

Friday, November 9, 2018

We write in response to the *Cooper Union HSS Protest: Decolonize Our Curricula* and want to begin by thanking members of the movement for raising our collective conscience on these issues, and thanking students and faculty who have engaged in healthy dialogue with an eye towards change. We recognize that the views of students are varied on these issues, and we have been encouraged by the healthy debate, the forum created for opinions to be shared and heard with respect, and the bravery of those who gave voice to these concerns and shared personal experiences, especially when it wasn't easy or comfortable. The student testimonials have weighed heavily on faculty and administrators, and we see this as an opportunity for important discussion and meaningful change. We look forward to continuing this evolving set of conversations and to the concrete actions that emerge.

Below, we respond to the requests put forward in the materials circulated by students on October 29. Some requests will take additional time to complete in a thorough and intentional manner, a reflection of how important we feel it is to do this right. We also want to bring your attention to the Diversity and Inclusion Task Force, co-chaired by Toni Torres and Sam Keene, who have reached out to the student organizers to ensure that the Task Force's work reflects and addresses students' concerns. The Task Force is a group of faculty, students, and staff, formed through voluntary participation. The group has spent the past year discussing issues created or intensified by the minimal diversity in Cooper Union's community. The group has been charged to release a formal report of recommendations by the end of November to President Sparks. This report will also be made public, and once reviewed, a plan of action to enact a selection of recommendations will be shared. We will invite community input in the process of crafting this final plan.

We hope this response makes clear our deep commitment to addressing the issues of faculty diversity, curricula that reflect global and post-colonial perspectives, and teaching that engages students' agency in their own learning. We agree that these are critical elements of a holistic education. At the end of the day, actions will speak louder than words, and we look forward to creating this change together with faculty, staff, and students.

1) Transparency

Members of the cabinet (listed below) have committed to gathering and analyzing statistical data relating to enrollment, retention and performance of students in HSS as well as other courses critical to students' progression in their academic disciplines by the end of January 2019. Meaningful analysis of the data will include demographic factors such as race and ethnicity as well as income, gender, and residency status. For context, we will also consider grading assessment and standards information. Because the numbers are small, we will seek to assemble course performance data in all key gateway courses ideally over 10 years from 2008 to 2018 and income data from 2014 to 2018. (FAFSA was more reliably collected at the onset of

the 50% tuition model in 2014). This may enable a large enough pool to be able to report out on findings without singling out students or faculty.

Actionable findings will be identified and shared with the academic leadership team (all deans, assistant/associate deans, and director of institutional effectiveness). Provided that student privacy and confidentiality can be protected, the outcomes and findings will be shared broadly for robust discussion.

All four deans have committed to making curriculum and faculty meeting agendas publicly available to all members of the larger Cooper Union community. We are researching a mechanism, likely online, to house these in one place so that it is simple to both post and find them. Currently, each faculty has a governance structure that includes elected student representation at its meetings. We understand that the disproportionate number of students relative to faculty may create power dynamics that inhibit a free and open exchange of ideas. We look forward to talking with students to understand this dynamic and any others that yielded this request and exploring together with students and faculty whether there are more effective structures.

Acting Dean Buckley will also open additional student seats at the next scheduled meeting of the curriculum committee on November 27 and is proposing a larger joint open meeting of faculty and students on November 28 to discuss suggestions for changes to the readings and topics for HSS courses next semester, and the organization and content for courses next fall.

2) Hiring

All four deans and President Sparks have committed to working with search committees (as defined in each school's governance), including the students who sit on those committees, to develop hiring practices that result in a more diverse faculty (full-time, adjunct, and post-doc) across all four academic programs, strengthening the quality of our work with more diverse representation and experiences. This includes working with Human Resources to improve hiring practices. Natalie Brooks, who leads Human Resources, is collecting information about current and past processes for hiring faculty, and will outline the process and timeline that exists today as well as opportunities she has identified for improvement (e.g., starting the process earlier to expand our applicant pools, specifically taking advantage of the resources available to reach a broader pool of candidates for all positions, educating faculty search committees about how to go beyond existing professional networks in identifying candidates). These discussions have already begun, and we are hopeful the improvements will be reflected for the next full-time faculty member search, class of postdoctoral fellows, and adjunct faculty hiring for fall 2019. Specifically, Acting Dean Buckley has committed to ensure that diversity and the expertise required for teaching a more comprehensive and decolonized HSS3 curriculum will be taken into account in the hiring and staffing decisions for the next academic year.

