The Irwin S. Chanin School of Architecture
THE IRWIN S. CHANIN SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE has a long and well-known tradition of asking students to engage with both abstract and technical questions that connect the built environment to a sense of civic responsibility:

How do you design effective public space? What is the role of a monument? How does architecture relate to its site and the larger community? How do materials perform, and can they be deployed in sustainable ways?

At the same time, students, who work together in one large studio both on and offline regardless of the year of study, are trained in the essential skills of drawing, model-making, and design development while learning analytical and critical uses of digital technologies. More and more, architecture also draws upon an expanding set of disciplines—from biology to computational sciences to interactive technologies—all of which have helped architects re-envision their way of working. A Cooper architectural education motivates students to explore these different perspectives as a basis for expanding their design vocabularies.

Through a five-year, studio-based curriculum, students investigate the role of the architect and the societal and environmental implications of their work, taking cumulative courses in design, structures, building systems, environmental technologies, history and theory, representation, construction management, and the multiple forms of contemporary practice. The goal of Cooper’s architecture faculty, made up of esteemed practitioners and theorists, is to convey to students that designing and building are not just the endpoint of a set of ideas, but can often themselves prompt constructive debate and critical discourse.

Together with core and elective studies in humanities and social sciences, the architecture curriculum culminates in students’ self-defined thesis projects. Humanities and social science-based minors are also available to architecture students who are in good academic standing.
A UNIQUE ENVIRONMENT FOR MAKING

All first- through fourth-year and graduate architecture students are provided full-sized individual workspaces within a single 8,000-square-foot open studio, while fifth-year thesis students work in smaller, adjacent spaces. This shared and open design studio layout promotes the kind of creative dialogue and interactions between students, classes, and faculty that are essential to Cooper’s approach to learning.

Another unique feature of Cooper is the all-college Shop, where architecture students have access to equipment for a wide range of three-dimensional works at all scales. The Shop, which is staffed by professional technical assistants, supports construction and fabrication in wood, metal, plastics, plaster, and clay, and includes welding equipment and a bronze casting foundry.

The Cooper Union was also recently awarded a $2 million grant from the IDC Foundation to create a new multidisciplinary fabrication studio called the Art, Architecture, Construction, and Engineering (AACE) Lab. Once completed, the AACE Lab will offer facilities for students from all professional schools to collaborate on projects involving state-of-the-art “making” technologies, from 3-D printers to robotic arms to virtual reality.
For more than a century and a half, The Cooper Union community has hosted its annual End of Year Show, a tradition that completely transforms classrooms, labs, studios, and galleries all across campus, showcasing student work from the three schools—architecture, art, and engineering. The show not only gives students a chance to share the culmination of their experiences from the academic year but invites the general public to see the innovative and critically engaged work for which Cooper students are known.

This year the EOYS went virtual and is open to visitors until the end of the year.
Adaptive Hybrid Learning

During the spring of 2020, as the entire globe experienced a shutdown resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, The Cooper Union had to recalibrate its teaching methodologies, platforms of learning, and engagement with the virtual world, not only to adapt itself in these unprecedented conditions but also to catalyze new possibilities in the ways that we work together.

What we discovered was that we required no fidelity towards a single digital platform, but instead an adaptability and flexibility towards multiple platforms, while at the same time allowing for the communicative and representational dexterities that are the hallmark of Cooper Union culture.

In the initial hours of the pandemic, we had thought it to be the end of our lectures, exhibitions, and classroom sessions. Instead, it offered us an entirely new way of approaching these venues and absorbing new audiences—expanded voices from around the world—and more ways for students to collaborate in ways that physical space never allowed.

We have also learned that there are many aspects of in-person education that cannot be supported solely with online interactions. Looking forward, our new hybrid model of learning allows for a critical engagement of online collaborations in tandem with fabrication-based projects, drawing on the many benefits of Cooper’s workshops and labs to leverage creativity within an expanded field.

