

OPINION



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Valley Publishing Co. Derby, CT

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GUEST COLUMNIST
ELIZABETH SHVARTS

Yale New Haven Hospital is betraying transgender Yalies

It was never just about bathrooms. It was never just about sports. From the State Department suspending its policy allowing transgender, intersex and nonbinary people to update the sex field of their passports to President Donald Trump's order stripping Medicaid and Medicare from hospitals that provide transgender healthcare, those in power are making it clear that they don't just want to take away transgender rights; they want to erase transgender people from the picture entirely. Want proof? Look no further than the Ivy League.

Earlier this month, Brown University signed a binding agreement requiring the school to adopt the federal government's binary definition of "male" and "female." In return, the Trump administration released \$50 million in frozen research funding earmarked for Brown.

Closer to home, Yale New Haven Hospital recently discontinued hormone-based gender-affirming care for patients under 19. While the hospital shares a name and an affiliation with Yale University, they are distinct corporations with separate sources of funding.

Not only are decisions like these legally and politically misguided — they will impact the day-to-day lives of transgender students like myself. Unless we act with courage and conviction, attacks on transgender students at Brown could become the reality at Yale, too.

The hospital cited federal executive orders, administrative actions and recent Supreme Court cases related to gender-affirming care for youth in a statement to the News. However, while the Supreme Court's ruling in United States v. Skrmetti may make it legal for states to ban gender-affirming care for minors, it does not change that allowing access to gender-affirming care is the moral and medically responsible thing to do. Plus, Connecticut has enacted no such restrictions.

Medical research demonstrating the efficacy of gender-affirming care for youth warrants an opinion piece of its own. In brief, multiple medical organizations, such as the American Medical Association and the American Academy of Pediatrics, endorse gender-affirming care — which typically includes hormone replacement therapy, puberty blockers and counseling — for transgender and non-binary youth. These interventions are widely acknowledged to result in more positive mental health outcomes, improved functioning and life satisfaction while significantly reducing depression and suicidality.

It took me more than two agonizing years to get a consultation and confirmed date for my top surgery through Yale Student Health. My heart breaks for the incoming first years who won't even be able to start the transition process, in an environment where it's most likely the first time they're safe to live as their true selves. Indeed, a number of transgender Yalies receive coverage from Yale Health and are referred to specialists at Yale New Haven Hospital.

Of course, the Yale environment isn't perfect when it comes to transgender inclusion. My own ability to receive necessary medical care — and ultimately the wholeness of my identity — was contingent on my ability to tell the story of my suffering in the most eloquent way. I often found myself getting misgendered or asked to rehash traumatic experiences related to my dysphoria in the process.

Likewise, when Yale-adjacent organizations like the Buckley Institute host debates on whether "the law should only recognize biological sex" or platform speakers such as Michael Knowles '12, a conservative pundit who called for the "eradication of "transgenderism," it's hard to focus on transgender joy when other students treat your humanity as an intellectual challenge rather

than an unwavering truth. Like fellow transgender Yalies and allies, I wasn't sure whether I felt more disgusted or disappointed by the normalization of dangerous eliminationist rhetoric around transgender people on Yale's campus.

It's said that transgender people are "canaries in a coal mine;" what the Trump administration is willing to do to dehumanize transgender people, it will do to other marginalized groups. Just in the last week, a cisgender 18-year old girl in Minnesota was subjected to sexual harassment as a waitress forced the girl to prove she was a woman to use the women's restroom. Back in March, a tall cis woman was fired from her job at Walmart after a customer accused her of being transgender. Enforcing gender norms and punishing those who fail to abide by these arbitrary, often misogynistic and racist rules, dehumanizes cis people as well as transgender people.

In a statement, the White House celebrated Yale New Haven Hospital's subservience. While the hospital and Yale University are distinct corporations, the former's concession to the Trump administration's draconian demands sets a dangerous precedent for our community. I urge Yale to fund gender-affirming care education and research at the School of Medicine and to unwaveringly support gender-inclusive spaces on campus.

