

## Communications Committee

### Principal Recommendations

The aim of this report is to outline a list of twelve recommendations which, if implemented, would enhance the internal and external communications of The Albert Nerken School of Engineering at The Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art. These recommendations address the issues associated with the three areas of the Communications Ad Hoc Committee's charge: Public Relations and Media, Internal Communications, and Web Presence/Dynamic Websites. We recommend:

#### *Public Relations and Media*

1. Creation of a new electronic newsletter for the engineering school which is distributed to a general (non-technical) audience on a weekly to monthly basis. The content of this newsletter should be collected, condensed, and added to a more extensive report or prospectus of events in the engineering school, which should be published annually / semesterly
2. Development of a "hallmark theme" for the school of engineering, i.e. a concise (explainable in 20 seconds / one slide) representation of the spirit of the school of engineering as the faculty see it
3. Organization of yearly presentations by individual faculty to prospective students which educate them about The Cooper Union, the engineering school, and our scholarly/educational work
4. Advertisement and dissemination of the faculty's scholarly and educational work in various forms of media through the Office of Public Affairs

#### *Internal Communications*

5. Creation and regular maintenance of internal, private websites for engineering faculty meeting minutes, election results, committee memberships and minutes, and other official business of the engineering faculty
6. Election of faculty liaisons to: The Alumni Association, The Board of Trustees, the staff, The Engineering Student Council, and the other faculties at The Cooper Union
7. Organization of monthly presentations by individual faculty for the students, administration, trustees, staff, and the general public
8. Organization of regular "coffee hours" and faculty gatherings to encourage faculty and faculty/student communication

### *Web Presence / Dynamic Websites*

9. Instructing and training the engineering faculty on the five areas of our current web presence (cooper.edu, engfac.cooper.edu, faculty.cooper.edu, web access to Datatel, and moodle.cooper.edu)
10. Development of a well-maintained social media presence for engineering school
11. Designation of a formal pathway for updating the main cooper.edu site with content about the engineering school and continued (semesterly) maintenance of the faculty web pages on engfac.cooper.edu
12. Ensuring that our communications infrastructure is sufficiently robust to be functional in an emergency situation

We feel that the above twelve recommendations will ensure the continued academic excellence of the engineering school and help strengthen our financial stability by making the school more visible to the public, alumni, and other potential donors.

## Current State - Public Relations and Media

The Cooper Union is not well-known, even in New York City. This opinion is supported by the survey data in the Maguire report and is an opinion held by the engineering faculty as a whole. This lack of knowledge about our institution and the valuable contributions we make to the city and our global society carries over to the engineering school as well. We believe that those people who are informed about The Cooper Union think very highly of it, with good reason.

We have performed a survey of the engineering faculty to assess their opinions and needs for communication; we are somewhat dissatisfied with the current state of general public awareness of the institution (2.1 out of 5 possible in our survey). This is in stark contrast to our belief that we provide a world-class education for our students (4.5 out of 5 possible).

We believe that this lack of information flow is the result of many things, some of which are outlined below: lack of a school newsletter, lack of a common message for the school, limited formal interaction with potential students/parents, and limited interaction with the office of public affairs.

### *Engineering Newsletter*

We no longer have a semesterly / annual engineering school newsletter and have never had a weekly/daily newsletter with information about current events and happenings in the school. We used to have a biannual engineering newsletter ("Clock Works", organized and edited by Susan Dorsey), but we haven't published it since 2008. As a faculty, we somewhat agree that the school should have a newsletter (4.0 out of 5).

The Art and Architecture schools at Cooper have a staff member creating a weekly newsletter for their schools; the engineering school currently does not. These newsletters contain pictures, graphics, and descriptions of current events and take some time and labor to construct.

### *Networking and Raising Awareness of the School*

As an engineering faculty, we network with business leaders at conferences and other public events; we interact with alumni personally through E-mail and social media, through events on campus, and through external societies; we also have been working with the development office to increase the awareness among donors of current events and needs in the engineering school. All this informal interaction begs for a catchy message about the institution – a concise way for faculty to describe the school and make it more memorable to our constituencies.

