REPORT ON TRUST

McInnis shares report a year after forming committee

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intellectual diversity, restrict technological devices in classrooms and address grade inflation, floating that Yale College should have around a 3.0 mean grade-point-average.

"In its report, the committee calls on Yale to reflect on and take responsibility for our role in the erosion of public trust. I accept this judgment fully," McInnis wrote in a University-wide email Wednesday afternoon. "This decline did not come out of nowhere, nor did it happen overnight. And we were certainly more than mere bystanders. We must acknowledge how we have fallen short."

In a brief Zoom interview with the News on Wednesday afternoon, McInnis said that she "can't say that I have any disagreements" with the committee's report.

The Trump administration has wielded its power to pressure universities into complying with its education agenda, slashing funding for universities it says have refused to cut diversity programs or address alleged campus antisemitism and lacking ideological diversity. While Yale has avoided targeted funding cuts, it has felt the wide-reaching effects of the administration's policies, including its endowment tax hike that has set off cutbacks across the University budget.

"We undertook this task at a difficult moment for higher education in the United States," the report's introduction, addressed to McInnis, reads. "You encouraged us to take the long view. As you noted, the problem of declining trust did not emerge out of nowhere over the past few months or years."

The committee, co-chaired by sociology professor Julia Adams and history professor Beverly Gage '94, gathered research over the summer before kicking off a series of listening sessions open to Yale community members. The committee also hosted a speaker series focused on the future of higher education.

The committee's report recommends that Yale change its mission statement to say, in line with the current Faculty Handbook, that the University's "mission is to create, disseminate, and preserve knowledge through research and teaching." That would remove the current mission statement's commitment to "improving the world today," its call to educate "aspiring leaders" and its mention of "an ethical, interdependent, and diverse community."

"These are all worthy goals. But they are not what makes a university a university," the report reads.

The report asks the University to bolster academic life by adopting a "device-free policy—no phones, laptops, or tablets—as the default in classroom settings" and by changing its approach to grading.

The committee wrote that "decades of inflation and compression have rendered the college grading system almost meaningless." In addition to suggesting a "college-wide standard," such as the 3.0 mean grade-point-average, the report suggests that the registrar's office "compute course percentiles" — which would show "where a student stands relative" to classmates — to include on transcripts.

McInnis wrote in her email that "grade inflation is another area which requires our focus" and that "raising the bar for ourselves will also raise trust in our university." She has directed the Committee on Teaching, Learning and Advising to "confront grade inflation" in Yale College, an effort that the College's dean, Pericles Lewis, has already discussed.

The committee also wants Yale to shake up its undergraduate admissions processes, which has long been the subject of intense intrigue and debate. In the recently completed admissions cycle, the regular decision acceptance rate calculated by the News sat below 3 percent.

The report lauds Yale's current undergraduate admissions system for "yielding a class of talented students" but refers to the system as "subjective and hard to explain."

The committee recommended that the University be more transparent about "how undergraduate admissions actually works," reducing "preferences for special classes of applicants" — listing varsity athletes and the children of alumni, donors, faculty and staff — and creating "a minimum standard of academic achievement necessary for consideration."

To establish that "minimum standard," the committee advised that Yale College require an "a minimum SAT score or a Yale-specific entrance exam," which it suggests would "spare a meaningful number of applicants time and emotional investment in an application that will not succeed."

In her email to the Yale community, McInnis did not specifically indicate whether she would accept the committee's recommendations on reforming the admissions process, but added that she referred the committee's recommendations on admissions to the Presidential Council on Yale College Admissions, which she wrote "will consider them as it prepares to finalize its recommendations."

The report also looks at concerns related to the cost of a Yale education. The total sticker price of undergraduate tuition and fees next year will be $94,100 per student, a 3.92 percent increase from this year's term bill.

"On this issue, there is little divide between Republicans and Democrats, conservatives and liberals, those attending public and private universities," the report reads. "Nearly everyone agrees that the cost of higher education is too high. Rising tuition rates bear out this complaint."

The committee recommended that the University "substantially raise the income limit on the 'no tuition' guarantee for undergraduate students" and "do everything possible to make the financial aid system more comprehensible, predictable, and fair."

Yale College recently announced that it will cover the cost of tuition for families earning under $200,000 and all costs for families earning below $100,000.

The committee's report finds, however, that the process of applying for Yale's financial aid is "laborious, frustrating, and unpredictable." The report suggests that "many families do not believe such aid exists," and cites a study that finds many believe "colleges and universities, like other businesses, are primarily out to make a profit," despite being non-profit organizations.

The report says that a "high tuition-high aid model" has "had a disastrous impact on public trust. By its nature, the system is complicated, unpredictable, secretive, and highly variable. These factors tend to reduce trust rather than increase it."

The committee wrote that it stands with the view of the influential 1974 Woodward Report which recommended that the University "treat free speech as a first principle."

"We share that view," the report reads, recommending the University work to expand campus ideological diversity and encourage faculty and students to "resist self-censorship."



William Qian / Staff Photographer

The Committee on Trust in Higher Education released a report proposing that Yale change its mission statement and its approaches to grading, admissions and more. President Maurie McInnis said Yale deserves some blame for public skepticism.

