NEWS

"The most difficult thing is the decision to act. The rest is merely tenacity."
AMELIA EARHART AMERICAN AVIATION PIONEER

At Battell Chapel lectern, Lewis returns to teaching after four years

BY ANAYAH ACCILIEN
STAFF REPORTER

Yale College Dean Pericles Lewis returned to the classroom for the first time in four years on Wednesday, when he opened this year's DeVane Lecture series in front of hundreds of audience members.

The dean spoke from behind the lectern at Battell Chapel, where some 250 people attended the first lecture of his fall course, "Purposes of College Education." Lewis said last academic year, one marked by student criticism in response to several of his office's budget-tightening decisions, that University President Maurie McInnis had asked him to teach the course this fall. As of Thursday evening, 83 students are officially enrolled in the course, though Wednesday's lecture — which, like all DeVane lectures, was open to the public — saw members of the New Haven community, alumni and retired faculty in the audience.

The class is a revamped version of an undergraduate lecture course Lewis has previously taught and examines the history and purpose of higher education with a focus on Yale. During Wednesday's lecture, he cited declining trust in higher education as a reason to discuss the course's subject matter now, referencing the Committee on Trust in Higher Education's report on trust in universities published this spring.

"I still think there is time for us to change our lives," Lewis told attendees, adding that he hoped they will find the lessons from his DeVane Lecture valuable, even "for those of you who are perhaps more at my end of the spectrum than student's end of the spectrum."

To begin his lecture, Lewis posed a series of questions encouraging members of the audience to converse for roughly five minutes with whomever was sitting beside them about reasons they did or did not choose to pursue higher education.

Next, Lewis outlined what he called the four central "internal, intrinsic purposes of education" that the course would cover in the first half of the semester, adding that the last few lectures will cover the social context of higher education. He presented "Character" as the first topic of discussion, opening with a quote from Marcel Proust's In Search of Lost Time, a novel that touches on themes of youth and growth.

"The notion here is that all mistakes you make in your youth shape you and turn you into who you are," Lewis noted. "So what I hear is that more and more high school students are curating their identity as it's represented by social media."

Victoria Mandes, a former Yale employee who worked for 20 years at the Yale School of Medicine, told the News she had been anticipating the lecture series.

"We and the larger community must understand what educational opportunities Yale provides to students, and through that understanding, what the new leaders of tomorrow are learning and what they will hopefully contribute to society," Mandes told the News.

Arianna Pereira '30, who is registered for the class, said she was motivated to take courses that would frame her perspective on why she was at Yale as a first-generation student.

Pereira said although Lewis' budget cuts may have garnered unpopularity among students, she believed that the lecture series is important to attend since "the course is not just based on his opinion, but it's based on ancient philosophers as well."

After the lecture, Lewis said he was excited to welcome members of the community to engage with his course.

"It's really fun to be back teaching in the classroom," he said. "But it's a little intimidating to be teaching in a chapel because it all feels much more serious."

Lewis entered the final year of his first five-year term as Yale College dean this fall.

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GARRETT CURTIS / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER
Yale College Dean Pericles Lewis ended his four-year hiatus from teaching on Wednesday at the first lecture of his fall semester course "Purposes of College Education." In the audience sat students, alumni, New Haven residents and retired faculty.

First years attend panel on protests and Yale's place in democracy

BY ANAYAH ACCILIEN
STAFF REPORTER

For the first time, first-year students were mandated to attend an orientation event that asked them to consider the interplay between higher education and democracy.

The conversation — led by Yale College Dean Pericles Lewis and History professor Beverly Gage '94 — took place in two sessions on Tuesday afternoon. The conversations, which centered on the relationship between higher education and American democracy, touched on topics including campus protests and free speech — which were also discussed at a teach-in marketed as an alternative to the panels themselves.

"I would say the first obligation to the university is to play the role that they ought to play in the democratic society, which is as a protected space for the production, dissemination, and creation that you can't do in other places," Gage said.

In the sessions — which each hosted students from seven residential colleges — Gage encouraged students to consider how universities can respond to federal pressure while maintaining academic freedom and institutional independence.

Hours before the first session began, over 300 alumni, students, professors and local union members gathered on Cross Campus in a teach-in, headlined "Democratize Yale," to demand the protection of student free speech and assembly, the democratization of the University board of trustees, the codification of academic freedom and that Yale not settle in negotiations with the Trump administration.

Yale College Council President Alex William Chen '28 and Vice President Michelle Jimenez '28 wrote in a Monday email to the student body promoting the event that the teach-in was intended to serve as "alternative programming" to the discussions hosted by Lewis and Gage.

"Yale's mandatory panel comes as the University has increasingly betrayed the democratic values it claims to cherish," Chen and Jimenez wrote. "Yale is cracking down on student free speech and assembly, negotiating with the DOJ over a baseless admissions investigation, and refusing to codify academic freedom protections for faculty, all under the governance of an undemocratic, unaccountable Board of Trustees."

The Tuesday panels, which took place in Woolsey Hall, followed a question-and-answer format in which Lewis interviewed Gage. The pair also responded to audience questions, which students could submit by scanning a QR code.

During the first session, Gage, who co-chaired Yale's Committee on Trust in Higher Education, spoke on some of the central issues discussed in that committee's widely-praised April report on declining trust in universities.

She said that the erosion of confidence in institutions of higher education is part of a trend that reflects broader questions about American society and its institutions.

In the second conversation, Gage said that academic freedom should be distinguished from broader free speech protections, explaining that the former primarily concerns professors' ability to pursue their areas of study and research and to determine what they teach.

Both sessions' conversations also touched on student protests and other forms of political expression on campus, addressing why universities may place restrictions on protests and the difference between academic expression and other forms of expression.

Lewis said during the later session that protest regulations were necessary to "ensure the ability of each student to get an education, the ability to back them, and to teach." He noted Yale has "rules regarding the time and place and manner, not content related rules," and that protesters can protest an issue from both sides.

Maor Baker '30, who attended the second event, said he was surprised that the conversation did not focus directly on democracy. Instead, he said, the conversation centered more on how Yale has changed over time, as well as Yale's approach to issues including protest and political violence.

Baker said he agreed with Lewis' comments on the "time, place and manner" of protests, saying he would not want demonstrations to interfere with students' ability to learn. He also said he appreciated Gage's emphasis on the importance of students having a "love for America," though he said he wished she had emphasized that point more clearly during the discussion.

Gage traversed the country over the course of writing her book "This Land Is Your Land: A Road Trip Through U.S. History," which was published in April.

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ANAYAH ACCILIEN / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER
On Tuesday afternoon, new students attended a mandatory conversation regarding the role of a university in a democratic society, led by former Committee on Trust in Higher Education co-chair Beverly Gage '94 and Yale College Dean Pericles Lewis.