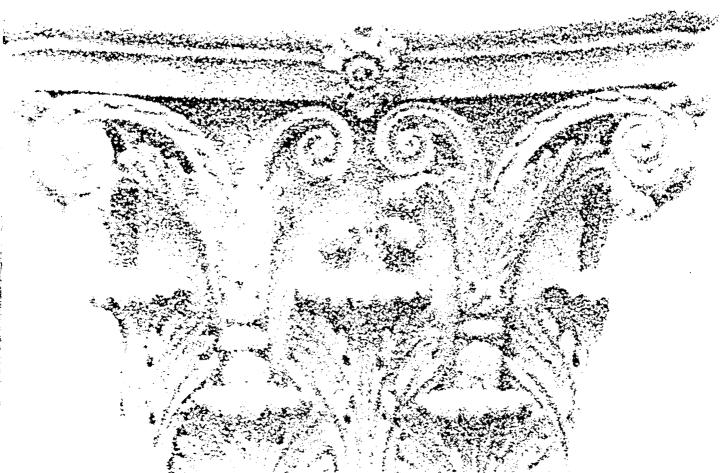
## THE COOPER UNION

INSTITUTIONAL SELF-STUDY · 1998



# SELF-STUDY REPORT

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# Mission, Goals and Objectives of The Cooper Union

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#### The Function of a Mission Statement

Early in its deliberations this committee became convinced that a succinct statement of mission, goals, and objectives may serve two important functions:

- 1. To present a sense of purpose, a basic orientation, a vision of the future, or a sense of uniqueness so compelling that it draws the assent of faculty, administration, and students (both enrolled or prospective). Such a statement offers both a public face for the institution and a focus for internal coherence.
- 2. To aid strategic planning and setting of priorities. This statement of mission is not a dead letter; it is used actively. As the Middle States Association publication <u>Designs for Excellence</u> notes (page 31): "A clear statement of purpose should provide a basis for strategic and long-range plans about every aspect of an institution's life, in order to ensure development consistent with its basic orientation."

The first function appeared initially to be easy to determine. Does not The Cooper Union have an overall purpose and an educational value so self-evident that they barely require frequent articulation or systematic investigation? "Free as air and water," "highly selective," "academically tough," "unique in its combination of disciplines," "dedicated to improving the public life of the city"; these terms and phrases are well known through experience but not, so to speak, as doctrine. This committee sent a letter to students and alumni asking for a personal "vision" of The Cooper Union. The returns were disappointing to the extent that they repeated what is generally felt and did not sketch a programmatic direction. The committee invited every Dean to its meetings to get their perspective on the mission of their particular areas of concern. These explorations were more fruitful in identifying changes and challenges since the last review

of mission in 1986. The results from these meeting were then compared to the mission statement of record, Cooper Union Beyond Its First 125 Years (often referred to here as 125+). The committee also reviewed mission and objectives statements from other colleges and universities and noted some of the following recurring components:

- A short descriptive statement covering the size, location, governance (private/public/religious), and degrees offered.
- A paragraph on programs, usually including a reason for offering those programs or emphasizing, in the case of universities, their panoramic sweep and their research prowess.
- A brief note on the history of the institution, noting the particular circumstances of its founding and any notable continuities of purpose.
- A description of the nature of the faculty.
- A description of the nature of the students, and the hopes for their individual and group development.
- A phrase or two on the relation of the institution to the community, city, state, or religion that it was intended to serve.

In most statements, particular goals and objectives are then listed in support of the more general principles enunciated in the mission.

Reduced to such a schema, any mission statement can appear to be a rather *pro-forma* attempt at public relations. Particular phrases do indeed appear with regularity; the faculty are invariably "dedicated," students are to be educated to "their full potential" and be trained as "leaders" in "a changing world" or, even better, for "the next millennium." The committee felt that such mission statements are successful to the degree that they identify the uniqueness of the educational environment, stress a commitment to particular disciplines and approaches, and identify with some specificity the means to achieve or support the stated objectives.

The committee decided that this self-assessment should therefore focus on the "uniqueness" of The Cooper Union with regard to the peculiarities of its history, the advantages of its size, the value it attaches to full scholarships, the intensity of its programs, the benefits of

its location, and the mandate of "civic improvement." This report, then, reviews the current mission statement of record -- the 125+ Report -- and offers some closing remarks on the need for a new statement, or at least a strong restatement of mission.

## **History of The Cooper Union's Mission**

"In re-studying its mission statement an institution might begin by questioning what it is legally authorized to do" (Designs for Excellence, page 31).

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The Charter and Deed of Trust, passed by the New York State Legislature on April 13th, 1859, together with the curious personal letter from the founder, provides the original statement of mission for The Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art. Though the charter and deed still provide the legal framework under which the Union operates (modestly amended in 1969, 1972, and 1986 to take care of trustee arrangements), the documents reflect primarily the state of popular and scientific education existing in the United States at that time. They are by no means dead letters, yet they do require some interpretive solvent to wipe away some of the antique varnish.

The first striking point about the charter is that The Cooper Union was not founded as a college but rather as a public educational institution that was to house many more activities than a lecture hall, classroom and library might admit. The 1859 act allowed Peter Cooper to give to a new corporate body a building and land "for the purpose of establishing a public institution in said city for the advancement of science, art, philosophy and letters, for procuring and maintaining scientific and historical collections, collections of chemical and philosophical apparatus, mechanical and artistic models, books, drawings, pictures and statues, and for cultivating other means of instruction."

Mid-century readers of Putnam's or Harper's monthly magazines would have had a clear

understanding of what those words promised. New York was to have a version, in smaller scale, of the artistic and scientific complexes then being developed under state sponsorship in London and Paris. New Yorkers, however, would be treated to this munificence by a private benefactor, the industrialist and political reformer Peter Cooper.