"The campus has not been immune from pressures toward conformity, intimidation, and social shaming that have affected the rest of higher education and, indeed, the rest of American society," the report reads.

The report describes some students as feeling uncomfortable sharing their political views in the classroom or in research. It cites a survey from the Buckley Institute — a Yale-adjacent organization that describes itself as "a home for enlightened conservative thought" — that found that a majority of students across the country feel intimidated in expressing their opinions or beliefs in class.

Departments and schools should "self-study" the breadth of their "intellectual and methodological commitments" and identify the "diversity of perspectives" among curricula, according to the report.

In the Wednesday afternoon interview, Gage said that "lots of people have made the case" that conservative voices are "underrepresented" at Yale.

In addition to co-chairs Adams and Gage, the committee's members were School of Medicine professor Anton Bennett, Slavic languages and women's, gender and sexuality studies professor Marijeta Bozovic, Sterling professor of English David Bromwich '73 GRD '77, finance and economics professor Judith Chevalier '89, public health professor Jason Hockenberry, environment professor Anthony Leiserowitz, astronomy and physics professor Priyamvada Natarajan and law professor Sarath Sanga LAW '14.

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Proposals span from mission statement to classroom

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refocus Yale's mission statement on creation and spread of knowledge.

The committee pitched a more focused mission statement, drawn directly from Yale's Faculty Handbook: "Yale University's mission is to create, disseminate, and preserve knowledge through research and teaching."

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>
> THE REPORT BY THE COMMITTEE ON TRUST IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Yale's current mission statement, adopted in 2016, includes language about "improving the world today and for future generations," educating "aspiring leaders worldwide" and a "diverse community of faculty, staff, students, and alumni." With the adoption of the committee's recommended mission statement, that language would be gone.

"At a moment when higher education is being buffeted from all sides, it is imperative to understand what we are here for and what universities do best," the report explains. "That requires clarity, not diffusion, of purpose."

Taking responsibility for declining trust in universities and focusing on the committee's proposed mission — which were the first two recommendations of the report — are the "direction we should be going," Sanga said, adding that the rest of the report "in some ways follows from that commitment."

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In the classroom: lower grades and laptops down

Grade inflation is one problem the University could tackle immediately, the committee's report suggested.

"Decades of inflation and compression have rendered the college grading system almost meaningless as an academic measure," the report says. "Previous efforts to reverse that trend have failed, in part because individual faculty, who rightly control grading in their own courses, have had no institutional framework for acting collectively."

One of the solutions the committee floated was establishing a mean grade-point average of 3.0, which equates to a B average at Yale College.

Professors have wrestled with the difficulty of deviating individually from the trend of high grades, and some have suggested that intervention by administrators is needed.

Sanga recognized that the report's discussions of grading and technological devices in the classroom were two "big things" likely to catch students' attention.

The report recommended establishing "a device-free policy—no phones, laptops, or tablets—as the default in classroom settings," though it said faculty may depart from such a policy for "compelling pedagogical, research, or practical reasons," and "students with documented needs must be accommodated."

"The technologies of the 21st century have transformed teaching, research, and learning in many positive ways," the report says. "Constant distraction, especially in the classroom, is not one of them."

The report also recommended that the University Registrar calculate "course percentiles" — a mechanism to show how a student placed relative to their peers in a course — and place the percentiles on transcripts. The committee wrote that this change could be implemented immediately.

In her email, McInnis did not say whether the course percentiles or 3.0 mean GPA will be implemented, but wrote that grade inflation is an "area which requires our focus." She urged the Committee on Teaching, Learning and Advising to "confront grade inflation directly within Yale College."

In February, a faculty committee at Harvard recommended a cap on A grades at 20 percent, allowing up to four additional A's per class.

In a February interview with the News, Yale College Dean Pericles Lewis said that the Committee on Teaching, Learning and Advising is "aware of what's going on at Harvard and will be looking closely at it."

Free speech and academic freedom

The report calls on Yale to protect free speech and support academic freedom, which McInnis called "foundational principles" in her email announcing the report.

"Yale's administrators have repeatedly affirmed the Woodward Report as the basis for university policies on free speech and campus protest," the report says, referring to the influential 1975 report that outlined guidance for having "a free interchange of ideas" on Yale's campus.

"Even so, the campus has not been immune from pressures toward conformity, intimidation, and social shaming that have affected the rest of higher education and, indeed, the rest of American society," the report adds.

McInnis wrote that she accepts "without reservation the committee's recommendations to protect free speech and support academic freedom."

Last month, Provost Scott Strobel announced the formation of a new committee focused on academic freedom. The Committee on the Principles of Academic Freedom will examine the "historical, legal, and ethical foundations of academic freedom" and release a statement on "the principles that guide the academic freedom of Yale faculty" by the end of 2026, according to Strobel's announcement.

The report lists "support academic freedom" as an individual recommendation, specifying that it "differs in meaning from free speech."

McInnis first announced the creation of the Committee on Trust in Higher Education in a message to the Yale community on April 11, 2025.

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