

PROS & CONS



Olivia Woo / Contributing Photographer

Jordan Peccia, Head of Benjamin Franklin College

The state of the colleges is ‘strong’

The state of the residential life among undergraduates at Yale is “strong,” according to Benjamin Franklin Head of College Jordan Peccia.

During his three years leading Franklin, Peccia wrote in an email to the News, his college has been “completely full.”

Peccia added that he knows many other institutions “would love to emulate our residential college system” and that he sees every day “how our college provides enriching social and academic experiences for our students.”

“The thing in life that’s important to us, that I think a lot of us discount so much, is building relationships with other people and the richness of your life,” he said in an interview. “I work really hard in trying to get to know all of our students. It’s not impossible for me to have a close relationship with all 530.”

The rise in students living off campus over the last decade may be “difficult” to identify, he added, considering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the increased size of Yale College.

Peccia pointed to his college’s fresh traditions, including an annual “Olympics” between Franklin and Pauli Murray College, as well as the fact that its first years live in the college, unlike 10 other colleges, whose first years live on Old Campus.

“I think having everybody in a college is good,” Peccia said. “That’s such a great way to network, just even within your college, to be talking to people in different classes.”

While his college is young, he added, it’s “a really good way to be” that budgets are distributed equitably among residential colleges, so that students do not have to watch other college’s students “you know, drink champagne, while you can’t do anything.”

In fact, Peccia said, “it sometimes can be easy to build a positive culture when you are not burdened by the way of doing things in the past.”

Benjamin Franklin College opened to students in 2017.

Hannah Liu contributed reporting.



Jaeha Jang / Contributing Photographer

Samuel Moyn, Head of Grace Hopper College

‘More power to them’ to go

The state of the residential life among undergraduates at For Grace Hopper Head of College Samuel Moyn, “it’s totally reasonable to live off campus.”

While he thinks the purpose of college is to “learn who to be in this short life you have” and living in a residential college with a diverse community allows students to expose themselves to “all the different ways to explore existence,” Moyn acknowledged that this perspective appeals to “some and not others.”

If students think their desires and preferences are better fit for off-campus housing, then “more power to them,” he said.

Moyn said he hasn’t seen “an exodus that would fundamentally undermine the community” in Hopper. The college’s bedrooms are full and don’t have the space to accommodate every student anyway, he added.

Moyn mentioned various hypotheses as to why a large share of students may be living off campus. One is that the “consumerization of universities” has resulted in the understanding of universities as a product to be customized, Moyn said. Another is that the residential colleges are physically declining, he added.

“I don’t have a strong view about why it could be happening. I don’t even think it’s necessarily wrong,” Moyn said. “It could have to do with the cell phones, could have to do with streaming.”

According to Moyn, his goal as the Hopper’s head of college is to make it more “amenable” to what students want.

“It’s not like the colleges are a static institution. I’m here mainly for fan service,” he said. “Like, what can I do to make this college more inviting?”

Grace Hopper College was called Calhoun College until 2017.



Braden Mathis / Staff Photographer

Michael Koelle, Head of Ezra Stiles College

Moving off is ‘detrimental’

When molecular biophysics and biochemistry professor Michael Koelle became the Head of Ezra Stiles College last year, he was surprised by the extent to which students are living off campus, he said in a March interview.

As the “number one distinguishing feature of Yale College,” Koelle said, residential colleges provide a sense of community. Large numbers of students moving off campus, he said, could have a “detrimental effect.”

“Why did you come to Yale? You came to Yale to be around these amazing people,” he said. “It’s just inevitable that you won’t feel that same sense of community here, won’t benefit from this community when you’re living off campus.”

When he talks to students about off-campus housing, Koelle said he tries to ensure that they understand the “less apparent” costs of living off campus, which include the costs of food, utilities, furniture and storage.

“There could be a rude surprise moving off campus, finding that it’s actually not costing less than it would cost on campus,” Koelle said. “There’s also this ineffable thing that’s hard to quantify, which is the loss of community.”

In addition to the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, when many students moved off campus, Koelle said he thinks one “issue” that has been pulling students away from campus is the “beautiful new apartment buildings” in New Haven that have been marketed “very cleverly” to Yale students.

