

Uses (and Mis-Uses) of Images, Graphics, and Infographics during the Cooper Union Financial Crisis

curated by Barry Drogin, Cooper Union History Project

Much has been written about administrative use of written and spoken propaganda, false narratives, half-truths, and lies, from single words such as “sustainable” and “reinvention” to short phrases such as “on the table” and “politics of destruction” and “blame the alumni” and “son of a surgeon” and “prior to 1902” and on and on. Those opposing the administration came up with their own catch phrases, nicknames, and strategies, “Free Since 1859” being one of the most prominent. There is a parallel history of numbers, sometimes in spreadsheets, and how they were used to lie and obfuscate, starting with a persistent claim made to The New York Times by then-President George Campbell that he had raised the school’s endowment from \$100 million to \$600 million.

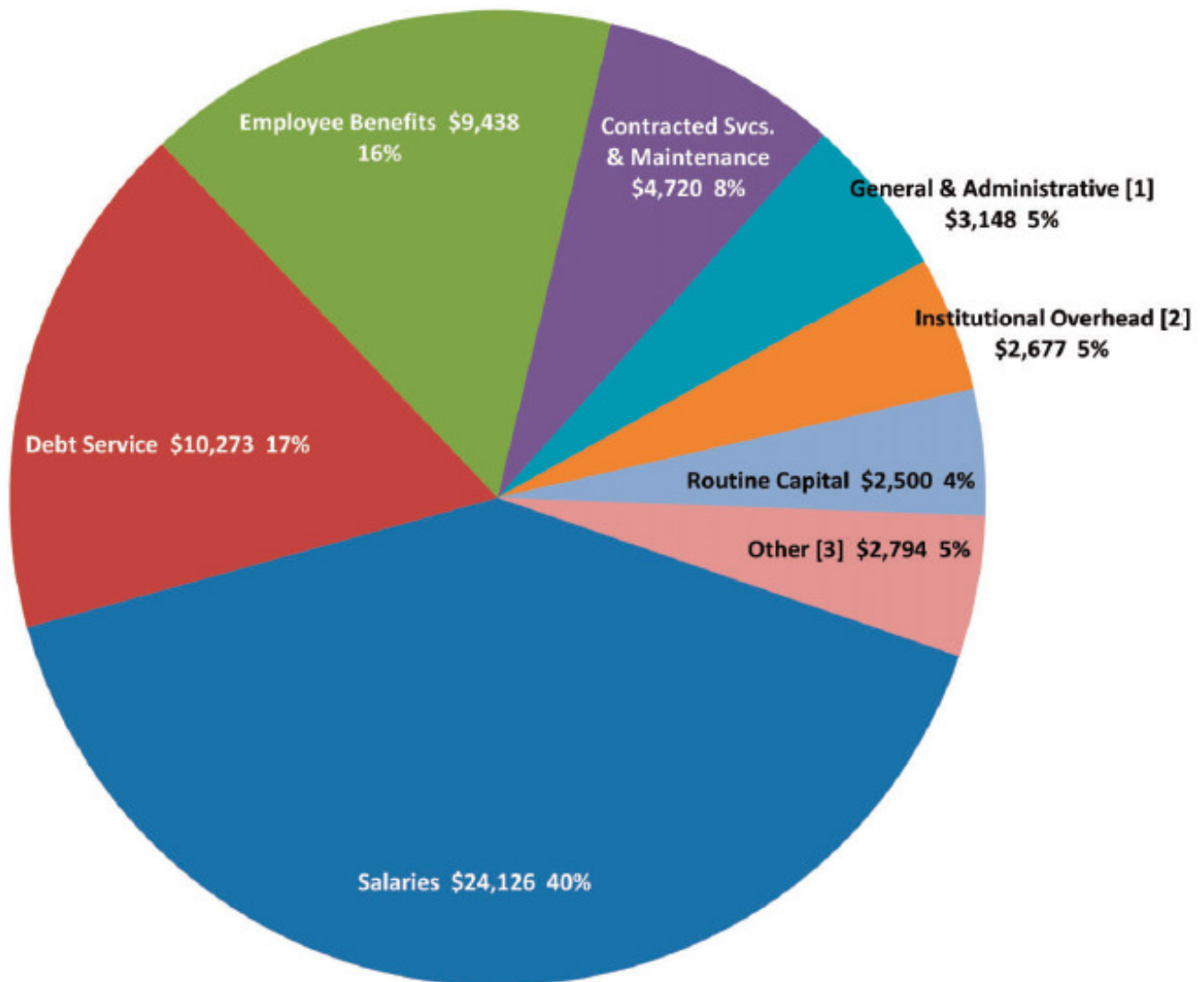
Visual information – sometimes rendered as art, sometimes not – have a different history. One reason is the potency of images – after one has seen something, it isn’t possible to unsee it – as opposed to the use of words or numbers, which can be understood more readily as misinformation or ignored due to the unreliability or distrust of the source, etc. This compilation is intended as a chronological annotated compilation of images, graphics, and infographics, primarily used by the opposition but sometimes used by the administration, that had significance. This compilation is not intended to be critical or judgmental in an artistic sense: many, many people, primarily artists, created images in response to the crisis as forms of self-expression, to provoke reaction, and many others may have been personally moved, if not inspired and motivated, by images not included here.

This is not, for example, a collection of posters advertising various protest events; such a collection would be historically important, as well. There are also important videos, many of which have been collected elsewhere, significantly in the documentary “Ivory Tower” but also on YouTube and Vimeo. Some were created explicitly as videos; some are documentation of important moments. Similarly, there are collections of photographs on Flickr and Facebook that document various events. Some of those photographs, especially those that were staged, appear in this collection as images, with an explanation of their creation, use, and effect.

The curator assumes all responsibility for which images to include, which images to exclude, and the commentaries that follow each image.

1. October 31, 2011, pie chart presented by VP of Finance T.C. Westcott to meeting sponsored by Engineering Student Council; later distributed to alumni.

