NEWS

"I'll never forget you (I will never, never, never, never, never, never, never)"
NEVER FORGET YOU ZARA LARSSON

Graduate programs reckon with reduced class sizes for next year

BY SASHA HUROWITZ
STAFF REPORTER

Yale's English department had a target of four incoming graduate students for next year — down from as many as a dozen. Medieval Studies could make just one offer, down from its usual two. Classics will have three spots instead of four.

Facing an 8 percent federal tax on its endowment investment income and resulting University budget cuts, the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences has reduced the size of incoming graduate student cohorts across various programs. Administrators' plans to reduce graduate student enrollment over the next three years — by approximately 13 percent in the humanities and social sciences and 5 percent in STEM programs — emerged in the winter.

Now, some enrollment numbers for next year are coming into focus. Directors of graduate studies across a variety of departments, who provided the sizes of the incoming and previous classes, told the News that the reductions will diminish graduate and undergraduate student experiences.

"Because the cuts came so quickly and were a surprise to many of us, we're now kind of scrambling to figure out what other kind of changes we need to make to our programs in response to what seems to be a far smaller profile or footprint for graduate education in our program," Daniel HoSang, the director of graduate studies for Yale's American Studies Program, said in a phone interview.

"What it's turned into is just trying to manage austerity," HoSang, who is also the president of Yale's chapter of the American Association of University Professors, added.

In a January email to the News, University spokesperson Karen Peart attributed the varied graduate program cuts across disciplines to "the fact that a larger fraction of graduate student support for humanities and social sciences comes from endowment funds than in the sciences and engineering."

She added that the enrollment reduction numbers were decided in conversation with a "faculty working group and with each department chair and director of graduate study."

Admissions cuts by department

Across the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, directors of graduate studies reported lower admission targets and smaller incoming classes compared to historical averages.

The American Studies cohort was reduced by roughly half, according to HoSang. He noted that the program — which includes joint programs in Black Studies and Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies — will bring in just four students this year, down from recent classes of seven to nine students.

The English department, which typically welcomes between eight and 12 graduate students, was given a strict target of four and allowed to make just five offers to reach it, according to Sterling professor Ruth Yeazell GRD '69 '71, the director of graduate studies. Classics saw its allocation drop from four spots down to three, the department's director of graduate studies, Christina Kraus, wrote to the News.

The East Asian Languages and Literatures department received between 80 and 90 applications but was tightly restricted to just two offers — a sharp decline from historical highs of six or seven offers — according to its director of graduate studies, Mick Hunter.

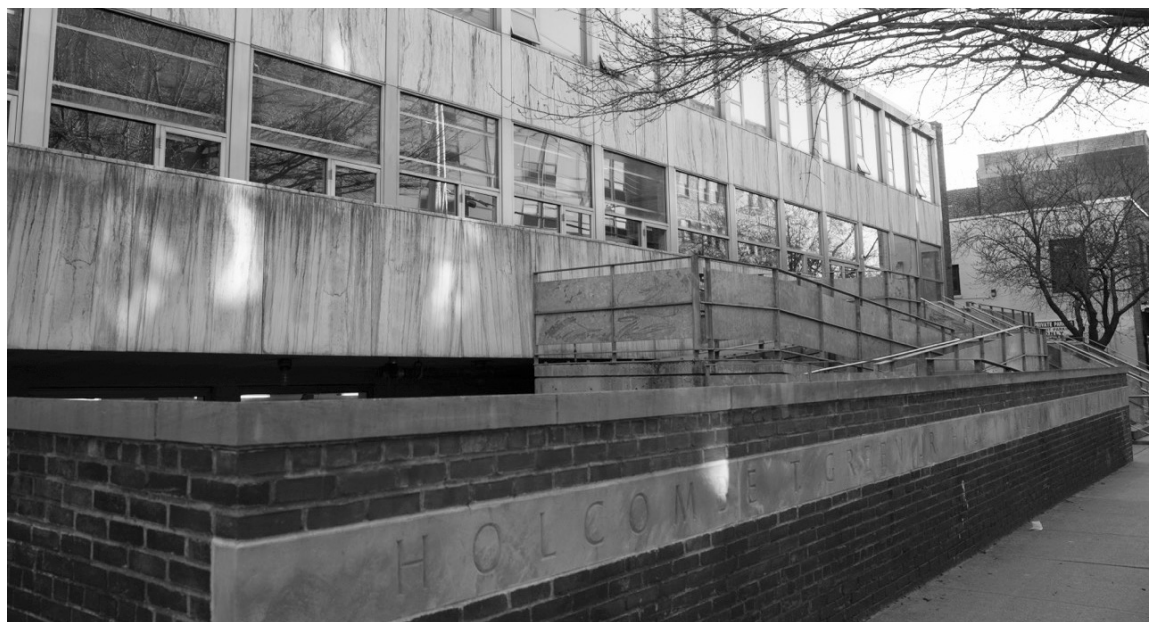
"Since I have been at Yale, we've never had a situation where we've only been able to make two offers of admission," Hunter said in a phone interview.