Acting Dean Buckley has a maximum of two years to serve in the role, as defined in the CUFACT contract. Before hiring a dean for the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, we expect to thoughtfully use an interim period for exploration of the program. In the search for the Dean of Engineering, three student representatives participated on the search committee; all students were invited to meet the candidates selected to visit campus and provided input. Once a search for the Dean for HSS is established, we will follow a similar model, welcoming student voices on the dean search committee and providing multiple opportunities for student involvement in the candidate vetting process.

3) Accountability

Dean of Student Chris Chamberlin has included a statement (attached in this email) about the Title IX procedure and potential improvements as well as plans to undertake an objective self-study. Part of this study will include inviting outside evaluators who can offer an objective point of view. The office will establish and share a timeline for the exercise that will allow it to be as comprehensive and effective and possible.

We have begun researching various models for an ombudsperson and will make a determination in the spring semester on whether to pursue an ombuds model. We are eager to talk with students, faculty, and staff about a structure that could effectively support them.

4) Decolonization and Restructuring

The Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, in partnership with members of the academic leadership team, have begun the process of revamping the curriculum and are committed to ensuring that not only the assigned texts but the pedagogical approach to understanding the material is not limited to Western perspectives. While we understand progress is slow, we won't be starting from the beginning on this effort.

As a result of strategic planning and recommendations that emerged from our Middle States Commission on Higher Education evaluation, we were in the process of forming a representative group – a “council on shared learning” – that would identify the shared literacies, inquiries, and proficiencies in a holistic education that serve to make students' time at The Cooper Union compelling and distinctive, regardless of their professional field of study. We recognize and embrace the notion that such an education requires us all to think outside the bounds of Eurocentricity and to include non-Western perspectives in the design of all course offerings.

As part of this effort, this group will engage the broader community in a discussion of opportunities across the schools of architecture, art, and engineering, and a re-envisioning of the role of humanities and social sciences to prepare students for active democratic and global

citizenship and service, to inform and enrich students' professional practices, to foster imaginative and critical thinking, and to reshape the integration of humanistic and professional education.

The deans of the four faculties and the full-time HSS faculty have enthusiastically agreed to this program review and development and welcome its potential to transform the HSS program in relation to the needs of students in the three schools consistent with our mission and our proposed strategic priorities. This student movement has given us an opportunity to refine the structure of this group and increase student representation. In addition to intense self-assessment and self-reflection, we are committed to seeking input and advice from a diverse set of experts outside of Cooper Union to examine new models of curriculum development, organization, and pedagogy. After an initial organizational period, the council will open many of its meetings to the general community. By December 1, we will provide additional details.

We make these commitments with sincerity and urgency, and we look forward to working in partnership with all students, staff, and faculty to make real and lasting change in the short and long terms.

Cabinet:

Natalie Brooks, Chief Talent Leader
Peter Buckley, Acting Dean, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
Chris Chamberlin, Dean of Students
Danielle Cooper Daughtry, Governance and External Affairs Officer
Mike Essl, Dean, School of Art
Adriana Farmiga, Assistant Dean, School of Art
Nicole Kidston, Interim Vice President of Alumni Affairs and Development
Mindy Lang, Creative Director
Kim Newman, Media Relations Manager
Elizabeth O'Donnell, Associate Dean, The Irwin S. Chanin School of Architecture
Anita Raja, Associate Dean of Research and Graduate Programs, Albert Nerken School of Engineering
John Ruth, Vice President for Finance and Administration
Ruben Savizky, Associate Dean, Albert Nerken School of Engineering
Laura Sparks, President
Richard Stock, Dean, Albert Nerken School of Engineering
Nader Tehrani, Dean, The Irwin S. Chanin School of Architecture
Toni Torres, Director of Strategic Initiatives and Institutional Effectiveness