Cooper, then, endowed a public building, not a particular program. Even before his institute opened it was besieged with requests for, and advice about, the use of the space. Art patrons, some of whom went on to the establish the Metropolitan Museum of Art, petitioned for a floor. The New York Historical Society wanted a new home. The American Geographical Society hoped for an site for their cabinets and meetings. One group, The New York Female School of Design (1852), was successful in securing space even before the building officially opened, and it was their right as "sitting tenants" to be included by name in the programmatic features that the charter actually spells out.

There are five objectives specified beyond the general mission statement:

- 1. To provide Free Night courses on:
  - a. the application of science to the useful occupations of life.
  - b. social and political science. (Cooper was careful here to stress that he did not mean political economy of the Manchester School, but rather the science of republican government.)
  - c. any other branches of knowledge that in the opinion of the trustees might tend to improve and elevate the working classes of the city of New York.
- To create a free reading room, art galleries, scientific collections designed to improve and elevate "those classes whose occupations are such to be calculated [by the trustees]. to deprive them of proper recreation and instruction."
- 3. To provide and maintain a school for "the instruction of respectable females in the arts of design and indeed in such other art or trade as will tend to furnish them suitable

employment."

- 4. To establish and maintain a thorough polytechnic school by the trustees when enough funds were secured, or by other bodies willing to set one up beforehand.
- To organize a society to be called The Associates of the Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art.

It is certainly possible to see within these five objectives, nearly 140 years old, the seeds of Cooper Union's separate schools of architecture, art, and engineering, and our current outreach and public programming, even though to understand our contemporary structure would require a detailed history of each particular path taken. For the purposes of this self-study, however, it is probably better to begin before 1859, with some points about the founder's vision that informed the mission and these stated objectives.

Peter Cooper saw his union as an instrument for civic cohesion. One resonance of the word <u>union</u> in 1859 issued from the immediate political crisis facing the nation. Cooper, ever the optimist, hoped that the first event in the Great Hall would be a convocation of all U. S. senators, who, after rational debate, might forge a new and lasting compromise over the future course of slavery in the West.

Union also had a local reference. Long worried about the growing problems of social inequality and class division in New York, Cooper hoped that his institution, strategically situated at the top of the Bowery, would provide a meeting ground for the working and genteel classes, the immigrant and native born. The galleries, library, exhibitions, and collections would draw all grades of society, yet, unlike P. T. Barnum's establishment, these would operate without an eye to commercial return. Other cultural institutions, such the new Astor library nearby, were only nominally public since they were never open during hours when the working classes could use them. Whatever other ventures the Union undertook, it was always intended to train informed and disinterested citizens to be ethically vigilant and able to determine the public good. The letter

specifies that the students were to have Great Hall once a week to conduct debates; hence, there is another resonance from the word union that echoes the Oxford Union founded in 1832.

Cooper saw his Union as militantly public in all of its aspects. Beyond the obvious issues of accessibility (no cost of admission and extended hours of operation), he thought that the Union actually belonged to the city. Having grown up in a period when the legal distinctions between public and private activity in an individual's career were rather fuzzy, the founder hoped initially that the trustees of the institution would comprise the mayor, other elected officials, and important newspaper editors. The legal requirements of incorporation, however, forbade office holders as trustees, so the idea of the Associates of The Cooper Union was formed as an advisory and examining body composed of alumni and selected public figures from the sciences, arts, literature, and the professions. The Associates also were supposed to project various schemes for the improvement of the city and nation (much like Ben Franklin's junto in Philadelphia) and also were viewed as a parallel municipal government at times when New York descended into the politics of sheer expediency. Of all of the stated objectives, little came of this idea apart from a short-lived Inventor's Institute and alumni advisory boards. However, the function of the Associates regarding the life of the institution still seems novel and compelling: it would be the body that ensured that the Union's programs would always be current, innovative, and practical.

The word <u>practical</u> appears five times in the Charter and Deed and thus demands some attention. Practical education appears to stand in opposition to what was then taken to be liberal learning. Columbia still required knowledge of classical literature for admission, and though it was moving ahead with the enlargement of its School of Mines (at Cooper Union, Abram Hewitt hoped), the whole tenor of college education was still elitist and religious. (The charter therefore specifies that no religious test can be made of students or faculty.) "Practical" thus meant extending and developing contemporary knowledge in a democratic fashion; hence the emphasis on advancement in the institution's title. "Practical" did not mean, as the Trustees frequently

reminded the public, the teaching of trade skills.

Cooper Union's students, (with the exception of the "respectable females") were already at work. They came at night to learn the fundamentals of science and art and thus to develop problem solving techniques for work already underway.

The aim of a truly practical education was not, therefore, employment as such but rather independence and innovation in thought. At this point the politics and programs of the institution come into alignment. Having grown up as a radical artisan, Peter Cooper had a personal horror of indebtedness, dependency, and private patronage. Cooper believed that competence and independence assured both political stability and material progress.

Practical learning, democratic access, and civic improvement: these strands thread their way through the five programs initially projected by the founder. The trustees were unusually observant in the way they kept these objectives before them, in part because the board had no turnover in membership for the remainder of the 19th century. They worried about the lack of classes and lectures in political science; they promised, almost annually, that the Associates would be set up; and they longed for the day when enough funds could be secured for the Polytechnic Institute.

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In the meantime they diligently extended the useful employment training for women into telegraphy and stenography; admitted students on a first-come first-served basis to an expanding range of classes in science and art without regard to race, gender, or creed; experimented with classes in music and oratory under "the any other branches of knowledge" category; and allowed the full spectrum of political and cultural debate to take place in the Great Hall.

