Peter Cooper's vision. The United States is full of higher-education institutions trying to carve out "a global brand" for themselves, often through "investment."

They generally have multi-billion-dollar endowments, global name recognition, and undergraduate tuition costs somewhere north of \$40,000 a year. You could name a dozen of them off the top of your head, and Cooper Union would never be one of them. On the other hand, what you can't do is name a dozen—or even two—institutions like Cooper, based on a social mission and free tuition and low-key excellence, where the pedagogy is not reliant on the provision of climbing walls, and where the health of the institution is not reliant on jet-setting deans who address the World Economic Forum on the subject of Global Leadership.

An investment is what you do when you spend money today, with an eye to reaping a profit in the future. Investments, by definition, are associated with future cashflow: if they're not, then they're not investments. Once Cooper Union starts "investing" in programs and faculty, it will have to charge for those programs and faculty in order for the investments to bear fruit. All of which is to say that this tuition charge is permanent: once it's implemented, the chances of it being reversed are *de minimis*.

Bharucha, like Campbell before him, is intensely focused on improving Cooper Union's name recognition.

Note. The sum of columns (B)(i)-(iii) for each listed individual must equal the total amount.

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Compensated Employees. Use Schedule J-1 if additional space needed.

ation from the organization on row (i) and from related organizations, described in the
II

nt of Form 990, Part VII, Section A, line 1a, columns (D) and (E) for that individual

(C) Retirement and other deferred compensation	(D) Nontaxable benefits	(E) Total of columns (B)(i)-(D)	(F) Compensation reported in prior Form 990 or Form 990-EZ
17,841 0	27,390 0	1,307,483 0	0 0
24,500 0	13,656 0	327,333 0	0 0
19,532 0	12,986 0	250,516 0	0 0
17,871 0	28,423 0	249,084 0	0 0
18,052 0	12,832 0	235,424 0	0 0
24,500 0	29,021 0	296,238 0	0 0
12,837 0	12,287 0	153,131 0	0 0
24,500 0	1,358 0	300,858 0	0 0
14,790 0	28,526 0	195,389 0	0 0
24,500 0	102,328 0	387,079 0	0 0

Cooper Union has historically not been very well known, even among New Yorkers: they often think it's some kind of labor union, rather than an undergraduate college. That's fine: the people who matter—the teenagers applying to the art school, the entire architectural profession—know exactly what Cooper Union is, and what it stands for. Not every non-profit organization needs its own awareness campaign—but of course if Cooper Union now has to start attracting richer kids capable of paying \$20,000 a year in tuition, it's going to have to start marketing itself more aggressively. Again, that's not something it historically ever wanted or needed to do, and it's not something Peter Cooper would be remotely happy about. His resources were meant to go towards education, not towards marketing and billing and “development.”

Another thing that Bharacha and Campbell had in common: both entered into talks about essentially selling Cooper Union to a deeper-pocketed institution. Campbell talked to NYU in the mid-2000s; Bharacha talked to Bard more recently. Obviously, none of those talks got very far; the NYU discussions ended when it decided to buy Polytechnic University instead, in 2008. But in either case it's hard to see how Cooper Union's social mission and commitment to tuition-free

education could have been preserved in perpetuity.

But the end result—what we ended up with—is arguably worse. Once you start charging tuition, you can't go back: you build a huge amount of infrastructure for students who feel entitled to certain amenities, given how much they're paying. And the college becomes a business with a P&L, having to chase revenues and persuade potential students that it's a better financial deal than the various alternatives they have.

The result is that Cooper is certain to lose its much-cherished selectivity: according to the transcript, the September board meeting discussed a report from Maguire Associates which concluded, intuitively enough, that there's simply no way to charge \$20,000 a year and still accept less than 8% of applicants. That selectivity helps Cooper Union rank top among “regional colleges” in the influential *US News* ranking; both the selectivity and the ranking are sure to fall once tuition is introduced. (Cooper Union claims that it will have “need-blind” admissions, and that if you're eligible for any kind of Pell Grant, you will get a full scholarship. But there's no getting around the fact that it will need a certain number of paying students in order to make the math add up.)

