FROM THE FRONT

"Life is like a box of chocolates; you never know what you're gonna get."
FORREST GUMP FORREST GUMP

In 2025, faculty donations skewed heavily to Democrats

DONATIONS FROM PAGE 1

tax on endowment investment returns that has led to a series of budget cuts.

"Professors tend to support political parties and policies that align with their interests, such as open research, institutional autonomy, and financial aid," Italian Studies senior lector Michael Farina, who donated three times to a Democratic candidate in 2025, wrote in an email to the News.

"If the Republican Party evolved to support policies like those, more faculty would be financially supportive of Republicans, but, instead, the Republican Party just cut Yale's budget by $300 million annually," he added, referring to the projected cost of the endowment tax hike that will go into effect this year.

In January 2024 — one year before President Donald Trump's second term began — the News reported that 98.4 percent of Yale professors' donations in 2023 were directed to Democratic candidates and groups.

7.5 percent of Yale employees' donations and 2.4 percent of Yale professors' donations reported in the FEC filings went to independent candidates and public action committees, which advocate for specific initiatives or industries by supporting both Democrats and Republicans.

While 17 people who listed Yale as their employer donated to Republican candidates or groups, none of them listed professor as their occupation.

'No surprise'

History professor Mark Peterson, who made 56 donations to Democratic groups in 2025, wrote in an email to the News that there is no "great mystery" about the fact that Yale professors' donations lean overwhelmingly Democratic.

Going back to the days of President Richard Nixon, Republicans have attacked intellectuals and institutions of higher education, "calling them enemies, trying to defund them, limit their freedom," Peterson wrote.

"Would it be surprising if labor unions overwhelmingly favored the party that supports them against their union-busting opponents?" he added. "If environmentalists support the party that promotes environmental protection against a party that attacks it?"

On the other hand, Farina wrote, the Democratic Party has been more supportive of public funding for higher education, research and financial aid. He wrote that professors who support Democrats are not "ideologically biased" but are simply supporting those causes.

Political science professor Steven Smith said in a phone interview that the overwhelming support for the Democratic Party among faculty is "characteristic" of standard demographic trends.

"That's old news," he said. "That's no surprise. It's true, generally across the culture, not just in universities, on the whole, in the country, educated people vote Democrat."

Harold Attridge, a professor emeritus of divinity who made 10 donations to Democratic groups in 2025, wrote in an email to the News that he is "happy to have provided some modest support in the last several years to politicians who stand for the fundamental principles of our democracy."

Attridge wrote that Trump's administration has committed actions that contradict the nation's founding democratic principles, such as claiming "dictatorial powers for the president," killing civilians as if they were military combatants and imposing tariffs without authorization from Congress.

"If other members of the faculty recognize the problem that this nation is facing, I am not surprised," he wrote.

Robert King, an emeritus professor at the Yale School of Medicine who made 28 donations to Democratic groups in 2025, said in a phone interview that, as a child psychiatrist and physician, he is concerned about factors like poverty, biomedical research, access to education and affordable healthcare.

If Republicans expressed more support for issues that university professors tend to prioritize — such as advancing public health and having free intellectual discourse — King added that he is "sure they would have more support amongst the faculty."

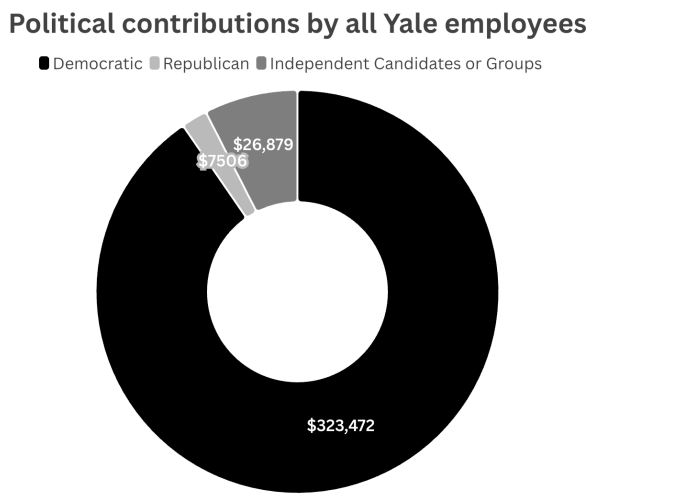
Questions about intellectual diversity

The overwhelming Democratic tilt among faculty donations is consistent with the Buckley Institute report, released last month, that found that professors at Yale are predominantly Democrats in terms of party registration and donations.

Carlos Eire, a history and religious studies professor who described himself as "a conservative in the traditional mold," expressed pessimism about this imbalance.

"It's true, there is very very, very little intellectual diversity at Yale and at most institutions of higher learning when it comes to politics," Eire wrote in an email to the News. "Academics in the US, Canada and Europe have been leaning left for the past three or four generations. And this is something that shows no signs of being corrected or correcting itself anytime soon."

The presence of the Buckley Institute and right-leaning parties in the Yale Political Union, Eire added, indicates that "there is less of a drastic imbalance among undergraduate students than among faculty."



