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CUAA UPDATE

CAROLINE YU (EE '15) | JOSEPH T. COLONEL (EE '15)

This article serves to update the Cooper community on as many aspects of the Cooper Union Alumni Association (CUAA) as possible. Facts have been based on articles from the CUAA website and opinions have been obtained from various Cooper Union alumni.

Throughout 2014, the relationship between the CUAA and the school administration changed drastically. The Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) is a document that describes the operating relationship between the Cooper Union, the Board of Trustees, and the CUAA. President Bharucha and the administration overrode this agreement in the following ways.

1. All financial support for operations were withdrawn and the bank account that used to contribute to the CUAA with funding was closed.

2. On-campus meeting space was denied for the CUAA and the Robert Torraco Alumni Space in the Cooper dormitory was converted to an administration office without any prior notice in April of 2014. An embargo on the objects in the Alumni Space lasted about 60 days. Although alumni have no issue with repurposing the space to save Cooper money in rent and allow student services to be closer to students, it is important to note that the CUAA was not consulted beforehand.

3. In addition, in September of 2014, the Director of the Office of Alumni Affairs told members of the CUAA that the school would no longer support the CUAA financially or with administrative support. Because of this, the cualumni.com website would no longer be maintained.

A group consisting of the CUAA President, the CUAA Secretary-Treasurer, members of the Board of Trustees, the Chairman of the Board of Trustees, President Bharucha and his Alumni Director has been meeting since November of 2014 to restore a working relationship between the CUAA and the administration.

In November of 2014, John Leeper (Arch '85), CUAA President, listed three items that the CUAA Council was hoping to address by the

end of the year. The first was to return the CUAA's status of being of 501(c)(3) organization. The CUAA wishes to be able to accept tax free donations from future events and projects. The second was an outreach campaign to contact every living Cooper alumnus. The third was to poll alumni and determine what the most important tasks are for the CUAA.

Later in November the Cooper Union Board of Trustees, Cooper Union administration, and the CUAA met. The temporary ban of CUAA events on campus was overturned and on-campus meeting space was made available to the CUAA. The CUAA will soon regain its tax-exempt status. Though the original CUAA website was deactivated, the new website for the CUAA is up and running at cooperalumni.org.

It was also stated that the CUAA and Cooper Union will continue to work cooperatively on alumni events. However, Founder's Day will be entirely sponsored, planned, and carried out by the CUAA, scheduled for Sunday, April 26. Alumni awards will be given out and entertainment will be provided at the Peter Cooper Block Party. Information can be found at cooperalumni.org/founders-day-2015.

The CUAA Executive Committee set up an online forum so that alumni could ask questions about the Joint Statement released after the meeting with the Board of Trustees, administration and the CUAA.

One question pertained to communication from the CUAA to its members. CUAA members now receive news directly from the CUAA Council instead of having the Cooper Union Alumni Office send out information on the CUAA's behalf.

Issues regarding the Annual Fund were also addressed. The CUAA has in the past collaborated with the Development manager in charge of the fund. Now, as of 2011, the Development Office is in charge of the Annual Fund.

Lastly, the CUAA has stressed the importance of continuing to fight tuition at Cooper. Resolutions related to tuition as well as the mis-

sion of the Cooper Union were sent out to alumni via emails and newsletter or posted on the CUAA website. The most recent resolution was written on August 6, 2014 and reads as follows: "The CUAA is committed to a return to free tuition for all students, and encourages all efforts to defend the Charter and founding documents, founding principles, and Mission of Cooper Union which states that 'the College admits undergraduates solely on merit and awards full scholarships to all enrolled students.' To this end, we resolve to make it a priority to provide current, relevant and accurate information related to the tuition controversy and related developments, in an effort to foster an informed alumni body. Furthermore, we unequivocally respect and defend each individual's right to engage in and support efforts to defend the Mission of Cooper Union as they see fit."

For 2015, members of the CUAA are voting on CUAA Council positions and three referendum questions. CUAA members will be able to meet the candidates on Tuesday, April 14 at 6 PM. The positions being sought after are CUAA president, Alumni Trustee, Secretary-Treasurer, VP/Faculty-Student, VP/Alumni Activities, Nominating Committee, and spots on the CUAA Council. The three referendum questions pertain to supporting the continued fight against tuition, the status of the CUAA being a 501(c)(3) organization, and the CUAA's representation on the Board of Trustees. There has been an emphasis on making sure that alumni answer the referendum questions responsibly and carefully.