Bharucha has also managed to ensure the undying opposition of Cooper Union's most passionate students. Just this weekend, they painted the lobby of the architecture school black in protest, unaware that during the September board meeting, Bharucha complained about their "politics of destruction." The relationship between Cooper Union's administrators and its students has never been worse—and that's not going to make it easy for Cooper to be able to paint itself as a prestigious institution worth paying \$20,000 a year to attend.

In September, according to the transcript, Bharucha talked of the "enormous reputational risks" of charging tuition, and the "difficulty recruiting new students." So it's not like any of this was unexpected. "If it weren't for all this noise," Bharucha said in the meeting, he would be much more confident that charging tuition could work. But with it, he said, "it will be very difficult" to make a success of the new strategy.

The board has gone along with Bharucha's strategy anyway, in the belief that all the alternatives are worse. In large part they were forced into their decision by the mortgage on the New Academic Building: you can't shrink your way to sustainability when you owe MetLife \$175 million, and you

have to come up with the eight-figure debt-service payments somehow. Given that no one was about to write a \$100 million check to Cooper Union, the only other place to find the necessary money was by charging. Even if doing so means destroying the very basis upon which Cooper Union was founded.

Save Cooper Union

by Sangamithra Iyer

N+1

April 10, 2013

On November 17, 2011, at a student rally in Union Square organized by Occupy Wall Street, a young woman's words echoed through the crowd via the people's microphone: "Education should be as free as air and water."

The woman was an art student at Cooper Union, and the words she spoke were not her own, but have been attributed to industrialist and inventor Peter Cooper. The rally came just a few weeks after Dr. Jamshed Bharucha, who became president of Cooper Union in July 2011, revealed the grim financial condition of the school and suggested that the historically tuition-free institution could no longer be free. "I'm not saying I want to charge tuition," Bharucha said at a subsequent meeting in his office with alumni. "I'm saying the institution is going down. We have to have all options on the table and hopefully this is only the last resort."

Cooper Union is currently only one of a handful of schools that offer tuition-free education to all enrolled students. Among them are Webb Institute in Long Island, Deep Springs College

in California, and military academies such as West Point. Berea College in Kentucky accepts only low-income students, offering them tuition-free education in exchange for a labor requirement. Olin College, which was founded in 1997 as a free engineering school, switched from offering full tuition to half tuition after suffering endowment losses during the recession. But it wasn't long ago that free education was within reach at some of the nation's best public universities. The City University of New York, once called the Free Academy, only started charging tuition in the 1970s. Several decades ago, state residents could attend the University of California for free.

In an era in which air and water have become increasingly commoditized, education at Cooper Union until now has been spared the fate of the University of California. This small art, architecture, and engineering college, with a student body of fewer than one thousand students, is dealing not only with a financial crisis but also an existential one. What is playing out at this East Village institution speaks both to

the national debate about debt, labor, and the affordability of higher education and to Cooper Union's history, which in its early years was so closely tied to the desires of the nation.

For more than 150 years, Cooper Union has been a symbol of a certain American dream. Founder Peter Cooper himself seemed to come right out of one of Horatio Alger's tales. Born during the Washington Administration, in 1791, he rose through a series of craftsman jobs, with almost no formal education, to acquire wealth through innovation. His inventions included the first gelatin dessert, the structural I-beam, and perhaps most notably, the first steam locomotive to be used on a common carrier railroad. Cooper also devoted decades to public service, becoming a New York City alderman, supporting the anti-slavery and Native American reform movements, and at 85 serving as the presidential nominee of the populist Greenback Party. He became one of the wealthiest men in New York, but unlike his robber-baron contemporaries, Cooper believed that wealth was a public trust.

