

# TAKING A STANCE

*“We’d get sick on too many cookies,  
but ever so much sicker on no cookies at all.”*  
SINCLAIR LEWIS ’08 AMERICAN WRITER

## After admin banner ban, YSE grads don anti-ICE t-shirts in class photo

BY MICHELLE SO  
SCI-TECH EDITOR

When Yassin MuSince the school’s founding in 1900, graduates of the Yale School of the Environment have taken an annual class photo behind Marsh Hall, where the original Yale Forest School was located. For over a century, these photos have captured the school through class size increases, the emergence of color photography and shifts in student body demographics.

In recent years, the class photos have become a platform for School of the Environment students to make broader political statements. Members of the class of 2024 posed with pro-Palestinian protest materials, according to members of class of 2026, before the school updated its class photo protocol to prohibit signs and banners. This year, some members of the class of 2026 organized an unofficial class photo in which students donned t-shirts that depicted melting ice cubes.

“The shirts were meant to be symbolic and hold two meanings: climate change is melting ice, and abolish ICE,” Riki Bertoldi ENV ’26, one of the photo’s organizers, wrote in a text to the News.

On April 29, after the graduating students lined up for their official photo, nearly all of them stayed behind to change into the shirts and pose for a new photo, according to Bertoldi. She said that the idea for the unofficial photo had been conceived “months before.”

Emily Kaufman ENV ’26 wrote in an email to the News that past students have presented more “explicit mes-

sages” in their class photos.

“I really loved the class of 2024 photo when we saw a lot of protest signs, and I believe there was a big banner that said, ‘War is an environmental issue,’” Adrian Huq ENV ’26 said in a Zoom interview. “That really resonated with me as a peace advocate and anti-militarist sort of climate activist.”

Huq said that administrators discouraged protest-related photoshoots after the 2024 display.

Paige Stein, the school’s chief communications and marketing officer, wrote in an email to the News that in order to “emphasize the collective, inclusive nature of our school community,” the School of the Environment updated its “class photo protocol.”

“Official photos are now taken without banners or signs,” Stein added. “The School of the Environment adheres to the university’s wider policy on freedom of expression.”

According to the website of the office of the secretary and vice president for university life, the University prohibits large “banners held by multiple individuals” at outdoor events, but does not specify a policy prohibiting signs or banners in official photos.

This year, as the annual class photo neared, Huq and Bertoldi said they worked to navigate around this updated policy change.

“We decided to get creative and use textiles instead as a medium to express a collective statement in a way that still felt visible and meaningful to our community,” Bertoldi said.

According to Bertoldi, Kaufman



BRANDON HOAK

In a student-organized unofficial class photo, members of the Yale School of the Environment’s class of 2026 wore shirts depicting melting ice, a double entendre intended to highlight both the changing political and global climates.

led much of the planning and coordination, while Brandon Hoak ENV ’26 created the initial design, produced the stencil and led the screen-printing process.

“We made sure to communicate our plans with both international students and the broader class and asked whether people would feel comfortable with the shirts being worn during the official class photo,” Bertoldi wrote in an email. “Some students expressed discomfort, so we decided to take the shirt photo separately after

the official class photo.”

Bertoldi said she and other organizers invited other students to join the unofficial photoshoot through a WhatsApp group chat called “YSE Class of 2026,” which included every member of the graduating class. Students who wished to opt out were given the option to.

According to Kaufman, the photo’s organizers “felt it was important to continue the tradition in a more subtle yet still powerful way” after they had elected not to wear the shirts during the

official photo.

“Through the drawing of melting ice, we wanted to show that environmentalism cannot be separated from the injustices currently facing immigrant communities and that YSE will continue our longstanding tradition of speaking out despite administrative pushback,” Kaufman said.

Marsh Hall is located at 360 Prospect St.

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