Graph: Aiden Zhou, Data Editor

But Yale College Dean Pericles Lewis said in a Monday interview with the News that the vast majority of professors teach subjects, such as physics, in which political views are minimally relevant. Even in classes where politics is more relevant, he noted, professors want students to understand various perspectives of subject matter, and he doesn't think the professors' party affiliation affects that goal.

"I think at the moment, there's a lot of tension between some of the more conservative elements in our society and our universities, and that probably is affecting how university professors vote," Lewis said. "But I don't think it's affecting how they teach."

Smith also said that there is "probably about zero" way in which professors' Democratic tilt in donations translates into the classroom.

While it's important to strive for diversity of thought in universities, Smith said, setting litmus tests on prospective professors' political views will not achieve that goal.

"Are we going to ask people for a job interview what candidates they support and who they give money to as a criterion for hiring them? I mean, are you serious?" he said. "The only way to offset the tendency towards monoculture is by giving students a broader and richer historical sense of the basic problems that we're facing."

Lewis said the University recognizes that professors at Yale and beyond tend to lean Democratic, adding that administrators and campus groups try to compensate for the imbalance "to some extent" by inviting Republican and conservative speakers.

Independent PACs

For some professors, independent political action committees, or PACs, provide a more effective donation option to support specific fields and issues.

Caroline Nelson, a dermatology professor at the Yale School of Medicine, wrote in an email to the News that her contributions to an independent PAC are consistent with her interpretation of the Hippocratic Oath to "provide the highest quality care for all patients, regardless of party affiliation."

According to Nelson, the American Academy of Dermatology Association PAC, to which she donates, contributes to individual congressional campaigns based on each recipient's understanding and record on issues related to dermatology.

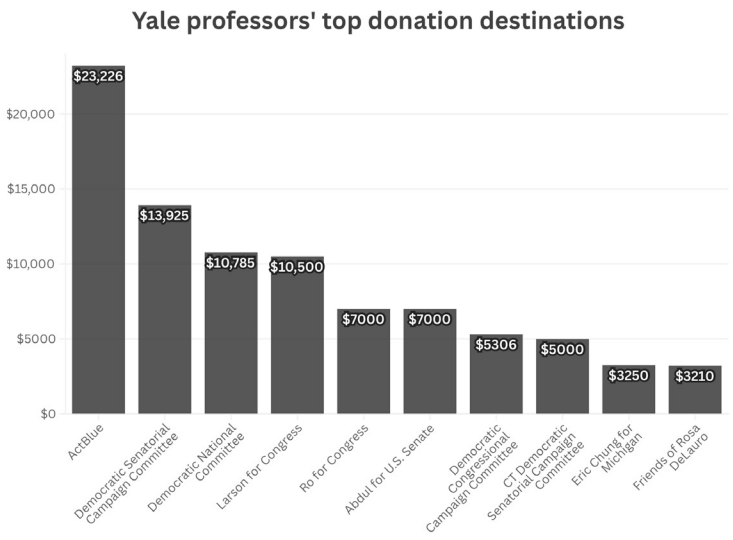
"So, whatever is best for all of my dermatology patients, is what I support," she wrote. "That's how I interpret my oath."

King, however, noted that while he also donates to professional organizations like the Academy of Child Psychiatry and the American Psychiatric Association, it can be more effective to "choose directly" whom to donate to when it comes to influencing "the actual makeup of the legislature or the administration."

ActBlue, the popular Democratic political action committee, received the most donations from Yale professors last year, totaling $23,266.

Olivia Woo contributed reporting.

Contact **JAEHA JANG** *at jaeha.jang@yale.edu.*



Graph: Aiden Zhou, Data Editor

Graduate enrollment set to decrease over three years

ENROLLMENT FROM PAGE 1

safeguard the long-term health of our graduate programs."

The targets for the reduction were first reported in a Yale Alumni Magazine article in its January/February edition. The News reported in September that graduate studies directors were briefed about an upcoming 12 percent reduction in graduate student enrollment in humanities and social sciences programs but were not specifically told about reduced enrollment in STEM programs.

Since the announcement of the impending endowment tax hike, Yale has implemented several cost-saving measures, including a 5 percent reduction in non-salary expenses and a retirement incentive program for managerial and professional staff. University leaders stated in a December email that "layoffs may be necessary" as they look to downsize the staff due to budget constraints. The increased tax is predicted to cost Yale approximately $300 million per year.

The heightened tax rate has also diminished the graduate school's budget, Peart wrote in a Monday email to the News. The statement noted that 93 percent of the budget is dedicated to supporting graduate students, with Yale providing "full financial support" to doctoral students, and that the enrollment reductions allow the University "to continue to fund and invest in its excellent graduate education in the decades to come."

Per the statement, the disparity between the roughly 13 percent and the 5 percent reductions in enrollment can be attributed to a difference in funding. Graduate student funding for STEM programs comes from both the University endowment and "substantial" federal and private funding, while that for the humanities and social sciences relies "entirely" on endowment investment returns, the statement reads.