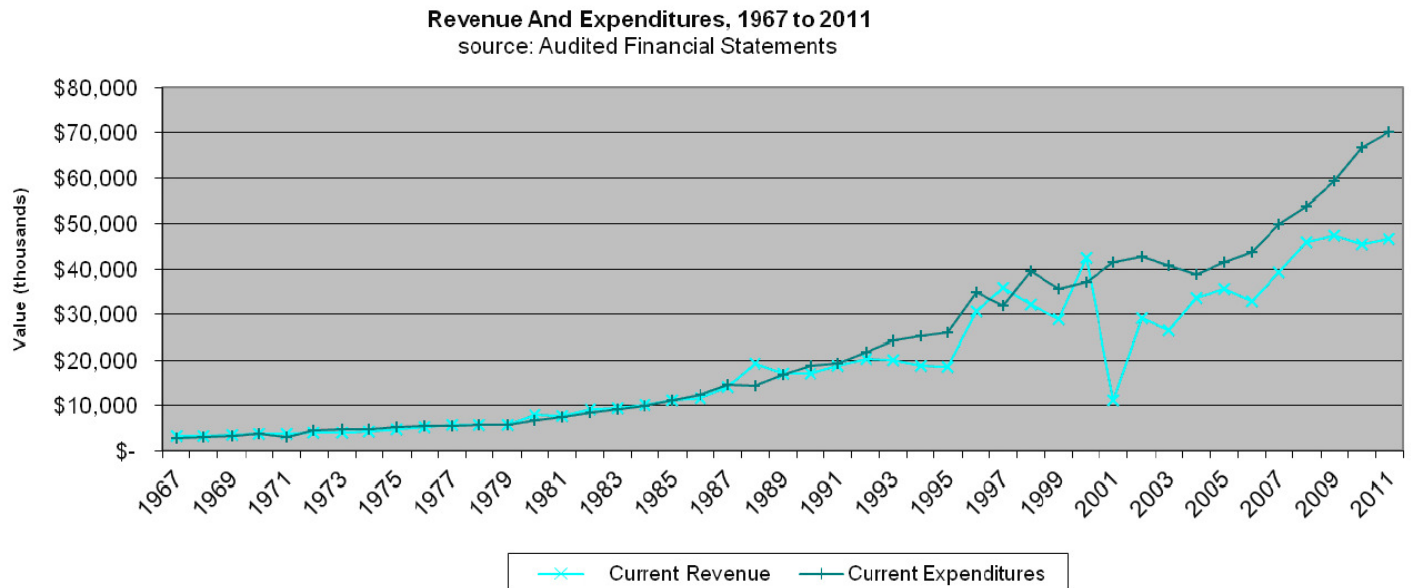
Cooper Union FY 2011 Expenses (in \$000s)



What is significant about this graphic is that employee benefits are at the top of the pie chart and salaries are at the bottom. Since the numbers decrease as one rotates from the bottom, this may be unintentionally misleading, although it certainly comes from an administrative narrative whereby employee benefits are to be connected to the unions, and so are “separate.” Another important aspect of the graphic is its lack of granularity: the chart doesn’t separate academic salaries from administrative salaries, full-time faculty from part-time faculty, etc. The only thing it accurately shows is the size of the debt service. Depreciation and amortization are also embedded in some of the numbers.

Activists were able to glean some information about headcount and the relative cost of academic budgets vs. non-academic budgets from on-line directories and the Form 990s, but an accurate graphic on cost was never generated. Eight months later, the Expense Reduction Task Force provided a spreadsheet on its final page which showed that 50% of the salaries were consumed by non-academic personnel. Because the actual allocation of employee benefits – although, explicitly, only healthcare benefits - varied from year to year given the insurance program used, the administration never agreed to perform an appropriate division, let alone a graphic, although they already had a system in place to apportion depreciation and amortization.

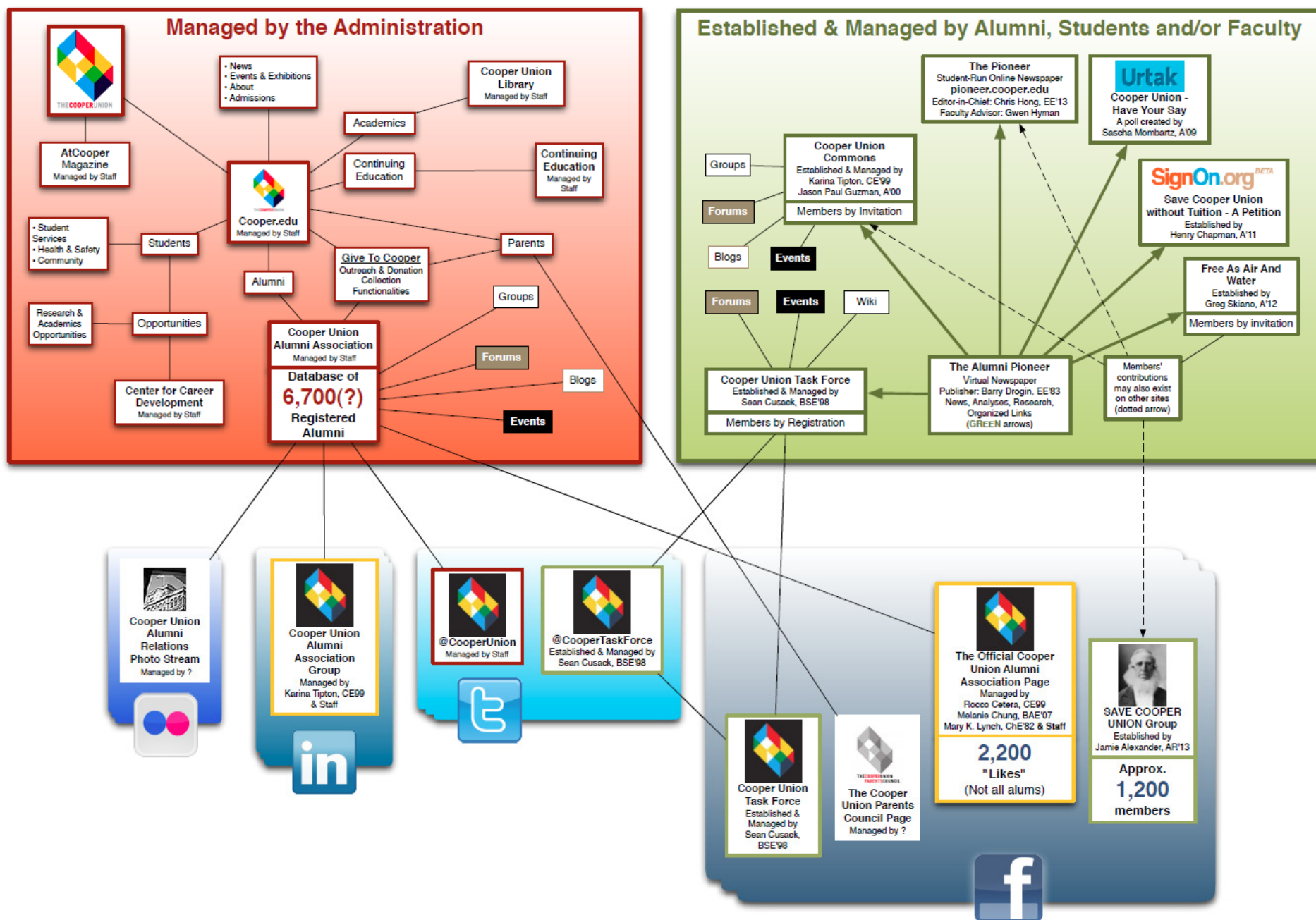
2. November 7, 2011, graph distributed by the Board of Trustees to the Cooper Community.



