

THE COOPER UNION ALUMNI PIONEER

And the No Confidence Vote Goes to ...

by Barry Drogin, EE '83

Abstract

A consideration of who might become the next Chairman of the Board of Trustees in December 2013.

Who will become the next Chairman of the Board of Trustees (and of the Executive Committee, which can act on the Board's behalf)? Who should be? Who can't be?

The Board took the unusual step of announcing that a new Chair was needed, accompanied by a set of criteria: leadership, commitment, credibility, communication, philanthropic commitment, courage, judgment, integrity, financial aptitude, and inspirational. Courage is a little disconcerting; "The chairman must be able to operate under highly stressful conditions and stand firm in his/her convictions." And then there's a time-table: June-August Ad Hoc Committee (including one alumni trustee – am I the only person who reads these things?), September 18, 2013, vote, December 11, 2013, begins term.

First, let's eliminate those who can't be the Chair: Epstein is the current Chair, Bharucha is the president, Leeper is president of the CUAA, and there are four alumni trustees: Blauweiss, Mokuvos, Falci, and Skolnick (and Slavin, who will replace Blauweiss). Also Bernhard was already Chair – implemented the Master Plan, G-d forbid he should become Chair again.

Of course, de Menil was elected Vice Chair in November 2011 (amidst the panic that Cooper was going to institute tuition at that Board meeting), so many assume he will merely become the Chair, but he doesn't seem very eager to take on that burden. De Menil has given over half of a million dollars to The Cooper Union, he is likely the richest person to ever receive the full-tuition scholarship; it would be beyond ironic if he became the Chair at the moment that Cooper started removing the scholarship from rich kids. He's quiet – almost too quiet. Perhaps he's the Teddy Roosevelt candidate, speaking softly and carrying a big stick. He doesn't meet the Board's own financial aptitude criteria: he doesn't have a business, finance, real estate or legal background. He's a documentary filmmaker who became a practicing architect.

Borkowsky, of course, is very vocal and a strong supporter of the full-tuition scholarship, co-chair of the Working Group and the first trustee to visit the student occupation. Also, his term expires this year – will the most popular candidate be term-limited out?

For that matter, Gural, the Working Group co-chair, already tried to resign from the Board. One doubts he has the stomach or the desire for the position.

Michaelson has a public profile – completely negative. Not only shouldn't Michaelson become Chair, he should be removed from the Board, and forbidden to ever publish anything about Cooper, or respond to any press questions about Cooper, ever again.

Of the remaining trustees, the only other one with any public persona is Driscoll, who put on a show at the Alumni Trustee forum (although he isn't an alumni trustee), and has appeared briefly on Facebook. Driscoll

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has also given over half a million dollars to Cooper, and he's very chummy with Bernhard. He's a dark horse candidate.

Who's left? There's the Peter Cooper heir, Dobronyi, and Lincer, the lawyer who sat next to Epstein at the Open Forum whispering into his ear. One doesn't expect that Okrent, the Board's press guy, has any interest in the position, and he also doesn't meet their criteria. That leaves seven people, including two women who just recently joined the Board, Warren and Hill. Trust, another old guy, is also being term-limited out. So that leaves four relatively young businessmen, in order of descending financial contributions: Pasternack, Cohen, Benenson, and Wertheimer. The first and last are also alumni.

Being an alum doesn't necessarily endear one to the Cooper Community, Epstein being a case in point. Michalis was a very strong Board Chair for many years, and he wasn't an alum. Coming from the opposite angle, there appears to be a move to dilute alumni strength on the Board, with the public statements about increasing Board size from 24 to 40. At the moment, alumni have a slight majority on the Board and, given the vocal pronouncements of the alumni trustees, seemed to be those who fought hardest to stop the tuition decision. There was an attempt to stack the Board with non-alums at Dartmouth, and Bharucha and Pearson kept playing pages from the Dartmouth rulebook throughout the crisis. Is anyone paying attention?

The entire Cooper Community gets no say in who gets nominated and elected to be Board Chair – except through the alumni trustees. Perhaps this is an important topic for the August CUAA Alumni Council meeting – as if everyone didn't already have their hands full. Is there another No Confidence petition in our future?

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