OPINION

GUEST COLUMNIST

MELANIE TROTOCHAUD

The 'humanities Ivy' has lost its way

The Yale Young Global Scholars program is a unique opportunity for many. High school students from all over the world stay at Yale for two-week sessions of academic enrichment. YYGS was split into four academic tracks: Literature, Philosophy & Culture; Innovations in Science & Technology; Politics of Law & Economics; and Solving Global Challenges.

For the forthcoming year, Yale has cut the humanities track, known as LPC.

As an instructor for YYGS last summer, I taught original seminars in which I advised students through the process of making a collaborative creative capstone project, and encouraged reflective and social exploration in a global setting. This program allowed eleventh and twelfth grade students from over 150 countries to experience their educational interests in a higher-level setting. Eliminating the humanities track's unique opportunity for critical intellectual exploration sends a troubling message, especially from a university often called the "humanities Ivy."

The only cause YYGS cited for the cut is to "increase seats in our remaining tracks." Though the reasoning remains opaque, the decision reflects how society's focus on education as a means to a financial end in a dismal job market has impacted both student and institutional decisions.

While it's true that students have been increasingly shifting towards STEM degrees due to more promising job opportunities, Yale of all institutions should know the persistent importance of humanities careers and of humanities skills for life outside of jobs. Considering YYGS is for intellectual enrichment and not for credit, YYGS is the perfect opportunity to engage in the humanities regardless of where students end up in their careers.

Yale is a school many students look to, trusting Yale still knows the value of investing in the humanities. Many enroll specifically because of its strong humanities programs. It's worth noting that this year's reunion for past participants in YYGS who now attend Yale was, anecdotally, almost entirely made up of former LPC students.

The freedom of the LPC's project-based style was profound for my students as it ushered them into an academic environment that went beyond perfunctory high school regurgitation — they worked in groups of unfamiliar peers making an imaginative project that gave analytical commentary on a given topic.

I had a group that made a video where each of them reflected on experiences where they'd felt "outside of the circle" and what they'd learned about themselves in the process. While in progress, they expressed embarrassment and nervousness about their project; but after presenting, many in the audience thanked them for their vulnerability, identifying with sentiments the project expressed. The students told me afterward that they felt much more confident in themselves, in being creative and in being sincere.

I know what it is like to be a high schooler interested in the humanities, disheartened by the lack of opportunities and appreciation for my interests. The average high schooler's exposure to humanities differs significantly from what can be found in higher education. It's easy to believe that learning history is useless when all you have ever been taught in history classes were seemingly insignificant facts.

These kids were starved for the humanities. Very few high schools offer classes where they get to think critically about the history, art and culture of their lives and world. Very few high schools teach how to think about the implications of historical changes and trends on the lives of people like us, and how the threads of history have shaped everything about the world around us.

If we do not give students the opportunity to ask the important questions through their education, how can we blame them for treating education like a passionless tool? Students everywhere receive so much pressure to direct their intellectual interests towards profit.

I've seen so many of my peers following instructions to "go into computer science, study economics, look at the degrees with the highest return on investment" as if education is only a transaction, and not part of our journey of exploration throughout our one human life. Through YYGS, not only did my students get to see what it's like to have a career in the humanities, they also learned what it means to incorporate humanities and critical thinking into their engagement with the world in everyday life.

Yale, out of all prominent universities, should know what's at stake. It is Yale's responsibility to have a role in preserving vulnerable studies. In a country where critical thinking and social studies have been under attack for years, what hope are we giving future generations to invest in understanding themselves and the world's cultures, history and art? If even Yale is telling high schoolers that their academic interests in the humanities have no place, what hope do they have?

Nobody should have to fight for the right to simply exist.

MELANIE TROTOCHAUD *is a master's student at Yale Divinity School studying Religion and the Arts. She can be reached at melanie.trotochaud@yale.edu.*

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Editorial: (203) 432-2418 editor@yaledailynews.com Business: (203) 432-2424 business@yaledailynews.com

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GUEST COLUMNIST

ALEXIS RICHARD

In the face of Trump v. Orr, Yale must do better

On Thursday, Nov. 6, the United States Supreme Court handed down a decision that will reverberate across the country and deeply impact the Yale community. In Trump v. Orr, the Court ruled that all federal identification — including passports, visas and Global Entry cards — must reflect a person's sex assigned at birth.

The ruling stems from a series of lawsuits surrounding Executive Order 14168: "Defending Women from Gender Ideology Extremism and Restoring Biological Truth to the Federal Government." Yet, as a Yale student and future health professional, I can say with certainty that this order does the opposite of what it claims. It does not "defend women" — it weaponizes gender to control and divide. It threatens the freedoms of all Americans who believe in privacy and equality under the law.

At Yale, this decision hits close to home. In July 2025, Yale quietly discontinued its youth medical gender-affirming care services. This move left many students, alumni and community members feeling abandoned. I, for one, came to Yale to pursue that exact field and proudly discussed Yale's Gender Program in my interviews for the Physician Associate Program. For an institution that prides itself on advancing health equity, this retreat contradicts its stated mission.

After Executive Order 14168 was issued, lawsuits by the ACLU and others ruled it violated the Administrative Procedure Act, the Due Process and Equal Protection Clauses of the Constitution and the right to travel. That decision briefly allowed trans and gender-diverse individuals to continue accessing identification that reflects their affirmed gender identities.

But on Nov. 6, the Supreme Court reversed that progress in a 6–3 decision, with Justices Jackson, Kagan and Sonia Sotomayor LAW '79 dissenting.