This was another misleading graphic provided to support a “decades of deficit” narrative. Aside from the fact that the numbers represented are wrong – in a later mailing from TC Westcott on November 9, there was a statement that years prior to 2006 “contained errors” – the graphic isn’t adjusted for inflation, nor does it use a logarithmic scale in order to reveal any information about the differences between revenues and expenditures prior to the mid 1980s. It doesn’t separate out depreciation and amortization, and hides surpluses in the early decades. An independent analysis provided as spreadsheets in December actually showed that half of the years between 2000 and 2011 were surpluses, not deficits.

So what’s the purpose of the graphic? It’s first purpose is to exploit the emotions of those who don’t understand inflation, to make tangible the “rising cost of higher education” without providing a comparison to other indexes. It’s second purpose is to show that revenues are not keeping up with expenses, and a widening divide between them. The fact is that this was a narrative fed to the Board of Trustees as well, to convince them to invest in risky hedge funds and the risky Master Plan. In this way it similarly provided cover to the narrative that the Board had been discussing tuition for a decade, but that it had “never left the Board room.” In this way it is also meant to provide support for the initially provided idea that only an increase in revenues, not a decrease in expenditures, could solve the financial crisis.

3. November 29, 2011, infographic by Christine Moh, published by The Alumni Pioneer.



Christine created this amazing graphic after the launch of Cooper Union Commons as a tool for herself – it existed as a PDF with clickable links. She was working on a draft on November 22, 2011, when she sent it to the publisher of the Alumni Pioneer. Although it might be seen as self-serving – it clearly showed that The Alumni Pioneer was the only site to link to all of the others – the final, third draft, seen here, actually de-emphasized The Alumni Pioneer's importance, at the publisher's request. Christine's original placed The Alumni Pioneer in the center, and the original text in the box was "Containing tremendous information, archived articles and resources."

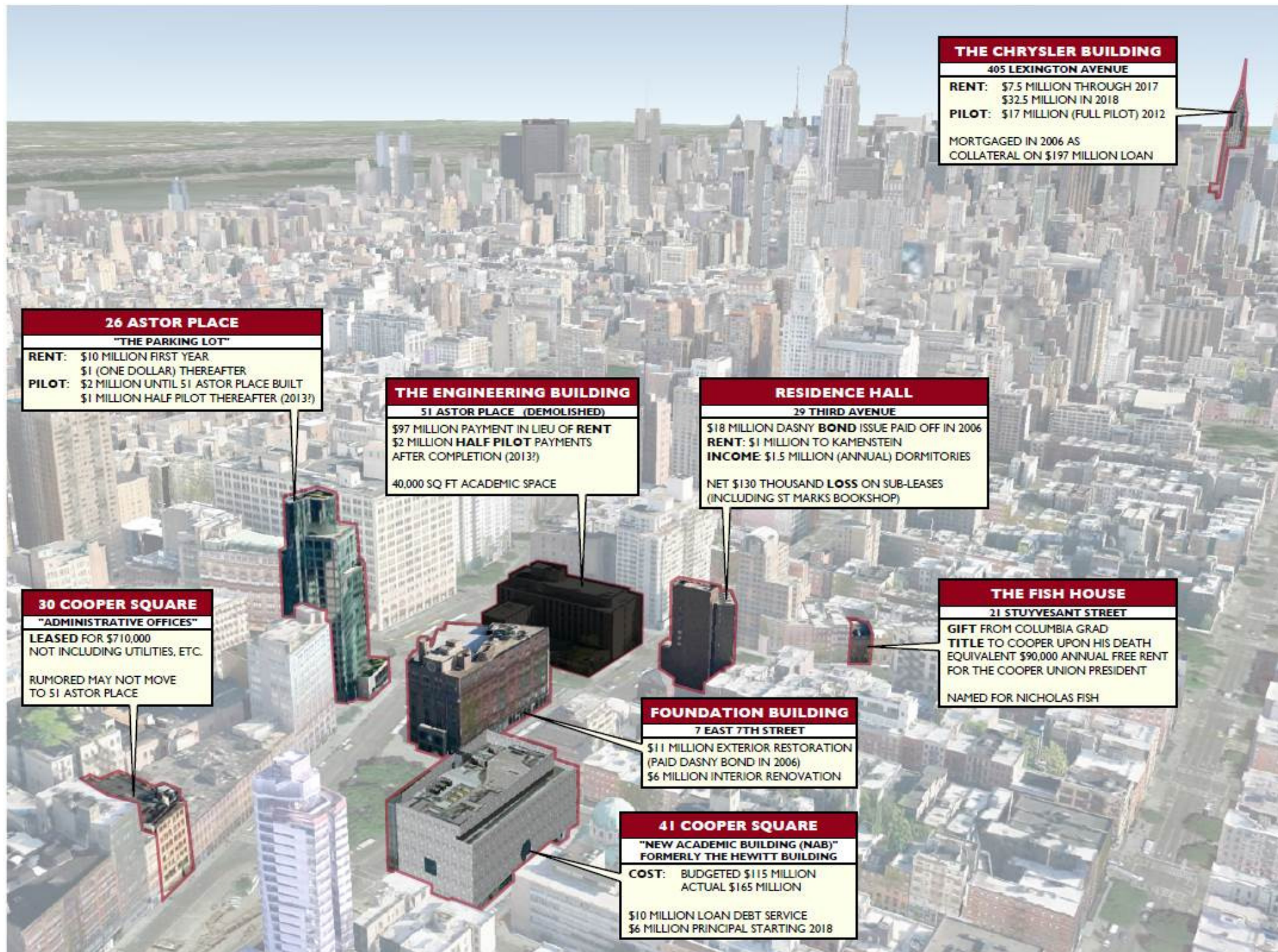
4. December 5, 2011, slides presented at the First Community Summit by Barry Drogin, created with Matthew Arnold.