At the end of the nineteenth century, however, several developments, many external to the operations of the institution, came together to narrow the focus of The Cooper Union's educational mission:

• A large amount of money, equivalent to a contemporary capital campaign, flowed into

Cooper coffers from Andrew Carnegie, and other important benefactors. A Day School of Engineering, answering the fourth objective of the original charter, was opened in 1901.

- After the 1880s the city possessed a wide range of museums, lecture halls, and exhibition spaces. The days of the multipurpose civic and educational institution were at an end.
- The board of education improved the quality and quantity of its high schools, allowing
   Cooper to relinquish much remedial work in mathematics and science. Admission
   requirements for day and night classes were established after about 1890 and were
   progressively tightened as demand for admission increased.
- Trade schools, both public and private, undertook the function of improving skilled labor.
- The People's Institute and the Board of Education took over the management of the Great
   Hall programming, fulfilling the founder's civic mandate.

• States, through land grant money, expanded formal scientific education at the higher levels.

Thus, in the twentieth century, within this increasing and complex division of educational labor, and with changes in the structure of the work force, Cooper gradually lost sight of its original objects of benevolence -- the working artisan and tradesman (or in case of the Day School of Art, the deserving female). Instead, a new objective, or least a new phrase, comes to the fore -- the training of professionals. The education was as still "free as air and water," and it was still assumed that the working classes would remain the primary beneficiary. Yet the training of professionals in engineering and art required an attention to the processes of admission and to the likelihood of graduation and certification that the original charter could not have predicted. Though it took more than half a century to accomplish, Cooper went from being perhaps the most relaxed educational institution on the subject of admission to one of the most highly selective. By choosing to remain a full scholarship institution throughout the decades when schools such as MIT, Rice, or Worcester Poly began to charge tuition, Cooper also determined to remain a small,

focused teaching college. The notion of *democratic access* was thus encapsulated in its needs blind, full scholarship admissions policy. *Practical learning* is now emphasized in the unique combination of programs in architecture, art, and engineering. *Civic improvement* is found in Cooper's public and outreach programs and in its continued concern to train ethically vigilant students.

#### Size

Although its history has been inextricably tied to that of New York City for more than half of America's existence as a nation, and although its Great Hall has been the venue for historical moments from Lincoln's "Right Makes Might" speech to President Clinton's speech on the Social Security system, The Cooper Union's main focus for most of this century has been on its students. Above all else, the institution's small size, together with its celebrated tradition of full-tuition scholarships to all matriculated students, has been the hallmark of a Cooper Union education for generations of artists, architects, and engineers.

Cooper Union's size is not only its hallmark but also its greatest asset. This is felt in a number of ways. The size of the student body means that within each of the three schools it is possible for students to become well acquainted with a majority of their classmates. Classes are small (see "Programs" in the Comprehensive Overview section of this report) and most students get to know the other members of their program within a very short time. This familiar and supportive atmosphere within each of the schools is enriched by a variety of campus-wide phenomena that serve to integrate students from the three schools. Although the degree of social integration varies and is, to many, still inadequate, this sense of community has been supported in recent years by the presence of a student residence hall, which, in addition to making available a range of opportunities for informal involvement, greatly enhances the space available for student

activities. Traditionally, the integration of students from the three schools also has benefited from the broad array of campus activities funded in part by the office of the Dean of Students and the Cooper Union Federation of College Teachers. In recent years, the number of these activities has increased significantly, and current offerings include ethnic/racial societies, professional societies, and organizations for performing arts. Besides increasing the opportunities for social interaction, Cooper's small size significantly heightens the intensity of its academic programs. A 1995 alumnus of the School of Art recalled the "intensity of focus" as the most characteristic and exceptional feature of his Cooper experience. Architecture alumni recall being "pushed to a level of excellence" here. Competitive salaries and limited teaching loads have meant that The Cooper Union's full-time faculty are present and available on campus to devote a high degree of personal attention to the students. That level of attention can be demanding at times, and recent graduates of the three schools have cited the level of intensity that pervades the place as the most memorable feature of a Cooper education.

With only 56 full-time faculty, communication and exchanges between professors within each of the schools are possible in a way that is unknown in larger institutions. Faculty members are aware not only of each other's fields of interest, but also of the way in which those interests may support and interface with the students' goals as well, and they can offer encouragement and direction to an unusual degree. There is thus a good deal of informal exchange and mentoring within each of the three schools. Cooper Union graduates who have attended other colleges or universities (this includes students who matriculated at other institutions and subsequently transferred to Cooper as well as those who attended as nonmatriculants and exchange students) have commented on the high quality of a Cooper education. One recent graduate reported in a 1996 focus group discussion that: "Other schools couldn't come close to the education one received here." The group elaborated on the smallness of the institution and the fact that people at Cooper (faculty, administration, staff) care.

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The small size of the student body and, by extension, the number of graduates produced each year, is a function of Peter Cooper's legacy and of The Cooper Union's historical policy of full-tuition scholarships for all matriculated students. With no revenues incoming from tuition, the school functions economically on a very different basis from all other institutions, large or small. The practical result of this calculus is that, in order to assure its own survival as an institution, Cooper must strictly limit the number of students it enrolls (see "Students" in the Comprehensive Overview section of this report). The ultimate purpose and consequences of providing what traditionally have been regarded as a "free education" to those who can match the competition for admission have been the subject of much discussion in recent years; the question was raised several months ago at a November 1996 retreat by a member of the Board of Trustees, who raised the important issue of need versus merit as an admissions priority. The tradition of full-tuition support has continued to attract a student body of extraordinary talent and promise. This feature, together with the limited size of the Cooper community, makes it possible to mentor students and foster their development as future leaders. These two factors, the exceptional abilities of the students combined with the possibilities for guidance from faculty and peers alike, may well determine The Cooper Union's mission for the next century.

