FROM THE FRONT

"There are as many worlds as there are kinds of days, and as an opal changes its colors and its fire to match the nature of a day, so do I."
JOHN STEINBECK

McInnis wants 'efficiency.' Will budget cuts force it?

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highest in the nation among four-year private colleges.

Faculty members have spent years pressing the University to explain and examine that growth. But the budget pressure Yale now confronts has renewed questions among some faculty members about whether the administrative workforce's growth over the past two decades was ever justified.

"The positive part of all of this mayhem that is occurring is that it will force a rearrangement," Ronald Coifman, a Sterling professor of mathematics, said in an interview, referring to the scheduled endowment tax hike that President Donald Trump signed into law last summer. "And let's hope it is a positive rearrangement."

On Wednesday, the Committee on Trust in Higher Education — a group of 10 professors convened last year by University President Maurie McInnis — released a report with sweeping recommendations for reforms to address the causes of public skepticism of universities. Among the report's 20 recommendations: "Streamline bureaucracy."

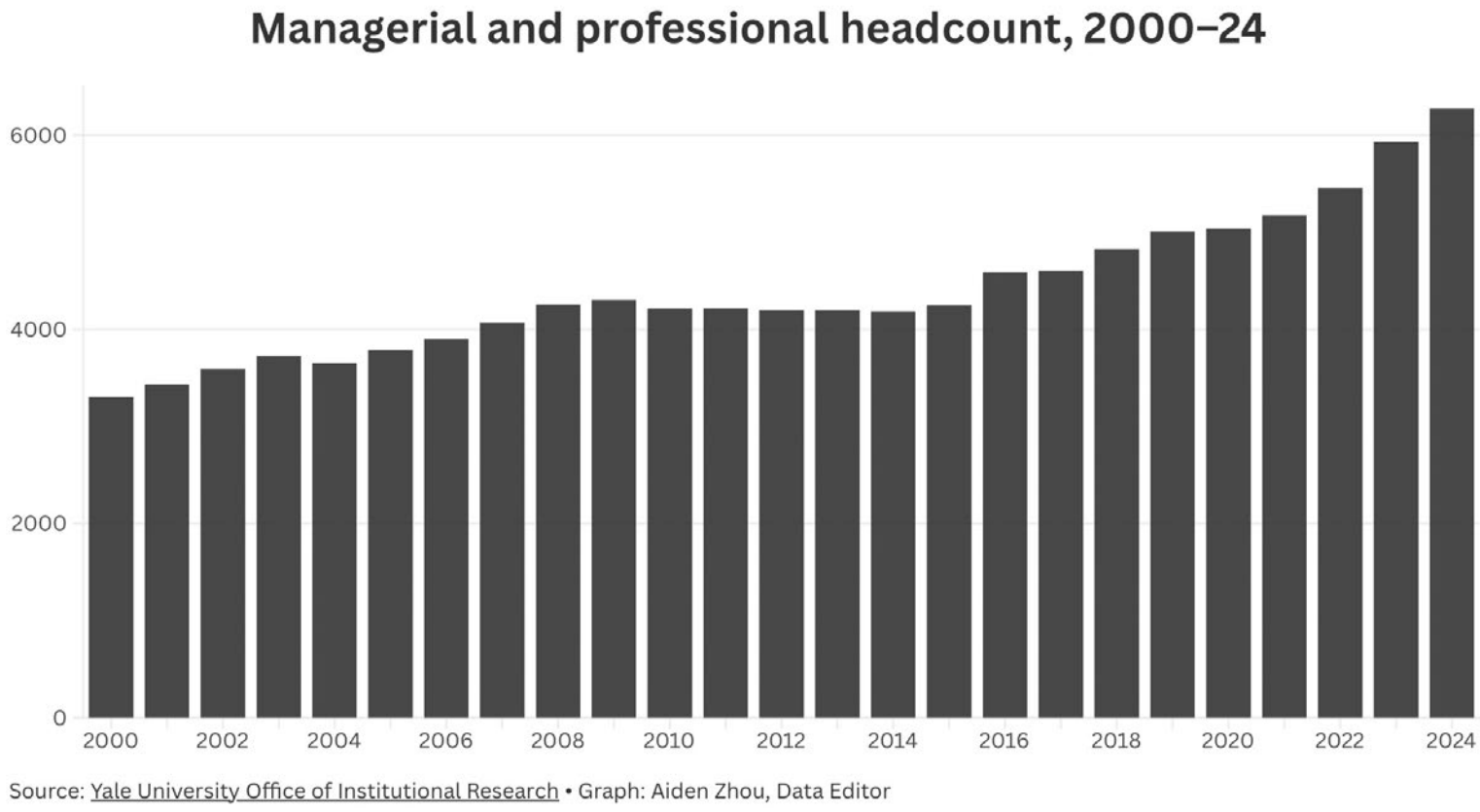
"The oft-heard criticism of disproportionate bureaucratic growth or so-called administrative bloat in U.S. higher education matters for both external and internal trust," the report says. "Yale has its own internal responsibility to streamline bureaucracy."