A letter from John Leeper to all Cooper alumni highlights the CUAA Election for 2015, how CUAA will be an independent organization, and restates the CUAA's mission to serve alumni and the Cooper Union. The entire letter and more general information on the CUAA may be found at: cooperalumni.org/cuaa-election-2015-letter-from-john-leeper. ♦

PROPOSED OVERLOAD CHARGE

BRENDA SO (CE '18) | PRANAV JONEJA (ME '18)



Photo Credit: Winter Leng (ChE '18)

On March 30th, the Engineering Student Council informed the Cooper community that the administration had decided to charge additional tuition fees. Starting from Fall 2015, current freshman or incoming students registering for more than 19.5 credits would be charged \$1,200 per credit (\$600 for those with half-tuition scholarship). Immediately after the announcement, the student body erupted in outcry and made a petition to overturn the decision. The petition received 346 signatures within 48 hours of the news breaking.

ESC representative Yash Sharma (EE '18) was one of the first people to notify the student body about the charge. He told The Pioneer after receiving the notification on Monday, "I was enraged that I had to pay for something that wasn't advertised to me when I applied, and now I am told about this after I am trapped here." By charging a fee for extra credits, the "affordability to take as many classes as you want" was erased. Moreover, students who had planned to earn a Master's degree within four years were, in essence, precluded from pursuing their ambition.

As word of the new tuition policy spread, so too did the response from students. In a meeting open to all students hosted by JSC the next day, students spoke their mind. One student felt the policy "discourages interaction between schools since students would not want to pay for non-required classes". Furthermore, specializing in a

particular area of interest would become a question of whether that specialty is worth the added financial burden. Among the discussion was also the sentiment that in order to enact change, the student body needs to take "baby steps" with the administration.

The petition was one of those steps. Drafted by engineering freshmen, the petition claimed that "the sheer inanity of charging students to try their best academically, capping them a mere half credit from their requirements, has no reasonable justification, economic or otherwise". As students assembled to discuss their views and express their frustration, the petition rapidly gained signatures. Giovanni Sanchez (ME '18) and Jessica Marshall (EE '17) helped to "gather signatures from art and architecture students", while Yash gathered support from the alumni. One student leading the petition effort, Anthony Passalacqua (ME '18), said that "students have the right to be pissed off - they should be". Moving forward after this petition, however, he hopes that "we can channel this into more action to get something concrete done. We need to make sure the students know what is going on at the Cooper Union and forge open channels of communication with the administration and Board of Trustees."

Two days after the ESC informed their constituents of the administration's pol-

icy change, Vice President for Finance and Administration Bill Mea announced via email that the decision to charge an overload fee was being rescinded. While he did not promise that such a fee would not be considered again in the future, he emphasized he was "still learning about the culture of Cooper Union" and that all "affected constituencies [would be] included in the conversation" if such a policy were considered again in the future.

Justin Harmon, the VP for Communications of the Cooper Union, explained that the original purpose of the overloading charge was not for substantial financial profit. Instead, it was mainly used as a marginal cost to pay staff that need to work more for students who overload, as well as providing an opportunity for students to deliberate about overloading credits. From the whole issue, he told the Pioneer that there are things that are "crucial to Cooper's culture and it's important not to change them, but there are also habits that could be changed if it helps." He also remarked that the way to learn about Cooper's culture is through better communication and that people "must ask questions to know the difference." Harmon said that currently, there are no plans in which overloading credits would be charged until the faculty and students are taken into account. ♦

PETER KATZ (Arch '76): CANDIDATE FOR ALUMNI TRUSTEE

CAROLINE YU (EE '15)

Peter Katz (Arch '76) is a candidate for Alumni Trustee in the Cooper Union Alumni Association. We asked him about his candidacy and thoughts on the CUAA.

TCP: What are the primary reasons you're running for alumni trustee?

PK: Although CUAA members have worked tirelessly for Cooper over the years (and I have great appreciation for their work), there's a value of bringing in new leadership from time to time who see the world differently and bring new solutions. Also, given the strong possibility of "regime change" at Cooper in the near future, perhaps even forced on the administration and BoT by regulators as the result of a legal finding, it's important that there are a few people around who have been elected by duly sanctioned bodies, yet have no connection to previous actions that may be seen as "part of the problem" that regulators may be trying to fix.

Also, from a personal standpoint, I feel a great debt to Cooper: I was a student whose parents were in the middle — not poor enough for scholarships and not rich enough for private colleges. The meritocracy that existed at Cooper when I attended resulted in a mix of fellow students that was really amazing. Future generations who self-select for such a school ought to be able to have the rich social and creative experience that I enjoyed.

TCP: What do you think are the most important goals CUAA should have right now?

PK: Consistent with Peter Cooper's notion of grads "rallying round" the now troubled CU the best thing CUAA can do now is to prepare for a

significant role in the coming transition. Elsewhere I have suggested new committees that will be about reconnecting with the Founder's intent, and keeping the school functioning through the upcoming potentially messy regime change; spearheading an alternative search process for both an interim and long-term President (recent searches by the BoT have brought leaders who are out of touch with Cooper's values and uniqueness); and also to create a "warehouse" ideas aimed at boosting CU's revenue and restoring its proper functioning once regime change has occurred (but not before).