Perhaps his greatest legacy and act of philanthropy was the founding of an educational institution for the working classes, free of charge, which since opening its doors in 1859 has pro-

fessed not to discriminate by race, gender, class, or creed. The original charter called for free instruction at night in the sciences, a day school of design for "respectable" females, a free reading room, and free public lectures. When funds became available, a polytechnic school was to be created. Cooper also hoped to establish "The Associates of Cooper Union," modeled after the Society of Arts in London. Its reach was to be vast and inclusive, including alumni, professional societies, members of the press, public school teachers, and other civil servants.

Cooper was influenced by the free École Polytechnique in Paris, which a friend had described to him. "What interested me most deeply was the fact that hundreds of young men were there from all parts of France, living on a bare crust of bread a day to get the benefits of those lectures." That deep desire and want of education was something Cooper empathized with, having had no access to education as a young man. "It was this feeling which led me to provide an institution where a course of instruction would be open and free to all who felt a want of scientific knowledge, as applicable to any of the useful purposes of life," Cooper said in his 1864 commencement address.

From the outset, Cooper Union

opened its doors to debate. The basement of the Foundation Building housed the Great Hall auditorium, where Abraham Lincoln delivered his "Right Makes Might" speech challenging Stephen Douglas in 1860, and started out on the road to the White House. During the following years, The Great Hall provided a space for debating, rallying, and organizing the abolition, suffrage, labor, and Native American reform movements. Frederick Douglass spoke there in 1863. Susan B. Anthony had an office at the school. PJ McGuire and Samuel Gompers met taking night classes at Cooper Union and went on to start the American Federation of Labor. Cooper welcomed Oglala Sioux Chief Red Cloud when Red Cloud addressed the Great Hall in 1870. The NAACP and the Red Cross were chartered and convened their first meetings at Cooper Union.

When the school opened, women could attend either the Female School of Art during the day or the coeducational Free Night School of Science. Women who attended night classes during Cooper Union's first decades had backgrounds that ranged from wealthy to working class. The noted exception to Cooper Union's policy of free instruction occurred was the School of Art, run by a Ladies Advisory Council who had overseen the

New York School of Design before it was absorbed by Cooper Union. These "benevolent and enlightened ladies" pleaded with the Cooper trustees to make an allowance for some paying pupils, who would be called "amateur students." According the school's first annual report, the trustees "were at first opposed to this deviation" but agreed on the condition that the number of amateurs be limited so as not to exclude the industrial pupils. These amateurs paid between one and two dollars a week for instruction in drawing, pastel, watercolor, or oil painting until the 1880s, when they disappeared from mention in annual reports. Discussion of the amateur class was removed from Cooper Union's bylaws during their next revision in 1911.

"The dealers in money have always been the dangerous class," Cooper wrote in the last year of his life. "There may, at some future day, be a whirlwind precipitated upon the moneyed men of this country." In his unpublished autobiography, Cooper recounts his frustrations with the bankers who controlled Congress and were creating a national debt. They had the power to control the volume of currency, issue credit, and charge unfairly high interest rates. In the spirit of Cooper's beliefs, the original Cooper Union charter stated that the trustees should never mortgage the property

or go into debt for more than \$5,000 a year (except in anticipation of rents and revenues), and that they would be held personally liable for any deficit. In his turn-of-the century biography, Rossiter Raymond notes that Cooper claimed to pay all his debts every Saturday night, tracing “that horror of debt” to the time of debtors’ prisons.

How was Cooper’s vision sustained after his death? How did his school maintain its policy of free education? During its first four decades, Cooper Union was largely supported by Cooper and his family, and those years were not without struggle. To supplement gifts and donations, part of the Foundation Building was rented out to commercial tenants. Cooper and his son-in-law Abram Hewitt had asked Columbia University “with its large and growing revenues” and the Board of Education, which controlled the Free Academy, for support, but neither was willing to offer it.

In 1902 Andrew Carnegie, who had previously described himself as a “humble follower of Peter Cooper,” made a \$600,000 gift to Cooper Union, one that was matched by Cooper’s heirs, who donated a property on Lexington Avenue. These gifts ensured Cooper Union’s endowment and allowed it to build the polytechnical school called for in the original charter

and stop renting out part of the building to commercial tenants. The “Vanderbilt flats,” as the property was then called, now sits beneath the Chrysler Building. The school receives rent and the equivalent of property taxes from this piece of real estate, which in turn secured Cooper Union’s ability to provide full tuition scholarships.

