NEWS

"She had started wearing makeup. Lipstick. Kohl. A sly touch of rouge."
THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS ARUNDHATI ROY

Local bakery keeps serving traditional Mexican breads amid ICE fears

BY CHUER CINDY ZHONG
STAFF REPORTER



REGINA SUNG

The bakery on Grand Avenue has served Fair Haven for 16 years. An uptick in federal immigration enforcement operations has presented a new challenge for the business.

The scent of freshly baked goods, a large portrait of the Lady of Guadalupe and the bilingual chatter of bakers and customers greet visitors at Mi Lupita Bakery, a Mexican panadería in Fair Haven.

The bakery is nestled between a grocery store and a Latin American eatery on Grand Avenue, Fair Haven's main commercial thoroughfare that is home to many Latino-owned businesses. Since Mi Lupita's owner, Yolanda Guzman Elias, opened the bakery 16 years ago, she has guided her business through the tumult of the pandemic and the challenge of competing with home bakeries — and, more recently, a decline in business amid increasing Immigration and Customs Enforcement activity.

When Guzman Elias arrived in New Haven from Mexico 25 years ago, she said, she "started from zero."

"I'm a single mother. I don't have a husband," Guzman Elias said in Spanish. "I've gotten ahead, with my brothers' and sisters' help of course, but I'm the one who opened the bakery."

Before opening Mi Lupita's storefront, Guzman Elias said, she sold bread from her home for three or four years. She said she loved making bread from a young age, and that much of the food she sells today is based on her parents' recipes.

Two customers, Ayde Aquino and Juan Aquino, live an hour away from Fair Haven but said they have made the trip to the neighborhood several times just to visit Mi Lupita Bakery. Their favorite item on the menu is the chocolate concha, a traditional Mexican sweet bread with a chocolate sugar crust on top.

Batriz Guzman Elias, Guzman Elias' sister, said that in the bakery's early days it sold very little food, and employees had to throw away much of its stock. She said she helped her sister out at Mi Lupita while working another job, but decided to fully commit to working at the bakery after she saw that her sister had to travel to New York to buy supplies.

Yolanda Guzman Elias said the COVID-19 pandemic posed another challenge, as the bakery faced a decline in customers.

"But I didn't let it defeat me," she said.

Guzman Elias said that her bakery competes with home-based bakeries. Although those shops have fewer costs because they don't have to pay certain business taxes or rent out a storefront, she said she doesn't "feel envy." Having run such a bakery herself, she said she understands their position.

"They also have a family to support," she said.

More recently, Mi Lupita has faced a new challenge. Guzman Elias said the bakery's sales have declined because of increased ICE presence in New Haven, reflecting a broader pattern affecting Latino communities across the nation.

In September, ICE agents arrested two people at Tweed-New Haven airport. In late August, ICE's Boston office arrested 118 people in a "targeted immigration enforcement operation" in southern Connecticut.

"People are afraid. They don't come to shop because they think ICE will catch them," Guzman Elias said in Spanish. She added that she believes ICE agents are "doing their job, God bless them, but I say they should go after people who are really bad, not those of us who come to work honestly."

Guzman Elias said she believes it's better to grant amnesty to "good people who want to work hard in this country" rather than deploy more ICE agents to arrest and detain families.

Her sister also said in Spanish that the Fair Haven community has developed a system to communicate about ICE sightings in the neighborhood.

"We post it on Facebook, 'Look, they say immigration is around such-and-such place,'" Batriz Guzman Elias said. "Then, some people might call us on the phone and ask 'Is it true that they're there?'"

She said she hasn't seen any ICE agents around Mi Lupita Bakery.

Despite the obstacles the bakery has faced in recent years, Yolanda Guzman Elias said she is happy to be running her own business and sending remittances back home to her extended family in Mexico.

"The only thing that saddens me is not seeing my family," Guzman Elias said. "I would like to hug my father. My happiness would be complete if I could hug my father and my brothers and sisters, because my mother is dead. I'll never see her again."

As Mi Lupita's employees prepared to close the bakery on a Monday night last month, a few people stopped by. Guzman Elias handed each of them big bags of baked goods that she said would otherwise go stale. She said that customers say her products stand out.

"I have competition because other bread is made like my bread," Guzman Elias said. "But it doesn't have the same flavor. People tell me so."

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Humanities courses turn to blue book exams amid AI concerns

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JOANNA CHANG / CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER

The share of humanities and writing classes that require in-person exams has increased steadily in the past four school years.