Many creative alumni minds are now focused on the problems at Cooper, and in some cases are coming up with viable solutions that they'll share over a glass of beer. But because the administration has lost the confidence of the larger Cooper community, and they are not listening to alums anyway, many of our number are now withholding financial support and our best ideas for "fixing" Cooper. I suspect the situation will remain until alums feel that Cooper has an administration that's more in sync with its core values, culture and the stated goals of its Founder.

Yet Cooper will need these ideas, so it makes sense to collect and refine them so they can be implemented quickly once Cooper is on the mend.

TCP: What is your current view of the relationship between CUAA and Cooper?

PK: I've touched on some of this in my previous answers and also in my comments on the candidate's website. Al-

though the energy and insights of alums may be great, that energy is often unfocused and clouded by sentimental memories of the institution where we spent our formative years. I've been away from Cooper for a good while, but I am now coming back to Cooper with fresh eyes. So I have a clear sense of what needs to happen to get Peter Cooper's house in order.

This said, I keep coming back to the quote from Peter Cooper about grads "rallying round" the institution when all else fails. That was a visionary thought. More grads need to come back to the fold like I have, and so I applaud CUAA's efforts to broaden the pool of voters and candidates.

But at the end of the day, this is not about us alums; Cooper needs to be saved, not for us, but for the current and future students of Cooper. When one reads the fine print in all the school's governing documents, and looks at the dictionary definition of the word trustee—the job I'm "applying for," one realizes that a board member's job is simple: It is to prudently manage the property in the trust for the benefit of current future students. That clearly has not been the case in recent years.

TCP: What is your biggest message for voters?

PK: I want my candidacy to stand for three things: A back to basics approach to managing the schools assets (no more hedge funds!), transparency in its operations and leadership, and a return to the guidance of Peter Cooper which, semantics aside, means free tuition for all of its students. ◊

MARCH MADNESS: FACULTY RESEARCH PRESENTATIONS

CAROLINE YU (EE '15)

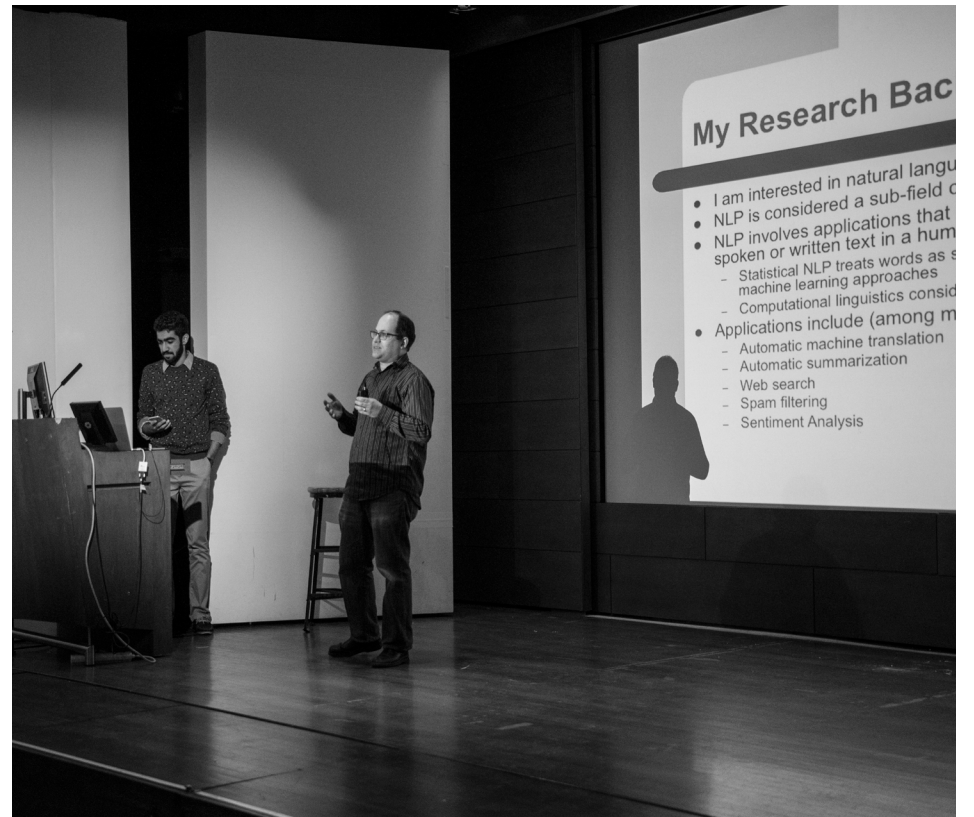


Photo Credit: Winter Leng (ChE '18)

On March 31 Anita Raja, Associate Dean of Research and Graduate Programs, held Cooper Union's first March Madness research presentations event. Faculty members from each department shared their previous and current research projects. Professors had exactly three minutes to give their presentations. Pranav Joneja (ME '18) kept the event on schedule and Monica Chen (CE '18) helped coordinate the professors before it was their time to present. For information on the research conducted by each faculty member at Cooper, visit their page at engfac.cooper.edu as well as the new website on research at Cooper.

