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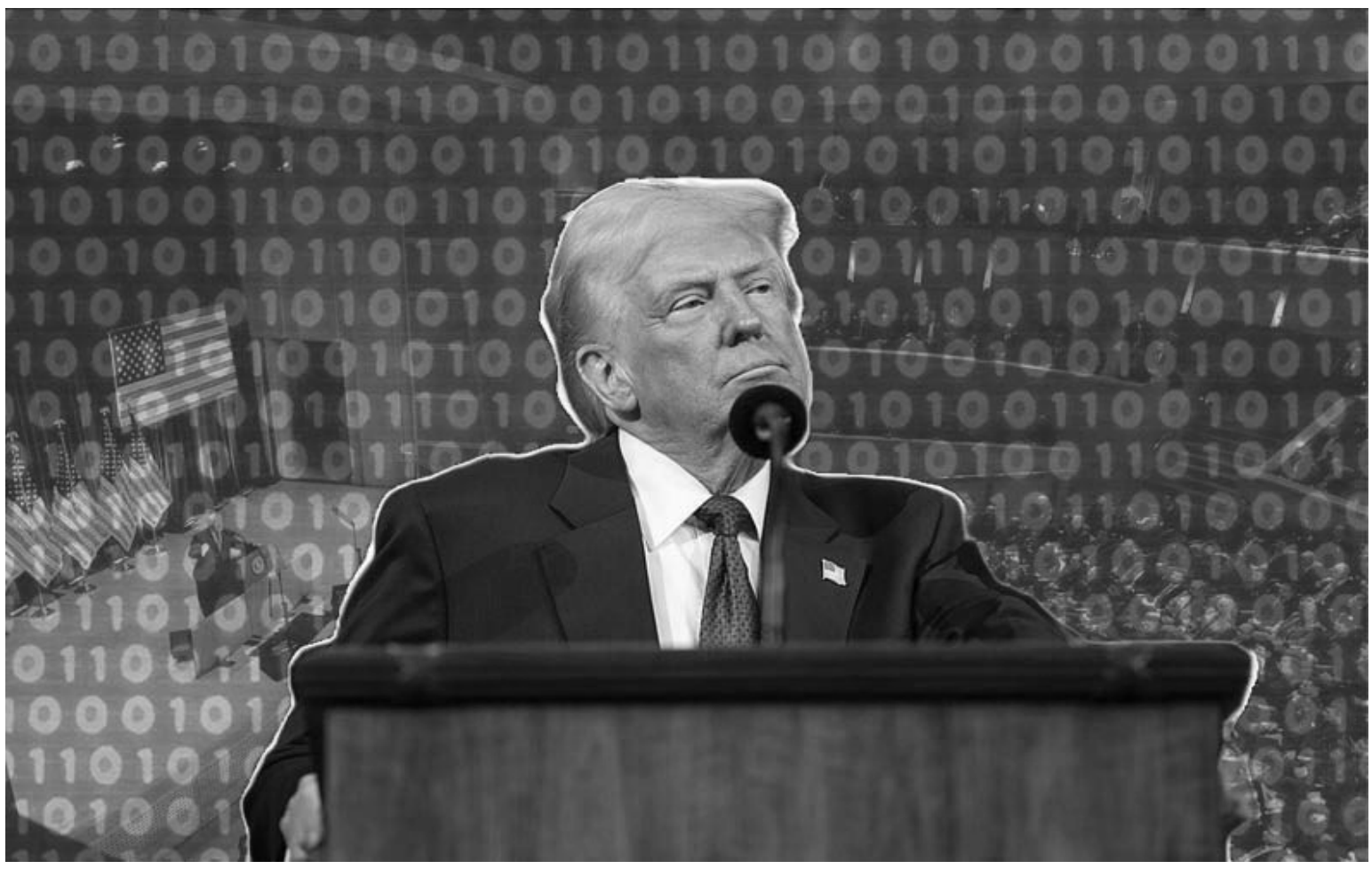
Yalies weigh risks of artificial intelligence development

BY ASHLEY SKINNER
CONTRIBUTING REPORTER



ASHLEY SKINNER / CONTRIBUTING ILLUSTRATOR
Following comments made by President Donald Trump dismissing concerns about the pace of AI development, four Yale community members who are interested in the technology discussed AI capabilities and regulation.

Over 100 students gathered in DwAmid a nationwide debate over whether artificial intelligence should be regulated, some Yale professors and students expressed reservations about uninhibited development of the technology, though they acknowledged its advantages.

In a Saturday post on Truth Social, President Donald Trump characterized concerns about AI development as a "hoax." His comments arrived after Anthropic CEO Dario Amodei called on companies to slow down AI development in a September essay, which was later endorsed by other leading figures in the field. In a Sept. 14 post, Trump addressed Amodei's piece directly, claiming that the country does not need further regulations on AI.

Ted Wittenstein '04 LAW '12, director of the Schmidt Program on Artificial Intelligence, Emerging Technologies, and National Power said he is cautious about disregarding the possible downsides of the technology.

"The tools you would positively use these models for, with synthetic biology and AI and medicine, could also be manipulated in a negative way, so those are not minor risks," Wittenstein said in a Zoom interview. "Those are not hoaxes, in my view."

