



THE PLAN AT FIVE YEARS: RETURNING TO FULL-TUITION SCHOLARSHIPS

THE COOPER UNION
FOR THE ADVANCEMENT
OF SCIENCE AND ART

JUNE 2024

A MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES AND PRESIDENT

On behalf of the Board of Trustees, the members of the Free Education Committee (FEC), and The Cooper Union’s (“Cooper’s”) leadership team, we are pleased to present this important update on The Plan to Return to Full-Tuition Scholarships (“Plan”).

The Board of Trustees’ (“Board’s”) landmark decision in **March 2018** to adopt the Plan marked a historic turning point for Cooper. With this decision, the Board declared its unequivocal commitment to return to a full-tuition scholarship model for all undergraduate students. Bold and ambitious, the Plan would require a level of fiscal discipline and fundraising not seen before at The Cooper Union. It would also need the support of The Cooper Union’s full community—a community that had just come through several highly contentious years following the 2013 decision to charge tuition for the first time in Cooper’s history.

With the first half of the Plan complete, we are pleased to report a genuine transformation in the making. We met the Plan’s cumulative financial targets over the first five years and made overwhelmingly positive progress on multiple fronts, including:

- **Achieving steady financial gains, despite the challenges of the pandemic and the economic uncertainties that followed.**
- **Investing in and advancing our academic programs.**
- **Increasing scholarship levels according to the Plan.**
- **Making capital improvements to our facilities, including the opening of new, interdisciplinary student spaces and critical maintenance on our historic campus buildings.**

Additionally, in both the formative year of the Plan and in the years since its adoption, important work was done to heal what was a fractured Cooper community due to the tuition decision. This work has had a tangible, positive impact, building productive working relationships and overall community support.

Financial Progress Fiscal Years 2018-2023

In a relatively short period of time, the critical work toward achieving the Plan enabled us to:

- **Hold undergraduate tuition flat** for five consecutive years—0% tuition increases.
- **Retain at least a 50% tuition scholarship level** for every undergraduate student.
- **Increase scholarship levels every year** since FY 2020 so that by FY 2023, on average, over 80% of tuition costs were covered for undergraduates and nearly 50% of students attended The Cooper Union tuition-free.
- **Achieve Plan priorities** for five consecutive years and be on pace for a sixth consecutive year; notably, the surplus achieved in FY 2018 marked the end of decades-long operating deficits.

Our community of donors, both individuals and institutions, has grown significantly and shares our optimism and commitment to restoring full-tuition scholarships and investing in The Cooper Union’s academic programs and facilities.

Key financial highlights FY 2018–23 include:

- **New and significant fundraising milestones** reached with a total of \$96 million raised since the Plan’s inception and through FY 2023. (Momentum continued through FY 2024 with fundraising projected to increase this number to nearly \$113 million.)
- **A 103% increase in contributions** raised from individuals from FY 2018–23.
- **A series of highly successful challenge grants**, each completed ahead of schedule and contributing, collectively, nearly \$20 million in new revenue.
- **A 24% increase in giving by institutional partners**, including several new donors. These investments helped bring important projects to life, including new interdisciplinary student learning and fabrication spaces and a comprehensive digital archive preserving and making public decades of historic Great Hall programming.
- **Government funding** (including gifts awarded but not posted in FY 2023) increased more than 30-fold—from \$62,500 in 2018 to \$2.26 million in 2023. These funds supported capital improvements to address years of deferred maintenance on the Foundation Building’s façade, roof, and surrounding walkways and allow for a renovated, ADA-compliant Green Room in the Great Hall and RPIE.

The focus on new fundraising was complemented by an emphasis on fiscal discipline, including significant reductions in administrative expenses, alongside increased investment in the academic programs. The Plan called for \$9.1 million in annual cost savings, and those were achieved over FY **2018–2021**. Savings primarily came from consolidating our administrative office footprint, eliminating administrative positions, achieving operating efficiencies, and updating our employee benefits plan. Overall, we tracked ahead of budgeted cumulative expenses since the Plan’s inception.

To put this progress in context, we offer a brief look back:

2013

The Board of Trustees reaches the decision to begin charging tuition. Their decision preserves scholarships covering 50% of tuition for every undergraduate and a full-tuition scholarship for every Pell-eligible student.

2014

The Committee to Save Cooper Union—formed by students, alumni, and faculty members who are staunchly committed to “free”—challenges the decision to charge tuition in a lawsuit against the Board of Trustees.

2015

The Attorney General of the State of New York issues a Consent Decree to resolve the legal challenge, appointing an independent financial monitor. The Board’s newly established Free Education Committee (FEC) begins studying the feasibility of a plan to return to full-tuition scholarships.

2016

A search begins for the next president of The Cooper Union. With a focus on transparency, the Board unanimously commits to restoring the long-term financial health of the institution. The Board appoints The Cooper Union’s 13th president, Laura Sparks.

2017

The work of designing a turnaround plan begins in earnest. Town halls and community feedback inform a path forward, as President Sparks, then Board Chair Rachel Warren, and the FEC develop a plan to restore Cooper’s legacy of full-tuition scholarships.

2018

The Board votes to adopt the comprehensive Plan to Return to Full-Tuition Scholarships for all undergraduate students. The Plan calls for \$250 million in additional funding over a 10-year timeline to build financial resilience for the long term, invest in academic programs, and fund capital improvements.

2020

Scholarships begin increasing annually and in step with meeting the Plan’s fundraising, operating expenses, and operating cash goals through FY 2028, with scholarships anticipated to reach 100% of tuition for all undergraduates starting in FY 2029.

Advancing Academic Programs

As we stated at the outset, by achieving this Plan, “[w]e will once again demonstrate what is possible when high-potential students come together on the same plane, without financial barriers or distinctions, to push each other to advance new thinking, new ideas, and new solutions to address the critical challenges of our time.” Alongside the financial commitment to the Plan, our faculty, staff, and Board have been committed to maintaining academic excellence and distinction so The Cooper Union remains an exceptional place of learning.

The Plan established a goal of increasing annual investments in current and new academic programs, building to \$3 million annually by FY 2025, if fundraising targets set forth in the Plan are met. Through FY 2023, we met or exceeded that goal. The investments broadened and deepened the academic experience for students and gave faculty the opportunity to redefine and experiment with pedagogy at the intersection of disciplines and in ways that anticipate the pressing issues our students will face in their professional lives.

By 2019, we made the first major changes to academic programs at Cooper in more than a decade, demonstrating our faculty’s renewed energy and commitment to moving the academic program forward. Between 2019 and 2023, we launched four new minors—bioengineering, chemistry, computer science, and humanities and social

sciences (HSS) for all students. In addition, our strategic investments made possible state-of-the-art spaces and technology-infused coursework for students as well as innovative partnerships with industry, civic organizations, and leading-edge researchers in New York City and beyond. For example, faculty-led exchanges provided opportunities for Cooper students to pursue research and projects with the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, the Storefront for Art and Architecture, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

For a relatively small college, these strategic investments created outsized impact in terms of the opportunities and reach that are possible for both students and faculty.

Progress Amidst a Global Pandemic

We would be remiss not to address the Herculean efforts of our community in response to the onset of COVID-19 in 2020. The pandemic dramatically changed the world as we all knew it and had the very real potential to derail the progress made in the early years of the Plan. Instead, our faculty and staff marshalled their resources and ingenuity to deliver robust remote learning and support for our students. Creative approaches included delivering equipment, materials, and data sets to students worldwide so they could continue making creative works and performing experiments wherever they were. This opened up space on campus to make studios and labs available with social distancing to every

student who could be in New York and wanted access to them. Outreach to other schools helped us source best practices for dynamic remote instruction leading up to an all-digital, virtual reality end-of-year show.

At the same time, judicious financial management helped mitigate pandemic impacts, including increased costs, lost revenue, reduced investment assets, and a potential decrease in enrollment. Through these combined efforts, we remained steadfast in our commitment to a 0% increase in tuition and to implementing the planned increase in average student scholarship levels, as defined by the Plan.

Achieving these critical milestones and more was made possible through the vision and support of our full Board of Trustees and our administrative and academic leaders; the ingenuity and commitment of one of academia’s finest faculties; the flexibility and resourcefulness of a resilient staff; the ongoing and renewed support and generosity of alumni, donors and other partners; and, always, the curiosity and high aspirations of our students.

