

THE COOPER UNION ALUMNI & PIONEER

Alumni Pioneer Questions – 11/28/2011

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The following questions were sent to the Office of Public Affairs on November 28, 2011 with a three day deadline of December 2, 2011. Consistent with the media blackout instituted on November 23, 2011 (Blackout Wednesday), no response was received. Admittedly, many questions don't pass legal muster and would be considered leading or worse ("When did you start beating your wife?"). Nevertheless, publishing them is important.

Past

Q1. NAB Financing – The previous VP of Finance set a goal for the capital campaign required to responsibly construct the New Academic Building. When that goal was not met, the decision was made to proceed with construction anyway. What steps, if any, were taken to mitigate the impact of the shortfall since the start of construction?

A1. NAB Financing – No comment.

Q2. NAB Construction – The NAB capital campaign was kicked off with a large donation from Sandra Priest Rose. A Board member since 1994, William H. Sandholm, is CEO of the Astor Place Holding Corporation and COO of Rose Associates. When the decision was made to select Jonathan Rose Companies to serve as real estate advisor and owner's representative for design and construction of the NAB, were other firms given the opportunity to be selected, what was the vetting process, and was The Cooper Union concerned about creating the appearance of impropriety in the selection, notwithstanding any claims of financial advantage in the selection?

A2. NAB Construction – No comment.

Q3. Recession – In FY 2009, the market crashed, businesses were closing, and the full extent of the crisis was apparent to all business owners. The opening of the NAB followed in FY 2010. While PR stayed on message about the NAB, and even boasted to The Wall Street Journal and CNBC about how successfully The Cooper Union had weathered the recession, did The Cooper Union implement austerity measures outside of the media spotlight and, if so, what measures were those?

A3. Recession – No comment.

Q4. Chrysler Building – The administration has chosen to tell the media and the Cooper Union Community that the current financial crisis is due to the Chrysler Building, even though the paper value of and income from the Chrysler Building has increased every year. Does the administration regret that portion of the media campaign, will it stop pushing the Chrysler Building story, and will it take any steps to correct the record?

A4. Chrysler Building – No comment.

Q5. New President – The Chairman of the Board of Trustees has told the Cooper Community that all final candidates for the presidency were informed about Cooper’s financial situation prior to hiring. Although most new presidents typically enjoy a media grace period before they are judged, President Bharucha has been aggressive in pushing a “new president discovers financial crisis” narrative. Is this a mischaracterization of the narrative, or is it that the media has decided to adopt this narrative in order to simplify the story for the public?

A5. New President – No comment.

Present

Q6. Hiring Freeze – The administration has announced an immediate hiring freeze, yet job openings are still posted on the Cooper Union website. Has the process of interviewing candidates for these positions stopped? If not, what are candidates being told? Does the administration plan on making exceptions to the hiring freeze?

A6. Hiring Freeze – No comment.

Q7. Abram Hewitt – The President has been accurately citing the historic documents relating to the founding of The Union, the writings of Peter Cooper, and has used the research of Cooper Historian Buckley in support of a narrative focused on this early history. Yet Abram Hewitt articulated a vision for The Cooper Union which became the *de facto* reality for The Cooper Union for over a century, and previous administrations and Cooper Union publications have always repeated what Abram Hewitt attributed to Peter Cooper, whether it is historically verifiable or not. The Hewitt Building has been destroyed and replaced with the NAB. Is it the current administration’s intention to eradicate Abram Hewitt from the history of the institution? Does it matter whether Peter Cooper or Abram Hewitt coined the phrase “education as free as air and water”? Isn’t the President’s narrative similar to the Founding Fathers narrative that conservative judges and politicians have attempted to use to roll back progressive policies of subsequent court rulings and administration policies? Does the President personally feel, as a result of his research, that if Peter Cooper were alive today, he would object to the policies instituted by his son-in-law and to the evolution and current operations of The Union?

A7. Abram Hewitt – No comment.

Q8. Free Cooper Union Summit – On November 22, 2011, Rocco Cetera, the Alumni Council Vice President for Alumni Activities, provided the Office of Alumni Relations with text for an e-mail blast to the members of The Alumni Association. The text consisted of three events, including a community summit on December 5, 2011, in The Great Hall. That night, the e-mail blast went out to the Alumni Association with the event deleted. Did an employee of the Office of Alumni Relations make an independent decision to delete the event? Was the employee instructed to do so by someone else in the Development Office? Whoever made this decision, what was the reason for interrupting communication between an elected member of the Alumni Association and the Alumni Association? If charging tuition is truly a “last resort,” why would a staff member keep the Alumni Association from publicizing a meeting to discuss alternatives?

A8. Free Cooper Union Summit – No comment.

Q9. Transparency – Perhaps in reaction to perceptions of the previous President, the new administration has promised “transparency” in its communications and in the information provided within the Cooper Union Community and to the media. How does the administration answer critics that it is selective in its transparency, and why has the administration imposed a media blackout on the financial story?

A10. Transparency – No comment.

Future

Q11. The Role of Academia – In the recent At Cooper Union, Dr. Bharucha claims that students come to The Cooper Union “knowing an enormous amount” and that the faculty should “guide and correct and push back and provide pointers.” Although appealing if not flattering, the reality is that pre-college education in America has been in decline, and that The Cooper Union must provide tutoring and basic instruction to incoming freshmen. The traditional model of a liberal education is that institutions of higher education open student minds up to academic theories that are typically counter-intuitive and may go against common sense. Is it the new administration’s intention to return The Cooper Union to being a vocational school, and are the faculty on-board with this old new direction?

A11. The Role of Academia – No comment.

Q12. Globalization – Dr. Bharucha has been a frequent promoter of a type of education based in global perspectives, and is teaching a class called, “Cooper Union World Forum.” The pre-inaugural seminar was devoted to this topic, as well. He is critical of academic institutions with long histories and “cherished aspects” of those histories, such as Abram Hewitt’s concept of The Union providing a free education to all. Yet Dr. Bharucha seeks to establish a new “creation myth” narrative which replaces this “cherished aspect” with the “cherished aspect” of Peter Cooper’s philanthropy and concern for the working class. In Dr. Bharucha’s global perspective, are the poor of India, for example, the working class, and are all Americans rich and obligated to provide, philanthropically, for the education of the world’s working class?

A12. Globalization – No comment.

Q13. Growth – In past financial crises, The Cooper Union has gotten into trouble with presidential growth policies and eliminated resources and academic programs. Except for the hiring freeze, the administration has plans for new research initiatives, new partnerships, and has already started restructuring for growth. Is it the administration’s position that The Cooper Union’s only choices are between closing its doors or embarking on risky ventures which have the potential to result in closing its doors as well? Does the current administration believe that The Cooper Union, as currently constituted, must be destroyed, that its “reinvention” is not a possibility but a philosophical necessity?

A13. Growth – No comment.

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