Anita Raja explains her

inspiration for holding such an event: "When I joined Cooper last fall, I was tasked with helping facilitate the ongoing faculty and student research activities. Since then I have had the privilege of meeting with many of our faculty and students to discuss their research interests and projects.

"In February, we launched the engineering website cooper.edu/engineering/research which serves as a centralized launch point to learn about the exciting research activities happening across the College. The page also lists open research positions for students.

"March Madness was a second step towards establishing this framework of

collaboration. We wanted it to be fun and we wanted students to see the exciting research questions our faculty are tackling - presenting them the opportunity to connect to faculty with similar interests. Almost 20 faculty signed up and their presentations were terrific. I also see the positive aspects of co-organizing events with students. Pranav Joneja was a huge help in helping me organize this event and he single handedly spread the word among students."

Raja hopes to hold research presentation events similar to March Madness each semester as well as regularly scheduled research seminars. ◊

INVERTED CLASSROOM

ANUSHREE SREEDHAR (ChE '18) | CAROLINE YU (EE '15)

In January 2009, Dr. Eric Mazur of Harvard University published an article in *Science Magazine* called "Farewell, Lecture," featuring an alternate structure for classes that proved to help students better understand material. Mazur claims, "In hindsight, the reason for my students' poor performance is simple. The traditional approach to teaching reduces education to a transfer of information." Instead of lecturing, Mazur is now developing the idea of an "inverted classroom" in which students read the material before class, go to class to discuss the material, and engage in group work. Mazur states, "I now structure my time during class around short, conceptual multiple-choice questions. I alternate brief presentations with these questions, shifting the focus between instructor and students." The inverted classroom is making its way into The Cooper Union via Professor Daniel Lepek of the Chemical Engineering department (ChE '04) and Professor David Wootton of the Mechanical Engineering Department.

Professor Lepek's "flipped classroom" consists of videos that present course content and class time used to solve problems. His classroom uses online electronic textbooks that can be annotated by highlighting and commentary features. Using a pedagogical system called "Learning Catalytics," Lepek can send questions to students' wifi-enabled devices during and outside of class.

Professor Lepek describes how and when he first starting thinking about the inverted classroom: "Originally, I was considering using the POGIL (process oriented guided inquiry learning) approach to teach the course. Then I joined the ASEE VCP (American Society for Engineering Education virtual community of practice) focused on research-based approaches to pedagogy. In the community, I met Professor Steve Yaliso from the University of Michigan, who was telling me about a project that he's been working on with Professor Eric Mazur of Harvard University. I was convinced that this was a better

approach than POGIL and began implementing it last spring in my Heat and Mass Transfer course."

Student reactions have been positive so far, but Professor Lepek is still seeking ways to improve the method. Professor Lepek would also like to further study how the inverted classroom approach enhances student learning and engagement and has a NSF grant under review for the teaching method. He is the recipient of the 2015 Ray W. Fahien Award, sponsored and awarded by the ASEE Chemical Engineering Division. The award, which is based on outstanding teaching effectiveness and educational scholarship, is given annually to an educator who has shown evidence of vision and contributions to chemical engineering education. Professor Lepek will receive the award, an honorarium and a commemorative plaque, this June at the Chemical Engineering Division Banquet of the 2015 ASEE Annual Conference in Seattle, Washington.



Photo Credit: Winter Leng (ChE '18)

EAST VILLAGE GAS EXPLOSION



Photo Credit: EventPhotosNYC/Flickr

On Thursday, March 26, a gas explosion at 121 Second Avenue led to a seven-alarm fire that left two dead and 19 injured. Both 121 and 123 Second Avenue collapsed during the blaze, and 119 was brought down after it had partially collapsed. Torn down with the buildings were Cooper favorites Sushi Park, Sam's Deli, and Pommies Frites. Benefits and shelters have offered to help the displaced residents of the buildings. ♦

HSS POST-DOC: NICHOLAS D'AVELLA

CAROLINE YU (EE '15)

Last semester, Nicholas D'Avella and Allison Leigh joined the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at Cooper Union. They are both postdoctoral fellows. Professor D'Avella specializes in anthropology and Professor Leigh specializes in art history.

This issue contains our interview with Professor D'Avella.

The Cooper Pioneer: Could you tell me about your academic background?