This sequence of graphics – each square represents \$10 million, so each row represents \$50 million – was used to dramatically demonstrate the “change in accounting principle” in 2003 (fifth slide) that suddenly increased the size of the endowment by including the fair market value of the Chrysler Building, how this was used to justify the first investment in hedge funds in 2003 (red rectangle, sixth slide), and how the Board went “all in” on hedge funds in 2007 and 2008 (tenth and eleventh slide), resulting in a dramatic loss of \$40 million in 2009 (twelfth slide).

Although the administration refused to use the phrase “hedge fund” in any of its communications, the presentation had such a lasting effect that, after the downfall of the administration, the new VP of Finance, as acting president, swore to donors that all future endowment gifts would not be invested in hedge funds.

5. January 2012, infographic by Matt Arnold, text provided by Barry Drogin (next page).



PILOT = PAYMENT IN LIEU OF TAXES

COOPER UNION REAL ESTATE HOLDINGS - 2012

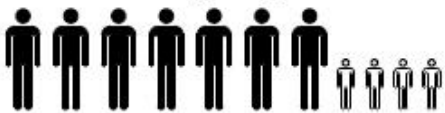
CHARTS BY MATT ARNOLD
THE ALUMNI PIONEER

This infographic was so well-received that it was distributed at breakout sessions held by the Friends of Cooper Union as part of the process of discussing and preparing “The Way Forward.”

6. January 2012, infographic by Matt Arnold, based on data presented by Professor Richard Stock at the First Community Summit in December 2011 (next page).

