

“Food is our common ground, a universal experience.”
JAMES BEARD, CHEF

Candlelight vigil honors victims of political violence

BY SOPHIA STONE & BAALA SHAKYA
STAFF REPORTERS

Students gathered on Cross Campus Friday evening for a candlelight vigil in honor of victims of political violence.

The vigil, which was announced in an email that circulated that morning, began just after 8 p.m., as roughly a dozen students stood in silence around a heart-shaped arrangement of candles. Over the next hour, the circle grew, and attendees stepped forward to place candles. By 9 p.m., about 50 students had participated in the vigil.

After conservative activist Charlie Kirk was shot and killed Wednesday while speaking at a university in Utah, a coalition of students unaffiliated with specific groups organized a vigil to honor “all those who have fallen victim to political violence in recent times,” an email invitation from William Barbee ’26 read.

“We actually ended up choosing not to have it officially sponsored by any organization at Yale, in the spirit of both bipartisanship and nonpartisanship,” Kylyn Smith ’26, an organizer of the event, said. “We thought that by having the vigil not affiliated, we’d be able to open the door for a more thoughtful and cohesive time of prayer and reflection for our students of all political ideologies.”

Utah Gov. Spencer Cox called Kirk’s killing a “political assassination,” and news alerts and graphic videos of the incident spread quickly across social media Wednesday. The motives of Kirk’s suspected killer, 22-year-old Tyler Robinson of Utah, are still obscure, though Robinson engraved his bullet casings with phrases from video game slang and the words “hey fascist! CATCH!”

The invitation for the vigil circulated Friday morning through political and religious networks, including Buckley Program fellows, Yale Political Union leaders, Yale College Republicans and Democrats. Barbee said the outreach was directed towards “politically minded or politically involved” students.

Barbee said he wanted to help lead the event after hearing from friends and peers who wanted a designated space to grieve. Smith said she began considering the vigil after the David Network, a conservative-leaning student organization, asked her whether Yale students were planning a remembrance.

Smith and Barbee worked with friends connected to political and religious groups across campus to put the event together. The David Network provided some of the candles, and others were borrowed from the Yale Chaplain’s Office. Still, Smith emphasized that organizers intentionally chose not to affiliate

the vigil with any student group, which she described as crucial for drawing students from across the political spectrum.

Smith admitted she worried before the event that it could become contentious but said her fears faded once the vigil began.

“At the vigil, I was reminded of how truly respectful and open to civil discourse the students at Yale are,” she said. “We were not met with any contention. We were met with respect, even from bystanders who asked what the vigil was for.”

Barbee similarly stressed that the vigil was not a celebration of Kirk, pointing toward other instances of political violence that have occurred recently in the United States.

In June, an individual shot and killed Minnesota House of Representatives Speaker Emerita Melissa Hortman and her husband, and also shot Minnesota State Sen. John Hoffman and his wife. President Donald Trump survived two failed assassination attempts in 2024, one in July at a Pennsylvania campaign rally and another in September in Florida.

“This is obviously an immediate reaction to what happened on Wednesday with Charlie Kirk, but the vigil itself is not at all related or tied to celebrating him or his life,” Barbee said. “It’s more so a moment for the Yale community to come



BAALA SHAKYA / PHOTOGRAPHY EDITOR

Nearly 50 gathered on Cross Campus following the assassination of Charlie Kirk and other high-profile attacks.

together at a time when in the last year, we’ve seen the president have attempted assassinations against him on two separate occasions and lawmakers in states like Minnesota be targeted and killed for bills that they supported.”

Students who attended said the silence of the evening was powerful.

Abhinay Lingareddy ’26 noted the importance of being able to pray and grieve together “no matter how evil you think someone is or how great you think someone is.”

“There is no greater expression of empathy or affirmation of our common humanity. During the vigil, not many words were said but multitudes were conveyed in the silence,” Lingareddy said.

Ethan Powell ’27 echoed the sentiment.