McInnis has set "efficiency" as a goal since the first semester of her presidency. She told the News in a late March interview that she had asked Geoffrey Chatas, who in the fall became Yale's senior vice president for operations, "to focus on operational efficiency" and "try to find the places within our operations that hopefully we can operate more efficiently." She said she wants to "be able to drive more dollars towards our academic priorities," but acknowledged that the University is a "complicated machine."

Managerial and professional staff make up Yale's administration. They are residential college deans and dining hall managers. They deal with human resources, career development, financial aid, fundraising and more across the sprawling university. Unlike Yale's clerical, technical, service or maintenance staff, they are not unionized.

In a February interview, McInnis said that the University "can save money in some of those administrative units," as well as in procurement and construction. Asked whether she felt regret about layoffs resulting from the current budget tightening, McInnis said: "Obviously, but the financial reality of any university is we can only spend the money that is available to us."

Referring to the way different parts of Yale would meet constrained budget targets, McInnis added: "Universities are mostly people."



Source: Yale University Office of Institutional Research • Graph: Aiden Zhou, Data Editor

An on-and-off discussion

When faculty raised concerns to the News about administrative growth in 2021, Provost Scott Strobel pushed back.

In a letter to the News that November, Strobel wrote that he took "strong exception to any view of Yale that privileges the needs of our students and faculty while dismissing the invaluable contributions of any of our staff." He pointed to the COVID-19 pandemic as evidence of what the administrative workforce makes possible, praising administrators who had kept the University running under emergency conditions.

Nonetheless, professors continued to call attention to administrative growth.

In January 2022, the seven-member Governance Committee of what was then called the Faculty of Arts and Sciences Senate produced a draft report titled "Size and Growth of Administration and Bureaucracy at Yale."

The report tracked the rising number of Yale administrators and how their salaries had grown, even as faculty pay remained comparatively stagnant. It noted that academic department chairs, in a FAS Senate meeting in 2020, had described an "onerous bureaucracy" that was slowing down decision-making and reducing funds available for academic purposes.

The report also made clear that its focus was not "concerned with the many members of the Yale community who fill staff and support positions" but rather "the general administrative structure of the University, and on its overall size and functioning."

"Yale's fundamental mission is research and teaching," the report read. "The apparent disproportionate rise in administrative positions and costs relative to faculty positions and costs may well be to some degree in the service of that mission, but it requires explanation."

"You've got to go in and carefully look at where you're spending resources and really ask yourself, 'Is this a priority?'"

That same month, the FAS Senate decided to table discussion of the draft until a later date, after some faculty questioned its calculations, according to the group Faculty for Yale. The FAS Senate later rejected a revised version of the report, the group's website says.

None of the Governance Committee's seven members from that period accepted the News' request for an interview. One member cited her fatigue with the issue.

