

THE COOPER UNION ALUMNI PIONEER

“Ivory Tower” Errata

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Abstract

The author presents four minor corrections and clarifications to the Andrew Rossi CNN documentary, “Ivory Tower,” as concerns the fight to preserve free education at The Cooper Union.

The movie, “Ivory Tower,” brings to a broader audience, through its initial theatrical release and then through multiple showings on the cable news network, CNN, the fight to preserve free education at The Cooper Union. A documentary by Andrew Rossi, it uses his own footage as well as footage by many others involved (especially Mauricio Higuera). Although the documentary tells many stories – the failure of Udacity in California, the struggles of a former homeless youth at Harvard, the role of Historically Black Colleges and Universities, the need for defunded public state colleges to appeal to out-of-state students, and so on – The Cooper Union is used in the title shot of the film, ends the movie, and, according to many reviewers and viewers, is the strongest story, and has generated enormous interest.

Although the struggle at The Cooper Union was covered by some major news outlets, including the Associated Press, The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, and the Rachel Maddow show (and, after the release of the documentary, the Katie Couric show), although the student protests got messages of solidarity from students in Berlin, London, Quebec, Amsterdam, and Mexico City, as well as UCLA, Albany, and the New School in NYC, and was known within the fields of engineering, architecture, art, and education as well as the New York metropolitan region, it never became a national media story. The movie ends with the rejection by the Cooper Union Board of Trustees of a plan, created by a working group led by two trustees with elected representatives of the alumni, students, faculty, and staff, to preserve the full-tuition scholarship policy. It does not cover the subsequent lawsuit by a group called the Committee to Save Cooper Union which, as of this writing, is still in the courts.

Within a limited time, and using interviews, photographs, and video, “Ivory Tower” does an excellent job of describing the college and many of the major efforts to stop, and then reverse, the tuition decision. Many people seeking further information about the story will be led to webpages set up by the Committee to Save Cooper Union, Free Cooper Union (formerly Cooper Union Students to Save Our School), Cooper Union Task Force, as well as YouTube videos, infographics, and analyses published by The Cooper Union Alumni Pioneer. This document is not an effort to provide more information about what happened, but is merely a series of errata, of minor corrections and clarifications to the content presented in “Ivory Tower.”

1. Presidential Salary

Three times the movie mentions the outrageous salary of the college’s president, Jamshed Bharucha: in a photo of a protest sign (“Jamshed’s Salary: \$750,000 and a free house”), in a verbal comment from Cooper Union historian (and faculty member) Peter Buckley (over \$700,000), and in a brief shot of the lobby of the seventh floor of the Foundation Building (“750,000”). This figure circulated widely amongst the Cooper Union Community, and even the Alumni Pioneer published it and defended it. Unfortunately, the figure is inflated, and the Alumni Pioneer published a correction and apology, although it wasn’t until over a year later that

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definitive proof was available. Although it isn't known who first leaked the \$750,000 figure, it appeared to be confirmed when a federal form called Form 990 was released for fiscal year 2012:

Part II Officers, Directors, Trustees, Key Employees, and Highest Compensated Employees. Use Schedule J-1 if additional space needed.

For each individual whose compensation must be reported in Schedule J, report compensation from the organization on row (i) and from related organizations, described in the instructions on row (ii). Do not list any individuals that are not listed on Form 990, Part VII.

Note. The sum of columns (B)(i)-(iii) for each listed individual must equal the total amount of Form 990, Part VII, Section A, line 1a, columns (D) and (E) for that individual.

(A) Name		(B) Breakdown of W-2 and/or 1099-MISC compensation			(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
		(i) Base compensation	(ii) Bonus & incentive compensation	(iii) Other reportable compensation				
(10) JAMSHED BHARUCHA	(i)	237,219	0	23,032	24,500	102,328	387,079	0
	(ii)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Using simple math, doubling the \$387,000 in Column E comes to \$774,000. Unfortunately, as verified by the Alumni Pioneer, column B, listing the W-2 and 1099-MISC compensation, is for half of a year (July 1, 2011 to December 31, 2011), while columns C and D are for the entire fiscal year (July 1, 2011 to June 30, 2012); Dr. Bharucha's "total compensation" was actually equivalent to \$647,000. The Form 990 for fiscal year 2013 wasn't filed until May 2014 and wasn't available publicly until October 2014:

Part II Officers, Directors, Trustees, Key Employees, and Highest Compensated Employees. Use duplicate copies if additional space is needed.

