

NEWS

"The worst was this: my love was my decay."

SONNET 80 WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Back in the classroom, Gendler calls teaching 'joyfully overwhelming'

BY JAEHA JANG
STAFF REPORTER

Tamar Gendler '87, a former dean who said she was considered for the Yale presidency in 2024, has returned to the classroom full time.

Gendler, who served as the inaugural dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences from 2014 to 2024, said in an interview that she is enjoying her return to a transformed teaching landscape.

In October 2024, Gendler told the News that she was considered for Yale president after former University President Peter Salovey announced that he would be stepping down. On Wednesday, she said that she has found her return to full-time teaching — after 13 years — “entirely fulfilling.”

“I had completely lost track of both how incredibly energizing and how incredibly exhausting it is,” she said about teaching full-time. “It is really, really joyfully overwhelming.”

This semester, Gendler is teaching a philosophy section for the first-year Directed Studies program and an upper-level cognitive science seminar. She said that it's clear that her students spent their formative years in “the 2016 to 2026 world, which was one of the weirdest worlds there was.” This distinction has “affected everything” about her classroom's understanding of learning and her students' “sense of the future,” Gendler said.

Gendler added that the international resurgence of populist frustration against elites from both the left and the right has raised new questions about the “structures the elite had brought about.”

“You guys, the guys I'm teaching right now, are incredibly nuanced and subtle in your understanding of how complex the world is,” she said.

It's also her first time having students who have been “native speakers” of smartphone technology “all their lives,” Gendler said.

The rise of artificial intelligence technology, too, has changed the relationship between the production and consumption of knowledge “in all sorts of ways,” Gendler said. According to Gendler, the AI policy in her cognitive science seminar is that while students can use AI for research, brainstorming or editing, all work they submit should reflect their own judgment and intellectual labor.

But Gendler said she already suspects some of her students are using AI, so she is asking for more subjective answers.

“I have directed exercises, which last week were so clearly everybody had just plugged my question into AI, and I thought, ‘This is ridiculous,’” she said. “I don't need to be reading what AI said back to you about this. So this week's exercise is much more personal reflection.”

Gendler's students praised her charismatic teaching style and warm personality in the classroom.

Liam Drake '29, who is in Gendler's Directed Studies section, wrote in an email to the News that one morning, she exclaimed that her students were not laughing at her jokes enough and told them to get up and switch seats. She demands the same level of commitment to the classroom from her students as she gives, Drake wrote.

Two students agreed that it is clear that Gendler's time as Faculty of Arts and Sciences dean influenced her methods of incorporating diverse teaching techniques into her seminars.

“Evidently, her time as faculty dean gave her a panoramic view of Yale's premier teaching styles, which she's synthesized into a whirlwind of pedagogical engagement,” Kyler Parker '29, another student in her Directed Studies section, wrote in an email to the News. “A dynamo in the classroom, Professor Gendler wields a repertoire of top-of-the-line instructional approaches frankensteined together into a style that's simultaneously accessible and erudite.”

Parker added that he is “extremely lucky to have been in Directed Studies the year of her return.”

Rhea McTiernan Huge '27, who is in Gendler's cognitive science seminar, said in a phone interview that classroom discussion with Gendler feels like “a conversation of equals.”

Devin Grooms-Lee '27, who is also in the upper-level seminar, said in a phone interview that Gendler's leadership experience comes off when she guides the conversation's direction while incorporating students' thoughts.

Gendler is returning from a yearlong sabbatical at Stanford, where she explored topics on behavioral science and artificial



This semester, Tamar Gendler returned to full-time teaching after serving as the dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences.

intelligence that informed her seminar on human, animal and artificial intelligence, she said.

She is also writing a book that introduces readers to philosophy “in the voice of a stand-up comic,” she said. The book is due to be published by Knopf in 2027, she added, and she hopes to do a book tour in the fall of 2027, she wrote in a Wednesday email to the News.

