NEWS

"Not knowing when the Dawn will come, / I open every Door"
EMILY DICKINSON AMERICAN POET

Sustainable food program hit by budget cuts, sparking student outrage

BY SASHA CABRAL AND JERRY GAO
STAFF REPORTERS

Financial constraints on the Yale Sustainable Food Program have caused its staff to be reduced from four to three people, and the future of the Food, Agriculture and Climate Change certificate program is uncertain, according to a Yale College spokesperson.

Over the weekend, rumors swirled around campus that the program's director, Mark Bomford, was let go and that the certificate program was eliminated. Students circulated a petition, which Yale College Council President Andrew Boanoh '27 and Vice President Jalen Bradley '27 emailed to the student body, calling for "transparency" about budget cuts affecting the sustainable food program and for a meeting with Yale College Dean Pericles Lewis.

According to Ivy Pete '26, a student who has held multiple positions with the sustainable food program, the petition was signed by 1,380 people, of whom 1,150 identified themselves as undergraduates. The letter claims that Bomford's position was eliminated. Bomford declined to comment when reached by email on Sunday. The Yale College spokesperson, Paul McKinley DRA '96, did not respond to the News' question about whether Bomford's position was the one eliminated.

"This morning I printed the open letter with the attached 1,400-some odd signatures — a 42-page document — and also made copies of 40 handwritten letters authored by students outlining the impact that Mark Bomford had on their Yale careers and also their significant concern about the future of the YSFP without a director," Pete said in a phone interview on Monday evening.

The sustainable food program focuses on educational and academic work about food and agriculture. According to its website, it manages the Yale Farm and is committed to developing "food-literate leaders."

"The farm, together with the YSFP, will continue its focus as a space for teaching and student engagement, now with a slightly smaller, three-person staff, down from four," McKinley wrote to the News on Sunday. "This change reflects necessary financial stewardship while preserving Yale's commitment to the program."

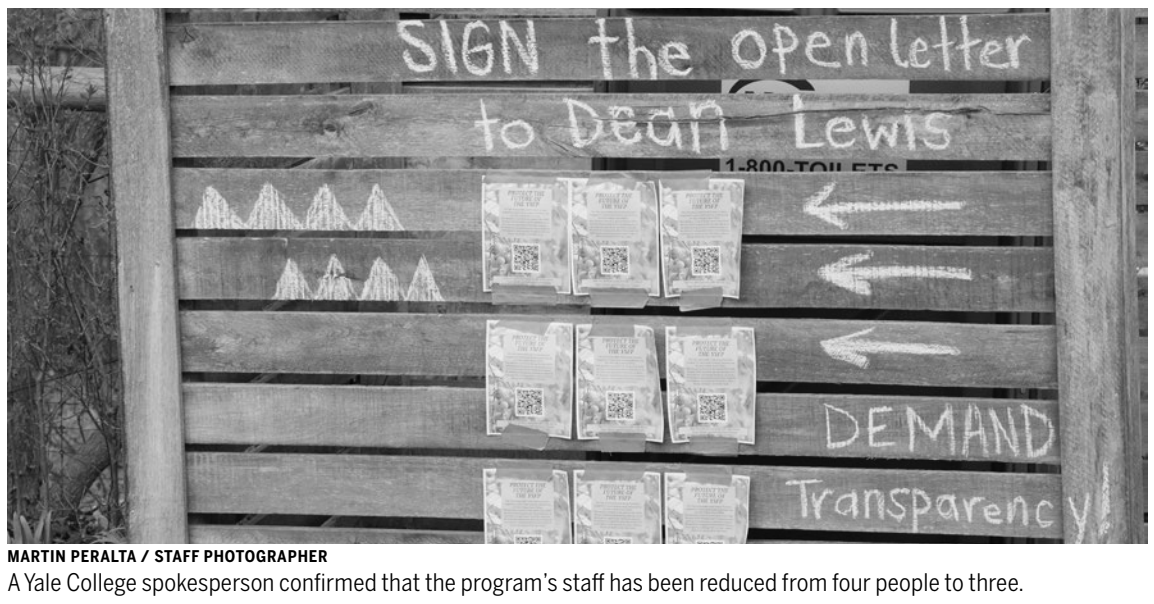
Numerous student groups promoted the petition over the weekend. The Spring Fling Committee, for example, urged students to sign the open letter both in an email to the student body, as well as at their annual Battle of the Bands concert, which was held at the Yale Farm on Saturday.

The open letter claimed that private donors offered to fund Bomford's position "upon notice of Director Bomford's termination," and that the dean's office turned down the offer.

McKinley denied on Monday that the College rejected donor support, writing that the letter's claim was "inaccurate."

