

REPORT ON TRUST

“Censorship is to art as lynching is to justice.”
HENRY LOUIS GATES JR. ’73 AMERICAN LITERARY CRITIC

Yale needs major reforms to rebuild public trust, faculty committee says

BY ASHER BOISKIN, ARIA LYNN-SKOV
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STAFF REPORTERS

A faculty committee assembled by Yale President Maurie McInnis released a report on Apr. 15 examining a vast range of campus issues to identify causes of and potential solutions to public wariness of higher education, prompting McInnis to say the University must accept some fault for declining trust.

McInnis formed the 10-member Committee on Trust in Higher Education last April, during her second semester as University president — and three months after President Donald Trump took office, having promised an aggressive approach to overhauling American universities.

In its sprawling 58-page report, the committee criticized certain University policies and listed 20 recommendations for reform. It suggested that for Yale to restore public trust, it should rethink its approach to financial aid, clarify and change admissions policies, promote more intellectual diversity, restrict technological devices in classrooms and address grade inflation, floating that Yale College should have around a 3.0 mean grade-point-average.

In its report, the committee calls on Yale to reflect on and take responsibility for our role in the erosion of public trust. I accept this judgment fully,” McInnis wrote in a University-wide email. “This decline did not come out of nowhere, nor did it happen overnight. And we were certainly more than mere bystanders. We must acknowledge how we have fallen short.”

In a brief Zoom interview with the News, McInnis said that she “can’t say that I have any disagreements” with the committee’s report.

The Trump administration has wielded its power to pressure universities into complying with its education agenda, slashing funding for universities it says have refused to cut diversity programs or address alleged campus antisemitism and lacking ideological diversity. While Yale has avoided targeted funding cuts, it has felt the wide-reaching effects of the administration’s policies, including its endowment tax hike that has set off cutbacks across the University budget.

“We undertook this task at a difficult moment for higher education in the United States,” the report’s introduction, addressed to McInnis, reads. “You encouraged us to take the long view. As you noted, the problem of declining trust did not emerge out of nowhere over the past

few months or years.”

The committee, co-chaired by sociology professor Julia Adams and history professor Beverly Gage ’94, gathered research over the summer before kicking off a series of listening sessions open to Yale community members. The committee also hosted a speaker series focused on the future of higher education.

The committee’s report recommends that Yale change its mission statement to say, in line with the current Faculty Handbook, that the University’s “mission is to create, disseminate, and preserve knowledge through research and teaching.” That would remove the current mission statement’s commitment to “improving the world today,” its call to educate “aspiring leaders” and its mention of “an ethical, interdependent, and diverse community.”

“These are all worthy goals. But they are not what makes a university a university,” the report reads.

The report asks the University to bolster academic life by adopting a “device-free policy—no phones, laptops, or tablets—as the default in classroom settings” and by changing its approach to grading.

The committee wrote that “decades of inflation and compression have rendered the college grading system almost meaningless.” In addition to suggesting a “college-wide standard,” such as the 3.0 mean grade-point-average, the report suggests that the registrar’s office “compute course percentiles” — which would show “where a student stands relative” to classmates — to include on transcripts.

McInnis wrote in her email that “grade inflation is another area which requires our focus” and that “raising the bar for ourselves will also raise trust in our university.” She has directed the Committee on Teaching, Learning and Advising to “confront grade inflation” in Yale College, an effort that the College’s dean, Pericles Lewis, has already discussed.

The committee also wants Yale to shake up its undergraduate admissions processes, which has long been the subject of intense intrigue and debate. In the recently completed admissions cycle, the regular decision acceptance rate calculated by the News sat below 3 percent.

The report lauds Yale’s current undergraduate admissions system for “yielding a class of talented students” but refers to the system as “subjective and hard to explain.”

The committee recommended that the University be more transparent about “how undergraduate admissions actually works,” reducing “preferences for special classes of applicants” — listing varsity athletes and the children of alumni, donors, faculty and staff — and creating “a minimum standard of academic achievement necessary for consideration.”

To establish that “minimum standard,” the committee advised that Yale College require an “a minimum SAT score or a Yale-specific entrance exam,” which it suggests would “spare a meaningful number of applicants time and emotional investment in an application that will not succeed.”

In her email to the Yale community, McInnis did not specifically indicate whether she would accept the committee’s recommendations on reforming the admissions process, but added that she referred the committee’s recommendations on admissions to the Presidential Council on Yale College Admissions, which she wrote “will consider them as it prepares to finalize its recommendations.”

