

Position and Candidate Specification



Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art

President

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COOPER UNION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF SCIENCE AND ART

The Cooper Union is a privately funded college in Manhattan's East Village that thrives on its founder's vision.

Vision

The Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art is dedicated to Peter Cooper's commitment to diversity and his founding vision that fair access to an inspiring free education and forums for courageous public discourse foster a just and thriving world.

The Cooper Union was a pioneer in providing non-discriminatory education to men and women of all classes, regardless of races, religions, and ethnicities. The school offers a challenging and academically rigorous course of study across its Irwin S. Chanin School of Architecture, School of Art, Albert Nerken School of Engineering, and its Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, serving nearly 1,000 students.

- **The Irwin S. Chanin School of Architecture:** The architecture school emphasizes design excellence and environmental sustainability. Students engage in intensive studio work, theory, and practical projects that enhance their understanding of the built environment.
- **School of Art:** The School of Art educates artists as creative practitioners and engaged citizens, fostering interdisciplinary exploration and an intellectual grounding in studio work, theory, and humanities. Students are encouraged to challenge cultural norms, expand their practices across disciplines, and engage with the urban and public spheres.
- **The Albert Nerken School of Engineering:** Cooper's engineering school offers specializations in chemical, civil, electrical, and mechanical engineering. The curriculum combines theoretical foundations with practical applications through projects and labs.
- **Humanities and Social Sciences:** The program offers a four-semester core curriculum in humanities and social sciences and provides the ethical, social, and humanistic framework crucial to personal development, professional excellence, and engaged citizenship. Through their work in HSS disciplines, students gain a deeper awareness of the world in which they must live and act.

Each school provides specialized programs and undergraduate degrees, and all students participate in social sciences and humanities courses taught by distinguished faculty members. Students engage in extensive hands-on projects, collaborative work, and design-build initiatives. This approach prepares them for real-world challenges and fosters a deep understanding of their disciplines. Additionally, the schools of Architecture and Engineering offer postgraduate advanced degrees. A new Computer Science (CS) Program is being launched in the School of Engineering, with its inaugural class beginning in September 2025.

A leader since the earliest days of the American system of continuing education, Cooper Union also provides a wide range of continuing education and professional certification programs, engaging the broader New York community.

THE COOPER UNION'S HISTORY

The Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art, established in 1859, is among the nation's oldest and most distinguished institutions of higher education. The college's founder, Peter Cooper, was an inventor, industrialist, and philanthropist.

Peter Cooper wanted his school to play a role in the political and cultural life of his city and country. The means he chose was the establishment of the Great Hall in the Foundation Building, the school's first edifice and continuing anchor. It seats 900 people at full capacity and was, at the time, the largest secular meeting room in New York. Soon after it was opened, it made history when Abraham Lincoln, an unannounced candidate for president of the United States, and a virtual unknown in New York, was invited to speak there. It propelled him to the presidency.

Since then, the Great Hall has welcomed abolitionist Frederick Douglass, Indigenous rights advocate Chief Red Cloud, and women's suffrage champions Susan B. Anthony and Victoria Woodhull. The Great Hall was the venue of choice for speeches by Samuel Gompers, Clara Lemlich, and the earliest workers' rights campaigns, the birthplace of the NAACP and the American Red Cross, and a stage for speeches by numerous presidents and presidential aspirants, including Presidents Grant, Cleveland, Taft, Theodore Roosevelt, Wilson, Carter, Clinton, and Obama.

Following financial challenges, the college ended its free tuition policy for undergraduates in 2013, offering need-based tuition remission to incoming undergraduates on a sliding scale. Throughout 2013, 2014, and 2015, the Committee to Save Cooper Union (CSCU) — a coalition of former and current students, alumni, and faculty — campaigned to reverse this decision, urging the president and the board of trustees to return Cooper Union to "its tuition-free and merit-based mission, ensure the school's fiscal recovery, and establish better governance structures."

On September 1, 2015, the school and the CSCU announced a lawsuit against the school's administration had been resolved in the form of a consent decree signed by Cooper Union, then-New York State's Attorney General Eric Schneiderman, and the CSCU. The decree includes provisions for returning to a sustainable, tuition-free policy, increased board transparency, additional student, faculty, and alumni trustees, an independent financial monitor appointed by the Attorney General, and a search committee to identify the next full-term president.