"We explored a number of options to expand financial support for the program, but ultimately the available funding was not sufficient to sustain it at its current staffing level," McKinley wrote.

In February, Yale College Dean Pericles Lewis told the News that the College's staff size shrunk by 7.5 percent due to budget tightening caused by the University's anticipation of an increased endowment tax hike.



MARTIN PERALTA / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER
A Yale College spokesperson confirmed that the program's staff has been reduced from four people to three.

Hi'ilei Hobart, a professor on the Food, Agriculture and Climate Change certificate's faculty committee, said in an interview that she became aware of "some uncertainties about the Yale Sustainable Food Program's future" in November. Similarly, Deborah Coen, another professor on the certificate's faculty committee, wrote to the News that she heard about the removal of the program's director in November.

Now, Hobart says that she believes "the plan is for the certificate program to be sunset at the end of this academic year."

According to McKinley, "Students currently enrolled in the certificate program will be able to complete it; after a consultation process, faculty will decide whether it continues in the future."

Both Coen and Hobart told the News that they have taught courses that involve the Yale Farm, and they noted the importance of Bomford and his position.

The changes have caused concern among current and former students, as well as faculty, who have been involved with the program and say they are concerned about its future.

"Without a director, there is no strategic and academic vision. I worry that Dean Lewis is determined to move the YSFP's operations into merely extracurricular Yale College student life, and not an integral part of the academic and educational experiences that we have here," Pete said.

"The change will not affect the YSFP's student fellowships, which will continue through the farm, or the support the farm provides to academic departments and programs," McKinley wrote on Sunday.

In addition to the Yale Farm, the sustainable food program also runs the Harvest orientation program for first years.

Gustavo Dominguez '27, a Harvest leader who completed a summer internship with the sustainable food program, said he also was notified of the cutbacks from an email from a coworker associated with the farm. He said that made the changes feel as if they were "sort of kept under the wraps."

"I don't think there are a lot of other spaces at Yale where you're able to sort of learn about agriculture, learn about food in a situation like that," Dominguez said. "It really does feel like an uncertain time for the farm."

Bomford has been the director of the program since 2011, according to its webpage.

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Hasan Piker says 'American empire' is dying at well-attended debate

BY LEO NYBERG AND SARAH RIVAS
STAFF REPORTERS

Sheffield-Sterling-Strathcona Hall was buzzing on Tuesday evening an hour before Hasan Piker, a well-known left-wing Twitch streamer, walked up to the podium to address the Yale Political Union.

Piker spoke in favor of the resolution "End the American Empire." In his speech, he criticized U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Israel and capitalism, and he claimed that "the American empire" was "in the process of dying."

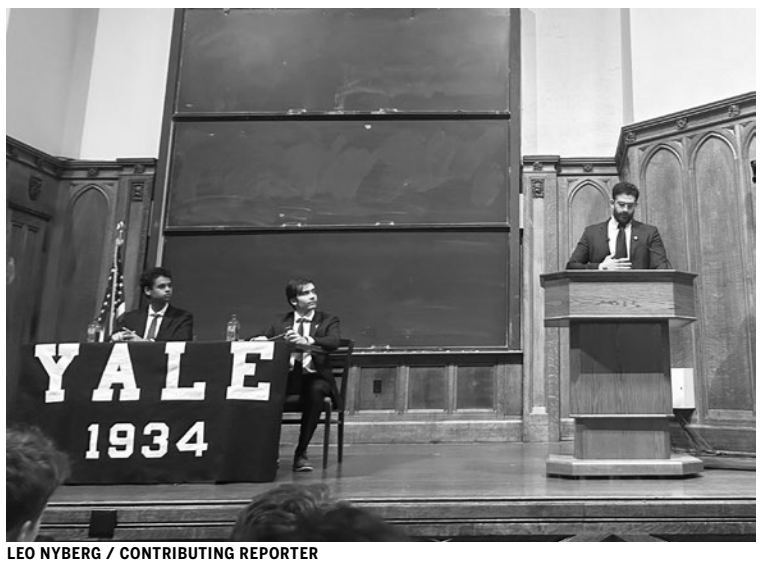
Four days before the event, Sen. Rick Scott wrote on X that the Trump administration should "IMMEDIATELY revoke" Yale's federal funding because the student group was hosting Piker, who said during a livestream last year that "if you cared about Medicare fraud or Medicaid fraud, you would kill Rick Scott." Scott, a Florida Republican who spoke at a Yale Political Union debate in October, was previously the chief executive of a hospital company that was investigated for fraud and later paid $1.7 billion in settlements to the government.