Requiring individuals to carry identification listing their sex assigned at birth is forced outing. It dangerously infringes upon privacy and increases the risk of harassment, discrimination and violence. This policy puts millions at risk, including many Yale international students who come from the 65 countries where LGBTQ+ identities are criminalized, 12 of which punish these identities by death.

According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness, LGBTQ+ people already face disproportionately high rates of mental health challenges — not because of their identities, but because of the relentless stigma, rejection and violence they endure. Forcing people to carry IDs that contradict their lived identities, and legitimizing those who oppose gender-affirming care as Yale has done, adds another layer of psychological distress, one known to correlate with suicidality and trauma.

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According to Yale's demographic data, 314 students across undergraduate, graduate and professional programs identify as nonbinary, transgender, or report "N/UNK" for gender identity, which is likely a significant undercount. At a minimum, that is 314 people in our classrooms, labs, and clinics whose existence and safety deserve more than passive acknowledgment. As a community committed to "Lux et Veritas," Yale must stand with them through meaningful action, not silence.

As a student training in public health and medicine, I see the effects of policy decisions like these in both data and lived experience. They have measurable consequences for health, safety, and well-being. If Yale is truly sincere about its nondiscrimination statement, then it should reinstate its gender-affirming care services, incorporate mandatory gender-based curricula in all schools, partner with students to develop evidence-based solutions and end its deafening silence.

Contrary to the claims of the Trump administration and its allies, trans people exist, and always have, on the natural spectrum of human diversity. Efforts to erase trans existence are neither new nor accidental; they are part of a long tradition of authoritarian control through social division.

Today, one about percent of adults in the United States identify as transgender, and another two percent identify as gender-diverse. These are not abstract numbers. They represent millions of Americans: our coworkers, classmates, professors, friends and family members. This is not a fringe issue. It is a civil rights crisis, and Yale must take a stand to defend its community and its values.

The Trump v. Orr ruling raises urgent questions: Will our institutions uphold the principle that all people deserve to live safely and authentically? Will universities like Yale, with its resources and influence, truly stand for the communities they claim to serve?

The promise of equality under the law and in medicine is not partisan. It is foundational. Ensuring that transgender and gender-diverse people can carry accurate identification, access affirming care and live openly is not just about gender. It is about liberty, safety and survival.

As Yale students, we are taught to pursue truth and justice. That responsibility extends beyond the classroom. It is on us as scholars, future clinicians and advocates to ensure that our university and our nation do the same.

Nobody should have to fight for the right to simply exist.

ALEXIS RICHARD *is a first-year PA/MPH candidate at the Yale School of Medicine and Yale School of Public Health, studying in the Social and Behavioral Sciences Department with a concentration in U.S. Health Justice. They can be reached at alexis.richard@yale.edu.*

LETTER 11.07

Having taught Yale College students for 20 years (from 1999-2020), and having graduated from the all-male, mostly white Yale in 1969, I've learned that freedoms of expression can be suppressed by many different stereotypes and presumptions, some "conservative," others "progressive." The recent YDN report, "Christakis' Defenders See Freer Campus Discourse," tells one half of that story in its account of what happened at Yale in 2015.

Leftist-liberal presumptions about racism, sexism, and "diversity" do sometimes run amok, as I showed in my book Liberal Racism in 1997. But to claim that they did so at Yale in 2015 needs to be qualified. A relatively few students did overreact furiously to Professors Nicholas and Erica Christakis' defense of transgressive Halloween costumes. An infamous video of a female Yale student cursing out Nicholas Christakis while roughly 20 other students snapped their fingers in support of her was shot by Greg Lukianoff, president of the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education. It became a media sensation and was reposted by the conservative propagandist Tucker Carlson's Daily Caller under a headline, "Meet the Privileged Yale Student Who Shrieked at Her Professor."

What the video didn't show were hundreds of white Yalies having their first frank conversations about race with minority classmates. A thousand students of all colors joined a vibrant "march of resilience," some of them leaving my seminar for the day to join the march. A thousand convened in Battell Chapel, where classmates and professors spoke from their deepest humanity, without malevolence or duplicity.

> WHAT THE VIDEO DIDN'T SHOW WERE HUNDREDS OF WHITE YALIES HAVING THEIR FIRST FRANK CONVERSATIONS ABOUT RACE WITH MINORITY CLASSMATES.

It was a perfect example of the way a good college is a civil society on training wheels: Students, many away from home and in "adult" society for the first time, may try out defensive ethno-racial flag waving, religious and political dogmatism, athletic and fraternal self-segregation, and premature career-ladder climbing. But they're also learning how and how not to stand up for themselves and to restrain themselves in deference to others.

If some collegiate civil societies are lurching into ditches now, as MAGA enthusiasts and sensation-chasing media claim, that's partly because Trump is accelerating a swift, dark current in the larger society. But most of what I witnessed at Yale in 2015 and often ever since have been constructive public reckonings across racial and ideological lines.

Yale graduates should be known for stimulating such reckonings. The progressives among them shouldn't give right-wing propagandists and Trump excuses to suppress freedoms of expression against racism and sexism, as Trump is doing by imposing duplicitous anti-"diversity" compacts upon academic freedom. Conservatives shouldn't "dine out" on exposing left-liberal follies so often that they forget how to cook something nourishing for the rest of us and end up abandoning their kitchen to demagogues. The Yale experience should balance career training with truth-seeking and responsible power-wielding in a civic-republican spirit, instead of teaching adversaries to be right only about how their adversaries are wrong.

JIM SLEEPER '69 *was a lecturer in political science and ethics, politics and economics from 1999 to 2020.*