A Model for Equal Access

Considered in total, this effort has generated the momentum and positive trajectory required to deliver on a bold, ambitious future for The Cooper Union. Moreover, our work together has established a national model for addressing the college affordability crisis in the US and equalizing access to higher

education. And that is perhaps the most significant outcome of all. We have a responsibility, all of us, as part of the greater social contract to provide the opportunity for young people to discover their potential, for their own good and for the good of the world around them. The college experience as an avenue to that discovery has become unattainable for many. In September 2023, *The New York Times* explored the question “is college worth it?” The reporting cited public opinion polls that found both students and their parents are wary of the risk associated with investing in a college education because of the long-term negative impact of the associated debt. A decade ago, some 98% of American parents expected their children to go to college. Today, that number stands at just 50%. Our demonstrated progress toward restoring a full-tuition scholarship model for an undergraduate education at The Cooper Union is tangible evidence that there is another way.

Reaching Our Goal

When the Board approved the Plan to Return to Full-Tuition Scholarships, we knew it was ambitious. Some said it was unachievable. Now, 165 years after Peter Cooper embarked on his own plan for The Cooper Union, we can see that achieving this Plan is within our reach. Let us continue in good faith to push past the finish line, together. As you’ll see in the pages that follow, that endpoint is really just the beginning of what will come next for The Cooper Union.

Malcolm King EE’97
Chair, Board of Trustees

Carol Wolf A’84
Chair, Free Education Committee

Laura Sparks
President

Our work together has established a national model for addressing the college affordability crisis in the US and equalizing access to higher education. And that is perhaps the most significant outcome of all.

“The hard work of improving Cooper Union’s financial condition needs to be aggressively pursued if the goal of returning to a full-tuition scholarship model is to be achieved. Now is the time for the Board and the entire Cooper Union community to get behind the FEC’s plan and, as the plan urges, “to join in the effort to start a new chapter in Cooper Union’s history.”

—Annual Report of the Financial Monitor
February 15, 2018

“Under the strong leadership of President Laura Sparks and Board Chair Rachel Warren, Cooper Union has made significant progress this past year in implementing the thoughtful and responsible plan it adopted last year to improve Cooper Union’s financial condition and put it on the path to a return to a full-tuition scholarship model within the foreseeable future.”

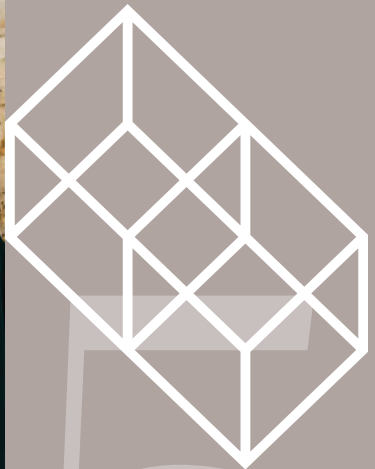
—Annual Report of the Financial Monitor
February 15, 2019

“Cooper Union’s strong financial performance this past year despite the continued disruptions caused by the global pandemic and economic downturn has demonstrated the wisdom of the Plan adopted by the Cooper Union Board in 2018. The Plan was strategically designed to implement long-term financial improvements that would allow the school to weather an unforeseen financial downturn while continuing on the path to a return to a full-tuition scholarship model within the foreseeable future. Issues associated with the pandemic, volatility in the market value of investments, and inflationary pressures may well continue throughout the coming year, affecting all aspects of Cooper Union, but the steady leadership of Cooper Union’s Board and President Sparks and her staff provides confidence that the school will continue to manage the academic, health, and financial challenges it faces.”

—Annual Report of the Financial Monitor
February 15, 2024

The Cooper Union is in the midst of something extraordinary. In March 2018, the adoption of The Plan to Return to Full-Tuition Scholarships ignited a renewed sense of community, a new vision for the future, and a new era of support and partnerships. That year, President Laura Sparks said, “For The Cooper Union, ‘free’ goes far beyond the finances and sustainability of full-tuition scholarships. It is a culture and a way of life here, a commitment to free thinking, free discourse, free expression. It is an equalizing force that opens the door for people from all walks of life—regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, religion, or status—to delve deeply into the pursuits of their own choosing, defined only by their ideas, dreams, potential, and work ethic.”

The Plan has served as a rallying call, reinstilling the zeitgeist of an institution and its historic legacy that education be as “free as air and water.” Confidence in our ability to meet the Plan’s goals has grown steadily, fueled by strong financial achievement and strategic advancements in our academic programs. We increased scholarships according to the Plan, covering 80% of tuition on average for undergraduates, with nearly 50% of students now attending tuition-free. We held tuition flat—no increases—for five, consecutive years. We added academic minors and creative partnerships while providing more support to elevate the student experience. Cooper’s distinguished faculty members are advancing our academic programs, identifying new ways to teach at the intersection of disciplines. And our students, among the strongest academic achievers in the world, continue to surpass expectations. They are coming to Cooper as inquisitive and passionate as ever, immersing themselves in innovative and rigorous academic inquiry, and are committed to discovering and maximizing their own potential for the greatest good.



THE PLAN AT FIVE YEARS

FINANCIAL PROGRESS

The Plan adopted by the Board in 2018 sought to rebuild the institution’s financial health and establish a level of financial resilience that could sustain a full-tuition scholarship model for all undergraduate students.

This required two key efforts:

- **Reversing decades of structural deficits** to bring the annual budget into balance, and
 - **Restoring the institution’s balance sheet**, which had degraded as a result of cumulative operating deficits and a substantial debt load.
- We achieved the first and are currently on target to achieving the second.

Central to the Plan, the Board adopted the Composite Financial Index (CFI) as a key financial metric to measure the long-term financial health of the institution. The CFI is used by higher education institutions to assist in assessing their financial strength and resilience and to inform strategies for long-term financial planning and risk management. The Financial Monitor has indicated that, in their opinion, a CFI of 4.0 or better is required to return to full-tuition scholarships. The CFI was -2.01 at the start of the Plan. In order to begin the process of increasing scholarships in FY 2020 and to continue until we reach 100% tuition scholarships, the Plan required us to meet critical financial milestones with respect to operating cash surpluses, which are driven by expense management, fundraising, and other revenue. Cooper successfully exceeded its cumulative primary net cash surplus target for the first five years of the Plan (+\$11.2 million over a target of \$62.1 million as of June 30, 2023) and generated positive returns on its investment portfolio (annual average return of +9%) to aid in the institution’s positive CFI position as of the end of FY 2023. Progress on the CFI over the duration of the Plan to date is summarized below:

COMPOSITE FINANCIAL INDEX

| | Actual | Plan |
|---------|--------|--------|
| FY 2018 | (1.81) | (2.36) |
| FY 2019 | 0.25 | (0.67) |
| FY 2020 | (0.45) | (0.59) |
| FY 2021 | 2.94 | (0.52) |
| FY 2022 | 1.81 | (0.43) |
| FY 2023 | 2.47 | (0.24) |

As of FY 2023, Cooper’s Composite Financial Index (CFI) score, a measure of long-term financial health, was 2.47. The Financial Monitor has indicated that a CFI of 4.0 or better will be required to return to full-tuition scholarships.

FINANCIAL RESERVES ESTABLISHED (IN 000’s)

| | Total Plan Need | Plan Need Remaining as of 6/30/23 | Actual Need Remaining as of 6/30/23 |
|--|-----------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Operating and Capital Reserves | \$ 152,000 | \$ 89,520 | \$ 22,400 |
| Bridge Loan Principal at Maturity | 39,000 | 29,523 | 29,500 |
| Deferred Maintenance | 11,500 | 8,000 | 3,700 |
| Post-Retirement Health Insurance Liability | 48,000 | 45,500 | 45,500 |
| | \$ 250,500 | \$ 172,543 | \$ 101,100 |

In addition to increased scholarships, the Plan identified four key financial priorities to establish long-term financial sustainability for The Cooper Union. Net cash surpluses and investment returns generated during the Plan period are to be allocated to:

- 1] replenish and establish operating and capital reserves,
- 2] fund the \$39 million loan balloon payment due in 2034,
- 3] invest in deferred maintenance, and
- 4] fund the post-retirement health insurance liability.

The net cash operating surpluses and investment returns generated in excess of Plan as of FY 2023 have placed the institution ahead of Plan. A portion of the positive returns have been invested in critical capital projects needing immediate attention, resulting in specific deferred maintenance projects to date over and above the Plan allocation.