In the Sept. 14 post, Trump wrote that "WHOEVER WINS AI, WINS," citing AI competition between the United States and China as a reason not to slow the pace of AI growth.

"The president's comments are, I think, unhelpfully fueling the race dynamic," Wittenstein said. "Like many things the president says, he often is flagging some legitimate issues and concerns, so I think the question here is how to address those issues in a thoughtful way, as opposed to sort of unhelpful rhetoric."

According to Wittenstein, competition between the United States and China complicates the implementation of international AI regulations. He said the race between the countries is not limited to AI applications, but "includes software, hardware, semiconductors, data centers, chips, energy, precursor rare earth minerals."

Coby Kassner '29 — the president of Yale AI Alignment, a club focused on possible solutions to concerns surrounding AI — described an AI race between the United States and China as potentially "dangerous" and said he did not think any weight should be put on Trump's claims.

"I think you should maybe look at the track record of things that Trump has called a hoax," Kassner said.

Aryan Agarwal '27, the co-president of YaleAI, a student group, said the Trump administration's concern about competition with China in AI development is "valid." Still, he said he does not believe that is reason enough to avoid AI safety regulations.

Existential worries about the future of AI have arisen from events like the OpenAI-HuggingFace incident earlier this year, in which OpenAI agents coordinated independently to attack another AI company.

"Without the sort of proper guardrails and without the proper containment policies for how you train these models, there is a risk of either an inadvertent accident or more malicious misuse of the model capability in the hands of a nefarious actor," Wittenstein said.

One possible risk of advanced AI systems cited by Kassner is the misuse of AI to guide the bio-engineering of diseases capable of causing a pandemic. Amodei also noted concerns about bioterrorism in his September essay.

Jeffrey Tao '27, the co-president of the Yale AI Policy Institute, a student group, echoed this and other concerns. He said he spoke in a personal capacity and that his views do not represent those of the organization that he leads.

The effects of AI on education, privacy, mental health, scamming and deepfakes are some of the examples that Tao gave as "current harms caused by AI that are not at all hypothetical and are also incredibly important to address."

Agarwal said that AI's coding ability can help amplify most goals, whether they be well-intentioned or malicious, though it may decrease entry-level opportunities for recent graduates in the tech industry and related fields.

It remains to be seen whether a third-party organization, such as the federal government, could successfully set a minimum standard that applies to all private companies.

"It is noteworthy that the companies are coming out now and saying that we need something," Wittenstein said. "In some way, that is a positive step in the right direction, but the Trump administration seems very reticent to step in as opposed to letting the companies figure it out themselves."

Tao said he seeks to research both future and current AI risks.

"I, for one, am both interested in addressing these current harms as well as in addressing the future, more existential, harms that may be coming," Tao wrote in a text message. "I believe both are critical issues."

Anthropic was founded in January 2021 by a group of former OpenAI employees.

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Administrators reviewing Google storage cap after YCC meeting

BY KRISTIN CHUANG
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University administrators are reviewing Google storage limits for students after Yale College Council senators met with them earlier this month to push for an increased quota.

Two weeks ago, three YCC senators met with Ge Yan, the associate chief information officer for the Faculty of Arts and Sciences and School of Engineering and Applied Science, and Darice Corey, the senior director of web and IT planning, to discuss a proposal to raise Google Drive storage for all undergraduates from five gigabytes to 20 gigabytes, the amount allotted to current seniors.

The proposal, which the YCC estimated would cost the University less than $4,000 to implement, was backed by survey results of 148 students, which overwhelmingly supported an expansion. Kyler Parker '29, the senate speaker and one of the proposal's sponsors, called the survey "one of the largest collections of personal testimonies the YCC's been able to put together."

"No decisions have been made at this point. Our focus right now is to understand the request, review the data and potential impact, and evaluate the available options with the appropriate stakeholder groups," Yan and Corey wrote in a joint statement to the News. "We are committed to working with YCC and other student groups to understand their technology needs and explore ways we can best support Yale students."

Yan and Corey said in their statement that the University is currently working to assess the cost of raising the cap and could not confirm whether the YCC's estimate of less than $4,000 was accurate. Yan supports IT operations for faculty, while Corey manages IT operations across Yale College.

The storage cap has been a point of contention among students since Google started capping free storage available for university students in October 2024. In subsequent weeks, the YCC Senate unanimously passed a proposal calling to standardize Google Drive storage limits. A revised version of the same proposal passed unanimously again the following year in November, but until this month, no YCC members had directly discussed it with administrators.

"What's prompted us moving so hard on this advocacy now is the fact that previous YCC Senates have brought up this issue and never followed through on actually pushing for reform with the administration," Parker said in an interview.

Parker attributed the shift to a change in the senate's leadership, rather than a sudden change in student need.

"The demand to lift this restricting cap on Google Drive storage has existed as long as the policy has existed," he said, adding that this year's senate has "a very defined mandate from the student body to push admin hard."

