NEWS

"I'm dreaming my life away."
ALL I HAVE TO DO IS DREAM THE EVERLY BROTHERS

To woo students, French department makes courses easier

BY PABLO PEREZ
STAFF REPORTER

In a recent push by the French department to make language courses less daunting to students, the department has attempted to reduce the workload demands of some of its courses.

This semester, many French courses designated as L1 through L4 have eliminated final exams and adopted a weekly "4 plus 1 model," which consists of four days of in-person instruction and one asynchronous class on Friday.

"We want to attract students to the study of French as they would to any other language," Constance Sherak, the department's language program director, wrote in a statement to the News. "Rigor doesn't mean an unsurmountable degree of work and shouldn't discourage students from pursuing a language they want to study for their own personal reasons."

Other changes to the L1 through L4 courses include a focus on oral assessments and in-classroom collaboration between classmates, reduced homework load and a larger emphasis on Francophone cultures as opposed to just French culture — a move broadening the global relevance of the curriculum to include scholarship from cultures such as the Caribbean, Sub-Saharan Africa and the Maghreb.

Shifts in the curriculum and workload of these courses are the results of student feedback and departmental reviews, French Department Chair Maurice Samuels wrote to the News. The department aimed to align its courses with those of other language departments at Yale and French courses at other institutions, Samuels added.

"There was definitely a sense among many students that while French language courses were rigorous and effective, they were too difficult in terms of workload and grading," Samuels wrote.

To address the concerns of students and the department, Samuels said he appointed a commission last spring to review feedback and lay out recommendations for changes to the courses. According to French Director of Undergraduate Studies Thomas Connolly, the commission conducted an official online questionnaire for students taking department classes and drew further from course evaluation forms.

The commission included members of the faculty, the language program director, the DUS and a member from within and outside the department.

"We took these complaints very seriously and compared our classes to other language classes at the university as well as to French language classes at other schools," Samuels wrote. "We decided to make some key changes that we hope will alleviate the perception that French is a more difficult language to study at Yale."

Sherak added that she is "currently overseeing a series of working groups to revise syllabi and implement changes."

Student responses to the changes have been mixed. Some have expressed appreciation for the department's former workload expectations.

Luke Parish '28 expressed concern that "you lose a lot in doing an asynchronous day." Parish said that he averaged 10 to 15 hours of work per week in his intensive L3/L4 course last semester.

While the student feedback received by the department highlighted concerns about the demanding workload, some students emphasized its importance for their learning.

"I don't think you'd be able to learn in general language without it being this rigorous," Julia Niemiec '28 said. "French is a difficult language. There's a lot of grammar structures. There's a lot of nuances."

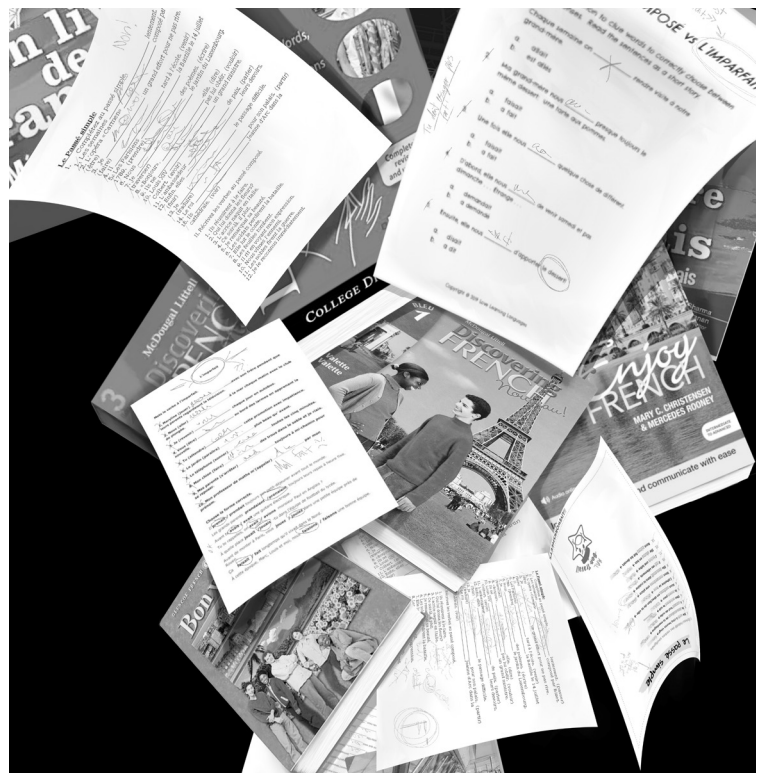
Other students appreciated the additional free time that came with the lighter workload.

