

Yale Daily News

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Yale to award first Black student a posthumous degree

BY BRIAN ZHANG
STAFF REPORTER

The decades-long push by students, alumni and members of the Yale Divinity School to grant the late Reverend James W.C. Pennington a degree has finally come to fruition.

On Monday morning, University President Peter Salovey announced in an email that the Board of Trustees has agreed to issue Pennington, along with the Reverend Alexander Crummell, posthumous M.A. Privatim degrees.

Both Pennington and Crummell studied theology at Yale during the 1830s and 40s, respectively, but because of their race, were denied various privileges that their white classmates had — including the ability to participate in discussion or borrow books from the library. They were also not allowed to matriculate for a degree. Pennington was a formerly enslaved person who went on to publish an autobiography and the first African American history textbook. Crummell was a scholar of pan-Africanism and the founder of the American Negro Academy in Washington, D.C.

“The decision to confer Yale degrees on Pennington and Crummell and the initiatives we have established so far in response to the research brought forth by the Yale and Slavery Working Group are milestones on our journey to understand and reckon with our history.”

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The push to award Pennington his degree 186 years after he studied at Yale has been far from easy, but student groups see the Board of Trustees' decision as a step in the right direction. / Courtesy of Jon Ort DIV '24

Trans students, faculty face healthcare barriers

BY SARAH COOK AND STEPHAN OLIVEIRA
STAFF REPORTER AND CONTRIBUTING REPORTER

Seeking feminizing hormone replacement therapy, F. first went to the Yale Health website — only to find a single paragraph stating that she would be referred to an endocrinologist in specialty services, with no phone numbers or further information.

The website was not organized in a “clear and compiled way,” said F., who has been granted anonymity to protect her privacy. Instead, she had to move through multiple different web pages to get the information she needed and still could not figure out which numbers to call.

Receiving conflicting responses from various departments at Yale Health while simultaneously calling providers across the state, F. said she spent hours of her day on standby. She thought constantly about

SEE **HEALTHCARE** PAGE 5

SUN calls for fin. aid transparency and mental healthcare reform



The rally, which took place on April 25, featured student testimonies and raised concerns over Yale's financial aid and mental health care policy. / Tenzin Jorden, Photography Editor

BY MOLLY REINMANN
STAFF REPORTER

Content warning: This article contains references to suicide.

Members of Students Unite Now took to Beinecke Plaza on Tuesday to rally in support of financial aid transparency and quality mental health support.

The rally featured testimonies from Craig Birkhead-Morton '24, Simone Felton '25 and Ivana Nique '26, who advocated for transparency in the financial aid process and shorter wait times for mental health services. Organizers also distributed over 500 copies of SUN's new zine residential college dining halls. The zine is titled “What Should Yale Be For?” and includes 11 additional student testimonies.

“We've found that students feel their needs aren't being met, and they have really pressing demands of this school,” Birkhead-Morton said. “We wanted to use this rally to lay out these complaints. But it's not really about SUN

speaking for students; it's about everybody having their individual story heard and shared with the broader public.”

Birkhead-Morton spoke to rally attendees about his struggles with mental health on campus and his experience receiving Yale-provided mental health care.

When he first requested mental health care services, Birkhead-Morton told the News he had to wait three months before being matched with a therapist. The University never acknowledged the delay.

“I take this issue very seriously,” Birkhead-Morton said. “Since this experience, there have been two suicides at Yale, both people I've personally known. This issue of mental health care is really a matter of life and death for a lot of students.”

Birkhead-Morton began receiving University mental health care in between his first and second year. Now, as he finishes his third year at Yale, he said he still does not feel that there have been significant systemic improvements.

Recently, Birkhead-Morton was informed that his regular therapist was put in charge of a group therapy program and therefore was unable to continue their individual meetings. This situation led him to resort to receiving virtual therapy from a private provider in his home state of Maryland.

“This is dangerous for students from low income backgrounds who don't have access to private insurance and private mental health care,” he said. “It's really a matter of equity and accessibility for students.”

Paul McKinley, senior associate dean of strategic initiatives and communications at Yale College, said that the University has taken tangible steps to improve the quality of mental health care on campus.

He pointed to the Yale College Community Care program, established in April 2021. Colloquially known as YC3, the program offers short-term on-demand support from mental health specialists, according to the program website.

SEE **SUN** PAGE 4

Lupe Fiasco named Saybrook Associate Fellow

BY NATHANIEL ROSENBERG AND MIRANDA WOLLEN
STAFF REPORTERS

Grammy award-winning artist Wasalu Muhammad Jaco, better known by his stage name Lupe Fiasco, will join Yale's community as a Saybrook Associate Fellow in the fall of 2023.

The program allows Fellows and Associate Fellows — who can be faculty, staff and other Yale affiliates — to form connections with each other and with students over a four-year renewable timespan. Head of College Thomas Near described Saybrook's Fellowship as a sort of college “social network,” wherein students are able to reach out to specific Fellows based on individual interests and expertise.

Though Fellows are often associated with the University, colleges can nominate and appoint non-Yale employees per year as Associate Fellows. This year, Head Near nominated Fiasco, and Fiasco accepted.

“He's a big fan of Yale because he's essentially participated in every one of the Open Yale Courses online on YouTube,” Near explained.

Fiasco's journey to becoming a Fellow started at an entirely different academic institution: the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Fiasco has been at MIT for a year as part of its MLK Visiting Professors and Scholars Program, where he taught a course at MIT called Rap Theory and Practice, a technical exploration into the creation of rap music.

Fiasco also worked with MIT faculty to understand the neurophysiology of spoken word art and rap. While there, he met computational biologist and Yale Assistant Professor Brandon Ogbunu GRD '10, a member of the same program.

“Lupe represents the kind of thinker that Yale champions,” Ogbunu told the News. “He had a very big impact on MIT.”

He and Ogbunu collaborated on projects and talked, and eventually Ogbunu invited him to take part in a College Tea at Saybrook.

Nathan Mai '25 attended the February College Tea, and described the experience as “surreal.” He said that Fiasco

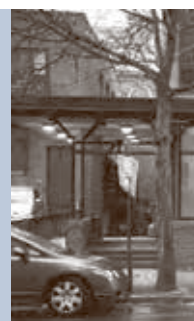
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CROSS CAMPUS

THIS DAY IN YALE HISTORY, 1993. Fifty Yale students return from one of the largest gay rights marches to date in Washington, D.C., estimations as high as one million protesters. The Elis march under the banner of the Yale Gay and Lesbian Association.

INSIDE THE NEWS

Black and Latino overdoses skyrocketed during the pandemic.
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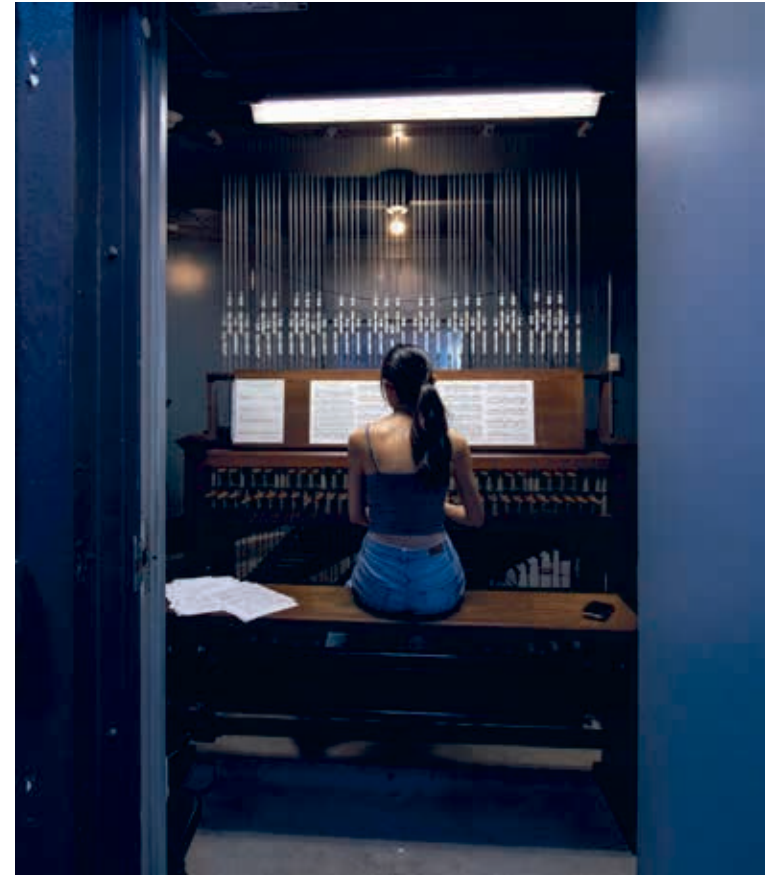
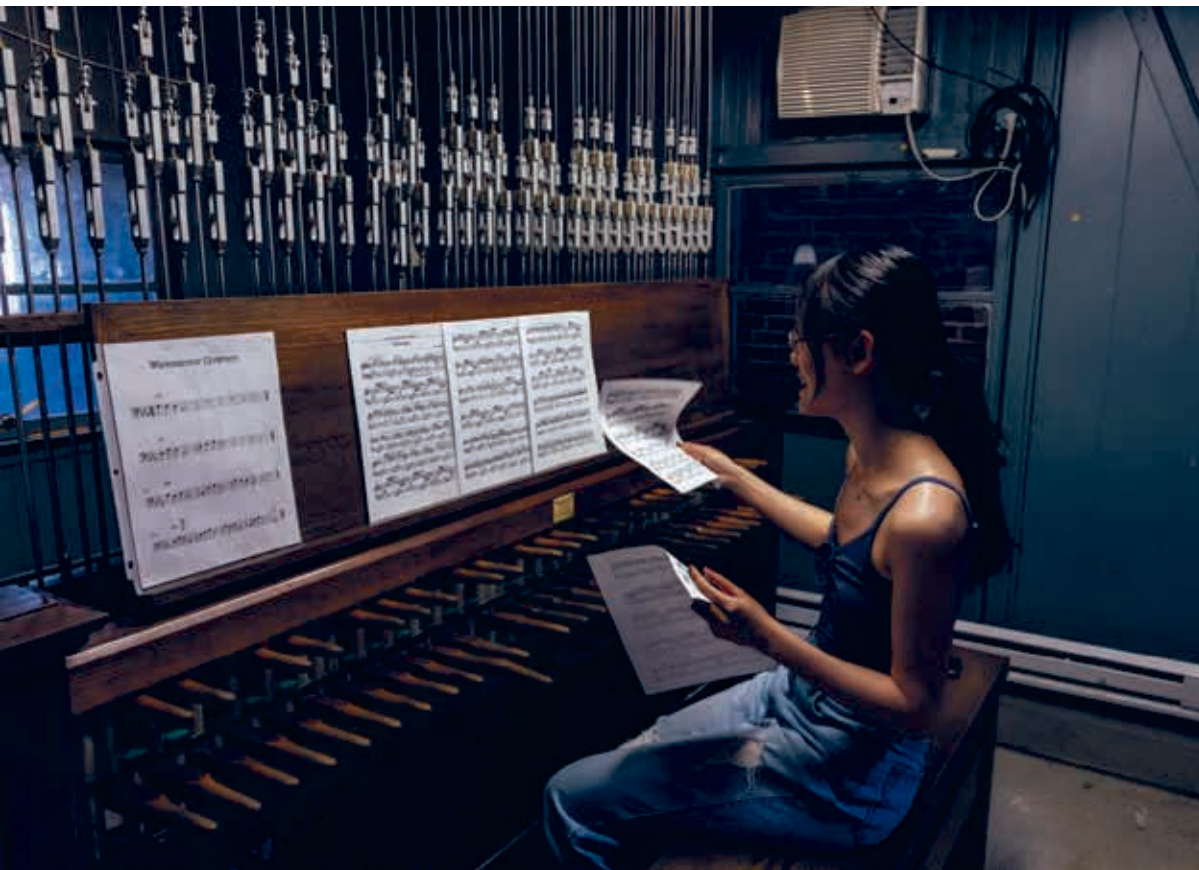
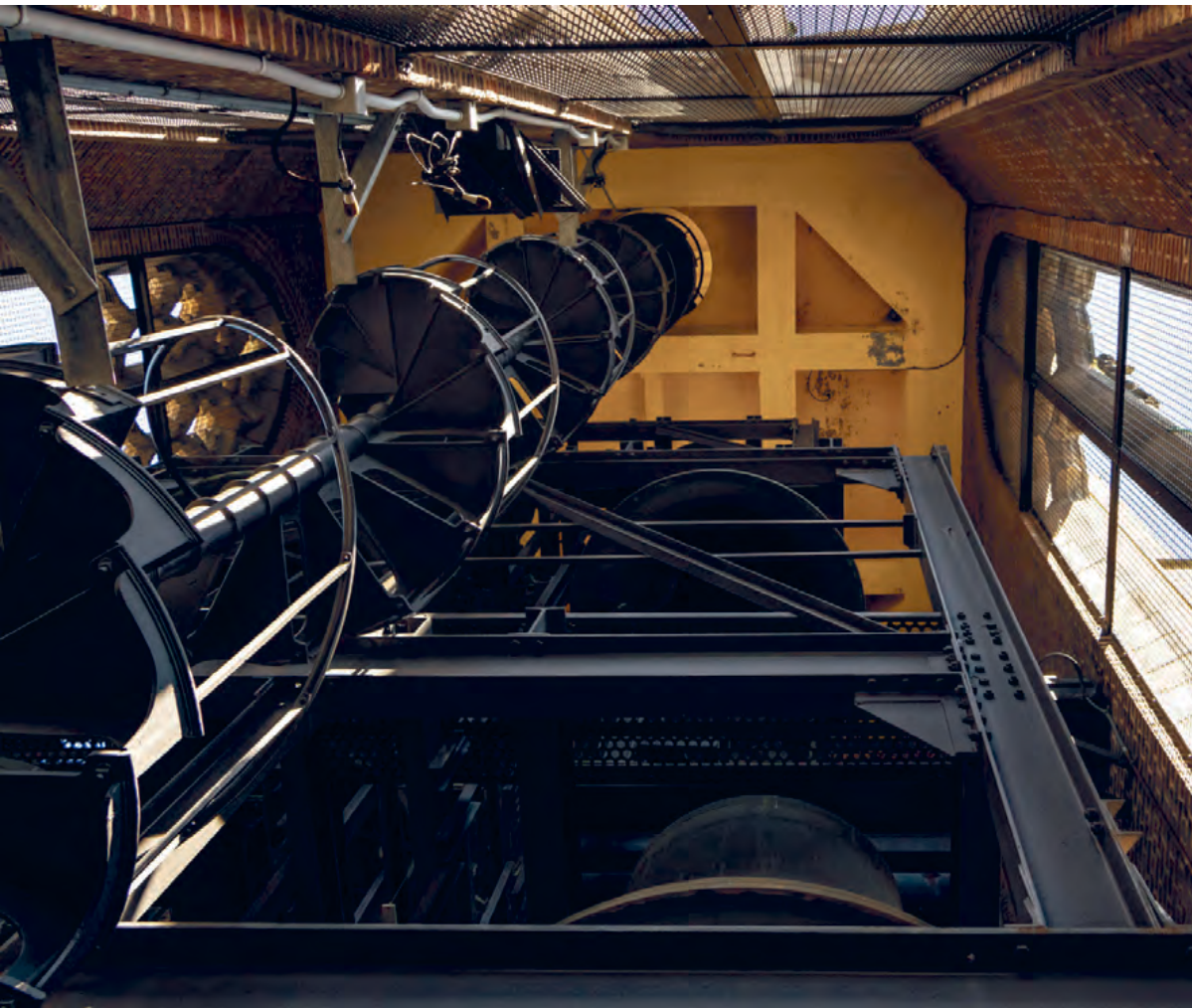
EID Muslim students celebrated the end of Ramadan.
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PRISON Yale Prison Education Initiative will expand to a second prison.
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THROUGH THE LENS



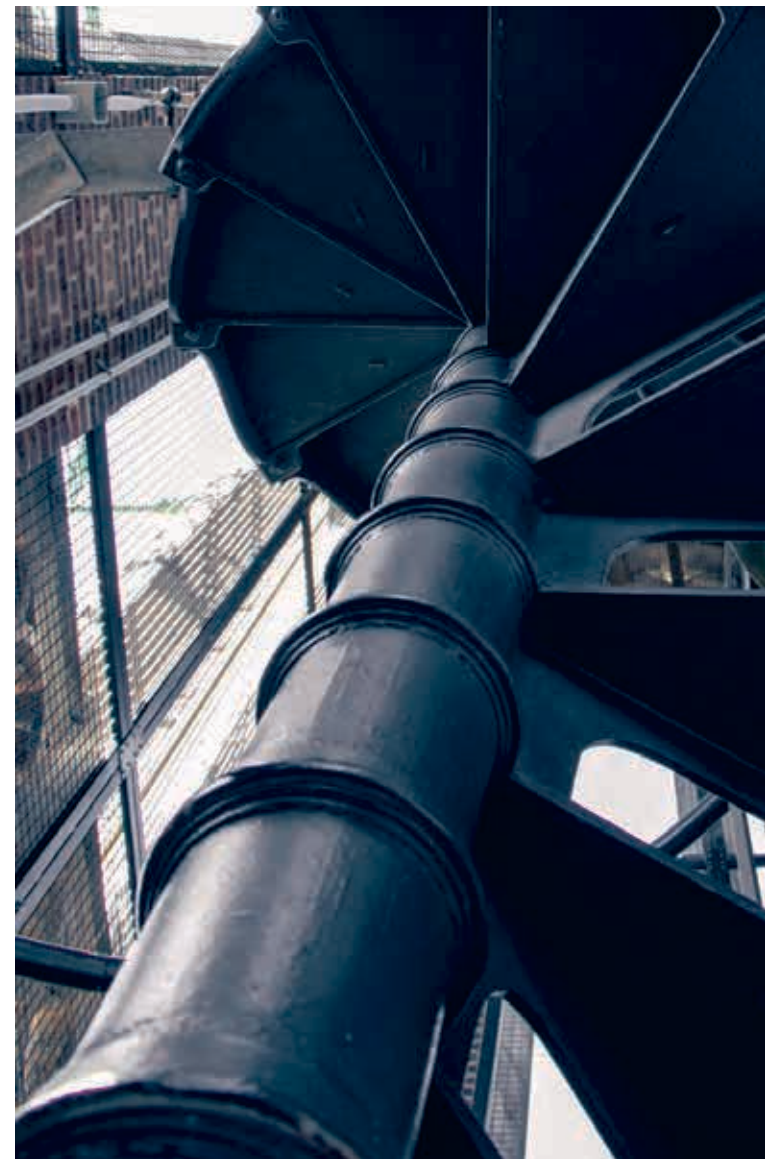
Photos by Giri Viswanathan



I'm always surprised that, for an instrument so imposing — 43 tons elevated 284 feet in the air — the Carillon seems to blend into the background. Harkness Tower might be striking for tour groups taking photos, but after a few months, the bells are just a subtle soundtrack. Every once in a while, you'll hear something that makes you stop and smile: a Beatles song, bits from the "La La Land" soundtrack, or another classic hit.

It's sometimes easy to forget that the Carillon is helmed by a dedicated Guild of student-musicians. However, their perspective — from a small room, surrounded by colossal bells, high above the ground — is remarkable. I was curious, so I joined Yilin Chen '23 for a Friday afternoon ring. Here's a glimpse from their side: up the stairs, behind the Harkness walls, and inside the bells.

Words and Photos by Giri Viswanathan



FROM THE FRONT

"I think this is the beginning of a beautiful friendship."
RICK BLAINE "CASABLANCA"

Students United Now distributes 500+ copies of "What Should Yale Be For?" zine

SUN RALLY FROM PAGE 1

The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is a hotline for individuals in crisis or for those looking to help someone else. To speak with a certified listener, call 1-800-273-8255.

Crisis Text Line is a texting service for emotional crisis support. To speak with a trained listener, text HELLO to 741741. It is free, available 24/7 and confidential.

On-call counselors from Yale Mental Health and Counseling are available at any time: call (203) 432-0290.

Students who are interested in taking a medical withdrawal should reach out to their residential college dean.

Additional resources are available in a guide compiled by the Yale College Council which can be accessed in the QR code below.



Student leaders emphasized the importance of the rally occurring during Bulldog Days. Above, Craig Birkhead-Morton '24/ Tenzin Jorden, Photography Editor

to see Yale do more, he said, and believes that grassroots efforts like SUN's are important steps towards policy reform.

Felton also delivered a testimony, speaking about her friends' negative experiences with University mental healthcare. She advocated specifically for shorter wait times and more frequent therapy opportunities.