In 2018, The Cooper Union Board of Trustees approved a 10-year Plan to Return to Full-Tuition Scholarships. It was a historic and ambitious moment. To provide full-tuition scholarships for all undergraduate students, the Plan called for \$250 million of new investments in Cooper Union. Details of the Plan called for the school to generate the savings, expense reductions, fundraising, and other revenue increases necessary to sustainably provide full-tuition scholarships for every Cooper Union undergraduate student. The Plan linked returning to full-tuition scholarships with building long-term financial health for the institution and providing for ongoing investment in Cooper Union's academic programs and facilities.

This year marks the Plan's midway point and the end of the consent decree. Overwhelming progress has been made. To date, more than \$114 million in new funds has been raised.

The Cooper Union is:

- Achieving steady financial gains, including a substantial reserve fund;
- Meeting all guardrails of the Plan to return to 100% full-tuition scholarships;
- Investing in academic programs;
- Making capital improvements to its facilities;
- Holding tuition flat for the sixth consecutive year; and,
- Increasing scholarship levels according to the Plan.

On average, 80% of tuition costs are covered for undergraduates, and nearly 50% of students attend Cooper Union tuition-free.

This fall, the school announced that for each of the next four years, all graduating seniors will attend tuition-free. The development to cover all tuition for seniors is a major milestone and accelerates Cooper Union's progress toward successfully completing its Plan to Return to Full-Tuition Scholarships for all undergraduates by the 2028-29 academic year.

KEY COOPER UNION FACTS

Student, Alumni, and Faculty Achievement

- 40 Fulbright Scholars since 2001
- 13 National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowships since 2004
- 40 percent of graduates continue to pursue top-ranked graduate programs
- 3 National Medal of Art Recipients

Other Alumni Awards

- 15 Rome Prizes
- 26 Guggenheim Fellowships
- 3 MacArthur Fellowships: Whitfield Lovell A'83, Elizabeth Diller AR'79, Ricardo M. Scofidio AR'55
- 1 Nobel Prize in Physics: Russell A. Hulse Ph'70
- 1 Pritzker Architecture Prize: Shigeru Ban A'84
- 9 Chrysler Design Awards

FINANCIAL AND OPERATIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

\$89 mm Operating Budget (FY 2023)

\$1.2 bn of Assets

\$ 1.0 bn in Investments

\$200 mm in Long-Term Debt

Major Revenue Streams as a percentage of Total Revenues and Support:

- Investment returns utilized for operations: 68.8%
- Student revenues, net: 15.8%
- Contributions: 12.6%
- Government grants, contracts and appropriations: 0.4%
- Rental income: 1.8%
- Other revenue: 0.6%

The Cooper Union seeks an individual to provide institutional leadership for a multifaceted educational and civic institution with a rich legacy, strong reputation, and significant potential to grow its impact in academia and society. This leader will continue to advance a transformational plan focused on enhancing the institution's distinct offerings, including a deep commitment to affordability, a rich student experience, and leading-edge academic programs. The president will need to consider the broader context of higher education and synthesize input from faculty, students, and staff to develop strategic plans to ensure Cooper Union adapts effectively to a dynamic landscape.

The president is responsible for overseeing the effective execution of academic and administrative functions by ensuring appropriate allocation of resources, supporting leaders in overcoming challenges, and maintaining a culture of accountability to commitments. The president, in consultation with the board and the vice president of academic affairs, provides final approval of academic and administrative matters, including the development of new academic programs, tenure and promotion recommendations, and sabbatical requests.

In addition, the president oversees financial matters and collaborates with the board on resource development. The president also manages external relations, engaging with government entities, alumni, donors, the media, and other key stakeholders. The president of Cooper Union should be mindful of global trends, global employment demands, and the global economy, while positioned to play a significant role in shaping the political, cultural, educational, and philanthropic landscape of New York City, New York State, and the nation.

