OPINION

GUEST COLUMNIST

IAN AYRES

Shut up and dribble?

Across its 20 recommendations, the report recently published by the Committee on Trust in Higher Education is, in many respects, an admirable document. It defends free speech in unambiguous terms, calls for the formal adoption of academic-freedom principles for the 21st century and names the opacity of admissions and the financial aid system as drivers of distrust. But the committee's second recommendation should give our community cause for concern: the proposal to narrow the University's mission statement and thus deemphasize its commitment to public service.

In 2016, Yale expanded its mission beyond just the pursuit of knowledge to include "improving the world today," educating "aspiring leaders worldwide" and fostering "an ethical, interdependent, and diverse community." The Trust Committee proposes jettisoning these three goals and adopting a much leaner mission like the one in the Faculty Handbook: "Yale University's mission is to create, disseminate, and preserve knowledge through research and teaching." The committee frames this as a return to Yale's traditional mission. But narrowing what Yale stands for, at this particular moment, is retreat by another name.

It is unclear how deemphasizing improving the world and ethics will make Yale more trustworthy. A cynic might be forgiven for thinking that many of these changes are a smokescreen to distract from and justify excluding a "diverse community" from our central goals. Under this reading, the proposal, far from being directed to the public, is primarily aimed at placating the tyrant in chief who has recklessly targeted a number of our peers. What is clear is the message the proposed amendments send to our scholars whose work bears most directly on public life: improving the world is no longer central to Yale's institutional business.

In 2018, Fox News host Laura Ingraham told LeBron James, after the basketball star criticized President Donald Trump, to "shut up and dribble." The narrowed mission proposed by the Trust Committee, however principled its drafters' intent, might communicate a comparable message — to students, clinical professors, policy researchers, the many faculty whose scholarship influences law and policy and all at Yale who otherwise strive to enact meaningful change in our world. Turning away from "improving the world" implicitly suggests that professors should stay in their lanes and focus on what is more than what ought to be.

Mission statements can inspire, but they can also meaningfully constrain institutional activity. They tell deans what to fund, search committees what to value and administrators what to defend when a program is questioned. Under its current mission, Yale can confidently answer that the Grand Strategy program, the Tsai Leadership Program, Yale Young Global Scholars, the Law School clinics that sue government agencies and the public health initiatives that engage state legislatures all serve the university's stated purpose and thus deserve University backing. Under a pared-back mission, what would Yale instead choose to support?

Improving the world is not a recent commitment for Yale. President Kingman Brewster Jr., in his 1967 letter laying out Yale's modern admissions philosophy, argued that the University should seek future leaders whose capacities and moral seriousness would let them shape institutions beyond the campus. The Trust Committee's report quotes that letter approvingly in its admissions section. The "aspiring leaders" language now slated for removal is a direct descendant of the very tradition the report elsewhere honors.

This pivotal political moment should be one where Yale leads and protects scholars. Over the past year, the federal government has attacked many of Yale's peers over precisely the kinds of public-oriented scholarship and clinical work Yale's current mission embraces. The report itself notes that faculty "express alarm about mounting pressure from beyond the campus, especially from government authorities," and that "post-doctoral fellows and international students at Yale report that they now hesitate to speak out, even about their own research, for fear of government retaliation." Yet the report proposes no recommendation that takes a stand against government pressure.

Public trust is not built by quietly retiring institutional commitments in advance of pressure. It is built by standing behind them under pressure. The committee's report observes that universities have lost public trust in part because they have not done what they said they would. The appropriate fix is to do more of what we pledged: defend our existing commitments, fund them visibly and stand behind them when they are inappropriately challenged.

A Yale that retires "improving the world" from its mission — during a federal campaign against other universities for doing precisely that — would not solve its problem of public trust. It might instead confirm, with unfortunate irony, that distrust is warranted.

IAN AYRES *is the Oscar M. Ruebhausen Professor of Law and Professor at the Yale School of Management and the Yale School of Public Health. They graduated from Yale College in 1981 and Yale Law School in 1986. They can be reached at ian.ayres@yale.edu.*

GUEST COLUMNIST

ELEANOR KANDOLL

Rural students fall through the cracks

I sit down to write with this year's "Report of the Yale Committee on Trust in Higher Education" fresh in my mind. In many ways, I find myself agreeing with those who praise its honesty, but there are some very obvious things left unsaid. The report fails to fully reckon with how Yale's financial aid policies actively erode trust among the very students it claims to support.

For me, this concern is very far from abstract. While the committee was meeting, I was packing a tote full of all my possessions in preparation for an extended — if not permanent — leave of absence from Yale.

Months ago, I wrote an open letter undersigned by four pages of students addressing President Maurie McInnis, Yale College Dean Pericles Lewis, Dean of Undergraduate Admissions Jeremiah Quinlan '03 and Financial Aid Director Kari DiFonzo advocating for a change in financial aid policy for rural students with assets like farms and fishing boats. I wrote out of necessity: Despite being from a low-income family, I am expected to pay the full price of Yale attendance because of my family's not-yet-paid-off livelihood. For us and families like us, these are not liquid assets or disposable sources of wealth. They are what we depend on for survival; they are often tied up in debt and cannot be sold without a total loss of our ways of life.