Nicholas D'Avella: My undergraduate education was in a program called The Growth and Structure of Cities at Bryn Mawr College, which is outside Philadelphia. I was really interested in the way cities are structured and the ways people think about them - questions of urban planning and the history of urban life. Then for grad school I went on to study anthropology. One of my advisors was an anthropologist and I liked the way he thought about things. I was pretty taken by the methodology of anthropology, which is basically talking to people and doing interviews with them, observing them - I'm usually on the other side of the microphone asking people about their life and what they do. It's an unstructured way to understand the world and in that sense it's unique in the social sciences. I went to study anthropology at UC Davis where I earned my PhD. Then I had a post-doc at UC Berkeley, and now I'm here at Cooper!

TCP: How's the switch between California and New York?

ND: I grew up in New Jersey and lived in New York for a few years after I finished college. It's good to be back.

One of the big switches is

coming to Cooper, which is a much smaller and undergrad-focused institution. That's a really exciting thing for me. As an anthropologist, my research was about a construction boom in Buenos Aires after the financial crisis there in 2001. I lived there for a couple of years and ended up interviewing and reading a lot about real estate investors and market analysts, architects both in the university and in the professional practice, and with neighborhood groups, who were working to change the building code in the city. The project was about buildings and how they appear in different worlds - a building as it shows up in a graph of market investment analysis where they graph the price of three building apartments over thirty years is very different than how a building appears in an architecture drawing and it's very different than how it appears in the urban planning code. It's also different than how people live with buildings in their everyday lives. The idea of the project was to look at buildings from these multiple standpoints. Coming to Cooper is an exciting place to be because I worked with architecture students in Buenos Aires. I spent a year in an architecture school doing observation.

It's also exciting to see how artists and engineers have different ways of thinking about cities. I have my first couple of civil engineers in my HSS4 class called Writing the City, which has students do ethnographic projects in NY. We just read an article last week by an anthropologist who was studying water infrastructure in Mumbai and he was looking how water flow is not just a

technical question but also a question of politics. He uses this idea of pressure to talk about water in this way - that water pressure comes from political pressure. So I'm interested as an anthropologist in engineering questions, too. Infrastructure usually goes unrecognized until it starts falling apart - that's when we recognize it. It's an interesting take on the city.

TCP: Are you teaching another course at Cooper?



Photo Credit: Winter Leng (ChE '18)

ND: Yes. So last semester I taught an Intro to Anthropology course called Anthropology and the Other. Anthropology, in its long history, started out as something complimentary to sociology. Sociologists studied modern societies and anthropologists studied traditional societies. So that class was a history of how anthropology started thinking about human rela-

tions through people who live in radically different social worlds, but how those insights are still useful to think about how we relate to people different from ourselves today. Right now I'm teaching a class called Maps/Charts/Drawings: Visualization and the Anthropology of Knowledge. This class is about thinking about visual forms of representation not just as transparent views onto a reality but as certain cultural ways of thinking about and engaging with the world.

TCP: As a post-doc, how does this course relate to you?

ND: This course is very relevant to my own research. With both of the classes I'm teaching now, my work is influenced by and in dialogue with the classes I'm teaching. It's nice for me to reread texts with students - especially because HSS4 is about students writing their own research projects. To see

ATTORNEY GENERAL LAUNCHES INVESTIGATION, BOARD DUMPS BHARUCHA

JOSEPH T. COLONEL (EE '15)

The Wall Street Journal announced on March 24 that Attorney General Eric Schneiderman will investigate the Cooper Union's finances and the decisions that led to the charging of tuition to undergraduates.

Justin Harmon told the website The Villager, "We have engaged in regular briefings with the A.G.'s office since realizing that The Cooper Union's financial circumstances would likely require us to change its financial model. We initiated contact with the office again after the lawsuit was filed, so as to be available to answer any questions the allegations in the lawsuit might raise. We are cooperating fully and providing as much information and perspective as we can."

This announcement came on the heels of President Bharucha's "The State of Cooper Union" report, which made no mention of the lawsuit against the school nor any possibility of an investigation. In response, the Committee to Save Cooper Union released its own "The Real State of the Cooper Union," writing that Bharucha's report "is rife with bald-faced inaccuracies, clumsy attempts to misdirect and mislead readers, and the careful omission of information

that undermines its assertions. [...] Faculty, students, and alumni have repeatedly gone on the record opposing the dismantling of Cooper Union's founding mission and voiced their complete lack of trust and confidence in the course taken by the Board and President; hundreds have donated time and money to support the CSCU's lawsuit to counter the improper imposition of tuition by the Board of Trustees; and there is a constant drumbeat of despair and fury rising up from all corners of the Cooper Community as academic processes are circumvented and administrative costs skyrocket. The crisis is not over and the storm is as active as ever."

On April 9, the Wall Street Journal announced the Board of Trustees had decided to not renew Bharucha's contract when it expires at the end of this semester. According to the Journal, "though there is no guarantee that [this move] will end the litigation or the attorney general's investigation, trustees said they believe it will help."

