

REACHING OUT

“I have developed a very strong partiality for the dead: they don’t talk back, they don’t sue, and they don’t have angry relatives.”
RON CHERNOW ’70 AMERICAN WRITER

Report draws national attention, with some critics doubting incentives

BY ARIA LYNN-SKOV AND LEO NYBERG
STAFF REPORTERS

Within minutes after University President Maurie McInnis shared the Committee on Trust in Higher Education’s sprawling report last month, it hit the headlines of national news outlets like The New York Times and the Wall Street Journal.

While the University’s robust media campaign promoting the report and its recommendation that Yale narrow its mission to focus on knowledge drew criticism from some academics, who characterized the report as a political gesture designed to improve public perception, other critics have praised the report’s content as an essential reckoning for higher education.

“Here is what I am pleased about. Higher education needs to have a conversation broadly about the reasons why higher education has lost the confidence of the American public,” McInnis said in an interview when asked whether she was pleased about the media coverage. “And I think one of the great things that this report has generated is a broader conversation. Some will be positive about things, some will be negative. That’s what debate and conversation and intellectual engagement looks like.”

The report’s recommendations, ranging from free speech to collaborative governance, covered nearly every facet of life at Yale. Few of the recommendations have been fully implemented so far, with McInnis sending many issues, including admissions reform and grade inflation, to additional committees for review. Even without a clear timeline for when and how specific policies may be implemented, the report sparked debate in major newspapers and across higher education.

Daniel HoSang, the president of Yale’s chapter of the American Association of University Professors, said in a phone interview that he suspects the report was “as much a kind of public relations undertaking as it was about a serious engagement with the underlying questions of trust,” pointing to a contrast between the report’s recommendation to focus on the classroom and Yale’s cuts to instructional faculty amid budget pressure in anticipation of the federal endowment tax hike.

HoSang said that the fact that the report seems to have been shared with the media before it was circulated on campus fuels that suspicion.

“The New York Times ran a full story on it complete with interviews just as the report was leaked out,” he said, adding that this “shows that the administration has been very, very concerned about public perception. And that’s what makes a lot of this, I think, to many people feel disingenuous.”

When asked about the report’s early release to outlets, University spokesperson Karen Peart wrote in an email to the News that “major reports are released through the standard institutional practice of embargoed, coordinated distribution to the campus and to the press.”

She added that this practice allows the reports’ contents to “reach all audiences simultaneously and are available for review by those within the Yale community and for public review broadly.” Per Peart, the Trust Committee’s report “followed that process,” offering embargoes to “interested outlets, including the Yale Daily News.”

Yale promoted the report in a multi-slide Instagram post on the day of its release, writing, “Trust matters. American higher education must earn it every day. And for Yale, it’s a priority.”

While many opinion columns in national outlets supported the committee’s recommendations and praised Yale’s leadership on confronting declining trust in universities, other commentators, like Wesleyan University President Michael Roth, have called parts of the report a defensive measure against the Trump administration, which has clashed with universities during its first 18 months in power.

The Trump administration has cut funding to Harvard and other elite universities for allegedly failing to prevent antisemitism on campus and a lack of “viewpoint diversity.” Yale and Dartmouth are the only Ivy League schools that have avoided direct punitive cuts from the Trump administration, though some federal cuts have impacted research and fellowships at Yale.

“Amid the Trump administration’s ongoing attack on higher education,



YULIN ZHEN / PHOTOGRAPHY EDITOR

While the Committee on Trust in Higher Education’s recent report garnered substantial praise on national media outlets, some critics characterized it as a disingenuous political gesture in the face of a hostile federal government.

the message is clear: Don’t worry, it says, we are staying in our narrow lane. That’s not a mission; it’s a defense strategy,” Roth wrote in a guest essay for The New York Times a week after the report’s release. “And the retreat from public purpose will not enhance trust; it will further erode it.”

When asked to respond to Roth’s criticism, McInnis said, “I do not comment on comments made by others.”

She did, however, say that her colleagues at an April meeting she attended with the Association of American Universities were “pleased to see the report.” The Association of American Universities is composed of 71 research universities in North America, and McInnis is on the organization’s board.

“I’ve recently returned from that meeting, and my colleagues at the meeting were really enormously impressed with the report, thought it was just fabulous that it was launching a national conversation, and for them, they said, also a great conversation on their campuses,” McInnis said.

Two weeks after the report’s release, the editorial board of the Harvard Crimson lauded what it described as a “detailed” report and echoed the committee’s claim that the purpose of the university lies in academic excellence.

“It’s time for Harvard to copy Yale,” the editorial reads. “Harvard, too, is due for a reckoning — its walk should match its talk.”

Some proponents of the report framed it as a step away from what they described as Yale’s social justice and diversity initiatives and lauded the report for guiding the University’s focus back to knowledge.

