OPINION

STAFF COLUMNIST

VIOLET CHIN

The end of Yale's humanity

On June 30, 2026, Yale's "For Humanity" capital campaign came to a close, raising over $7 billion, supposedly, for humanity. The campaign's name and lofty goal was announced publicly in 2021 under former Yale President Peter Salovey, who could be found at the campaign celebration gala late last month. Yet as the days of Salovey's administration drift further and further away, and as Yale's mission statement, adopted during his administration, is altered to exclude "improving the world" from the university's core pursuits, the question stands: Is Yale still for humanity? Or does the end of this campaign mark a shift in ambitions, as Yale narrows its attention to the internal function of university operation, rather than the pursuit of a better world?

The answer to this perhaps best lies in the University's silence more so than its words. So let's look at what has vanished from the mission statement.

In Yale's original 2021 announcement of the "For Humanity" campaign, the University outlined four "priority areas" of donation: Arts & Humanities for Insight, Science for Breakthroughs, Collaborating for Impact and Leaders for a Better World. Many of these areas aligned, at least ideologically, with the 2016 mission statement. The former mission's commitment to "outstanding research and scholarship" perhaps best aligned with the campaign's commitment to "breakthroughs" and "insight," while the mission's promise to educate the next generation of "aspiring leaders worldwide" clearly aligned with the campaign focus in "Leaders for a Better World." But, within the new mission statement, adopted during President McInnis' administration, the origins of the "For Humanity" campaign are difficult to trace.

Ironically, while running a $7 billion campaign with the catchphrase "What are you for?" Yale has erased all of the "for" or purpose behind its mission; in the new mission, which simply reads that Yale is to "create, disseminate, and preserve knowledge through research and teaching," the University has essentially obscured to what end their means are directed. Whereas the old mission statement took a bold stance, obligating the University's resources, prestige, power and knowledge towards the betterment of our world, the new statement takes the campaign's catchphrase as a question, leaving students to ask: What is Yale for?

I would posit that Yale, or more specifically Yale leadership, has a new answer to this question. In the era of the Trump administration, Yale is for Yale.

Perhaps the faculty committee responsible for the new mission said Yale's perspective best: the old mission contained all "worthy goals" but "they are not what makes a university a university." The new mission is thus focused on simply making the University run, not quite an easy goal, but I would also argue not a particularly noble one, especially when considering that Yale, as a multi-billion-dollar organization steeped in American culture and generational influence, could presumably fight for more.

In the case of nobility, Yale is not for standing up for the freedom of their university against the Trump administration's unjust and unqualified claims. Yale's ongoing offers seem to suggest that it is for settlement. Yale is for the preservation of the University's operations, not the University's integrity.

Yale is not for its students' free expression, as when it comes time to confront the next generation of "aspiring leaders," Yale chooses to restrict speech. Yale is for previously authorized protests. Yale is against disruption of operations, even if that means disregarding the leaders it once promised to educate.

Yale is for silence in the face of federal pressure. It's for leaving the School of Medicine without a public defense in the face of the DOJ's accusatory findings. Yale is for quietly fading away the core principles that once made our university bold.

And given that Yale has essentially reshaped its mission, priorities and policies, limiting the scope of the University to the operations of Yale itself, how can Yale possibly maintain that it is for humanity? Because if we trace the transformation of the University under McInnis' presidency, through the Trump Administration and to the present moment, we understand that Yale is for itself. That slogan might not look as good on billboards or raise $7 billion, but in the spirit of light and truth, it is the exposed reality of the schools actions.

So perhaps "For Humanity" was a promise to the world, and one left broken in the face of leadership change, political turmoil and value shifts. Presently, the end of this campaign marks the closing of Salovey's legacy, and more importantly, Yale leadership's humanitarian pursuits for the time being. But I urge you, Yale: Leave the question on the table, look back at your campaign and give us an answer. What are you for?