Medieval Studies, which usually makes two offers for a target class of two, was permitted only a single admit this cycle, director of graduate studies Emily Thornbury confirmed.

This year, the Music department was allowed to make four offers for a target class of four graduate students, Chair Gundula Kreuzer wrote to the News, adding that while the numbers "have varied widely" in the past, they have "never dropped below five."

Some STEM programs were less affected. According to Astronomy's director of graduate studies, Robert Zinn, the program yielded four students, roughly its usual number.

Others saw significant drops compounded by yield challenges. Earth and Planetary Sciences typically targets 10 incoming students and enrolled 12 last year, director of graduate studies Alexey Fedorov wrote to the News.



ELLIE PARK / SENIOR PHOTOGRAPHER

Yale's Graduate School of Arts and Sciences has reduced enrollment numbers due to budget cuts. Several directors of graduate studies reflected on their programs' admissions cycles and the implications for the incoming cohorts.

"This year, we sent admission offers to only 9 students, and only 4 decided to enroll. This is due to a combination of factors: reduced support from the Graduate School, increased tax on the departmental endowment, and a more conservative approach by the department in light of reduced federal funding for the sciences," he wrote.

Smaller cohorts

As the reality of these reductions sets in, faculty are warning that the cuts will fundamentally alter Yale's intellectual experience and competitiveness.

"We had more trouble persuading people to come than we might have in other years, because they're worried about the small size of a cohort," Yeazell said.

Yield rates also posed a problem in the reduced Medieval Studies graduate program. Because the department was only allowed to take one person, Thornbury said she was "really worried" that if the accepted student declined admission, people on the waitlist might have accepted offers elsewhere, leaving the program with an empty class.

"When you're facing a question of no one coming in, versus a slightly smaller class than usual, it feels existential in a way that it doesn't normally," Thornbury said.

Beyond initial yield rates, Yeazell expressed concern over sustaining a "robust program" when cohort sizes are so small.

"We teach by seminars, just as we teach undergraduates by seminars. How many seminars can you run if you only have four or five people coming each year?" Yeazell said.

Beyond recruitment, faculty are also concerned about the social and intellectual isolation of the students who do enroll. Hunter, in East Asian Languages and Literatures, highlighted the "increasing importance of having graduate students form cohorts that are across departments," so that students have peers "to bounce ideas off of, to compare experiences with, and to be friends."

Potential effects on undergraduates

Faculty members also warned that having fewer graduate students will compromise the undergraduate academic experience.

William Honeychurch, a professor of anthropology, stressed that experimental learning relies heavily on having enough skilled graduate students to guide undergraduates, noting that his department's current struggles are "following cuts from COVID."

