

PROS & CONS

In newest colleges, customs emerge from a blank slate

BY HANNAH LIU AND SASHA CABRAL
STAFF REPORTERS

In 2017, Yale opened two new residential colleges, the first since 1962: Pauli Murray and Benjamin Franklin.

Over the past decade, Franklin and Murray students have designed their traditions from the ground up, providing a front-row view into the status and evolution of individual residential colleges' cultures.

When Jay Mehta '24 GRD '25 arrived at Franklin as a first year in 2019, he did not feel a strong sense of pride or culture in the college. Over time, he said, he slowly grew more involved, putting on an original musical in Franklin's facilities and eventually returning as a Franklin graduate affiliate.

"Franklin has changed over time and really blossomed," Mehta said. "When I first got to Franklin, it was very new still. It felt like it didn't really have a culture or its own sort of pride and identity, the way old colleges did, like we hadn't yet figured out who we are. I have no idea when that changed, but by the time I graduated, went from college and then did the masters program, I feel like it has."

Mehta mentioned returning to Franklin recently for the first time since graduation and, while sitting in the Franklin courtyard, realizing how much the place felt like home.

Several Franklin and Murray students described actively participating in starting new traditions.

During the pandemic, students in Franklin created the college's annual Christmas album, which continues to be produced every year, under the name "Yale Franklin Founders." Made in the Franklin recording studio with college resources, the project is meant to showcase Franklin's musical talent and creative spirit.

"We wanted to make this a very open community project in the first two years," Tony Ruan '25 GRD '25 said. "We would literally grab people coming in from the hallways to sing with us."

In her first year, Coco Ma '25 MUS '22 founded a club called the Sci-fi and Fantasy Society. The group hosted events including a college-wide screening of "Dune" and college teas with fantasy authors such as Holly Black.

"It was really cool getting to see a lot of my friends or even students that I didn't know very well, all connecting over a shared passion, which was books, writing in general, becoming authors and fantasy sci-fi," Ma said. She added that Franklin college administrators and staff were always supportive of ideas for new traditions.

Aaron King, who has been the dean of Pauli Murray since 2024, mentioned the Pauli Pumpkin Patch as another example of a new tradition. He voiced appreciation for Murray students' living in a "newer" part of "an old institution."

"We don't have an event that's been going on for decades, but we get to create those if we choose to. Even small things that come up become kind of a fun memory, like the Pauli Pumpkin Patch that came a few years back," King said. "These are small things that kind of become part of the story and culture of this newer space."

The Franklin and Murray College Councils have also taken charge in establishing traditions.

"It's like a double-edged sword because, on one hand, we're so young that we don't really have a ton of traditions," Murray College Council President Ben Braecklein '27 said. "But on the other hand, because we don't have these set traditions, we also get this really cool chance to try and build the traditions that will be for the future. A good example of that is I suggested to the office and then the head of college that we have a Christmas tree."

Students are not the only ones shaping culture. Murray students also credited Head of College Tina Lu, known as Prof T, and King for creating a welcoming environment. Franklin alumni and students mentioned Head of Operations Maria Bouffard as a source of support and inspiration, in addition to the rest of the college and dining hall staff.

Franklin's and Murray's basement murals,

handpainted by students, also reflect efforts by students and staff to foster college pride and culture.

Benjamin Franklin Head of College Jordan Peccia remarked that students get to shape not just social traditions but also the college's academic culture. He mentioned building new collections of art pieces and books. By now, he said, the college has acquired several thousand books.

Franklin and Murray's relative newness offers an abundance of opportunities for North Campus students to create their own college character and form new traditions — suggesting that residential college culture, however modest, is important to Yale undergraduates.

"I feel like we still have an influence in making traditions in culture, and it's far more flexible," Marc Firpo '29 said. "Where I feel like you look at JE, you know, one of the first ones being founded — it's a bit harder to kind of have an influence there."

Holden Lee '29 said that Murray and other residential colleges have distinct characteristics, but the differences among them are minor.

"I wouldn't say there's a distinctive characteristic, because it is a random group of students at the end of the day," Lee said. "But I do think there is this little sense of, like, trauma bonding from walking to Old Campus all the time or it being nice that we're so close to Science Hill, you know, for early classes. And also having, like, the best dining hall is obviously something to be very proud of."