### *Interactions with Potential Students and Parents*

We as an engineering faculty interact with potential students in some formal ways, such as on-campus open houses and outreach events at local schools, but this interaction is not formalized. We are in the process of re-electing members for our admissions committee in an effort to increase communication with the admissions office to reach out to prospective students, but that avenue of formal communication had been poor during the last presidential administration. As a faculty, we are somewhat dissatisfied with the methods through which potential students receive information about the school of engineering (2.2 out of 5 possible). Some of that dissatisfaction comes from lack of information about how the school reaches out to students in formal ways.

#### *Interactions with the Media and the Public Affairs Office*

We do not have a media policy for faculty at Cooper which would formally guide faculty as to the process for their interactions with external media. We used to have a person in charge of community relations and working with the local community to spread information about The Cooper Union, but we no longer have that. It has been suggested that one of the primary reasons that the engineering school is not well-known or well-represented in the public is because the person who is responsible for media relations for the school has not been kept informed about what we do; if we want Cooper Engineering to be well-known, we need to have someone advertizing for us who knows what we do and can explain it to multiple levels of audience.

#### Path to Improvement - Public Relations and Media

##### *Our Audience*

Our public relations presence should focus on the following primary groups:

1. Potential students
2. Parents of potential students
3. High school teachers, staff, and administrators
4. Engineering alumni
5. The general public

##### *“Hallmark Theme”*

The Albert Nerken School of Engineering should have a “hallmark theme”. This theme should be used as a pitch to promote the school among our audience.

#### *Engineering School Interactions with Public Affairs*

We would like to have an engineering-specific or science-specific public relations / media person. This person needs to be able to effectively communicate what we do as an engineering school to multiple levels of audience, both internally and externally. We feel that the current poor level of awareness of Cooper Engineering in the outside world is a direct result of not having a public relations person who is

knowledgeable about science and engineering. We should designate a liaison from the engineering school to the office of public affairs in order to establish a regular flow of communication between those two entities. The engineering faculty somewhat agree with this statement according to our survey (4.0 out of 5).

We should publicize the research of faculty and students in the national and local media. Most major news organizations (e.g., New York Times, Wall Street Journal, national and local TV, etc.) have technology reporters who seek out and report on current trends and developments in technological innovations and their societal impacts. Cooper Union should develop and implement a strategy to enhance outreach to these entities. We could create a wiki / web form for posting story ideas by faculty which could be picked up by The Public Affairs Office.

### *Starting a New Engineering Newsletter*

A weekly/daily electronic newsletter can be very effective in reaching a large audience and could be sent to faculty, alumni, parents, and students as well as forwarded to others if there are school events which are of general interest. Receiving a newsletter makes our constituencies feel aware of what is going on at the school and can potentially get them to feel more a part of school life, creating a positive feeling towards the institution. A semesterly / annual newsletter could be composed regularly using desktop publishing software and used as a "prospectus" to: recruit students to come to the school, inform potential donors about the school, inform alumni and parents about current school events, and provide an introduction of what we do to potential collaborating institutions.

We should have multiple levels of communication on events in the engineering school, which may include a monthly newsletter, annual newsletter, faculty sites listing current and ongoing projects, and news items on the cooper.edu site. We should reach out to students and parents in an organized and effective way. We should advertise for the school via print ads, web ads, other media ads, etc. We should publicize how Cooper Union as an institution is contributing to the intellectual and professional life of New York City by educating future leaders in Engineering, Art, and Architecture.

### *Faculty Interactions with the Public*

We should reach out to alumni and ask them to help us spread our message to prospective students and parents. There is language in the CU/CUFCT contract about faculty views. We should also keep The Public Affairs Office informed about the faculty's activities. We should publicize the research of faculty and students to the local high school and middle school students in the Metropolitan area. This should include talks by faculty and students to high school audiences, and tours to our laboratories and other facilities.