FINANCIAL GOALS/TARGETS (IN 000’s)

| | Cumulative Cash Surplus | Current Use Fundraising | Operating Expenses | Cash and Investments Balance |
|----------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------|------------------------------|
| Actual FY 2018–2023 | \$ 73,233 | \$ 45,057 | \$ 328,355 | \$ 323,335 |
| Plan FY 2018–2023 | 62,065 | 39,031 | 334,176 | 242,935 |
| Target Favorable to Plan | \$ 11,168 | \$ 6,026 | \$ 5,821 | \$ 80,400 |
| % Target Favorable to Plan | 18% | 15% | 2% | 33% |

Cooper met Plan targets through FY 2023, resulting in tuition remaining unchanged—0% increases—for the first five years of the Plan. Cooper also increased scholarship awards as planned, resulting in an average 80% tuition discount for FY 2023, with tuition fully covered for nearly 50% of students. (These scholarship levels are expected to reach an average 83% tuition discount for FY 2025.)

80%

In FY 2023, The Cooper Union provided scholarships covering 80% of tuition costs, on average, with nearly 50% of students attending tuition-free.

AVERAGE ANNUAL TUITION SCHOLARSHIP LEVELS

| | Actual | Plan |
|---------|--------|------|
| FY 2018 | 76% | 76% |
| FY 2019 | 76% | 76% |
| FY 2020 | 77% | 77% |
| FY 2021 | 78% | 77% |
| FY 2022 | 78% | 78% |
| FY 2023 | 80% | 79% |

FUNDRAISING MOMENTUM

| | FY 2018 | FY 2019 | FY 2020 | FY 2021 | FY 2022 | FY 2023 | TOTAL |
|-------------------|--------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Individual Giving | \$6,882,584 | \$11,619,020 | \$4,743,366 | \$7,269,586 | \$10,491,741 | \$13,958,173 | \$54,964,470 |
| Alumni | 5,287,115 | 2,803,752 | 3,823,483 | 2,861,878 | 5,615,132 | 8,364,172 | 28,755,532 |
| Non-Alumni | 1,595,469 | 8,815,268 | 919,883 | 4,407,709 | 4,876,609 | 5,594,001 | 26,208,938 |
| Bequests | 579,182 | 7,503,114 | 928,331 | 2,731,909 | 2,245,701 | 6,328,615 | 20,316,852 |
| Organization | 4,606,951 | 2,438,141 | 1,404,034 | 3,840,302 | 2,725,780 | 5,725,694 | 20,740,902 |
| Corporation | 645,492 | 496,007 | 694,029 | 973,170 | 581,860 | 512,049 | 3,902,607 |
| Foundation | 3,898,959 | 1,764,893 | 680,005 | 2,786,382 | 1,215,727 | 5,153,645 | 15,499,612 |
| Government | 62,500 | 177,241 | 30,000 | 80,750 | 928,193 | 60,000* | 1,278,684 |
| Grand Total | \$12,068,717 | \$21,560,275 | \$7,075,731 | \$13,841,797 | \$15,463,222 | \$26,012,482 | \$96,022,224 |

*Does not include \$2.2M in government funding awarded for capital projects and \$250K awarded subsequently in FY 2024 for Retraining Program for Immigrant Engineers (RPIE), totaling an additional \$2.5M.

When adopted in 2018, the Plan called for a significant increase in fundraising. During the Plan’s first full year, which spanned FY 2018 and 2019, individual and institutional donors answered that call to build critical early momentum. Fundraising has increased significantly over the Plan period, exceeding goals in every year except FY 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic hit. The year prior (FY 2019) saw the highest level of contributed revenue (cash and pledges) since 2008 at \$21.5 million. As the world recovered from the impacts of the pandemic, Cooper rebuilt its fundraising momentum and reached a new milestone at \$26 million in FY 2023.

This progress has been powered by a combination of highly successful matching grants, new institutional and foundation partners, increased investment from long-time supporters, greater government funding, and consistent individual giving. Between the Plan’s inception in FY 2018 and FY 2023, Cooper raised \$96 million.



What followed the Board's approval of the Plan to Return to Full-Tuition Scholarships was a community-wide process to define a set of Institutional Goals and Strategic Priorities. In addition to the FEC planning insights, this process drew on internal and external assessments of the academic environment; a revised mission and vision statement (right); completion of and feedback from the Middle States Commission on Higher Education Reaccreditation; and input and feedback from alumni, faculty, staff, students, and other community members. The Cooper Board adopted the Institutional Goals and Strategic Priorities in December 2018. These guiding principles, in tandem with the Plan, became the blueprint for our collective efforts to pursue an aspirational path forward for The Cooper Union—one that would rightfully celebrate and build on our historic legacy and make way for new approaches and innovations, all grounded in fiscal discipline and a sustainable future for the institution and the world at large.

Vision

The Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art is dedicated to Peter Cooper's radical 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.

Mission

Our mission is to sustain The Cooper Union as a free center of learning and civic discourse that inspires inventive, creative, and influential voices in architecture, art, and engineering to address the critical challenges and opportunities of our time.

INSTITUTIONAL GOALS

- Create an institution of excellence that:
 - engages students in an academic program that is rigorous, supportive, and dynamic
 - fosters a culture of curiosity, agency, compassion, and engagement
 - is tuition-free and financially resilient
- Prepare students to question and lead in a complex world
- Develop leading-edge models for higher education that consider the ethical, cultural, and environmental contexts and consequences of technical and creative disciplines
- Lead by example to promote civil discourse and engagement on important civic issues
- Advance the fields of architecture, art, and engineering and foster intersections of study and practice among them

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

- Fortify our rigorous professional schools
- Return The Cooper Union to full-tuition scholarships
- Create opportunities for experimentation at the intersections of disciplines
- Increase diversity of thought, background, and experiences
- Balance budget, build reserves, instill financial discipline
- Develop programs, activities, and physical space to increase student engagement and improve student life
- Set a leading-edge standard for the integration of professional, practice-based education with a humanistic and socio-political education
- Integrate public service orientation into academics and actively contribute to the betterment of New York
- Position the Great Hall as a premier forum to advance critical issues of our time



CURRICULAR INNOVATION AND COLLABORATION

The implementation of the Strategic Priorities has been supported by a wide range of innovative academic efforts focused on building a culture of collaboration and cross-disciplinary learning between schools and fostering a richer plurality of student and faculty representation, critical perspectives, and areas of exploration. All of this work is done in service of our students' immense passion for pushing boundaries and asking questions that challenge the status quo. Through this work, we are creating opportunities for them to see and experience the impact they can have in society as future architects, artists, and engineers. We are empowering a new generation of innovators to make the technologies, images, designs, tools, models, and concepts needed to address the climate crisis, tackle complex social issues, and sustain the world's cultural, built, and natural environments.

Across disciplines, deans and faculty members are revamping project-based learning. Starting in Fall **2020**, The Cooper Union joined 36 schools around the world offering students an innovative course structure known as Vertically Integrated Projects (VIP). VIP coursework allows students to participate in long-term, interdisciplinary projects while learning in an environment that lets them apply their theoretical knowledge to real-world problems. VIP teams, which work on topics ranging from bioengineering to autonomous vehicles to the US Department of Energy-sponsored collegiate Solar Decathlon, engage students over the course of multiple semesters in sustained problem solving with fellow students from different class years and across all disciplines and schools. The Cooper Union Solar Decathlon team, made up of students and faculty in architecture and engineering, was awarded the Commercial Grand Prize at the 2023 national design competition for their work re-imagining the Urban Assembly New York Harbor School on Governors Island.

Collaboration is a significant focus of new disciplinary offerings. In **2020**, a committee of faculty and deans in the Albert Nerken School of Engineering developed a state-of-the-art computer science curriculum, which is now offered as a minor through the Department of Electrical Engineering. With the goal of preparing graduates to enter a workforce where computer science has become integral across industries and job functions,

the new curriculum interfaces directly with other engineering disciplines while focusing on a rigorous foundation in mathematics, science, and theoretical computer science. The school has plans to expand the curriculum in the coming years to offer a computer science major with a strong emphasis on multidisciplinary group projects and problem solving.