Kevin van Bladel, the director of graduate studies for Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, said in a Zoom interview that the decision to reduce STEM enrollment to a lesser extent "makes sense," considering the different sources of funding. He reaffirmed that supporting doctoral candidates is "not inexpensive" because the University funds the students' tuition, healthcare and "generous stipend" for six years.

Jonathan Kramnick, the director of graduate studies for English, wrote that the difference "seemed reasonable, if somewhat narrow."

"Yale is one university, and we're all in this together," he wrote. "We can hope that in the long term the administration keeps in mind the role the humanities have played in making Yale a world class university."

No surprises, mixed sentiments

According to Kramnick and Thornbury, directors of graduate studies were told before the fall semester that there would be some form of reduction to enrollment targets in this year's cycle. On Aug. 25, Stephen Murphy, the University's vice president for finance and chief financial officer, gave a presentation on the enrollment cuts to directors of graduate studies across departments, the News previously reported.

"We were told just before the start of the term at a meeting for all Directors of Graduate Studies," Kramnick wrote. "The decision was already made, so far as I know, without faculty input."

According to Peart's statement, in anticipation of the endowment tax hike, administrators had "thoughtful discussions and consultation with a faculty working group and with each department chair and director of graduate study" to decide on the next three years' enrollment targets.

"Early on, we were told that there would be across-the-board cuts, and that they would try to impose them based on program numbers rather than on perceived program strength, success, etc. -- in other words, that cuts would not be used to reward or punish," Thornbury wrote. "Right now, I think GSAS' leadership is doing their best to cope as fairly as possible with a major financial shift that couldn't be planned for."

Alexey Fedorov, the director of graduate studies for earth and planetary sciences, expressed disapproval regarding the enrollment cuts in an email to the News. Fedorov described graduate students as "vital to a research university such as Yale" and pointed to alternative measures to save costs, such as setting "stricter limits on time to graduation" and decreasing "administrative expenses across the university."

Van Bladel said that he was unsurprised and, if anything, "a little relieved" when he learned about his program's new target number. He thought there could have been "much, much sharper cuts," he said, because many peer institutions have implemented more drastic cuts to graduate student enrollment.

Last semester, Harvard announced that it would reduce doctoral candidate enrollment by 50 percent in its science division, by 60 percent in its arts and humanities division and by between 50 and 70 percent in its social sciences division, according to the Harvard Crimson. Meanwhile, the University of Chicago's arts and humanities division froze all new doctoral student admissions across all but two programs for the next academic year, according to Inside Higher Ed.

"Some of them have stopped taking students this year," Van Bladel said. "We're not stopping admissions entirely, so that's good news. A cut is bad news, but the good news is that we are still moving along."

Kramnick similarly wrote that he was "not particularly surprised" by his program's new target numbers, given the impending endowment tax hike and the "overall climate in higher education." He had also been worried that the cuts might be worse, he added.

Impacts on graduate, undergraduate learning

Thornbury wrote that "smaller programs were always going to be hit harder with any cuts" since enrollment only operates in whole numbers, adding that a continued 50 percent reduction for her "tiny" program is "clearly not equitable or sustainable." She also noted that with fewer graduate students, departments may need to offer fewer and larger discussion sections for undergraduate courses.

"My hope is that we will be able to admit two students again next cycle or the one after," she wrote. "I hope they will revisit their projections this coming fall, instead of simply locking in this year's numbers for the next three years."

Kramnick wrote that while his program has had an annual target class of six or seven students in recent years, it was given a target class of four this year. This decrease will have a "compounding effect" of reducing the number of students in coursework over the next two years, he wrote.

"We are in uncharted territory here but will work hard to maintain our culture of intellectual exchange and cohort energy as we design a curriculum and events for fewer students," Kramnick wrote. "I expect us to band together and meet this challenge."

Jay Emerson, the co-director of graduate studies for statistics and data science, wrote in an email to the News that his program will likely matriculate one or two fewer doctoral students this year, and that it is "fortunate to have very healthy recent cohorts."

While Van Bladel did not specify his program's usual or new target admission numbers, he said that the reduction in graduate student enrollment may lead to fewer graduate courses being offered in his program. While this decrease could mean that more undergraduate courses are available, fewer teaching assistants would be available to support full-time faculty in those courses, he said.

Wilkinson wrote that administrators are "working closely with the graduate school and the college to understand how these changes will affect our teaching mission."

Van Bladel said he is "pleased" that the administration has prioritized support for "the people already at Yale" instead of admitting "a lot of new people" and cutting resources from the programs and people already in place.

"They have prioritized compassion for our students, so our approach is aligned. When we have a student, we do the best we can to take care of them," he said. "

It remains to be seen what the long-term ramifications will be, but I'm personally optimistic. This is not a drastic cut. Nobody wants this to happen, right?"

The GSAS offers degrees in 73 departments and programs, per Yale's website.

Contact **ISOBEL MCCLURE** *at isobel.mcclure@yale.edu and* **JAEHA JANG** *at jaeha.jang@yale.edu.*