We should institute a program of faculty lectures in the Great Hall or Rose Auditorium which are open to the public. These lectures should highlight how Cooper Union is fulfilling the mandate of its founder for educating the public in the complex technological issues confronting our society.

We used to be much more involved with ASEE and that was a source of a lot of our PR / contacts. Our budget for professional development and travel has been lower in recent years, which reduces our ability to interact with engineers in industry. One suggestion is to subsidize faculty membership in professional societies like ASEE in order to encourage faculty to spread information about Cooper.

#### Current State - Internal Communications

There are six primary, high-level entities that comprise Cooper Union: the Trustees, Administration, Faculty, Staff, Students, and Alumni, and some formal channels of communication exist between these groups. In particular, there is the recently-reconstituted Faculty-Student Senate, the periodic meeting between a few Engineering Faculty members (who are selected by the administration) and a small number of Trustees, and the agreement under which the Alumni Association sends a representative to attend Engineering Faculty meetings.

In addition, some long-standing, semi-formal lines of communications have been established. For example, various members of the Administration have traditionally been invited to Engineering Faculty meetings, and these guests have been asked to present information and/or respond to inquiries. Trustees occasionally attend Engineering Faculty meetings, but this usually occurs only during extraordinary events such as the recent Presidential Search. When the need arises, students have been invited to Faculty meetings, as well. In general, though, the majority of the communications between the various constituencies at Cooper Union tends to be either on an informal, ad hoc basis between individuals, or hierarchical in nature and of somewhat limited scope.

Attempts to improve communication have been made, though with varying degrees of success. The Institutional Liaison Group was established in 2007 in response to student requests for enhanced communication. Although the group met for a few semesters, it appears to have been disbanded. The Engineering Faculty has made formal efforts to send an elected representative to the Cooper Union Alumni Association/Council meetings, but to date this mechanism has not been adopted by the Alumni Association.

As a consequence of the somewhat minimal formal communication amongst the Cooper Union constituents, there is little understanding of the roles played by various members of the College's community. According to the results of a recent survey distributed by this Communications Committee, a substantial number of Engineering Faculty members are unaware of "who the other employees are at Cooper and what they do." There is a dearth of knowledge amongst the Engineering Faculty about the functions of many of the members of the Administration, Staff, and other Faculties, and the Engineering Faculty recognizes that many of its own activities, goals, and accomplishments are somewhat mysterious to those outside of the School of Engineering. This disconnect acts to the detriment of Cooper Union.

The Engineering Faculty would like to improve and enhance communication. To this end, a series of recommendations are being made to address and remedy the existing deficiencies.

#### Path to Improvement - Internal Communications

We are recommending that the faculty secretary create two websites. The first website could be public, and would list: committee memberships along with terms (which in turn indicate when new elections are necessary); the Chairperson of each committee; the representatives to each committee from other bodies within Cooper Union. The second website will be a private website only accessible by the Engineering faculty. This website will contain official documents maintained by the secretary including agendas and minutes. This suggestion first arose during conversations within our committee. We since learned that a website listing committee memberships used to be maintained, but was dropped many years ago. The current lack of such a website also relates to the general notion that people are unaware of what other people at Cooper Union do. The second website containing documents would allow us to use of modern technology to make important information readily available to the faculty. Currently, if faculty members want to access previous minutes or agendas, unless they themselves personally archived these documents when they were originally distributed, they need to contact the faculty secretary directly. We listed these two suggestions (related to each potential website) on the faculty survey, asking the Engineering faculty to rate the helpfulness of each idea; both suggestions scored an average rating of 4.0 out of 5.