The report also looks at concerns related to the cost of a Yale education. The total sticker price of undergraduate tuition and fees next year will be \$94,100 per student, a 3.92 percent increase from this year’s term bill.

“On this issue, there is little divide between Republicans and Democrats, conservatives and liberals, those attending public and private universities,” the report reads. “Nearly everyone agrees that the cost of higher education is too high. Rising tuition rates bear out this complaint.”

The committee recommended that the University “substantially raise the income limit on the ‘no tuition’ guarantee for undergraduate students” and “do everything possible to make the financial aid system more comprehensible, predictable, and fair.”

Yale College recently announced that it will cover the cost of tuition for families earning under \$200,000 and all costs for families earning below \$100,000.

The committee’s report finds, however, that the process of applying for Yale’s financial aid is “laborious, frustrating, and unpredictable.” The report suggests that “many families do not believe such aid exists,” and cites a study that finds many believe “colleges and universities, like other businesses, are primarily out to make a profit,” despite being non-profit organizations.



BRADEN MATHIS / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

The Committee on Trust in Higher Education released a report proposing that Yale change its mission statement and its approaches to grading, admissions and more. President Maurie McInnis said Yale deserves some blame for public skepticism.

The report says that a “high tuition-high aid model” has “had a disastrous impact on public trust. By its nature, the system is complicated, unpredictable, secretive, and highly variable. These factors tend to reduce trust rather than increase it.”

The committee wrote that it stands with the view of the influential 1974 Woodward Report which recommended that the University “treat free speech as a first principle.”

“We share that view,” the report reads, recommending the University work to expand campus ideological diversity and encourage faculty and students to “resist self-censorship.”

“The campus has not been immune from pressures toward conformity, intimidation, and social shaming that have affected the rest of higher education and, indeed, the rest of American society,” the report reads.

The report describes some students as feeling uncomfortable sharing their political views in the classroom or in research. It cites a survey from the Buckley Institute — a Yale-adjacent organization that describes itself as “a home for enlightened conservative thought” — that found that a majority of students across the country feel intimidated in expressing their

opinions or beliefs in class.

Departments and schools should “self-study” the breadth of their “intellectual and methodological commitments” and identify the “diversity of perspectives” among curricula, according to the report.

Gage said that “lots of people have made the case” that conservative voices are “underrepresented” at Yale.

In addition to co-chairs Adams and Gage, the committee’s members were School of Medicine professor Anton Bennett, Slavic languages and women’s, gender and sexuality studies professor Marijeta Bozovic, Sterling professor of English David Bromwich ’73 GRD ’77, finance and economics professor Judith Chevalier ’89, public health professor Jason Hockenberry, environment professor Anthony Leiserowitz, astronomy and physics professor Priyamvada Natarajan and law professor Sarath Sanga LAW ’14.

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Professors praise report on public trust as students raise questions

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In the hours after University President Maurie McInnis shared the Committee on Trust in Higher Education’s report, faculty members praised its purpose and frankness, while students questioned whether it sufficiently dealt with the pressures faced by undergraduates.

The report, which was written by a committee of 10 professors, examines a wide range of campus issues, including the cost of attendance, the admissions process, a lack of political diversity and grade inflation. It lists 20 recommendations, including reforming financial aid policies, setting public standards for admissions, streamlining bureaucracy and setting a 3.0 mean grade-point average for Yale College.

“This is a serious and admirably honest report, one that the administration and the broader university community need to engage carefully and searchingly,” English professor Jonathan Kramnick wrote in a text message to the News. “Its core insight strikes me as exactly right: that restoring public trust depends above all on recommitting to what universities do best, which is to create and share knowledge through rigorous teaching, scholarship, and open intellectual exchange.”

Mór Szepesi ’27, the president of the Yale Political Union, said in a phone interview that he has been “following President McInnis’ initiatives around ensuring free expression and free speech.” He said that he was “overall pleased” with the committee’s report.

Other faculty members generally praised what they described as the report’s honest and thoughtful nature.

Political science professor Dan Mattingly ’04 GRD ’08 called the report “thoughtful and well-considered” and described its conclusions on the decline in public trust as “sobering.”

“I think the recommendations should all be taken seriously, and I’m glad that President McInnis is doing so,” he wrote in an email to the News.