"I gave enough of my time to this important question when I was on the Senate a few years ago," Hélène Landemore, a professor of political science, wrote in an email to the News. "It made no difference whatsoever so now I'm focusing on problems I think I can actually meaningfully contribute to solving."

When Faculty for Yale formed in December 2023, the group described itself as "a spontaneously coalescing group of faculty drawn from across the university." Among the measures it endorsed was a "thorough reassessment of administrative encroachment" on faculty searches, classroom requirements and student orientation programming.

When McInnis became Yale's president in July 2024 — two years after the draft FAS Senate report was released — operational efficiency was one of the first subjects she heard about repeatedly in meetings with Yale affiliates, she told the News in November of that year.

McInnis said she had heard about university processes "that may require more steps than seem necessary or take longer to enact than seem necessary."

Trump intervenes

In January 2025 — during the seventh month of McInnis' presidency — Trump returned to the Oval Office, bringing with him a promise to shake up higher education. He soon began to pitch the "One Big Beautiful Bill," a massive legislative effort that, among other things, initially proposed increasing the tax on wealthy university endowments like Yale's from 1.4 to 21 percent.

In a budget update addressed to Yale faculty and staff in early March 2025, Strobel, Chief Financial Officer Stephen Murphy '87 and Jack Callahan '80, Chatas' predecessor as the senior vice president for operations, warned that the University might "face serious financial challenges in the coming months," particularly in light of "recent actions taken by the federal government."

Later that month, more than 100 Yale faculty members signed a letter addressed directly to McInnis and Strobel, calling for a freeze on new administrative hires and a faculty-led audit of administrative positions.

The letter described Yale as sitting at the "collision of two opposing forces: extraordinary financial strength and runaway bureaucratic expansion." The letter called for a "top-to-bottom audit of non-academic positions," which, it argued, "would not only generate immediate savings—potentially in the hundreds of millions—but would send a resounding message: Yale prioritizes intellectual vitality over bureaucratic inertia."

Philosophy professor Daniel Greco, who signed the letter, wrote to the News that part of his motivation was "frustration" that the 2022 FAS Senate report had stalled without a clear explanation.

In May, after Trump's One Big Beautiful Bill passed the House of Representatives, McInnis asked members of the Yale community to urge their senators to challenge the bill. In McInnis' estimation, the bill posed "a greater threat to Yale than any other bill in memory."

In mid-June, Republican senators lowered the proposed tax on the wealthiest universities' endowment returns from 21 to 8 percent — the rate that Trump signed into law the following month. Yale responded by enacting a 90-day hiring pause in June 2025, reducing non-salary expenses by five percent and delaying construction projects.

Beginning in July 2026, Yale will owe the federal government an estimated $300 million a year. Tightening Yale's budget to address the impending tax increase has become a primary concern across campus.

In October, the University announced a "one-time" retirement incentive program for managerial and professional staff. And in December, Strobel, Murphy and Chatas warned of layoffs in a letter to faculty and staff. Some layoffs have already arrived, although their extent remains unclear. Yale College Dean Pericles Lewis told the News in February that "a very small handful of layoffs" has contributed to his office's 7.5 percent staff reduction.

'Compliance, expectations, federal regulations'

Todd Constable — a professor of radiology, biomedical imaging and neurosurgery at the Yale School of Medicine — feels that administrative expansion at the University has become "totally out of control" and made it more difficult for him to apply for academic grants.

"It used to be the case that one admin in our department and one in grants and contracts needed to sign off on such grant submissions," Constable wrote in an email to the News. "My latest submission required signatures from nine admins."

For a recent grant proposal to the National Institutes of Health, Constable explained that nine administrators needed to "be in the loop," including two required to approve the submission.

The nine administrators, according to a screenshot Constable provided to the News showing a grant application portal, were a proposal manager, a finance manager, an associate director of finance, a research affairs director, a senior finance manager, a senior financial analyst, a senior manager for research administration, a sponsored projects coordinator and a pre-award manager.