We are recommending that the Engineering Faculty elect liaisons to each of the following groups: The Alumni Association, The Board of Trustees, the staff, The Engineering Student Council, and the other faculties at The Cooper Union. Of course, for each of these categories, it would require agreement from the other group to receive our elected representative. This is part of an effort to improve communications between the Engineering faculty and the other bodies at Cooper Union. In our survey, when asked to rate the level to which faculty members are aware of who other people at Cooper Union are and what they do, the average response was only 2.7 out of 5. Suggestions of elected faculty representatives to the Alumni meetings, Art faculty meetings, and Architecture meetings were specifically included in the survey; they received average scores of 4.24, 3.56, and 3.64 respectively. There therefore seems to be strong support for a representative to Alumni meetings, and reasonable support for the other two categories. Our committee ultimately decided that elected representatives to all of these constituencies would be good ideas to help enhance internal communications.

We are recommending the organization of monthly presentations by individual faculty for the students, administration, trustees, staff, and the general public. This was not evaluated in our survey, but since that time, the suggestion has come up at special full faculty meetings during which preliminary suggestions from each of the current ad-hoc committees were discussed. One recurring theme that arose was the lack of knowledge of faculty accomplishments. The engineering school at Cooper Union has a world-class faculty providing a world-class education. When asked to rate agreement with the notion that the engineering school provides a world-class education to its students, the average level of agreement was 4.5 out of 5. Yet, many faculty members have acknowledged anecdotes in which

someone has never heard of Cooper Union. In fact, on our faculty survey, when asked if the faculty members are satisfied with the current state of the general public awareness of The Cooper Union, the average response was 2.1 out of 5; this was the lowest score on the entire survey! Various recommendations in both of the other categories address this issue, e.g. newsletters and advertisements within the Public Relations and Media category, and faculty training and improved social media presence with the Web Presence / Dynamic Websites category all aim to improve the public and internal awareness of faculty accomplishments. This particular recommendation aims to make the constituents of Cooper Union, as well as the general public, aware of faculty accomplishments.

We recommend the organization of regular “coffee hours” and faculty gatherings to encourage faculty and faculty/student communication. Various faculty members have acknowledged low morale among faculty and students, largely stemming from past events that occurred before the current administration was in place, and this is one way of addressing that. Various suggestions in our faculty survey addressed this issue, and in general they received very positive feedback. When asked to rate the level of agreement with the statement that end-of-semester and end-of-year faculty parties are worth keeping, the average response was 4.4 out of 5. When further asked if these events are worth keeping even if faculty members need to personally contribute to their cost, the average response was still 4.0 out of 5. When asked if additional social events for faculty and student would be beneficial, the average response was 4.2 out of 5. In fact, in the free-text sections of our survey, allowing general comments, multiple faculty members suggested some sort of additional faculty gathering. The Acting Associate Dean recently instituted the first faculty coffee hour, and informal feedback from the event has been very positive. We recommend that these events continue and that we consider additional gatherings for faculty and students.

#### Current state - Web Presence / Dynamic Websites

There are five areas of our school web presence currently; we have a very limited presence elsewhere on the internet, such as through social media or other more formal publications. The faculty are somewhat dissatisfied with the current social media presence of the engineering school (2.3 out of 5 on our survey).

*The External Institutional Website: <http://cooper.edu>*

An important early initiative of President Bharucha was the implementation of the professionally-built website for The Cooper Union, *cooper.edu*. There was a prior website, also professionally-built during the last few years of the previous administration, and that system has been replaced by the current version. Over the years there have been problems with the keeping of the external site current. The recent addition of a professional electronic journalist should go a long way in solving these problems. The new system has a sophisticated Content Management System (CMS) to make the upkeep of the site easier.



We don't have a process in place for updating engineering-school-related content on the *cooper.edu* site. Related to that, we do not have anyone in the engineering school who is officially responsible for producing or maintaining engineering-specific content. We have a new managing editor, but we have not yet met with him to inform him about what we want to see about the engineering school on the main *cooper.edu* website. The web and our website are now the most current and most important method through which the public gets information about The Cooper Union. The President mentioned that information for the *cooper.edu* site should be filtered through the Deans. The Public Affairs Office is responsible for helping the faculty in the engineering school generate web content based on things they are working on. We have an editorial board at Cooper which is dealing with website content and that group will be meeting once a month. The Acting Associate Dean and the chair of this committee attended the first meeting of this group.