When asked how I went to school for free, I’d often point to the Manhattan skyline and say the Chrysler Building funded my education. I also often said that I came to Cooper Union because it was free, but that wasn’t the reason I stayed.

During my first year, which began in 1995, I lived in the dorms, at 29 Third Avenue. On the ground floor was St. Mark’s Bookshop, a tenant of the college. For the next three years, I shared a one-bedroom apartment with three other girls on Fourth Avenue. I slept in a tiny storage space that was six feet wide by seven feet long by four feet high. It was big enough to fit a mattress and a box spring and had a platform where I could put my computer. I sat on the edge of my mattress and worked on problem sets by hand or tinkered with Excel spreadsheets until the wee hours of the morning, usually on the phone with one of my classmates, figuring things out together. Sometimes we’d be working on

different projects, and we'd stay on the phone together, in silence, comforted by the fact that we were not alone.

Cooper Union was a lesson in humility, perseverance, and resourcefulness. One of the things I deeply valued about it was its diversity. Many of my classmates were immigrants or first-generation Americans like me. Cooper was a place where we could celebrate our own and one another's cultures, and every year, we put on an annual culture show in the Great Hall. I had the honor of dancing bhangra and dandia ras on that famous stage and also participated in a Filipino candle dance and Chinese fashion show.

When I graduated from Cooper, in 1999, I received a scholarship for a master's program in geotechnical engineering at UC Berkeley. That summer, a major earthquake devastated Turkey. The first day of classes, the first thing one professor said was that Turkey smelled "like 40,000 dead people" and that "engineers who know that smell do their work a lot differently than those who don't." It was this sense of social responsibility that led me to pursue engineering, but also to leave it from time to time. A Cooper education freed me from debt, and allowed me the freedom to pursue purpose, not profit-driven endeavors. Its Union, for me, not only united the arts and the

sciences but also was about making connections between the technical, the political, and the social.

During the decade after I left Cooper Union, as its operating expenses continued to rise, its future became increasingly uncertain. When George Campbell Jr., took over as president in 2000, he undertook a major development plan that was intended to increase revenue and modernize the campus. The proposal, which was approved by the Board of Trustees, was to demolish the engineering building at 51 Astor Place and replace it with a large commercial tower. The Hewitt Building, where art classes were held, would also be destroyed. It would be replaced with a taller structure with more modern facilities, where academic programs would be consolidated under one roof.

This "general, large-scale development" plan required approval from the Department of City Planning and was subject to a public review process. In an Environmental Impact Statement, the school claimed the new plan was necessary to "contend with two challenges: to continue funding the full-tuition scholarships for all students and generate the necessary resources to be a leader in its degree programs." This argument didn't persuade East Village residents, who loudly pro-

tested the proposed changes to their neighborhood, but in the end the city planning commission granted conditional approvals to Cooper Union. A New York Times article in 2002 noted that “the commissioners said the public good that Cooper Union does by offering free education for its students—most of them New Yorkers—outweighed the impact on the community.”

Even after the land use was approved, the school had more hurdles to overcome. After it failed to meet its fundraising goals for the construction of the New Academic Building in 2006, Cooper Union submitted a petition to the New York State Supreme Court seeking permission “to use the Chrysler Building as security for the loan of up to \$175 million,” releasing it from the restrictions of the 1902 deed. The school argued to the Supreme Court, as it had to the City Planning Commission, that the development plan was essential to maintain the school’s standing and financial well-being as a tuition-free institution.

The plans for the new building divided the Cooper community. Faculty members questioned the need for building and pleaded that the school make do with existing spaces. One letter from an engineering professor to President Campbell in 2006 noted the “great

deal of discontent amongst the engineering faculty. At a faculty meeting on 5/18 the engineering faculty roundly rejected the new building by a vote of 16–6 in a closed ballot.”

