NEWS

*"In basketball—as in life—true joy comes from being fully present in each and every moment, not just when things are going your way."*
**PHIL JACKSON** FORMER BASKETBALL PLAYER AND COACH

# David Vasseur, another ecology chair, named next Saybrook head

BY OLIVIA WOO
STAFF REPORTER

Many Saybrugians already have one thing in common with their incoming head of college, David Vasseur: years of looking up to the outgoing Saybrook College head, Thomas Near.

After Vasseur was named the college's next head in the Saybrook dining hall on Thursday evening, he spoke to dozens of students and fellows about how his time at Yale has mirrored, in large part, the path of his soon-to-be predecessor. Near will conclude his time as head at the end of this semester.

"In my career, I've had the good fortune to follow in the footsteps of many great role models. But none have been more influential than professor Near," Vasseur said. "From teaching in the intro bio sequence, I followed professor Near. As the chair of the Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, I've had the opportunity to follow professor Near."

Now, Vasseur and incoming Associate Head of Saybrook College Chaundra Vasseur will follow Near's 11-year tenure as Saybrook head alongside his wife, Allison Near. The Near and Vasseur families share a chance connection outside of Yale: Chaundra Vasseur, who is a fifth-grade teacher, taught the Nears' two daughters during their elementary school years, Thomas Near said.

After Yale College Dean Pericles Lewis presented a certificate to Thomas Near on behalf of himself and University President Maurie McInnis, Near urged Saybrook students to support Vasseur, whom he called "an outstanding scholar," and his family in their transition into their new roles.

"I think how we succeeded in this role," Near said of himself and his wife, "came from students in the class of 2016, 2017 and 2018, in that those students engaged with us."

"Those students helped us understand the parameters of our community and what was expected of us in our role," Near continued. "So much of what we did was shaped by our interactions with the students in those early days."

Vasseur came to Yale from Canada in 2008, and he and his wife are currently Saybrook fellows. Saybrugian Maria Arozamena '26, a former editor for the News, said that she has interacted with the soon-to-be head at fellows' meetings and characterized him as "wonderfully kind." She said that she appreciated how Vasseur concluded his speech on Thursday with the college's oft-repeated slogan: "Say-what?"

That remark was met with a raucous "Saybrook!" from the crowd, which moments before had erupted in laughter when Vasseur brought up a question he said he answers "20 to 30 times a day:" that of his own height.

"I am 6'7, and I am more tired of that meme than probably anybody else," Vasseur quipped. "So we got that out of the way."

"To me, one of the greatest values that Yale's residential college system provides is a sense of place," he continued. "And I think sometimes we imagine a community as something that just happens, something atmospheric that we just find ourselves with or without. But the truth is that community is a practice. It's dealing with sometimes the inconvenient decision to be present, to notice, to stay a little longer than we have to."

Vasseur pledged to be active and present in his new role as head, noting that he was the first in his family to attend college. He expressed excitement about Saybrook's traditions and the prospect of getting to know every student alongside his wife and three children — one of whom will be living in the head of college house.

Chaundra Vasseur said that she was looking forward to advising Saybrook students at "such an exciting stage of life," especially after witnessing her two eldest children enter college. The two attend McGill University and Queen's University in Canada, Lewis said during the ceremony.

"Looking at all the excitement and the enthusiasm they have as they start to launch into this next stage of their life — I think as a parent, you sort of feel for these kids who are far away from home," Vasseur said in an interview after the ceremony. She said she hopes to offer Saybrook students "another person in their corner."

Saybrugian Jordan Epping '28 told the News he thinks the soon-to-be head and associate head "are going to make a great team" and expressed "a lot of confidence that we'll be under great leadership."

Noah Torrance '28 said he was "optimistic about what is coming for Saybrook in the future," but expressed sadness about Near's departure.