The Cooper Union's limited size may also protect it from some of the anticipated risks of the rising costs of education (see <u>Breaking the Social Contract: The Fiscal Crisis in Higher Education</u>, Council for Aid to Education, June 17, 1997). Never having been tuition-driven, and with a long experience of relying primarily on income from its endowment to support its educational mission, The Cooper Union is better positioned than others to meet the challenge of rising costs. While the *cost* per student of a Cooper Union education will undoubtedly increase substantially over the next decades, the *portion* to be provided by the institution will not. And the number of students is likely to remain "controlled." Nevertheless, the challenge is a major one.

close attention to the academic and intellectual progress of each student, makes it unlikely that any significant economies of scale will be achieved in instructional costs. Cooper's size should not lull anyone into assuming that this institution will be immune from the rising costs associated with higher education. A major capital campaign is therefore of the utmost necessity if The Cooper Union is to continue to succeed in its educational mission.

Size can present disadvantages as well. Despite the many superior qualities of a Cooper Union education, parts of the school lack the "brand name" recognition and penetration of larger, competing institutions. Although Cooper's programs rank with the best of their kind on both the national and international levels, according to a focus group of recent engineering graduates, "there is an extreme difference between Cooper recognition and other top schools in the country." For example, a 1992 engineering alumnus was told by a representative of Lockheed/Merrill Lynch, "We're not going to hire people from Cooper Union, we want a 'name' school." Other graduates concurred with the view that better publicity is needed. The case with the School of Architecture is different. A high percentage of its students begin to work in their field while still in the program, more often than not working in the offices of faculty members or alumni. Many architectural firms seek out Cooper graduates.

Another disadvantage to Cooper's small size is that course offerings, particularly in elective subjects in engineering, are more limited than at larger institutions. The same engineering graduates mentioned earlier stressed the need for more humanities courses. These courses, they felt, rounded out their education. The disadvantages associated with the decreasing size of the engineering student body have yet to be addressed in a satisfactory manner by the institution.

## Full-Tuition Scholarship

Together with the various forms of support provided by both faculty and peers, the opportunity to receive full-tuition support for an education of the highest quality remains one of the most exceptional aspects of a Cooper Union education. With "need-blind" admissions now nonexistent at all but a handful of institutions (about 40 nationwide), and with scholarships and other forms of student aid decreasing virtually everywhere, The Cooper Union continues to offer a quality education to those students who can meet its exacting standards.

However, as many people pointed out at the 1996 retreat with the trustees and in the many Middle States self-study meetings. The Cooper Union is no longer so unique in offering full scholarship packages to working-class and minority students. We now have to compete with many fine liberal arts and professional schools for academically bright students, especially from within the metropolitan region. Yet, representatives from the administration, faculty, and students with whom the committee consulted all agreed that there is a manifest difference between a college with some scholarship students recruited from the top of their high school cohort and a student body, like Cooper's, composed solely of such students. Our policy of full-tuition scholarships awarded on a needs-blind basis allows us to admit students as equals. Admission is solely a matter of individual talent and future potential, without regard to creed, race, gender, or social class. No one ever has bought the right of entry. The remarkably diverse student body that assembles on campus each fall is not the only beneficiary of this legacy; so too is the community into which Cooper students ultimately will graduate debt-free. For more than a century Cooper Union graduates have made remarkable contributions to the city and to the nation, often because, unburdened by serious debt, they were free to pursue the calling of their choice. The sense of intellectual freedom issuing from our policy of full-tuition scholarships has never been fully expressed within our sundry statements of mission and purpose.

#### Location

Beyond the limits of the institution itself, New York City stretches as both laboratory and extended campus. Several years ago a tee-shirt, bearing a map of "the Cooper Union Campus"-a roughly 50-square block area including sights in the East Village, Greenwich Village, and other Manhattan landmarks -- was seen on the backs of many engineering students. If there is one feature in addition to the intensity of focus that characterizes a Cooper Union education, it is the school's proximity to, and integration with, the city that surrounds it. Physically, the city is ever-present. With the possible exception of the steps of the Foundation Building, and the steps and walkway leading from the School of Engineering, it is literally impossible to walk out of any Cooper Union building without finding oneself on the streets of lower Manhattan. The physical city has, in fact, become the eponym and guiding principle for a highly innovative project administered under The Cooper Union's aegis, The School for the Physical City. But it also has provided laboratory space for a variety of courses in each of the four faculties, such as Urban Design, Contemporary Art Issues, Urban Renewal, and New York Social History. The schools of art and architecture benefit greatly from their location among world renowned artists, design studios, galleries and museums. They are at the "epicenter" of their respective disciplines. The School of Engineering, though less tied to locational factors, has made good use of New York City's concentration of media and biomedical establishments, and its great feats of civic infrastructure.

Above all, New York has been an "immigrant city" for the entire span of Cooper Union's existence. More than half of New York's population was foreign born in 1859, and the institution was always intended to serve the entire population regardless of origin. It is incorrect to think that The Cooper Union is a local college in a traditional sense because its students have always

been drawn from all parts of the globe. The Cooper Union has both historical and contemporary sanction to be proud of its record of "diversity," and to claim that it intends to train citizens of the world. Not much is made of our location in the current mission statement, and our committee speculated whether this was not another case of oversight bred of familiarity. Unlike so many other "old" colleges, The Cooper Union has never considered relocating. We have a commitment to staying where we are and to improving the surrounding district and the city as a whole, and this should be more strongly emphasized.

