

The Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art  
The Irwin S. Chanin School of Architecture  
Anthony Vidler, Dean  
Elizabeth O'Donnell, Associate Dean  
Last Accreditation Visit: 10-14 April 2010

### **Brief Description of Changes to the program**

On 18 October 2011, Jamshed Bharucha was inaugurated as the twelfth president of The Cooper Union. During the past year, President Bharucha has been frank in his meetings with the Deans, faculties and students about the challenges facing The Cooper Union given the present difficult financial climate. The Institution's operating revenues have declined due to decreases in its endowment and flat giving to the Annual Fund, resulting in a substantial operating deficit for the previous fiscal year that is expected to continue this fiscal year.

During the Fall semester 2012, President Bharucha called for all members of The Cooper Union community to engage in a process of reinvention that would "place The Cooper Union on a sustainable financial path while at the same time advancing art and science well into the future". He convened an "Expense Reduction Task Force" and "Revenue Generating Task Force" in November 2011. Each task force was comprised of faculty, administrators, students and alumni from across the school. Each task force met weekly through the academic year, presenting findings and recommendations to the President which were then made public on The Cooper Union website. The Expense Reduction Task Force recommended an immediate reduction to The Cooper Union's operating budget of \$4,000,000.00, about 9%. The School of Architecture was charged with reducing its budget by 5.5% for the 2013 fiscal year. The School of Architecture accomplished this with minimal impact to its academic offerings, though monies available for support in areas such as student field trips, visiting lecturers and the student lecture series were reduced.

The President is continuing to work with the senior administration, the Deans, Associate Deans, the Faculty-Student Senate and student representatives in developing the specifics of a reinvention plan. The Deans have been charged with identifying sustainable revenue streams that will meet specific revenue targets within five years. The Faculty has been meeting through the Fall 2012 semester to develop a plan to present to the Board of Trustees in December.

We are very pleased that President Bharucha has placed The Cooper Union Institute for Sustainable Design, which has been directed by School of Architecture faculty member Kevin Bone for the past two years, under the administrative oversight of the School of Architecture. The Institute has organized significant lectures, symposia, exhibitions and other public programs during this time, often with the co-sponsorship of the School of Architecture; it has been a dynamic force in the school for broadening the conventional definition of "sustainability":

From the Institute's Mission Statement:

The Cooper Union Institute for Sustainable Design seeks to provide the greater Cooper Union community—architects, engineers and artists—with the cross-disciplinary knowledge and skills that are necessary to create a sustainable society. We define a “sustainable society” as one that prospers because its economy, social practices, physical infrastructure and engineering systems all work in harmony with the ecological dynamics and resource limitations of the earth.

The Institute will be self-supporting, through grants and sponsorships.

Dean Anthony Vidler was approved for a sabbatical leave for part of the 2012-2013 academic year. He will be away from the school from 1 August 2012 until 30 April 2013, returning to participate in final reviews at the end of Spring term and Commencement. He will retain the title Dean during his sabbatical; Associate Dean Elizabeth O'Donnell will assume responsibility for the daily operations of the school, including chairing faculty meetings, during Dean Vidler's absence.

## **Response to Section 1.4 Conditions Not Met**

Condition 8, Physical Resources

*“Despite significant improvements since the 2004 visit, the full scope of necessary improvements continues to be scheduled, but not completed. ... faculty office space remains an on-going concern.” VTR 10-14 April 2010*

Given the immediate financial challenges facing the college, the Board of Trustees has asked all schools to put non-essential capital projects on hold for the 2013 fiscal year.

Currently, all full-time faculty in the School of Architecture have private office space. Although the rooms are small (approximately 88 sq. ft.), and do not have natural light, they are located close to the studios and therefore are readily available for meetings with students. In addition, there are three shared but dedicated offices (two in the new academic building at 41 Cooper Square) that provide 5 spaces for research and writing by proportional time faculty and three small offices on the third floor for shared use by approximately 30 other proportional and adjunct faculty.

## **Response to Section 1.5 Causes of Concern**

Condition 13.6 Fundamental Skills

*“While the team determined that sufficient evidence is present to deem this condition met, they find cause for concern that [an engagement of non-urban sites] is not as thoroughly represented in the evidence as it might be.” VTR 10-14 April 2010*

The fourth year fall design studio is intended to address issues of landscape, climate, geography, and ecology in suburban, ex-urban, rural and/or urban sites. This year, the semester long project for the Design IV fall semester studio is "Nature of Urbanity: A Sense of Place, a Sense of Time, a Course of Action." The faculty team is comprised of Professor Sean Sculley, who teaches the "Landscape Architecture" seminar at the School of Architecture, and who is engaged in ongoing research on the history of Landscape Architecture and Public Policy pertaining to the use and protection of open space; Susannah Drake, who is principal of dlandstudio pllc, an award winning multi-disciplinary firm, and holds graduate professional degrees in architecture and landscape architecture; and Lydia Xynogala, a recent graduate from the Princeton School of Architecture.

The studio faculty brings significant experience in landscape design and all its concomitant concerns into the examination of two *low density waterfront* sites, atypical of the conventional high-density Manhattan context:

"At a time when the impacts of climate change necessitate a radical rethinking of the role of landscape ecology and infrastructure within the city, the qualities of human experience cannot be lost. ...The studio is an introduction to the relationship between urban design and the larger scale landscape systems that shaped [cities]."

Students are studying the qualities of a landscape through analytic models and drawings, qualities such as "how water both absorbs and reflects light, how plant growth transforms a space, how a tectonic shift exposes and conceals, the tension between the conditions of inert and dynamic", etc. Students will propose interventions on the sites, considering current predictions for storm impacts, to effect immediate, midterm, and long term change.

The studio took on a particular relevance and urgency when the New York waterfront areas were devastated by the impact of the coastal storm surge resulting from Tropical Storm Sandy, resulting in the loss of power to all of lower Manhattan for four days and the closing of The Cooper Union for a week.

Many students also use the Thesis year as an opportunity to closely study and propose designs for ex-urban and rural sites. Thesis projects presented in Spring 2012 included proposals for the following non-urban sites:

- Yeon Pyeong Island, South Korea
- The route of the Overland Telegraph Line constructed in 1872 across Australia's vast desert interior.
- The territory above the Ogallala Aquifer in the Great Plains of the United States
- An unbroken route from Vancouver, British Columbia to Halifax, Nova Scotia, traversed by bicycle, and marked at 50 km intervals.
- A site in the region of the southwestern United States known as the "Four Corners".