Neither the A.G. investigation nor the Board's decision have been officially communicated to the Cooper community by the administration. ♦

how students deploy these texts in their own arguments is fun and stimulating for me. For the Maps/Charts/Drawings class, I'm actually revising a chapter of my book right now about architectural drawing in Buenos Aires, and I'm approaching it in a way that's very tied in with the themes that we're looking into in that class, about knowledge and politics and how they articulate with different visual tools for knowing the world.

TCP: What do you like best about Cooper's humanities department?

ND: What I really like is the engagement with people who don't already know how to care about the questions of the Humanities and Social Sciences. I'm drawn in by the kind of interdisciplinary work that that forces you to do. At a place like Davis I would teach anthropology grad students and undergrads. Not exclusively - there were a lot of undergrads interested in agriculture, for instance. But there were majors. At Berkeley, I was a researcher and I was surrounded by people with PhDs in the humanities and social sciences. Although there, too, I was always drawn to how the Humanities and Social Sciences could articulate with other ways of thinking about the world. For example, I did this research project about a data center they were building at Berkeley, whose goal was to bring together biologists, astronomers, and comp scientists confronting new domains of knowledge and practice around computation. They brought me in to help facilitate a conversation between

these people, and to try and understand how each of them worked with data as part of their science. So in that sense I was also very much surrounded by scientists there as well as people from the Humanities and Social Sciences.

All this is to say that I've spent some time cultivating this practice of talking to and trying to be relevant to people who don't automatically see anthropologists as people who can help them work through problems that are relevant to them. That practice and challenge of making yourself relevant and achieving an important voice among a community of people who don't necessarily realize the value that you can have to them is one of the things I like about Cooper. I like that challenge.

TCP: Getting that interaction started is really important!

ND: It is important and it's difficult. They call these things disciplines for a reason. You've been disciplined to think in a certain way. The trick is to make the conversations [between students of the different schools] deeper. That's the kind of thing I enjoy doing. In the class on visual forms of knowledge, to me, it's cool and a really unique opportunity that we can read one article about the history of perspective in the visual arts and another about the practices of protein crystallographers, and then think those things along side one other - while also sitting at a table with artists, architects, and engineers! That's part of what makes Cooper really unique and special for me. ♦

INTERVIEW WITH MALCOLM KING (EE '97), BOARD TRUSTEE

PRANAV JONEJA (ME '18)

Over the past few years, tensions have been growing between the Cooper community and the Board of Trustees, with some perceiving the Board as a faceless, inscrutable body. In this new article series, *The Pioneer* interviews trustees to learn more about the people behind the decisions changing our school. Over the last three weeks, *The Pioneer* sat down one-on-one with alumnus and trustee, Malcolm King (EE '97).

The Cooper Pioneer: What do you remember of your first day – or first year – as a student at Cooper?

Malcolm King: I do remember I spent way too much time in the pool room and in Frankie's Kitchen in what was the Hewitt building, where the NAB now stands. I played on the basketball team during my first year. I guess, in much the same way as it is for you today, it was definitely intense but enjoyable. The friends I made during that first year are still people I call my friends today.

TCP: What was the East Village like at that time?

MK: St. Mark's Place was not nearly as gentrified as it is now. I remember hanging out at the residence hall – the same one that exists today – and I remember there being a methadone maintenance clinic for recovering addicts on St. Mark's Place, if I recall correctly, where the Chipotle is located now. It was rumored that you could see people smoking crack out on the street. I don't know if I saw it myself, but it's not too hard to imagine. We weren't coddled inside gates of a college campus.

TCP: What was your career path coming out of Cooper?

MK: At the time, in the late 90s, information technology was really booming, especially for people like me in an electrical engineering program. Around the time of my graduation, a lot of the people I knew went into technology, being pulled by Silicon Valley or the banks in New York City. I myself joined the information security division at Federal Express (FedEx) right out of college, which eventually led more or less to where I am now as Executive Director of enterprise computing at Morgan Stanley.

TCP: Let's bring the conversation to the situation at Cooper today. What are your thoughts on President Bharucha's State of the Union letter?

MK: The President's letter comments on many of the topics that are of interest to the Board. The State of the Union is also informed by the same data that the Board uses to make decisions. Moreover, I think his letter makes an implicit point about financial sustainability that I think is really crucial. If you look at the graphs in the State of the Union document, there are two graphs in particular that examine two possible futures of Cooper Union. Both graphs show an increase in revenue in 2019, corresponding to the increased rent we will be receiving for the land under the Chrysler building that year. However, the two graphs differ

in that the first one shows the situation over the next 20 years with the financial sustainability plan (which includes tuition and other revenue generating programs) while the other shows the situation without the plan. Here's what's important to note for the latter situation, where expenditures are greater than revenue for so long: the lines on the graph can't extend for 20 years. There simply won't be a school in that case after even 4 years.