“I'm very much looking forward to the prospect of talking about philosophy to the wider public,” she wrote.

While Gendler said recent changes in the landscape of higher education are “so sad,” she said being a professor largely insulates her from these changes and that “the classroom experience is almost unchanged.”

“What's lovely about being a professor is, it doesn't matter what's going on in the world in terms of your day-to-day work,” she said. “Today, my DS students and I read Berkeley. And I taught it in the way I would have taught it in 1890, and I taught it in the way that I assume it will be taught in 2140.”

Gendler added that the changes in the higher education landscape did “profoundly affect” her role as an advisor to students.

In the past year, many universities across the nation, including Yale, have announced that they are reducing their graduate student enrollment due to the increase in university

endowment tax and subsequent budget pressure.

“Five years ago, they would have gotten into every graduate school in the world because there would have been every graduate school in the world,” Gendler said. “And now, they might or might not be able to pursue graduate study. That's a complete change.”

Gendler said that she is grateful for those who are serving as university presidents during this time, whether it be at an Ivy League school, small private colleges or big public institutions.

It's an “unbelievably challenging job” to be a university president amid such an unpredictable landscape, she said — “even in circumstances where the world is on your side.”

In October 2024, Gendler told the News she was interested in leading Cornell, Harvard, Columbia and the University of Pennsylvania, the four Ivy League universities that did not have a permanent president at the time. When asked whether she would be interested in returning to an administrative role, Gendler said, “I love doing whatever comes my way.”

While Gendler has previously said she was “sad” and “felt disappointment” about not being Yale's president — though noting that “I will have a fantastic time not being president” — she struck a more affirmative note this time.

“I love the job that I have right now. I love what I am doing,”

Gendler said. “I feel no sadness or deprivation in doing what I'm doing because it's entirely fulfilling.”

Grooms-Lee said that, having taken Gendler's class, he thinks she would have been a successful University president. She takes time to learn about her students' backgrounds, he said, and she would have been “excellent” at representing the opinions of Yale's student body. He also said that as a “talent” in philosophical thought, she would have been a “powerhouse” leader in reflecting the University's needs and the “American ethos.”

McTiernan Huge said that while she thinks Gendler would do “super well, really, in any role,” including University president, she is grateful to have Gendler in the classroom.

“It feels so natural for her to be a teacher,” McTiernan Huge said, adding that Gendler is always excited about class material and speaking with students. “I think in a selfish way, I'm grateful that she has the opportunity to be my professor because I think she's a really wonderful professor.”

Gendler graduated from Yale College summa cum laude in 1987, earning distinctions in the humanities and the mathematics and philosophy majors.

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New antisemitism scholar wants to move past definition debate

BY ARIA LYNN-SKOV AND LEO NYBERG
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The Yale Program for the Study of Antisemitism kicked off its new scholar-in-residence program with a lecture by Fordham Professor Magda Teter on Wednesday.

Teter's lecture, the first of five events with the scholar slated for this semester, was an hour-and-a-half discussion of the global history and contemporary politicization of antisemitism. The program plans to host a new scholar every year, program director Linda Maizels wrote to the News.

“We live in troubled times, in the times where hateful rhetoric and even violence are normalized,” Teter said in her lecture. “Times when it is difficult to have conversations about difficult topics, to face the past and the present. Times when it is really

increasingly difficult to disagree with one another.”

Teter argued that it is necessary to move away from focusing on debates over definitions of what antisemitism is. Instead, she said people must “think more deeply” and focus on how “what people call antisemitism” impacts lives.

Since Hamas' Oct. 7, 2023, attack on Israel, which set off the war in Gaza, national conversations about antisemitism have often focused on its definition. Last April, Yale added a contested International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition of antisemitism to a webpage that explains its discrimination policies.

At the time, Linda Maizels, the program director for the Study of Antisemitism at Yale, told the News that she had mixed feelings about the University's decision

to add the definition to the webpage, saying that while it could be a “useful guide,” it was not meant to be applied to a University setting.