For each individual whose compensation must be reported in Schedule J, report compensation from the organization on row (i) and from related organizations, described in the instructions, on row (ii). Do not list any individuals that are not listed on Form 990, Part VII.

Note. The sum of columns (B)(i)-(iii) for each listed individual must equal the total amount of Form 990, Part VII, Section A, line 1a, applicable column (D) and (E) amounts for that individual.

(A) Name and Title		(B) Breakdown of W-2 and/or 1099-MISC compensation			(C) Retirement and other deferred compensation	(D) Nontaxable benefits	(E) Total of columns (B)(i)-(D)	(F) Compensation reported as deferred in prior Form 990
		(i) Base compensation	(ii) Bonus & incentive compensation	(iii) Other reportable compensation				
9 JAMSHED BHARUCHA PRESIDENT	(i)	478,171.	0	37,080.	25,000.	119,158.	659,409.	0
	(ii)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Therefore, \$650,000, as a general figure, is more accurate. Also, the student sign contains two errors: Dr. Bharucha's "salary" is \$475,000; the value of the "free house" is below \$100,000. The "total compensation" includes retirement funds and other nontaxable benefits.

This correction – from \$750,000 plus a free house to \$650,000 including a free house – is no less outrageous. Dr. Buckley's point about "proportionality" is well-taken, and, on-screen, Dr. Bharucha clearly expresses that he thinks that he deserves the inflated salary. To provide context, the median total compensation for private college and university presidents with at least \$50M budgets was \$386,000 in 2009 (with a base pay of \$294,000), according to The Chronicle of Higher Education. The Cooper Union had been over-compensating its chief executive (and its other top officers) for years; the former president, Dr. George Campbell, placed in the Top Ten that year (for total compensation as a percentage of budget), due to a bonus. The history of total compensation for Cooper college presidents is listed below:

1998	Iselin	\$205,047
1999	Iselin	\$278,318
2000	Campbell	\$403,097
2001	Campbell	\$395,687
2002	Campbell	\$403,531
2003	Campbell	\$410,946
2004	Campbell	\$428,084
2005	Campbell	\$456,047
2006	Campbell	\$489,268
2007	Campbell	\$678,661

2008	Campbell	\$673,433
2009	Campbell	\$668,473
2010	Campbell	\$482,053
2011	Bharucha	\$647,330
2012	Bharucha	\$659,409

The working group told the Board of Trustees that a reasonable management compensation policy – nine other top employees (vice presidents and deans) were earning over 200% of median salaries for their positions – would save the college between \$600,000 and \$1,000,000 per year.

2. Chrysler Building endowment

It has been estimated that Peter Cooper gave almost one million dollars to build and run The Cooper Union prior to his death in 1883. That is in actual 1800’s dollars, not adjusted for inflation. This included buying up the parcels of land under the Foundation Building (which he donated, as a trust, to the college), building the Foundation Building (he used steel beams from his own iron works factory), and payments directly to the college to keep the institution from going into debt (and to fund special needs, such as the purchase of typewriters for a secretarial course). The Foundation Building itself was the only money-generating “asset” that the college owned – it rented out the street-level floor to shops and the top two floors as office space (two additional floors were later added to the top of the building).

After his death, his son, Edward Cooper, and his son-in-law, Abram Hewitt, along with other trustees, kept the institution solvent, bound by a Charter which proclaimed that trustees would be liable for any institutional debts over \$5,000. The Cooper sons were joined by a contemporary – Andrew Carnegie – in a philanthropic race to expand the college. First, Andrew Carnegie gave \$300,000 to the college. Then he gave a second \$300,000 to the college, and Edward Cooper and Abram Hewitt matched his two contributions by giving \$300,000 each. These gifts allowed the college to end the commercial leases and devote all of the Foundation Building to educational purposes, and to start an engineering day school (in addition to the engineering night school). The second gift was acknowledged by Abram Hewitt in a famous speech to the graduating night class of 1902 (the speech also mentions the first (and second) alumni contributions since the college had been founded in 1859).