"Taking 20 to 30 students out to an archaeological site is not easily accomplished with only one professor, but on the other hand it would be a shame to not do such activities since these greatly enrich the learning opportunities for undergraduates in our field," Honeychurch wrote to the News. "Without help from qualified TFs, I cannot create these high quality opportunities for my students."

A lack of grading support could also prompt changes to course offerings. Hunter speculated that, with fewer teaching assistants, "professors might decide they're going to limit enrollment to 30 students, which is more manageable if they are going to be doing all the grading themselves."

Thornbury shared that concern, saying that an assumption that one can take any grad student and "plunk" them to teach any subject matter, regardless of their speciality, is "simply not true."

"You need to know something about the material in order to be able to teach it well," she said.

Thornbury said she believes that the cut in graduate admissions will not start affecting undergraduates for at least three years, because the previous incoming graduate classes were "pretty much normal in size."

In a statement provided to the News in January, Graduate School of Arts and Sciences Dean Lynn Cooley wrote that implementing the enrollment cuts amid the University's current budgetary strain "preserves Yale's ability to continue to fund and invest in its excellent graduate education for the students currently at Yale and in the decades to come."

The Graduate School of Arts and Sciences has about 3,500 students, according to its website.

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Lewis expects food certificate to continue for at least two years

BY SASHA CABRAL AND JERRY GAO
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Yale College Dean Pericles Lewis said in a Wednesday interview that his office is "looking for faculty leadership" to sustain the Food, Agriculture and Climate Change certificate program for at least two more years.

Those plans were conveyed in a meeting last Thursday between College administrators and students, according to a Yale Farm manager, Sawan Garde '27, who said he was present at the meeting.

Garde said that the dean's office arranged the meeting after students involved in the Yale Sustainable Food Program, which runs the Yale Farm, circulated an open letter that alleged the program's executive director, Mark Bomford, had been let go. The letter also called on Lewis to disclose the budgetary rationale behind cuts to the program.

Yale College spokesperson Paul McKinley DRA '96 previously confirmed that the program's staff was reduced from four to three people but did not confirm whether Bomford was the staff member let go. Bomford has not responded to the News' requests for comment.

Lewis declined to comment on Wednesday about whether the staff reduction has left the certificate program without a faculty director, saying that he could not "comment on anything specific to any individual."

"The plans are the following: Yes, we're looking for faculty leadership for the program for the next two years. And then the faculty will decide whether to continue the certificate after the two-year period," Lewis said.

Garde wrote in an email to the News that administrators and students had come "to agree" on continuing to offer the Food, Agriculture and Climate Change certificate program for a minimum of two years. When asked to confirm the agreements Garde mentioned, Lewis pushed back on the notion that the meeting had been a negotiation.

"Just to clarify, I talked to a group of students and I shared with them what my plans are. So characterizing it as an agreement makes it sound a little more like it was a negotiation, if you know what I mean," Lewis said.

Lewis told the News that academic decisions, such as those regarding the future of the certificate program, will "always" be made "in conjunction" with faculty.