KEY RELATIONSHIPS

Reports to Board of Trustees

Direct reports Vice President, Academic Affairs
Vice President, Finance, Chief Financial Officer
Vice President, Administration
Dean of Students (Acting)
Vice President, Enrollment
Vice President, Development and Alumni Affairs
Vice President, Communications (open)
Interim Chief of Staff

President's Cabinet also includes:
Dean, Albert Nerken School of Engineering
Dean, School of Art
Acting Dean, the Irwin S. Chanin School of Architecture
Acting Dean, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
Vice President, Institutional Effectiveness

Other key relationships City of New York
State of New York
Lease Holder of the Chrysler Building

KEY PRIORITIES

- In partnership with the Board of Trustees, faculty, and staff, sustain and advance progress against the 10-year Plan for the Return to Full-Tuition Scholarships.
- Maintain the financial discipline that has enabled Cooper Union's progress to date.
- Steward Cooper Union's assets, including the Chrysler Building, to ensure they support the long-term objectives of the institution.
- Identify and pursue opportunities to streamline and modernize institutional functions.
- Develop a plan to increase donor support among alumni, major philanthropists, foundations, and corporations.
- Maintain the well-known rigor of the academic programs while enabling innovation in learning, including the advancement of interdisciplinary study.
- Lead development of pedagogical and curricular elements that enable students to effectively understand and discuss important social and geopolitical issues.
- Expand and maintain practices for sustaining a sense of community among students, faculty, staff, and alumni.
- Identify innovative ways of improving student engagement and student life.
- Deepen and reimagine the legacy of civic orientation in the academic and institutional programs to increase Cooper Union's contribution to New York City and beyond.
- Continue to grow the prominence of the Great Hall as a platform for civic discourse, social commentary, and cultural expression.
- Oversee the institution's application for re-accreditation by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education.

The Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art seeks an individual who is experienced, intelligent, hard-working, compassionate, and possesses the highest commitment to academic and scholarly standards, accompanied by the financial and operational acumen to advance the institution. Compelling candidates will be able to inspire faculty, staff, students, and alumni with a sense of pride and purpose. The new president will be an innovative leader who is able to grow and build high-quality programs and provide a dedicated and established commitment to both undergraduate and graduate education with a commitment to diversity and inclusion. Highly qualified candidates will have significant professional experience, demonstrating a proven track record of distinguished accomplishments and effective leadership, including fundraising and external relations.

IDEAL EXPERIENCE

Mission-Driven

Has demonstrated a deep passion for educational/opportunity access, practice-based scholarship/research, and engaged civic discourse.

Organizational Leadership

Has provided executive leadership at a similar scale, guiding institutions through rebuilds and acceleration.

Proven Fundraiser

Has experience raising significant financial support from individuals, corporations, institutional donors, and through government funding.

Academic/Organizational Leadership

Has experience leading and encouraging academic excellence in programs, pedagogy, interdisciplinary teaching and research, or similar experience leading complex organizations in growth, interdisciplinary collaboration, and overall excellence.

External and Community Engagement

Has experience serving as the spokesperson and key representative for organizations attuned to the interests of divergent internal and external stakeholders.

CRITICAL LEADERSHIP CAPABILITIES

Leading People

- Maintains a culture of continuous improvement and accountability.
- Gives ownership to the entire team to deliver on a strategic objective.
- Passes leadership responsibilities down the organization, ensuring alignment with the overall strategy and/or direction.
- Sets up practices to reinforce independent and open communication among team members.
- Gives teams broader visibility inside the organization, including publicly recognizing accomplishments.
- Facilitates team members' contribution and partnership across schools and departments.

Collaborating and Influencing

- Builds partnerships across the school to address organization-wide challenges or opportunities.
- Creates an environment of shared values where collaboration is expected at all levels.
- Systematically builds support at multiple levels and across groups to achieve alignment, acknowledging differences in interests.

Acting Strategically

- Creates or evolves a longer-term strategy for the institution that connects seemingly unrelated events or information.
- Creates a clear and coherent strategy that anticipates the future direction of higher education, competition and/or the broader environment, at least five years ahead.
- Provides new direction for the institution, leading to actionable changes across multiple operations or functions.
- Engages in scenario planning that incorporates new information or disruptive thinking to gain significant advantage or impact.

OTHER PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS

- Intellectual curiosity and humility.
- Dedication to transparency.
- Strong listening and oratory skills.
- A passion for the opportunities offered by New York City.

COMPENSATION

\$600,000-\$800,000 based on skills, experience, abilities, and organizational needs.

In addition to the annual salary, Cooper Union offers a strong benefits package.

THE SEARCH PROCESS

The Cooper Union has retained Spencer Stuart to support this search. If you wish to submit your own application materials or nominate someone to serve as the next President, please send an email with supporting materials to CUPresident@SpencerStuart.com.

The Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art is an Equal Opportunity Employer.