“Political violence, no matter what your viewpoint is, is never acceptable and should never be celebrated,” Powell said. “I just wanted to be with other people.”

Barbee said the event served its purpose and that the vigil had been “pretty positively” received.

Under Trump’s orders, the flag on the New Haven green was flown at half-mast until Sunday evening in honor of Kirk.

Contact **SOPHIA STONE** at sophia.stone@yale.edu and **BAALA SHAKYA** at baala.shakya@yale.edu.

Students welcome first two Filipino language courses

BY JAEHA JANG & ABDEL ABDU
STAFF REPORTER & CONTRIBUTING REPORTER

Yale is offering its first Filipino language courses — “Elementary Filipino I” and “Intermediate Filipino I” — this fall.

The two courses arrive after years of student advocacy spearheaded by Tagalog@Yale, an initiative within Yale’s Filipino student group Kasama. Five enrolled students told the News that the courses have already deepened their sense of Filipino identity, and they expressed hope that additional classes will be offered in the future.

“It has been very fulfilling to finally take on detailed study of a

language I have grown up hearing my family speak but never got to fully learn,” Janina Gbenoba ’27, a student in the Level 1 course “Elementary Filipino I,” wrote in an email to the News.

The push for Filipino language courses included a petition that garnered over 380 signatures, an open letter to the University administration joined by the Yale College Council Senate and meetings with the Center for Language Studies and the Council on Southeast Asia Studies.

Other students echoed Gbenoba’s enthusiasm for learning the language, which has its roots in Tagalog — one of over 180 languages spoken in the Philippines and the fourth

most-spoken language at homes in the United States, according to Census Bureau data from 2017 to 2021.

The Filipino program is headed by the newly hired lector Louward Allen Zubiri, a linguist whose specialization includes the loss and revitalization of endangered languages across generations.

Celene Bennett ’26, one of 18 students in the L1 course, wrote in an email to the News that she feels proud to come to class every morning to learn her familial language, especially after working with Kasama to advocate for the language courses during her sophomore and junior years.

According to Bennett, while she has not previously taken a Monday-through-Friday class or an introductory language course, her Filipino class has been “a beautiful reminder of how meaningful a classroom can be.” After class, she often calls her grandparents, her aunt, her sister or her best friend from home.

“I try my hardest to take what I learn in the classroom and share it with the other Filipinos in my life,” Bennett wrote.

Ava Estacio-Touhey ’26, who is in the L1 course, agreed that taking the course helps her connect with her heritage.

As a former president of Kasama, she said she is also taking the language to support the advocacy that resulted in the offering of the courses.

Marissa Halagao ’27, one of five students in the Level 3 course “Intermediate Filipino I,” wrote in an email to the News that the “sheer immersion and encouragement that a structured language class provides” are helping her improve her skills and confidence in speaking Filipino.

Patricia Joseph ’26, who is in the L3 course, said that after not having a tight-knit Filipino community growing up, the course has allowed her to connect with the Filipino language and culture and grow closer to other Filipino students at Yale.

“The Filipino community at Yale is composed of a lot of diaspora but also native Filipinos, and it’s been fun trying to interact with people who are still Filipino but might be from the motherland and trying to reconnect with them by speaking in Tagalog,” she said.

Bennett added that Zubiri, the professor who teaches both courses, is a “brilliant and dedicated” presence in her class.

Zubiri, affectionately known to students as Kuya — meaning elder brother — Louward, said his background at the University of Hawaii, the largest Filipino-serving institution in the United States, and at the University of Victoria in British Columbia, where he started a Filipino program “from scratch,” will assist him in establishing Yale’s Filipino program.

“I’m very grateful for the opportunity to know that I have this position,” Zubiri said. “At the same time, I also want to acknowledge years of advocacy by the different student groups and the community here on the East Coast in trying to push for more opportunities to learn their heritage language and to have more representation in higher education.”

According to Halagao, Zubiri’s background in linguistics allows him to give in-depth explanations of the language.

Students suggested that the two new language classes should mark only a first step for Filipino courses at Yale.