"My story is one of playing therapist," Felton said. "On numerous occasions, I've had to support friends who couldn't access mental healthcare on campus, or who have spent weeks waiting to be matched with a therapist. While I want to support people that I love, I'm unequipped to do that in the same informed way that a healthcare professional can."

Like Birkhead-Morton, Felton receives mental health care from a private therapist outside of Yale.

Since beginning therapy, Felton has noticed a profound difference in her overall wellbeing. Support of a trained professional, Felton said, has made it possible for her to operate normally as a student in stressful situations.

"As a result of therapy, I have so much more space in my life to develop my emotional and academic self," Felton said in her speech. "The inadequacies of Yale's mental healthcare have widened the gap in emotional wellbeing and academic success between students on the basis of socioeconomic status. Yale needs to do more to close that gap."

Nique was the final speaker at the rally. Shifting the focus away from mental healthcare, she spoke about her experience with the Undergraduate Financial Aid Office.

Nique is a first-generation college student and the only one of her siblings to attend an Ivy League college, she said. As such, she described entering the matriculation process completely uninformed about how financial aid operates at Yale.

"Before even attending Yale, I had a really rough experience with the financial aid office," Nique told the News. "There were countless phone calls back and forth, and there were just a lot of things that I didn't understand. I felt like I was

just being told things to do without any support.

Ultimately, the process, for me, lacked a lot of compassion."

Nique explained that her financial situation was complicated due to her parents' divorce. Despite her unique circumstances, she said, her assigned officers were difficult to reach and insensitive.

In response to a situation that she felt was inappropriately managed by her financial aid officer, Nique attempted to contact the director of financial aid to file a complaint. Despite calling numerous times, Nique said that she was unable to reach the head of the office.

Alex Muro, acting director of undergraduate financial aid, said that the University gives careful and critical attention to every family's unique situation.

"The Office of Undergraduate Financial Aid recognizes that every family's financial situation is different, and we work with all families to help them understand

how their financial need is determined," Muro wrote in an email to the News. "Because some families' financial situations are quite complicated, this analysis can – in some cases – require multiple requests for documentation."

In an email to the News, Dean of Undergraduate Admissions and Financial Aid Jeremiah Quinlan encouraged students concerned about their financial aid to connect with undergraduate financial aid officers.

He pointed to virtual appointments, business-hour phone calls and email as spaces for admitted or enrolled students to pose questions about financial aid.

In terms of desired action by the University administration, Nique said she wants to see the implementation of a system to offer feedback and anonymously disclose concerns and complaints about financial aid.

"There really needs to be more transparency in how interactions between students and financial officers are handled and recorded," Nique said. "If there were some sort of feedback form where students could rate their interactions, then the office could specifically respond and evaluate the system."

Birkhead-Morton, Felton and Nique all emphasized the significance of the rally taking place during Bulldog Days.

They said that it is important for prefrsh to be aware of some of Yale's shortcomings as they decide whether to matriculate in the Fall.

"Ultimately, I don't think anyone is really arguing 'Yale is bad,'" Nique said. "Because if that were the case, then why would any of us be here? I just think it's about acknowledging that there are components and layers to this institution that should be reevaluated and looked further upon. You have this beautiful architecture, all of these resources, yet at the same time, everyone's experience isn't really equal"

SUN was founded in 2012.

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"The kind of thinker Yale champions": Fiasco named Saybrook Associate Fellow

FIASCO FROM PAGE 1

invited him to take part in a College Tea at Saybrook.

Nathan Mai '25 attended the February College Tea, and described the experience as "surreal." He said that Fiasco had been one of his favorite artists since he first heard the rapper's feature on "Touch The Sky."

"He really struck me as a cerebral guy when he was talking," Mai said. "There were moments where he was quoting Aristotle next to A\$AP Rocky ... He had all sorts of little influences from everywhere. He seems like a very curious guy."

From the tea, Fiasco and Near bonded quickly – near, like Fiasco, is from Chicago, and connected with Fiasco's music.

"We grew up in different geographic parts of the city, but we both faced very similar pressures, and I'm a white dude, and because of white privilege I was

able to escape trouble," Near noted. "Lupe escaped trouble ... by being an artist."

His favorite song? "Kick, Push," the lead single off Fiasco's first album: "Lupe Fiasco's Food and Liquor."

Near nominated Fiasco as an Associate Fellow, and Fiasco was chosen this past March.

"Proud to announce I've been chosen to be a Saybrook Fellow at my OTHER favorite school in the whole wide world outside of MIT...@Yale," Fiasco wrote on his Twitter on March 30. "Shout to Tom Near for nominating me to a place where against all odds two Chicagoans found a home in the Ivy League. #SayBrookCollege #SAYWHAT"

Mai had been following Fiasco's MIT class from afar, and praised Fiasco's desire to bring rap music into the university as an art form worth being studied as poetry.

Fiasco will likely continue living in Cambridge in the fall, but

Near and Ogbunu are hopeful that he will establish a physical home-space at Yale in some capacity over the next year.

Sartaj Rajpal '25, who produces hip-hop and house music, praised Fiasco's lyricism, and said he was particularly excited about the opportunity to learn from such an accomplished hip-hop artist.

"I will be spending some time in Saybrook that's for sure," Rajpal told the News. "I'd love to work with him at some point."

Near and Ogbunu both noted that Fiasco would be a resource for students interested in the arts.

The college will work with the rapper to set up lectures and talks – and perhaps even to establish a course for Fiasco to teach.

"I love the fact that we have communities where we can bring people all together, regardless of who they are ... We all come together and we find community," Near explained in clos-



The Grammy-winning rapper, singer, record producer and entrepreneur will become a member of Saybrook's Fellowship program. / Wikimedia Commons

ing. "I don't think there's a lot of institutions where that happens"

Lupe Fiasco headlined Yale Spring Fling in 2011.

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First Black student awarded degree 186 years after studying at Yale

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Salovey wrote in his email to the Yale community. "More work remains, and we will announce additional programs and projects as we approach the publication of the working group's findings in early 2024."

A ceremony in the fall of 2023 is slated to take place and commemorate the conferral. Details about the event and accessibility options are to be released early next academic year.

In his announcement, Salovey acknowledged that the degrees being awarded was by no means a reversal of the injustices that Black Americans have historically encountered at Yale. Rather, it was a step forward in holding Yale accountable, recognizing two men who made significant

contributions to scholarship and cultivating a "stronger and more inclusive" University.

The Board of Trustees arrived at the decision following research by the Yale and Slavery Working Group, as well as advocacy by student and alumni groups, according to Salovey.

In recent months, student organizations such as the Yale Black Seminars and Pennington Legacy Group have pushed Pennington's story to the forefront of University discourse. On Feb. 23, the Graduate and Professional Students Senate passed a resolution to give Pennington the first posthumous seat at the organization, and in late March, members of the Divinity School published an open letter to Salovey and Associate Vice President for Institutional Affairs Martha Schall, reiterat-

ing their commitment to fighting for Pennington's honorary degree.

Previous steps by the University to honor Pennington, including designating a HBCU scholarship and a room in the Divinity School in his name, were not enough, the letter emphasized.

Among the professors shedding light on the University's historical ties with slavery is David Blight, a Sterling professor of history and a recipient of the Pulitzer Prize for History. Blight, who is chair of the Yale and Slavery Working Group, told the News that the group's research is based on "primary source documents, prior scholarship and community memory."

"For both Pennington and Crummell, there are deeply sourced contemporary biographies with comprehensive views

of their lives," Blight wrote in an email to the News. "Those books build on documentary evidence in 19th century newspapers and magazines, diaries, and correspondence."

Noah Humphrey DIV '23, founder of the Pennington Legacy Group and a co-chaplain of the Yale Black Seminars, said that today's announcement brought him hope and peace.

In previous interviews with the News, Humphrey had called attention to the tumultuous journey of communicating back and forth with University leadership on the matter. He said that the decision to confer the degree was the beginning of Yale upholding its motto of Lux et Veritas, or light and truth.

Meredith Barges DIV '23, another organizer of the Penning-

ton Legacy Group, credited Humphrey for keeping the "embers and fire burning on this issue" and expressed gratitude for the cross-campus student efforts this year that saw undergraduate and graduate students working together for the cause.

"It's right that Pennington will be Class of 2023," Barges said. "It means that Yale is not trying to erase what happened, not trying to deny this wrong. It tells the story of justice delayed 190 years."

Pennington studied at Yale from 1834 to 1837, while Crummell studied at Yale from 1840 to 1841.

William Porayouw contributed reporting.

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FROM THE FRONT

"So long, partner."

WOODY 'TOY STORY 3'

Transgender students, faculty face barriers to healthcare at Yale

HEALTHCARE FROM PAGE 1

her gender dysphoria and the fact that she could not access hormone replacement therapy, a process which she said led her mental health to deteriorate.

"It sucks to sit with that because you have to navigate this all by yourself," F. said. "It's super isolating. There are very few trans people on campus and very few trans people in my life. The only reason I got through it was because of word of mouth and trans people... It's a cycle because some days you don't have the energy to do anything or to make those calls because my gender dysphoria was so bad."

The News interviewed 17 Yale students and faculty who had sought gender-affirming care. Of that 17, 11 chose to seek care outside of the Yale Health network due to delays or incompatible treatment options. 11 also reported having been dead-named or misgendered at some point in their interaction with Yale Health. Of the remaining six, five had not interacted with Yale Health.

Four of the students the News spoke to said the quality of Yale's health care coverage was a major reason why they chose to attend the University. However, despite the purported resources, students and faculty expressed frustration at their experiences with Yale Health, not only by the limited coverage under the Basic Student Health Services insurance plan but also by a pattern of deadnaming and misgendering.

Last summer, F. called Yale Health's Specialty Services, along with their Pediatric Gender Program and the endocrinology department. She received different responses from each, and was told varying wait times to get an appointment that ranged from one month to a year and a half.

However, F. was ultimately unable to access hormone replacement therapy at Yale Health, as it is currently only offered under Yale Hospitalization/Specialty coverage. Yale Health's Hospitalization/Specialty Care plan extends beyond the Basic Student Health services all students receive and comes with a cost of \$1,378 — however, that cost is waived for those on full financial aid.

For F., Hospitalization/Specialty Care was "off the table" due to its high cost compared to her parent's insurance and because it only included limited care at Yale Health, which would not fulfill the medical needs that come along with F.'s physical disability. F., who is not out to her parents, also has privacy concerns that prohibit her from using their insurance to cover gender-affirming care, as a diagnosis of gender dysphoria would have appeared on her parent's insurance.

F. continued to seek gender-affirming care throughout the summer and early fall of 2022. She would wake up in the mornings before classes and call different hospitals and gender support programs in Connecticut. Healthcare providers often lacked information about trans healthcare, F. said, and she described a "constant back and forth" in which hours of her day were spent waiting to get calls and voicemails back from providers.

She ultimately found care through Anchor Health — the largest trans healthcare provider in Connecticut that does not require insurance — but was placed on a waitlist for six months. This process, as well as facing severe gender dysphoria without care, took a toll on F.'s mental health. She was hospitalized in early spring of 2023 at Yale-New Haven Psychiatric Hospital.

"I couldn't tell if I was suicidal because of my dysphoria or because [of] what I had to go through," F. said.

Even while receiving care through Anchor Health, F. said she still found it frustrating to navigate gender-affirming healthcare without insurance. F.'s private insurance through her parents bars her from accessing HUSKY, Connecticut's state health insurance. Despite finding care in the end, she described the entire process as unnecessarily complex, especially because Yale Health does not publicize alternatives for gender-affirming care such as Anchor Health and Planned Parenthood.

These experiences seeking care, F. said, have discouraged her from pursuing further gender-affirming care beyond hormone replacement therapy.

"I think I'd be interested in more [gender-affirming services]," F. said. "It's just that it has been so demoralizing and just so soul-crushing to have to go through that. I just don't want to have to put up with that."

Organizations such as the ACLU, Human Rights Campaign and Trans-

formations Project have been tracking the status of legislation targeting transgender people in the United States, amid increasing national scrutiny and persecution. Over 500 anti-transgender bills have been proposed across the country as of April 27.

Many of these bills target gender-affirming care, which refers to treatments that support a transgender or nonbinary person in their transition — a period of time during which an individual takes steps to express their gender identity. These treatments can range from interventions such as hormonal replacement therapy and surgery to social forms of care that expand beyond the transgender patients themselves, such as using the name and pronouns that an individual chooses for themself.

Connecticut is one of the few states that does not currently limit gender-affirming care, and Yale has stated a commitment to increasing access to "comprehensive, effective, and affirming health care services for trans persons." Included within this commitment is a promise to respect a patient's privacy, treat a patient with consideration and dignity and provide care that is responsive and sensitive to a patient's health concerns and needs.

In a statement to the News, Chief Operating Officer of Yale Health Peter Steere wrote that Yale Health's Basic Student Health Services provides primary care services to all enrolled and eligible students. Yale Health's Hospitalization/Specialty Care coverage covers prescription medications as well as many specialty care services, including gender-affirming care referrals to endocrinologists at Yale Medicine, which also accepts private insurance.

"Gender-affirming care is a continuum," Steere wrote. "Much of the associated care is covered under the basic plan. Gynecology, student health, mental health services, and care management are included in basic coverage for all students."

Steere added that while Basic Student Health Services does not include endocrine or surgical care, both are covered under Yale Health's Hospitalization/Specialty Care plan, including hormone therapy and top and bottom surgery — gender-affirming surgeries that focus on the chest and genitalia respectively.

He also recommended students contact a care manager at Yale Health who is experienced with gender-affirming clinical services and can provide information and help patients connect with specialists, both at Yale and those affiliated and approved through Yale Health.

Barriers to HRT

Doctors may prescribe hormone replacement for a variety of reasons, but in the case of gender-affirming care for transgender and nonbinary individuals, hormone replacement therapy is used to achieve masculinizing or feminizing effects.

Individuals may take HRT through a variety of routes of administration, including ingesting oral supplements, injecting subcutaneously or intramuscularly or through a topical gel patch. Testosterone cypionate and estradiol valerate are common hormones used in hormone replacement therapy to achieve masculinizing and feminizing effects, respectively, but some may also take additional medications such as testosterone blockers like spironolactone or bicalutamide to supplement their effects.

Yale previously required patients to present letters of recommendation to be allowed to start hormone replacement therapy, but in September they switched to an informed consent model — which does not require letters of recommendation to receive HRT — to comply with the recommendations published in 2022 by the World Professional Association for Transgender Health.

A said this change was a "big deal," but the fact that HRT is still not covered under the Basic Student Health Services plan remains.

Letters of recommendation, F. said, magnify privacy concerns students may have about who knows that they are seeking gender-affirming care, as students may not feel safe coming out to their therapist or whoever else they need recommendation letters from. Furthermore, a gender dysphoria diagnosis may show up on private insurance records.

F. also added that the previous requirements were "condescending," adding to the barriers that exacerbate the mental health issues that can accompany gender dysphoria by forcing trans students to prove their need for care.

Studies have reflected that among

youths between the ages of 13 and 20, receiving gender-affirming care has been associated with a decrease in suicide risk of 73 percent and a decrease in depression risk of 60 percent.

J.D. Wright '24 said she gave up on trying to start hormone replacement therapy at Yale after unsuccessfully trying to get in touch with Yale Mental Health and Counseling at the beginning of her fall 2021 semester.

Wright requested a therapist early in the fall and was assigned a therapist around two months later; however, once she reached out to her therapist to set up an appointment, she never received a response. After her therapist failed to answer her email all semester, Wright pivoted and set up a telehealth appointment with Planned Parenthood instead.

Wright had learned about Planned Parenthood's services through Aster Aguilar '24, a student assistant at the Office of LGBTQ Resources and a member of the Gender Resources of Yale Committee, who Wright said has become a point of contact for individuals seeking gender-affirming care.

"I felt more confident in going through Yale Health even though Aster warned that they're not great," Wright said. "I knew about both options from the very start, from the time that I had made the decision to seek out gender-affirming care, but I thought Yale Health would be a lot easier than it actually was, and I thought there were more downsides to going through Planned Parenthood than there actually were."

Wright said that these difficulties accessing treatment drastically impacted her health, particularly mentally.

Just like F., Wright cited delays in accessing care as a source of strain on her mental health. She told the News that her mental health improved after she was prescribed hormones, and she wished that she would have been allowed to transition "five months earlier."

"That's five more months of my life that I would have been a little happier for," Wright said.

Aguilar said that the prior model for the approval of HRT at Yale Health was a large hurdle. At the time Aguilar applied to get HRT, the requirement of multiple letters was difficult for her to fulfill because the only therapist she could access was cisgender and recommended she talk to other trans people.

Aguilar said that numerous organizations, such as Anchor Health and Planned Parenthood, used the informed consent model far before Yale. Further, Aguilar said that Yale Health never issued a notice that they switched to the informed consent model, so she only found out about the switch through a meeting with Yale Health leaders — one which followed rallies calling for the change.

In Steere's statement to the News, he wrote that the Yale Health website was updated to reflect the change, which was also communicated to patients seeking care.

However, Aguilar added that vaginoplasty and other surgeries still require multiple letters. Currently, Yale Health requires one letter of support for top surgery and one to two letters for bottom surgery.

In addition to this change in policy, Director of the Office of LGBTQ Resources Samuel Byrd spoke on the imperative to include HRT in Yale Health Basic Student Health Services.

"[HRT] should be considered a form of primary care because it addresses the basic health needs of patients by helping to alleviate symptoms and improve their overall quality of life," Byrd wrote to the News.

Byrd added that Yale Health has been "responsive" in ongoing conversations with students on these issues and is working on plans to enhance training of primary care clinicians in gender-affirming care.

Elle Wiggs '26 passed by the Office of LGBTQ Resources over the summer while on campus for the First-Year Scholars at Yale program and heard that gender-affirming care was free. Wiggs said the cost of care was a "big hurdle" because they come from a first-generation, low-income background. Once on campus, they decided to get paired with a peer liaison who gave them advice on how to navigate receiving HRT through Yale Health.

However, after reaching out in January 2023, Wiggs was told by their primary care provider at Yale Health that the wait time for HRT would be approximately six months, and they would need a letter of recommendation from Mental Health and Counseling prior to starting treatment,

despite Yale's switch to the informed consent model in September 2022.

After reaching out to MHC, Wiggs was told they no longer needed the letter of recommendation. Wiggs was annoyed that they had been made to waste their time getting in contact with MHC when it was not necessary to do so.

Aqua Lake '25 also had been provided misinformation about the informed consent model implemented last September.

At a Feb. 2023 appointment, Lake said they were misgendered by a nurse before being seen by their endocrinologist, an associate professor of endocrinology at Yale School of Medicine. The provider, according to Lake, then insisted that she did not have an appointment with Lake.

"She held her head in her hands and took several moments to gather herself," Lake said. "I was confused as to why she would have such an intense reaction to simply having an appointment scheduled without her knowledge."

At the appointment, Lake said he expressed his decision to start testosterone gel — a form of hormone replacement therapy. However, rather than giving him the informed consent paperwork, the endocrinologist insisted that she needed to consult with his psychiatrist. After he asked why, she said it was just "the way she practiced medicine."

Lake reported having a rescheduled consultation a week later. At this consultation, he was given his prescription for hormone replacement therapy.

Lake stated that the change to the informed consent model was a motivating factor for him to try to access HRT through Yale Health. While he was grateful that he was able to access an endocrinologist for free under the Hospitalization/Specialty Care plan and without a letter of recommendation, he said his life would have been made far easier if these initial difficulties getting care had not been present.

Because they believed that Yale's requirements for HRT were more stringent than those of other healthcare systems — including the previously-required therapist referral — Akio Tomura-Ho '23 eventually chose to receive HRT through Anchor Health.

When Tomura-Ho sought therapy with Yale Mental Health and Counseling during their first year, they waited a whole semester just to be assigned to a white cisgender male therapist.

"I hadn't felt comfortable sharing deeply about my identity, and he had also seemed busy and overworked, so I had discontinued appointments," Tomura-Ho said. "I did not want to have to repeat this arduous process all over again to access basic hormone therapy and I was advised [by a Yale Health staff] to seek outside care to avoid this long process."

Hailey Schoelkopf '23, like F., initially sought HRT at Yale Health, but ultimately went to Anchor Health to avoid outing herself to her parents and said she was very glad she stuck with the latter option.

When Schoelkopf initially went to Yale Health, prior to the change to the informed consent model, she was immediately frustrated with the care she received.

"I tried calling Yale MHC for a first appointment with the goal of getting an immediate referral for HRT from a therapist, but I never got matched with a therapist or any return email or call," Schoelkopf said. "It definitely discouraged me from trying again to get HRT at Yale and I didn't try again to get on HRT for some months after that."