"Professor Near has been definitively the greatest part of my Saybrook experience. Just the amount of effort that he puts into our community, the cheer that he brings, the character that he brings, the support and love for IMs that he brings, has just improved everything about this place by leaps and bounds," Torrance said. "I honestly wish that I was here a couple years earlier."

As a professor, Near has garnered popularity for his course on ichthyology, which is the study of fishes. Vasseur said in his speech that he has yet to develop a passion for the subject but joked that he still has time to do so.

Vasseur is an expert in his own right in the study of community ecology, and he has been interviewed by the News on his work on the effects of climate change on endangered species.



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Vasseur will be the second ecology and evolutionary biology chair in a row to hold the role.

When introducing Vasseur at the beginning of the ceremony, Lewis noted that the incoming head of college was "a fellow Canadian."

"He has a strong interest in athletics and community engagement. Many of you will have seen him at Yale's hockey games," Lewis said. "I have a seat right behind him, which, admittedly, can be challenging."

Near is one of three heads of college who will be stepping down at the end of this term. Of those three, he is the second whose replacement has been announced.

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# First year makes experimental film with 3,000 printed images

BY TAJRIAN KHAN
STAFF REPORTER

The film "Fireflies," made by Noah Shin '29, was showing in a Branford College student gallery last week.

The film runs 4 minutes and 15 seconds, each second created with twelve printed images, and has a score created by Grace Halak '26. At a reception for the film on Thursday, Shin told guests that he had rendered over 3,000 digital frames, printed them on letter-sized paper and photographed them one by one while his iPad screen provided backlight for each sheet of paper. Shin used a Creative and Performing Arts award to fund the project.

Shin started learning animation during the pandemic when his sister asked him to make a film from a cartoon for her 18th birthday. Since then he has made one film each year and "experimented with a different media with each one," he said.

"I think physical film is interesting. This is paper, not even film, but just a different way of looking at film is interesting, because you have to be a lot more deliberate," Shin said. "People always focus on the final product, but a lot of it really is more centered in the way you get there."

The experimental process resulted in a distinct look that could not be achieved digitally.

"This is my first time seeing something like this," Nevin Dabrah '29 said at the Thursday reception. "I think the textures and the physicality make it really unique."

Shin said he became interested in making a film in this form after taking "Introduction to Film Studies." The grainy look from photographing sheets of paper lit up by an iPad screen is his way of telling a story about how we remember the past: Some memories are clearer whereas others feature obscured details.

The film is called "Fireflies" because Shin wanted the film to be about "something that's haunting, something that's transient and only here for a short time," he said.

"If you showed me this at a film festival, I would think this was made by an experienced, 30-year-old filmmaker," said Jake Boston '27, who met Shin in their "Introduction to Film Studies" discussion section and came to the reception. "Even though the process seems amateur, the finished product looks like an actual experimental film."

Halak said she met Shin last fall while working on a student film together. She is working on a senior thesis about sonic degradation for the Computing and the Arts major, for which she has spent the last two semesters putting music onto blank cassette tapes and degrading them — crinkling them, rewinding them, exposing them to heat with a flat iron and brushing magnets on the outside of the tape. Then she built a program that can emulate those degraded states for new audio files.

"There's just something automatic when you hear something that is degraded and imperfect," Halak said. "The way analog media preserves sound, it just immediately connects to memory and nostalgia."

For "Fireflies," she recorded digital music with synthesized violin and used sounds from her father's home videos and manipulated the tracks with the program she built for her thesis — a process of engaging with analog and digital media that complemented Shin's film.

"Bringing something that is entirely digitally grown into the real world and altering it in a very organic way and putting it back into the screen," Halak said, "is almost like how we remember the past."

"The film was a beautiful collaboration between visuals and music," Branford Head of College Enrique De La Cruz said.

Both he and Leslie Carmin, De La Cruz's wife and the associate head of college, were excited about the film's showing.

"This is what student galleries are for," Carmin said.

Branford College is located at 74 High St.

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