Along similar cross-disciplinary lines, the School of Engineering introduced a bioengineering minor, offered jointly by the Departments of Mechanical and Chemical Engineering in **2021** and supported by the Maurice Kanbar Center for Biomedical Engineering. Through exchanges with the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai and Memorial Sloan Kettering, Cooper's bioengineering minor confers world-class research and teaching opportunities well beyond those of similarly sized undergraduate programs and has become a popular option for students pursuing graduate studies and related industry research.

As a result of fostering collaboration with faculty members and external partners, Cooper undergraduates gain valuable pre-professional experience in the biomedical field. They serve as co-authors on publications in journals such as *Advanced Healthcare Materials*, contribute to research projects funded by the National Institutes of Health, and present work at national conferences, including the Orthopaedic Research Society and the AIChE Student Conference.

“The faculty and staff are envisioning a vibrant future in which we prepare our graduates to succeed in a dynamic and increasingly complex world. This includes a commitment to educational innovation and leading-edge pedagogies, integration of ethical design and leadership, and experimentation in the curriculum.”

—BARRY SHOOP, Dean
Albert Nerken
School of Engineering



The Cooper Union Solar Decathlon team received the 2023 Commercial Grand Prize at the national competition.

“By expanding the boundaries of our studios and seminars into other public formats and engagements, we have created meaningful spaces for dialogue and exploration.”

—HAYLEY EBER, Acting Dean
The Irwin S. Chanin
School of Architecture

“With the addition of brilliant new faculty, more students pursuing HSS minors, robust programming, and HSS faculty co-teaching across schools, we continue to foster students’ own sense of resolution and responsibility, creativity and ingenuity, and train them to think critically, to reason, and to make equitable and ethical decisions.”

—NADA AYAD, Acting Dean,
Faculty of Humanities
and Social Sciences



Students testing facial recognition software in *Hiding from the Eyes of the City*, a course co-taught by engineering and architecture faculty.

Curricular innovations have centered on continuing to strengthen and expand The Irwin S. Chanin School of Architecture’s long-established commitment to the relationships between history, theory, design, and methods of architectural representation. To that end, faculty restructured the required curriculum in the first and second years to include photography, animation, computation, and other digital tools as ways to analyze architecture; broadened history and theory courses beyond Western canons; and introduced a new, required Environments course sequence in the **2018–19** academic year that explores the urgent and critical issue of whether architecture will exacerbate or

mitigate climate change. The school has widened the scope of learning opportunities beyond Cooper as well, with workshops, projects, and studio courses that incorporate immersive travel experiences ranging from reimagining Albany’s Empire State Plaza to studying housing challenges in Puerto Rico in the aftermath of hurricanes Irma and Maria. Cooper architecture students have in recent years exhibited works at some of the world’s most prestigious biennials, including the Shenzhen Bi-City Biennale of Urbanism/ Architecture, Festival des Architectures Vives in Montpellier, the Venice Biennale, and the Tallinn Architecture Biennale.

Everything’s On the Table, an installation created by Cooper students and faculty, was featured in the 2022 Tallin Architecture Biennale, co-curated by Lydia Kallipoliti, associate professor of architecture.





“As our curriculum grows to connect with new technologies and media like never before, it’s an incredibly exciting moment to be a student at The Cooper Union.”

—ADRIANA FARMIGA
Dean, School of Art

Connecting student practices to a broader range of tools is

another significant emphasis of recent curricular and pedagogical innovation. In **2018**, the School of Art’s Foundation-year techniques curriculum was reorganized to build digital fluency and technical skills among first-year students. In **2020**, the course was augmented to focus on the skills that are central to online learning success while instruction was conducted remotely because of the pandemic. Through a grant-funded initiative, additional technology-based courses are now being developed as part of the Computation Studio, and a materials fund is enabling students to pursue projects in new technology.



All three schools now offer minors in the humanities and social sciences,

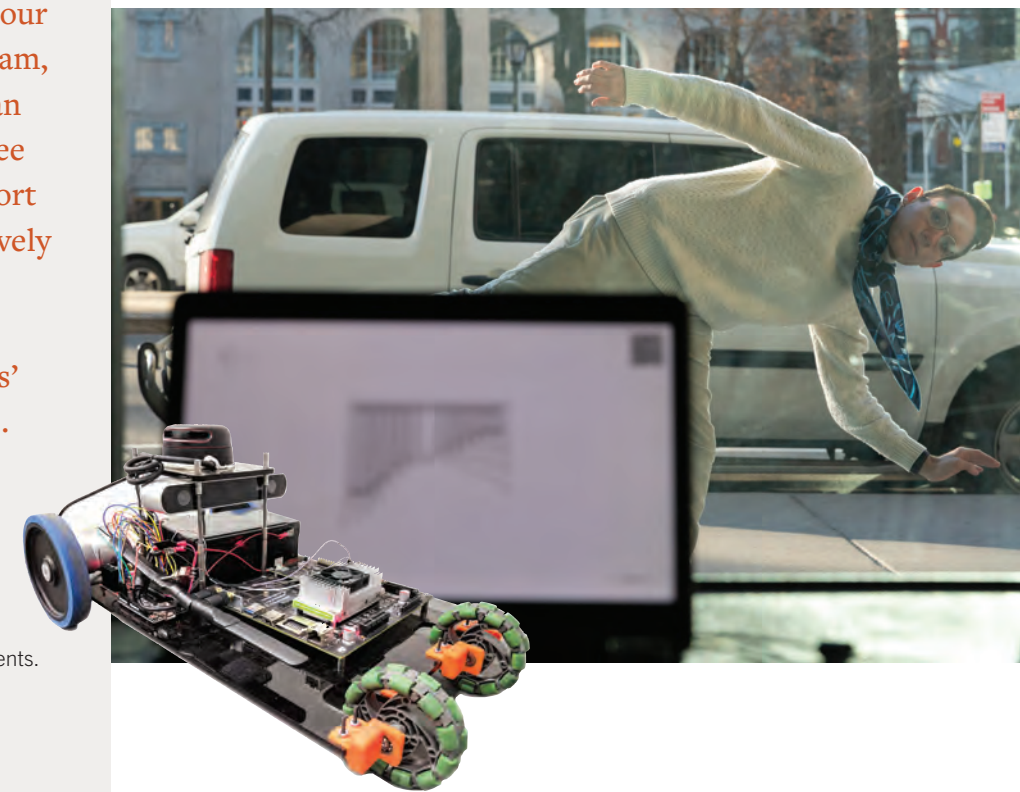
an increasingly popular option for students since Cooper adopted a block scheduling model in **2020**. Organized around fewer, longer periods of class and studio time, block scheduling is designed to provide opportunities for focused collaboration, personalized faculty mentoring, and greater flexibility for earning HSS elective credits toward a minor. It also enables students from different programs to take more courses together and has further supported faculty collaboration, resulting in interdisciplinary course offerings such as Public Art as Alimentary Infrastructure, co-taught in Fall **2023** by faculty in HSS and the School of Architecture. Similarly in **2021**, faculty from the School of Art and HSS co-taught a new sculpture course that combines art history with art making, using Arte Povera, a 1960s Italian art movement, as a starting point for analyzing issues critical to artists then and today.

INITIATIVES TO ADVANCE NEW IDEAS

The Cooper Union’s extraordinary faculty, staff, and students have led new initiatives and cross-disciplinary collaborations that have directly advanced Cooper Union’s Institutional Goals and Strategic Priorities. In 2019, the Cooper Union Grant Program was established to provide annual funding for projects that enhance our students’ learning experiences; our faculty’s teaching, scholarship, and practice; and opportunities for our community to come together in addressing the critical societal issues of our time. Through this program, we have funded more than 80 projects across all three schools and HSS to support and fuel ideas that positively impact our world, our community, and most importantly, our students’ and faculty’s experiences.

In **2019**, the School of Engineering launched the **Autonomy Lab**, a cross-disciplinary project made possible by the Cooper Union Grant Program. The Autonomy Lab houses various student-run projects relating to design and innovation for smart cities that combine efforts from architecture, art, and engineering students. Projects have focused on a broad array of topics ranging from autonomous driving vehicles and hydroponics to creating robots to help elderly individuals or people with disabilities interact with their cities. One recent exhibition to come out of the lab, a collaboration between art and engineering, used

real-time body-tracking software to generate a dynamic virtual sculpture. The Autonomy Lab is a prime example of faculty and students from different disciplines joining together to combine resources, diverse perspectives, and state-of-the-art technology typically only used in their respective fields, to broaden the student experience. By fostering this interdisciplinary thinking through new curricula and course structures, creating more flexibility around minors and electives, and expanding project-oriented collaborations, we are encouraging students to see their work through the lens of real-world problem-solving.