Navigating insurance coverage for surgeries

Yale's health system, unlike all other Ivy League institutions, is structured as a healthcare maintenance organization, rather than the typical model of preferred provider organization. As a healthcare maintenance organization, or HMO, Yale runs on a structure that offers a local network of doctors or hospitals and requires a primary care provider at Yale Health to coordinate care. The alternative, a preferred provider organization, or PPO, allows for out-of-network coverage but often has greater costs.

Therefore, students can either find medical services through Yale Hospitalization/Specialty coverage, which covers many gender-affirming surgical options — including facial feminization surgery, a procedure many insurance providers do not cover — or try and get referrals to doctors outside of Yale Health, some of whom have contracts with Yale that allow the utilization of Hospitalization/Specialty

coverage. However, if a provider is not connected with Yale, then an individual will have to pay the costs for that care upfront and then file a claim for reimbursement — but funding is not guaranteed.

Three years ago, Laurel Turner '25 was seeking gender-affirming surgery. After Yale Health failed to respond to Turner's numerous emails about the coverage details for gender-affirming care outlined in the Yale Specialty plan, Turner said she snuck into the building while the building was locked down due to the COVID-19 pandemic to get administrators to speak with her.

Two years later, Turner was finally able to receive the surgery. She then needed another gender-affirming surgery, for which she only had to wait one year. She said she faced a shorter wait time for this second procedure because she was then already aware of how to navigate Yale Health and its insurance structure.

However, Turner expressed concern regarding the lack of institutional memory about how to obtain gender-affirming care, because many students rely on previous testimonies to know how to access it.

"I feel like a lot of people have come to me to ask questions about [gender-affirming care], and I'm kind of scared," Turner said. "I know a lot about Yale's insurance procedure, but I'm going to graduate and then how is that knowledge gonna get passed on?"

After reaching out to Mount Sinai Hospital to schedule a vaginoplasty, Aguilar spoke to Christina Pivorotto, a registered nurse under Complex Care Management, who was able to arrange for the surgery to be covered by the Hospitalization/Specialty plan. However, Aguilar said this is often done on an "individual basis." According to Aguilar, this surgery, which is very specialized, is not offered at Yale Health.

In conversations with the News, other students expressed concern about the lack of specialized options at Yale.

Sasha Karsavina GRD '28 told the News that she is only aware of Yale Health having one surgeon who conducts top surgery. Yale Health did not respond to a request to confirm this number.

Karsavina said that coverage limitations are similar for graduate school students, adding that the reality of gender-affirming care at Yale was totally different than what she expected.

Karsavina started the process of trying to get a consultation for two surgical procedures with Yale Health in Sep. 2022. She originally thought the Yale Hospitalization/Specialty plan would cover these procedures, but later found out that she did not have many options in-network.

It was not until six months later that she was able to secure scheduled consultations, after several short phone calls and a final significantly longer phone call where she reported having resorted to screaming. Karsavina said she first called in late November or early December, and received consultations for late February and late March.

In previous calls, Karsavina had been told that prior to being scheduled for a consultation, she would need a letter of recommendation from a therapist. She began therapy for that specific reason, only to find in this final call that a letter of recommendation was not needed at all to acquire a consultation.

"I came here because I really wanted to get surgeries," Karsavina said. "I wanted to have a fast track and honestly, for the first six months, I had zero idea how you had to navigate the system. I just believed people, I trusted everyone. And...it swallowed up so much of my time to do so much because also at some point they were like 'oh, you're depressed' and I'm like, I'm partially depressed because I can't get surgeries."

Karsavina was also dissatisfied with the options provided by the practice of Angie Paik, the Yale Health surgeon in charge of top surgery.

In a consultation, Karsavina said that Paik told her that, on principle, she does not conduct a particular form of feminizing top surgery that is done underneath the muscle. Karsavina said she also had to urge Paik to show previous results for feminizing top surgery, which Paik initially refused to disclose, stating that because Yale Health is a research hospital, they do not typically show those results.

SEE HEALTHCARE PAGE 10

NEWS

“I’ll be right here.”
E.T. FROM “E.T.”

“Compounding” Pandemics

BY MEGAN VAZ
STAFF REPORTER

New Haven resident Richard Youins has been clean since 2010.

After battling drug addiction for over two decades, he now serves as a peer mentor for others struggling with substance use disorder, often working directly with his neighbors and friends or friends as they navigate recovery. Because of the nature of his work and his personal experiences, he is no stranger to the horrors that substance use disorder can wreak on the lives of individuals and families, especially in communities of color like his own.

At the same time, the drugs on the street today are different than they were when he battled addiction decades ago. More people are dying of overdoses, too.

“I find myself wondering when this shit is gonna end,” Youins said. “I don’t even do funerals no more, because I’ve been to so many.”

During the COVID-19 pandemic, people across the country grappled with reduced access to in-person health care, deteriorating mental and physical health and deepening racial inequities across society. With the rise of the deadly synthetic opioid fentanyl, overdoses skyrocketed across the board. But for Black and Latino people both in New Haven and throughout the country, the rise in deaths was even steeper.

Two months ago, Youins lost a longtime friend to a fatal drug overdose. He told the News that as a Black man in recovery, he carries the harsh realities of the rising overdoses in his community with him every day, often worrying whether a given conversation with a friend will be their last.

As a peer recovery mentor, he said he is also acutely aware of the social and structural barriers to treatment that have prevented people of color from getting the help they need, both historically and in the present. He feels exhausted as social services and programs in the community, often run by white people, fail to connect with people like his neighbors and family members. These inequities have exacerbated the racial disparities in overdoses, making the risk of dying even higher for Black and Latino people who have long been overlooked in conversations about the opioid crisis.

“It’s funny that the pandemic brought this to the forefront,” Youins said. “It’s been happening all along. It’s just that all of a sudden now, the white media and the white community are recognizing it.”

Deadlier drugs, rising overdoses and escalating disparities

In 2013, a potent new street drug hit the illicit substance trade, eventually flooding the national market. Fentanyl, a synthetic opioid primarily used to treat cancer patients, was easy to illegally manufacture and sold for a cheap price. It was also about 50 times more powerful than heroin, making it more profitable to drug traffickers.

Since fentanyl and its analogs are highly addictive, manufacturers often “lace” its active ingredients into counterfeit opioids and substances like cocaine to boost buyers’ dependency.

“Prior to 2013, if law enforcement took samples of drugs off the street and they tested cocaine or crack or heroin, which was the primary opioid back then, they would find cocaine or crack or heroin,” said state drug intelligence officer Bobby Lawlor. “When we test a sample of opioids on the street today, what we see is that there’s fentanyl in there; there are fentanyl analogs in there; there’s Tramadol in there; And a lot of times, there’s also xylazine, which is an animal sedative, in there.”

Even tiny amounts of fentanyl added to powders, injectables and pills cost lives. The Drug Enforcement Agency estimates that three milligrams of fentanyl can potentially kill an average-sized adult male. Datahaven researcher Kelly Davila told the News that in 2012, “close to zero percent” of overdose deaths in New Haven and surrounding communities involved fentanyl. Eight years later, the drug was involved in about 84 percent of regional overdose deaths.

According to a 2021 Datahaven study led by Davila, most overdose survivors in the region seemed to be unaware that fentanyl likely played a role in their overdoses. Only 6 percent of survivors surveyed stated they knew they had consumed the drug. New Haven resident Isabelle Firine, whose brother Cameron had long

battled addiction before dying due to an overdose, told the News that her brother purchased what he believed were oxycontin pills in 2019. The one he took was pure fentanyl.

“He was dead before he even hit the ground,” Firine said.

Like other urban areas across the country, New Haven has grappled with far higher overdose rates compared to that of the nation as a whole. A March 2023 report produced by DataHaven, which collects statistics to report on regional well-being and equity, estimated the Elm City’s 2020-2021 overdose fatality rate to be 445 deaths per one million residents — over double that of the state of Connecticut and 67 percent greater than that of the country.

At the start of 2012, according to Datahaven’s 2023 Community Well-being Index, the rates of drug overdose deaths among Greater New Haven’s Black, Latino and white populations were nearly the same. Fatality rates among all groups rose throughout the rest of the decade after fentanyl was introduced, with deaths among white people often remaining higher. However, starting in late 2019 to early 2020, when fatal overdoses surged even higher across the board, the local Black community’s death rate rose at double the speed of that of white people.

In 2022, 133 people died of drug overdoses in the city of New Haven. 56 of the fatal overdose victims were Black, 31 were Hispanic and 45 were white. This breakdown shows deaths are skewed across the city’s ethnic communities: Black New Haveners make up about 30 percent of the city’s total population, but they comprised about 42 percent of the lives lost to overdoses that year.

Hurting communities and barriers to treatment

The News spoke to local addiction treatment experts and care workers who presented several social health determinants as explanations for the racial disparities in overdoses.

Traci Norman, a program manager of Yale’s Addiction Treatment in the Black Community study, connected the disparities to other challenges that disproportionately affected Black people during and beyond the pandemic, including higher rates of underlying health issues, worsening mental health and civil unrest in response to structural racism and police brutality.

“Racism isn’t new... but seeing it in your face, seeing people getting murdered, hearing people being disproportionately impacted by COVID. And not knowing what’s going to happen tomorrow,” Norman said. “I think all of that compounding on one another definitely led to a lot of increased substance use, as well as relapses for some people, too.”

Former University chaplain Rev. Dr. Frederick J. Streets DIV ’75, who works to support people of color in New Haven through addiction recovery, also emphasized an “explosion of racial animosity,” as well as the acute phase of the pandemic and political polarization, as stressors and sources of anxiety. These unique pressures and fears, Streets said, made many people turn toward self-medication.

Depression, anxiety and other mental health problems surged across demographic groups during the pandemic. However, this rise did not impact all ethnic groups equally: according to the Datahaven report, Black and Latino individuals were 2.3 times and 1.6 times more likely to report feeling depressed than white people were, respectively.

“If you’re a person struggling with mental health or substance use history, now you’re isolated,” said treatment care worker Sylvia Cooper. “People are feeling like, ‘Am I gonna die? I have substance use, and I have health issues — it’s coming for me!’ So it really creates a hysteria of ‘what else is there left to do?’”

Beyond mental health stressors, physical health issues that disproportionately affect people of color were also exacerbated by the pandemic. COVID-19’s mortality rate among Black individuals was over double that of white people in the Greater New Haven region, according to the 2023 Datahaven report. Norman added that even though people of all racial backgrounds consume drugs and alcohol at similar rates, racial disparities regarding the incidence of other health complications caused a higher risk of overdose deaths for people of color.

“We typically have greater health challenges and health occurrences, underlying things such as hypertension rates, high cholesterol and

diabetes, that also play a role in why we face greater mortality in regards to substances,” Norman explained. “I personally saw how black people were being disproportionately impacted by COVID-19.”

Local minority communities often see a lack of access to treatment services, especially as they face higher levels of economic inequality compared to white people.

Assistant Professor of Psychiatry at the Yale School of Medicine Fabiola Arbelo Cruz said that barriers to care include a lack of physical proximity or transportation to treatment centers, high insurance costs, daily financial pressures and social stigma.

“If someone’s unemployed and with unstable housing, you give an appointment for a follow-up,” Arbelo Cruz explained. “But meeting the basic need of going to work and getting money might be a reason for them missing an appointment.”

Arbelo Cruz added that bed closures, long waitlists, limited walk-in appointments and reduced group therapy options also cut access to in-person addiction treatment centers. As these centers implemented social distancing regulations to protect patients from the spread of COVID-19, many of those struggling with substance use disorder — especially those who already faced barriers to in-person care — also had issues accessing telehealth services.

In a statement to the News, YSM Professor of Psychiatry Chyrell Bellamy also noted that Black and Latino people have less access to medication-assisted treatment for substance use disorder, which includes methadone and buprenorphine treatments that relieve withdrawal symptoms.

According to one study conducted by JAMA Psychiatry, Black and Latino patients also tend to be prescribed MAT for shorter durations than white people do. Receiving MAT for an appropriate duration is often vital in patients’ survival — studies have shown that these medications may cut the overdose death rate in half among those struggling with opioid addictions, and receiving at least six months of treatment is associated with better recovery outcomes.

“We now have a very good treatment strategy for opioid use,” Mark Costa, associate research scientist in psychiatry at the School of Medicine, told the News. “We have medication that is very helpful ... But the way we offer these treatments is not impacting the Black and Latino community how it’s impacted the white community.”

The legacy of discrimination in clinical mental health and addiction treatment

Racial discrimination in the health care system has already long discouraged those of minority backgrounds from seeking treatment for substance use disorders, according to experts who spoke to the News. Datahaven’s 2023 CWI supports such claims — compared to 3 percent of white residents, 7 percent of Latino residents and 16 percent of Black residents in Greater New Haven reported that they had been discriminated against in the health care system.

For Bridgett Williamson, who formerly battled substance abuse disorder and now works with those in recovery, the issue of racial discrimination and abuse in addiction treatment hits close to home. When she received methadone to treat her drug addiction in the 1980s and early 1990s, treatment workers said that one of her urine samples tested positive for drugs, even though Williamson maintains she did not consume any substances. She received an ultimatum from the criminal courts: be admitted to the state’s in-patient mental health treatment facility or go to prison for five years.

When she entered the facility, staff members exerted control over what she could and couldn’t do. For instance, although they allowed white patients to step outside to smoke cigarettes or make trips to the store, they barred Williamson and other Black patients from doing the same. They told her they were afraid she wanted to step outside to purchase drugs, but they never raised this concern with the white patients — including those who Williamson said actually did bring drugs inside.

Trapped on the third or fourth floor of the facility for over a month, Williamson’s mental and physical health deteriorated. She said she was forced to stay without any means of escape as she endured experiences that still traumatize her three decades later, including witness-

ing other patients harm themselves, finding mice in her bed and having her health and safety concerns constantly ignored by staff and doctors.

“Caring and controlling is two different things,” Williamson said. “Do you think I trust the hospital? Hell no, I don’t even go. So that’s how they treat us people of color.”

Streets named a long history of suspicion toward traditional clinical care models among minorities that persists through the current crisis. Oftentimes, he told the News, people of color seeking help are cast as criminals and treated as “people who are problems” instead of people experiencing problems.

Over 30 years after Williamson’s experience in the state facility, the state’s Department of Mental Health and Addiction services boasts a Health Disparities Initiative on its website. The page raises questions about a “culturally competent system of care” and asks readers to reflect on steps the Department has taken “toward developing culturally relevant programming.”

At the same time, state mental health facilities collectively employ 70 police officers, many of whom show up to work armed. By having armed police officers on their premises, state mental health and addiction treatment centers may heighten the fear of seeking help among Black and Latino people in Greater New Haven, who were far more likely to report experiencing discrimination at the hands of the police in the Datahaven CWI. Only 45 percent of Black and 54 percent of Latino residents of Greater New Haven reported that they approved of the local police, as opposed to 76 percent of white residents. And although Black residents make up 16 percent of residents in Greater New Haven, they comprised 45 percent of drivers who were searched by police from 2018-2020.

The presence of police may also discourage people who have had previous experiences with the criminal justice system, Costa noted. The Yale-affiliated Connecticut Mental Health Center in New Haven, where Williamson was mandated to go decades ago, currently hosts a team of armed cops and features metal detectors at its entrance.

Streets stressed that existing clinical models must prioritize hospital-ity toward minority patients in order to truly make them feel comfortable enough to receive medical care during a crisis. Clinical models, others added, must also become more accessible to all people struggling with addiction regardless of race or class.

“Here’s the dilemma: as you work and encourage people not to feel bad about feeling bad, not feeling bad about needing help, what happens when a person goes to a system that then treats them inhumane?” Streets said. “It’s a catch-22.”

Ethnic churches, multidimensional treatment and peer support

After coming to Connecticut for treatment, Bellamy’s cousin died from an overdose in August 2022. Bellamy told the News that she, her colleagues and other community members are motivated to work on “culturally responsive” treatment efforts because of their life experiences.

“I do the work because as a professor and as a person with my own lived experiences, we are all on a recovery journey either personally or with family, friends, neighbors, roommates, classmates, co-workers and colleagues,” Bellamy wrote to the News. “I know far too many people that hide their use of drugs because of the shame and fear of reaching out.”

Bellamy serves as the director of the Yale Program for Recovery and Health, or PRCH, which aims to foster inclusion and trust through culturally responsive approaches to care. These efforts often center around building connections between people in recovery and peer mentors of their own backgrounds who have been in recovery themselves.

Williamson and Youins, who both work with PRCH, said their personal experiences with addiction drive their need to give back to others in the community through one-on-one mentoring. Williamson shared that sharing her experiences of substance use disorder and trauma helps demonstrate the realities of addiction in the long term, motivating people to continue recovery. It also helps combat the shame and stigma around substance use disorder on a more personal level, she said.

“I stayed in the streets, I stayed in crackhouses, so this is why it’s

so easy for me to let a person know that you don’t have to be ashamed for where you’ve been,” Williamson said. “I don’t care what you did three minutes ago. How can we move forward today, right now?”

Youins emphasized the importance of receiving care from people who “look like you,” especially as treatment and addiction recovery outreach efforts have often been led by white people “who have no connections in the community” and do not understand the social factors that influence substance use. He stressed that Black leadership has been crucial to bolstering recovery efforts in his community.

Created in 2017 by Bellamy and Assistant Professor Adjunct of Psychiatry Ayana Jordan, the Imani breakthrough project study was specifically designed to target people of color looking for recovery, though treatment for substance abuse is open to all. Using Black and Latino churches in the state, providers and care coordinators have tried to create a comfortable faith-based treatment environment while still being “non-proselytizing,” according to Streets, who helped facilitate the program at the Dixwell Avenue Congregational United Church of Christ.

“It’s a natural outgrowth of faith communities, as a matter of the basic principle and ethics of supporting the neighbor and assisting those who are more vulnerable,” Streets said. “It’s a public health approach, which combines the whole notion of empathy and an appreciation for our struggle as human beings.”

Dixwell UCC also promotes other community-centered approaches to combating the rise of substance use disorder and overdoses. The church has worked to educate congregation members about the nature of substance use and the signs of potential suicide, as well as hosting trainings on administering Narcan and other harm reduction methods. Some congregation members have also stepped up to help lead the meditation sessions for those in addiction recovery through the Imani program.

“Those same people are advocates with their own families and in the wider community,” Streets observed. “If you replicate that by hundreds of churches or organizations throughout the community, you... advocate for a better atmosphere in which treatment can be offered and addiction could be understood.”

Gayle Brown began recovery treatment with Imani when she ran into a few counselors at Varick Memorial A.M.E. Zion Church about five years ago, right across the street from the Dixwell UCC. After the counselors asked her whether she knew anyone who had experienced substance use disorder, abuse, poverty or other hardship who would be interested in participating in a paid study, she boarded the bus and began spreading the word. Soon enough, she and dozens of other local residents gathered in Varick Memorial’s basement for their first session.

Cohorts of patients have gathered to receive weekly treatment through education on the harms of substances and racial disparities in overdoses, computer-based cognitive behavioral therapy, group support, a clinical treatment program staffed with doctors, one-on-one wellness coaching and self-reflection exercises.

Shellina Toure, who currently facilitates the program at Varick Memorial with Sylvia Cooper, said that the self-reflection activities that happen during sessions are “intense.” Her facilitator training, which featured the same mindfulness strategies as the treatment sessions, had such a strong impact on her that it brought back her memories of almost becoming addicted to painkillers.

The church setting and group component, which Toure said becomes more comfortable as people build relationships over the course of several weeks, can help combat much of the distrust associated with traditional addiction treatment in hospitals. The room used for treatment also features a “Comfort Zone Agreement” on the wall, which Toure said instills ground rules and a culture of mutual respect during sessions.

Sessions, Brown said, prioritize seeing one’s own experiences through the lives of others and understanding why they experi-

NEWS

I'll be right here.
E.T.E.T.

Muslim students celebrate the month of Ramadan and Eid-al-Fitr

BY JOSHUA ZHANG
STAFF REPORTER

Throughout Ramadan — which officially began on Thursday, March 23 and concluded on Friday, April 21 — members of the Yale and New Haven community gathered for an array of events and activities on campus to celebrate the holy month.

Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, and for Muslims all over the world, it is a month of fasting, prayer and reflection. In observance of Ramadan, many Muslims will fast from dawn to sundown. Events on campus ranged from daily Taraweeh prayers — an additional night prayer performed only during Ramadan — to weekly community Iftar dinners and a campus-wide Eid prayer at the end of Ramadan.

“I’ve been here [in New Haven] 15 years, and in my 15 years, the [Muslim] community has grown quite dramatically, which is really wonderful, but now we need to have on-campus programming that meets the needs of the growing community,” Director of Muslim Life Omer Bajwa said.

While fasting, undergraduate students enrolled in a meal plan were eligible for daily Iftar — dinner — and Suhoor — breakfast — boxed meals in the Morse College dining hall, which was the designated dining hall for Ramadan meals. Students could also pick up a Suhoor boxed meal from the Morse dining hall during Iftar time. Graduate and professional students had access to meal accommodations in their respective schools.