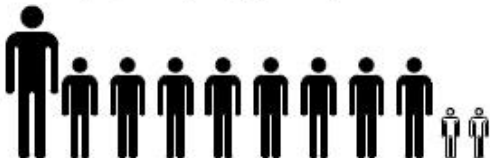
SCHOOLS

Art, Architecture, Engineering, Humanities



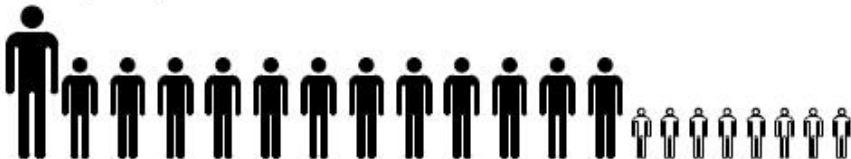
EDUCATIONAL

CUCC, AV, CURF, Design, Lubalin, Public



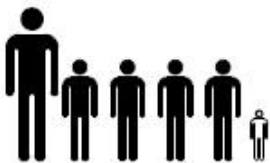
STUDENTS

Housing, Library, Admissions, Services



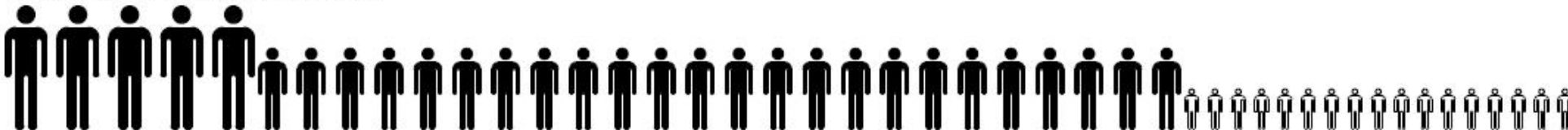
BUILDINGS

Maintenance



ADMINISTRATION

Development, Business, President's Office, Affairs



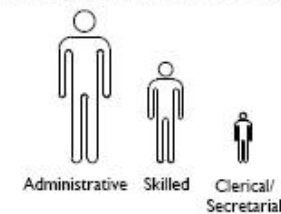
CHANGES IN STAFF

COOPER UNION 1996 - 2010

STAFF INCREASE

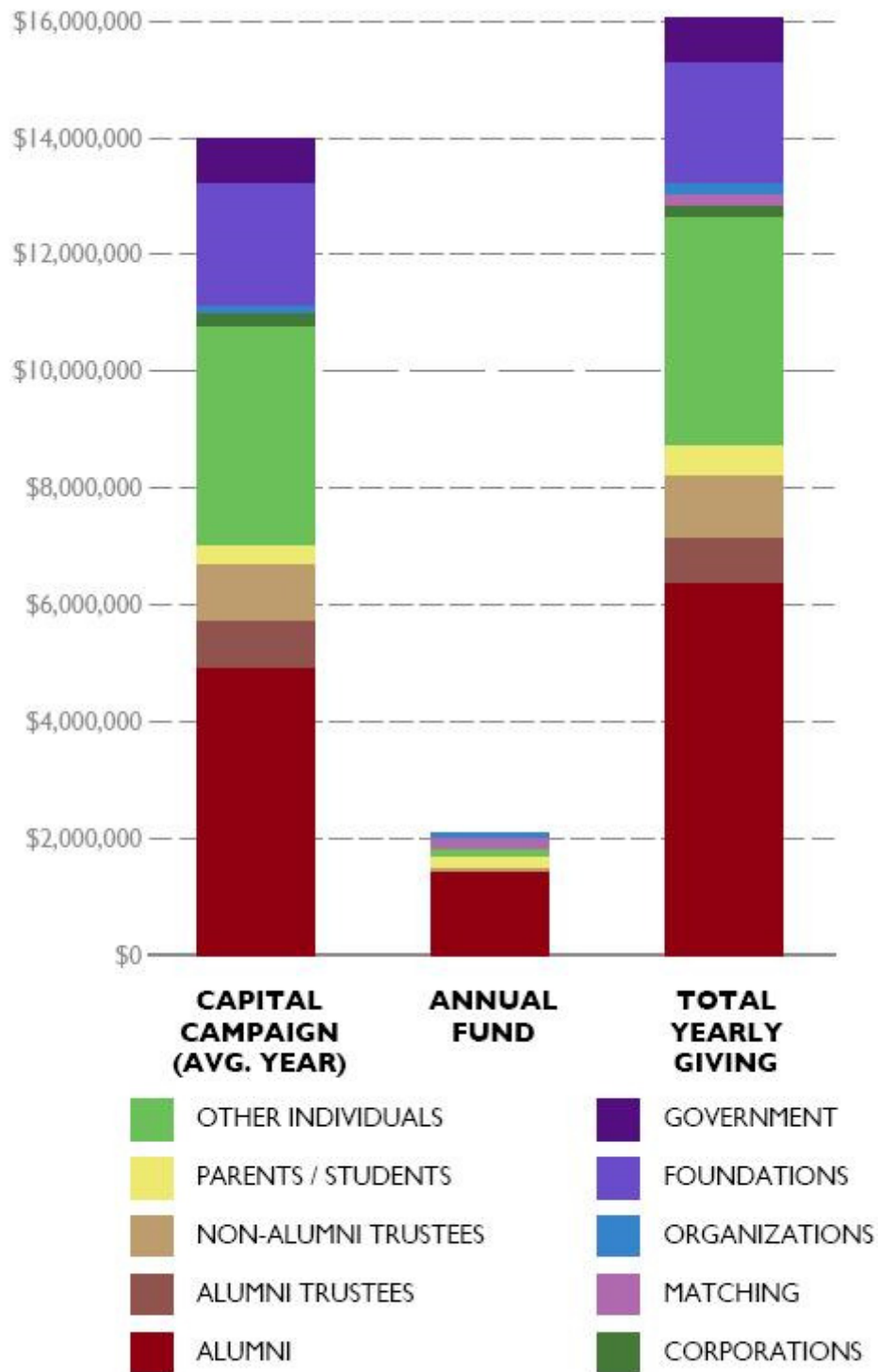


STAFF REDUCTION



Another version of this infographic was presented a month later at a breakout session of the Friends of Cooper Union. Professor Stock had presented it as a table; its impact as an infographic makes the data legible, showing administrative bloat over the course of 15 years. It also showed the financial harm of firing secretaries and replacing them with assistant directors.

7. January 2012, infographic by Matt Arnold, based on data provided by Barry Drogin, presented at Friends of Cooper Union breakout session in February 2012.



ANNUAL GIVING COOPER UNION

Based in part on data leaked to the Alumni Pioneer, this infographic was used to battle the false “Blame the Alumni” narrative. In the manner of an inconvenient truth, it was also used to battle false claims by some members of the Cooper Community that the trustees were not major donors.

8. May 26, 2012, photograph by Barry Drogin.



This photograph will have to suffice to describe the experience of the 2012 End of Year Show, during which most of the art school students worked out a system to give away their art work, for free, to all of the visitors on opening night, leaving the walls empty for the remainder of the show's exhibit schedule.

9. August 9, 2012, slide by Barry Drogin, used in “The Student’s Guide to the Cooper Union Financial Crisis” YouTube video.

The collage features several distinct branding elements and website interfaces:

- Top Left:** A circular logo for "FRIENDS OF COOPER UNION".
- Top Center:** A banner for "CU \$.O.\$. Cooper Union Student Action to Save Our School" with a "GIVE NOW!" button.
- Top Right:** A banner for "Cooper Union Task Force Community-Powered Solutions!" with a colorful geometric logo.
- Middle Left:** A vertical stack of logos including "CU \$.O.\$ STUDENT ACTION TO SAVE OUR SCHOOL", "COOPER UNION TASK FORCE COMMUNITY POWERED SOLUTIONS", "MONEY ON THE TABLE PLEASE NOW", "THE PETITION TO SAVE CU WITHOUT TUITION", "COOPER UNION COMMONS", "THE ALUMNI PIONEER", and "BROOKLYN RAIL 'Why Cooper Union Matters'".
- Middle Center:** A large, bold title "MONEY ON THE TABLE" with a horizontal line above and below it.
- Middle Right:** A vertical stack of logos including "GIVE NOW!", "FRIENDS OF COOPER UNION", "COOPER UNION COMMONS", "THE COOPER UNION ALUMNI PIONEER", a "JULY 2012" calendar graphic, a colorful geometric logo, and a Facebook "f" logo.
- Bottom Left:** A section titled "LINKS" listing various resources like "Friends of Cooper Union", "Why Cooper Union Matters by Litia Perta", "Money on the Table", "Petition - Save Cooper Union Without Tuition", "Burning Down the House", and "NoTuitionEver's YouTube Channel".
- Bottom Center:** A section titled "LINKS" and "FACEBOOK" with various links and social media handles.
- Bottom Right:** A screenshot of the "THE COOPER UNION ALUMNI PIONEER" website, featuring the headline "Fighting For a Fair Risk-Free Austerity Budget Since November 2011" and a "Page 2 Resources and Links" section.