The Cooper Mapper, a robot that creates 3D maps of its surroundings, and Marionette, an interactive virtual sculpture by art and engineering students. Both projects were developed as part of the Autonomy Lab.

PRACTICE-BASED LEARNING IN NEW YORK CITY

Sanjna Rao ChE'22 (left) and Chris Panebianco ChE'16 (second to left) with collaborators in the Icahn School of Medicine.

Staying on course with the financial goal of the Plan within the relatively small footprint of our facilities inspired creative efforts to leverage resources and institutional relationships outside of classroom experiences for the benefit of our students. Several world-class partnerships established in recent years are now fostering research opportunities, professional mentorship, and student projects that take advantage of New York City as Cooper's extended classroom.

In **2018**, the School of Engineering established a partnership with the Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai (ISMMS). Through this exchange, Cooper engineering students can take courses and collaborate on research with ISMMS faculty and graduate students in areas such as bioengineering, biomaterials, and biomedical science. The relationship has strengthened in recent years such that Cooper graduates pursuing their Ph.D. at ISMMS often serve as mentors for Cooper students participating in the exchange, resulting in co-authored papers in journals such as *Biomaterials* and *Biomedical Engineering Education*. In 2020, the partner institutions inaugurated an annual research symposium where students and faculty can connect and present research.

In **2020**, the School of Engineering formalized a collaborative agreement with Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center to provide practical experience and joint research projects for Cooper students. The agreement has supported undergraduate work and a master's thesis focused on the emerging subfield of computational oncology, which uses data science, machine learning, and artificial intelligence to analyze biological data and model the behavior of cancer cells. This leading-edge partnership will provide a parallel learning opportunity for Cooper's planned computer science major and other computational offerings.



The Project of Independence: Architectures of Decolonization in South Asia, 1947–1985, MoMA.

David Almeida

In **2021**, also in engineering, a new partnership began with the Center for Computational Astrophysics (CCA) of the Simons Foundation's Flatiron Institute through a joint faculty position in physics. In addition to the role at Cooper, the faculty member served as an associate research scientist at the Flatiron Institute, opening opportunities for collaborative research in areas that leverage machine learning.

For the last five years, the School of Art has partnered with Public Art Fund to bring renowned artists to speak about their practices at The Cooper Union. Public Art Fund Talks at The Cooper Union are organized around groundbreaking New York City exhibitions with the goal of connecting a wide audience with socially relevant public art. The series has featured acclaimed exhibitions that model the importance of public art for our students and expose them to critical and contemporary practices that engage the city.

The School of Architecture has similarly continued efforts to engage major civic and cultural institutions in New York and beyond. Collaborations with the Museum of Modern Art have engaged Cooper students in seminars and fabrication for two major architecture exhibitions: one on modernism in Yugoslavia in **2018** and another on architectures of decolonization in South Asia, which ran through **2022**. Through a similar museum collaboration, models built by Cooper students and recent graduates were part of a **2023** Metropolitan Museum of Art exhibition on early Buddhist art in India. A recently introduced third-year housing studio has featured student collaborations with nonprofit organizations focused on making a difference in the lives of New Yorkers. Through a partnership with HELP USA, for example, students focused on designing and building affordable housing in East New York.



Cooper alumni, including Felipe Baeza A'09, have been among the Public Art Fund's featured artists.

EVOLVING OUR MISSION OF ACADEMIC LEADERSHIP

In much of the work proposed and developed by our faculty and students, we have seen a tremendous appetite for cross-disciplinary opportunities that engage important social issues, global contexts, and broader expertise. Asking how we can support that work led us to seek both alumni involvement and outside points of view to aid us in sustaining Cooper's legacy while ushering in new ideas. That breadth of perspective is guiding the evolution of our leadership structure and allowing for intentional planning that considers the intersections of our academic programs.



Left to right
Albert Nerken School of Engineering: Barry Shoop, dean; Ruben Savizky ChE'98, associate dean for academic affairs; Lisa Shay, associate dean for academic innovation; Hayley Eber AR'01, acting dean, The Irwin S. Chanin School of Architecture; Mokena Makeka, special advisor to the vice president of academic affairs; Adriana Farmiga A'96, dean, School of Art; Nada Ayad, acting dean, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences.

Above:
Demetrius Eudell, vice president of academic affairs

In July **2023**, we welcomed Demetrius L. Eudell as The Cooper Union's inaugural vice president of academic affairs (VPAA), a role that was created to provide leadership for cross-disciplinary learning, pedagogical collaboration, and global perspectives in the humanities and social sciences, architecture, art, and engineering. In this new academic leadership capacity, the VPAA is lending integrative support to school-level and departmental planning and curricular revisions while also fostering shared learning experiences for the Cooper community.

To help us reimagine the future of Humanities and Social Sciences as an ethical and social core of a Cooper Union education, we convened a visiting committee of external scholars in **2021**. The committee was led by Ben Vinson, then-provost at Case Western Reserve University who subsequently served on The Cooper Union's Board of Trustees before becoming president of Howard University. It included a diverse group of seven other renowned social scientists and humanities scholars representing a variety of disciplines and institutions, including Rhode Island School of Design, Georgia Institute of Technology, New York University's Tandon School of Engineering, and Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Working with faculty, students, and HSS acting dean Nada Ayad, who has provided leadership and support since **2019**, the group assessed how HSS curricula and pedagogy could meaningfully influence and contribute to students' professional studies. Considering the full scope of institutional work, it produced a report with specific and actionable recommendations—including the creation of the VPAA role—for initiating positive changes in HSS and across the Schools of Architecture, Art, and Engineering in the coming years.

In **2019**, the School of Engineering embarked on its first strategic planning process in many years. Led by Dean Barry L. Shoop together with Lisa A. Shay, associate dean for educational innovation, and Ruben Savizky ChE'98, associate dean for academic affairs, the plan was developed in concert with the Board-adopted Institutional Goals and Strategic Priorities and an assessment of Cooper's engineering education and the external challenges facing the engineering profession and society at large. The school subsequently assembled an Engineering Advisory Council in **2020**, made up of experts from industry, academia, and government and

tasked with providing recommendations to the school and its four ABET-accredited programs. Among the results of this planning process, the school developed new pedagogical approaches to its required first-year Engineering Design and Problem Solving course, introduced an Education Innovation Grant for faculty-led efforts to widen the scope of curricula, and has supported events and projects that examine the social and ethical dimensions of emerging technologies.

In the School of Architecture, a new leadership model emerged as part of the focus on interdisciplinary teaching and exploration. As of the Fall **2023** semester, Hayley Eber AR'01, the acting dean of the School of Architecture, and Mokena Makeka, in a new role for Cooper as special advisor to the vice president of academic affairs, are working in tandem to expand the academic program in ways that equip and inspire students to take on urgent challenges such as climate change, sustainability, social and economic justice, accessibility, and inclusivity. In preparation for a reaccreditation site visit by the National Architectural Accrediting Board in 2025, the school has begun a comprehensive self-study that will guide strategic planning and curricular updates that reinforce the school's commitment to global frameworks and civically engaged design practices.

The School of Art is also undergoing a significant strategic planning process. In the Spring **2024** semester, a visiting committee comprising scholarly, disciplinary, and professional peers began assessing the quality of the degree program and providing insights and recommendations. This external review brings broader perspectives and outside expertise on the frontiers of creative practices. The committee has shared long-range projections relevant to the discipline with objective and constructive counsel on programmatic and operational considerations for the school.

In Spring **2024**, Adriana Farmiga was appointed dean of the School of Art. Farmiga, a practicing artist and member of the Class of 1996, is central to Cooper's dynamic, collaborative learning environment and strongly supports its return to full-tuition scholarships. Serving previously as assistant, associate, and acting dean, she worked closely with former dean Mike Essl, a key advocate for the return to a tuition-free model. Essl stepped down in 2023 after nearly eight years as dean.

