

THE COOPER UNION ALUMNI PIONEER

At Cooper Union 2016: CUA A Edition

by Barry Drogin, EE '83

Abstract

The Year in Review (September 2015-September 2016): Progress, but Slow or Delayed

A summary of news put out by the CUA A itself and, in some cases embedded in documents but never highlighted, by CU itself. Consider it the CUA A version of "At Cooper Union," written by an alumnus for alumni.

A lot happened in the last academic year, both to The Cooper Union and to the Cooper Union Alumni Association. Most of it has happened in spurts and over a period of months, so an annual summary is probably the best way to catch everyone up.

Lawsuit

As probably everyone knows, on September 2, 2015, the Office of the Attorney General filed a Cross Petition with a Request for Cy Pres Relief and a Consent Decree to settle the lawsuit filed by the Committee to Save Cooper Union against the Board of Trustees. A formal hearing was held on September 14, 2015, and on December 15, 2015, Judge Nancy Bannon issued her Decision and Order accepting the Cross Petition and disposing of the case. Despite the three month lag, the Board of Trustees acted in the meantime to modify their Bylaws to meet the Consent Decree, and elections were held for a new Alumni and new Student Trustee, as well as faculty and staff representatives. The biggest news was that the CUA A membership elected Adrian Jovanovic BSE '98, the alumni petitioner and founding director of CSCU, as the first new additional Alumni Trustee.

Alumni Trustees

Adrian was one of three Alumni Trustees endorsed by CSCU now serving on the Board of Trustees, the other two being Peter Katz A'76 and Scott Lerman A'81. Prior to the founding of CSCU, Kevin Slavin A '95 was elected as a write-in candidate endorsed by a group called Friends of Cooper Union. In the following year's election, Robert Tan AR '81 won against a candidate who had been endorsed by Free Cooper Union. Stephen Gerard ME '67, the most recent Alumni Trustee, ran and won in an election in which no endorsements were made. Kevin Slavin is now the Vice Chairman of the Board of Trustees and Robert Tan is Chair of the Free Education Committee.

The Alumni Trustees, joined by other trustees, held two Open Forums, in March and June of 2016.

Free Education Committee

After a long selection process conducted by the Office of the Attorney General, the company Kroll was finally chosen to act as Financial Monitor, starting work on July 25, 2016. In the meantime, the Free Education Committee had asked for detailed budgetary projections from Bill Mea, Acting President and Vice President for Finance and Administration. These projections were published in February 2016 and made available to the entire Cooper Union community. The Board of Trustees asked for \$3 million in cuts in fiscal year 2017 and 2018; in June 2016, Mr. Mea presented the Board with a fiscal year 2017 budget with \$2.2 million in cuts; the nature and distribution of those cuts are published in a Board Report posted to the Cooper Union website. That

Board Report also contains further granularity into the distribution of raises and benefits amongst the various schools and departments of the college. This level of transparency has never been provided to the public before. The administration has been asked to consider additional cuts on the order of \$3 to \$7 million. Progress on this was presented at the September 2016 Board meeting, whose minutes have not been approved and published yet.

Presidential Search Committee

On September 14, 2016, The Cooper Union announced that Laura Sparks, executive director of the William Penn Foundation in Philadelphia, will become the college's 13th President, effective January 4, 2017. Kevin Slavin has reported that her appointment was unanimously approved by the whole board.

Governance Committee

Under the Consent Decree, the Trustee Committee was renamed the Governance Committee and given additional responsibilities. Aside from recruiting new trustees (5 resigned last year, 5 have terms that are expiring, and 3 are forced off of the Board by the Consent Decree), a major issue the Governance Committee has been dealing with is the participation on the Board and its committees of the elected non-trustee representatives from the faculty and staff. The Governance Committee decided that the representatives would act as observers but that at specific times reserved during each meeting (and identified on the meeting agendas) they would be allowed to provide input.

The approval of new faculty governances – as written by and submitted for approval by three of the four faculties – has not been settled by the Governance Committee this year. Although it is only one of five new responsibilities assigned to the committee by the Consent Decree, the governance structure for the schools is the most important to the faculty.

Dean Vacancies

The appointments of Nader Tehrani as Dean of the School of Architecture and Richard Stock as Acting Dean of the School of Engineering were last year's news; this year, Saskia Bos resigned as Dean of the School of Art, and Mike Essl A'96 – one of the two faculty petitioners of CSCU – was appointed as Acting Dean of the School of Art. In an interview, Professor Essl said that the one-year appointment will probably go longer, as a search committee has yet to be formed.

Cooper Union Alumni Association and the Associates

Aside from running a special election to choose two more Alumni Trustees (bringing the total from 4 to 6), a major accomplishment this year was the creation and approval of a new Constitution for the CUAA in May 2016. In September 2016, the Council approved the Certificate of Amendment of the Certificate of Incorporation of the CUAA, and approved revised by-laws. The new Constitution shifts many operational issues to the by-laws, which can be changed by a 2/3 vote of a quorum of the Council (19) and ratified by a majority of the Executive Committee.

The 1974 Memorandum of Agreement (revised in January 2000) between The Cooper Union and the CUAA was violated in some respects by the previous administration and superseded in other parts by the Consent Decree. A new or revised Memorandum of Agreement was not signed in the past year.

Although the Consent Decree established the membership of the Associates of The Cooper Union and its Council, as called for in the Charter and Deed of Trust, no formal meetings or activities by the Associates, aside from the participation of the members of the Council of the Associates on the Board of Trustees, have been scheduled or carried out during the past year.

Student Activism and Accomplishments

Although conducted largely out of sight of the alumni, a major issue on campus has been the designation of gender-neutral bathrooms. In March 2016, The Cooper Union became the first college in the United States to

make all of its bathrooms gender-neutral. Other colleges are starting to follow Cooper's lead. Gender-neutral bathrooms and showers have become commonplace in coed college dormitories, but not beyond to an entire campus.

Alumni probably have heard that a team of Cooper civil engineering students won first place in the regional Steel Bridge Competition in April 2016. The students have demonstrated their design and building skills at the Engineering End of Year Tour and Reception in June 2016 and at the Peter Cooper Block Party as well as the Astor Place Festival in September 2016.

Mood on Campus

To loop back to the beginning, since the signing of the Consent Decree, the mood on campus has improved enormously. The conservative goal of \$3 million in unrestricted gifts budgeted for the last fiscal year was actually realized as \$4.7 million, with another \$6.3 million provided as restricted gifts. The specter of layoffs amongst the non-academic staff, mentioned by Acting President Mea in an interview with the student newspaper as starting this year, is sure to lead to some heartbreak, but, as of this writing, that is for the future.

About the Author

Barry Drogin was given an Award of Special Recognition for Extraordinary Service to The Cooper Union in April 2014. He is currently an elected member of the CUAA Nominating Committee and serves on the CUAA Communications Committee and CUAA Membership Committee. He also coordinates the annual CU@Green-Wood event and is active with the Cooper Union History Project. He was elected to represent the engineering alumni on the Working Group and published The Alumni Pioneer, now a news archive. He is a Class Representative for the Class of 1983.

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