Daily Taraweeh prayers, which consisted of the Isha — mandatory night prayer — and 20 rakats — additional ritual prayers — were held in Dwight Chapel every day at 9 p.m.

These daily times of prayer led to over 40 community members gathering each night. Prayers were also regularly held at 2 a.m., which between 20 to 30 people would attend.



COURTESY OF FATEYA OMER

As Ramadan came to an end this weekend, students and Muslim leaders reflected on the ways in which they have celebrated one of the holiest months of the year.

“This is the second year in a very long time that Ramadan has fallen during the academic calendar,” Bajwa said. “Now Ramadan falls during the academic term... That’s why we now have on-campus Eid prayer arrangements. We did it last year in 2022, this year in 2023, and we will in subsequent years. But prior to that, we didn’t because we didn’t need to.”

While individuals had their fast-breaking Iftar dinner daily, a community Iftar dinner hosted by Bajwa was held weekly as well. The dinners were hosted in Dwight Chapel on March 26, March 31, April 7 and April 14.

These community Iftars were catered through the Chaplain’s Office budget, and approximately 150 to 200 people attended each one. The dinners were not only

open to students but also to faculty, staff and families in the New Haven community.

“I think [the growing Muslim community] has been one of the biggest blessings of this year,” said Muslim Students Association president Zahra Yarali ’24. “One other thing that I think Ramadan has really shown me and has been a testament to is just how deeply invested in each other we are, in not only each other’s social well-being, in each other’s academic well-being but also in each other’s spiritual well-being.”

On Monday, April 17, the annual Ramadan Banquet was held at the Omni Hotel New Haven. This was the 15th time that Bajwa organized the event as part of the Yale Chaplain’s Office.

The night began at approximately 6 p.m. and consisted

of opening remarks, a special screening of the film “Stranger at the Gate” and a panel discussion. There was also time devoted to the Iftar dinner, prayer and socializing.

“During every odd night of the last 10 nights of Ramadan, we had the opportunity to go to HOC Baskin-Sommers’s house to cook food [for suhoor] in her big kitchen,” said Hasfa Fazl ’25. “It was just incredible that we even had this opportunity to make homemade food and eat hot food and celebrate making our fasts with everyone in the Muslim community.”

This past Friday, April 21, many Muslim community members gathered in Dwight Chapel to celebrate Eid al-Fitr, the end of Ramadan, with a time of campus prayer, a sermon and refreshments.

While this time of prayer was the University’s official celebration of Eid, the remainder of the day and the days following Eid continued to be filled with various activities and events organized by smaller communities within Yale and New Haven.

According to Bajwa, graduate Muslim students at Yale had a picnic to celebrate on Saturday, while some students even went home for the weekend to celebrate the holiday with their families.

“We just have to keep creating awareness and empowering students to feel that they can advocate for rightful accommodations,” Bajwa told the News.

In 2024, Ramadan is expected to begin on the evening of Sunday, March 10.

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PROFILE: Dinny Risri Aletheiani makes Indonesian personal

BY WILLIAM PORAYOUW
STAFF REPORTER

When Dinny Risri Aletheiani first stepped foot on Yale’s campus in 2013 and reviewed the curriculum for Indonesian, she was dissatisfied.

Aletheiani, who identifies as part of the Indonesian diaspora in the United States, had taken notes on how to develop curriculum on the national language of the fourth largest country in the world during her early days at Arizona State University — where she received her doctorate in curriculum studies 15 years ago. There, in a county with approximately 1,000 Indonesian Americans, Aletheiani would teach undergraduate courses on Indonesian language, research and culture, designing instructional materials to reach students who were geographically and culturally disconnected from Southeast Asia’s most spoken language.

So Aletheiani was disappointed at Yale’s existing Indonesian curriculum when she arrived at the University 10 years ago.

“We didn’t have a class above [Indonesian] 150,” Aletheiani said.

Over the next decade, Aletheiani would take a crucial role in the petition to develop new courses for Yale students to examine the Indonesian language and culture, such as “Advanced Indonesian: Special Topics” and “Research and Creative Project on Indonesia.” Her goal was to create more spaces for students to continue studying Indonesian throughout all four years of college.

To Aletheiani, the popularity of the Indonesian language on campus is not surprising. She suggested two main reasons Indonesian has attracted what she considers a loyal following at Yale — first, many high schools often offer an abundance of courses in European language families, and students who do choose to learn an Asian language often lean toward east



CINDY ZENG / CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER

For Aletheiani, a curriculum studies scholar with Javanese roots, Indonesian is more than about language skills — it’s about people.

Asian tongues such as Mandarin. But once admitted first years come to Yale, they are often ready for a change.

“[Indonesian is] something new, something unique,” Aletheiani said. “So they look at the blue book and look at Indonesian.” Second, Indonesian is uniquely well-equipped for the English speaking tongue.

Unlike other Asian languages, Indonesian is not tonal and uses the same 26-letter alphabet as English. Neither English nor Indonesian uses accent marks, and words in the latter language are often phonetic. Yet the language itself has its own

“quirks and uniqueness,” Aletheiani told the News.

Aletheiani said that she notices many Yale students in her class continue to take courses in the Indonesian language past the minimum requirement. For many, this means taking advanced classes and conducting special projects in Indonesian.

The secret to promoting continued interest from students is revealed in the way class curriculums are structured, Aletheiani suggested. In her own seminar syllabi, Aletheiani includes texts and assignments which uniquely promote a cultural understanding as

well as the socioeconomic context of Indonesia. Since most who learn the language at Yale are not native Indonesians, Aletheiani believes that it is important to prioritize a sense of investment in the country’s customs and history rather than over simple grammatical rules and structures.

Emma Seitz ’23 told the News that she took Indonesian after she was disillusioned with the Spanish education she received in middle and high school.

“It was just so language focused, like ‘Oh, just memorize these words, learn this grammar’ and that was just not something

that got me excited at all,” Seitz said. “So I came here and I was just like, I want to take something totally different.”

Seitz would take her first Indonesian course her first year, where the focus was not on grammar, but rather on sociology, anthropology and culture — all of which grabbed her attention.

As Seitz began to take specific courses under Aletheiani, she not only became more invested in Indonesia, but also felt that Aletheiani was “very invested in [Seitz’s] success” as a student. When Seitz received research funding to visit Indonesia last summer, Aletheiani not only set up Seitz’s trip, but also “made such an effort” to meet Seitz once she was there.

Mark Capell ’25, who is on the Yale baseball team, told the News that Aletheiani “always comes to class with a smile.” He added that Aletheiani invested herself in his success, both in and out of the classroom.

Once, when Capell and his teammates were eating in Commons, Aletheiani passed by their table and recognized Capell. She sat with the team and had a “great conversation” with them all.

“That’s just who she is,” Capell said. “She loves getting to know people and she’s super friendly with everyone she meets.”

Aletheiani told the News that she enjoys watching the “personal transformation” of her students as they navigate a new language, whether through classes or travel fellowships. By focusing language through the relationships between the people engaged in its study, Aletheiani is able to achieve her goal.

“Language is much more fun and meaningful and personal,” Aletheiani said. “People can relate to that!”

Aletheiani received her bachelor in English Language Education from Satya Wacana Christian University, Salatiga, Indonesia.

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SCITECH

“Let’s get out of here.”
DJANGO DJANGO UNCHAINED

Yale researchers uncover novel implications of arachnoid cysts

BY DAVID T. ZHU
CONTRIBUTING REPORTER

Could something as innocuous as a common brain cyst hold the key to unlocking a deeper understanding of brain development and pathology?

A recent study published in “Nature Medicine” — led by Adam Kundishora, a resident at Yale-New Haven Hospital, Garrett Allington GRD’23 and co-authors from Yale and several other institutions — found that arachnoid cysts may serve as presage of neurodevelopmental disorders, paving the way for earlier diagnosis and clinical follow-up.

“Our motivation to study arachnoid cysts came from that relationship of them to the neurosurgical community — it sometimes becomes very difficult to figure out if the cyst is really at the center or is the etiology of the symptoms or if the cyst is just an innocent bystander,” Kundishora said.

Arachnoid cysts are cerebrospinal fluid-filled cysts that develop between two membrane layers of the brain — the arachnoid membrane and pia mater. According to Kundishora and Allington, arachnoid cysts are typically seen as incidental and not a particularly motivating factor in clinical decision-making. However, in some instances, the presence of arachnoid cysts may suggest early signs of an underlying neurological condition.

“Usually, arachnoid cysts are considered to be nothing — an anatomical variant — but in some situations, if you look further into patients, they can be associated with genetic malformation,” Mariam Aboian, an assistant professor at the Yale School of Medicine, said.

According to Allington, there is an association between arachnoid cysts and neurodevelopmental phenotypes such as autism and seizures. Further exploring the nature of this association was



COURTESY OF YALE SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

Using an integrated multiomics approach, a recent Yale-led study found that arachnoid cysts may serve as radiographic biomarkers for neuropathologies.

part of the driving interest behind the study.

The study evaluates whether any de novo variants — types of genetic variation that are not inherited from either parent — are involved in the causes of complex inheritance for neurodevelopmental disorders.

Specifically, the research team examined the exome, which, according to Allington, is the entire protein coding region of the genome and is a “high yield place to look for potential variants that cause disease.” The team’s findings revealed seven genes that are implicated in similar biological processes, such as chromatin modification and gene transcription regulation, potentially involved in mech-

anistic pathways for arachnoid cysts formation.

“This strengthened our hypothesis that those genes were not just simply mutated and correlated ... but were really involved in the biological process leading to arachnoid cysts formation as they all seem to take part in the same regulatory transcription and translation processes,” Kundishora said.

These de novo variants offer valuable insights into not only arachnoid cysts formation but also arachnoid cysts mediated pathogenesis. To investigate this, the authors spearheaded a novel technique involving an artificially intelligent natural language processor to comb through electronic medical data to iden-

tify distinct phenotypic profiles across patients.

They also performed cluster analysis to evaluate whether these neurodevelopmental phenotypic groups were significantly related to the presence of de novo variants. Their findings revealed four distinct clinically-significant clusters related to hypotonia, like decreased muscle tone and seizures, further supporting the idea that neurological conditions may be related to epigenetic dysregulation from de novo variants in arachnoid cysts pathogenesis.

Distinct arachnoid cysts phenotypic subtypes may be associated with varying prognoses and guiding courses of treatment, according to Kundishora. The nature of the phenotypic subtype may be able to serve as an accurate predictor of whether or not certain drug treatments or surgeries will be effective, although further research is needed to evaluate this.

These prognostic and clinical implications are applicable to a wide variety of neurological conditions, according to Kundishora and Allington. Allington discussed specifically how arachnoid cysts could have compelling benefits for flagging early neurodevelopmental processes, which could be essential for better clinical outcomes.

“If you have a pre-verbal child, it might be very difficult to diagnose a neurodevelopmental disease because you can’t speak to them yet,” Allington said. “However, if you were to see a radiographic harbinger, it may serve as a way to flag a potential risk ... and might help to make a clinical decision on whether that patient is indicated for additional genetic or neurocognitive testing.”

Aboian suggested that this research may have implications for brain tumors as well. She cautioned that more research was warranted before these types of diagnostic deci-

sions can be made since arachnoid cysts alter standard anatomic features of the brain and can skew features such as volumetric measurements of different portions of the brain such as the hippocampus.

“When we make a diagnosis using imaging, there’s a lot of information in the MRI of the brain that we can’t see with our eyes ... so in the future we can use AI algorithms that analyze radiomic features of images to assist in establishing the diagnosis,” Aboian said. “If you’re trying to find the etiology of behavioral problems, maybe in a patient who has an arachnoid cyst, it may not be a bad idea to do radiomic features analysis with assistance of AI algorithms to help make a diagnosis.”

Kundishora and Aboian both emphasize the importance of such artificially intelligent methodologies in the fields of radiology and neurology. This has the potential to recognize not only different types of brain tumors, but also different molecular subtypes, according to Aboian.

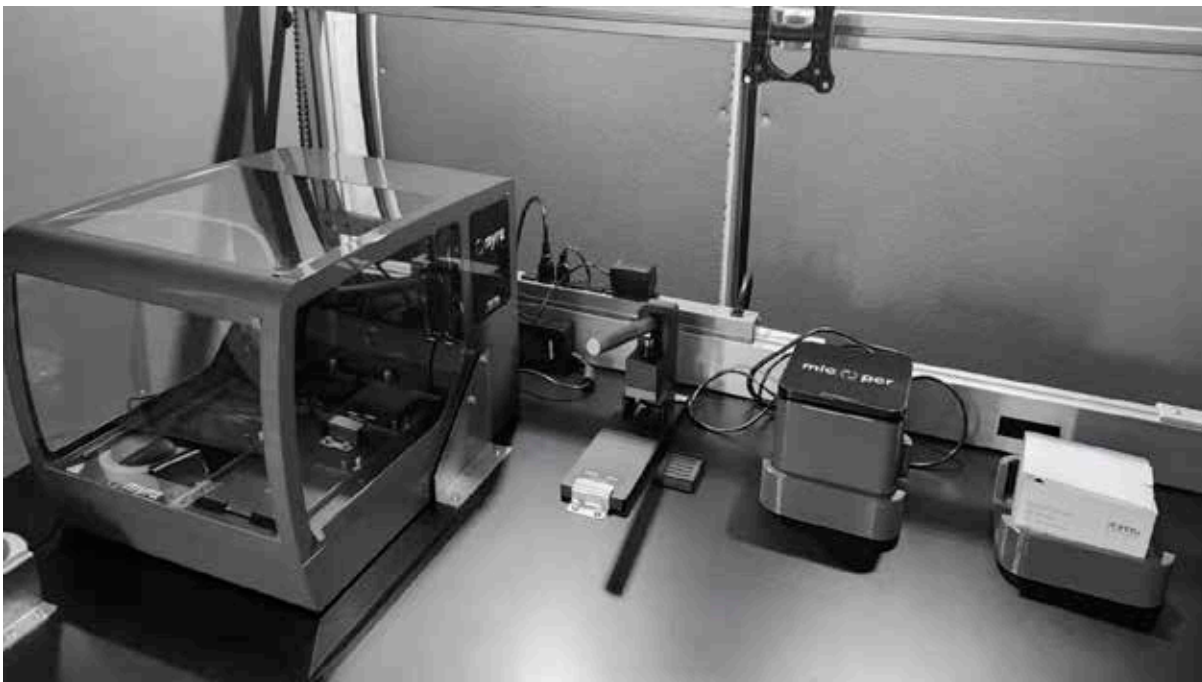
“If you’re looking at a high grade glioma, for example, is it a glioblastoma or a grade four astrocytoma — they look very similar, right?” Aboian explained. “On imaging, it’s hard to tell a difference ... but there are radiomics features that can differentiate these, so we can actually use an algorithm to help a radiologist make a diagnosis before surgical intervention.”

These artificially intelligent, integrated, multiomics approaches may be the future to identifying more key biomarkers that help scientists and clinicians understand disease progression.

The Yale Department of Neurosurgery leads cutting-edge research in the fields of neuro-oncology, neurovascular surgery, spinal surgery, brain trauma and more.

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YSPH and YPL launch Laboratory-in-a-Van program



COURTESY OF KATHERINE FARJADO

A new initiative from the Yale School of Public Health and Yale Pathology Labs hopes to make health screening more accessible.

BY GIRI VISWANATHAN
STAFF REPORTER

A new initiative from the Yale School of Public Health and Yale Pathology Labs hopes to bring low-cost, accessible health services to New Haven — all on four wheels.

Unveiled at an April 20 meeting on Yale’s West Campus, the Laboratory-in-a-Van initiative aims to bring public health services to historically underserved communities. Using a van retrofitted with laboratory-grade diagnostic equipment, the mobile clinic will employ SalivaDirect — a saliva-based COVID-19 PCR test developed at YSPH — to facilitate on-site testing with a turnaround time of two to three hours.

“It is a brilliant way to reduce the barriers to testing, instead taking the lab to communities who may be less likely to — or unable to — access the necessary clinic or labs,” Anne Wyllie, one of the project’s principal investigators and the creator of the SalivaDirect testing process, wrote to the News. “We are actively working with our community partners to identify how we can best serve their communities.”

The mobile lab project is funded by the National Institutes of Health’s RadX Underserved Populations program. According to Brittany Choate, the SalivaDirect program manager, the funding will

allow the mobile clinic to administer 400 free SalivaDirect COVID-19 tests for uninsured patients through the end of 2023.

To do so, Choate and the mobile lab team are collaborating with city health departments — including those of New Haven and West Haven. The mobile clinic is also partnering with community organizations such as the Alliance for Living, Columbus House, Liberation Programs and the APT Foundation.

Last week’s West Campus announcement of the mobile lab program also included a meeting between YSPH and YPL officials and representatives from these regional partner groups to propose ideas for how to best utilize the van. According to Wyllie, her team is now working to finalize the van’s first appointments.

Within a month, she said, the van should be operational.

“We’re engaging with these community partners because we want to work with them and be respectful of the relationships that they have with their communities, with their constituents and with their clients,” Choate said. “We’re going to be able to partner with them to coordinate where the mobile lab van can go and deploy in conjunction with existing community events. And hopefully, [we can] use that connection with community partners to build trust and ... be more effective as a result.”

Earlier in the pandemic, the SalivaDirect team had partnered with Flambeau Diagnostics, a biomedical company specializing in mobile lab testing, to expand access to mobile saliva-based COVID-19 testing. According to Wyllie, the new YSPH and YPL initiative utilizes one of the former Flambeau vans that had been retrofitted for clinical testing.

To outfit the van for administering SalivaDirect, Kat Fajardo, a SalivaDirect lab manager, opted to utilize two portable pieces of equipment to conduct the PCR tests.

The first is a Mic, or Magnetic Induction Cycler, which is a portable PCR machine that can run 46 specimens at a time, according to Fajardo. At six inches by six inches, the Mic leaves a “small footprint on the van itself” while leaving extra space in the van’s benches.

Ordinarily, Fajardo added, PCR machines in laboratories are considerably larger. Given the small size of the Mic machine, the van’s lab technicians can work with specimens on the van’s benches while running a PCR test at the same time.

The other piece of equipment is a Myra, a portable robotic liquid handler designed to automate the process of moving clinical specimens between vials. Together, according to Fajardo, both the

Mic and the Myra work “hand in hand,” to conduct PCR testing.

“What we wanted to do is run high complexity testing in the van, with a reduced timeframe,” Fajardo said. “And then be able to get the results out to the patients as soon as we possibly can, within a designated two to three hour timeframe.”

According to John Sinard, director of clinical operations at Yale Pathology, a mobile pathology laboratory can bring testing to individuals without a “formal association” with the healthcare system.

A standard van that collects specimens, he explained, needs to bring samples back to a central lab before getting results to patients — steps that require a patient to have an “identified healthcare provider.”

With a mobile laboratory, Sinard added, testing can be completed on site and the patient can directly access the results without an intermediary provider.

However, according to Wyllie, the mobile lab will not solely conduct SalivaDirect COVID-19 tests. She expects that the van will also provide more comprehensive public health outreach, including distributing health communication and education materials, supporting vaccination efforts and screening for other infectious and chronic diseases.

Fajardo also described an interest in expanding the van’s capabilities to include tests for other upper respiratory viruses such as influenza, RSV and human metapneumovirus, as well as possible STD testing.

According to Fajardo, conducting multiplex testing in the van — screening for multiple diseases at the same time — could provide a crucial way to track upper respiratory viruses during flu seasons.

“Let’s say you have an event going on, like a concert, and vans have popped up over the weekend on the [New Haven] Green,” Fajardo said. “So these people who don’t have access to medical care, or even insurance, can come to the vans and test there.”

In order for this initiative to be impactful, both Sinard and Choate emphasized the importance of developing relationships with community organizations that have earned the trust of historically underserved New Haven communities.

Those relationships with community organizations, Choate

explained, are a two-way street: public health experts are able to access communities that might be skeptical of health interventions, while also being able to tailor outreach to the communities’ needs.

“Having that trust and engagement with community partners that have been well established is essential for being able to offer these kinds of services,” Choate said. “That way, they can act as ambassadors on our behalf. Beyond that, community leaders can then help us inform the outreach that we’re doing.”

Moving forward, Choate aims to obtain funding to sustain the mobile lab program beyond 2023, especially as the pandemic — per the federal government’s standard — is coming to close.

By using the van as a pilot, she hopes to continue offering accessible tests and demonstrate the effectiveness of mobile testing options.

Sinard, however, remains aware of the challenges associated with ensuring high-quality mobile testing. While the team’s on-site evaluation procedures ensure that the van’s testing is as accurate as those conducted in a YSPH or YPL laboratory, mobile testing poses new obstacles.