EXPANDING FACULTY STRENGTHS

Instrumental to our strategic progress is an overarching commitment to academic excellence and a supportive, equitable learning environment. To uphold that commitment, we have prioritized the support, growth, and renewal of Cooper’s full-time faculty to introduce new key areas of expertise and expand the diversity of thought and perspectives across our schools. Since the 2017–18 academic year, 26 new full-time faculty members have joined Cooper’s academic programs in architecture, art, engineering, and the humanities and social sciences, growing the total from 46 to 58 across all schools. The proportion of full-time faculty who are women also increased in that time, from approximately one-third to nearly 45% in 2023–24, as has the share of underrepresented minority faculty members, from approximately 13% to nearly 26% in the current academic year. These faculty hires comprise not only accomplished scholars, professionals, researchers, and creative practitioners at the forefront of their fields but also educators who reflect the breadth of experiences and backgrounds of Cooper’s student body.

FULL-TIME FACULTY

| | AY 2017–18 | AY 2023–24 |
|------------------------------------|------------|------------|
| Total | 46 | 58 |
| Women | 33% (15) | 45% (26) |
| Underrepresented Minorities (URM)* | 13% (6) | 26% (15) |

*Did not report a specific race or ethnicity: AY 2017-18 (2); AY 2023-24 (1)

Full-time, part-time, and visiting faculty hired in the School of Architecture in recent years bring a breadth of expertise to issues of great societal importance, ranging from border studies to racial justice to climate change. A pedagogical emphasis on critical and creative approaches to technology has been another strategic focus, inspiring courses that look at the relationship between digital technology and architecture, projects that make use of advanced fabrication tools, exhibitions that center on the social impacts of technological change, and lectures on cutting-edge materials.

In the School of Art, the five new full-time faculty members hired since 2018 include internationally celebrated and award-winning artists working across various disciplines in both traditional and new media. These recent additions to Cooper’s art faculty encompass a range of practices dedicated to engaging the public sphere and exploring questions about ecology, representation and knowledge, art’s relation to museums and cultural institutions, and the impacts and legacies of colonialism. Thanks to endowed visiting professorships such as the Alex Katz Chair in Painting and the Robert Gwathmey Chair in Architecture and Art, the school also continues to welcome distinguished contemporary practitioners to teach, lecture, and exhibit work at Cooper, including recently Firelei Báez, Daniel Arsham, and Torkwase Dyson.

Diversifying faculty perspectives has been particularly important for engineering, a field where women and people of color are widely underrepresented nationally in institutions of higher education. In 2013, women comprised just 6.2% of the full-time engineering faculty at Cooper. That number steadily increased to 18% in 2018 and 43% by the 2023-24 academic year. Similarly, the share of underrepresented minority faculty members among the School of Engineering’s full-time faculty increased to 26% by FY 2023. This progress is accompanied by an influx of leading-edge faculty research and new areas of disciplinary specialization, including expertise in plasma engineering, computational astrophysics, and bio-inspired robotics.

Faculty renewal in the humanities and social sciences, including six new full-time and visiting appointments since **2019**, has similarly lent a breadth of perspectives and current expertise to the curriculum. Recent additions to the full-time HSS faculty include scholars of economics, art history, global history, and humanities with specializations ranging from queer and trans contemporary art practices to Black cultural studies to histories of colonialism, cities, and politics.

SUPPORTING STUDENT WELL-BEING

Developing new resources that support our students' well-being, both academically and personally, is integral to our mission of making education free and accessible to all. These programs and resources are particularly important for first-year and first-generation college students as we take seriously our commitment to setting the newest members of our community up for success.



In Fall **2018**, The Cooper Union began a strategic partnership with JED, a national leader in college student wellness.

Through the completion of the four-year JED Campus Program, the Student Affairs team identified opportunities for increasing student well-being and making a positive impact on mental health. Since completing the program in Summer **2022**, Cooper has developed a thoughtfully crafted support network that integrates both personal and academic support and well-being into the daily lived experiences of the student body. We aim to build on that success by engaging students, faculty, and deans through focus groups, workshops, and other programs that provide academic, professional, and personal support.

Since **2018**, the Office of Student Affairs has offered a peer mentor program that matches incoming students with returning students to serve as a point of contact and support during their transition to life at Cooper. This program is reviewed and refined each year as it continues to grow in conjunction with new student orientation programming.

The Office of Student Affairs has also developed support resources centered on students' physical and mental health needs. In **2021**, Cooper added a full-time clinical Student Care Coordinator and a new full-time director to oversee the Office of Student Care and Support. Cooper has also expanded its contracted network of clinical providers as part of its Student Counseling Program. In **2019**, The Cooper Union partnered with TimelyCare to offer students 24/7 access to physical and emotional telehealth-care. This partnership has been extremely successful, particularly through the challenges of the pandemic, in ensuring students are connected to medical and health resources when they need them.

In summer of **2022**, the School of Engineering launched Cooper's Help for Engineering Student Success (CHESS), a summer bridge program consisting of a week-long, online course taught by engineering student tutors. Fifty-two incoming students participated in the inaugural program, which covered foundational topics in math, chemistry, physics, and computer science, as well as study skills, time management, and mental health. Along with the CHESS program, the school also launched the Engineering Student Success Center, a dedicated tutoring, mentoring, and academic support space for engineering students.

CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS

The Plan to Return to Full-Tuition Scholarships was built on three tenets: build a financially resilient organization for the long term, invest in academic excellence, and invest in Cooper's campus. This allowed us to address longstanding issues of deferred maintenance while at the same time introducing exciting new spaces for interdisciplinary learning and civic engagement. In 2017, the Financial Monitor Report highlighted the need to substantially increase our annual capital expenditures to address many years of deferred maintenance to Cooper's physical plant. Doing so while raising scholarship levels required a significant financial commitment, exceeding the \$11 million of investment in deferred maintenance already included in the Plan. We made strides bringing spaces up-to-date and continuously investing in the facilities and equipment that are essential to a hands-on learning environment like The Cooper Union.



Repurposing and reimagining existing spaces has been central to our approach. In 2020, we unveiled the IDC Foundation Art, Architecture, Construction, and Engineering (AACE) Lab in a space formerly used for sculpture on the fourth floor of the Foundation Building. The college's first state-of-the-art facility dedicated to student projects from all three schools, the AACE Lab offers students access to advanced fabrication equipment

in a renovated space designed by Cooper alumni, all of which was made possible thanks to \$2 million in funding from the IDC Foundation and support from the New York State Higher Education Capital Matching Grant Program. Since opening, the lab's technologies have been incorporated into student projects across art, architecture, and engineering, with nearly 500 different students using the facility during the 2022–23 academic year.

We opened the doors to another new interdisciplinary facility in November 2021 in the street-level space in 41 Cooper Square, which was formerly rented externally. With generous funding from The Charina Endowment Fund, longtime supporters of interdisciplinary work at Cooper, the Benjamin Menschel Civic Projects Lab was created as an all-in-one studio space and public showcase to facilitate engagement with the surrounding New York





These updates have been complemented by the relocation of the Center for Writing from 41 Cooper Square to a new home within the library. With support from the Gelb Family Foundation, **the renamed Center for Writing and Learning** is now closer to the library's research materials and more centrally positioned to support scholarship, teaching, and creative endeavors across Cooper. The new Center has

expanded its scope to not only mentor students in writing but also engage students, faculty, and staff across all of the academic programs in creative, interdisciplinary projects and pedagogies. Moving the Center has also allowed us to add classroom capacity to 41 Cooper Square, which was critical to accommodate additional class time for students across disciplines.

City community. The lab is specifically designed to support student-initiated work that is multidisciplinary and in the public interest, and has since hosted interdisciplinary workshops; student projects that partner with local nonprofits as part of the popular course Data Science and Design Projects for Social Good; a collaborative workshop on generative art, architecture, and engineering; and public exhibitions of work from both Cooper students and participants in The Cooper Union's Saturday Program, which offers free studio art and architecture courses to New York City public high school students.

The additional space adjacent to the Civic Projects Lab also allowed us to make administrative services more centrally available to current and prospective students. The Hub opened in Fall **2022** as a center for information and questions about enrollment, financial aid and scholarships, student accounts and campus tours, and more student services will be available in the coming academic year.

Capital improvements to existing spaces have also helped bolster student collaborations across disciplines.

The first phase of revitalizing The Cooper Union Library, which began in the summer of **2022**, updated the spaces used by The Cooper Union Archives and Special Collections, reorganized the main stacks to expand study areas, added furniture, and repurposed the atrium as a public forum. After a two-year analysis of the library collection, with input from faculty members, the library set out to cull damaged, redundant, and outdated materials to modernize the library as a place for research as well as collaborative work. Following the revitalization, the average weekly gate count of students coming into the library more than doubled, and plans are now underway to install whiteboards, additional electrical outlets, accessible bathrooms, and quiet study spaces.





