SCI-TECH

"Everybody stepped up their game after me."
COCO GAUFF AMERICAN TENNIS PLAYER

School of Public Health dean talks federal grant cuts in annual speech

BY ANYA GEIST
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MARTIN PERALTA / HEAD PHOTOGRAPHY EDITOR
Megan Ranney, the school's dean, addressed AI, funding cuts and new faculty, as well as student collaborations with local non-profits and community centers, in this year's State of the School address.

In the Yale School of Public Health's annual State of the School address on Wednesday afternoon, dean Megan Ranney said philanthropic funding has become increasingly important in the wake of federal funding cuts.

Ranney also discussed faculty engagement, student enrollment and community engagement. She said that although YSPH has received about 10 percent fewer grant dollars this year compared to last year, funding from Yale donors has helped faculty whose grants were cancelled to "at least temporarily weather the storm."

"Despite the current headwinds, we have had 58 new grants this year alone. Importantly, many of these new grants represent a diversification in grant revenue," Ranney said. "Our foundation funding, which is critically important during this era of uncertain federal support, is growing as well."

Ranney highlighted that YSPH has hired 13 new faculty and 42 new postdocs, lecturers and fellows in the past year, and that the Yale Institute of Global Health named a new director, Ingrid Katz, in the spring.

The dean also shared that YSPH consistently educates around 550 Master of Public Health students, 150 Master of Science in Public Health students, and 100 PhD students, she said, meeting its enrollment goals. She said the school is always looking to make sure its classes serve students' needs in changing environments.

"Starting this summer, we've also begun a comprehensive review of our MPH program," Ranney added. "I'm hearing from students, alumni and employers that with the rise of AI and with the changing public health landscape, our institution has both a chance, but also, I'd say, an obligation to lead in articulating the design principles for a 21st century MPH."

Joseph Riggio SPH '28 studies mental health and the preliminary correlations between AI companion bots and psychosis.

The school's AI endeavors have included new classes about hands-on communication, leadership in divided times and the ethics of AI.

"It's a bit sensational, but recent suicides that have ended up in the news that have been claimed to be related to artificial intelligence. It's a topic on my mind and on a lot of other people's minds," Riggio told the News.

Regarding the new AI taskforce, he added, "I was sort of skeptical about the inclusion of AI. I hope students can participate on that task force and advocate a bit more about how professors and faculty use it in research."

Ranney's speech was followed by short comments from community members Steve Werlin, Audrey Huang and Edward Brown III. Werlin, the executive director of the Downtown Evening Soup Kitchen, described the role that YSPH students have played in the organization.

"The public health students we work with come from a different perspective," Werlin said to the crowd. "So, whereas those social work students really are making those one-on-one connections, the public health students are coming into our space to answer big questions, questions that are related to research, that are related to systemic change, that are related to moving the ball forward and creating new program models that can really change lives, not in an immediate sense, but down the road."

Ranney also described the role that AI is playing at YSPH. PopHIVE, YSPH's public health data collection site, launched an AI connector with Anthropic over the summer.

According to the PopHIVE website, the connector helps researchers, policymakers and other data users use and understand PopHIVE data, by linking the data to large language models and AI agents. Ranney said that the connector has been used 2.8 million times since its release.

As YSPH incorporates AI into PopHIVE, it is also assembling an AI taskforce to assess what place artificial intelligence has in the school.

"We're holding symposia on both the technical and ethical sides of this work, thinking about the landscape's design, if you will," Ranney said.

Ranney also touched on plans to build a new YSPH building, which were announced in spring 2025. Construction is supposed to begin in June 2027 and finish five years later, she said. She showed the audience artist renderings of the new building on College Street.

The new YSPH building will be located at 47 College Street.

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Yale AI club kicks off year with demonstration of SpaceXAI's Grok Bot

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MELISSA ADAMANTIDI / CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER
At Wednesday's event, board members of the Yale AI Association demonstrated Grok Bot, the AI agent product of SpaceXAI, and laid out project teams, a fall fellowship and a building competition.

The Yale AI Association held its kickoff event Wednesday evening at the Tsai Center for Innovative Thinking at Yale, co-hosted with SpaceXAI.

YaleAI members walked through plans for the year, including project teams, a fellowship for students learning fundamental AI concepts, trips to AI labs and a building competition. The club also conducted a demonstration using Grok Bot, SpaceXAI's AI agent product.

David Antwi '28, YaleAI's project director, framed the year as one ripe with opportunity for Yale's student builders.

"It's the best time to build, if you're interested in AI, if you want to be a founder, and that's what we want to help bring to Yale," Antwi said. "We feel like Yale was behind in the AI race."

YaleAI has partnered with SpaceXAI, one of a growing list of the club's industry partners, according to board members. At the meeting, members said that AI agents of the company's Grok Bot can keep working even when the user's laptop is closed.

One board member showed a routine he had set up where an agent checks Canvas each morning at 8 a.m., downloads new files and assignments and organizes them into a project.

"SpaceXAI is very interested in partnering with existing student clubs in order to foster a unique campus environment in which everyone is building," said Filippo Fonseca '28, head of development. "So, they are being very generous with students."

Board members said the group prioritizes in-person programming. Last spring, members traveled to Boston, where they visited Massachusetts Institute of Technology facilities and held a mixer with a Harvard machine learning group. The group also hosted an AI showcase that brought together research labs from across departments, through which some students obtained research positions.

"Our main way of operating is through in-person events. We love that. We feel like in the age of AI, it's the most important thing to have a connection with each other, and at the same time, foster relationships," Fonseca said. "And so, we want to take trips, for example, and we will, we have them planned, to top frontier labs, to institutions that do research in AI."

YaleAI leaders told attendees who filled Tsai CITY's ground floor that the group is meant to be more than a mailing list, and that YaleAI membership requires no application.

The group aims to be accessible to all students, regardless of their technical background or major, leaders said. Educational workshops are directed at students learning to use AI tools, while project teams are for students who want to build, with the goal of pairing each team with an industry or institutional partner.

"I think what differentiates Yale AI from the other AI-oriented clubs on campus is that ours is very technical focused," co-president Addison Shea '29 said. "And so if you want to learn how to apply AI or build using AI, this is really the place to be."

The first event of the semester will be dinner with Pareto VC, an early-stage venture capital firm, on Sept. 15. Board members also announced a competition to build a web application useful to Yale students, due Friday at midnight, with submissions requiring a one- to two-minute demo video. Three winners will receive three free months of Cursor, an AI coding assistant.

The fall fellowship will place participants in cohorts to learn fundamental AI concepts and applications, following an educational program the group ran last fall.

Shea said that Demo Day, where project teams present their work, was the event she expects members to anticipate most.

"I think Demo Day will be really enticing both for the people on the project teams to showcase the work that they've done all term, and then, hopefully, all year," Shea said. "But then also for the members who are interested in seeing what can be done using the tools, I think it can be very exciting."

The Yale AI Association was founded in 2022.

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