In that sense, you can say that the name – “Financial Sustainability Plan” is a euphemism. It's really the “Plan To Save the School.” Here's the thing: in my understanding, the true picture at the time this plan was being affirmed was so grim that if we widely publicized that we were doing this because we had three years of money left – If we said we're doing this as a desperate last ditch effort to save the school – then you might not be here (*the author of this article is a tuition-paying freshman*). Your parents would have said, “I'm not quite sure about this”. When you look at the graph, you have to read between the lines of communication citing financial sustainability.

TCP: You make a good point about the level of uncertainty surrounding that decision. What other areas do you see falling in this category?

MK: There are some things you don't know until they fully take form. The quality of the incoming class is one of them. We were simply not sure; we were basically crossing fingers and biting fingernails. We had no way of knowing. And we had to acknowledge that because there were many people in the boardroom, and on the fringes, who were saying tuition will destroy the quality of the student body, and thus destroy the school. We didn't think that was the case, but we couldn't be sure.

TCP: Do you think there are any merits to that argument – that tuition would ruin the school?

MK: After weighing every side... I don't think so. The full-tuition scholarship being offered over all of these years was definitely the major factor contributing to the quality of the student body, and by extension, maintaining Cooper Union's elite status. Since the price point was so attractive, we had high demand coupled with low supply, and so we got the best talent.

In early 2014, when we were deciding whether the Working Group Plan was a viable alternative to charging tuition, we had consultants, presidents of other universities as well as other people on the board involved with academia, telling us that the view that “meritocracy goes away once you charge tuition” is not widely held. I think graduates of Harvard, Yale and Princeton would all disagree with that sentiment, too.

Looking at Cooper from my perspective, I am well aware that the full-tuition scholar-

ship played a huge role in maintaining the school's elite reputation. I will be quite frank, though, and say that reputation was in spite of a lot of complacency within the school: curriculums were not up to date and facilities were not up to the standard. Those are both critically important factors, and for a very long time, they stayed stagnant. I feel that even though we didn't have the most up to date equipment and facilities, it was still a rigorous curriculum and there was still valuable science, technology, engineering and mathematics knowledge that was imparted – and students were willing to put up with it because it was free. I think now that we're charging tuition we can't be as complacent about attracting high quality student and maintaining an elite profile.

TCP: One sentiment that many students share is that when Cooper was free, we only focused on things that absolutely matter because the budget was strictly constrained. We were forced to make difficult trade-offs, and so we always chose the most essential things, and nothing superfluous. Now, amid attempts to ‘grow ourselves out of the crisis’ with tuition and new revenue-generating programs, our budget is limited only by the extent of our fundraising ability – and that means we are losing focus on those imperatives in favor of chasing secondary goals. What do you think about this? In the context of what you said, wouldn't that actually make us more complacent?

MK: So students want to keep the school lean – we definitely have that in mind. It is always going to be something to watch out for in any organization – any institution, any corporation, any non-profit. What we are absolutely focused on is accessibility for high-caliber students that are deserving but don't have the means. One of the key things we are keeping in mind is that we want the school to exist, first and foremost, but we also want the school to be elite and to be accessible. To be accessible, we have to be wise and not extravagant about our spending. That's going to come down to a judgment call that will rely on the administration as well as oversight by the Board. When I talk to other members of the Board, I think there is nearly unanimous agreement among the alumni trustees that we will need to keep an eye on that.

To that end, there have been things that have been questioned in recent Board meetings.

TCP: Can you share specific details of those questions?

MK: Yes, absolutely. Here's one recent example: The financial sustainability plan does factor in annual increases of tuition to keep up with inflation. In dollar terms, that means the plan accounts for the amount of tuition charged to go up by about 3% annually, but in real economic terminology, it is supposed to match the

natural increases in the price of everything else in the economy – that's inflation. And the committee on finances approved this at the time.

However, when the Board discussed the latest financial reports, we learned that we are actually ahead of plan this year because of we have revenue in excess of what we expected and greater reduction of expenses, too. Basically, for this year, we are ahead of where we thought we'd be according to the original financial sustainability plan. Is that a surplus? No – but it's less of a deficit, and that's good news.

Here's where I raised a question about accessibility: If we're ahead of the target for this year, do we really need to raise tuition? Why don't we just take this as a win and keep the rate flat? We deliberated on this for a while and in the end, the Board as a whole decided: “Look, this is only one year. It's nice that we're ahead of plan, but it's possible that we are behind next year. There could be variations. We will consider the possibility of keeping tuition flat once we have a better track record, when we know that we are ahead of plan consistently.”

TCP: Last week, there was an announcement of an added fee charged to students registering for more than 19.5 credits. According to Bill Mea, Vice President of Finance and Administration, the Board approved this decision before it was reversed. Can you comment on the Board's approval process for that decision?

MK: The finance committee looked into that decision and brought it to the whole Board for approval. This was part of the same vote about increasing tuition by 3% to keep up with inflation. While I'm not part of that committee, I did read through the minutes of their meeting, and what stuck out to me most was the point I made earlier. So when I raised that question, the discussion on the Board remained largely on that point about inflation.