As part of our efforts to address deferred maintenance as outlined in the Plan, we have also sought to protect the historical and architectural significance of The Cooper Union's physical assets. With the aid of a \$750,000 matching grant awarded through New York State's Environmental Protection Fund Grant Program for Parks, Preservation, and Heritage, the institution completed a major and necessary restoration of the Foundation Building's historic façade in **2023**. The project—one of the most significant preservation efforts undertaken at Cooper since John Hejduk AR'50 renovated the building in the 1970s—followed a comprehensive study of the exterior that revealed the need for masonry repairs and required oversight from the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission. A plan is now in place to conduct a study of Cooper's building exteriors every five years. Other capital improvements to the Foundation Building began in summer of 2023, including repairs to the roof, accessibility improvements for American Disabilities Act compliance, and renovations of the backstage area and green room of the historic Great Hall.



Capital expenditures were also directed to the needs of the schools and various departments within the limited space of Cooper's relatively small urban campus, enhancing the academic experience for students.

In **2019**, the School of Architecture completely overhauled the individual workspaces used by first- through fourth-year students to support collaborative work in the Design Studio, an 8,000 square foot shared space. The workspaces are equipped with full-size adjustable tables for

drawing, drafting, and laptop computing as well as shelving for much needed storage for student work.

The School of Art renovated its photography lab in **2021**, providing students with access to analog photography facilities including a darkroom with enlargers and a processing area as well as a fully equipped digital photography lab and a professional lighting studio.

The School of Engineering upgraded its chemistry labs with new high-ventilation fume hoods. The school also remodeled its administrative spaces for greater efficiency to include a state-of-the-art conference room, freeing up more space for academic use.

Even smaller-scale investments in facilities increased opportunities for collaboration and community building. At the beginning of Fall 2021 with the support of a donor, we introduced newly furnished informal lounge areas in our academic buildings,



added more comfortable lobby seating, and in response to student requests, designated a meditation space in 41 Cooper Square. Investment in these more informal spaces alongside major investments in facilities, equipment, and resources are all part of a holistic approach to reshaping our academic culture to strengthen our disciplines, work across disciplinary boundaries, and support students.



COOPER'S CIVIC IMPACT

Equal access to education and to the opportunity to engage in the issues that matter to a citizenry are components that Peter Cooper saw as essential to sustaining a democracy. We steward those ideals today not only by working to mitigate financial barriers to a college education and empowering an academic environment that is just and equitable, but also by serving the broadest community. In addition to our traditional students, thousands of others engage with Cooper's civic and educational programming annually—from high schoolers and adults who are part of our outreach and continuing education programs to the legions who assemble in our public spaces, primarily the Great Hall, to spark change and celebrate progress.

“Why is The Cooper Union significant in the whole educational progress of the United States? The Cooper Union is a pilot plant, a pacemaker, in the role that education must play if we are to continue to approximate the ideals for which this country was founded and toward which one hopes it is moving...”

FELIX FRANKFURTER, Associate Justice
Supreme Court of the United States
October 6, 1956

“Cooper Union is a microcosm of what we seek as a democracy, and it is precious in that way.”

GLORIA STEINEM
October 29, 2020



THE GREAT HALL

Especially in these times, it is even more important to remember The Cooper Union's historic role as a destination for productive debate and new ideas and a platform for those who seek to improve society. Cooper's Great Hall has always been a place where influential voices share new ideas, organize movements, and contribute to a better way forward. Since adopting the Plan, we have sought not only to elevate the Great Hall's legacy as a public forum—where visionaries advocated for change and New Yorkers gathered to debate and discuss pivotal moments in American life—but to bring that civic function to bear on the key issues of the present. In the Great Hall, congressional leaders such as the venerable John Lewis as well as Ro Khanna and Adam Schiff addressed New York City audiences live and national audiences via livestream. New York Governor Kathy Hochul signed landmark legislation to protect reproductive healthcare in New York State here. New York City Mayor Eric Adams debriefed us on his very first state of the city speech. And Cooper students organized forums for world renowned authors, activists, and environmentalists such as Naomi Klein, Varshini Prakash, Ayana Elizabeth Johnson, and Bill McKibben to activate students here and at neighboring colleges and universities during Climate Week. The list of recent Great Hall guests is filled with names of national and international import—Gloria Steinem, Wynton Marsalis, Atul Gawande, Ai Weiwei, Patty Jenkins, Jon Batiste, and Neil Gaiman, to name a few.

Thanks to a generous grant from The Robert David Lion Gardiner Foundation, the legacy and lessons of Great Hall programs are now preserved and available to the public through Voices from the Great Hall, a digital archive launched in **2022**. The archive, which is accessible free online, gathers all known sound and video recordings made in the Great Hall from 1941 to the present day as well as more than 8,900 objects, such as photographs, tickets, and flyers, related to more than 3,000 Great Hall programs dating to 1859. Featuring recordings of some of the most renowned thinkers, activists, and leaders in American history, the archive provides an invaluable educational resource while celebrating the Great Hall as a birthplace of important and influential movements.



OUTREACH AND CONTINUING EDUCATION

The Cooper Union also offers a collection of outreach classes—a parallel educational experience to the undergraduate and graduate degrees—on a broad scope of subjects to students of varied ages and origins either at no or low cost to participants. Annually, these programs reach a population of students nearly as large as Cooper's full-time student body. These programs have fulfilled an integral component of The Cooper Union's mission by putting quality education within reach of all.



Since 1968, the Saturday Program has offered free art and architecture courses taught by Cooper students to more than 11,000 New York City youth from underserved communities. In 2023, 230 students representing high schools across all New York City boroughs participated in the

program. In addition to free courses, the Saturday Program also offers writing workshops, field trips, and visits to studios of professional artists. These components help prepare students for college admission and careers in the arts.

Cooper’s STEM outreach programs connect high schoolers to valuable learning opportunities through the Albert Nerken School of Engineering and via partnerships with guidance counselors from New York City schools and other STEM or college prep organizations. Each year, the STEM Saturdays program, taught by Cooper undergraduate and graduate students, serves approximately 60 New York City high school students from historically under-represented groups. Students assemble in small teams to design, analyze, build, and present their solutions to real-world engineering problems. The program also includes career counseling and college planning sessions with Cooper staff members. Students typically report that the program helps them feel academically prepared for college and that they plan to pursue a STEM degree. In the Summer STEM program, high school sophomores and juniors take an immersive, six-week course that challenges them through hands-on engineering design and problem-solving. During the 2023 summer session, 197 students were enrolled and 90 students received a full-tuition scholarship to participate.



Providing learning opportunities for adults, our ongoing Continuing Education courses reflect The Cooper Union’s historic commitment to educating a broad citizenry while modeling the virtue of a lifelong pursuit of skill and knowledge. Each year, some 800 students explore fine arts, graphic arts, illustration, typography, creative coding, and information design. While most students pay for these high-quality courses, bringing in revenue to fund undergraduate scholarships, students and staff members of The Cooper Union can access one free class per term.

Perhaps the program that most closely resembles Peter Cooper’s intent when he first opened the doors of The Cooper Union to New York’s working class is the Retraining Program for Immigrant Engineers (RPIE). RPIE is a free professional development program that for more than 30 years has helped immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers navigate a complicated set of barriers to rejoin and succeed in the engineering workforce. RPIE participants, who number more than 250 annually, have backgrounds in more than 30 engineering specializations, including civil, electrical, mechanical, and chemical engineering, as well as architecture, IT, and programming. All participants enter with at least an undergraduate

degree, with 35% holding an advanced degree and more than half having at least 10 years of professional experience in their field. RPIE’s curriculum encourages participants to pair their experience with courses and projects that develop high-demand technical and digital skills, advance professional communication, encourage collaboration, and prepare participants for the engineering workforce in the US. RPIE participants regularly enter the engineering workforce in positions that match their previous experience and help propel them to a higher socioeconomic status. The impact is profound—70% of participants enter full-time engineering positions within one year of completing the program.