This is a graphic of graphics, meant to show how the Cooper Community had wised up to the administration's censorship and how multiple sites were now linking to each other. It shows which organizations had "branded" themselves with logos or distinctive typefaces, and which didn't, and it also reveals some of the politics that were swirling within the movement. For example, Sean Cusack, creator of Cooper Union Task Force, often criticized Barry Drogin, publisher of The Alumni Pioneer, on the Save Cooper Union Facebook group, which Barry did not have access to; his staff, however, would send him screenshots. After a long, contentious telephone call, Sean and Barry called a truce and agreed to prominently link to each other. There was a similar ebb and flow of tensions between The Alumni Pioneer and The Cooper Pioneer, the school newspaper, and CO\$O\$, later rebranded as Free Cooper Union.

Interestingly, CU\$O\$ was the last to brand itself, but when it did, it was a potent symbol.

I ♥ NY

I ♥ CU[®]

I ♥ CU
MORE
THAN
EVER

I ♥ CU
MORE
THAN
MILTON
GLASER



PLACEHOLDER FOR I ♥ JB

Milton Glaser was one of Cooper Union's most famous alumni, particularly known for the graphic he created for the "I Love NY" campaign (first graphic). Cooper adopted it for its own use (second graphic), putting it on buttons. After September 11, 2001, a variant was created, and after the financial crisis was announced, someone created a similar variant (third graphic). Glaser was used by the administration and the trustees, and this exploitation was mocked (fourth graphic). After the president became a focus, Professor Alan Wolf tried to ignite engineer vs. artist tensions on campus by launching an "I Love JB" campaign with stickers and a large sign in the New Academic Building (fifth graphic, pending). Free Cooper Union started an "I Lemon" counter-campaign, that included this button (sixth graphic), bringing the entire chain full circle.

11-14. December 3-8, 2012, Free Cooper Union.





The fall semester of 2012 was a dark period, when the administration threatened to shut down the engineering school and art school if the faculty didn't cooperate in formulating new for-pay programs for the college. Students staged protests outside of a Board meeting until they were let in and, with the next Board meeting pending, eleven brave students barricaded themselves inside the Peter Cooper Suite, garnering national news coverage.

The images that resulted from this single action fed upon each other. The banner dropped from the Peter Cooper Suite became a national symbol, even appearing in an Oregon news article about efforts towards implementing free education in the state. The clocktower itself, lit up in red at night, inspired a logo that became the Free Cooper Union brand (the red came from the *carré rouge* (red square) of the 2012 Quebec student movement against tuition hikes). The Cooper 11 continued to control the narrative when they left, releasing this iconic photo of themselves in the manner of the Last Supper.

15. May 2013, Free Cooper Union.



Although the actions of the Cooper 11 did not persuade the Board to stop their tuition announcement, it did embolden more students to join them in occupying the President's Office. After a tense first day and exciting first night, hundreds of students rotated in and out of the President's Office; this self-portrait constitutes a fraction of those who helped to perpetuate the occupation.



25th Reunions, 50th wedding anniversaries, centennial celebrations, and so on; there is a natural human obsession with numbers that relate to our decimal and monetary systems. The poster above (the photograph of it was also much perpetuated) is incorrect, as is the prominent reproduction of it as part of the art show that accompanied the occupation of the President's Office. The error became such a meme that it made its way into the "Ivory Tower" documentary and was even reinforced, verbally, by Professor Peter Buckley, the Cooper Union historian, who should have known better.

The error is unintentional and comes from the confusing formatting of the Form 990s, which are based on a financial year that runs from July 1 to June 30, as opposed to individual's tax filings, which run from January 1 to December 31. Couple that with the fact that the new President was hired on July 1, and the prior President had appeared on a top ten list of most expensive Presidents (due to a bonus, and only when sorted as a percentage of school budget), and an irresistible myth arose.

The facts are that the President's compensation package, which includes an estimated \$90,000 for the use of the Hamilton-Fish House, as well as retirement benefits and an expense account in addition to what would normally be considered "salary," totals around \$650,000. It is still an outrageous amount, and nearly double the median for college presidents.

Why did the administration allow this meme to perpetuate? First, it reinforced their narrative that opponents were spreading "misinformation." It also was part of a media strategy that worked very hard not to produce anything that was directly quotable that didn't serve the major narratives they were pushing. Both the VP of Finance and the President himself confirmed privately to The Alumni Pioneer publisher and to the write-in Alumni Trustee that the \$750,000 figure was incorrect, but not in a way that could be directly quoted.

Despite the fact that the number is wrong (and the poster is worse), the myth did lead to one of the most memorable moments in "Ivory Tower," in a kind of "60 Minutes" confrontation where the President is asked, on camera, why he should be compensated nearly as much as the President of Harvard. The expert way that Andrew Rossi phrased the question, and the ridiculous, improvised response of the President, cut through all of the fake narratives that the administration had been feeding to other media outlets.

