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Cooper Union Will Charge Tuition for Graduate Students

By RICHARD PÉREZ-PEÑA

After months of agonized debate about its 110-year-old tradition of free education, Cooper Union will begin charging graduate students next year while maintaining, at least for now, its no-tuition policy for undergraduates, the college's president said Tuesday.

Cooper Union, in the East Village, will also expand its graduate and other programs to generate more income as it searches for a way out of a deepening financial hole. Jamshed Bharucha, who became president last July, said in October that the institution had no choice but to consider making students pay, prompting a storm of protest from some students, alumni and faculty, who saw the idea as a violation of Cooper Union's core principles.

The plan announced on Tuesday stopped far short of broad-based tuition, which might have been the simplest and surest route to financial stability. It also fell short of meeting the fiscal target that Cooper Union set last fall. In an interview, Dr. Bharucha made it clear that the college may yet have to be more aggressive about raising revenue.

"This hybrid model is exciting because it gives us a chance to do new things and not just hunker down," Dr. Bharucha said. But, he added, "There are risks for this strategy, and there are those who worry if it will work."

Undergraduate students who begin college in September 2013 will not pay tuition during their four years at Cooper Union, Dr. Bharucha said, but so far, the institution has made no commitments for those who follow them. At least some students who begin gradu-

ate school that year will pay tuition, but how much remains to be decided.

Cooper Union will also start new programs as soon as 2013, like a master's degree program combining the school's strengths in technology and design, or online programs, to increase both enrollment and revenue. Dr. Bharucha acknowledged that the plan called for "a very accelerated time scale," adding that the college was already in discussions with the State Board of Regents, which must authorize any new programs.

Friends of Cooper Union, a group opposed to charging tuition, will hold a long-planned forum on Thursday to explore alternatives, and some of its leaders said they were taken aback that the college would proceed with its plan before hearing them out.

"There are a lot of good ideas that haven't had their audience," said Henry Chapman, a 2010 graduate in art who is one of the group's organizers. "What they've proposed goes against the school's identity. It's risky, and the fear is, in two or three years, they'll say, 'We tried this, it didn't work, and now we have to charge undergraduates.'"

But some Cooper Union alumni and

staff members hailed the idea of a graduate program melding art and engineering. "It's really an impressive vision," said the architect Daniel Libeskind, a 1970 graduate, adding, "We have a boom in technology that is changing the art world, changing architecture very dramatically."

Thomas Micchelli, chairman of the school's Faculty-Student Senate, agreed and expressed cautious approval for the administration's plan over all. But Mr. Micchelli, who served on a task force that helped draft the plan, added, "Whether it will solve the financial problems remains to be seen."

Cooper Union has about 1,000 undergraduate students in schools of architecture, art and engineering, and fewer than 100 in master's degree programs in architecture and engineering. It is routinely rated among the elite colleges in those fields, making its policy of giving every student a free education all the more remarkable. (Technically, the college has a tuition price of \$37,500 a year, but it gives each student a full scholarship to cover that cost.)

The tuition policy is part of a strongly liberal tradition. From its earliest days, Cooper Union accepted women

and minorities, and last fall, many of its students participated in the Occupy Wall Street protests.

The institution was founded in 1859 by Peter Cooper, a wealthy industrialist, primarily to provide a free education to working-class students. Cooper Union officials said the college had not charged any students in degree programs since 1902, a policy made possible by large gifts left by Cooper and others.

Last fall, Dr. Bharucha said that the college had to reduce its annual operating deficits by more than \$20 million by 2018.

The new plan "gets us a good distance toward this target," but not all the way, he said. And at a school that has already endured multiple rounds of budget cuts and a hiring freeze, the plan relies on still more cutting, including a 7 percent reduction of the operating budget in the coming academic year.

Cooper Union uses its \$600 million endowment to cover operating deficits. Its assets include the land under the Chrysler Building in Midtown, on which it collects \$7 million a year in rent (the amount is scheduled to rise to \$32.5 million in 2018). This year, the college has stepped up its alumni fundraising, an area where it had been relatively weak, and contributions have increased by almost one-third. Students have also organized a donation drive.

Dr. Bharucha said that the college also needed to be more aggressive about making money from its work in technology, which includes starting businesses and licensing patents, but that the efforts could take many years to pay off.



RICHARD PERRY/THE NEW YORK TIMES

"It gives us a chance to do new things and not just hunker down."

JAMSHED BHARUCHA

President of Cooper Union

Cooper Union to Charge

BY LISA FLEISHER
AND ALISON FOX

After considering charging undergraduate tuition for the first time in more than 100 years, Cooper Union will instead confront a budget crisis by charging students in an expanded graduate program and adding a raft of other revenue-producing courses, the school announced Tuesday.

A \$16.5 million annual budget deficit had threatened one of the prestigious school's most distinctive features: a free higher education in art, engineering or architecture. Students at the Greenwich Village institution had been on edge since news of the budget crisis emerged in October.

The school's trustees explored charging undergraduates. But in

an April 17 vote, they adopted an alternative plan.

Starting in 2013, the school expects to significantly expand its small graduate program, charge tuition for those students while creating online classes and adding more continuing-education courses.