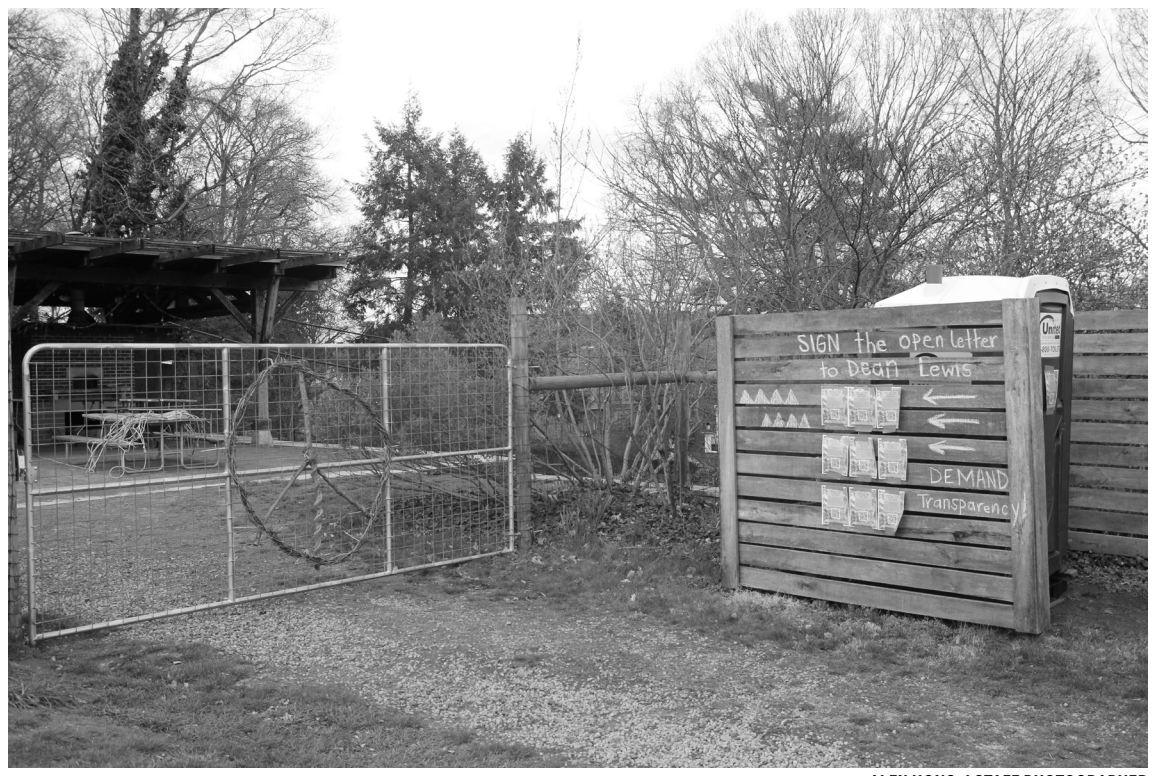
Deborah Coen, who directs the certificate's faculty committee, told the News on Wednesday afternoon the dean's office has not been in communication with the committee since November regarding related changes.

"I have not received any communication," Coen said in a phone interview. "The faculty group responsible for the certificate is the one that I direct, and I have not been part of any such communication."

Hi'ilei Hobart, another member on the faculty committee, echoed Coen's account.

"I haven't, as a member of the certificate's faculty committee, received communication from the Yale College Dean's office yet," Hobart wrote in an email to the News on Wednesday evening. "I can't speak to whether or not a new director will be selected (I just have no information to offer in that regard)."

Coen told the News that she is "very confused" about the lack of communication. When asked about the two year continuance of the certificate, Coen said that she does not know if the certificate director position is vacant and what the process to fill the position would be.



ALEX HONG / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

After a meeting with student leaders, Yale College Dean Pericles Lewis said that the Food, Agriculture and Climate Change certificate program will likely continue for at least two years, after which faculty will decide on the program's future.

"I have no idea. I was still under the impression that it would be possible to preserve Mark Bomford's position — which, to my mind, is vital to the certificate. So I have not even begun to contemplate what it would look like to replace him, and certainly my colleagues and I have not discussed that because I thought it was still in the realm of possibility that he would be retained." Coen said.

Several active staff members of the sustainable food program did not respond to the News' requests for comment.

Garde said he contacted Lewis after the meeting to confirm the future of the certificate program.

In Lewis' email response to Garde, which Garde provided to the News, the dean wrote that he is "consulting with faculty about the future of the certificate program, but it is unlikely I will have news for you before May 6."

"But I do expect everyone in the classes of 2027 and 2028 who has started the certificate program to be able to complete it," Lewis wrote. "As I hope I made clear, I am very supportive of the mission of the Yale Farm and am sorry that our budget situation has made these difficult decisions necessary."

Yale College will offer 42 certificate programs for the 2026–27 academic year, according to its website.

Olivia Woo contributed reporting.

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