It is true that Peter Cooper provided start-up funding to the partnership formed by Edward Cooper and Abram Hewitt, but he did not leave the land under the Chrysler Building to the college. According to recent research conducted by a Cooper professor, Robert Topper, that land was intended as an inheritance for Peter Cooper’s grandchildren. Dr. Topper has discovered that this inheritance was donated to The Cooper Union and, in further competition between the Cooper family and the Carnegie family, the Carnegie grandchildren compensated the Cooper grandchildren, restoring, financially, their inheritance. It wasn’t until after the Great Depression that this asset started to provide revenue to the college. In the meantime, other industrialists, including JP Morgan and Frederic Vanderbilt, provided funding to build the Hewitt Building after the death of Abram Hewitt (the building which was torn down to build the \$1,000/square foot Thom Mayne building featured in the movie).

Further details on exactly who donated the land upon which the Chrysler Building was built to the college, and when, is a detail for further research. To be on the safe side, it would be accurate to say that the Cooper family – and the Carnegie family – provided the endowment which includes the land under the Chrysler Building, not Peter Cooper, as stated in the film. The original Cooper Union also included a museum, which was broken off and became the Cooper/Hewitt Smithsonian Design Museum, and the Carnegie family funded many other New York City institutions, including Carnegie Hall and 67 “Carnegie Libraries” (out of 3,500 built in the United States and approximately 1,000 built in other countries around the world).

3. Student Actions

“Ivory Tower” shows photographs and video footage from numerous student actions, and the chronology in which these are shown is not exact. Student actions date back to November 2011 (many that occurred in the academic year prior to “Ivory Tower” are documented by The Alumni Pioneer in a YouTube video (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z1xnuW4Y0os>)). Of course, the movie couldn’t show all of the actions. But it is important to note that, prior to the Sit-In, which was between May 8, 2013, and July 12, 2013, eleven Cooper students, including Victoria Sobel, who is interviewed and narrates portions of the film, had risked a “Lock-In” in the Peter Cooper Suite (often referred to as the Clocktower) one floor above the Presidential Offices, from December 3, 2012, to December 10, 2012. This was prior to the announcement in the Great Hall shown in photographs and video in the film. The “Cooper 11” were not disciplined for their action although, as with the Sit-In, they were certainly threatened. The main reason for bringing up this particular student action is that, during the film, when Ms. Sobel talks about the tension and energy prior to an action, “Ivory Tower” shows video footage taken in December 2012 of people on the roof of the Foundation Building near the Clocktower (apparently these are not members of the “Cooper 11” itself, according to the students). The clockface was lit red (during the Sit-In, the entire Presidential Suite was lit red. In a later action, the incoming freshman class – the first to pay tuition at the college – lit up their dorm rooms in red in solidarity with the cause). Photos from the Lock-In and the Sit-In (including a photo of Andrew Rossi filming the students) can be found at <http://www.notnicemusic.com/Cassandra/cooper1.html>.

4. Board of Trustees vote

The vote of the Board of Trustees to reject the plan presented by the working group was held in secret and there are no photos or videos of it (the author, who was elected to represent the engineering alumni on the working group, did take two photos of the presentation of the plan to the Executive Committee of the Board, and one photo at the meeting in which the plan was presented to the full board, but the vote did not occur until a month later). So what is the video at the end of the film? It is video from a meeting of the Council of the Cooper Union Alumni Association at which the Council unanimously endorsed the plan. Don Blauweiss, an alumni trustee who is seen earlier in the film, is shown at that meeting, as well as Mark Epstein, the Chair of the Board who had just been replaced by a new Chair. The final shot is of Mike Borkowsky, one of the trustee co-chairs of the working group (his term expired just prior to the vote), who wrote and proposed the resolution. The hands you see being raised are not votes to reject the plan – they are votes to endorse the plan.

To learn more about the legal action to reverse the tuition decision, visit the Committee website, <http://savecooperunion.org/>, and to check out recent student actions and look through the archives of previous student actions, visit Free Cooper Union’s website, <http://cusos.org/>.

The current version of this document can be found at <http://www.notnicemusic.com/tower.pdf>. Corrections to this document are appreciated and, if based on substantiated facts from legitimate sources, will be implemented by the author. The original version was completed on December 6, 2014.

The Alumni Pioneer, <http://www.notnicemusic.com/Cassandra/cooper.html>, was a virtual newspaper with breaking news stories and links to analyses, sources and the media. It was written and formatted in an inverted-pyramid newspaper style to facilitate quick access to what was deemed the most important information. It is now a news archive.