More professors in humanities and writing courses are now requiring in-person assessments in their courses, reflecting a broader effort to ensure students can demonstrate their skills without relying on AI.

While Yale has pledged over $150 million over the next five years to help students and faculty incorporate AI into their work, some professors are taking a different approach in the classroom. The share of humanities and writing courses that require in-person exams has steadily risen from 14.8 percent to 20 percent between the 2023-24 and 2026-27 school years, according to a News analysis.

The News examined the syllabi of 779 courses that offer either humanities or writing credits and are listed for more than one semester since fall 2023. Exams include both midterms and finals, and the data did not include syllabi that are not accessible to all Yale College students and spring 2027 courses that are yet to be finalized.

Of the available courses with an in-person exam this school year, 34.5 percent did not have an exam in past offerings. Conversely, 7.1 percent of the courses in the 2024-25 academic year adopted in-person assessments in a later course offering.

"I have tried to sort of redesign my course to keep the skill development process front and center. By skills, I mean, not just the skill of writing, but also the skill of thinking and problem solving," philosophy professor Brad Inwood said in a video interview.

Inwood, who has been teaching "Introduction to Ancient Philosophy" since 2015, said he is piloting new assessments this semester to emphasize the development of students' writing and analytical skills.

In a departure from previous years, Inwood said, he is also experimenting with in-class "writing challenges" to evaluate impromptu skills, as well as a new midterm exam to help prepare students for the final.

"I compare it to physical training. If you want to develop strength or speed in athletics, it has to be you that does the running and the lifting," Inwood said. "If you want to develop facility in analysis and expression, it has to be you that does the analyzing, the expressing, the thinking and the writing."

Slavic Languages and Literatures professor Edyta Bojanowska, who teaches "Tolstoy's War and Peace," previously only required essays. This semester, Bojanowska has introduced midterm and final exams, which she said allows her to better verify whether students have completed the required reading.

Beyond exams, Bojanowska said, the teaching fellows in her course have introduced individual meetings and pre-writing exercises to track students' progress throughout the writing process. She said students must learn to build arguments, engage closely with texts and develop their own writing voices through practice rather than outsourcing those tasks to AI.

Out of the subjects offering humanities and writing credits this semester, archaeological studies, classics and classical civilization and philosophy are offering the highest share of courses with exams, with 80 percent, 59.1 percent and 45 percent of courses having in-person exams, respectively.

According to Benjamin Glaser, the director of AI initiatives in the humanities at the Poorvu Center and Yale Library, the increase is consistent with his discussions with faculty about AI usage.

"Homework and problem sets are being given a lower, if not zero, percentage of the grade, and closed-book exams are being given a higher percentage," Glaser said.

These changes reflect Inwood's concern that generative AI can undermine the skill-building process when students rely on it to perform the analysis and writing they are meant to learn.

"Policing AI usage is, I think, a technological nightmare, so I've tried to focus instead on designing the course more explicitly around dynamic skill development," Inwood said.

Rather than focusing on catching students using AI, Inwood said, instructors should reconsider how they structure their courses.

"This is a very exciting semester to be teaching because for the first time in quite a while, I'm running an experiment to see what works and what doesn't," Inwood said. "I think in the next few years, we'll all be running this at the university level."

While Yale does not have a blanket policy on the use of AI in coursework, Yale's academic integrity policies prohibit students from submitting AI-generated text without proper attribution and may also penalize students who use AI tools without their instructor's authorization.

Other professors are embracing AI in their courses and exams. Professor Sue Chen teaches the graduate seminar "Applied AI for Global Affairs I," a new course this semester where students explore AI tools firsthand which includes experimenting with AI agents and creating interactive websites.

Chen said adapting education to AI requires making the learning process itself more visible. She said instructors should create opportunities for students to experiment with AI while reflecting on what they learn from using it.

Glaser said that a recent topic of conversation among professors has been the use of AI detectors.

"Faculty are starting to sort of debate among themselves whether that sort of deterrence element has a valid role in this community and in teaching," Glaser said.

Glaser said that an increasingly common approach is to have students instead of turning in a paper, discuss or defend the ideas behind their paper — something that Inwood also implemented in a new assignment. Some professors are following suit by changing how papers are structured.

"From every interaction I've had, students are very eager to still gain those skills of attention and revision and writing into one's own voice," Glaser said.

The Yale College Course of Study Committee limits final exams to no more than 50 percent of a course's overall grade.

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