History professor John Lewis Gaddis also praised the report’s candor.

“I’m impressed,” Gaddis wrote in an email to the News. “This report speaks straightforwardly in a worthy cause, a tone too rarely heard in the recent past.”

Kramnick added that the report’s prioritization of Yale’s academic mission should be taken seriously at “a moment when so many forces are pulling the university in competing directions.”

Some faculty and students drew attention to the report’s references to academics.

“There is arguably no greater threat to higher education than the devaluing of teaching and learning,” the committee’s report reads.

English professor Lloyd Sy wrote in a text message to the News that he hopes to see a classroom where “students are fully present and ideas can be tested openly.”

In order to improve engagement in the classroom, the report recommends a default “device-free policy” from which faculty may deviate for “compelling pedagogical, research, or practical reasons,” while accommodating “students with documented needs.”

Before the report was released, Yale College Dean Pericles Lewis said in an interview that at a faculty meeting, professors had unanimously agreed to endorse a more lenient policy than the report’s on regulating device usage, which is that professors should have the choice to enforce a “technology-free space.”

The report from the Committee on Trust in Higher Education also charges faculty members to “create classrooms where open inquiry and intellectual debate thrive,” recommending that they establish principles to “ensure that a Yale education does not come with a political litmus test.”

Lewis wrote in an email to the News after the report’s release that he thought the committee had released “a very thoughtful report with a lot of good analysis and important recommendations.”

Szepesi said that he does not think the report sufficiently addresses the fact that “a lot of the censorship that happens happens because students try to police one another.”

Guidelines such as the ones suggested in the committee report, Szepesi said, are helpful in “setting out the parameters of a discussion” but cannot promote “cultural rewiring” in the same way that encouraging disagreement through debate can.

“That would be a disservice to Yale, if we reduced the issue to something that can just be solved through a series of guidelines that we outlined,” he continued. “I don’t think we can reasonably assume that there are a series of words that every professor can say that will, for some reason, solve the

issue of trust in higher education.”

Global Affairs lecturer Ted Wittenstein ’04 LAW ’12 wrote in an email to the News that he was “very pleased” about the report and McInnis’s support, especially the recommendations on increasing intellectual diversity on campus.

“Regardless of one’s own personal political views, everyone benefits from a university community where free, open, respectful, and rigorous debate is a hallmark of the Yale experience, both inside and outside the classroom,” Wittenstein wrote. “Trust is earned over time when communities across the country gain confidence that their views and values are represented among our students and scholars.”

The committee’s recommendation regarding grade inflation — “a 3.0 mean, or some other college-wide standard” — sparked mixed reactions.

Lewis said before the report was released that the Yale College faculty has not “had any voting on anything” like grade caps, which he said he was considering in February after a Harvard committee released a report recommending a 20 percent cap on A grades.

“McInnis has urged the 2026-27 Yale College Committee on Teaching, Learning, and Advising to explore grading issues in Yale College, and I will charge it to do so,” Lewis wrote.

Physics professor A. Douglas Stone wrote that he is “delighted” that the committee “took a strong stand” on grades.

“Setting a 3.0 grade point average is a way of signaling seriousness but I suspect that won’t end up being what our new system will be, and I don’t think students

should panic due to that headline,” Stone wrote.

Ali Otuzoglu ’27 said that he did not feel strongly about what the average GPA among undergraduates should be, but he emphasized that faculty should “address discrepancies between majors and departments” in grading standards.

Earth and Planetary Sciences professor Michael Oristaglio ’74 GRD ’74 criticized the recommendation that Yale enforce a mean GPA.

“Would any Yale department be content if an outside visiting committee reviewed the faculty and gave the department a solid ‘B’ grade? Probably not,” he wrote in an email to the News. “If Yale’s select and truly exceptional faculty would not be happy being rated ‘B,’ why would they imagine that Yale’s select and truly exceptional students would be happy with that rating?”

William Zhu ’29 said in an interview that he thought the implementation of a mean 3.0 GPA would be “counterintuitive.”

Because Yale’s rigorous admissions process “filters for the best of the best students,” Zhu said, he thought it made sense that the average Yale undergraduate GPA would be high. He added that the “job market’s already very competitive,” and posited that “grade inflation definitely can be fought, or at least thought about in a more constructive way.”

Sociology professor Julia Adams and history professor Beverly Gage ’94 co-chaired the Committee on Trust in Higher Education.

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