"This was for a straight forward grant involving only my home department," Constable wrote.

Coifman, who has taught at Yale for more than 40 years, said that "sort of a level of incompetence" has spread across the University because of administrative growth. He attributed the change to a proliferation of legal and regulatory requirements that universities increasingly needed staff to manage.

"The regulatory level has increased substantially," Coifman said. "So they need more people to fill up papers. And people need to fill up more required forms all the time. So the bureaucracy has increased."

McInnis, for her part, agrees with Coifman's argument about regulatory explanation, and pointed in the March interview to "a variety of compliance, expectations, federal regulations" that have emerged over the past two decades. The report by the Committee on Trust in Higher Education suggests that "these requirements have become unstable and unpredictable, whiplashing colleges and universities from year to year."

But McInnis also thinks that critics who focus on aggregate head count are not accounting for how much the University has changed. McInnis pointed out that, over the past two decades, Yale has added two new residential colleges, a stand-alone Faculty of Arts and Sciences administration, the School of Engineering and Applied Science, the Jackson School of Global Affairs, a School of Public Health and a significantly expanded medical enterprise.

"So the institution is wildly different, more complex, serves more people, has more faculty, has more students," McInnis said. "If you look at the staff-to-faculty ratio, it is slightly lower than it was 20 years ago. That's the context."

Chad Loose, Yale's senior associate provost for strategy and data analysis, noted in an email to the News that approximately 4,500 of Yale's roughly 12,000 staff are in the medical school alone.

Howard Forman, a professor of radiology, biomedical imaging and public health policy, said the medical school's growth reflects an expansion of clinical research and patient care, not waste.

"If you're running five times as many clinical trials as you did 20 years ago, it should not surprise you that you have five times as many program coordinators and project directors as you had before," Forman said in a phone interview.

'Is this a priority?'

On the question of curbing administrative growth, there was little consensus among those interviewed by the News beyond the view that blanket cuts are the wrong approach.

"You've got to go in and carefully look at where you're spending resources and really ask yourself, 'Is this a priority?'" Paul Weinstein Jr., who teaches at Johns Hopkins University and worked on higher education policy in the Clinton administration, said in a phone interview.

The growth at Yale mirrors a national pattern. Between 1975 and 2005, the faculty head count at universities nationwide grew by slightly more than 50 percent, while the number of administrators increased by approximately 85 percent, according to Benjamin Ginsberg, a professor of political science at Johns Hopkins University and the author of "The Fall of Faculty."

Ginsberg said reversing the trend would require outside pressure. He suggested that universities "spending more money on administration than on teaching" should lose their nonprofit status, which provides them with tax benefits.

The Committee on Trust in Higher Education recommended in its report that the University "undertake a transparent review of its administrative structure, conducted jointly with faculty and measured against the academic mission."

"The governing principle should be clear," the report reads. "It should be hard to administratively expand, and easy to contract."

John Whelan, Yale's vice president for human resources, wrote in a statement provided to the News before the report's release that the "university continues to monitor its growth and resource allocation, including leadership positions, to ensure alignment with Yale's academic mission."

Todd Zywicki, a law professor at George Mason University and former Dartmouth College trustee who has written about administrative growth in higher education, said in a phone interview that "the only way that this is going to get under control is to starve the beast," and that pressure from the federal government is needed.

Leslie Brisman, an English professor, said change can come from within.

Brisman, who wrote that other professors are "more alert to the interferences and waste associated with administrative bloat" than he is, raised concern about the issue with McInnis' predecessor, Peter Salovey GRD '83 '84 '86.

"There are deans galore and supervisors everywhere," Brisman wrote to the News. "I can summarize this opinion briefly by pointing to my unsolicited advice to President Salovey when he first took office: Every time you are tempted to establish a new deanship, consider eliminating one instead."

The One Big Beautiful Bill passed the Senate last year after Vice President JD Vance LAW '13 cast the tiebreaking vote.

Contact
ASHER BOISKIN
at asher.boiskin@yale.edu.