“This is a new adventure for us,” Sinard wrote. “The mere size of the van and the amount of equipment and reagents which it can accommodate does limit the range of testing which can be offered at any one time. There are also some regulatory hurdles which [need] to be addressed.”

Yet, Choate remains optimistic about the potential of mobile lab testing. She described how the SalivaDirect team is exploring how to use saliva to detect other diseases, including monkeypox and, potentially, diabetes.

Community partners, she explained, are also eager to understand how “mobile deployments” can be used for community health issues beyond COVID-19 and pandemic preparedness.

“How can we be using these mobile vans for other community health concerns such as gun violence or mental health?” Choate said. “And how can we use these mobile deployments and be able to pop up in communities to offer public health services or education going forward?”

The Yale School of Public Health was founded in 1915.

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ARTS

“It’s important to keep it on the side.”
SALLY ALBRIGHT WHEN HARRY MET SALLY

Yale Vermillion Theater’s debut of “White Rose, Red Rose”

OPHELIA HE
STAFF REPORTER

The first bilingual production of “White Rose, Red Rose” debuted with the Yale Vermillion Theater, which produces bilingual Chinese plays, on Thursday, April 27.

The play is directed by graduate student Wisteria Deng GRD '26 and will be performed on 205 Park Street from April 27 to April 30. “Red Rose, White Rose” is an adaptation of a love story written by the Chinese female author Eileen Chang and adapted by the Chinese writer and director Tian Qinxin. The play follows the story of two women, the “Red Rose” and the “White Rose,” who are living in the patriarchal society of 1930s Shanghai. It explores the clash of traditional Western and Eastern values and tensions that arise between characters, grappling with conflicting ideals of what family and marriage should mean.

“It’s about people trying to survive in a society that’s extremely restrictive and extremely limiting,” said Deng.

Deng told the News she feels that the play’s themes are especially relevant today, as progression and regression on women’s issues happen simultaneously. She explained that the play portrays how different people cope with choosing between family, career and love.

In a choice unique to this produc-

tion, Deng decided to have each of the three main characters — White Rose, Red Rose, and the protagonist — played by two different actors. This approach, Deng explained, separates the “inner” and “outer” selves of the characters, allowing the audience to see how the characters’ inner selves evolve over time. These selves, Deng said, become more reserved, passionate or genuine as the play progresses.

“The play is about values clashing, it’s about a person’s ideal self clashing with the harsh truth,” Deng said. “It’s about a person’s imagination of what a family is made of, what a marriage means, clashing with how society rules the family.”

The play will be performed in a lecture hall and auditorium, rather than a professional stage. The creative team is constructing two different homes on stage to represent the residences of the Red Rose and White Rose. Traditional costumes and props, paired with “nostalgic tunes,” will add to the play’s atmosphere, according to Deng.

Jessy Li, a New York-based software developer, will be playing the role of Red Rose in the upcoming show. According to Li, Red Rose is a “complex character” who embodies many of the themes and conflicts of the novel, including love, desire, tradition and modernity.

Li said she was drawn to the role because she identifies with the character’s struggles and has “empathy” for her. To prepare



COURTESY OF MELODY LI

The play, a love story written in Chinese, is premiering its first-ever bilingual version this week through the Yale Vermillion Theater.

for the role, Li read the novel and watched both a recording of the original play and its film adaptation. Li also worked with a private tutor to perfect her Chinese pronunciation and refine her posture to better embody the character physically.

The most challenging aspect of portraying Red Rose, Li told the News, has been capturing the character’s expressive body movements. Li said this is because she herself is naturally more introverted in her own movements, unlike the character.

Xingyi Zhang SOM '23 is playing the alternate Red Rose. This will be Zhang’s second performance with Yale Vermillion Theater after acting in their fall show “No Exit.”

According to Zhang, her participation in the fall show last year provided her with an opportunity to connect with several people involved in the theater at Yale and expand her network within the community. This network, she said, led her to audition for Red Rose in the upcoming production.

Zhang also said she was drawn to the role because of her love for “bad women” in literature who challenge traditional norms. This, she said, made the Red Rose character a perfect fit for her. She describes the character as “sexy, but not pushy or vulgar,” which presented a unique challenge in attempting to strike “the right balance.”

Haoyu Tang GRD '24 is the president of Yale Vermillion Theater and plays the role of Zhenbao Tong in the play. According to Tang, the biggest challenge with this year’s performance was the short time frame for production. They launched the play in less than two months — from recruitment interviews to the actual performance — leaving only one month for rehearsals. This was half the usual time dedicated to the theater group’s productions, Tang said.

“The story makes the audience reflect on their own true selves, including their selfish and greedy tendencies, creating a unique and thought-provoking experience,” said Tang.

Crystal Liu '25, the head of outreach for the Yale Vermillion Theater, said the show received funding from the University Graduate and Professional Students Senate, as well as some local restaurants like Tai Chi Tea.

Tickets for the production can be reserved online.

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“Passage:” Yale’s first original opera premiere in 30 years

BY ANABEL MOORE
STAFF REPORTER

“Passage” is the first original opera to premiere at Yale since 1988, as well as the only evening-length opera by a Yale College student to ever premiere at Yale. It was well-worth the wait. Not simply a performance, rather an emotive, well-paced and exhilarating experience, Passage reinterprets the 14th-century Japanese text “Atsumori.”

Composed by Benjamin Beckman '23, in part to fulfill his Composition senior project, “Passage” premiered in the Saybrook College Underbrook on Saturday evening. Presented by the Opera Theater of Yale College, Yale’s only student-run opera organization, and in collaboration with the Yale Undergraduate Chamber Orchestra, “Passage” featured librettist Adam Haliburton. It was directed by Joaquín Lara Midkiff '25 and produced by Jacqueline Kaskel '24.

Haliburton, who is completing his doctorate degree in East Asian Languages and Literatures, was quick to note the pleasure of working with Beckman.

“[Beckman] combines knowledge, talent, and taste. I was sure about the first two, but when I started to work with him, it was clear he had all three,” Haliburton said. He added that “Passage” marks the end of more than 10 years at Yale for him, and described the show as a “farewell” to the institution.

“Passage,” which drew from the Noh-period play by Zeami Motokiyo that is a subject of Haliburton’s dissertation, chronicles the trials of competing seaside armies and probes broad philosophical questions surrounding loss, torment, responsibility and absolution.

“It’s a pretty interesting structure similar to that of Virginia Woolf’s novel ‘To The Lighthouse,’” Beckman

said. “There’s a beginning and an end, but no middle. It’s very cool, how the piece reckons with agency.”

Beckman centers the composition on a chilling flute melody that repeats and transforms itself throughout the piece, propelling the show forward with astounding technical clarity. His prowess and intimate knowledge of the opera instrumentation — the ensemble was scored for flute, clarinet doubling bass clarinet, piano, percussion, string quartet and electronics, alongside the chorus — is lyrically rich. Grounded in the strengths of each individual contributor, “Passage” offers a resoundingly cinematic experience. Both libretto and score move as one, and this intricacy keeps “Passage” lively and balanced.

Midkiff emphasized the collaboration between Haliburton and Beckman. Indeed, “Passage” is the epitome of the modern opera: timeless and clear, it is obvious that its primary concern is emotive beauty that is both accessible and engaging.

“It’s all about Ben and Adam and the beauty and synergy between the two,” Midkiff added.

Beckman, whose orchestral music has been performed by the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the National Youth Orchestra of the United States of America, and the Yale Symphony Orchestra, has been writing art songs since the age of 15, and has written 27 such pieces since. With an extensive catalog of compositions ranging from jazz-fusion to post-rock to traditional Jewish cantillation, Beckman describes himself as creating “a new and unique sound for the modern world.”

The Opera Theater of Yale College was founded in the fall of 1998.

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ANABEL MOORE/CONTRIBUTING REPORTER

The opera, composed by Benjamin Beckman '23, reinterprets the 14th-century Japanese text “Atsumori.”

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FROM THE FRONT

"This is an adventure."
STEVE ZISSOU, "THE LIFE AQUATIC WITH STEVE ZISSOU"

"An exhausting circus": Yalies struggle to get transgender healthcare

HEALTHCARE FROM PAGE 5

When Karsavina was allowed to see the results, she was dissatisfied with them. After asking a few Yale Health practitioners, Karsavina was told that Paik, prior to coming to Yale Health, had only practiced as a surgeon for six months and only as a urologist for labiaplasties. Upon learning this, Karsavina said she did not feel comfortable going to Paik for surgery and has elected to seek out-of-network care with a surgeon who specializes in top surgery for transfeminine individuals.

"They have to allow out-of-network coverage or they have to create infrastructure that would actually attract specialists," Karsavina said. "It can't just be something that they view as supplemental or view as an accessory. If it's going to be something that they tout as one of the selling points for the students, they have to make it a priority and they have to make it something where it's more of a holistic effort rather than just cherry-picked."

Lake also had concerns about his experience with masculinizing top surgery with Paik.

Two weeks after his top surgery, he developed an infection in his incision and had to follow up with Paik frequently to monitor the infection. Lake said that at his follow-up appointment in February, two practitioners — whom he had not been told the position of — entered his examination room.

"These were not nurses and they were not providers of mine," Lake said. "No one asked me if it was okay for them to be present, not even when I had to stand there topless and have my breasts marked with a marker by Dr. Paik."

Lake said that he wasn't surprised when this happened again at his follow-up appointment, but he was uncomfortable regardless. At the follow-up appointment, Lake informed Paik that he struggles with severe dermatillomania as a byproduct of his obsessive-compulsive disorder, which had made the infection far more difficult to cope with.

Lake reported that Paik shamed him for picking at the agitated incision wounds as she examined them.

"At my next appointment with Dr. Paik, she entered the examination room with an additional person but asked me for permission for that person to be present," Lake said. "I said no and Dr. Paik asked me if something was wrong. I feel that I should be able to have private appointments with my provider without the constant presence or attempted presence of strangers."

Paik did not respond to a request for comment.

However, Nita Ahuja, the chair of the department of surgery, replied on behalf of the department.

"Regarding your email inquiry, medical records are confidential, and we cannot discuss specific patients or their cases," Ahuja wrote in an email to the News. "Yale Medicine is dedicated to providing exceptional patient care. Our physicians are experts in their fields, who are fully certified in the procedures they perform."

"The reimbursement game": Reimbursement structures for electrolysis

Numerous students also expressed concern over the reimbursement system for electrolysis — a method of removing individual hairs from the face or body by destroying the growth center of the hair with chemical or heat energy — at Yale Health.

Arjaan Miah '26, who benefited from Turner's "institutional knowledge," initially sought hormone replacement therapy at Planned Parenthood after learning it would be faster than seeking treatment through Yale Health's endocrinology department.

However, she sought electrolysis through Yale Health, which at the time cost \$80 per weekly session. Miah said this was "a big barrier" because she did not always have money in the bank at the time of payment.

Yale Health only reimburses a maximum of \$60 per session. Miah stated that many Yale students visit a local electrolysis provider named Catherine Sansone, whose sessions typically cost \$80, although Miah mentioned that a few students have paid \$85.

Miah described this payment system for electrolysis as a "reimbursement game."

In his statement, Steere wrote that in response to feedback, Yale Health has increased coverage for electrolysis to \$125 per hour, from \$60 per hour, effective Apr. 1, which has been communicated to patients seeking this service.

Tomura-Ho, like Miah, has been dissuaded from seeking electrolysis due to the reimbursement cost, especially given that they had heard from others that the reimbursement process can take a while.

Aguilar, who has started electrolysis at Yale Health, described the costs as "through the roof" and "a pain."

Her costs, which currently amount to \$500, were submitted to Yale at the start of March, but Aguilar said she has not received the reimbursement yet.

Aguilar added that these costs may be higher for those trying to get full beards removed, which would require weekly sessions, or those who need hair removal for bottom surgery, which can take up to 40 hours.

Another barrier to accessing electrolysis is the referral system. Miah recalled that when she first went to Yale Health seeking a referral for electrolysis, the provider told her that Yale Health does not offer such referrals. However, after Miah explained that electrolysis referrals were common practice at Yale Health — something she knew because of Turner, her peer liaison — the provider wrote her one.

Misgendering and deadnaming at Yale Health

In addition to the issues accessing gender-affirming care through Yale Health, many students also told the News that they have faced misgendering or deadnaming while receiving care or in communications from Yale Health. Deadnaming is an experience in which individuals refer to transgender people by a name that is not their preferred name.

Lake told the News he has had his chosen name and pronouns recorded in MyChart for the past eight months. However, every time he goes to Yale Health, he is referred to incorrectly.

"During the morning of my top surgery I was referred to as 'she' by the nurses putting my IV in," Lake said. "I corrected them but they continued to misgender me. The nurses in the endocrinology department did the same thing during my HRT consultation."

Lake also said his psychiatrist from YMHC misgendered him consistently in after-visit notes — months after he came out as trans.

Lake said that he's grateful for the access to free gender-affirming care at Yale Health, but the consistent misgendering has led to frustration, especially as it comes from the very providers helping him in his female-to-male transition.

"Being deadnamed and misgendered nearly every time I try to access care at Yale Health has significantly impacted my relationship with pursuing treatment," Lake said. "There were times when I delayed picking up my important medication from the Yale Health Pharmacy because I knew that I would be referred to by my deadname whenever they called out that my prescription was ready. Every time I sit in a Yale Health waiting room I try not to panic about the very real possibility that my deadname will be called out in front of everyone."

Lake told the News that he has medical-based PTSD that developed prior to coming to Yale. Attending appointments at Yale Health is only possible because of years of weekly therapy, he said.

Lake said that he knows that attending these appointments will be incredibly stressful for him, at times leading to "uncontrollably crying and passing out from stress," which is why he delays his own care.

"On paper it sounds great that Yale provides gender-affirming care, but in reality, it's an exhausting circus," Lake said. "If I was any less resilient and determined of a person I would have never transitioned at Yale."

Like Lake, Maxwell Kiekhofer '26 experienced deadnaming and misgendering both while seeking gender-affirming care and in online communication with Yale Health. Kiekhofer has been deadnamed multiple times via MyChart message, even at the beginning of conversations, and often is misgendered with she/her or they/them pronouns, when he prefers he/him pronouns.

Even after correcting providers, Kiekhofer said, they often continue to use his deadname.

Kiekhofer said his worst misgendering experience occurred when referred to gynecology at Yale Health. Due to pain he was experiencing, Kiekhofer was told he needed to have two different types of ultrasounds — both of which he did not feel comfortable getting as a trans man.

In a recent appointment with gynecology, Kiekhofer was deadnamed twice — once when his deadname was called out into the waiting room. While the check-in staff corrected themselves and later apologized, Kiekhofer said the "damage was already done."

"This has happened multiple times, and each time it happens I feel more likely to sacrifice my health to avoid being deadnamed or misgendered," Kiekhofer said.

Community support and activism

In addition to advocating for HRT to be covered under Yale Health Basic Student Health Services, students are currently working to make the process of finding resources for gender-affirming care — which often involves relying on word-of-mouth — more clear and accessible at Yale.

Currently, Trans@Yale, a student organization on campus, has a survival guide that was crafted by students for students. One of the stated goals of this guide is to preserve a semblance of institutional memory for future transgender students at Yale. The pages outline ways to navigate the Yale Hospitalization/Specialty coverage and other approaches to access gender-affirming procedures.

Aguilar said creating the guide has taken a long time, especially given that students at the Office of LGBTQ Resources only recently began being compensated for the work on the guide as well as their work spreading awareness on trans issues outside of healthcare.

Byrd wrote to the News that the Office advocates for a wide range of issues involving discrimination and harassment, promoting LGBTQ-inclusive policies, education about LGBTQ issues and equity and access across the board.

Work this year, Byrd added, has also focused on combating the national rise in anti-LGBTQ hate.

"This year alone, over 469 anti-trans bills have been introduced in state legislatures across the US ranging from drag bans, health care bans, censorship and forced outing, bathroom and sports bans — each of which have real-world impacts on members of our community," Byrd wrote. "On campus, advocacy ranges from continuing to update primary and secondary data systems, addressing housing, restrooms, healthcare needs, and promoting inclusive educational and workplace practices."

The Office also provides individual and group consultations and support with navigating the coming-out process, transition and Yale student life. The Office hosts a Gender Resources @ Yale committee, a Beyond the Binary social group and programming for TransWeek and TransVisibility, along with having a Qloset with gender-affirming clothing and shapewear like binders or gaffs.

Students interviewed, many of whom are involved in the Office and its subcommittees, told the News they have met with the leaders of Yale Health as well as administrators who oversee student life to discuss their concerns about trans healthcare.

Dean of Yale College Pericles Lewis told the News he has met with student representatives from the Office of LGBTQ Resources, and that he conveyed many of their concerns to former CEO of Yale Health Paul Genecin. However, since the switch in leadership in Yale Health, Lewis said he has not spoken with the new leaders regarding the concerns about gender-affirming care.

Kiekhofer, who serves as a Queer Student Alliance representative, told the News that the Queer Student Alliance — an LGBTQ+ umbrella activist

group that educates, mobilizes and unites students on issues facing the LGBTQ+ community — met with Lewis about gender-affirming care.

AJ Eckert at Anchor Health said that a solution to these widespread discrepancies for transgender populations lies in training all doctors in all specialties to provide competent gender-affirming care. He said that the solution to transgender healthcare is not to place all transgender individuals in a specialized clinic, but to ensure that all physicians are competent in caring for these populations.

"To be able to see a patient and when they disclose to you that they're trans or gay or whatever it is that you're not comfortable with to be able to say 'okay, well go to that clinic there the gender clinic,' that's wild to me," Eckert said. "It's wild to me that a doctor can literally say, 'Well, I don't know enough about that.'"

The only student who reported not experiencing any deadnaming or misgendering in her interactions with medical staff in any setting was Hannah Szabo '25.

Szabo began attending Yale-New Haven Hospital's Pediatric Gender Clinic at the age of 11 and has continued to do so throughout her time at Yale. Szabo also reported that the process for electrolysis reimbursement was slow and that the wait times for certain procedures were incredibly lengthy, which weighed negatively on her mental health.

Szabo said that there is a GroupMe for transgender and nonbinary students on campus, which is often active with students asking questions about navigating the Yale Health system.

"I'm so glad [the chat] exists," Szabo said. "But it shows something profound about the system that you don't really have other group chats on this campus that end up being like seeking serious medical advice, right? You don't usually have to turn to your peers for that. And I'm glad the trans community at Yale is so strong that we can turn to each other and support each other. But I don't think we should have to be, there should be more institutional support."

Szabo stated that she goes to the Pediatric Gender Clinic for all of her health care needs, save for blood tests, which she gets at the Yale Health building through Quest Diagnostics.

She said that she's always had a positive and affirming experience, which she's disappointed to see isn't the case for other transgender patients.

"I think it would be really, really awesome if we could just expect that every patient gets treated the same way when they go into a health care clinic," Eckert said. "Because I'm really tired of the horror stories. It's heartbreaking to keep hearing from patients how they are treated by other providers in 2023."

The Office of LGBTQ Resources is located at 135 Prospect St.

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Among Black and Latino communities fatal overdoses have skyrocketed

OVERDOSES FROM PAGE 6

ence substance use disorder. As she continued to engage in self-reflection and open dialogue with others, Brown unearthed experiences from her traumatic childhood and her family's history of addiction, reckoning with their influence on her life in the present.

"All of the people that was in this one program at that one time — I could fit into each one their shoes," Brown said. "I've been through it, mentally abused,

physically abused, sex abused. After all these many years, it started bringing up my childhood, what happened to me."

The program also directly targets the social determinants that put minorities at a higher risk for fatal overdoses, aiming to provide people with basic needs to eliminate barriers to treatment access. Toure said she has personally helped patients find emergency housing, look for rental assistance programs, earn their high school diplomas and get their driver's licenses.

Brown said that most people in the program are doing better now than they were when they first entered it. The program, she confirmed, has connected people with jobs at Yale and other employers, housing and financial help — setting them up for long-term wellness.

The Varick Memorial facilitators and Arbelo Cruz, who works as a provider in Latino churches hosting the program, added that the Imani program is especially effective at keeping patients in treatment because it does not

impose specific goals onto them. For many, Arbelo Cruz attested, a move in the right direction might look like reducing use from eight bags of heroin per day to two, or going from three bottles of wine per day to one. There is no "friction" between what the patient wants and what the provider wants.

Brown attested to this, recalling "life-death situations" like the time where one of her fellow cohort members overdosed during a session. Immediately, the rest of the group sprang into

action, calling emergency services and watching as responders "brought him back to life" with Narcan. They quickly welcomed him back with open arms.

"When one of the guys fell out with the fentanyl and came to us, we cried and we told him, 'you slipped, but you get back up!'" Brown said.