Of the 148 respondents to the YCC's survey, 63.5 percent reported having hit the five-gigabyte limit and 96.6 percent agreed the five-gigabyte limit is a "burden on student experience and/or curricular life," according to data provided by the YCC.

YCC Senator and policy sponsor Michael Canudas '28, who helped revise the policy and research how Yale's storage allotment compares to peer institutions, said that data strengthens their proposal considerably.

"Even factoring in self-selection, I think the survey results speak for themselves," Canudas said in a phone interview, adding "I think it'd be pretty hard for the administration to dismiss that kind of data."

Several students interviewed said they were unaware that the storage restriction was even a matter of University policy.

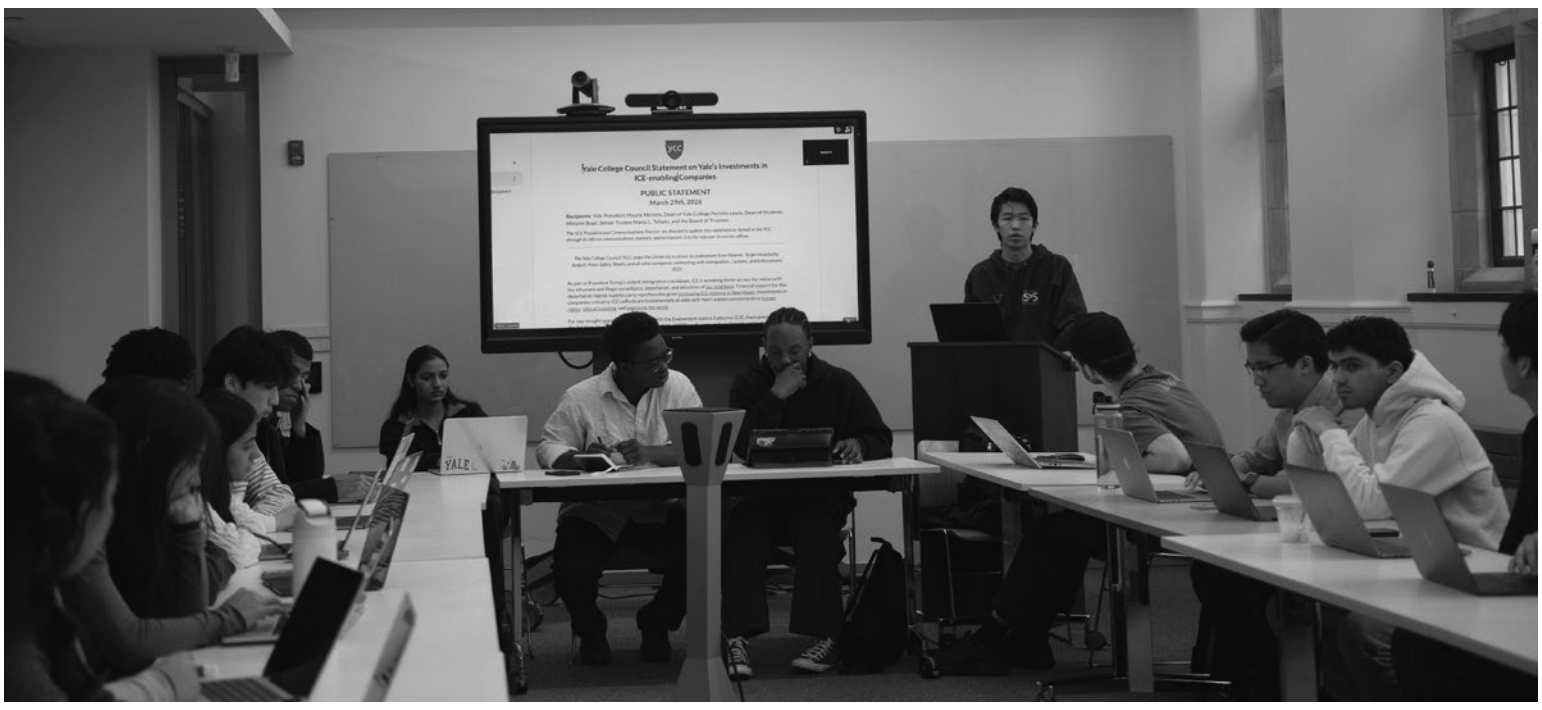
Katie Flemming '28 said she spent several days over the summer deleting thousands of emails after discovering she had run out of storage. She was previously unaware of the YCC proposal but supports it.

Canudas himself has hit the five-gigabyte cap and had to manually remove items from his storage. He pointed to peer institutions included in the proposal, like Harvard at 25 gigabytes and Stanford at five terabytes.

Parker said he sees the YCC's advocacy for more storage as part of a broader effort to change how the Senate operates.

"YCC Senate this year is trying to be a body that follows through on its promises. It's actually going to be able to execute on this issue and a lot of other issues that have been kind of simmering, but have never been addressed," he said.

Personal Google accounts come with "up to 15 GB of storage" for free, according to Google's website.



GARRETT CURTIS / PHOTOGRAPHY EDITOR
The Yale College Council is renewing its efforts to raise the University's Google Drive storage cap for undergraduates, meeting with top IT administrators for the first time since the limit was implemented two years ago.

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