## **❖** Public Programs

Treating our public programs as a separate category is something of a paradox given that the institution was founded precisely to offer courses and instruction to the "general" (though targeted) public. In the recent past Cooper publications have claimed even that Cooper was first in the field of adult education, and this is true if one discounts the history of Mechanics Institutes and Lyceums. Since 1950, with dissolution of the Division of Social Philosophy, the status (in terms of the allocation of internal resources) of Cooper's public programming has declined relative to that of the degree-granting schools.

Two recent documents review the present and future commitment of the institution to its "public" and "outreach" programs. The first is Cooper Union Beyond Its First 125 Years; the second is a strategic planning report completed in 1996 titled "Public Programs and Outreach."

(Both are attached to this report as appendices.)

Though 125+ was the work of trustees and "Public Programs and Outreach" the work of faculty members and librarians, both recognize that the mission of The Cooper Union and the mission of its Great Hall, the physical and symbolic center of its public programming, remain the same. The trustee report concluded, "That Cooper Union should serve the public has been an

institutional mandate from its beginning," and the internal committee stated that "The Great Hall, as Cooper Union's most prominent public forum . . . needs . . . to maintain its historical role within New York City's changing cultural scene." Both recommend programs that are "appropriate for its [Cooper's] history and role in the city and that increase understanding [of] the issues raised by the relationships between art and technology." "Public Programs and Outreach" also urges that we "avoid programs that duplicate or can be better accomplished by others."

On implementing this part of The Cooper Union mission, the trustee report concluded that Great Hall Program Advisory Group "will be formed composed of faculty, alumni and professional colleagues to assist the Great Hall Director shape programs." Similarly, the internal committee concluded that "The formation of a standing Public Programs Committee drawn from administration, faculty, students and alumni . . . [to] serve as a forum on the policies, goals and financial structures of current programs, as well as a clearinghouse for new proposals . . . would help to resolve the occasional conflicts that arise over physical space and educational philosophy."

To date there is no such committee. This is the most significant recommendation contained in reports made almost ten years apart, and it is important for all the reasons noted in both reports. A Public Programs Committee could link the various programs, or at the least open a dialogue, and it would create no immediate financial obligation for The Cooper Union. Both reports also agreed on the need for independent full-time management of the Great Hall program and also on development of a distinct continuing education reflective of The Cooper Union's interests, especially in science and art.

To varying degrees, lack of funds, lack of staff, lack of space and facilities, and lack of media coverage remain chronic problems for The Cooper Union's public programs. As a result, neither the Great Hall, Cooper Union's most prominent forum, nor the Extended Studies and Outreach Programs fully live up to their institutional mandate.

The reports issued by the trustees and later by the Public Programs and Outreach

Committee (PP&O) note the constraints limiting these public programs from fulfilling their mission. Both reports make reasonable recommendations that would, if implemented, allow the programs to operate as intended. However, in the ten years since the trustees report was issued, many of the problems remain unaddressed. First, the administration and trustees need to:

- 1. Define the mission of these public programs
- 2. Make the financial commitment for both of these programs to provide "civic improvement."
- 3. In the instance of Extended Studies and the Great Hall to provide the staff and financial support to develop them into the moneymaking ventures as envisioned by some.

This committee recommends that the following measures should be considered:

- 1. Engage in an active discussion as to whether we should affirm low course fees as the public program's mission. Although some students could pay more tuition, many cannot. Those who are able to pay more should be targeted for special solicitations by the Office of Resources. Raising course fees to the level of NYU, Parsons, and Pratt would be very difficult. Extended Studies, as a not-for-credit program, does not have the incentive of conferring a degree or a certificate which assures other schools a steady stream of repeat "customers." Our students, however, take courses for their enjoyment only and compare our course fees with the price of admission to the other entertainment options available.
- 2. Increase the human resources dedicated to public programs. To carry out the many functions of the Office of Extended Studies and to try to reach the program's objectives, the director should be assisted by an Administrator of Continuing Education and/or an Administrator of Public Programs and an Administrative Assistant. The current staff of two does not have the time to develop either the continuing education or Great Hall programs expected of this office. With a rejuvenated Office of Resources, with someone dedicated to raise funds for all public programs, it would be possible for grant moneys to

- be raised to hire part-time curators for specific projects, events, and exhibitions.
- 3. Establish a Public Programs and Outreach Advisory Committee. This committee, comprised of students, faculty, administration, and alumni, would be a valuable resource for the Extended Studies and Outreach programs. Currently, exchange between the public programs' staff and the school's other communities is limited and has at times allowed misunderstandings to develop. A committee could facilitate communication, mediate, and provide an avenue for constructive criticism, and promote greater understanding.
- 4. Develop revenue-generating courses and programs. To be competitive with other schools and to generate the significant amounts of revenue envisioned by the trustees and administration, it is necessary either to build or make available facilities (i.e. studios and labs) that are comparable to NYU, Pratt, and Parsons. However, the committee realizes that Extended Studies will always be a smaller operation than the other schools. It will never directly compete for students; it fills a special niche. Extended Studies can be seen as a "focused study center offering a concentration of specialized courses for professionals." As the trustees noted in their report, the administration will need to provide the start-up costs to develop a continuing professional education program (to include also architectural and engineering examination review courses). The courses would in time be revenue generators.
- of New York City's ... best kept secrets." This remains a problem for many of the institution's functions and severely impacts public programming. Audience studies have shown that familiarity with an organization affects attendance and that familiar organizations receive higher perceptions of usefulness. Until this situation is corrected, Cooper Union's low public profile will hinder efforts to implement the recommendations of both the trustees, the PP&O, and this report. The Cooper Union should increase

program advertising by, among other means, direct mail, by placing a lighted kiosk that lists upcoming events in front of the Foundation building, and by building a web site.