Varick Memorial is located at 242 Dixwell Ave.

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NEWS

"We are the first generation to feel the impact of climate change and the last generation that can do something about it."

BARACK OBAMA PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

Bringing in Bangaliyana: Yale affiliates celebrate Bengali New Year

BY ANIKA SETH
STAFF REPORTER

When the sun enters the constellation of Aries in the middle of April, many South and Southeast Asian communities usher in a new year. Last weekend, almost 150 Yale affiliates gathered in Sudler Hall for a cultural showcase in celebration of Pohela Boishakh, the first day of the Bengali calendar.

The program, which was organized by the Yale Bengali Students Association, took place from 11:30 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. on April 16 and included dances, musical performances and poetry recitation, as well as a Bengali meal at the event's conclusion. Individuals from across the University — undergraduates, graduate students, post-doctoral fellows, faculty and other staff — came together to celebrate Bengali culture and the new year.

"I planned the event with two goals in mind: to create a space that fosters stronger relationships within the Bengali community and share the rich art and literature of our culture with the wider Yale community," YBSA cultural chair and showcase director Mrinmoyee Guha '25 wrote to the News. "Over hours of rehearsal with singers, dancers and instrument players, we were already successful in creating an atmosphere where Bengalis felt at home."

Students and affiliates sang, performed solo and group dances, played classical instruments and recited poetry at the event. Afterward, YBSA organizers served mango juice, shingaras and a variety of Bengali sweets to highlight other aspects of Bengali culture.

Among the dancers was Saiti Srabonti Halder GRD '25, who choreographed several of last weekend's dance performances. Shanta Nag, a cell biology research associate at the School of Medicine, played the keyboard, and New Haven-based



TIM TAI/PHOTOGRAPHY EDITOR

The Yale Bengali Students Association put on a showcase in Sudler Hall last week to celebrate Pohela Boishakh, the first day of the Bengali calendar.

freelance writer and researcher Upahar Shah played the tabla.

"To me, choreography is like a painting on a canvas," Halder told the News. "I incorporated different elements of South Asian Classical dance forms such as Manipuri and Bharatnatyam, which blend in seamlessly with Rabindranath Tagore's eclectic compositions. It was absolutely thrilling to be able to deliver these compositions on the joyous occasion of Pohela Boishakh to the Bengali community and to the greater Yale community."

Aranyo Ray '25, the YBSA communications chair and co-chief of logistics for last weekend's showcase, told the

News that as a Bengali international student, he has found it hard to find campus spaces that "celebrate or even highlight" his culture.

YBSA, Ray explained, first formed last year to fill the gap in spaces for Yale's Bengali community on campus.

"For the longest time, Bengali culture has remained largely unrepresented at Yale," YBSA social media

coordinator and co-chief of showcase logistics Nawal Naz Tareque '25 told the News. "Being able to provide Bengalis of various backgrounds a fraction of that representation - while having fun during

rehearsals and costume selection - gave me immense fulfillment. A plethora of Bengali history and culture remains untold. I'm very excited to plan bigger projects next year with even higher ambitions."

Looking to years ahead, Ray said YBSA hopes to "add more Bangaliyana to Yale's campus," referencing a term — Bangaliyana — that describes the cultural essence of being Bengali.

The significance that the solar new year holds varies among communities across the South and Southeast Asia region. In Bangladesh, Pohela Boishakh is marked by colorful processions, music and dance

performances and traditional food. Many parts of the country also hold Boishakhi fairs, which include various agricultural products, artisan crafts, toys and sweets as well as merry-go-rounds, puppet shows and other forms of family-oriented entertainment.

Pohela Boishakh is generally celebrated on April 14 in Bangladesh and on April 15 in the Indian states of West Bengal, Tripura, Jharkhand and Assam.

In Bengali, Pohela means "first," and Baisakh is the first month of the Bengali calendar.

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ISM professor Mark Miller headlines Discovery Orchestra's televised special



COUERTSY OF ALIMAH BOYD

The special — an exploration of Camille Saint-Saëns' "Symphony No. 3 in C Minor" — featured Miller on the organ.

BY MOLLY REINMANN
STAFF REPORTER

Mark Miller '89, organist and professor of church music at the Yale Institute of Sacred Music, made his television debut as the lead soloist in a televised special by the Discovery Orchestra on April 22.

The interactive special, which premiered on The WNET Group's ALL ARTS channel, explored the work of 19th-century French composer and organist Camille Saint-Saëns, particularly highlighting his third symphony. Known for its mission to make classical music more easily digestible, the Discovery Orchestra is a New Jersey-based group that focuses on interactive

education during its concerts.

Miller spoke to the News about his experience working with the orchestra, his training as an organist and his goals as an educator.

"Professor Miller is a valued and versatile member of our faculty, and I am proud that his diverse talents will be showcased in this broadcast," Martin Jean, director of Yale's Institute of Sacred Music, wrote in an email to the News. "Not only is Prof. Miller an exquisite organist, he is a composer, pianist, conductor, and church musician with command of a wide range of musical styles. This program will feature him in only one of his many guises!"

The Discovery Orchestra's

mission is to teach the critical skills that help listeners thoroughly understand and connect with classical music, said founder and artistic director George Mariner Maull.

The orchestra produced its first televised concert in 2002, according to Maull, and has since sought to promote classical music education in an entertaining way. Maull said he uses methods like interactive conversations with the audience and brief histories of composers and instruments to make pieces more understandable to the average listener.

"We help people get inside of pieces of classical music in ways they might not have otherwise been able to," Maull said.

"It's much like going into an art museum and getting close to a famous painting, trying to learn and understand things that weren't noticed at first glance."

This weekend's special focused on Saint-Saëns' "Symphony No. 3 in C Minor," which Maull explained uniquely featured the organ as a core part of the orchestra.

With the prominence of the organ in the piece, Maull wanted to find a skilled organist to headline the Discovery Orchestra's special. He landed on Miller, a fellow New Jersey local who Maull said has earned much acclaim for his work as an organist and composer.

Miller told the News that he was honored to perform in the special. The Saint-Saëns symphony, he said, allowed him to apply his skills as an organist in unique and empowering ways.

"You don't have to be a virtuoso to play the organ in this piece," Miller said. "I've certainly played a lot more difficult pieces, but this one really just showcases the power of the organ in an orchestra. The organ is really exposed in this piece, it has a higher profile."

Miller started playing the piano at age seven, and said he developed a passion for the pipe organ as a teenager. Growing up, he played as an organist for his local church.

He said he credits much of his career success to his musical training as an undergraduate at Yale. He pointed specifically to organ concerts at Woolsey Hall and annual appearances at the Yale Symphony Orchestra's Haloween Special.

"I practiced for so many hours a day when I was at Yale, and that skill was definitely a huge part of my training for this performance," Miller said. "You know, just learning how to train and get that technical proficiency and play on the highest level I can."

After earning his masters in organ performance at The Juil-

liard School, Miller returned to the University in 2006 as a professor of church music at Yale's Institute of Sacred Music. He currently teaches a class to aspiring organists called "Liturgical Keyboard Skills."

One of his main goals as an educator, Miller said, is to encourage his students to approach music with an open mind.

He described focusing on assigning his students pieces from a variety of traditions, at varying levels of difficulty. He is especially interested, he said, in helping his organ students learn about gospel music.

"Even though I am Black, I grew up in a mostly white environment, and I was always taught in Western musical traditions," Miller said. "It wasn't until I was in my 20s that I even learned about gospel music. As a teacher, I am really focused on helping other organists learn how to play in diverse styles, like church style."

Miller emphasized the eagerness and high skill level of his students. He spoke about how he enjoys assigning them challenging pieces and watching them struggle with styles they are unfamiliar with.

The challenges he faced as an undergraduate, he said, were important parts of his own musical journey.

"It's kind of amazing to think from my perspective as an 18 year old coming to Yale that as a 56 year old I'm still doing exactly what I love to do and what I learned when I was here," Miller said. "My music and this performance is deeply meaningful, and it's integrated and connective work for me and my life. So I have a lot of gratitude for Yale and for my career."

Invented in the 3rd century B.C.E., the organ is the oldest keyboard instrument.

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NEWS

"Good morning, and in case I don't see ya, good afternoon, good evening, and good night!"
TRUMAN BURBANK "THE TRUMAN SHOW"

YPEI to extend curriculum to second prison and hold first graduation ceremony

BROOKLYN BRAUNER
STAFF REPORTERS

Incarcerated students enrolled in the Yale Prison Education Initiative will walk across the stage in the program's first ever commencement ceremony this spring.

YPEI, officially founded at Dwight Hall in 2016 by Yale alumna Zelda Roland '08 GRD '16, offered its first for-credit courses in the summer of 2018 at MacDougall-Walker Correctional Institution, a high to maximum-security facility for adult males.

The YPEI received a \$1.5 million grant two years ago to further support its mission of bringing rigorous, credit-bearing Yale courses to incarcerated students in the state of Connecticut. The donor, the Mellon Foundation, serves as the largest benefactor of the humanities in the nation; their donation to the YPEI was part of a larger \$125 million project to foster intellectual and creative freedom for those affected by the carceral system. The most substantial development that ensued from the additional monetary funds was the expansion of the YPEI to a second prison in the fall of 2022 — the program now also provides classes at the Federal Correctional Institution, a low-security women's prison in Danbury.

"Five years ago this summer marks the moment we first started bringing real, rigorous credit-bearing courses on Yale transcripts to incarcerated students in Connecticut," Roland said. "We are also celebrating YPEI's launch this year at a second facility to reach incarcerated women at Danbury federal prison, where we believe YPEI is the first college program that has been offered to students there."

This development is one of many recent firsts for the YPEI, as the organization also formed a partnership with the University of New Haven in April 2021, allowing the Yale credits earned through YPEI instruction to be transferred towards college degrees from UNH.

Additionally, the program, which began with only English courses, has expanded their course offerings to include philosophy, sociology, African American studies, Latin and physics. Graduates from the MFA program in the Yale School of Art have also provided lessons to the incarcerated students.



COURTESY OF KENDALL TEARE

With a \$1.5 million grant from the Mellon Foundation, YPEI now has the capacity to expand its programs.

The availability of the content continues to increase as well, expanding from four to 30 classes per year that now run year-round. Academic resources for the students have also grown, with funds now allocated for libraries, tutors and further support from the Poorvu Center for Teaching and Learning.

To conclude the 2022-2023 academic year, the Dwight Hall program is planning the first-ever college graduation ceremony at MacDougall-Walker. The students will graduate with a broad liberal arts associate's degree in general studies.

The ceremony will include an invocation given by Yale University Chaplain Sharon Kugler, while Sheahon Zenger, the interim president of UNH, will award the diplomas.

The impacts and rewards of YPEI's initiatives have a major impact on their students, according to YPEI alumnus Marcus T. Harvin, allowing

them to overcome the challenges of incarceration.

According to the YPEI website, only 22 percent of individuals in state prisons have received some form of postsecondary education — the program aims to increase this statistic each year.

"The YPEI served as an oasis while I was incarcerated; and upon my release, it has served as a catalyst for many lasting and fruitful connections," Harvin wrote in an email to the News.

While reflecting on his time in YPEI courses, as well as his involvement in the College to Career fellowship offered by YPEI, Harvin expressed great appreciation for the opportunities his education has given him.

He said that not only does he recognize the merit in earning a college degree, but also values the privilege of learning with other undergraduates "void of the stigma of being a convicted felon."

"I thought it near felonious to pass on an opportunity to be edu-

cated by an Ivy League institution, especially while imprisoned," Harvin wrote. "I was born and raised in New Haven, so therefore, I am well acquainted with the esteem and importance of Yale University. As a result, I always harbored a hidden desire to be educated by this institution."

This "implicit power" that Yale University possesses is not lost upon Roland, as she said that YPEI receives inquiries almost daily regarding their program and the ways in which they have succeeded.

The YPEI currently serves as a model for many peer institutions around the country who are attempting to bring rigorous curricula to students behind bars, according to Roland.

"When Yale acts, others listen and follow," Roland said.

As such, Yale is part of the Bard Prison Initiative, a national consortium working towards the extension of liberal arts education through federal prisons. The Bard Prison Initiative's core mis-

sion is to provide classes that are not altered or diluted from campus to prison, on the basis that incarcerated students deserve and are capable of succeeding with the same rigor found within a university.

As influential as YPEI's work is, the exchange between students and instructors is mutually beneficial, according to Roderick A. Ferguson, an educator at MacDougall-Walker.

"If you had told me that there was a classroom experience that promised rigorous engagement from the students every session, I wouldn't have believed you," Ferguson wrote in an email to the News. "But I've found that there. Students there do not waste time, and they do not waste their intellects."

The Yale Prison Education Initiative plans to admit two new cohorts, one from each participating prison, for the upcoming academic term in the fall.

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Yale book donations travel to Kenya through Likoni Library Project

BY ELENA UNGER
CONTRIBUTING REPORTER

The Likoni Library Project is calling upon the Yale community to help inspire Mombasa youth.

The project — which aims to cultivate foundational literacy skills in Mombasa, Kenya by disseminating donated books — will host a book packaging event on April 27 at the Afro-American Cultural Center. Student volunteers will gather to close out a months-long campus book drive.

"When I think back to my first moments of falling in love with learning, and I think it's the case with everyone, it started with reading," Nadja Umlauf '22 said.

Umlauf, a current Fulbright English Teaching Assistant in Likoni, a division of Mombasa County, Kenya, began The Likoni Library Project alongside fellow ETA Elaine Anshah. Umlauf was assigned to teach at Mrima Mixed Secondary School, while Anshah works at Shika-Adabu Secondary School.

When the pair initially arrived in Kenya in January 2023, they spoke with school staff and students to see how they could best serve the community during their nine-month stay.

"In both of the schools, it became apparent pretty quickly, that they were in really desperate need of books," Umlauf told the News. "Really outside of textbooks, there are no books that students have access to. And by no books, I literally mean like no books."

This shortage of reading materials prompted their creation of the Likoni Library Project. Umlauf and Anshah began tapping into American networks to organize book drives and fundraising efforts to support international shipping. The project launched its first book drive at Yale in early March and has expanded to academic institutions like The Dalton School, a

private high school in New York City, by April. The project also received donations from the US embassy.

Darren Markwei '25, the current president of the Yale African Students Association, has been a key organizer of the book packing event and has helped spread word of the project's mission across campus.

Umlauf, who was active in YASA during her undergraduate years, reached out to Markwei so he could help promote the project on the Yale campus. Markwei said that the project's mission resonated with him personally, and he gladly jumped in.

"My parents growing up, they didn't have much at all, and someone invested in them and built libraries in their local school where they're from in Ghana," Markwei said. "I've seen the impact firsthand of what reading and literacy has done to them."

The Yale Black Women's Coalition is working alongside YASA and The Likoni Library Project to recruit volunteers and accumulate books. Umlauf hopes to ship at least 1,000 total books to Likoni, allowing each school to start its library collection with 500 books.

Collecting, cataloging and transporting donated books is only one step, though, in the project's greater mission to help students fall in love with reading and the creativity it inspires.

"Every child should have the ability to have access to books to expand their knowledge and most importantly their imagination," YBWC Publicist Shelley Duodu '26 wrote to the News.

The books donated by The Likoni Library Project will be used to run English enrichment programming for Mombasa students enrolled in Access, a U.S. Embassy program that aims to provide global students from disadvantaged backgrounds with English language skills.



SURBHI BHARADWAJ/SENIOR PHOTOGRAPHER

The Likoni Library Project will be hosting a book packaging event for Mombasa youth at the Afro-American Cultural Center.

Current programming includes creative writing classes, student-run literary magazines, local readings and a newly-developed scholarship system.

"In Kenya, generally speaking, tuition for primary school is free, and then you have school fees for secondary," Umlauf told the News. "As part of the program we're now offering and have offered eight scholarships for students in the secondary school."

Students on scholarship will serve as Likoni Library ambassadors; they will help sort and organize books, lead book clubs and support student magazines. This in turn will make English enrichment programs available to students outside of the Access program.

The Likoni Library Project also

hopes to expand its mission to more schools in the area. The project is currently working with a community organization that runs English literacy programs in both secondary and primary schools throughout Kenya. Umlauf sees the potential to open a third library in an additional location.

For Jailon Henry '23, a student organizer involved with the project, the more students that have access to libraries, the better.

"I really believe in the power of reading to open up a new type of thinking that can allow you to access your thoughts more clearly and to analyze information that is presented to you in a deeper way," Henry told the News. "I believe in the power of fiction to add depth to the way people experience their lives."

With possible expansion on the horizon, the Project is currently focusing its efforts on donation transport and officially opening the Mrima and Shika-Adabu libraries.

Umlauf grinned as she described watching her students browsing brand-new bookshelves during an April soft launch of the Mrima school library.

"For some of my students, they've never really had a story-book," Umlauf said. "It was such an amazing moment."

The Likoni Library project is accepting donations through its GoFundMe as well as through an Amazon wish list of curated books.

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DAILY NEWS



I look like a cow in this



... Yeah

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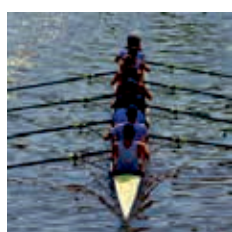
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CREW
CARNEGIE COMING BACK TO NEW HAVEN
At the Carnegie Cup against Princeton and Cornell, the Bulldogs prevailed to bring home the trophy. Yale dominated the competition, winning all five races.



WOMEN'S GOLF
CHAI '23 HEADLINES FOUR ALL-IVY SELECTIONS
Four Yale women's golfers earned all-Ivy honors. Coco Chai '23 represented the Bulldogs on first-team. Ami Gianchandani '23, Kaitlyn Lee '23 and Lexi Kim '25 each earned second-team recognition.



"I'm proud of our guys for grinding out a win against a tough rival. It's always a physical game with Albany."

ANDY SHAY
M. LACROSSE HEAD COACH

Bulldogs fall to Quinnipiac midweek, continue Ivy play against Penn

BY BETSY GOOD
STAFF REPORTER

Yale men's baseball (14-19, 8-7 Ivy) competed in a midweek game against Quinnipiac University (14-19, 7-5 MAAC) in Hamden on Wednesday.

The Bulldogs fell to the Bobcats 11-4 in a run-packed game. Over the weekend, the Blue and White then continued Ivy play with games against the University of Pennsylvania, 23-12, 11-4 Ivy, at Meiklejohn Stadium in Philadelphia with a double header on Saturday and a game on Sunday.

"We are showing so much progress in areas that we have worked on all year," Coach Brian Hamm wrote to the News. "Our pitching was outstanding this

week, credit goes to our veteran pitchers for their leadership and our pitching coach Chris Wojcik for developing our pitchers and putting together an effective plan against opponents' hitters."

Bryant Reese '24 started on the mound for the Bulldogs in their midweek game against the Bobcats. Quinn Cleary '23, Ethan Lewis '26, Josh Richardson '24, Jimmy Chatfield '24 and Jamis DeKay '24 all pitched for the Elis on Wednesday.

Scoring didn't get started until the top of the fifth when the Bulldogs scored off an error by the Bobcat's third baseman. Max Imhoff '25 brought in the run for the Blue and White. In the top of the sixth Jeff Pierantoni '24 singled to left center, which brought

both Davis Hanson '26 and Jake Williams '24 home, bringing the score to 3-0.

In the bottom of the sixth, the Bobcats brought in five runs, bringing the score to 5-3 to start the seventh. In the top of the eighth, the Bulldogs brought in their fourth and last run of the game after AJ Gaich '23 stole third and then was able to come home off an error by the Bobcats' third baseman.

However, the Bobcats then brought in the last six runs of the game in the bottom of the eighth, securing the victory. The ninth inning remained scoreless and the final score of the game was 11-4.

On Saturday, the Bulldogs started the morning with a 4-0 win over the Quakers, but fell in the afternoon in a close 1-0 loss.

In their match in the morning, the Blue and White scored the first run of the game in the top of the first after Chatfield doubled down the left field line, bringing Gaich home. The Bulldogs brought another run in after Swank doubled down the left field line, which brought Alec Atkinson '24 home.

The score stayed 2-0 throughout the game until the top of the eighth when the Eli's brought the last two runs of the game in. Gaich brought in the third run and Chatfield brought in the fourth after stealing home. The Quakers remained scoreless.

"Game one was definitely the highlight of the weekend," Reese wrote to the News. "Seeing our hitters score a couple of runs

early against Penn's formidable pitching staff and then watching our own staff shut them down for 9 innings gave the whole team energy."

In the second game on Saturday, the game remained scoreless until the bottom of the ninth when the Quakers sneaked a run in off a wild pitch to win the game 1-0.

Colton Shaw '25 started on the mound for the Bulldogs and threw eight scoreless innings in the afternoon.