Nevertheless, the New York Supreme Court granted Cooper Union’s request and construction began. A 2009 Wall Street Journal article lauded Cooper Union for being able to build its green LEED Platinum certified New Academic Building on 41 Cooper Square while other colleges were being forced by the economic crisis to halt their campus expansions. Newspapers reporting on Campbell’s retirement in 2011 noted that he grew the endowment, balanced the budget, and brought fiscal stability to the college.

So it came as huge shock to alumni and students when Bharucha announced in October 2011 that with an annual deficit of \$16 million and an unrestricted endowment of \$45 million, the school’s available funds were on the verge of depletion. Just a few weeks before, St. Mark’s Bookshop had announced that Cooper Union was raising its rent and launched a massively popular petition to save the store, which led to Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer negotiating a rent reduction. There was no mention of the fact that Cooper Union itself was in crisis.

What had happened? It appeared that Cooper Union's investment portfolio had not been immune to the crash of the financial markets. As the trustees subsequently explained, "projections made in 2008 conservatively anticipated a 2009 return of \$6 million but instead our portfolio suffered a loss in that year of \$22 million." Meanwhile, the goal to reduce operating expenses by 10 percent by 2011 had never been achieved, and the college was paying \$10 million a year of the \$175 million loan taken out from Metropolitan Life. One can only imagine what Peter Cooper would think of the debt the school currently holds.

The plan proposed by President Campbell was supposed to ensure Cooper Union's ability to grant full scholarships, and was approved based on Cooper Union's reputation as a provider of free education. Ten years later, that plan appears to have jeopardized the full scholarship policy it was put in place to secure. (The board of trustees has argued otherwise: "It is also important to state that 41 Cooper Square was not the cause of the current financial dilemma. Its construction relieved Cooper Union of the costs that would have had to be incurred to renovate the old engineering building and the Hewitt Building to make them acceptable sites for a 21st-

century education and meet accreditation standards.")

If tuition is implemented, some fear that the Chrysler Building's tax equivalency payments to the school might face a serious challenge. There have been several legal cases questioning a private college's receipt of property taxes, but the courts have consistently sided with Cooper Union and its service to the public good. By seeking new revenues from tuition, the school could threaten its largest and only reliable source of funding.

In November 2011, the Great Hall once again opened its doors to debate. Speaking to a nearly full auditorium about the college's financial crisis, board chair Mark Epstein opened by saying there was no culprit, that "the problem is a systemic deficit." The tuition model had been "on the table for twenty years" but only now brought "out of the board room." Later in the evening, when pressed about the cause of this crisis, he did place blame. "If we have to go to the tuition model I would blame the alumni, 80 percent of whom do not donate to the school," Epstein, himself an alumnus, said. "We made an investment in a lot of students that are now alumni, and only 20 percent of them donate back to the school, so I think that that's a failed

investment as far as that's concerned for development."

In a gesture of transparency, Bharucha offered to meet with small groups of students, faculty, and alumni to discuss this situation further. In December 2011, I joined a few other engineering alumni in his office on the seventh floor of the Foundation Building. Bharucha, formerly provost at Tufts, came to Cooper Union with his own background in art and science: he's a violinist and neuroscientist. He sat at the head of the table, sketching its rectangular shape on his notepad. He wrote down our names, labeling where each of us were located. Bharucha showed us a drawdown graph that charted Cooper Union's unrestricted endowment over time, under different market scenarios. He traced the lines until they hit the x-axis, between two and three years.

Bharucha reminded us that the financial vulnerability of the institution was not a recent phenomenon. "Financial troubles existed since day one," he said. From 1859 to 1926, "there were thirty-five deficit years." Later he referenced an article in the alumni magazine from 1971 that mentioned the possibility of phasing out the school of engineering or instituting tuition. Neither of those things happened. One of the alumni noted that this was around the

time that Cooper Union sold Green Camp, a property it had acquired in Ringwood, New Jersey, which served as a country retreat for its students. (It was also where the National Society of Women Engineers was founded.) In the past, financial problems were solved by selling off assets, but Bharucha said there are no more assets to sell, and he is reluctant to shut programs down.

