NEWS

"You've been dreaming of the fate of Ophelia"
"THE FATE OF OPHELIA" BY TAYLOR SWIFT

McInnis creates ombudsperson role for employee, grad student concerns

BY ISOBEL MCCLURE, JERRY GAO AND ASHER BOISKIN
STAFF REPORTERS

Yale is hiring an ombudsperson to provide confidential support to faculty, staff and graduate and professional students regarding concerns about the University environment, President Maurie McInnis announced last Tuesday.

The announcement came in a message addressed to those groups and posted to the president's office's website. The ombudsperson will act independently of the University's existing "procedures and administrative offices," McInnis wrote.

The role of the ombudsperson, according to McInnis' message, will be to serve as an impartial actor who informs faculty and staff, as well as graduate and professional students, of their rights under the law and university regulations. The ombudsperson will report directly to McInnis and will not serve undergraduates, according to the announcement.

"I am prioritizing this role—even during our period of restrained spending—because of the comments and suggestions I have received from all of you," McInnis wrote. She cited the community feedback she received during her first year as president, including on "administrative and conflict resolution processes."

The University is expected to lose $280 million next fiscal year to an elevated endowment tax of 8 percent, signed into law on July 4 by President Donald Trump. On Sept. 30, Provost Scott Strobel, Senior Vice President for Operations Jack Callahan Jr. '80 and Chief Financial Officer Stephen Murphy '87 released plans for reduced budget targets and a retirement incentive program for managerial and professional staff.

The establishment of the ombudsperson position comes after years of advocacy from faculty as well as graduate and professional students.

In the spring of 2023, the Faculty of Arts and Sciences and School of Engineering and Applied Science Senate, or FAS-SEAS Senate, convened a committee geared towards advocating for the creation of an ombuds office. Around the same time, the Graduate Student Assembly and Graduate and Professional Student Senate passed a resolution "calling for a University ombuds office."

Yale has stood apart from peer institutions in its lack of an ombuds office. The News reported in 2013 that Yale and Dartmouth were the only two Ivy League schools without an ombudsperson. Dartmouth appointed its first ombudsperson in 2022.

Nathan Suri GRD '25 '28, the chair of the Graduate Student Assembly, wrote in an email to the News that the group's executive board applauded the establishment of the position.

"This role will provide graduate students and other members of Yale's academic populace with direct access to critical resolutions that will improve the academic environment," Suri wrote.

Saman Haddad LAW '26, the president of the Graduate and Professional Student Senate, said in a phone interview, that the University's current conflict resolution system is "very decentralized."

"An ombudsperson helps you navigate that system, which is otherwise very unclear," he said.

But he expressed concern about the title "ombudsperson," noting that students might be unfamiliar with it. While he expects the office may see "limited uptake" at first, he believes that choosing a more accessible name and hiring a "high quality candidate" could help overcome that challenge.



TIM TAI

Yale will be the last Ivy League institution to hire an ombudsperson — a position geared towards handling concerns from University employees and graduate and professional students.

Yale has several University-wide offices and centers intended to address misconduct, discrimination and complaints, including the Office of Institutional Equity and Accessibility, or OIEA, the Title IX Office and Sexual Harassment and Assault Response and Education Center, or SHARE.

Students and staff who have contacted the OIEA have criticized the office for slow responses, opaque processes and disappointing results.

In 2019, the office dismissed a Yale Hospitality employee's allegations against a former hospitality director without meeting with the employee, a News investigation last year found. The office found that the former administrator had committed "severe" sexual misconduct in another incident in 2023, and he left Yale last year.

Prior to her role as Yale's president, McInnis served as president of Stony Brook University, as well as in administrative positions at the University of Texas at Austin and the University of Virginia. All three other universities had an ombudsperson role during her time there.

"The ombudsperson will serve as a neutral advocate for fair treatment and processes, operating under strict confidentiality and helping faculty, staff, and G&P students understand their rights and options based on all laws and university policies and procedures," McInnis wrote in the announcement last week, referring to graduate and professional students.

She added that the official will also "provide informal dispute resolution services" and "offer referrals" to related resources.

Merle Waxman, who was the ombudsperson for the School of Medicine for over 30 years, endorsed the change in an email to the News.

"I am delighted to hear that Yale is moving forward on this important initiative," Waxman wrote. "Yale is an incredibly wonderful institution, but even the best institutions can benefit from the Ombudsman concept."

McInnis wrote last Tuesday that she has established a search advisory committee for the position. The committee is chaired by Elizabeth Conklin, the University's associate vice president for equity and accessibility and its Title IX coordinator, and David Post, an ecology and evolutionary biology professor.

Conklin and Post wrote in a joint statement to the News that the committee planned to meet this week to discuss the qualities it will seek in candidates, emphasizing skills in active listening, mediation and negotiation, as well as the ability to remain impartial, independent and credible.

"In her first year at Yale, President McInnis heard many faculty, students, and staff speak of the need for a university-wide ombudsperson, and she recognized the value of an ombudsperson for the Yale community," Conklin and Post wrote.

Conklin and Post noted that candidates for the role must have certification through the International Ombuds Association or "eligibility to obtain certification."