In their last game of the series, the Quakers got the scoring started in the bottom of the first, bringing seven runs in. The Bulldogs brought their first and only run of the game home in the top of the fourth after Williams doubled down the left field line, which brought Gaich home.

In the bottom of the sixth, Penn brought in three more runs, making the score 10-1. Penn then scored the final run of the game in the bottom of the eighth, bringing the game score to 11-1.

Shaw expressed his excitement about the team's upcoming games against Princeton on Apr. 29 and 30.

"This is obviously a big one for us so I'm looking forward to how we compete," Shaw wrote to the News. "We have been competing these past couple of weeks and some things haven't been going our way, but that hasn't seemed to stop us. We are going to bring that same intensity and I'm excited for this next challenge."

Looking ahead, the Bulldogs will host Princeton University (18-17, 5-2 Ivy) in a three-game series at the George H.W. Bush '48 Field at home in New Haven.



MUSCO SPORTS PHOTOS

The Yale baseball team was defeated by Quinnipiac in a midweek game and fell in three game series against UPenn over the weekend.

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Sailors partake in weekend of competitive fleet racing



YALE ATHLETICS

The co-ed sailing team headed to Boston and Kings Point this weekend, while the women's team cruised into fourth in Rhode Island.

BY PALOMA VIGIL
STAFF REPORTER

The Yale sailing teams have continued to sturdily sail the Charles and Providence rivers, looking towards postseason fleet and team training.

The weekend allowed sailors to get back in the fleet racing mindset, as they placed third at the Admirals Cup and tenth at the Boston Dinghy

Club Challenge Cup. Kings Point saw a light breeze on Saturday, but anti-climactic winds the next day led to only one race taking place. Nearby in Rhode Island, the women's team came by in fourth place, despite a precarious eastward wind.

"This past weekend was a challenging weekend with tricky conditions, but I was able to learn a lot and continue to get bet-

ter moving forward," Nathan Sih '25 said. "As we near the end of the season, I will continue to keep practicing hard and trying to improve all the way up until nationals at the end of May and beginning of June."

In Kings Point, the Bulldogs started off by staying in the top five, but ultimately fell out of first place towards the end of the day.

Although overall Yale placed tenth in Boston, Jessi Avila-Shah '25 and teammate Mateo Farina '25 placed second in their division, taking advantage of the lighter and shifter winds that Sunday brought to the Charles.

"This weekend was a pretty classic weekend on the Charles River with a shifty breeze," Avila-Shah said. "I thought our team was good

in terms of maintaining good boat speed and fleet race starts."

The No. 2 ranked women's team competed with higher stakes this past weekend at the NEISA Fleet Race Champs, a week after their win at the NEISA team race championship.

The team came out in fourth out of the top 16 teams, so they did not receive automatic qualifying berths for the ICSA Women's National Championship. Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Harvard University received this honor as they placed first and second in the races.

Battling the shifty conditions for the Reed Trophy were skippers Mia Nicolosi '25, Emma Cowles '25 and Megan Grimes '24, with crews Helena Ware '23, Sarah Moeder '26 and Carmen Berg '26.

Regardless of the weekend's results, all the Eli sailors are looking forward to their postseason practice from May into June.

"I'm looking forward to post-season practicing and really refining our skills before nationals," Jack Egan '25 said. "Everyone can always improve their boat handling, so that's what we will be working on."

According to Sih, once the academic year ends, the team will be practicing twice a day without worrying about schoolwork.

This weekend will see the Bulldogs compete for an automatic berth to the coed fleet race nationals at the New England Dinghy Champ. The breezes will be shifty, but the team will look to be shifter.

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STAT OF THE WEEK

4.18

CHRIS LYONS '25 IS AVERAGING 4.18 GOALS PER GAME, SECOND-BEST IN THE NATION IN LACROSSE

WEEKEND



// BY ANDREW CRAMER

My second-floor bedroom window looks out over York Street — and coincidentally, the YDN building itself. Pulling back the curtains every morning, I check the weather and watch students rush to pick up their coffee or make it to a discussion section on time. Sometimes, when the light hits just right — or maybe wrong, actually — I catch a glimpse of myself in the reflection with bedhead, tired eyes and all.

As this year comes to a close, and I prepare to move out of my suite and off campus, I'll miss my little morning window-watching routine.

This article is the conclusion of a selfish and exhausting project: documenting a year in the life of myself through weekly personal essays. I've spent, by my estimate, 26 weeks and 18,000 words on this effort. I've talked about trivialities like coffee, Geronimo Stilton and orange sweatshirts, but I've also tried to share semi-existential crises about summer jobs, abandoning my major and coping with rejection at Yale.

While I suppose the primary reason for writing — especially in a newspaper — should probably be to share something with readers, this journey was largely motivated by my own self-interest. I wanted to become a better writer. The unintended consequences have been much more defining.

It's forced me to alter how I perceive the world. Knowing that next week's deadline was always right around the corner, I kept my eyes peeled for inspiration. I found meaning in parts of my life that I otherwise wouldn't have known to appreciate. The people in my life — suitemates, basketball buddies and family — have all featured prominently. My most mundane rituals — gratitude journals, showering and watering a plant — carry much more weight upon further reflection than I had previously realized.

Some people meditate, some people go to therapy, but I reflected with a public pseudo-diary.

But the audience matters, too, and I think I always was somewhat aware of that fact. I've never been entirely sure who reads these pieces, if anyone. My parents, editors and three dedicated friends claim they've read them all. And one visiting prefrish said she was a fan, which honestly spooked me a little bit. I forgot that people could be out there consistently reading and getting to know me through my ramblings.

Why would anyone read this? That's the bigger question I've been pondering. If it really is just about me, I don't get the motivation for someone else to spend their time checking the YDN website every Friday.

Thankfully, I don't think it's just about me. I would like to think that this column — I don't know if it formally qualifies — is a window into not just my life, but into a broader community of Yalies or college kids or humans. Maybe that last part is a little ambitious. I have tried to treat myself as a self-appointed scribe of some sort of collective diary. To be clear, it is far from all-encompassing, and there are so many writers more talented and thoughtful than I who have brought life to so many other dimensions of this campus.

However, what I really hoped to capture at least some sliver of life at Yale through a relentlessly optimistic lens. If this were a true diary, there would have been a lot more negativity over the course of the year, not because it's been a bad year, but because there are always difficult, exhausting days where all of the bad things from every area of life stack up. That's not what I wanted to share, though. This was, fundamentally, an exercise in happiness.

Nearly all of the feedback I have received centers around the most joyous or humorous aspects of these pieces. And I'm glad. I wanted to not only write about joy but to share some as well.

However, what I really hoped to achieve — and the type of response that meant the most to me — was this: I wanted people to look through the window of these little articles, expecting to see me, but instead, the light would refract just right, and you'd catch a glimpse of yourself as well.

I wanted anyone following this journey to appreciate breakfast and hot chocolate just a little bit more, to remember the days of half-fighting, half-joking with their siblings and to know that doodling as a twenty-year-old is still totally acceptable.

I'm still a sophomore, and I'm sure there will be more of these half-sweet, half-joking, half-rambling, entirely self-indulgent articles to come. However, writing weekly was a unique project that I hope produced a unique cumulative effect. In my mind, the natural course of that project was a year, and it's run its course.

I began the year by creating a window into the struggle to find my place at Yale. I've tried to leave that window into my thoughts, feelings and experiences wide open all year. Now, grateful for what I saw and hopeful that it illuminated something worthwhile for you, I'm closing the blinds — at least until next September.

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Don't Touch Grandma's Junk

// BY ANGELIQUE DE ROUAN

The elevator inches its way up, rumbling like an upset stomach as I pass each floor. Stepping out from behind the steel doors, I walk down a winding hallway and count down the apartment numbers until I reach my Grandma's place. 520, 514, 509. I wonder what kind of homes people have created here. 507.

"Hey, the whole flock is here!"

My Grandma's smile shines bright, melting my heart within seconds. She's the Grandma on my dad's side who I've been a stranger to for thirteen years. And somehow, I feel like I know her all too well. After some hugs and banter, my parents and I properly step foot into the apartment. Two feet in, I look around to see that there is not much of a home to step into. It's more of a container really, designed to hold junk rather than people. There's trash that comes up to my waist and clutter that goes up past my head. It's a tight squeeze just to get past the kitchen to what's left of the living room. Dad is actually optimistic: he says there was a lot less room to walk before. The time I spent dancing with my friends instead of doing lab work this summer was worth it after all; my amateur skills move me across the apartment to get to the bedroom.

I salsa past the dog crate, making sure my footwork is sharp so that I don't knock down the mountains of outdated health magazines on top of it. My Grandma doesn't have a dog. She just has a friend (who she hasn't spoken to in years) who had a dog decades past. She hangs onto the crate "just in case." Losing my balance, I swing my arms and two-step past the kitchen counter, careful not to hit the broken microwave that sits on top of the boxes where old junk mail resides. She saves them "just

in case." In what's left of the living room, I glance back at the narrow path I just

took: endless boxes, broken light fixtures, and black mold line the walls like ornaments. My eyes veer toward the kitchen sink, and plastic containers covered with mildew fill my visual field, some still have expired food in them. I feel a deep desire to wash my eyes out,

"just in case."

As I shuffle into the dining area, I feel myself getting woozy. Overwhelmed, I plop on the couch and let it engulf me, transforming into just another one of the useless things in my Grandma's apartment. My mind tries to wander but it's clouded by dust. With every breath I take I feel the dust bunnies hop on my throat, leaving it irritated and itchy. If I could claw through my skin and scratch it I would. The air conditioning unit may be the problem, the clogged ducts blowing invisible particles until my eyes water in retaliation. Like a veil, it thinly covers every object, concealing all but a hint of what's underneath. Touch something, anything really, and watch how your hands become stained with gray. My concern grows as I continue to peer across the dining area, or rather what I can see beyond the piles of trash bags upon trash bags that keep the overflowing bookshelves from spilling all over the place. How can she live like this? echoes in my head, and I feel my thoughts drift to another apartment, one that is so clean you could eat dinner off the floor.

My other Grandma on my mom's side, Anneanne, was your typical neat freak. There was never a cushion out of place, a carpet that was left unvacuumed, a window that was not doused with cleaner. The smell of bleach would singe off my nose hairs. When I was younger, I would frequently mess up her carefully tucked-in couch covers with my restless feet, and she would be quick to tell me to tidy up so that it didn't look like an orospu bohçasi, or a bundle of bitches (the Turkish language is fascinating). Anneanne ran her house like a military commander; there was a certain order for everything. Grandma runs her house like a washed-out general manager; there is disorder everywhere. And yet they parallel each other, both let their obsessions for tidiness and preservation control them, and their compulsions follow the lead. Would you rather sit stiff, afraid to make anything dirty (or pis as Anneanne would say)? Or would you rather plant yourself in filth and let the grime consume you until you, too, are left covered with a layer of dust?

Snapping back into reality, I find myself in the bedroom, surrounded by empty cardboard boxes and plastic bags ready to burst at the seams. I place my things on top of my Grandma's things; she made some space on top of her cardboard boxes for me. Annoyed by the lack of space, I find myself worrying that the weight of my luggage will crush the boxes. I attempt to shift them and swiftly get a scolding from my Grandma. That's when I learn the only rule in the house: don't touch Grandma's junk.

As the hours pass and I spend more time with my Grandma, I learn the stories behind the junk. Notably, her bookshelves are filled with physical therapy books. Some focus on the connections between different muscle groups, others concentrate on pain management, and all of them blur together as my eyes glaze over them. I ask her about her career as a physical therapist, and she pours her love for her field onto me. The passion in her voice is thick, filling the air with something other than dust. She was the first in her family to graduate college, inspiring her younger sister to do the same. Her pride in her accom-

plishments is enough to break the dam, my eyes filling up with tears. Books for my Grandma are not meaningful because of the content in them, but because of what she sacrificed to get those books. She wants to hold onto anything that reminds her that she made it. Her dementia creeps in as she forgets the names of certain ligaments, but her fingers gently touch each book's spine, showing how she cares for them as her own.

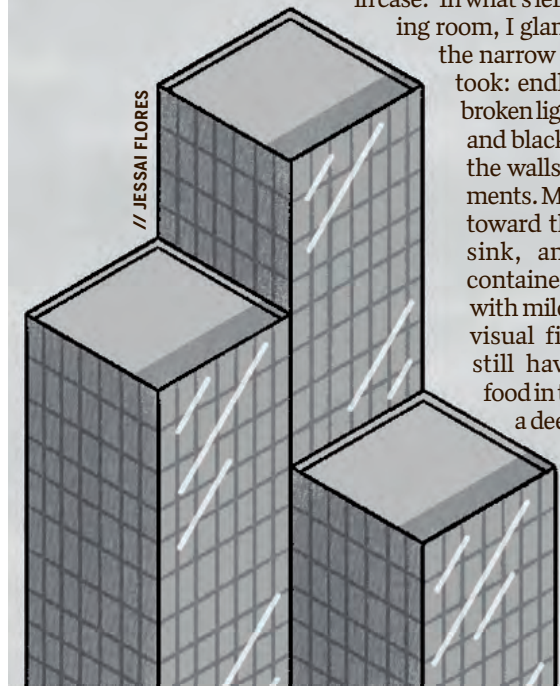
In her unused china cabinet, she has a little shrine with portraits of all of the people she loves. Her cousins, her mentors, her colleagues — she doesn't remember where they're from or details about their families but she has no trouble recalling how much they mean to her. Dad is in there, and so am I. None of the photos are framed, they hang freely. Fragile, they could fly away with the dust at any moment. But in the china cabinet, they are safe. Her memories are safe there, they can't escape her.

My Grandma continues to tell me colorful backstories, and the mess begins to clean itself up. When my Grandma sees me looking at a trash bag labeled "Mae's Short Pants," she is quick to say that she just stores them like that for convenience. I learn that those short pants are for when she goes back home to Louisiana. She tells me about the heat down South, how your skin boils under the sun and burns to the touch. When she picked cotton to make some extra money to feed her family, she would wear her short pants out in the fields. She and her friends would add water to the bag so that they could make a few more pennies. She could tell that I was confused and explained how adding water to the bag makes it heavier, and they got paid by the pound. She's still embarrassed by it. I tell her it's admirable and that she should never feel ashamed for helping out her family. Suddenly, I'm grateful to be with her and her clutter, blessed to be there and follow her life story through all of her souvenirs.

I realize Grandma doesn't live with her junk, she lives in her memories. I realize that this mess is the way her mind works, materialized. I realize Grandma is just trying to keep going, and her hoarding is how she copes. All of her trash bags of clothes that linger next to the dining table and come up waist-high are mementos from New Iberia to Chicago. Her newspapers are stacked like bricks against the wall so she can see all of the knowledge that she used to build herself up and create a beautiful life. Every sticky note that she should've thrown out years ago dangles from her desk like fruit from a tree to show her that she continues to nourish and sustain herself every day. She's a hoarder, and it's all-consuming, harmful even. But it's the same thing that gives her life meaning right now. I sit with that for a moment.

"Get the flock outta here!" says Grandma, grinning so wide that her smile blinds me on the way out. As I cha-cha over rolled-up carpets and past a dishwasher that hasn't worked for eight years, I can't help but wonder how things could've been different if she let in more people and fewer memorabilia into her space. I take a final look around the apartment and admire the home underneath all of the mess.

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// JESSAI FLORES

THE BEAUTY OF ACCUTANE

// BY LIZZIE CONKLIN

I've had acne since fourth grade. On Halloween, my squat, fourth grade roly poly body rolled into my parents' room to show them the alien mound on my face.

"I think I'm dying," I murmured, as they inspected the red bump on my chin.

"No," they said, "you have a pimple." And I did.

A few months later, when I realized I couldn't pray my acne away, my mom towed me to the doctor. The dermatologist had a physique not unlike my round 4'11" frame. A blunt, middle-aged woman with the rubbermaid tupperware-thick glasses, she examined me with big eyes and prescribed me a topical retinoid.

Her witch's brew mitigated my carbuncles (courtesy of thesaurus.com) for a while, but as I got older, my skin flared up. I tried every impossible-to-pronounce medication the doctor could spew out: tretinoin, spironolactone, adapalene gel, benzoyl peroxide, salicylic acid, doxycycline, or what you will. Despite being safe for skin, it all seemed poisonous. Some of it bleached my clothes. Some doctors told me birth control made it better, others called it the culprit behind the whole thing. There was no solution.

Finally, like more than 13 million people worldwide, I resigned to the acne-sufferer's medication of last resort: isotretinoin. You might know it as "Accutane," or the drug-that-must-not-be-named. I'd avoided it after years of suggestion per anecdotal horror stories detailing skin dryness, joint pain, and even suicide, all in pursuit of acceptable skin.

Isotretinoin is a Vitamin-A derivative used to treat severe acne. Although medical professionals have yet to pinpoint exactly why, they know it reduces oil production, shrinks sebaceous (oil producing) glands, and prompts cellular turnover on the surface of your skin. When enough builds up in your system, your skin should stop producing oil altogether, encouraging normal cells to rise to the surface and hopefully cure your acne forever. It's a wonder drug, if you're willing to risk the side effects.

The inescapable ones include incessantly dry skin, constantly cracking lips, bloody noses, and severe birth defects (if you get pregnant). Before starting, patients who can get pregnant must either start two forms of birth control OR sign a vow of abstinence. This is not a joke. During treatment, they must take a monthly pregnancy test; if you have a baby, it will have severe birth defects. For the first three months of treatment, doctors run blood tests to make sure your liver isn't quiet-quitting. You can't give blood. You can't eat too many leafy greens — every child's dream — at risk of a vitamin A overdose. If you value your liver, you can't drink.

It gets worse. Accutane can cause hair-loss, joint pain, unexplained bruising, ulcerative colitis, and IBS, and severe depression. I'll stop now. Unbelievably, I didn't want to start.

In desperation, I binge-watched "Accutane Journey" youtube videos and prepared for the worst. Severe acne runs in my family. The only way to get rid of it would be to poison myself with vitamin A.

And it worked.

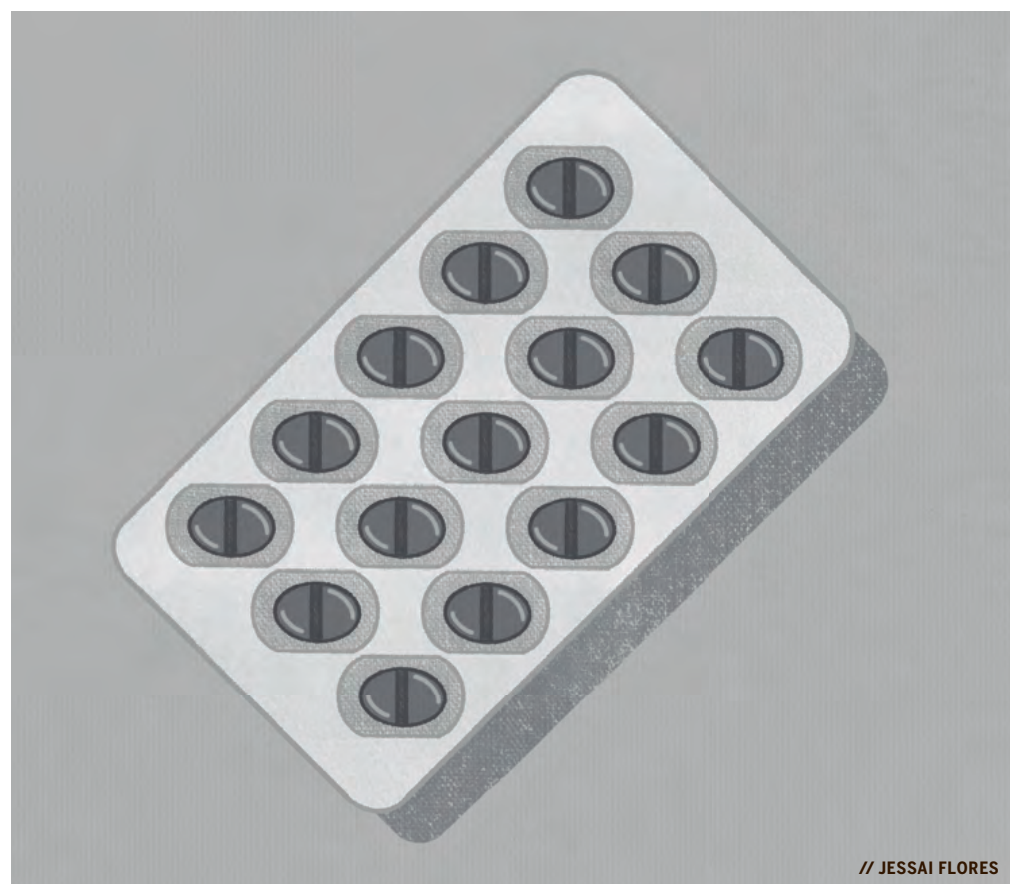
After eight months of daily pills and around 15000 mg of Vitamin-A, my acne is better, at a marginal cost. Despite constantly dousing my lips in medicated lip balm, they still crack. My

skin peels constantly. Have you ever seen a child try to make their barbie walk? If you haven't, look for me hobbling down Prospect at 9:25 on business days, and you'll get the gist. Accutane has given me arthritis-level hip pain that (hopefully) will fade away over the next few months. As the dermatologist promised, the extreme side effects are unlikely. I didn't have them. If you have nodular acne, you probably won't have them either, but ask your doctor or a reddit dermatology thread before starting. I ceremonially took my last dose today.