Bharucha said he hopes to have a sustainable financial model in place by 2018, the year the principal payment on the loan will kick in. But 2018 will also bring some relief. The legal document that negotiated the mortgage on the lease of the Chrysler Building states that the lease payments will increase to \$32.5 million in 2018, \$41 million in 2028, and \$55 million in 2031. Bharucha argues that 2018 won't bring enough relief to cover the rising cost of education. In the nearer term, Cooper Union could deplete its available funds by 2015.

I asked President Bharucha to what extent the tuition model has been developed. "On the question of how much tuition would be charged, how many would have to pay, and how much of it they would have to pay, we've hired a consultant," Bharucha told me. "It's a specialty now. It's called enrollment management. We've hired

one of the top enrollment management firms. They will do the market research.”

He reiterated that “any student that merits a Cooper Union education should not be denied one because of lack of affordability.” I asked if the phrase “for those who can afford to pay,” had been defined, to which he responded, “No it hasn’t been defined. It is a consideration. It has to be costed out.”

While Bharucha is not responsible for the financial woes he inherited, he is the creator of a new narrative for the school, one that supports a tuition-based model. In speeches and meetings over the past year, Bharucha has spoken about “reinventing” Cooper Union. A crucial part of this reinvention is replacing the founding principle of free education with a new commitment to “accessible” education. “Access,” Bharucha has said, means “enabling students of merit to benefit from a fine education that would otherwise be out of reach. We must always have this as a priority, regardless of how we solve our financial challenges.” References to tuition-free education are slowly being edited out of the administration’s language; when free education is mentioned, it is described as a “cherished aspect” rather than a core value of the school.

As students looked to Peter Cooper’s words to support their case against tuition, President Bharucha—in speeches, radio interviews, and meetings with alumni and stakeholders—invoked Cooper to support another argument. Bharucha took these opportunities to bring up the small fraction of “amateur” students at the women’s school of design who paid for their classes. In a speech in the fall of 2011, he stated, “It is important to note that in the early years, approximately the first forty years, tuition was charged at Cooper Union. It wasn’t until 1902, when Andrew Carnegie made a large gift to the institution, that a tuition-free education was granted to students.”

Bharucha looks to the amateurs as a sort of precedent, a justification for a tuition model. But the context and duration of the amateur program are misrepresented in Bharucha’s narrative. Paying students did not attend the school for the four decades, as Bharucha has repeatedly said; their presence can only be traced until the late 1880s. And the amateur program was not the norm at the school. It was clearly noted as an exception from the rule that instruction be “entirely gratuitous.” Attendance wasn’t mandatory for the amateur students, and they weren’t held to the same standards as the industrial pupils, who attended for free. The contemporary equivalent of an

amateur class would not be a tuition-based model for undergraduate education, with some students funding the education of others, as Bharucha suggests. Instead the amateur class most resembles Cooper Union's current fee-based continuing education programs (which themselves may be viewed as a deviation from the original mandate to provide free night instruction).

"There is a very fundamental framing conflict between the internal narrative of the institution and where the country is, for wanting those with means to contribute more so that others can have opportunity," Bharucha said. He has often appropriated the language of the Occupy movement to suggest that Cooper students, who largely come from working and middle-class backgrounds, are the 1 percent. The administration has argued that charging some students to fund others would somehow level the field. Others argue that Cooper's meritocracy is what ensures equal ground. They fear that if tuition is implemented, and the school is reliant on a certain amount of revenue from tuition, it will then become dependent on a certain percentage of its students being able to pay.

At a community forum in December 2011, Sam Messer, an assistant dean at the Yale School of Art and a Cooper alumnus, said, "There's a lot of talk

about the idea of tuition, and if you just say it as a sound bite it does seem fair: that the rich should pay their way." But "what happens if you don't have qualified students at that level? Then you have, in a sense, amateurs," meaning that admissions to the school at large would no longer be entirely merit-based.