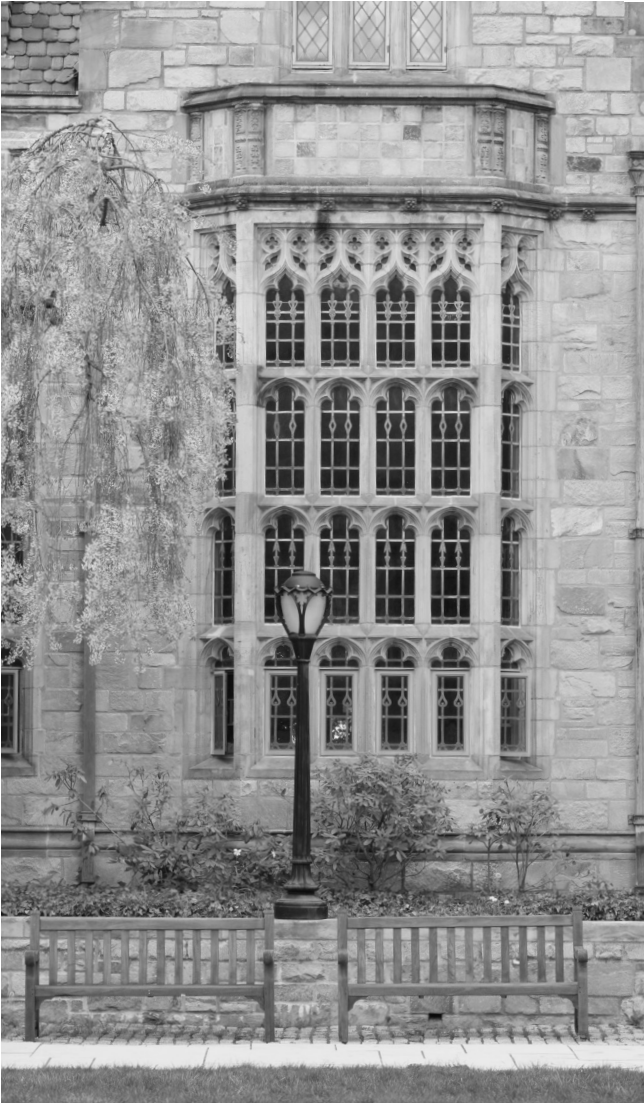
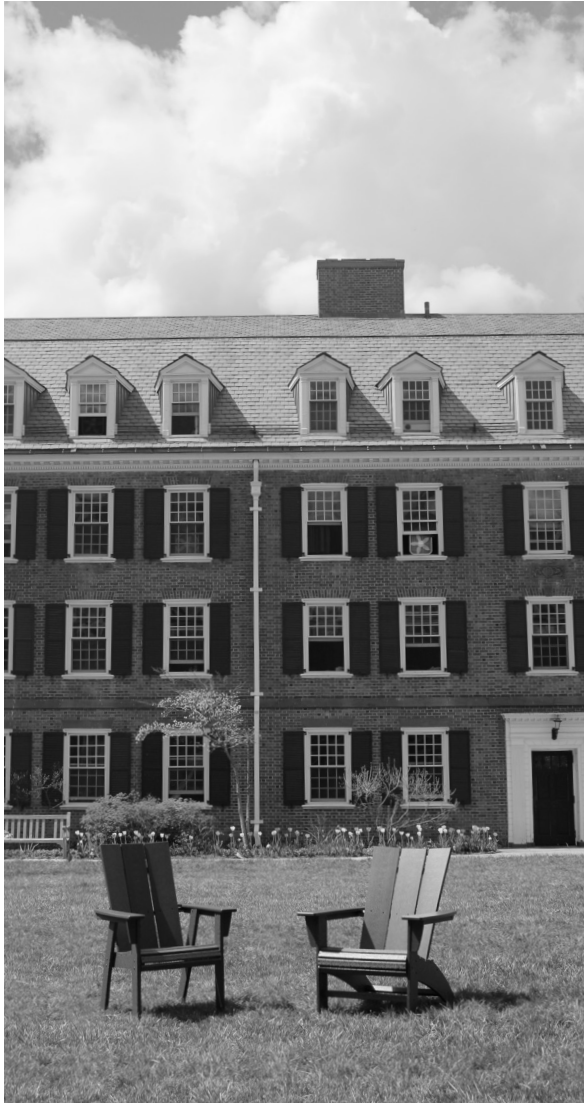
The landlords of these apartments often require students to sign leases before Yale’s housing draw, and they set prices that “appear attractive relative to housing costs at Yale,” Koelle said.

Koelle praised efforts by the Yale College Dean’s Office to keep juniors on campus, including the recent move to give them priority in the housing draw and to allow students annexed from their colleges to choose where they live on campus.

“If I had a choice between students moving off of campus and really being siloed away from campus, off in their apartment building with their little friend group there, versus being on campus and being more a part of the Yale community, I prefer to have them here on campus,” Koelle said, acknowledging that annexed students may be separated from their college’s sense of community.

Koelle teaches “Biochemistry and Biophysics” this semester.

Interviews by Jaeha Jang and Hannah Liu. Words by Jaeha Jang. Contact Jaeha Jang at jaeha.jang@yale.edu.



Alex Hong and Dani Klein / Staff and Contributing Photographers