Despite Yale's advertisement of its financial aid as reasonable, holistic and accessible to everyone, my situation has been met with utter indifference from the powers that be at Yale. And now, after fighting for nearly a year simply for the ability to stay here, I am preparing to leave Yale.

This isn't to say that I haven't had support. Many fellow students, staff members and even alumni have expressed their sympathy for my case. Some have given great time and effort to help me navigate this system. But this is precisely why I find Yale's silence so disturbing. Yale has ignored all of us, not just me. What my situation lacks isn't awareness but action.

My experience is unfortunately not unique. Rural and low-income students have long struggled within financial aid systems that fail to account for the realities of non-liquid, livelihood-based assets. When institutions like Yale treat those assets as if they were equivalent to disposable wealth, they effectively exclude students from backgrounds like mine, all while claiming to broaden access to higher education.

Our administration's recent decisions embody this pattern. The removal of funding for summer storage for low-income students, for example, signals a broader disregard for the financial struggles many of us face in our daily student life. Programs like the Sustainable Food Program, which are especially meaningful to rural students as they form links to our agricultural homes, are also facing slashes in funding. While these decisions are separate from financial aid policy, they reflect Yale's broader attitude towards things that don't have obvious financial value.

These policies, not reports or public statements, are how trust is truly built — and broken. It's no wonder that rural and low-income places are notorious for their mistrust of universities, if this is what happens when they sacrifice time, effort, money and separation to send their children to school. When rural students are admitted but not meaningfully supported, Yale's message to us becomes clear: We are welcome in theory but not in practice.

> I WILL BE FORCED TO LEAVE ONE OF THE WEALTHIEST UNIVERSITIES IN THE WORLD SIMPLY BECAUSE I CAN'T AFFORD IT.

I would love to assert my full trust in Yale and encourage others to do the same, but I cannot do so with a clear conscience. I will be forced to leave one of the wealthiest universities in the world simply because I can't afford it. If Yale cannot recognize the diversity of backgrounds that comprise it, students like me will continue to be left behind, and if our administration is truly serious about building trust, it needs to start by addressing these gaps. Right now — for rural and low-income students especially — this trust remains as far out of reach as financial support does.

ELEANOR KANDOLL *is a first year in Pierson College studying Music from Petersburg, Alaska. She can be reached at eleanor.kandoll@yale.edu.*

GUEST COLUMNIST

JACK CLAWSON

Yale still doesn't get it

The Committee on Trust in High Education's 58-page report is nothing if not thorough. It makes 20 recommendations and cites hundreds of sources. But the committee missed an obvious problem.

> AMERICANS HAVE WATCHED, DECADE AFTER DECADE, ELITE SCHOOLS LIKE THIS ONE SHEPHERD OUR NATION'S BEST AND BRIGHTEST INTO INDUSTRIES THAT ACTIVELY EXTRACT VALUE FROM THE PUBLIC.

Yale became a prominent university because of the success and strength of its alumni. Our public trust and legitimacy are directly correlated with what those alumni do with their Yale education. So I was astounded to find that in 58 pages on trust in higher education, alumni were only mentioned about a dozen times. Furthermore, alumni were almost always mentioned as donors or trustees, never as the actual output of the institution and therefore a critical source of legitimacy.

While I respect the committee's effort, academics often overcomplicate or outright ignore simple truths. Have we considered that the first step to rebuilding trust in Yale is making sure our alumni aren't inflicting massive pain on our country?

It is a fact that Yalies are fleecing America. The Wall Street Journal reported that nearly 30 percent of Yale graduates are funneled into finance or consulting. The report briefly acknowledges this, writing that selective universities reinforce this "culture by allowing recruitment from finance, law, and consulting firms as early as a student's first year, before a single round of classes has been completed." The conversation ends there. This brief remark is treated as a byproduct of declining classroom rigor rather than a central fact of our campus culture and a crisis of legitimacy.

Americans have watched, decade after decade, elite schools like this one shepherd our nation's best and brightest into industries that actively extract value from the public. Alumni of this school were architects of the Iraq War, the Vietnam War and the 2008 financial crisis. The American people are not confused when they distrust Yale. They are simply beginning to see Yale for what it is.

Obviously, the University can't police the careers and private lives of its alumni. So there is certainly no way this problem can be addressed, right? Wrong.

Start with admissions. Each time a student admitted based on an interest in humanitarian work becomes a McKinsey consultant junior year, the admissions office has failed. To avoid this common pitfall, the admissions office could connect admitted students before they reach campus with clubs and communities on campus that match the moral aspirations they wrote about in their essays. We need to give students the resources to actually accomplish their lofty moral ambitions. Thirty percent of the class of 2030 probably did not answer "Why Yale?" by stating their desire to work 80-hour weeks in high finance.

Next, examine our career infrastructure. The Office of Career Strategy should devote substantial time and energy into recruiting for careers like public service, teaching or journalism. Seemingly, first-year students are more likely to have opportunities to interview with consulting firms than local nonprofits. This ought to change.