Beginning in December 2011, the newly formed grassroots coalition Friends of Cooper Union (FOCU), composed of alumni, students, faculty, and staff, met to generate its own solutions to Cooper's crisis. The result was a document, "The Way Forward," released in April 2012, that imagined a future without tuition and demanded more transparency and community engagement from the administration. FOCU later produced a ten-point financial plan, which it presented as a set of reasonable measures to start cutting costs and develop more effective fundraising based on the school's mission. "The only radical idea in it is Peter Cooper's," Kerry Carnahan, an alumna and contributor to the document, said.

Bharucha appointed his own expense reduction and revenue task forces, and although their reports were not complete, he preempted "The Way Forward" by announcing last April that the school would preserve free

undergraduate education for at least two more years, as it explored tuition-based graduate, online, and continuing education programs. This has been called the “hybrid” tuition model, and even the revenue task force report went on to note that it has considerable risks, would require an initial investment, and would not see returns for several years.

In late April 2012, coinciding with the publication of “The Way Forward,” I participated in a community summit organized by FOCU. Litia Perta, an adjunct professor who has taught on and off at Cooper Union since 2006, opened up the discussion by saying that she’s currently on unemployment and collects more money—“kind of by a lot”—than she has as an adjunct, and that while on unemployment she had the additional benefit of being able to defer her own student loan payments. “I could not afford to teach here this semester,” she said. “I think that seems really relevant.”

Perta made this statement on the same stage that launched the modern American labor movement. She also noted that about 70 percent of classes at Cooper Union are taught by adjuncts with no job security, health insurance, or other benefits. Nationally, about 75 percent of college classes are taught by adjuncts in similar situations

today. Cooper was founded to educate the working classes, and now highly educated faculty members are among its working class.

While there is a lot of discussion at Cooper Union of how to increase revenue streams, Perta posed the question, How much does it actually cost to educate someone? “I’m one of the teachers here and I don’t make no money, and neither is it coming to any of the tenured faculty members,” she said. Full professor Toby Cumberbatch also wanted an answer to this question. “I understand we are spending about \$60 million a year—that is \$60,000 a year per student.” He noted that the budget of the engineering school, which educates 50 percent of the college’s students, was only \$6 million. Where is the money going?

Richard Stock, professor of chemical engineering and head of the faculty labor union, noted at a FOCU summit in December 2011 that operating expenses more than doubled between 1995 and 2010, going from \$28 million to \$68 million. Stock said that a large part of that increase could be attributed to growth and salary increases among nonacademic staff. In fact then-president George Campbell, Jr. was ranked by the Chronicle of Higher Education in 2009 among the ten highest-paid college presidents,

with an annual compensation package valued at \$688,773, for overseeing a school with fewer than 1,000 students. According to tax records the ten highest-paid officers at Cooper collectively made approximately \$2.9 million in 2010. Meanwhile the approximately fifty-six full-time faculty members made roughly \$5 million combined.

T. C. Wescott, the vice-president of finances of the college, has noted that a recent \$4 million in cuts were largely directed at the administration, and that in 2013 the overall budget is approximately half administrative, half academic, in line with other institutions. But it should be asked whether this is necessary for a school with a very small student body and a full-scholarship policy. "The Way Forward" contains a modest proposal that the top three administrative officers defer a third of their compensation until 2018, when the college will receive increased income from the Chrysler Building. Bharucha, whose compensation package has been valued at about \$750,000, has pledged to donate 5 percent of his base salary to the school.

Underpaid faculty, overpaid administrators, and campus expansions that drive up the cost of education can be found at colleges large and small across the country. At the April 2012 community summit, art student Alan Lun-

dgard noted that should the tuition model go through, "Our problems will exemplify our country's inability to provide for its citizens an education unencumbered by the barriers of class privilege or wealth. We must make it clear, that it is not the unique ideals of this institution that are built to fail, but the educational disasters that run rampant everywhere else in this country."

In August 2012, Bharucha charged the deans and faculty of each school with coming up with academic programs that would meet prescribed revenue targets (\$6 million, \$3.6 million, and \$2.4 million for the engineering, art, and architecture schools, respectively). If faculty did not meet these revenue targets, they would be threatened with the closure of their school.