“Being in the class with other Kasama members has also made us think critically about why we had to advocate for the language class in the first place and broadens our desire for more Filipino studies in general, maybe beyond language,” Joseph said.

Halagao wrote that she hopes to see more representation of Filipino identity across the curriculum, including classes on Filipino culture, arts, literature, history, decolonization and other Filipino languages.

English and Filipino are the official languages of the Philippines.

Contact **JAEHA JANG** at jaeha.jang@yale.edu and **ABDEL ABDU** at abdel.abdu@yale.edu.



BAALA SHAKYA / PHOTOGRAPHY EDITOR

After over a year of student advocacy, Yale started offering two courses for the Filipino language this fall.

Yale launches student fellowship aimed at open dialogue

BY JOLYNDA WANG
CONTRIBUTING REPORTER

On Yale has launched its new Cultivating Conversation Fellowship — a semester-long series of workshops aimed to help students engage with different perspectives across political lines, according to Kimberly Goff-Crews, vice president for university life.

The inaugural cohort of roughly 120 students gathered for the first time on Tuesday. The kickoff meeting consisted of speeches from Yale administrators, including Goff-Crews, and “dialogue sessions,” in which the groups of students discussed “conversation norms” to guide discourse for the rest of the program.

Annie Rappeport, Yale’s associate director of community dialogue, who led one of the dialogue sessions, said that the program hopes to foster dialogue between students in a moment of divisive politics.

“Conversation is one of the few tools we still have to address today’s polarization,” Rappeport said. “In an era where divisions can

feel intractable, dialogue offers the possibility of compromise, mutual understanding and the preservation of common ground.”

Cultivating free speech is a key issue for the University this year. At a first-year opening assembly in August, both Yale College Dean Pericles Lewis and University President Maurie McInnis advised first years to engage with challenging viewpoints.

The beginning of the fellowship also coincides with the 50th anniversary of the Woodward Report, which established Yale’s free speech guidelines in 1975. The University has advertised the anniversary on its social media accounts.

Recently, Yale jumped up 97 spots in a prominent ranking of the state of free speech on college campuses.

The new fellowship is part of the broader Cultivating Conversation initiative first launched in August 2024 by Belonging at Yale, a five-year diversity initiative that later concluded in June 2025. As part of the initiative, Yale hosted various lectures and events throughout the 2024-2025 academic year designed to equip students with communication tools.

Grayson Hoy GRD ’28, a third-year graduate student in the fellowship, cited his participation in and enjoyment of last year’s programming as reasons for applying to the fellowship this year.

“As the world seems to feel more and more divisive, it’s definitely important to be able to see someone’s humanity,” Hoy said. “That’s the first step in being able to fully understand their perspectives.”

Other students said they hope the fellowship will give them a chance to engage with a diverse set of political opinions.

Maya Viswanathan ’28, another student fellow, said that the fellowship is providing her with a unique opportunity to have discussions with people who have different perspectives.

“That’s something that I’ve always been interested in,” she said. “But I didn’t always feel like what the best space to be able to do that would be.”

Arrow Zhang ’26 said she was looking forward to connecting with people from many different backgrounds.

“In the various instances where I was able to connect with people,



ELLIE PARK / SENIOR PHOTOGRAPHER

On Tuesday, the University welcomed its first Cultivating Conversation fellows.

I felt so happy,” she said. “I would like to hone this sort of skill, but in a more official format where there is someone moderating or everyone is here for the purpose of having these sorts of conversations.”

During a dialogue session, students were asked to identify a feature of an unproductive or unkind conversation they previously endured.

Carla Melaco LAW ’27 answered that she’s found people often conform to the majority opinion, rather than present a controversial take.

“Sometimes in conversations, there’s this kind of groupthink aspect to it where everyone converges on the same point, and then, people don’t want to disagree,” she said. “I think that’s problematic.”

The Cultivating Conversation fellows will next meet for their first workshop on Sept. 23.

Contact **JOLYNDA WANG** at jolynda.wang@yale.edu.