"I'm especially sad that Senator Rick Scott couldn't make it," Piker said Tuesday in his opening speech, drawing laughs from the audience. "I'm sure he had many opinions on whether or not we should end the U.S. empire and the global capitalist system, which is what I'll be talking about today. And then your grandparents are probably going to hear about it on Fox News tomorrow."

Yale Political Union President Mór Szepesi '27 said Tuesday's debate saw the most demand he had seen for a political union event.

"Earlier this semester, when we hosted New York mayoral candidate Curtis Sliwa, I stood on this very stage at this very podium and proclaimed that I could say without a shred of a doubt that I have never seen this level of excitement for a guest of the Yale Political Union," Szepesi said as he introduced Piker. "That distinction was perhaps short-lived."

"It was electric," Kai-Shan Kwek-Rupp '28, who gave a speech opposing the resolution, told the News after the event. "I really appreciate that the community cares about it, as the national headlines are reflecting, it's really contentious and so it's good to have civic engagement at Yale and it's really good to have people disagree who are willing to listen to each other."



LEO NYBERG / CONTRIBUTING REPORTER
The left-wing streamer Hasan Piker, whose visit to campus drew a Republican senator's rebuke, attracted a large crowd to a Yale Political Union debate on Tuesday. He harshly criticized United States foreign policy.

Avi Rao '27, the Yale Political Union's speaker, said that while the increase in attendees brought "more energy" to the debate, every student speaker was "able to speak, have questions, not be interrupted."

The crowd thought they spotted Piker entering three times and began to applaud, only to realize each time that someone else had entered the back door of the hall. When Piker entered, the lecture hall erupted into applause.

"This is a guy that has a modern media presence," Cemre Keles '28, a member of the political union's Independent Party, said in an interview. "He reaches to our demographic exactly, people that are our age."

In his remarks, Piker traced the history of what he called America's "imperial roots" from the Spanish-American War through World War II and the Cold War — which he described as "an endless series of butcheries, each more perverse and more tragic than the last."

"What was the point of defeating the Nazis if we went on to dominate so much of the globe as violently as we have?" he asked.

After the fall of the Soviet Union, which Piker argued was "one of the greatest catastrophes of the 20th century," America had "no more big enemies left" to beat and turned "the gun on itself."

"No matter what we say here, the American empire is going to inevitably fall," Piker said.

Piker argued that the American people still had power to "manage the retreat" of the American empire from the world stage, preventing it from ending "in a much more violent way."

Students who argued against the resolution suggested that the United States, while in need of reform, should remain as a global superpower.

"Power does not evaporate, it changes hands," Kwek-Rupp said, arguing that "an American empire is greatly preferable" to the dominance of other global powers.

Similarly, William Flanigan '27 argued against Piker's vision of a "weak, retreating America."

"We do not have to accept anything less than what we know this country can be," Flanigan said.

The resolution passed by a vote of 54–31, with three members of the union abstaining.

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Todd Blanche, now acting attorney general, slated to visit Yale

BY HENRY LIU
STAFF REPORTER

Todd Blanche, now the acting attorney general, was announced last month as a speaker for an event scheduled by Yale Law School's Federalist Society chapter.

The conservative group's plan to host Blanche for its spring banquet on May 1 was announced in an email sent to its mailing list in late March and obtained by the News. At the time of the email, Blanche was the deputy attorney general. He became the acting attorney general after President Donald Trump fired Attorney General Pam Bondi on April 2.

When asked if Blanche would still be attending the event, Yale Federalist Society President David Haungs LAW '26 declined to comment.

A spokesperson for the U.S. Department of Justice wrote in an email to the News that the department's press office did not have access to Blanche's schedule.

As deputy attorney general, Blanche served as the department's second-in-command, overseeing roughly 115,000 employees across the Justice Department, which includes 93 U.S. attorney's offices, as well as the FBI, the Drug Enforcement Administration and other agencies, according to a profile on the Federalist Society's website.

Prior to President Trump's reelection in 2024, Blanche served as Trump's personal defense attorney in three of the four criminal cases brought against him. Although he was unable to prevent Trump's 2024 conviction in New York, he helped delay the federal cases related to classified documents and the 2020 election, neither of which ultimately went to trial.

The Federalist Society's email invitation to the spring banquet said the event would include a cocktail hour, dinner and remarks by Blanche. "Dress code is formal," the email said.

According to The New York Times, Blanche was a registered Democrat before he represented Trump.

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RYAN BILLER VIA WIKIMEDIA
Yale Law School's Federalist Society chapter announced in an internal email last month that Blanche would be the guest speaker at a spring banquet. Then he became the Justice Department's interim leader.