"There is enormous untapped potential," said Cooper Union President Jamshed Bharucha, who took over the school in July. "Cooper Union has tremendous strengths and outstanding student bodies."

Mr. Bharucha said the school may still revisit the undergraduate tuition issue. He said he wanted to preserve the school's "extraordinary selectivity"—a 7% admissions rate.

Cooper Union hasn't yet decided how many more graduate students to enroll, how much to

charge or which degrees to offer. Currently, there are 60 graduate students, most of whom are in the engineering program. About 750 continuing education students pay by the class.

The school's economic troubles date to the early 1990s, when rent it received from the land it owns under the Chrysler Building decreased from \$13 million to \$11 million while school expenses increased.

It has operated at a deficit for more than a decade, according to school figures. Last fall, Mr. Bharucha proposed charging tuition, sparking protests from a student body that insisted the school stay true to founder Peter Cooper's vision of an education that was "free as air and water."

The roughly 1,000 undergraduate students aren't asked to cover the cost of general tuition,

which is estimated to be \$37,500 per student. They pay minimal fees, and students must pay for books and to live in dorms.

Graduate students interviewed at the school on Tuesday were unsettled by the news.

Taylor Knoblock, 24, said he enrolled in Cooper Union's chemical engineering graduate program because it was a free option when he couldn't find employment after receiving his undergraduate degree there. Mr. Knoblock said he believed the school was "being sneaky" by just charging for a master's degree, hoping to still market itself as a free institution.

Undergraduates said while they were happy not to pay tuition, they feared for future students. Aaron Graham, a 21-year-old junior, said charging tuition

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would change the school's dynamic and demographics. "It will destroy the ideology of the whole school," he said.

Annual tuition at top-tier schools can top \$40,000 a year.

Mr. Bharucha said he has received backing for the plan in recent discussions with faculty and alumni nationwide. "There is very strong, if silent, majority who are highly supportive of a plan that energizes the institution," he said.

The plan could involve hiring professors and leasing more space, but the school isn't in a position to buy additional buildings, he said. In 2006, the school took out a \$175 million loan to partially cover the cost of its new \$166 million building at 41 Cooper Square. Of that loan, \$23

million was used to pay off outstanding New York state dormitory bonds, while \$32 million was added to the endowment, which had been covering the annual deficit.

Mr. Bharucha's plan also calls for a cut of about \$4 million in annual expenses, including cuts to discretionary funding, such as special projects or grants. That effort will get the school about a quarter of the way into the black, he said.

The additional revenue-raising programs will cover the majority, but not all, of the remaining deficit, he said.

"Even if we were to have to consider other options, we will have very substantially reduced the goal through these other programs," he said. "It's doable. It's a viable strategy."

Cooper Union Alum Climbs Famed Statue in Tuition Protest

April 25, 2012 8:03pm



A man climbed the Peter Union statue, triggering a standoff with cops on April 25, 2012. (DNAinfo/Alan Neuhauser)

By Alan Neuhauser and Wil Cruz

EAST VILLAGE — A one-man protest against **Cooper Union's** decision to start charging graduate students tuition turned into a hour-long standoff with cops Wednesday when the dissenter scaled the Peter Cooper statue.

The protester — whom friends identified as Jesse Kreuzer, a recent graduate of Cooper Union — climbed the famed statue on East 7th Street and Cooper Square in defiance of **the school's decision to charge students for its graduate programs** next year.

"I'm doing this because I appreciate the education I got and what I got it for," said the protester, who moonwalked and made phone calls atop the statue.

Some 200 gawkers cheered on the man, who was carrying a sign that read: "No tuition, it's our mission!" Kreuzer began climbing the statue around 5:30 p.m. but "his sign kept falling," said Santiago Gomez, a junior at Baruch College who was walking by at the time.

"It takes a lot of b---s to get up there," Gomez added. "But they're going to raise tuition anyway."

"Students can't afford loans. We can protest, but the big guys already decided."

Cops initially tried to extend a ladder up to the protester, but it didn't reach. So they called for a bucket truck and eventually talked the man down from the statue at 6:45 p.m.

He was taken into custody, though it was not immediately clear if he had been charged.

The elite school announced Tuesday that it will begin charging graduate students tuition. It will not, however, charge undergraduate students to go to school.

"Weighing all the alternatives, I am convinced that some fee-based programs are necessary for Cooper Union's solvency, and that this framework gives us the most optimistic way forward," said Jamshed Bharucha, the university's president on the school's web site.

"Because we have a short runway to get these programs going, failing to act now will put the institution in peril."

Still, the so-called hybrid model still hurts students, protesters said.

"Cooper Union is free, but they're threatening to change that...It makes a huge difference in terms of debt," said Kanchan Richardson, a Cooper Union art major. "It affects people's lives. Education is invaluable and beyond a business model."



Cops tried to convince the protester to get down from the statue on April 25, 2012.



Students watched a man climb the statue at Cooper Union in protest of the student's decision to charge tuition for graduate students.



Students looked on as cops took the protester into custody on April 25, 2012.

Read more: <http://www.dnainfo.com/20120425/lower-east-side-east-village/cooper-union-alum-climbs-famed-statue-tuition-protest#ixzz1t9u0pBrk>