First years in Benjamin Franklin, Pauli Murray, Silliman and Timothy Dwight colleges live in their residential colleges in their first year.

Contact
HANNAH LIU
at hannah.liu@yale.edu and
SASHA CABRAL

Sasha Cabral / Staff Illustrator



Sophomores look ahead to divergent housing paths

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Looking for flexibility

Clara Díaz Suárez '28 of Jonathan Edwards College will be living off campus next year, trading Yale housing for a shared house with her sailing teammates. For Suárez, the decision came down to independence and comfort.

"I want to have a kitchen, liberty to eat my meals whenever," she said in an interview. Having a more private space and the ability to cook on her own schedule ultimately outweighed the conveniences of residential college life, Suárez said.

Suárez said that her experience living in Yale housing has not always been positive. While she declined to go into detail, she said that dissatisfaction played a role in her decision to move. Living in a house, she hopes, will offer more stability and personal space than the residential system can provide.

She is looking forward to sharing a home with her teammates, a setup that blends independence with built-in community, Suárez said. Suárez is one of many undergraduates who move off campus in search of greater autonomy and a more tailored living situation. For her, off-campus life promises both comfort and camaraderie.

Uniting with friends across colleges

Addy Gorton '28 is a sophomore in Jonathan Edwards College moving off campus next year to the Cambridge Oxford Apartments on High Street.

"A lot of my close friends are in other residential colleges," Gorton said in a phone interview when asked why she chose to move off campus. Gorton said she will be living with three friends from three different residential colleges.

Gorton added that she is "excited" to have a kitchen. Gorton said that a group of seniors passed the lease for the apartment down to her and her friends.

Gorton expressed her appreciation for Jonathan Edwards and said she will miss living so close to its courtyard.

"I'm only moving like half a block away," she said. Gorton added that living close to campus was one of her priorities when she was looking for off-campus housing.

Gorton said she will miss "being close to a lot of people that maybe I wouldn't bump into on the daily."

"It's nice that we're kind of confined to this one thing we have in common, which is Jonathan Edwards," she added.

Location, location, location

Noah Lee '28, a sophomore in Ezra Stiles College, plans to stay on campus for his junior year.

Initially, he thought his undergraduate experience would naturally include living off campus, he said in a phone interview.

"A lot of my siblings have lived off-campus in their college experiences," Lee explained.

However, for Lee, his experience living in Stiles so far influenced his decision to continue living on campus. He said that Stiles is "centrally located" for many of his classes, which tend to be between Linsly-Chittenden Hall and the Humanities Quadrangle.

"I also work in Stiles, in the office, so everything was kind of more compact there," Lee added. "I'm probably more tapped into my college community than the average person."

Lee was also discouraged by the lifestyle adjustment that moving off campus would require, he said.

"Especially amidst what I expect to be the hecticness of junior year, I think I'm a little

scared of that honestly," he said.

Lee is also close to his current suitemates, he said, and their "rapport" and the benefits of residential college life are keeping him in the dorm room.

"There's just something very endearing to me about being able to go to the buttery at midnight and then go straight back to my room nowadays without having to walk, I don't know, 20 to 30 minutes," he said.

Lee is currently living in a sextet suite this year and will be in a quintet next year. He will live in a single bedroom next year, he said.

Inspired by upperclassmen

Aubrie Williams '28, a sophomore in Davenport College, will be living off campus next year in Crown Towers.

Initially, she was not planning on living off campus, she said.

"You have the rest of your life to live in an apartment and you only have four years to live in a residential college," Williams said.

During Williams' sophomore year, however, she experienced an "upperclassman influence" from those already living off campus. Additionally, she said she noticed that many of her peers were planning on doing the same.

Williams said her decision to move off campus came down to hearing others' experiences.

"I feel like also hearing like personally from someone about a good experience they've had has a lot more like power than anything else," she said.

When deciding between living in a house or an apartment, Williams said "it kind of came down to thinking about safety a lot," which is why she chose an apartment.

Williams and her friends chose to live in Crown Towers based on "the price and then all the amenities and the location," she said.

Contact
ARYA STAPLETON DHILLON
at arya.stapletondhillon@yale.edu and
MELISSA ADAMANTIDI
at melissa.adamantidi@yale.edu.

Garrett Curtis / Photography Editor