## Current Mission Statement and Status of Its Objectives

The current mission statement "of record" remains the 125+ planning document: Cooper Union Beyond Its First 125 Years. It was prepared by the Trustees Planning Committee throughout 1984 as part of their preparation for the first large Capital campaign, published in Fall 1985, implemented in 1988, and closed, with its financial aims accomplished, in 1994. To arrive at the statement, the Trustees Planning Committee, with the aid and assistance of the then Vice President for Policy and Planning, consulted with the faculty, staff, and students. Questionnaires were sent out to significant parties. No one has ever doubted the sincerity and seriousness of the effort involved. However, the origin and speed of the process was such that the resulting document has not been viewed by some parties as a collaborative endeavor in planning. Indeed, both the schools of art and architecture prepared memoranda suggesting different emphases and objectives that were not incorporated in the final version.

The format is an initial statement of mission, followed by several pages of specific goals.

The introduction, "Cooper Union Then and Now," cites a bibliography of documents used to plan the report and presents facts about Cooper Union as of 1985: enrollment of 1,100; full-time faculty of 55; three buildings with a sum of 382,000 square feet; and a budget of \$10 million, 78% from endowments. All these can be compared to facts reported in the present self-study report.

125+ then provides a single-sentence statement of mission, as follows:

"That, consistent with the Deed of Trust, Cooper Union will provide the highest quality education in the disciplines of art, design, architecture, engineering, and related studies, to those gifted students who may most benefit from its academic

scholarships, location, size, and supportive environment, and, in addition, will offer relevant programs to its various publics."

That statement is followed by a series of initiatives that follow from it. Subsequent sections of the report consider the topics of students, programs, and institutional support, which were also the selected topics of the 1988 institutional self-study report.

Even without the inevitable disagreements that arise in the preparation of any general statement of mission, goals, and objectives, the authority of the document has not been well served by its near invisible status since its release with much fanfare in 1985. It is now more than a decade old. The document has not been used to create, for example, a succinct, ongoing statement of mission for the catalog. In fact, the catalog contains only the briefest comments about the institution's origins, goals, and practices. Nor is any of this material available for public consumption on the Internet, or ever circulated to current members of the Cooper community. Hence, the most immediate recommendation of our committee is that a succinct interim statement of mission be prepared for the broadest possible circulation to aid in recruitment, public outreach, and program development. The last catalog version of the mission statement may form a useful draft upon which to work (see the appendix).

Reflecting the 125+ report's close relationship to the demands of a specific capital campaign, the general tone is cautious and pragmatic rather than celebratory and inspirational. One member of this committee characterized the report's language as "ambiguous, self-contradictory, and occasionally incomprehensible." Most glaringly, compared to other colleges' stated objectives, the report contains next to nothing about The Cooper Union's expectations for its students; about the character of those it seeks to attract, the values it wishes to instill, or the practices and qualities it hopes to develop. The social or intellectual value of the programs it offers -- architecture, art, and engineering -- is taken to be self-evident. Other colleges are much better at expressing enthusiasm for the disciplines and practices to which they

devote their resources.

In reviewing the particular statements of the 125±, this committee felt that many objectives had been met over the last decade, especially in the following areas: improved financial aid, more aggressive recruitment of students, creation of a Center for Writing and Speaking, and more support in career and personal counseling. In general the record on meeting particular goals is good. The largest campus-wide change occurred in accommodation and housing. The most frequently cited reason for not accepting admission to The Cooper Union is/was accommodation. The dorm is considered by the students to be a great asset; it encourages friendships and mixes students from the different schools. However, there is insufficient accommodation for all but freshmen students. There is little doubt in anybody's mind that living in New York City is difficult without reasonable housing. 125± acknowledged this and cites the commutation problem, where students and/or faculty come to Cooper, transact their business, and leave for home, having little contact with each other outside of the institution or at other times. The report proposed a housing referral service, long term guaranteed leases, and cooperative ventures with other institutions. Some of these initiatives have come to fruition.

## Full Scholarship Policy

- Policy #1: "[To] remain a small select institution providing full-tuition academic scholarships to all degree students." "The board of trustees voted unanimously . . . to continue the policy of full-tuition scholarships."
- Policy #2: "It may be that the resources to maintain [a] full-tuition scholarship for all students will not be available indefinitely, and [that] some form of tuition based on family means will have to be introduced."

This remains a perennial, core issue. Many faculty and staff joined The Cooper Union believing that the full scholarship is fundamental to Cooper's identity, is a good cause, and simply is right. It confers such a sense of distinctiveness in an era of dramatically rising educational costs

that many have never questioned the policy's value. Uncertainties about the trustees' commitment to the policy continue to circulate. The term need blind is in vogue at the moment, yet policy #2 clearly indicates a "means test" paradigm. At the November 1996 retreat meeting with trustees, many left with the impression that policy #2 is closer to current thinking than policy #1. Despite the recent reaffirmation of policy #1 by the trustees, doubts remain, perhaps because the rationale for keeping such a policy never seems enthusiastically expressed in terms suggested in our report. We recommended that any revision of the mission statement provides a broader, enthusiastic endorsement, more visionary than descriptive, of the benefits of a full-scholarship policy.

## Governance and Compensation

A great deal is made of governance, rules, equity and expected behavior. The 1964

Faculty Handbook is mentioned in several places as being out of date and in need of replacement.