There is a campus events calendar, but the engineering school currently does not use it. Because we don't post there, no one looks to see what events are occurring. Our managing editor plans to improve the structure of that site.

*Engineering Faculty Pages:* <http://engfac.cooper.edu>

At the request of the Acting Dean of Engineering, a team of students built an easy-to-use CMS with the goal of enabling faculty to build their own websites, empowering them to update and add to the site with great ease. While this CMS is by no means as sophisticated as the previously mentioned system for our external site, it is very functional, and it produces web content that can be managed in a variety of ways. The Acting Dean has been urging the faculty to put information up on this site and we have had success.

We are in the process of creating and putting up content for the *engfac.cooper.edu* site. Our goal is to have each engineering faculty member represented on that site with content on their current work in order to display that work to the general public and to give other entities at Cooper easy access to information about what the engineering faculty are currently working on. The faculty somewhat agree that these new websites will improve our external web presence (4.5 out of 5) and that they will help faculty members be aware of each other's research (4.3 out of 5).

*Free-Form Faculty Pages:* <http://faculty.cooper.edu>

This is a full access web server where the users (faculty) can have a UNIX shell account and develop their content through a variety of standard web development tools. The server is a high end system, with a rich assortment of software. Using this system requires that the user learn additional programs and tools. It is not as easy to use as the *engfac.cooper.edu* website, but it can be a rich development environment. This site can be linked to *cooper.edu* and *engfac.cooper.edu*.

*Enterprise Administrative Data Management System*

This system is also known as Colleague by Datatel (aka Ellucian). This web system should be viewed as a tool to the faculty for assistance in doing their work as academic advisers. Each faculty member should have access to the WebAdvisor product where they can find their class lists, obtain information on their students, and manage their grades including the submission of their final grades to the Registrar. Other functions are available through the site as well. We endorse the improvement of the new Datatel / WebAdvisor system to mimic the functionality of the previous system (Agent.)

#### *Moodle Learning Management System (LMS)*

Moodle is the learning management system for the Cooper Union community. This software allows the faculty, if they so choose, to communicate with the students in a managed online setting. Moodle is a full-featured piece of software that has been in use for several years.

#### Path to Improvement - Web Presence / Dynamic Websites

##### *Providing Training to Faculty*

Almost all of the five areas of our web presence are quite new; the engineering faculty have not been provided with formal training on any of them. We recommend having the faculty be fully engaged in making use of all of these important systems; in order to facilitate that, the faculty must be formally trained in their proper use.

##### *Social Media Presence*

We have no official Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, FourSquare, etc. accounts as an engineering school. We are represented on social media by individuals, but not as a school. We recommend finding someone to create engineering accounts on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc. in order to disseminate news about the school on multiple channels. This could be a student, as long as they were trained and reliable.

##### *Updating Websites*

We recommend that the school continues to work with our managing editor to make the engineering page on *cooper.edu* more dynamic. When we identify persons who will access the *cooper.edu* CMS to update content for engineering, we will refer them to the department of information technology for technical assistance in this area.

The faculty should regularly update their websites using the new CMS system on *engfac.cooper.edu*. They should also make the Cooper webmaster aware of events and achievements that ought to be placed on the other Cooper websites. This will help us to improve our web presence to prospective students and strengthen the engineering school. We will develop policies and procedures for who will

appear on the website and what information they will provide as well as policies and procedures for acceptable web content.

### *Hardening of Infrastructure*

As demonstrated by Hurricane Sandy, we need to ensure that our communications infrastructure is sufficiently robust to be functional in an emergency situation. We recommend “hardening” the infrastructure for our important communication services for the safety and security of our community.