NEWS

"You may say I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one"
IMAGINE JOHN LENNON

Before Trump cuts, years of efforts to strenghten graduate funding

BY SARA AGRAWAL
STAFF REPORTER

Concerns over the evolution of Yale's graduate student support in the past decade persist among some Yale faculty members, as the University navigates a tumultuous federal funding landscape.

The second Trump administration has brought a wave of uncertainty to universities' federal funding access. Last spring, the National Science Foundation placed Yale on a freeze list, delaying Yale researchers' access to grant money for months. The University's federal funding dropped by around $11.6 million, or 1.5 percent, between fiscal year 2026 and 2027, according to data available on Tuesday. And President Donald Trump is now pursuing a 41 percent cut to the National Institutes of Health's budget, which could further financially constrain Yale research.

"The reality is that Yale can't replace the federal government's funding," physics department chair Sarah Demer said in a phone interview. "We can't even replace it with private foundations."

Yale faculty have long expressed concern about federal funding volatility — even before Trump returned to office in January 2025. A 2018 report by Yale professors and administrators on STEM programs recommended more sustained support from the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences to doctoral students, while in 2023, the unionization of graduate students prompted calls from professors for increased support from the graduate school.

"These discussions were being had a decade ago," chemistry professor Seth Herzon said. "A decade ago, it was abundantly clear that the current financial model is not sustainable, that we needed more support from the university."

A 2018 report called for increased graduate student support.

In 2018, the University Science Strategy Committee, charged with developing "a strategic plan for STEM at Yale that could be implemented in the coming decade," released a report with recommendations including raising Yale's investment in STEM graduate student support.

Yale's graduate student funding model varies by department and school. The Graduate School of Arts and Sciences funds the tuition and living stipends for the first one to two years of a graduate student's doctoral program. After that period, fellowships or research grants fund students' stipends and some of their tuition.

The 2018 committee report explained that Yale's system of graduate student support relied "heavily on external funding sources, which puts significant burdens on faculty to raise the requisite funds and further limits the number of students who can be supported."

The report stated that "over the last few years, the federal funding pipeline has become seriously constrained, and is no longer as reliable a source of support as it was in the past."

David Skelly, a professor of ecology at the School of the Environment, wrote in an email to the News that for "much longer than 15 years there has been a steady increase in the competition for funding even as the agencies have shifted priorities in ways that affect support for graduate study."

In a Saturday email to the News, Daniel Colón-Ramos, a cell biology and neuroscience professor and a member of the committee, cited the Graduate Student Tuition Matching Program — which began in 2023 — as a source of "significant progress on the areas of growth identified" in the report.

Dean of Graduate School of Arts and Sciences Lynn Cooley said in a Tuesday interview that under a previous policy, faculty members who paid for a student's stipend from their research grants would also pay for half of that student's tuition. The graduate school covered the other half of tuition.

Under the Graduate Student Tuition Matching Program, faculty members who paid that 50 percent of tuition using their research grant would receive 35 percent of their payment back from the graduate school in the form of flexible research funds, whose use was determined by that professor, Cooley said. In 2025, the graduate school's share increased from 35 percent to 50 percent of the tuition that the faculty member paid.

Anna Marie Pyle, a professor of molecular, cellular and developmental biology and chemistry and a member of the University Science Strategy Committee, said she does not think that Yale has made good progress towards improving graduate student support in accordance with the University Science Strategy Committee's report.

"USSC committed to greatly advancing support for our science graduate students," Pyle said in a phone interview. "This was one of the features that I think led members of the faculty to be broadly supportive of the USSC priorities. And so therefore I think it's unfortunate that, in fact, this core goal has fallen short."

Pyle mentioned that the 2018 report had called for longer years of stipend and tuition support, more than the current one or two years, from the graduate school. The report called for "an endowment to provide three full years of support to all science and engineering graduate students that is independent of faculty research grants and irrespective of nationality."



ZOE BERG

Under the Trump administration, Yale is facing unprecedented uncertainty around federal funding for graduate school research. But concerns about the stability of the University's financial support for graduate programs is not new.

In a Wednesday email to the News, Cooley cited several areas of progress since the report, including "raising endowment for fellowships; implementing and then increasing the tuition match program; increasing University Fellowships from nine months to 12 months; instituting relocation awards for incoming PhD students; expanding our pipeline programs; and developing interdisciplinary programs in partnership with Yale Planetary Solutions and Foundations of Data Science (FDS)."

"The vast majority of the Graduate School's budget goes toward supporting PhD students and the important research they are doing," she wrote. "This significant investment reflects the university's deep commitment to research and discovery, and to the graduate students who enable this research."

Graduate students unionize, prompting stipend change.

The 2023 ratification of a contract between Yale and Local 33, the graduate workers' union, built further pressure on researchers, two faculty members said.

The contract, which went into effect in December 2023, guaranteed an average 30 percent raise to graduate students' salaries and stipends over the course of the five-year contract period.

"To expect faculty who are functioning on fixed budgets from research grants to all of a sudden be able to up the amount they're paying their grad students with no warning, we judged unfair," Cooley said.