AN ENGAGED ALUMNI NETWORK

Among The Cooper Union's greatest strengths is the devotion of its alumni network. Cooper alumni are not only instrumental to the work of shaping a sustainable future for the institution, but also demonstrate time and time again the range and far-reaching impact that a Cooper education can have in the world. We have been intentional and proactive in our efforts to reinvigorate connections between the institution, alumni, and the Cooper Union Alumni Association (CUAA) while also focusing on outreach to those who have not been in contact with Cooper for many years. The enthusiasm, generosity, and increasing levels of engagement we have seen from alumni in recent years suggest that attitudes have been shifting for the better in step with our demonstrated strategic and financial progress. Expanded opportunities to participate in the life of the community are facilitating active relationships with The Cooper Union both near and from afar.



In **2017**, we launched Cooper Together, an annual celebration marking Peter Cooper's birthday with gatherings of alumni in their local communities. The Cooper Together tradition has grown over the years, from initially nine events in the US only to alumni celebrations hosted each year in more than 30 cities around the globe. We are also seeing alumni from a wide range of graduation years reconnect with classmates through in-person events in New York City, including the CUAA Founder's Day Awards ceremony, class reunions, and signature public programming in the Great Hall.

Another sign of renewed engagement with the institution is the current energy and interest behind Cooper's alumni affinity groups, which provide support and networking opportunities in a variety of professional areas, including law, technology, finance, design, and real estate. In **2023**, the Cooper Union Climate Initiative (CUCI) was founded as the newest affinity group, dedicated to promoting involvement in addressing the climate crisis and other environmental issues. Alumni have been eager to engage with Cooper undergraduates as well, facilitating educational experiences in the field, connecting them to internships and job opportunities, and providing mentorship and career guidance.

...and efforts for the accomplishment of the greatest number of the good youth of this beloved native city and to meet the expense of enlarging the course of instruction in this Institution. The Trustees may rely on my best efforts to aid them in every way in promoting the highest welfare of this Institution.

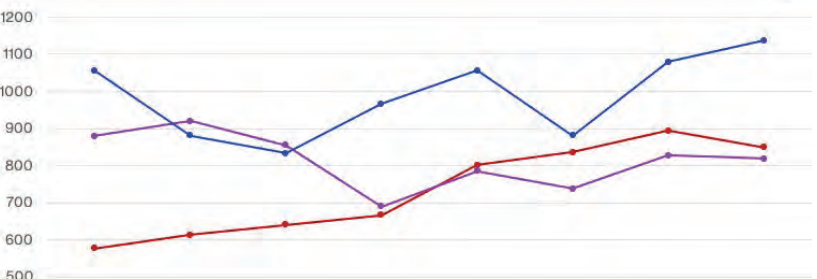
Very respectfully,
Your obedient servant,
Peter Cooper

LUMINARY SOCIETY \$10 MILLION AND ABOVE
MAURICE KANBAR
THE STARR FOUNDATION
FOUNDATION SOCIETY \$5 MILLION - \$9,999,999
THE ESTATE OF WILLIAM HERGENROTHER '55
RICHARD AND RONAY MENSCHER
ALBERT NERKEN '33
ROSEMARY '53 AND MILTON OKUN
GEORGE REEVES '64 AND ROSS WISNEWSKI
FREDERICK P. AND SANDRA P. ROSE FOUNDATION
IRMA GIUSTINO WEISS '45
ANONYMOUS (3)
PETER COOPER HERITAGE SOCIETY \$1 MILLION - \$4,999,999
ALTMAN FOUNDATION
SIDNEY J. ALTMAN



Several data points provide important context for this work as well as evidence that we continue to be among the nation’s most distinguished colleges and universities.

TOTAL APPLICATIONS BY SCHOOL
New, First-Time Applicants



| | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 | 2024 |
|--------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| ARCHITECTURE | 576 | 613 | 640 | 667 | 801 | 835 | 894 | 884 |
| ART | 879 | 919 | 854 | 690 | 785 | 737 | 827 | 818 |
| ENGINEERING | 1055 | 881 | 832 | 966 | 1056 | 881 | 1079 | 1136 |

The Cooper Union’s enrollment position is strong. Applications are up 20% over 2020, with increases in all three schools. The admissions rate has held steady from 13.5% in 2017 to 13.7% in **2022**. Cooper’s admissions profile remains consistent with highly selective institutions. Average standardized test scores continue to be on the rise for our enrolled first-year students (an average 1385 SAT score in 2017 rose to an average 1440 in 2022).^{*} Grade point averages have also held to pre-tuition levels. Retention of first-year students is also on the rise. In Fall **2022**, 93.2% of the entering cohort from the year prior returned. That compared to 91.7% returning in Fall 2021. That placed us well above the national retention rate of 75.6% in postsecondary institutions as of Fall 2021, the most recent year for which data is available from the National Center for Education Statistics. This momentum, including the

growth in applications, resulted from strategic enrollment planning and outreach and followed several years of a sharp downturn in applications (by roughly 30%) in the immediate years after Cooper began charging tuition—a decline that continued through 2019. With the Plan’s inception, a concerted effort was made to bolster outreach efforts, improve supporting technology, and renew staffing and leadership to reverse the downward trend. Since then, key enrollment metrics have improved significantly, and did so despite the impacts of the pandemic, which at Cooper and across higher education temporarily interrupted relationship-building with high school students and was, for some, a determining factor in decisions to delay college entry.

^{*}The Cooper Union has been test-optional for undergraduate admissions since 2020. The first class admitted under this protocol entered in Fall 2021.

LOOKING FORWARD

The cumulative progress we are making across The Cooper Union shows us that the goals of the Plan are within reach, and that means we are increasingly connecting students with a world-class education at an unmatched level of affordability. We are on our way to restoring full-tuition scholarships for all undergraduates while advancing our academic programs, investing in our facilities, enrolling and supporting a highly qualified, highly engaged student body, and strengthening our balance sheet to secure a financially sustainable future for the institution.

While there is great momentum, we remain focused on the critical factors and unknown circumstances that may arise and adversely impact the Plan. We continue to monitor the long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as economic trends that affect everything from market returns and real estate holdings to fundraising and evolving student needs. The Plan is equipped with a wide range of specific guardrails and multiple “bullpen” items that we can activate if necessary to offset negative events. Importantly, as of the close of FY 2023, none of the bullpen items were pursued—as Plan results established a positive position for Cooper.



Looking ahead, we will continue to closely watch and manage several potential areas of risk, including:

- **Fundraising** We have been fortunate to build a base of sustainable fundraising and, in the next years of the Plan, will be seeking 11% annual increases in fundraising revenue. Certainly, macroeconomic factors could interfere in our pursuit of those goals. We will continue to watch market and economic conditions closely.
- **Real estate** The pandemic has resulted in stress on certain sources of revenue, particularly in real estate. Lower occupancy rates and falling commercial rent revenues have resulted in lower tax equivalency revenues from our real estate holdings. In addition, the retail market continues to struggle, which has stifled some of our retail rental opportunities.
- **Facility rentals** The pandemic also affected our facility rentals with at least two years of no or reduced event revenue. We have, however, begun to see a return of facility rentals.
- **Operating expenses** The Plan called for operating expenses to increase, on average, approximately 2.7% annually. Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, rising inflation trends have put upward pressure on certain costs such as utilities, goods, services, and construction. We will continue to evaluate expense pressures and look for opportunities to mitigate them with each annual budgeting process.

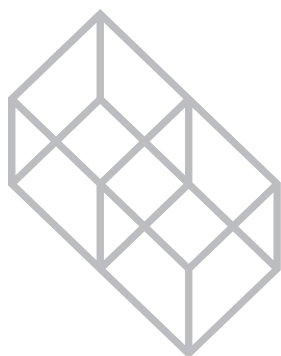
So what's the prognosis for the second half of the Plan's timeline? We continue to make progress and are currently on target to deliver the established financial targets within the timeframe set forth in the Plan. Meeting these targets would allow us to reach a level of financial health that supports a return to undergraduate

full-tuition scholarships. With consistent operating surpluses and positive investment returns, we should remain on track. Those results will contribute to the long-term financial health of the institution, which is ultimately necessary to sustain a full-tuition scholarship model, just as Peter Cooper envisioned it.



We are deeply grateful to the entire Cooper Union community—students, faculty, and staff as well as our generous alumni, friends, and supporters—along with our Financial Monitors and everyone who has played a part in helping us achieve a solid footing at this point in the Plan. We also thank the members of the Free Education Committee of the Board of the Trustees who contributed to drafting the Plan and whose confidence helped to set us on a positive path forward.





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