VIOLET CHIN *is a first-year in Grace Hopper College studying American studies and a staff columnist for the opinion desk. She can be reached at violet.chin@yale.edu.*

GUEST COLUMNIST

AASHRITH MUPPALLA

An inefficient pursuit of knowledge

In 2024, Michel Devoret left Yale after two impressive decades. A Nobel laureate in physics and one of the architects of the Yale Quantum Institute, Devoret moved to California to serve as Chief Scientist of Google Quantum AI, while also joining the faculty at the University of California, Santa Barbara.

The implications of such a transition are troubling. Yale spent decades cultivating and supporting one of the world's foremost quantum information scientists, and a technology company eventually became the institution with the resources to employ him.

Devoret is just one small example in a sea of scientists falling victim to the phenomenon of brain drain. As artificial intelligence and other frontier technologies become enormously valuable, technology companies have begun wooing professors and researchers with extraordinary resources that universities struggle to match. Prominent intellectual leaders across the fields of mathematics and computer science have already made the transition to private companies. For example, Jelani Nelson, formerly a professor of electrical engineering and computer science at the University of California, Berkeley, joined Anthropic as a research leader. In 2025, Meta reportedly offered some OpenAI researchers compensation packages exceeding $100 million in their first year, with quoted four-year packages reaching as high as $300 million. One reported offer to AI researcher Andrew Tulloch was worth as much as $1.5 billion over six years. Other prominent academics have similarly taken leaves of absence, moved between academia and industry or founded companies of their own.

This is not necessarily a problem. Universities and companies have always benefited from one another. Some discoveries should be commercialized, and researchers should be free to pursue opportunities outside the academy. However, this relationship is becoming one-sided. It seems universities are simply becoming training grounds to join companies ultimately making short-term, profit-maximizing decisions.

The university was never meant to be a factory for economically useful knowledge. Its value at the post-graduate level was that it cultivated a free space for thinkers to pursue questions that had no reasonable use in sight. Take the modern cellphone, which contains the universal lithium-ion battery. Research on producing a practical lithium-ion battery was conducted in the 1970s, but it was only in the early 2000s when it entered daily life. The Nobel Prize for it was awarded much later, in 2019, to John Goodenough, M. Stanley Whittingham and Akira Yoshino.

This is true across all fields of science. An even more extreme example has to do with a branch of mathematics known as knot theory. Beginning in the 1860s, mathematicians developed a theory of knots which eventually became part of the broader field of topology, but it was soon discarded. It was not until the 1980s, more than a century later, that scientists began applying knot theory. They used ideas that initially seemed utterly useless to study knotted and linked DNA, helping advance understanding of replication and recombination.

Companies cannot sustain this sort of innovation. To be clear, private enterprise still produces important research and can make great discoveries. However, these discoveries will be motivated by the market. A company must ask whether research will produce a competitive advantage, a product or a return on investment. And oftentimes, the return on investment must come in the very short term, with close attention to quarterly results, instead of open-ended, knowledge-oriented research that goes on for decades.

This distinction matters more as the boundary between academic research and commercial development thins. My concern is not that Google or Anthropic lack the capabilities or resources to carry out frontier research. Both companies clearly have the means. But their domination of a hypothetical future research ecosystem could slowly change the purpose of research entirely.

If the most talented researchers solely follow the resources, the areas of inquiry most capable of generating enormous commercial returns will accumulate talent, computing power and institutional attention. Other fields may continue to exist, but they will live as second-class citizens in a system that measures intellectual importance by market value.

This problem is not confined to physics or computer science. The humanities, for instance, face repercussions of this change. A classics department cannot immediately produce a profitable language model. A philosophy department cannot, in most cases, patent a theorem. A historian cannot promise future quarterly growth. A private sector-led academy that only studies what can eventually be monetized becomes merely a mold for what major corporations select for. When we focus too much on the outcome, we can forget the pure whimsical exploration that leads us to the wildest and most human discoveries. This nullifies the notion of a liberal arts institution like Yale.

Universities should certainly interact with industry. But they must make a conscious effort to preserve spaces where intellectual value is not based on profit, where research can be pursued because it is true and beautiful and important, and where one of a professor's most important contributions is to teach the next generation, in particular the undergraduates.

In the immortal words of John Keating in "Dead Poets Society": "Medicine, law, business, engineering—these are noble pursuits and necessary to sustain life. But poetry, beauty, romance, love—these are what we stay alive for."