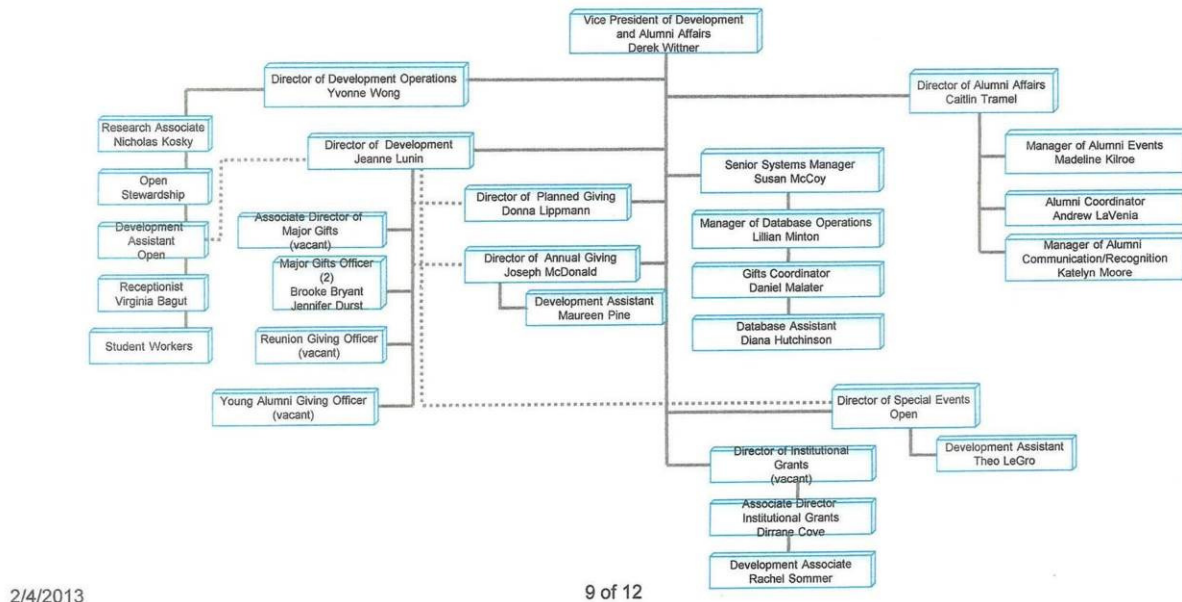
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/SaveCooperUnion/permalink/845089472233381/>

17. June 27, 2014, Ivory Tower title sequence.

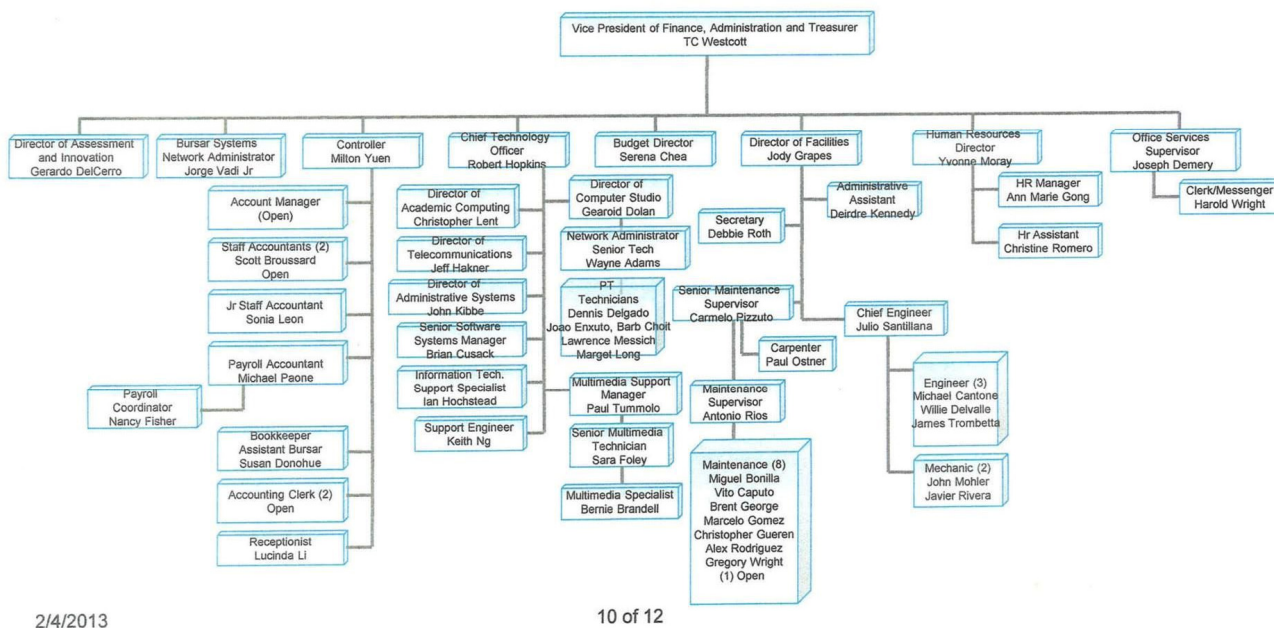


In an echo of the Clocktower occupation, Free Cooper Union lit the entire President's Office in red every night, an image so potent it was used in the title sequence of the "Ivory Tower" documentary. It is believed the 65 day occupation was the longest in the history of the United States at the time.