"I have an assignment on the asynchronous day, but it normally takes a little bit less time, and it's just nice to have a day off of having to go to class" Ella Benedetto '29 said.

Modernization efforts by the French department stretch beyond the L1-L4 sequence. In fall 2024, the department launched a BA/MA path, also known as the 'simultaneous MA,' which allows students to pursue a master's degree in French at the same time as a bachelor's degree in the same field.

"I want Yale's French language program to be serious and rigorous but I also think that studying language should be enjoyable," Samuels wrote. "Students who want to study French because it's a beautiful language or because they are fascinated by the literature and culture should not be scared away by onerous requirements and a difficult grading scale."

The French department is offering 14 courses this semester.



RANA ROOSEVELT/CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER

In response to surveys conducted by a committee and course evaluations, the French department largely eliminated final exams and reduced in-class hours.

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Students heartened, wary about tenuous Gaza ceasefire deal

BY ANAYAH ACCILIEN, JOLYNDA WANG AND SARA AGRAWAL
CONTRIBUTING REPORTERS

Miguel Cardona, Joe Biden's secretary of education, recently joined the faculty of Yale's School of Management.

Cardona, who once taught at an elementary school in Meriden, was previously Connecitcut's commissioner of education. Since Cardona served in the Biden administration, President Donald Trump has significantly reduced the Department of Education. Earlier this year, he signed an executive order demanding the closure of the education department in favor of sending its responsibilities to the states.



COURTESY OF XIMENA SOLORZANO

Two weeks after Israel and Hamas reached a ceasefire, students have expressed joy about the release of hostages, as well as doubts about the future of peace in Gaza.

"We're at a time where the current administration is taking aim at anything related to equity. And the appointment and the call of Secretary Cardona to come teach at SOM shows that there is a commitment on the part of educators at Yale to still value equity," Nathan Dudley '82, a lecturer on public school education policy, said.

Cardona will co-teach the elective course "Education Policy" — which will cover such as accountability, college access and economic returns to education — with professor Seth Zimmerman during the 2025-26 academic year.

Dudley highlighted Cardona's stances on improving "college affordability" and creating "career pathways" as ones he hopes students learn from in the course.

Beyond teaching, Cardona will also participate in programs run by The Broad Center — a School of Management program focused on K-12 public school students — to engage with leaders of school systems.

"What I think will be special about the course is that we will take on education policy issues in the context of specific decision points. Dr. Cardona's experience as leader at the local and state level here in Connecticut and then at the federal level as Secretary of Education will give us a window into what the people making key choices were thinking," Zimmerman wrote to the News.

Cardona and Zimmerman will explore how institutions like Yale fit into the higher education landscape and challenge their students to reflect on how policy decisions are made in circumstances of uncertainty and limited information.

"This is an incredibly challenging time politically nationwide, especially for the field of education, which I love so dearly as a strong believer in the federal government's role in empowering and supporting schools, especially public and low-income schools, so it is not surprising that Yale made this call" Roy Kohavi '26, a student in the intensive education studies certificate, wrote.

Dudley added that Cardona's commitment to supporting teachers is especially valuable now, when teachers and teachers unions have been under attack by the current administration.

"I'm interested to see how Dr. Cardona's experience in high-level governance will impact

his teaching, particularly in how to maintain focused commitment to students when there are so many stakeholders vying for an education leader's attention. Because that's really who education leadership is about: students," Noemi Liu '26 wrote.