AASHRITH MUPPALLA *is a first-year studying physics. His column explores how being a student at an institution like Yale can mold one's aspirations, morals and beliefs. He can be reached at aashrith.muppalla@yale.edu.*

STAFF COLUMNIST

ZACHARY CLIFTON

Illiterate Lunch

An infinite ghost kitchen food concept opened on Elm Street this summer, a restaurant with a string of descriptors so absurd and fantastical that the owners have little choice but to call it "Wonder."

Rather literally, Wonder is a restaurant built for the illiterate. Its website provides users with the word's definition: "a feeling of surprise mingled with admiration caused by something unexpected or inexplicable." Anyone who has ever had the displeasure of taking a bite of Wonder's plastic-like fare will understand why the company feels the need to define it: Wonder doesn't want its diners to consider the meaning of the word for themselves. Its food is gray, prepackaged sludge prepared offsite, days prior, finished in an all-electric kitchen — what many Reddit users have called a microwave.

Wonder wants you to believe that all of its efforts amount to "great food made more accessible." The company boasts about its "advanced food robotics program," as if that's something to brag about, as if anyone has ever asked for that.

At least try to appear amazed, dear reader!

Wonder operates more than a hundred food halls in ten states. It's valued at $9 billion and plans to go public next year. It bought Blue Apron and Grubhub. Its founder ran Walmart's e-commerce business—since every great American eatery clearly begins and ends with a man who sold Diapers.com!

At Wonder's location on Elm Street, you can order from two dozen "restaurants" at a touchscreen: a Bobby Flay steakhouse, Texas barbecue, Brooklyn pizza and poke. All of it comes from the same staff, in the same kitchen, behind the same partition. The "meal" arrives wrapped in more packaging than even the sweetest and most sentimental birthday gifts. A Baltimore Banner critic wrote that even the best dishes reminded her of airplane food. Near Baltimore, in Washington, D.C., two of Wonder's locations have 2.7 stars on Yelp.

Wonder's whole vocabulary works toward deceiving its customers or assuming they'll be too stupid to notice its trickery. Take "infinite kitchen." False! There's only one kitchen, and it's finite. Take "restaurants." False! They advertise two dozen names, but there's only one address and one line of cooks. Take "Bobby Flay." False! The name is also a word — one the company purchased, because nothing says "delicious dinner" like buying words to sell to retail food customers! The name on the menu doesn't mean Bobby Flay actually cooked your steak or has ever even tried it. I presume he's done neither. But Flay does own shares in Wonder.

Then there is "Seamless," which should mean where two things are joined, where you can see one end and the other begin. Seamless is a delivery app that was folded into Grubhub.

Within three months of buying Grubhub, Wonder brought "Seamless" back. On Reddit, New Yorkers write about ordering Wonder by accident, under names like Tejas Barbeque or Limesalt, without realizing what they were getting.

In 2019, writing about Sweetgreen, an earlier iteration of the kind of fast-casual joint Wonder based itself on, Jia Tolentino published an essay titled "Always Be Optimizing." Tolentino wrote that Sweetgreen feels less like a place to eat than a "refueling station," a machine for feeding people too busy working to sit down or eat a meal on a flat plate — opting, instead, for a big, compostable bowl whose high edges can contain the scoop of nutrients one allows oneself to shovel into one's face-hole weekdays for lunch.

Wonder, somehow, manages to be worse.

The ultimate aim of Wonder is an AI platform that its CEO is developing to track your biomarkers and body composition and then order every meal for you, taking as much human decisionmaking out of the whole nutrition thing as possible. MEL, the name of that platform, seems to mean nothing in particular, much like what it will contribute to our world. Just as incomprehensible is the fact that the CEO is, effectively, coding a solution to the problem that Tolentino named in her headline.

What stands between Wonder and its ultimate goal?

Diners who can still read its menu.

ZACHARY CLIFTON *is a junior in Benjamin Franklin College studying political science and a staff columnist for the opinion desk. He can be reached at zachary.clifton@yale.edu.*

Yale Daily News

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Valley Publishing Co, Derby, CT

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