Development and Alumni Affairs



Department of Finance and Administration

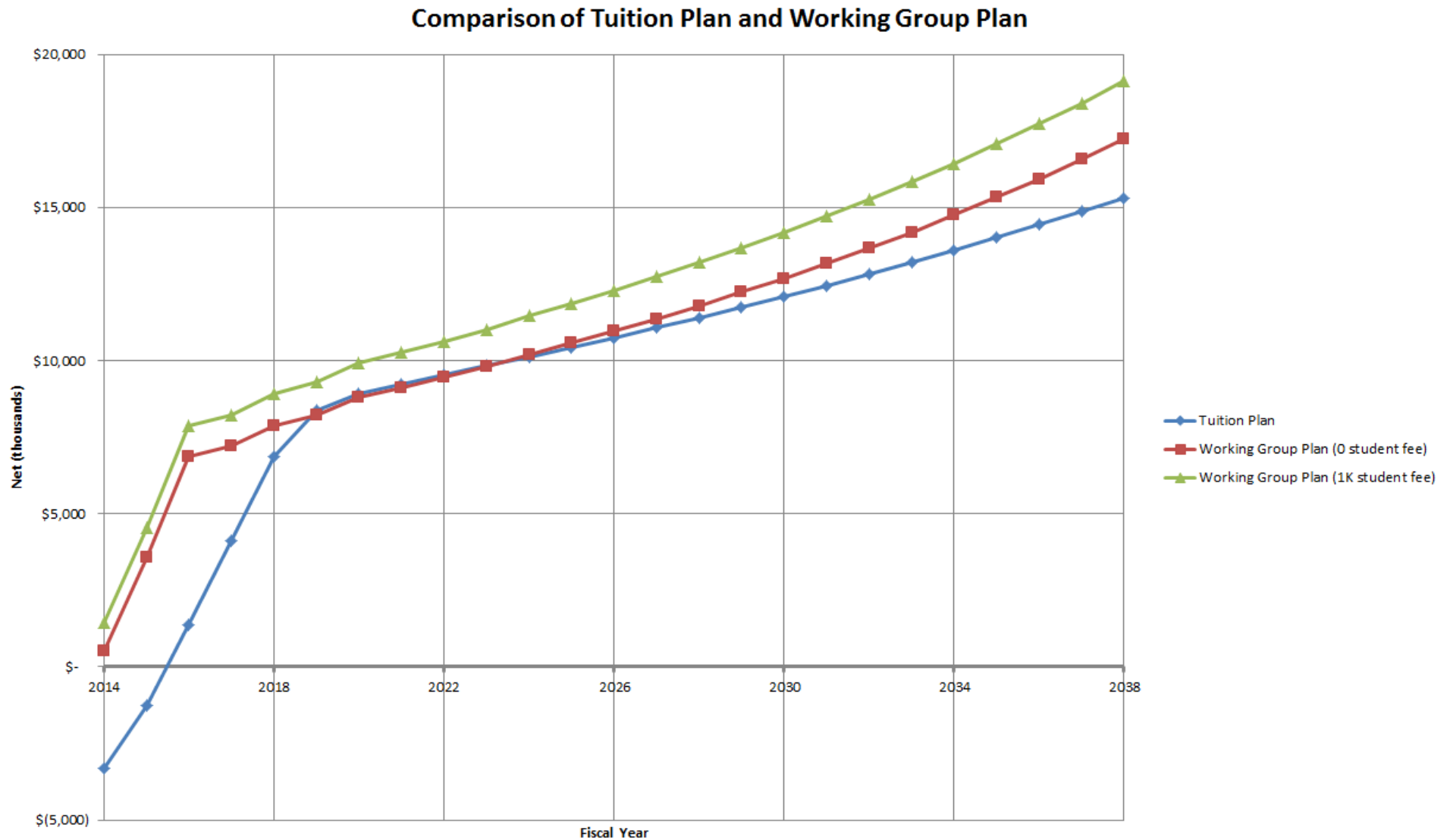


The administration did everything possible to sabotage the Working Group; despite signing onerous confidentiality agreements, they were denied access to almost everything but already public information. Although the administration apparently possessed the organization charts that the Working Group requested, they were not provided. Free Cooper Union, however, held #TwoWeeksOfLeaks, which included the organization charts on Day 3, which were invaluable in formulating the administrative headcount reduction section of the report.

19. November 2013, Free Cooper Union.



Although seating of a student trustee had already been approved by the Board prior to the end of the occupation, it was also codified in the agreement to end the occupation. The Board insisted on being given a selection of candidates, rather than merely accepting the student with the most votes, although that process was used for election of Alumni Trustees. When circumstances led students to believe that the Board would delay seating a student representative at the December 2013 Board meeting where the Working Group report would be discussed and voted on, Free Cooper Union staged this action. The image circulated widely. Although it was clearly a work of art and not an actual bomb, there was a mixed response within the Cooper Community to the image. Fortunately, a student trustee was seated at the December 2013 Board meeting, although there were two Executive Committee meetings prior where the Working Group report was first discussed and then debated. Although the Working Group report did not explicitly recommend selling the Student Housing building, it did mention it, and the Board was surprised to learn from the student trustee that the students were willing to sacrifice the dormitory in order for the college to remain free. Nevertheless, they rejected the Working Group report.



Despite a beautiful layout by Mindy Lang, and a confusing plethora of floor plans inserted by Professor Diane Lewis without the Working Group's approval or knowledge, the Working Group report ended with a table of reductions and a spreadsheet comparing the Working Group plan to the Tuition plan. It didn't have the impact of this graph, showing that, in the near term and the long term, the Working Group plan was clearly superior to the Tuition plan.

Unfortunately, both the Tuition plan and the Working Group plan needed additional revenue sources in order to balance the Cooper Union budget. That's why the Board meetings turned into philosophical discussions, not a "battle of the spreadsheets." How could the institution provide a free education to some, and then set about creating new programs that didn't provide free education?



On April 5, 2014, architecture student Vincent Hui refused to shake the hand of the President at a Saturday Program opening reception. The supervisor persuaded the student to do so, but the President had him fired from the Saturday program and suspended from athletic programs. This inspired a “Do Not Shake” campaign, publicized by this image.

22. May 27, 2014, the Committee to Save Cooper Union.

THE COMMITTEE TO SAVE COOPER UNION

Along with its filing with the Supreme Court of the State of New York, the Committee to Save Cooper Union created a website, ran several on-line fundraising campaigns, and held rallies and press conferences. Their logo was a unifying branding effort.