Finally, look at who Yale celebrates. When people think of Yalies, they think of a Silicon Valley tech bro creating AI solutions to nonexistent problems. They envision a private equity executive who bought his hometown's only grocery store and overleveraged it within a year. They picture an establishment politician who has spent years dodging accountability, likely for his time spent on a certain island. Instead, let's highlight the alumni that are doing meaningful work and leading change. Yale's communications apparatus could prioritize the graduates doing work aligned with the mission of "improving the world today and for future generations," rather than the ones who are simply rich, powerful and prestigious.

None of this violates institutional neutrality. Yale does not have to denounce Vice President JD Vance LAW '13. It does not have to denounce any particular alumnus or career. It only has to stop crafting and celebrating a pipeline that contradicts our mission to serve the public.

Shockingly, the first step toward rebuilding trust may be actually doing good for society. The report writes that "trust is earned by doing what you say you're going to do—and, ideally, doing it well." Yale says it is educating future leaders who will serve the public. The public has looked at said leaders and, rightfully, drawn conclusions about the trust they place in our institution and higher education. Now we have to respond.

JACK CLAWSON *is a first year in Grace Hopper College studying Ethics, Politics and Economics. He can be reached at jack.clawson@yale.edu.*

Yale Daily News

YALE DAILY NEWS PUBLISHING CO., INC. 202 York Street, New Haven, CT 06511 (203) 432-2400
Editorial: (203) 432-2418 editor@yaledailynews.com Business: (203) 432-2424 business@yaledailynews.com

EDITOR IN CHIEF & PRESIDENT Ariela Lopez

MANAGING EDITORS Carter Cashen, Lily Belle Poling, Ethan Wolin

PUBLISHER Alyssa Chang

DIRECTOR OF AFFAIRS Karla Cortes

UNIVERSITY EDITORS Nora Moses, Chris Tillen

CITY EDITORS Maia Nehme, Zachary Suri

ARTS EDITORS Kamini Purushotharman, Luciana Varkevisser

INVESTIGATIONS EDITORS Zoya Haq, Ada Perlman

SPORTS EDITORS Tommy Gannon, Sienna Tejpaul

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY EDITORS Asuka Koda, Fareed Salmon

OPINION EDITORS Mia Gorlick, Max Grinstein

WEEKEND EDITORS Ella Piper Claffy, Julian Raymond

MAGAZINE EDITORS IN CHIEF Ashley Wang, Everett Yum

HEAD PHOTOGRAPHY EDITOR Ximena Solorzano

HEAD PRODUCTION & DESIGN EDITOR Dani Klein

HEAD COPY EDITOR Isobel McClure

ILLUSTRATIONS EDITOR Mia Rose Kohn

HEAD PODCASTS EDITOR Andre Fa'aoso

DATA EDITOR Aiden Zhou

HEAD AUDIENCE EDITOR Emily Chen

THIS ISSUE COPY EDITORS: Leandro Menchu, Nate Stein, Jack Tompros; COPY STAFFERS: Oliver Browne, Alina Chakarova, Gaurav Chaudhuri, Perry Dye, Leo Gabara, Clare Griffin, Maria Gregory, Ella Kim, Miriam Levenson, David Liu, Ruby Nichols; P&D STAFFERS: Anayah Accilien, Lucy Bland, Michael Chang, Evan Bonilla, Olivia Cyrus, Olivia Dick, Ezra Helfand, Ella Kim, Aryeh Hirshaut, Theresa Liu, Jaeha Jang, Aria Lynn-Skov, Kushan Mahesh, Kalina Sabala Montes, Delilah Sonnenshein, Serina Yan

EDITORIALS & ADS
Content on this page with bylines represents the opinions of those authors and not necessarily those of the Managing Board. Opinions set forth in ads do not necessarily reflect the views of the Managing Board. We reserve the right to refuse any ad for any reason and to delete or change any copy we consider objectionable, false or in poor taste. We do not verify the contents of any ad. The Yale Daily News Publishing Co., Inc. and its officers, employees and agents disclaim any responsibility for all liabilities, injuries or damages arising from any ad. The Yale Daily News Publishing Co. ISSN 0890-2240

SUBMISSIONS
All letters submitted for publication must include the author's name, phone number and description of Yale University affiliation. Please limit letters to 250 words and guest columns to 750. The Yale Daily News reserves the right to edit letters and columns before publication. E-mail is the preferred method of submission.

ISSUES PRINTED BY
Valley Publishing Co, Derby, CT

DIGITAL ARCHIVE
YDNHistorical.Library.Yale.edu

ADVERTISEMENT
(203) 432-2424 (before 5 p.m.)
business@yaledailynews.com

Direct all letters, columns, artwork and inquiries to:
Contact the Opinion Editors at
opinion@yaledailynews.com

Direct all comments regarding the fairness or accuracy of stories to:
Ariela Lopez
Editor in Chief & President
editor@yaledailynews.com

NEW HAVEN, CONNECTICUT COPYRIGHT 2026 — VOL. CXLVIII, NO. 35