Liu added that "though Cardona was a prominent politician and has much insight to share on navigating federal leadership," she is "the most excited about his experience as a practitioner and local leader."

There is a large "policy-practice divide in education," according to Liu, where the guidelines implemented by policymakers are often not translated effectively into practice within classrooms.

This reality makes a professional such as Cardona, who has worked at every level of public education, invaluable, she said.

Cardona, a Connecticut native, became the state's youngest principal at age 27 and later its commissioner of education.

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Widespread web service outage disrupts Canvas for hours

BY SARAH RIVAS, JERRY GAO
CONTRIBUTING REPORTERS

On the first day after October break, students logging onto Canvas, Yale's online course management system, were met with a message that Canvas was "experiencing issues due to an ongoing AWS incident," referring to a widespread Amazon Web Services outage.

Early Monday morning, disruptions to Amazon Web Services, or AWS, a cloud service provider, led to outages for hundreds of websites, including Canvas, the learning management system used by Yale. Access to Canvas was restored Monday evening.

"I am encouraging professors to use their flexibility and ingenuity in responding to this unusual situation; if the outage goes on much longer, we will issue guidance, but it looks like it is already being resolved globally," Yale College Dean Pericles Lewis wrote in an email to the News Monday afternoon before Canvas was restored.

Some students felt that the Canvas shutdown was especially impactful this time of year, when students often have midterm exams.

"The canvas shutdown has me tweaking out—I'm a girl that religiously checks her canvas so not being able to submit my assignments or even see them has been really worrisome," Faven Wondwosen '27 wrote to the News.

Wondwosen added that she relies on her online assignments and the materials her teachers have uploaded to Canvas to help her study for her exams.

Another student, Nikolai Stephens-Zumbaum '26, said that the Canvas outage was helpful for some students whose exams or assignments were postponed because they couldn't access necessary course materials.

Anurag Khandelwal, an assistant professor of computer science who is teaching, told the News that the AWS outage seems to have occurred in two phases.

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Khandelwal, referring to outage updates by AWS, said that the initial failure was likely related to the Domain Name System, or DNS, which associates domain names — such as yale.edu — with numeric addresses. DNS is needed for websites and services such as Canvas to access DynamoDB, a database service provided by AWS, Khandelwal wrote in an email.

By early morning on Monday, an update by AWS wrote that the "underlying DNS issue was fully mitigated at 2:24 AM PDT." However, the outage continued, and another update at 7:14 a.m. PDT confirmed "significant API errors and connectivity issues."

Khandelwal wrote that the previous outage may have caused another outage if AWS was overwhelmed by a backlog of queries.

"Once the DNS failure was resolved, there was still likely a backlog of query requests that had to be serviced by the DynamoDB after recovery. This backlog — combined with new queries coming in — can overwhelm the system," Khandelwal wrote.

By Monday evening, the issue was marked as "resolved" on AWS' status website, and the latest Monday update said that backlogs would be processed "over the next few hours."

According to an announcement by AWS, the outage was resolved at 2:24 a.m. PDT on Monday. Instructure, the Utah-based company that operates Canvas, announced that Canvas became accessible at 5:16 p.m. MDT.

Brian Watkins, an Instructure spokesperson, wrote in an email to the News on Monday evening at 8:01 p.m. confirming that Canvas access has been restored.

"We recognize the integral role Canvas plays in the daily lives of educators and students, serving as a central hub for teaching and learning, and we know today's AWS outage had a significant impact on that experience." Watkins wrote. "Our teams have worked closely with Amazon Web Services (AWS) to restore service and continue to monitor stability. All affected users should now have full access."

Khandelwal wrote that the usage of cloud computing platforms such as AWS, Google Cloud Platform or Microsoft Azure is mainly due to "cost-efficiency, flexibility and ease of deployment," akin to the difference between renting and purchasing a home.

"Canvas could host its service on its own infrastructure (at significant capital investment), but this would not necessarily avoid such outages — it might actually make it worse since they may not have enough resources to stay on top of issues that arise," Khandelwal wrote.

AWS reported an operating income of $39.8 billion for 2024.

Olivia Woo contributed reporting.

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