Yale must recognize the truth: gender-affirming care saves lives, while transphobia harms all within and outside the community. It's time for Yale to act on truth — and keep the light shining through its unwavering protection of transgender youth.

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STAFF COLUMNISTS
TEDDY WITT & MILAN SINGH

Can American universities be fixed?

In a recent essay for Compact magazine, University of Chicago professor Clifford Ando argued that his institution is "simply choosing not to be a university." Its leaders treat it as a "tax-free technology incubator" and have borrowed enormous sums of money in pursuit of that goal. Now, according to Ando, Chicago is planning to consolidate departments, send students elsewhere for certain classes, and has even proposed using ChatGPT to teach several languages.

Ando traces these changes to increased university investment in risky applied science research, with the hope that a breakthrough would lead to windfall patents. Chicago, he points out, now spends the equivalent of 85 percent of undergraduate tuition to service its debt. But Ando also points the finger at a broader cultural shift. Americans, in his view, have come to think of education as "a private, personal good, to be measured solely in terms of increase in lifetime earnings." He decries this, righteously: education's true purpose is to "create people as lifetime learners, seekers, and questioners."

Ando's vision of American university life as a "shared project" of learning is a worthy one. But we think the changes at Chicago and at selective universities across the country can also be understood as a simple change in the priorities of university student bodies. After all, the decline of the "lifetime learner" model coincided almost inexorably with a shift in the makeup of those student bodies — a shift that was clearly beneficial but that nevertheless changed the way students relate to higher education.

Yale became the first private university in the country to institute need-blind admissions in 1966. In the decades since, student demographics have come to more closely match those of the nation as a whole.

Ivy League universities went from being havens for wealthy, WASP-y graduates of Northeast prep schools to institutions open to talented, ambitious students from all over the country. Students now reasonably believe that the purpose of their education is precisely that "increase in lifetime earnings." Becoming a lifelong "questioner" pales in comparison to delivering a financially secure future for one's family.

This fact — which is about the incentives that govern the college process, not amorphous cultural trends — suggests that the changes in American education cut to the core of the system. Students and universities engage in a college admissions market that is increasingly open and competitive. Like any marketplace, the preferences of the consumers will eventually influence the offerings.

Those preferences create an unfortunate dynamic. Applicants and their parents prioritize earnings and certain amenities largely unrelated to the core function of the college: fancy dorms, shiny new buildings, gourmet food. Administrators at elite universities hurry to respond in kind. Why was the University of Chicago in so much debt? Because it was competing for top applicants with better-funded Ivy League schools — alongside places like Duke University and Stanford University — who are already fighting tooth-and-nail amongst themselves. It's competition, not just culture, that threatens the kind of university Ando describes.

Is there a remedy? Taking university enrollment off the market, likely by way of an admissions lottery, would ease the pressure to field the nicest buildings and the coolest-sounding course offerings. It would reorient higher education towards lifelong education while not closing off the increase in earnings that

makes universities so valuable to so many different kinds of people.

Competition, though, allows student preferences to play a role, which surely is good for something. It allows for colleges to craft bespoke student bodies and for students to find their way to schools that seem like cultural fits. It allows low-income students to compare and shop around for financial aid offers. Altering the university system in such a basic way would risk undoing the prosperity that made our country's universities the best in the world, as well as the transformations that opened institutions like Yale to a much broader swathe of America.

Changing the incentive structure of American higher education is a difficult task, and changing the preferences of hundreds of thousands of applicants would be almost impossible. It might be that the research-university-as-close-knit-academic-community is simply a fish out of water, a relic of another age. All that is solid about college life melts into air, and all that is holy is profaned.

But we shouldn't be so pessimistic. Yale, in our experience, retains much of the spark that always follows a "shared project" of learning and seeking. We are lucky to do so, and we hope that such a spark exists across the country: at the thousands of community colleges and from the smallest liberal arts schools to the largest state universities. We must huddle around our little flame and shield it from the elements. Amid raging political and economic headwinds, that may be the best way to keep it.

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