People have commented on my skin's newfound clarity. I can finally look in a mirror again, and honest children have stopped asking me what's on my face. Although my confidence has skyrocketed, when I look for skin-deep problems, I find them with ease. Like many children raised on filters and facetune, I know exactly what I should look like. I've kept up with the Kardashians. A more beautiful version of myself stares back at me every time I open Snapchat. We take extreme measures, like Accutane, to fit the accepted bill of beauty. I suffered through painful headgear in seventh grade to get straight teeth and humility. We forget that braces are cosmetic surgery. I have friends with lip fillers. I sauté my hair with a curling iron every time I go out. I wear high heels. Yes, I do these things to make myself feel good — not to suit any outsider's gaze — but why does this make me feel good? Who funds the ads that insist I buy concealer?

I don't regret taking accutane. It has greatly increased my quality of life — but why should it?

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// JESSAI FLORES

WKND Recommends

Partying to classical music.

WEEKEND *CLARITY*

// BY ELIFNAZ ONDER

I click on the picture of a girl sitting next to a bunch of flowers, with electric blue headphones, smiling with her eyes closed, “Relax & Unwind” in thick brown letters in the top right corner. The Spotify playlist description reads: “Melodies to let your worries and cares slip away.”

In the basement of Becton, I look at the gray concrete walls, which is not necessarily a sight conducive to letting your “worries and cares” melt away. We all have those “worries and cares” that can be a little stubborn and refuse to go away with the swiftness of a slip. Staring at the walls, I realize that I sometimes don’t show myself enough kindness to fully relax and unwind, especially when every single thing in my life seems to devolve into a problem. I look around and see friends who, like me, don’t take the time to unwind. Sometimes I see strangers in the library, on the street and in class who look visibly stressed.

So in case you happen to be a Yale student who is stressed, which I know is a small subset of the student population, here are some personal ideas to let your “worries and cares slip away” as the Spotify playlist description suggests.

I usually start with detangling the thoughts, feelings and ideas that are floating inside my mind. At times everything becomes so inseparable that I stop functioning properly. That’s when I take naps! I feel like there is a certain quality to taking naps that reminds me of the “this thing did not shut down correctly, do you want to report the error” message you receive when an app stops functioning. When all you want is to detangle your ideas and feelings, naps usually aren’t the most useful and enlightening option. But I almost always wake up with a little more energy, slightly more patience, a pillowcase mark on my face and the

inevitable “this thing did not shut down correctly, do you want to report the error” message. I am this thing. You are this thing. At this point in the

becoming my one and only character trait. My journaling doesn’t begin with “dear diary” though. It hasn’t since 2009. It’s more of an “I have to

allow me to let out what is consuming me. Sometimes it’s writing pages and staring down at New Haven from the top of East Rock; other times it’s

ies, stanzas from poems I’ve read, one-liners from my friends. I write down my thoughts when I can’t stop thinking about certain things or when I want to talk to people I no longer talk to. I draw random lines, circles and spirals when I have feelings inside me that I can’t yet put into words. Those pages look like my journal took a trip to daycare and was experimented on. And that helps me relax, unwind. It lets my “worries and cares slip away.”

You don’t even have to have a physical journal. Get scraps of paper, doodle on the back of this newspaper, fill in the margins of those readings you didn’t do, write frustrations on the empty pages of your old bluebooks.

There are times, however, in which I can’t even pinpoint what my worries are. My mind is occupied with the immediate things I have to do during the day. That’s when I take long — sometimes several-mile-long — walks. Sometimes on my own, sometimes with friends. Walking and thinking, walking and talking... There is something in walking that lets ideas flow. There is something even more liberating in a walk when you don’t have to travel from point A to point B. Try going on meaningless walks — it could offer you a peaceful moment of solace and reflection.

I believe, as the last item on this list, it is appropriate to actually leave you with a few songs to “let your worries and cares slip away”: “Parfum thérimine” by L’Impératrice; “Melody noir” by Patrick Watson; “Unintended” by Muse; and my all time favorite “On Every Street” by Dire Straits.

Take a deep breath, listen to the music and unwind for just a moment. I don’t know you — I don’t even know if you’ve read this far into this list — but you’ve got this!

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// SOPHIA ZHAO

semester, we all are these things.

As much as I enjoy running away from my problems, when I actually want to confront my worries, I journal, a passion that is currently

write—sketch—draw—doodle whatever’s happening inside of me” situation. My journals must be the most chaotic lumps of paper I’ve ever seen, but they are the lumps of paper that

doodling random cartoon characters around sentences that try and describe my worries as I dig into an entire scoop of Arethus ice cream. I write down quotes from mov-

Age 20: “The Year of Magical Thinking”

// BY ANABEL MOORE



// ANABEL MOORE

At a Barnes & Noble off the A1A in Stuart, Florida, I picked out two books. The first was for pleasure, Donna Tartt’s “A Secret History,” an accompaniment to “The Goldfinch,” which I devoured over the course of four days the summer between high school and college. The second I chose at the encouragement of my father, who insisted that I’d be through “A Secret History” in less than a week and needed to decide on another read in celebration of my twentieth birthday. It wasn’t tradition to pick out books on my birthday, but it certainly felt as though it should’ve been. As someone who self-admittedly loves to buy books I’ll never read, it simply felt right that I should be in a chain bookstore with my dad on my birthday over spring break, skimming the fiction section and wondering how on Earth Barnes and Noble employees could argue that “War and Peace” and “A Little Life” are “Single Sitting Reads.”

I spent a lot of time alone as a kid; it’s cliché to say that this is why I love reading, but reading was the pastime that staved off loneliness. My brothers are decades older than me; I was closer and more comfortable with my parents’ friends than kids my own age. My after-school activities all throughout elementary school were remarkably straightforward: watch “Rachel Ray: 30-Minute-Meals” — the best programming on my parents’ hand-me-down 30-channel box television, take free throws in the driveway, or read. Today, I am a terrible cook, a sub-50 percent free throw shooter and a student who spends more time looking at the haphazard stacks of books beneath my common room window than actually reading them.

I wish I could read for enjoyment more at Yale. I read my bookmarks more than the books themselves; my biology assignments make excellent placeholders. I used to try to read for fifteen minutes before bed every night, either an opinion piece from The New York Times or J.M. Coetzee’s “Elizabeth Costello.” I chose to be busy instead, and write a lot, too. I find it bizarre that I write for fun more than I read for fun; perhaps that’s why I spend an embarrassing amount of time on Thesaurus.com.

It was in the context of this longing that I chose Joan Didion’s “The Year of Magical Thinking.” I had watched “The Center Will Not Hold” while jogging on the treadmill. I felt guilty that my first and only exposure to Didion was accompanied by violent huffing and puffing, particularly as she visibly withered away in the film.

It was the only work by Dideon that Barnes & Noble had in stock. On my twentieth birthday, I wanted honesty and an accurate description of a worst-case scenario. In my free time, I wanted both the amusement of Tartt’s academic novel and the integrity of Dideon’s prose. As I read about art history and cell signaling and twentieth-century smallpox eradication for my courses, topics that all start to feel a bit hand-wavey the more time you spend with them, I wanted to read something that was raw and decidedly real. I’m not the first person to say this, but “The Year of Magical Thinking” reminds us that we all die.

I was a year older, still closer to the beginning of my life than the end, but spending my time staring at Kaplan-Meier curves and reading about childhood tuberculosis in low-income countries and trying like hell to understand what the seventeenth-century Dutch were trying to do with vanitas art. My courses this semester are preoccupied with death: evading it, eradicating it, respecting it and understanding it.

But if I’m being truthful, I picked up “The Year of Magi-

cal Thinking” because I wanted to know what would happen and what I might feel when I eventually lose someone I love. I do not presume to live a perfectly privileged life; I know this day will come.

A few days ago, I came across an old Yale Daily News article, published just after Commencement for the class of 2012. Written by Marina Keegan, it’s titled “The Opposite of Loneliness,” and was featured in a special Commencement issue of the News. A few days after graduation, Marina died in a car accident. She was driving with her boyfriend to Cape Cod, a job at the New Yorker awaiting her after summer’s end. Her prose is made even more ephemeral by her fate, but I couldn’t shake a line: “We’re so young. We can’t, we MUST not lose this sense of possibility because in the end, it’s all we have.” She tells the class of 2012 to “make something happen to this world.” She tells them, too, that they can change their minds. They can start over. They can do whatever they want.

Somewhere between Rachel Ray and Marvin Chun’s first-year address, I forgot about this freedom. I didn’t want to explore “what-ifs” anymore. I didn’t want to imagine, or speculate, or dream a dream that didn’t align with what I had been thinking for the last ten years. I wanted to do what had to be done, to put in the work, reap the rewards, and continue on my way. I wanted to be prepared; I conflated the word “possibility” with “risk.”

There is a possibility things could go wrong. There is a possibility that my hard work will not pay off. There is a possibility that my family will get COVID-19 and die. There is a possibility that bad things will happen. There is a possibility that I will make the wrong decision, and all of this scares me more than I can begin to articulate.

Yet none of this has materialized. Joan Didion is right; “grief turns out to be a place none of us know until we reach it.” My preparation is pointless. When I chose “The Year of Magical Thinking,” I told my dad that I wanted to appreciate Didion’s writing — I, too, wanted to be able to write a sentence so beautiful it hurt. But in reality, I picked it up because in the year 2023 I was turning twenty and he was turning seventy and all of a sudden his age was something I was meant to be concerned with. I felt in my bones the possibility of big, scary feelings lurking around a blind corner.

Though I wish I could read for enjoyment at Yale, I realize that I never really read for enjoyment in the first place. I’m always looking for answers, and sometimes answers to questions I don’t need to be asking. I don’t need to know what will happen if I lose someone. It will happen, and I will be okay. I am too young to waste this promise of possibility to fear, to lose this time in the pursuit of answers, only to let these answers gather dust on the ledge beneath the window.

Books always filled a void, but if I’m being honest, that void no longer exists at this school. Like Keegan, I’m in the web of this “elusive, indefinable, opposite of loneliness.” Like Keegan, I have no idea what is around the next bend. All I know is that each birthday, I will pick out a book. I might read it, I might not — who knows. I am “in love, impressed, humbled and scared.” The answers to my questions are out there somewhere. And for now, that knowledge is enough.

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WKND Recommends

Doing a social media detox.

MARIO MOVIE REVIEW

// BY CLAIRE FANG

I hope we all remember the infamous trailer for *The Super Mario Bros. Movie*, for which Chris Pratt was in/justly pilloried on the internet due to his flat, non-Italian delivery of the line: “Mushroom Kingdom, here we come!” I certainly did, so when I walked into the Bow Tie Criterion Cinema on Earth Day, April 22 2023 at 6:30 PM, the famous words of Twitter user @9_volt were bouncing about in my brain: “I think if we get angry enough we can force Chris Pratt to re-record all his lines with an exaggerated Italian accent.”

The great question on my lips (then) and your lips (now): Did he?

No.
But it’s a fantastic movie, regardless. And when I say “movie,” I mean movie. The pictures are popping with color in various and mood-appropriate palettes, the movement is animated with detail and passion, and the sound! It will take me a full paragraph alone to cover the sounds of the *Mario Movie*.

Let’s get back to the accent question. Although Chris Pratt does not speak in an Italian accent for the whole of the movie, this is explained by — spoilers for the first act — him being a New Yorker. Yes, this movie is of the isekai genre. He does, however, perform the Italian accent for an in-universe advertisement of the *Mario Bros’* plumbing services, which is delightful. Moreover, the original voice actor for Mario, Charles Martinet, plays Mario’s dad. Jack Black’s Bowser also sings an original song about how much he loves Princess Peach, with the heart-rending lyrics “Peaches Peaches Peaches Peaches Peaches Peaches” (The vocals more than make up for, and indeed enhance, the repetition). And, as a nod to the original games, audiences will recognize some of the iconic music of the *Mario* series, remixed and ‘powered-up’ for the movie.

One might wonder if the *Mario Movie* pays satisfactory homage to its video game roots. The happy answer is that it does, and in ways that extend beyond what’s shown in the official trailer. Power-up blocks are amply distributed throughout the sets and script, and they give Mario and Peach a wide collection of colorful character costumes (including a catsuit and raccoonsuit) and matching powers. Pipes feature strongly in the urban planning of the Mushroom Kingdom and even facilitate interdimensional travel. But what really brings joy to my nostalgic gamer heart is one sequence in the movie’s first act, which closely mimics a classic 2-D side-scroller. The animators really did their research.

The core of a film is its characters, and *The Super Mario Bros. Movie* does not disappoint. For the sake of time, I’ll be evaluating them in terms of the three main duos/dyads:

1. Mario and Luigi: Honestly, I could also talk about Mario and Donkey Kong, but this is the “Bros” movie and so on the Bros I focus. Although they are separated for most of the film, they display impressive teamwork when together and heartwarming devotion to each other when apart. Given animated films’ recent propensity for twist villains, I was almost expecting a “Luigi was secretly evil” twist, but this was not the case. The brothers’ relationship is static but very wholesome and mutually supportive. I stan healthy sibling relationship representation in the media.

2. Bowser and Kamek (I had to google Kamek’s name, but you can easily identify him as “the wizard turtle”): This is a classic example of the Boss-Head Minion dynamic, complete with the Boss’s gratuitous cruelty towards yet extreme dependence on the competent Head Minion. It’s also very funny, in a slapstick kind of way. Again, no stunning plot twists to be found in this department, but there’s no need to get it twisted: their interactions feel original because of the sincerity of Jack Black (Bowser) and Kevin Michael Richardson (Kamek)’s vocal performances.

3. Peach and Toad: These two are interesting. I came into this movie expecting a Mario-Peach romance, and although there are hints in that direction, it’s Toad who ends up expressing more affection towards the

Princess. Though it’s notromantic, he does take upon himself a knight’s duty of protecting her, and I found the expression of medieval chivalry in a video game movie quite charming, honestly.

Of course, no movie is perfect. You may expect that the story does not break the ground of children’s animation, and indeed, it doesn’t. Without spoiling too much: What you expect will happen to Mario and Luigi does happen, the fate you predict for Bowser comes true, et cetera. You probably also predicted this assessment of the movie’s plot.

As I end this review, my time at Yale is likewise coming to an end; I’m a graduating senior. While I was here, I spent a lot of time with the WKND desk, first as a staff writer, and then as an editor. And so I’m looking at everything around me for



meaning, for closure, for finality. Coming to Yale was like Mario getting isekai’d through the pipe from New York to the Mushroom

Kingdom — I flew over from Taiwan and found myself in a country with unfamiliar rules and new people. It was a culture shock to be sure, but I was lucky to have mentors who guided me like how Peach put Mario through the training montage. I certainly “powered-up” my skills in the various classes I took here, and found help even in the darkest depths of the ocean (a metaphor for the bathroom in which I fainted — thank you again, nameless stranger, for your water bottle which revived me). Finally, I’m grateful for the friends I’ve made here, and the journey we had together.

It’s been fun, though sometimes it was scary, but in the end everything turns out all right.

Go watch the *Mario Movie*, you’ll have a good time.

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NUTS



// BY BAYLINA PU

The house, on the outside, looked the same as all the others: Victorian, lightly painted, shelved in a neat row of similarly picturesque homes along a steep San Francisco incline. The house had belonged to Don, who was no longer living. My friend fumbled with the lock on the front door; after some jiggling, we stumbled inside, our bags sliding to the wooden floor with a soft thunk.

Don had been a family friend of Meredith’s, who had arranged for us all to stay in his house while we were visiting the city. Meredith came from an artsy, intellectual family, so I wasn’t surprised to see hand-painted art posters and scrapbooks scattered throughout the house of one of her parents’ closest friends. What

I was not expecting were the squirrels.

They weren’t real squirrels, but they were realer than real squirrels. They were the romantic idea of squirrels: paintings of squirrels, vintage black-and-white photographs of squirrels, squirrel-themed calendars, miniature wood carvings of squirrels, stylized text quotations about squirrels. And nuts. Lots of nuts. Nuts in bowls, polished acorns on the bookshelves, rubbings of oak leaves done in charcoal. It was as though I had stepped foot in the home of a woodland creature from one of those lovingly illustrated children’s picture books, and all the squirrel images on the walls were portraits of its family members. Except Don was (as far as I know) human, or at least he lived in a human-sized house.

Now I have to confess that while I am on the whole a lover of animals, there has always been somewhat of a friction between squirrels and myself. It isn’t exactly animosity; you could call it something like a rivalry. Here you might protest that a relationship between a human and a squirrel can’t possibly be equal enough for it to be defined as a rivalry, but the flaw in your argument lies in the fact that I have, probably since birth, been a bird person (no hyphen). I am unflinching in my loyalty to birds of all species. And as an ally, supporter and occasionally defender of the avian class, I felt it my duty to harbor at least some minor suspicion towards the family known as Sciuridae, mostly on behalf of the small backyard passerines who always seemed to be in fisticuffs with them at the bird feeders (they’re called bird feeders for a reason!).

My commitment to the birds aside, I have also had a few hostile squirrel encounters of my own. Once, I was practicing driving in the parking lot of my old elementary school when a giant squirrel began scurrying across the pavement. I braked and waited for the squirrel to reach the sidewalk. Instead of continuing, though, the squirrel just stopped in the middle of the road. Slowly, I inched the car forward; nothing happened. I finally honked my horn. The squirrel turned and looked me dead in the eye. Even through the windshield, I could feel the intensity of its cold, empty stare. I don’t even remember what happened after that. I certainly didn’t run it over; I may have attempted to go around it. Perhaps it ran away eventually. I don’t know, and I don’t want to think about it.

I know countless others who have been personally victimized by squirrels, especially the ones that roam college campuses (which are truly another breed — my friend swears she’s seen one drinking out of a red Solo cup). The point is, in the current political climate, squirrel-human relations are quite fraught. To enter a house that was essentially a monument to the squirrel ideology was a bit of a culture shock, if you could call it that.

And yet there was something comforting about it. Something

familiar, in the same way that the colored pencil forests in those picture books felt familiar. This person I’d never known was so dedicated to these creatures that he felt compelled to decorate his entire home as an expression of his love and admiration for them. In the kitchen, photographs of a squirrel being hand-fed popcorn stood next to an empty bowl. I wondered what other treats the bowl might have held: peanuts, grapes, pecans, sunflower seeds, slices of pumpkin. It reminded me of when I’d feed seagulls at the beach, tossing fries into the air and watching the birds swoop down in complex aerial maneuvers to catch them. Usually whenever I recounted doing this, people would look at me like I was crazy — they couldn’t understand why I’d expose my food to the thieving gulls, much less give it to them freely. Or why I’d get so excited whenever I saw a murder of crows, or why I took offense when people referred to pigeons as “rats with wings.” Pigeons are intelligent and clean and cute; I would complain. Then again, wouldn’t a rodent lover say the same about rats?

I thought about how Don might respond if someone insulted squirrels to his face. Maybe he would retort something scathing and witty. Maybe he would remain silent. Maybe he would shrug, a shrug that indicated years of experience with squirrel-bellitting people who didn’t understand, knowing there was nothing he could do to change their minds. I’ve been there. But I’ve also learned that the world isn’t just made up of you and a few billion people who don’t get it. You will always be able to find the people that do.

My friend and I moved a spare mattress to the floor for us to sleep on that night. The blankets were patterned with autumn leaves: oak, maple, poplar, hickory. It felt cozy. I never had the privilege of meeting Don while he was alive, but those nights we stayed in his home, I felt like I knew him, just a little bit. At the very least, I knew that this was someone who loved deeply and wasn’t ashamed to show it. This house was a reflection of the purest kind of love, one that expected nothing in return. Despite being in enemy territory, as a bird ally in a refuge for squirrels, I felt safe. As I drifted off to sleep, I felt as though I were in a sanctuary not only for squirrels, but for us, keeping us warm and protected, asking nothing of us in exchange.

Maybe one day, when I have my own place, I’ll put up paintings of birds and hang calendars with a different species of pigeon for each month. I’ll fill up bowls with nuts and seeds and step outside every morning to feed the passerines. And maybe, just maybe, I’ll let the squirrels have their share.

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WKND Hot Take:

White chocolate is the best type of chocolate.