NEWS

"There are far, far better things ahead than any we leave behind."
C.S. LEWIS BRITISH AUTHOR

Silicon Valley trip left McInnis bullish on Yale's value in AI future

BY ASHER BOISKIN, ARIA LYNN-SKOV AND LEO NYBERG
STAFF REPORTERS

Tech leaders recently told University President Maurie McInnis that the proliferation of artificial intelligence will increase the value of a Yale education, she said in an interview last month.

McInnis said she spent a week of spring break in Silicon Valley meeting with tech executives, who she said told her that a liberal arts education that promotes critical thinking will be increasingly valuable in a world that is becoming dominated by AI.

"The kind of education provided at Yale is going to become more valuable," McInnis said those leaders told her.

McInnis declined to share the names of the leaders she met with, writing to the News that she usually does "not share specific details about my private meetings."

The executives she met with stressed that "we need more than ever" students who have received liberal arts educations and "can think and make connections across disciplines, who know how to ask hard questions, see unexpected connections," McInnis added.

"We need more, and this was kind of a joke that somebody was saying, but it kind of sums it up. It was, you know, 'what we really need are more philosophy majors,'" McInnis said in the interview.

Referring to students, she added that it will also be important for Yale to "construct educational experiences where they both become really expert users of the tools that are available to them, but that they not cognitively offload the hard work."

At Yale, new AI-focused student groups have emerged in the past two years, and professors have taken various approaches to implementing the technology and regulating its use in their classrooms. Last semester, professors teaching Yale's introductory economics lectures embraced AI, allowing students to use the technology to complete problem sets.

In August 2024, Yale committed to investing more than $150 million over five years into its artificial intelligence infrastructure. In an email sent to the Yale community at the time, Provost Scott Strobel wrote that the money would be used for "computer infrastructure, access to secure generative AI tools, targeted faculty hires, seed grants, and opportunities for interdisciplinary collaboration."

In her email to the News, McInnis said she "discussed the $150 million commitment Yale made in 2024" with the tech leaders.

Richard Levin GRD '74, who was Yale's president from 1993 to 2013, is now chairing Anthropic's higher education advisory board, which will guide the company's AI models, like Claude, for education.

"They want to co-develop a vision with the university partners," Levin said about Anthropic in a phone interview. "They realize the experts on teaching and learning are the professors and universities, and so I think they are quite eager to collaborate."

Levin said faculty tend to be "conservative" in their approach to new technology, but said if he were leading a university, he would want to be at the "forefront" of artificial intelligence and new technologies.

Yale faculty members interviewed by the News expressed concern that students' use of AI could limit original thinking, but they offered different perspectives about whether the University should embrace it.

"I think it's something we're going to have to adjust to," political science professor Steven Smith said in a December phone interview. "We can't prohibit AI. It's just going to be a fact of life, just like a few years ago the laptop or Wikipedia became a fact of life."

Smith said that AI can be a "useful resource" if it "doesn't become a substitute for thinking."

"The more recent development of artificial intelligence is even more discouraging, because I have had papers and responses submitted to me which were obviously cribbed or taken off of artificial intelligence," Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations professor Benjamin Foster said in a December interview.

"And students think that, you know, you can deceive the faculty," Foster added. "You can't."

Foster said he thinks that "many students are substituting artificial intelligence for thinking," and that they are spending "too much time in a parallel, electronic universe and are not engaged."

Jeff Dinski is a development officer at Ellucian, a Virginia-based firm that provides artificial intelligence services to hundreds of universities including Princeton, which uses them for fundraising efforts, Dinski said in an interview.

"I think AI might actually slow some of the pull towards things like computer science and coding because I think those are the jobs that are getting disrupted the most," Dinski said.

He said he is "optimistic" that learning technology skills, including artificial intelligence, alongside a liberal arts education will be valuable in a job market influenced by artificial intelligence.

During a late February Yale Corporation meeting, trustee Felicia Norwood LAW '89 said that Yale trustees had "been learning a lot about AI" when asked about the contents of their closed-door meetings.

"Yale's trustees regularly engage with issues shaping higher education and society," University spokesperson Karen Peart wrote to the News in March following the trustees' meeting. "Recent discussions about artificial intelligence reflect the university's commitment to preparing students to lead in a world where these technologies are increasingly important."

Strobel assembled the Yale Task Force on Artificial Intelligence in January 2024.