On December 3, 2012, eleven Cooper Union art students barricaded themselves on the top floor of the Foundation Building and draped across it a red banner that read "Free Education to All." These students had three demands: that the administration publicly affirm its commitment to free education; that the board immediately implement more transparent and democratic decision-making structures; and that Bharucha step down. The first day of the occupation coincided with a day of action at Cooper Union organized in collaboration

with Occupy Wall Street, All in the Red, and Strike Debt. Several faculty members joined the student occupiers at a joint press conference. That evening, speakers from other schools rallied in solidarity with students of Cooper Union.

Although their demands had not been met, the students left the building after one week to plan their next action. The faculty did as they were told and came up with various revenue-based programs, even as they continued to express their opposition to a tuition model. In December 2012, the art school faculty refused to vote on the new programs they had proposed. This February, the art faculty issued another statement, “reaffirming our belief that The Cooper Union is not only the last citadel of the social reforms movement of the 19th century, but is in fact the vanguard of the 21st century—a beacon of access to free education.” In response, the administration refused to admit early decision students to the art school. Faced with the real possibility of their school closing, the art faculty gave in and submitted their proposals for revenue-based graduate, continuing education, and high-school summer courses.

The administration now seems close to announcing a decision regarding tuition. On March 1, at the request

of the alumni association, trustees appeared again at the Great Hall to answer questions from the community. Trustee Thomas Driscoll said at the forum that he didn’t think the school could shrink to sustainability—crucially, he was referring to shrinking academic programs and not administrative costs. Faculty, students, and alumni asked whether Cooper could live within its revenue stream from the Chrysler Building, \$40 million a year, cut administrative costs, and grow its endowment through more effective, alumni-led fundraising.

One recommendation made by “The Way Forward” is that Cooper Union “grow down.” Rather than invest in fee-based programming, what if Cooper instead focused on strengthening its roots and giving back to the community, spreading the culture of free education and illustrating that Cooper’s benefits are not just for the few who merit entry? There are existing programs in which Cooper Union students tutor and mentor New York City public school students. Some of these are facing budget cuts. Rather than curb these efforts, what if Cooper Union grew them? “If you can do that, your community will fight for you,” Perta said. She later posted on the Save Cooper Union Facebook page a line from a wild fermentation cookbook: “To be indispensable to the

organisms with which one shares an environment—that is the strategy that ensures successful . . . and continued survival.” This would represent another kind of union with the community, in which education would be considered as vital as air and water.

Mr. Cooper was a poor boy, born of good Revolutionary stock, but, like most of the patriots of that time, he had a good deal more patriotism than money. He began life as an apprentice. There were no schools in New York in those days,—no night schools. He was very anxious to get on, but there was no place where he could obtain an education. He had no money with which to pay a teacher. So he had to get what knowledge he could get by himself, and, as I have often heard him say, by the light of the single tallow candle which his means made him able to get; and that every night he passed his time trying to acquire some knowledge which would be of use to him in the battle of life. This made a great impression on him, and he determined that the reproach of New York, of its lack of means for free education, should be removed.

This occurred about the beginning of the last century, in 1804 or 1805, and he set himself to work, alone, without friends, without suggestions from any quarter, to get money enough together to open what he called a night school, for at that time there was not a single free night school in New York City. This was the purpose of his life.

The time came when he had accumulated money enough to begin to build a building. His original idea of a night school was of a rather moderate character, but it very soon enlarged itself until at last, having selected this site, on which he had carried on business for some years, he was able to buy the whole block, and he proceeded to erect this building. He knew, when he undertook this task, that his means would not suffice for more than the erection of the building, and he was determined not to incur any debts. When he called the Trustees together to receive the property at his hands, he said to them: "Here is this building. I want it appropriated as soon as possible to the education of the young men and young women of New York City, and appropriated to *free* education. There must be no fee paid in the Cooper Union, for education ought to be as free as air and water."

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