—Dean Nader Tehrani

Faculty, students, and staff collaborated to bring the 2020 Architecture End of Year Show online. Using Unreal Engine gaming technology to visualize and simulate the Foundation Building, the exhibition allowed visitors to traverse the building’s spaces and explore student work in a digital environment. It included work from across all five years of undergraduate design studios, from first-year foundational Architectonics through Thesis, as well as work from the Master of Science in Architecture program, seminars, and other courses. The exhibition can be viewed online until the end of the year.
As part of the Structures I course, architecture students learn how to work with the particular properties of different building materials. Two recent projects that came out of this course challenged students to design and fabricate public installations. The first project, IBEJI, was a collaboration with dieFirma, an art exhibition gallery in the Cooper Square area dedicated to providing a space for the local community to engage with thinkers and makers. The second project, Manifold/Corps et Cadre, was an installation for the 14th Festival des Architectures Vives (FAV), an annual architecture festival that takes place in Montpellier, France.
A highly lauded exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) entitled *Toward a Concrete Utopia: Architecture in Yugoslavia, 1948–1980* included five highly detailed, exquisitely executed architectural models conceived and fabricated by students of The Irwin S. Chanin School of Architecture. Students studied the history of Yugoslavian modernism and analyzed the buildings’ structures to replicate their designs in scale while gaining experience working with a client and designing for a museum audience.
The Architecture Archive records the history of the School of Architecture’s pedagogy by documenting student work, providing students with resources that augment and enhance their architectural education, and producing informative exhibitions and publications on architecture and its related disciplines. The Archive is responsible for the coordination, design, curation, and installation of all major exhibitions presented by the School of Architecture in the Arthur A. Houghton Jr. Gallery, the 41 Cooper Gallery, as well as exhibitions presented in the third floor hallway—a main thoroughfare of the School.

Work study and part-time students are essential to the Archive’s daily activities. Their contributions include handling archival materials, documenting student work, and scanning materials for exhibitions and publications. Students also assist with installations in the galleries and the third floor hallway.
Opposite page and above
Nivola in New York | Figure in Field,

Right
John Hejduk—Jan Palach Memorial,
The Cooper Union, 2017
AFFORDING COOPER

As an all-honors college, every admitted student receives a half-tuition scholarship valued at $22,275 per academic year. Applicants will automatically be considered for additional merit-based scholarships. To be considered for need-based financial aid, students must submit the FAFSA (002170).

APPLYING

The Irwin S. Chanin School of Architecture is a highly selective school that admits students based on their talent, potential, and ideas as demonstrated through the completion and submission of the Studio Test. The Studio Test consists of a number of visual and written projects to be completed in approximately 3–4 weeks and returned to The Cooper Union for review.

Undergraduate students apply to The Cooper Union by completing the Common Application and submitting the below items to admissions@cooper.edu. Graduate and Transfer students apply to The Cooper Union by completing our Slate application and submitting the below items to admissions@cooper.edu.

- Official high school transcript or GED certificate
- Official college transcript, if applicable
- Official TOEFL, IELTS, or DET scores, if applicable

Following the application deadline you will receive instructions to submit:
- Completed Studio Test
- Portfolio (Transfer applicants only)

Please note: First-year architecture applicants should not submit a portfolio; submitted portfolios will not be reviewed or returned. Transfer students seeking advanced standing in the studio sequence are required to submit a portfolio in order to be considered for admission.

APPLICATION DEADLINES FOR 2020/21

UNDERGRADUATE

Early Decision: Tuesday, December 1, 2020
Regular Decision: Tuesday, January 5, 2021

GRADUATE (Master of Science in Architecture)

Spring 2021: Tuesday, September 15, 2020; Fall 2021: Tuesday, January 5, 2021
The Student Residence Hall offers apartment-style housing for approximately 170 students during a typical year. Most apartments accommodate four students, comprised of two bedrooms with a shared bathroom and kitchen. The building is staffed by the residence hall director and eight resident assistants. There is a 24-hour security system, including guards, closed-circuit cameras, and alarms. Due to space limitations, Cooper Union is unable to guarantee housing, giving preference to first-year students. Assistance with off-campus housing is provided by the Office of Housing & Residential Education.
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