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CHRISTINA LEE / SENIOR PHOTOGRAPHER
University President Maurie McInnis said she met with tech leaders in Silicon Valley over spring break. They told her the proliferation of artificial intelligence will make a Yale degree more valuable, she said in an interview.

After McInnis' nod to McMahon, Blumenthal warns against 'silence'

BYASHER BOISKIN, ARIA LYNN-SKOV AND LEO NYBERG
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Sen. Richard Blumenthal LAW '73 of Connecticut wrote on X this month that the Trump administration had "crippled Yale research" and warned that apparent "silence or even reticence on such despicable policies is hard to explain."

Blumenthal's series of posts came days after University President Maurie McInnis commended the Buckley Institute, which describes itself as "a home for enlightened conservative thought," for scheduling an upcoming event with Education Secretary Linda McMahon. The posts did not mention McInnis but included a link to the News' article about her praise for the Buckley Institute.

When asked to respond to Blumenthal's comments, McInnis declined to engage directly.

"I appreciate the senator's long-standing support for higher education and friendship with Yale, and I respect the senator for sharing his views," McInnis wrote to the News. "Typically, it is my practice not to comment on public statements."



COURTESY OF WIKIMEDIA COMMONS
In response to Yale President Maurie McInnis' comments praising the Buckley Institute for inviting Education Secretary Linda McMahon, Sen. Richard Blumenthal wrote that the Trump administration's "destructive policies deserve a retort."

In his post, Blumenthal, a Democrat, wrote that McMahon and President Donald Trump have "slashed student scholarships, demeaned&threatened academic freedom" and "blatantly violated statutory&constitutional protections for Yale&all Americans." He added that the pair had "worked to dismantle the entire Dept of Ed."

Without specifying who he believed had been silent, Blumenthal wrote that he understood "standing up to Trump&his minions may seem risky" but that "the Administration's destructive policies deserve a retort." His chain of posts also referenced former Yale history and global affairs professor Timothy Snyder, pointing to Snyder's book "On Tyranny" and one of its admonitions, "Do not obey in advance."

In a March interview with the News, McInnis said that the University has "long had support from many lawmakers," pointing to "our local Connecticut ones" as an example. She added that "both senators and congresspeople are among those champions" for Yale in Congress.

McInnis adopted a policy of institutional neutrality in October 2024, following recommendations from the Committee on Institutional Voice, which advises Yale leaders to limit public statements on political matters except in rare cases. She has said her priority is working with lawmakers behind the scenes, and lobbying has been a core part of her presidency.

In a January phone interview, American Studies professor James Berger said that Yale and other elite institutions should "stand up" in the face of the Trump administration's attacks.

University presidents should be "at the barricades," he said, adding that the University should "just be really clear on what higher education is about and stand up for it."

Micah Draper '28, the financial policy director for the Yale College Council and the Sophomore Class Council president, said while he believes bringing a range of perspectives to campus is important, so is standing up for higher education.

"I think the University would be doing a disservice to their students if they weren't bringing in people of alternative perspectives," he said but added that McMahon — who is slated to speak at the Buckley Institute event on Thursday — is "part of an administration that is attacking our university" and "causing student life to kind of become degraded."

"I think that the university should perhaps be a little more aggressive towards these things that we all can agree are wrong," Draper added. "Obviously, we all go to Yale University. We believe in higher education. And so, this increase in taxes, financially, budgetary — clearly are attacks on these institutions that we believe in."

McMahon's department opened an investigation into Yale for cooperation with a program for business school students that the department alleged was discriminating based on race. In February, the department announced they had reached a resolution agreement with Yale and 30 other universities who had agreed to cut ties with the program.

Lauren Noble '11, the founder and director of the Buckley Institute, disagrees with Blumenthal's remarks.

"Senator Blumenthal seems to define 'diversity of views' as his own view, expressed at three different press conferences in front of five different cameras," Noble wrote to the News. "The Buckley Institute both prefers and practices a more literal definition."

"We are grateful that President McInnis has publicly recognized the value of our efforts to facilitate robust campus discussion about important topics facing our country," Noble added.

Yale and Dartmouth are the only Ivy League schools that have not had federal funds punitively frozen by the Trump administration. McInnis has previously suggested that the presence of groups like the Buckley Institute and the Yale Political Union, which encompasses seven political parties, may be among the reasons Yale has avoided the targeted cuts that have hit Harvard, Columbia and other peer institutions.

McInnis in February denied credit for keeping Yale out of the Trump administration's crosshairs.

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