Work is said to be underway. The need for this is defined as urgent and "should be attended to immediately." "Clear equitable and manageable personnel policies [are] central to human resource utilization." "The Governance and the Handbook are badly in need of codification and revision . . . functional documents in these areas must be developed . . . central to supporting the effective participation of the faculty." The staff handbook is also mentioned. The needs for clear rules, lines of responsibility, job descriptions, community codes of conduct, and so on are clearly identified, but none of the prescribed documents or rules exist today. (A description of current governance can be found in the Comprehensive Overview section of this report.)

#### Compensation

"Compensation should contain merit increases." "Maintain and appropriately compensate and support a faculty and staff of skilled and dedicated professionals." "The marketplace demands improved faculty salaries." "[We should] adjust overall faculty compensation . . . Cooper's faculty salaries . . . tend to fall at the mid point of national compensation surveys. We should be at the top quarter and maintain that position . . . Improved faculty compensation."

Faculty salaries always need to be reviewed, and the nature of merit increases need to be reviewed in the light of collective bargaining. Looking at salaries on a national scale would certainly be a mistake, because New York City possesses anything but an average cost of living. The current three-credit compensation for an adjunct is \$3,000 – unchanged in the last ten years – and it may be an obstacle to the goal of "an education equal to the best." In general we found that the current mission and objectives statements in regard to the faculty, its character, support and development, are remarkably muted and cautious compared to other colleges. "Maintaining" a faculty does not suggest an institutional commitment to its advancement. Having an "appropriate balance of full-time and part-time faculty" says little about the criteria of appropriateness or the particular character of our part-timers, most of whom are established professionals and not graduate student adjuncts. This committee concurs with the recommendations and findings referenced in the general overview of this self-study.

## Student Character and Qualifications

What do we look for, if anything, beyond talent? The point that surely deserves to be stressed is that we look closely and seriously at every application. Unlike other colleges, the foundational principle of our admissions process is review by faculty committees of the three schools. Despite the increase in the number of applications, all letters of application are read, and, in art and architecture portfolios are intensively reviewed.

One issue of student "diversity" not often addressed is that of age. Cooper is accepting more mature students, those seeking second degrees or those who were not ready or able to pursue a professional degree earlier in life. The committee felt that Cooper's openness to this kind of nontraditional student, and our ability to evaluate effectively such applications, was not sufficiently highlighted.

## Social Integration

- "Provide a general recreational facility" -- specifically, a near-Olympic construction on top of the Hewitt building. "A 'mini-field house' of 18,000 square feet."
- "Create a greater sense of community." Here we see a declared intent to place "a few chairs, a coffee cart" at various locations throughout Cooper.
- Develop the "terrace" in front of the engineering building, possibly even put a roof on it;
   provide furniture and so on for student and faculty use, "possibly a light-weight translucent roof."
- "[Create] a community center that will provide facilities and activities that naturally generate a mix of students." Here one could argue that the dorm fulfills this objective, especially for freshmen.
- "Adequate offices and informal gathering places." "[Create] a faculty and staff club
  room." "School-wide activities including a regular assembly." "General purpose
  Recreational Facility."

The committee notes that the <u>125+</u> report identifies the lack of social communication between the constituencies at The Cooper Union as a substantial issue. Their intent was to strengthen ties between faculty, staff, and students by fostering informal meetings. However,

their policy regarding common spaces has not been carried through to any significant degree; indeed, arguments can be made supporting a reality that is more or less the opposite of the 125+ report's intent. For example, the engineering terrace is now a commercial enterprise, the Hewitt building roof is no longer germane as it is ultimately planned for demolition, and there are no plans for any other "general purpose recreational facility." The committee notes further that space is only one constraint to social interaction at The Cooper Union. Having the three schools determine class schedules independently also results in an erosion of effective time. We recommend that two further club hours be set aside to facilitate student, faculty, and staff interactions.

## Technology

Remembering that the 125+ report was written in 1984-85, a notable omission in the trustees' plan is a stated objective and particular goals for technology resources. The Computer Center is mentioned [18] in 50 lines, 26 of which are purely descriptive, 20 of which are history, and only 9 of which are proposals -- for "enhancements" (unspecified) and committees. All three professional schools (engineering, art, and architecture) increasingly require use of technology as their tools and methods become more founded upon software and communications. Perhaps the most immediate need is that of the School of Engineering, where the technology is essential as a tool and also as the object of study. The lack of an adequate technological infrastructure and resource base will surely affect the institution's ability to carry out its mission and to fulfill its institutional obligations. While the details of implementation can rightly be left to the schools and departments, a clear statement of policy should be developed for reference, and this presupposes both an interest and a financial commitment to technology on the part of the administration. As high schools, middle schools and even primary schools routinely surpass The Cooper Union in

their use of computers and communications — both for education and also for science and engineering — this committee recommends closing the substantial gap now existing between the actual practices of the professions and the students' and faculties' experiences of them at The Cooper Union. The lag is symptomatic of a greater danger —the possibility that Cooper could become less of a "cutting edge" institution and assume more of a "follower" status — and requires immediate and urgent correction. The failure by a previous strategic planning committee on technology to produce a report is a cause for great concern. Individual improvements have been made — as in the Driscoll Room, the engineering Design Center and the School of Art Computer Center — but these initiatives do not reflect a unified institutional sense of commitment. (A new statement of needs and recommendations regarding technology appears in the Resources section of this report).

### Toward a Renewal of a Mission Statement

Given that The Cooper Union is composed of three separate degree-granting schools, a Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, and a series of public programs, is there a collective, institutional objective? Can a unified mission of Cooper be determined?