The report recommended a narrowed mission statement drawn from the faculty handbook that focuses on knowledge. On April 30, two weeks after the report’s release, Yale revised its mission statement to match nearly verbatim the committee’s recommendation, and the statement no longer includes language about improving the world, educating future leaders or fostering the free exchange of ideas in a diverse community.

Four days after the report’s release, the Wall Street

Journal’s editorial board praised the report for not ducking conservative critiques of higher education.

“The authors don’t indulge in the dodge of blaming Donald Trump,” the Wall Street Journal’s editorial board wrote. “They essentially agree with the criticism about rising costs, admissions that lack transparency, and the failure to support free speech on campus and genuine academic freedom.”

HoSang, however, said he thinks the report still caters to the perceptions of the “elite.”

“I think it was an effort to manage public perceptions of the University not from any perspective of everyday people, but in elite quarters, in the pages of the Wall Street Journal and New York Times,” HoSang said, adding that he thinks “it’s about a kind of image management.”

McInnis commissioned the Committee on Trust in Higher Education in April 2025.

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\$7 billion campaign ‘For Humanity’ nears end amid new mission statement

BY SARA AGRAWAL
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In 2021, Yale launched “For Humanity,” its largest capital campaign ever, with a goal of \$7 billion and a “mission to improve the world now and for future generations.”

Last month, Yale revised its mission statement to exclude “improving the world” and educating “aspiring leaders worldwide,” narrowing down to a mission “to create, disseminate, and preserve knowledge

through research and teaching.” But proponents of the campaign said that its priorities — and their alignment with Yale’s broader mission — remain intact as it draws near its end date of June 30, 2026.

“The university’s mission and the priorities of the campaign remain closely aligned,” Joan O’Neill, the University’s vice president for alumni affairs and development, wrote in an email to the News. “The campaign language highlights

the benefits of investing in the university’s core mission for prospective donors.”

University President Maurie McInnis’ end-of-year message to the Yale community last month included a link to, but did not address, the University’s newly revised mission statement. The changes in the statement follow suit of the Committee on Trust in Higher Education’s recently released report, which recommended that Yale revise its mission

statement to focus on knowledge.

While O’Neill refrained from releasing details on the financial finals and distributions until the end of the campaign, the campaign had raised over \$6.4 billion by the end of the 2025 fiscal year last September, according to its annual report. The campaign had raised \$3.5 billion during its silent phase between 2018 and 2021, when University leaders solicited large gifts from a small number of wealthy donors.

Randy Mastro ’78, a two-time deputy mayor of New York City and a donor to the For Humanity campaign, dismissed the change in mission statement’s impact on the campaign, reflecting that he found his own commitment to public service from his time at Yale.

“Those of us who are alumni have to step up and do even more to make sure that Yale can continue to advance the values that have always been an essential part of the university, whether or not certain words are in a mission statement or not,” he said in a phone interview.

Mastro said Yale’s values have remained its “cherished culture” for “many, many decades,” attributing the change in Yale’s mission statement to “the political reality of a federal administration that is hostile to the traditional mission of certain revered institutions like Yale.”

The success of the campaign is “a reflection of the alumni rising to the occasion and supporting the institution at a time when so many of the world’s great universities that are here in the United States are under siege,” Mastro added.

The For Humanity campaign began during Peter Salovey’s GRD

’83 ’84 ’86 tenure as Yale’s president. Since McInnis succeeded him in 2024, she has appeared at a series of events called “For Humanity Illuminated,” which have promoted the campaign in cities across the country.

On its website, the campaign is organized into four umbrellas: “Arts & Humanities for Insight,” “Science for Breakthroughs,” “Collaborating for Impact” and “Leaders for a Better World.”

The science priorities listed on the For Humanity website — data and computer science, quantum science, neuroscience, inflammation science and planetary solutions — align with the “top priority ideas” outlined in a 2018 report by the University Science Strategy Committee.

The University’s particular focus on the sciences has also been reflected in the decade-long development process currently underway in Upper Science Hill, which was a response to the report by the University Science Strategy Committee.

The umbrella entitled “Leaders for a Better World” includes financial aid. For Humanity has set a goal of raising \$1.2 billion for financial aid in Yale College and in Yale’s graduate and professional schools.

According to the campaign’s website, donors to the campaign can choose the school and initiative to which their donation will be allocated. Donors of \$100,000 or more can create an endowed fund, according to the campaign’s gift policies.

As of June 30, 2025, Yale’s endowment totaled \$44.2 billion, according to the 2025 fiscal report.

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TIM TAI

After Yale revised its mission statement to exclude “improving the world” and educating “aspiring leaders worldwide,” proponents of the “For Humanity” campaign said its priorities remain intact. The fundraising push is set to end next month.