TCP: Do you think there is any place for students to have a voice in those judgment calls? Currently, many students complain of a lack of transparency in the Board and administration's decision-making process with regards to new programs and new tuition fees. What can the community at large – students, faculty, alumni – do to have a say? What can be said of previous attempts to increase transparency?

MK (via e-mail): I think it would be reasonable for the student and CUAA members to compile a list of instances where their constituents felt that transparency has been lacking. This could be presented to and addressed by the communications committee of the Board. I think the feedback could result in measures that would help the students and larger community learn more; right now, I'm not sure what measures to take because I'm not clear on where the gaps are.

I think one good example

of the Board being aware of and addressing the desire for transparency was in early 2014, where the Board met to discuss the Working Group proposal. This was the week after the board affirmed the tuition decision, and the community was invited to discuss how the Board analyzed the proposal. The chairman and other trustees (and perhaps the consultants that evaluated the proposal) addressed questions from CUAA members. I didn't attend, unfortunately, because I missed the email announcing the event.

TCP: The Wall Street Journal published an article announcing the New York Attorney General's investigation into financial decisions at Cooper Union. When did you first learn of that investigation? Where do you stand with regards to that article?

MK: I was made aware of the inquiry about four weeks ago. My knowledge of it was protected by attorney-client privilege between the Board's lawyers and the trustees, including myself, and so I was not at liberty to comment on it publicly. The information published by the press, however, doesn't convey the situation in the most clear or accurate fashion.

Now that it's out in the open, I will say this: I became aware that the Attorney General was looking to act as a mediator between the Board and the Committee to Save Cooper Union (CSCU) to broker a deal that would result in the lawsuit being settled. The Attorney General's office conveyed to us that, among other things, the CSCU insisted on the board not renewing the president's contract. Another condition is an agreement to be a state review of the school's finances every five years to evaluate whether Cooper Union could return to a full-tuition scholarship model. The decision to move ahead with this deal is contingent on concessions on both sides of the agreement being accepted.

In response to the article in the Wall Street Journal: I vehemently disagree that avoiding an investigation was any type of motivation for the Board members; the Board is not afraid of an investigation. The way it's being portrayed in the press is that the Board sold out the President in order to save itself. This is simply not true. If one were to drill deeper, the question that arises is ‘Who in the Board needs to be saved? And from what?’. The answer is no one and nothing. The rationale for pursuing the settlement was to ensure the future of the school, because an adverse court ruling would be potentially catastrophic.

TCP: The last question is a thought experiment. You are to run the school. The stipulations are as follows:

a.) The year is 2012, but instead of years of crippling deficits, the school's budget is roughly balanced, giving you approximately \$30 million annually.

b.) You have at your disposal all of the endowment as it

stood, before property started to be sold off. You also have the Foundation and New Academic Buildings.

c.) The school must be tuition-free.

What does this school look like? What is it moving towards? (In other words, what is your personal, idealized version of Cooper Union?)

MK: No brainer, the school would be free. Beyond that, I would want to update the facilities and curriculum to keep them current. In many small ways, Cooper was out-of-date, and I'd try and fix that. For example, I'd have updated computers and better incorporation of cutting-edge technology, like 3-D printers. I think this hasn't been a concern recently, but I would make sure that we continue to keep things up-to-date in the future.

Looking at the bigger picture, Cooper has not historically instilled a sense of community and obligation to posterity. One of the larger, more fundamental changes I would push is to build that communal aspect. I would say that students given the full-tuition scholarship – or even half-tuition scholarship – have this privilege to attend because of people who came before them: Peter Cooper, the Carnegies, the Hewitts and many other illustrious donors, but there have also been many alumni donors. To the students, I would say “We hope that you enjoy it and make the best of it, and we hope that you remain part of the community basically forever, by contributing to sustaining the future of the institution, if you're able to”. I didn't realize until recently that it's sometimes necessary say that explicitly.

There were years after I graduated where I did not donate to Cooper Union, particularly when I left New York City for a while, because I didn't think about it. But, when I did return, I received a solicitation from the school to donate, and I have given every year since then – even before I was aware that Cooper was in financial trouble. On the other hand, there are some who have not given, ever. Had this message been conveyed to them before they came to Cooper Union, it would have been prominent in their thoughts after they graduate.

I think this is an important conversation to have with accepted students, perhaps even before they have decided to enroll. I have sent a note to John Falls, Associate Dean of Admissions, telling him to share my contact details particularly with accepted students from Stuyvesant High School, from where I graduated 20-ish years ago. In his capacity, Dean Falls has decided they are a good fit for Cooper Union, and I would, first of all, try to convince them to join our community. And then I would also explain to them that this scholarship is a gift bestowed to them by people who came before them, and that they have an obligation to provide that gift to those that come after them. ♦