Wednesday's lecture, titled “On Jewish Suffering, Empathy, and the Need to Rethink Antisemitism,” drew a crowd of around 25 in-person attendees, with over a hundred more joining on Zoom. In-person attendees included Yale students, faculty and staff.

Teter is the author of five books, including the award-winning “Blood Libel,” which details the history of the antisemitic trope and how it continues today. She is the co-director of the Judaic Studies department at Fordham.

She spoke about the complexity of studying and discussing the history of antisemitism, particularly what she described as the question of how to handle “both the longevity of anti-Jewish hostility, but also not to resort to what Hannah Arendt called ‘eternal antisemitism,’” referring to the German-American political theorist.

Teter said that she thinks Arendt “correctly cautioned against” the concept of eternal antisemitism “because it naturalizes anti-Jewish hostility.”

According to Teter, the problem with this “longest” or “eternal” hatred framework is that it provides an “alibi for the perpetrators” and “tends to blame Jews for what happens to them.”

“I think we have to think more carefully about these power dynamics that develop over centuries, conceptions of social hierarchies, modes of exclusion,” Teter said.

She also highlighted the differing approaches of the Biden and Trump administrations in their political responses to a rise in antisemitism in recent years. Teter talked about the Biden adminis-

tration's May 2023 report “The U.S. National Strategy to Counter Antisemitism,” which focused on a collaborative, cross-community approach to counter hate.

In comparison, when Teter described the Trump administration's approach to fighting antisemitism, she gave the example of a January 2025 fact sheet, where Trump stated his commitment to defending the civil rights of Jewish citizens by saying, “With your vote, I will be your defender, your protector.”

Teter described Trump's approach to antisemitism as “conditional,” pointing to the use of “with your vote.”

She added that Trump, in his defense of American Jews, focuses overwhelmingly on antisemitism from “the left,” and ignores what she described as the far-right's “white supremacist propaganda” that is also often “anti-Israel.”

Teter said antisemitism research tends to focus on the oppressor, while research on other forms of racism focuses on the impacted group. Teter said this should change.

“We talk about Jews and Jewish experience in Jewish history, but we don't talk about Jews in antisemitism studies,” Teter said “That's entirely missing.”

She later added, “When you think about the study of racism, this is entirely different. And in the study of racism, we never lose focus and never lose sight of those affected by racism, victims of racism.”

“The scale of thinking about antisemitism is much, much more narrow,” Teter said.

Teter believes “we need to reintegrate Jewish experiences” into studies of antisemitism to have “a reflection of Jewish lived experiences.” She said this will “give us a broader spectrum of language and

of experiences,” instead of only focusing on murder, violence or the Holocaust.

The program for the Study of Antisemitism at Yale supports research, two post-doctoral fellows and partnerships with student organizations like the Slifka Center and the Chaplain's Office, according to its website. The program's mission is to support research on antisemitism and provide opportunities to learn about antisemitism at Yale, Maizels wrote to the News.

“Antisemitism is often a hard topic to talk about, and nowadays, all the more so, an extremely volatile topic,” Sarit Kattan Gribetz, the acting director of the program and a Yale professor, said in an interview at the event. “What we hope to do is to historicize the questions, to think about them in nuanced and complicated ways.”

Gribetz said the program wants to “make it okay for people to ask questions, out of curiosity, without judgment, and to really think together.”

Claire Aubin, a postdoctoral fellow at the Program for the Study of Antisemitism, said she hopes Teter's lecture will encourage people to look at antisemitism as “a topic of real scholarly study, rather than a sort of emotional or cultural experience.”

Tracy MacMath, who works at Beinecke library and attended the lecture, said “the depth of the talk” stood out to her.

Teter's next lecture, set for Feb. 16, will be on researching and writing about antisemitism.

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Magda Teter, the Yale Program for the Study of Antisemitism's inaugural scholar-in-residence, called for more nuanced discussions about antisemitism.