Other members of the search committee include doctoral candidate Alex Rich GRD '27, psychiatry professor Robert Rohrbaugh MED '82, and Vice Provost for Health Affairs Stephanie Spangler. McInnis noted in her message that the committee would be soliciting comments from community members and linked a webform for people to submit feedback.

McInnis also noted that she would be establishing a "new council to review Yale's faculty and staff employment policies and procedures." The group will consider these practices and their support of Yale's mission, "academic excellence," the University's compliance with laws and support for faculty and staff.

McInnis listed the eight members of the council — four professors and four University administrators. She wrote that their work will be completed "by the end of the spring semester" and that she would provide an update on both of the initiatives she announced "by the end of the academic year."

The word "ombuds" comes from the Swedish word "ombudsman," meaning "representative."

Contact **ISOBEL MCCLURE,** *at isobel.mcclure@yale.edu.*
JERRY GAO *at jerry.gao.jg2988@yale.edu.*
AND ASHER BOISKIN *at asher.boiskin@yale.edu.*

Thirteen Yalies successfully walk from New Haven to New York City

BY SARAH MUKKUZHI AND ANNA KOONTZ
CONTRIBUTING REPORTERS

Last Wednesday, 41 Yale undergraduates met on Cross Campus and began walking to New York City. Four days and many blisters later, 13 students from the original group arrived at Grand Central Station, hollering and singing in celebration.

Many participants, regardless of whether they completed the journey, considered it a rewarding and transformative experience. Some students, like Bryce Falkoff '29, signed up without knowing who else would be on the walk. At the end of completing the full trip, Falkoff said he had found a community.

"It was a once-in-a-lifetime adventure. It's one of those things that you tell your kids, and something that you don't ever forget," Falkoff said. "It had to have been one of the most supportive groups I have ever been a part of."

The idea for the trip started as a joke between four friends — Freeman Irabaruta '26, Joshua Li '26, Brian Moore '26 and Michael Zhao '26 — but became a reality after they dedicated many late-night hours to preparing routes, researching lodging and planning a budget.

After compiling a seven-page-long planning document and color-coded map, the organizers extended an open invitation for anyone in the student body to participate in the walk.

Their route roughly followed the Metro-North railroad along the Connecticut coastline, allowing an alternative mode of transportation for those who could not complete the entire trip.

"Every Yalie has the experience of taking the Metro-North from New Haven to New York," Zhao said. "But to say you walked from New Haven to New York is crazy. It's such a trip of perseverance and patience."

The group took brief rest stops about every three to four miles and shared group meals for breakfast, lunch and dinner. The group planned to stay in hotels along the route each night.

Along the way, the group encouraged unexpected hospitality. Dunkin' Donuts donated extra food, a Chinese restaurant in Stamford offered significant discounts and a bakery in Greenwich gave them free baguettes and eclairs, Zhao said.

The group also received free lodging on the final night of the trip. They originally planned to stay in a hotel in New Rochelle, N.Y., but every hotel was fully booked or not affordable, Moore said. The organizers frantically reached out to student groups, fraternities and Yalies in the area, Moore added, and, finally, one junior agreed to host the group in her family home, accommodating 15.

That night, the walkers also threw a surprise celebration for Kear O'Malley '28, who turned 20 during the trip. O'Malley said that he had quickly forged strong friendships with the group, despite only having known one participant — his roommate — initially.

"I was exhausted and that was one of the hardest days because my feet were really hurting that day, and when they brought out the birthday cake I was just really overwhelmed," O'Malley said.

Despite the physically taxing journey, the group persevered by finding joy in small moments. In addition to the birthday party, students celebrated major road signs and borders marking their progress.

"It's really funny because the city line between the suburbs of New York and New York City was like in between an IHOP and a Wendy's," Moore said. "We were in the middle of nowhere, and then we crossed it and we were like ayyyy!"

Eliana Peyton '26 was one of three female students who finished the walk to New York City.



COURTESY OF JOSHUA LI

Planned to span 77 miles, the walk to New York was characterized by newfound community and unexpected mishaps.

"We were very vastly outnumbered, but it was never 'the men are leading the pack, and the women are following behind.' I was in front a lot of the time," Peyton said. "We're all very attached now that we've been through an intense experience together."

Li reflected about how the trip changed for the better when it evolved from the four senior organizers to a larger group of students.

"I really don't think that us four could have done it without the rest of the entire group," Li said. "The vibes would not have been there. The mutual support. We did not expect so many new friendships, so many new memories and the energy of the entire group."

Driving from New Haven to New York City takes around 2 hours.

Along the route, the group encountered numerous instances of hospitality – from a Trumbull junior spontaneously hosting the walkers to free baguettes and eclairs in Greenwich, Connecticut.

At the start of the trip, the Yalies walked side by side in two columns that extended a city block. As they walked, students joked, sang sea shanties and shouted compliments to passersby. Irabaruta was nicknamed "CEO of Vlogs and Vibes" and helped foster a welcoming, energetic atmosphere through games and silly conversations.

Contact
SARAH MUKKUZHI *at sarah.mukkuzhi@yale.edu.*
AND ANNA KOONTZ *at anna.koontz@yale.edu.*