Cooley said that she worked with the University provost to "ease that transition," and Yale offered funding to faculty members in direct response to the stipend changes.

"We provided faculty who were paying for their students with enough money to pay the difference from January to August," Cooley said. "And with the understanding that the next academic year, they would have to figure out a way to pay the higher levels."

Herzon criticized the limited duration of this aid from the university.

Pyle said that while the contract was "probably good for the students and for the research enterprise," the University should have contributed to "making it a success, which includes greatly enhancing the amount of resources available for grad students support."

Cooley said that one initiative the university has taken since the contract's implementation was increasing support for researchers whose graduate students are partially funded by fellowships.

Graduate student fellowships from the federal government do not cover a student's entire stipend, Cooley said. Faculty are also not allowed to "make up that difference between the fellowship stipend and the Yale stipend using federal research grants," Cooley said.

The increase of stipends for graduate students negotiated in the union contract made it difficult for faculty to pay that difference, according to Cooley. Two years ago, Cooley said, the medical school and the graduate school decided that the University would "fund the difference in stipend in a federal fellowship to an individual student compared to the Yale stipend."

Demers, the physics department chair, said that in her department, recent reductions in graduate student enrollments have not been drastic, unlike in other departments where uncertainty about federal funding has led to cuts in the number of graduate students they enroll.

Demers said that research related to quantum and AI still have "really strong sources of funding that a lot of people in our department are benefiting from," including private foundations. She noted that the funding landscape varies by department.

Cooley wrote in her Wednesday email that changes to the tax on the tax of the University's endowment income and to the way federal research grants are awarded have "created challenges for all large research universities like Yale."

"Faculty in the sciences are facing a much more competitive grant environment. Despite these budget constraints, cutting-edge research at Yale continues," she wrote.

Postdoctoral researchers voted to unionize in April.

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Lawsuit challenges order limiting foreign student internships

BY LEO NYBERG & ARIA LYNN-SKOV
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The Association of American Universities and several other higher education groups filed a lawsuit on Monday in an effort to prevent the Trump administration from restricting international students' access to internships.

The lawsuit challenges Immigration and Customs Enforcement's stricter interpretation of requirements for universities when approving United States-based jobs for international students. ICE first announced enforcement of internship rules in an Aug. 12 message and clarified these standards in a second announcement on Aug. 24.

The second message clarified that internships should not be approved unless they are necessary for completion of a curricular program. The Curricular Practical Training program, which allows student visa holders to work in the United States if the job is an "integral" part of the curriculum and "directly related to the student's major area of study," is overseen by an ICE division.

"This sudden change was issued with no substantive explanation, opportunity for comment, or even acknowledgement of the change, but with maximal impact on affected students and institutions," the association's complaint says.

Yale President Maurie McInnis sits on the board of the Association of American Universities, which Yale is a member of.

On Wednesday, two days after the lawsuit was filed, Yale's Office of International Students & Scholars posted an update about curricular practical training and the lawsuit on its website.

Ozan Say, the office's director, wrote in an Aug. 17 email to the News that his office was not planning to change how they approve internships. In a response to the clarification from ICE, Say told the News that the office was reviewing whether individual programs were eligible for curricular practical training.

This Wednesday, Say wrote to the News that he had no updates on the review and did not directly respond to questions about whether Yale College or any other school will be affected.

"OISS has processed CPT requests only when the practical training is an integral part of an established curriculum and is required of all students in the program for degree completion," the Wednesday announcement on the OISS webpage reads.

The complaint argues the new rule violates the Administrative Procedure Act — which governs federal agencies' actions — because it reverses longstanding enforcement of the internship policy and could retroactively punish school officials who approved curricular practical training under the old enforcement of the rules.

McInnis did not respond to questions about the lawsuit, including whether she was involved in the decision to file the lawsuit or if she supports it. University spokesperson Karen Peart referred to the association's webpage about the lawsuit. Peart did not say whether Yale was backing the lawsuit.

When asked in September what she would say to international students considering applying to Yale, McInnis responded, "They are absolutely welcome here."

"We have a remarkable Office of International Students & Scholars that works hard both to ensure that our students are able to get their visas in a timely fashion, so that they can join us, and that they are an absolutely essential part of our vibrant intellectual community," she said in a Sept. 15 interview.

The Association of American Universities filed its complaint in the United States District Court for the District of Massachusetts alongside three other higher education groups — the Presidents' Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration, the Association of Independent Colleges and Universities in Massachusetts and NAFSA: Association of International Educators.



ABBY ASSOUAD / PHOTOGRAPHY EDITOR

The Association of American Universities, which Yale is a member of, filed a complaint against the Trump administration to block a stricter interpretation of a work authorization rule that would make it harder for international students to pursue summer internships.

"Students have borne the most immediate blow: institutions have been forced to halt CPT authorizations midstream, cancelling long-planned internships and other placements—including opportunities scheduled for this academic year that students secured months ago and, in many cases, cannot replace," the complaint reads.

This is the second lawsuit from the association this month. Last week, it filed an emergency lawsuit to prevent the Department of Education from publicizing the names of universities' international donors.

Yale backed the lawsuit to block the publication of international donor names, according to a Monday email from Peart.

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