It is clear that we are unified historically. Everything we purport to do flows from Peter Cooper's original bequest and example. In the words of the last Middle States Association report of the evaluation team (1988), The Cooper Union is unified by "the special legacy of Peter Cooper." Though no formal instruction in institutional history currently takes place, every student soon becomes aware that Cooper's benefaction bestows a sense of privilege, distinctiveness, and perhaps social responsibility. As the Dean of Students related in a letter to this study group, she sensed immediately on her arrival that many students saw Peter Cooper as someone who had used his time on earth wisely to help other people and who had dared to reach

for something beyond mere financial success. (Letter to the Study Group on Missions, Goals and Objectives, dated March 31, 1997.) Some of the students we talked to were more than just thankful for an endowment that allowed for full scholarships; they were also grateful that Cooper provided a model for nonpecuniary ambition. Among other benefits, the full scholarship grants students permission to think more broadly about the confines and limits of a career, as well as about the danger in reducing one's aspirations to the pure pursuit of cash.

This strongly held feeling of historical unity among faculty, staff, students, and alumni, which helps The Cooper Union maintain a sense of shared purpose, contrasts strangely with the lack of cohesive structures actually in operation. The committee speculated on whether our distinct legacy has not also permitted us to be too relaxed about examining our current and future purpose. We considered which structures might be used to determine or to identify a shared mission. There were few.

At the faculty level there is still no campus-wide governance. The bargaining agreement has in fact become such a document, covering many areas that a governance might normally arbitrate, including procedures for promotion and tenure. There is also a lack of more general institution-wide bodies: There is no Faculty-Student Senate, no Joint Faculty Committee, no named committee on Academic Freedom and Tenure, and there is no Resources Planning Council as recommended in the last self-study. Most matters of planning are dealt with as needed.

Without many of the administrative and structural features of a conventional academic institution, is it possible to determine a shared mission?

This committee found it doubtful that any integration of "mission" could be found quickly on the level of academic programming. At the retreat with trustees in November 1996, there was much discussion about the interconnections of design in the three fields of architecture, art, and engineering. After about 1950 several Cooper publications suggest that the word union applies to a conjunction or confluence of science and art, and still today members of the public refer to The

Cooper Union of Science and Art, leaving the progressive notion of advancement to one side.

The President, in his note in <u>Triumph and Trial</u>, a report on the Capital Campaign, mentions our "unique union of design disciplines."

The curious thing about the linguistic nicety in taking union to designate a shared programmatic value is the timing of its arrival. It appears in the 1950s, when the two cultures debate was at its zenith, when indeed the professional and educational demands of engineering and art were perhaps farthest removed from each other. At the college's founding no one remarked on the opposition of science and art, certainly not in terms of their advancement, because both had the capacity to describe and transform nature. For all of the nineteenth century, students at Cooper (with the exception of the Day Art School for Women) could take courses in art or science even if they were outside the sequence of courses required in their degree program. Drawing and draughtsmanship were the basic skills for all departments. In the 1890s the arts of engineering, architecture, and design achieved even greater cultural prestige as the allied disciplines of the Beaux Arts movement. Many Cooper graduates found employment in the kinds of work promoted by John LaFarge, Louis Tiffany, and McKim, Mead, and White.

What remains of this sense of union? How might it be usefully reactivated, without diluting the disciplinary focus that is one of Cooper's recognized strengths? It is clear from our committee's discussions that <u>design</u> is a seductive word in that it seems to encompass the work of our separate schools and yet it possesses different meanings within the particular disciplines. We suggest that if <u>design</u> is employed in any new statement of shared mission that it be used with specificity and care so that it does not serve as a piece of linguistic patching over the differences between our schools.

It was not the mandate of this committee to create a new statement of mission, a task which we recognize would require much more time, consultation, and the broadest possible constituency. We do recommend, however, that an appropriate body be chartered to produce a

new statement since the 125+ report, now over a decade old, is inadequate in a number of respects, especially in regard to its justification and description of programs, and its lack of specificity regarding the character of students and faculty. Viewed against other mission statements, the whole tone of the document is uninspiring. New goals will have to be developed from any redrafting. We suggest that to reach a new unified statement of mission, each faculty and division (including administration) be asked to prepare brief statements of vision and purpose along the lines of the mission and vision statement now in development in the School of Engineering. (The committee notes that the draft possesses a certain boilerplate quality in its use of language). Given the different concerns and programs of the schools, the varying perspectives of trustees, alumni, and students it is necessary to work toward a shared mission rather than create one by administrative fiat. In the interim it is vital that a broad statement of purpose be included in our public documents.

In conclusion, the committee notes that all schools like to think of themselves as dedicated to "excellence." We have identified the following six points that, when combined, offer a compelling set of distinctive commitments to excellence at The Cooper Union and which may form a basis for a revived statement of mission:

- 1. Student admission solely on the basis of academic merit, not financial status.
- 2. A policy of offering a full scholarship throughout all of the student's tenure.
- A diverse body of students committed to approaching each other on the same basis as they
  were admitted as equals.
- The most highly ranked faculty dedicated to undergraduate teaching in all years of the program.
- 5. A high faculty/student ratio that engenders close student advising and mentoring.
- 6. An intensive training in the disciplines of art, architecture, and engineering committed to a critical perspective on the professions themselves.

#### Recommendations

- Creation of a revived statement of mission, drafted by a body of wide representation, with
  goals and objectives that will focus on the work of the new capital campaign. The
  committee suggests that the mission address especially the ongoing commitment to a full
  scholarship policy and the desired character and qualities of the students and faculty.
- Immediate preparation of an interim statement of mission to be included in the catalog and other public documents.
- Review and longer-term support of public programming.
- Further efforts at social integration, including adjustments in campus-wide schedules.
- A coherent policy and planning procedure regarding technology.