NEWS

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WE DIDN'T START THE FIRE BILLY JOEL

Some Yale students make a quick buck as research study subjects

BY SASHA CABRAL
STAFF REPORTER

When he was a first year, Oscar Solberg '28 became a lab rat for cash.

Research study opportunities, which are plastered around campus on bulletin boards and advertised on email lists, offer Yalies the chance to become study subjects and get paid. Compensation for subject work can vary from as low as $16.50 to as high as $2,000, according to flyers. Solberg learned he could make money by participating in studies that placed electroencephalogram — or EEG — caps on his head.

"I remember she put the cap on me, and she was calibrating the machine," Solberg said of the lab assistant he worked for. "She was like, 'You really have to think less right now,' which is really trippy because she's reading my brainwaves. That was kind of wild."



ETHAN SULLIVAN / CONTRUBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER
Studies facilitated at Yale are offering student volunteers compensation up to thousands of dollars to be research subjects. Several Yale students said they have enjoyed the studies in which they have participated.

He said he often participated in studies that compensated well — around $90 each — and that some might even involve follow-up sessions. Studies are often conducted by the Yale Stress Center and the Wu Tsai Institute, which studies human cognition.

Esmeralda Alejo '25, a postgraduate associate in the Psychology Department who said she conducts research on individual identity and personal beliefs, wrote in a statement that compensation for studies can encourage "participant recruitment and retention."

She noted that providing compensation to participants can "improve the quality of the data collected."

"Burden can be affected by things such as the length of your study, the amount of effort it requires, and the amount of stress it induces, though this is not an exhaustive list," Alejo wrote. "The greater the burden your study places on participants, the more they should be compensated."

Cameron Davis '28 began participating in research studies after accompanying her first-year suitemate to one.

Now, Davis said she is often a subject in psychology studies, which range from testing video game stimuli to building a drink brand on the spot. She said she gets satisfaction from helping researchers complete their goals.

"They're all over," Davis said. "Just take time to read them and see if it's something that you're interested in, and make sure you have the actual time commitment to do these and follow through them, because they're actual researchers who are trying to get data for an important project that they're working on."

When asked to give advice for students who might be interested in starting their journey as a research subject, Solberg noted the ease of being and making money as a participant.

"I mean I'd say just do them," Solberg said. "They're not hard. They're not stressful. Psych studies are not as scary as they used to be, so nothing's gonna happen. You know, just do it."

The Yale Stress Center was founded in 2007.

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Professors forecast midterm blue wave, but diverge on extent of gains

BY SHENHAO DENG
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With just over a month remaining before the closely watched congressional midterms, some Yale professors said Democrats have an edge heading into November's elections — though opinions differ on how far recent polling gains will go at the ballot boxes.

President Donald Trump's approval rating is at a historic low, and recent polling lists affordability among voters' top concerns heading into the fall. According to trends in American politics, the party in power — Republicans, in this case — rarely wins elections during a midterm year, and polling for seats in both the House and Senate have been shifting to favor Democrats' chances. Still, professors said it is difficult to forecast results.

"Making predictions with Trump is risky," political science professor Adam Meirowitz wrote in an email. "Economic indicators make me think larger than normal midterm losses for the President's party are likely."

Since 1934, the party of the president has lost seats in nearly every midterm election — and Yale faculty say this year is unlikely to break that pattern.

"I'm going to go with conventional wisdom that the Minority party will pick up some seats in the Senate and House," Meirowitz wrote. "Historically, this happens, especially when the economy is not doing wonderful."

The consumer price index, which measures price changes over time, rose 3.4 percent between last month and August 2025, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

In an email, political science professor Joshua Kalla '14 pointed the News to pollster VoteHub, which as of Tuesday gives Democrats an 86 percent chance of winning the House of Representatives and a 59 percent chance of winning the Senate.

"These are probabilities, not guarantees," Kalla wrote, "but Democrats are clear favorites for the House and slight favorites for the Senate."

Currently, the House of Representatives is controlled by the Republican Party under Speaker Mike Johnson, with a 219-214 majority and two vacancies. The Republican Party also controls the Senate, with Majority Leader John Thune leading a 53-47 majority.

Kalla singled out the Senate as the more competitive congressional chamber this cycle. Thirty-five U.S. Senate seats are up for election.

With competitive races unfolding in Michigan, Alaska and Maine, Kalla noted a rough threshold for gauging momentum: "If Democrats can't win North Carolina, they're unlikely to win the Senate. If they're competitive in Ohio and Texas, that's a sign of a strong blue wave."

Not every interviewed professor agreed on the smaller chamber's competitiveness.

"I think Democrats will win the House though lose the Senate," Gregory Collins, a lecturer in ethics, politics and economics, wrote in an email to the News, citing "Trump fatigue, the Iran war, the decline in disposable income, tariffs, energy prices, and Latinos' reaction against Trump's muscular deportation policies" as important to November's outcomes.

Still, Collins argued that the political landscape isn't uniformly bad for Republicans.

"Trump generally won the public debate over DEI and related culture war issues," he wrote, though he said the Iran war "has proven to be more unpopular than many Republicans expected, which explains why some Republicans have separated themselves from Trump over the war."

Political science professor Steven Smith said democracy was on the ballot this fall.

Republicans have been deploying tactics such as voter suppression to "dampen the vote" and "keep numbers lower," Smith said, referring to voter turnout figures.

He said that during a midterm election, outcomes are dependent on such turnout, as the center-aligned electorate determines who wins, not the "extremes" of either side.

Asked about the implications of a potential "blue wave," in which Democrats make major electoral gains, Yale professors said Congress may be more likely to pursue investigations into the White House and scrutinize the Trump administration more closely.

"There's a danger to this too," Smith said. "People are not necessarily voting for more subpoenas and legalism."

He said instead that voters may care most about "bread and butter issues," such as gas and grocery prices.

Kalla predicted that if the Democrats take back the Senate, Trump would have a far more difficult time getting his judicial picks, including those nominated to the Supreme Court, confirmed during the second half of his term.

At the same time, academics' predictions remain only speculation, and voters are not always motivated to turn out.

"They have four choices: Republican, Democrat, other, stay home," Yale political science doctoral candidate Basil Bastaki GRD '28 said. "It's not enough to look at how they feel about one candidate or the other; you always have to think about how they are going to make this decision between these four choices."

This year's congressional midterm elections will take place on Nov. 3.

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