FROM THE FRONT

"So raise another glass of wine"
KOS SHEL YAYIN MOSHE PERETZ

Students, alumni and Matt Damon echo calls to fight

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entrance into settlement talks with the Department of Justice, a change in the University's mission statement, the implementation of budget cuts and the addition of a new definition of antisemitism to University policy.

"I have several points for your consideration: one, Trump is a liar who doesn't keep his word. Approaching him for a deal marks you as a chump whom he'll continue to extort," Pak said at the event. "The one way to deal with him is to fight, and if you are unwilling to fight, you should resign."

The Democratize Yale coalition's other demands include increased protections for free speech on campus and the prioritization of shared University governance.

After panelists answered questions, dozens of attendees delivered testimony in person and virtually, including Congressman-elect Chris Rabb '92 and Academy Award-winning producer Bruce Cohen '83. Actor Matt Damon also appeared in a pre-recorded video.

"Students, faculty, and staff are being brave and are resisting, even if the trustees are just worried about the endowment going up," Damon, who attended Harvard College, said in a video shown at the event. "Please keep fighting the good fight. The world needs Yale to be Yale — even a Harvard guy has to admit that."

In response to a question from the News about why she declined to participate in the event, McInnis wrote in a Sunday email that there are no new updates to share with regard to the investigations into Yale admissions but that she would communicate any news with the community.

"I've been heartened by the engagement I've seen from the Yale community over the past few months," McInnis wrote. "Groups on campus hold events regularly on a variety of topics, including this one, and I think that's a sign of a flourishing campus. It's also a measure of how deeply people care about our university."

Yale is in negotiations with the Justice Department after the department alleged in May that the School of Medicine discriminated against white and Asian applicants. McInnis has described the conversations with the federal government as a required step in the resolution process. Activists at the event called the investigation a racist attack.

Kenneth Roth LAW '80, a Law School lecturer, moderated the event. In his remarks, he compared McInnis' commitments to the Yale community with the promises Columbia University's president made before cutting a deal with the Trump administration.

Columbia's deal, reached in July 2025, requires the school to pay the government $200 million and to accept a new definition of antisemitism — the same one Yale would later adopt. McInnis said in a September interview about the University's negotiations that Yale's situation is different from other universities.

Diego Loustaunau '27, an organizer with Democratize Yale and the Endowment Justice Collective, — a group that demands Yale divest from fossil fuels, among other things — said in an interview after the event that McInnis's refusal to attend the event indicated a hesitation to "engage with students directly."

"I think that it's really disappointing that President McInnis promotes dialogue and conversation in the words of the Woodward Report — the right to challenge the unchallengeable and debate the undebatable — but won't actually participate in that herself," Loustaunau said.

Yale adopted the Woodward Report in 1975 to outline standards of free expression on campus, according to a University webpage.

Katherine Profeta '91 DRA '99 '09, a professor at the Drama School and founding member of the alumni group Stand Up for Yale, said the group would send out information about alternative ways to support Yale for those hesitant to donate to the University because of their displeasure with the Justice Department negotiations. These channels could include donations to University-affiliated groups like Dwight Hall at Yale, Profeta said.

Yale College Council Chief of Staff and panelist Brendan Kaminski '28 said in an interview after the event that Democratize Yale and the YCC will likely continue to "create opportunities for McInnis to speak" with members of the Yale community, adding that they hope the president will accept a future invitation.

The town hall event took place in a Humanities Quadrangle auditorium.

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Courtesy of Greg Pak
Students, faculty and alumni gathered at a Saturday afternoon event where organizers broadly criticized Yale President Maurie McInnis' decision-making and the University's ongoing negotiations with the Trump administration. McInnis declined to attend.

Pass/fail rule for some language classes was shot down



Braden Mathis / Photography Editor
The Yale College committee tasked with developing guidance to address grade inflation has floated a proposal to make the first four levels of language classes graded on a pass/fail system, but the measure has faced pushback, three sources familiar with the matter said.

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a pass/fail system for language classes up to Level Four but has faced pushback. The individuals requested anonymity because they are not authorized to discuss private details.

One person said the committee will consider a wide range of proposals, including hot-button ones like A-range grade caps. The professors in departments implicated by any proposals, and not the committee itself, will likely have the final say on whether any proposals are implemented, two of the people said. Harvard's faculty voted in May 2026 to implement a 20 percent cap on the number of A's with room for four extra A's per class, which is set to go into effect in fall 2027.

Like Harvard, Yale College was originally planning to start implementing potential new grading rules in fall 2027. But Yale College Dean Pericles Lewis told the News last week that the committee needs more time to research and gather input and that any approved changes would not be implemented until fall 2028.

Committee chair and economics professor Benjamin Polak did not respond to a request for comment.

The language class proposal has faced some pushback from language faculty, whose approval would likely be necessary for any implementation, two of the people told the News. One person said the proposal is likely off the table due to the opposition.

To fulfill Yale College's distributional requirements, all undergraduates must take the equivalent of three semesters of a language — or take one or two semesters of language courses if they can enter higher levels through a placement test.

Rigor and workload for language courses vary depending on the department. In fall 2025, the French department made some of its courses easier in response to student feedback, and professors said at the time that they hoped the changes would encourage more students to study the language.

While an April report on declining trust in higher education floated a 3.0 mean grade-point average, the committee has so far focused on proposals like reforming which courses count towards GPA, one of the people said. These include proposals that could modify the language requirements or make other mastery-based courses — like introductory math — graded on a pass/fail basis, the person said.

In September, Yale's Faculty of Arts and Sciences and School of Engineering and Applied Science Senate passed a resolution encouraging the committee to minimize harm to students and faculty with any grading policy changes.

Yale's faculty voted to require undergraduates to study a foreign language in 1982.

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U.S. Rhodes winners include activist, art historian

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"I honestly didn't really believe it for a couple minutes," George said in an interview. "It was pretty surreal, and, honestly, it's still surreal now."

After hours of interviews and deliberations, the finalists gathered to hear the results in person in their home regions. Koda said when she heard her name announced, she was initially overwhelmed by emotion and embraced her co-winner from New York-South. Koda then called her mother, who had stayed awake through the night in Asia waiting to hear the news.

George, a staff columnist for the News, is a history and philosophy major who plans to conduct research at Oxford, focusing on Black economic thought and the legacies of decolonization and the Civil Rights Movement. After Oxford, they hope to develop their dissertation into a book and pursue a law degree, with the goal of working in public finance law and using government policy to advance economic equity.

"The reason why I want to pursue this dissertation is because in most economics classes, and even in classes on economic history, you don't learn how Black people, particularly Black thinkers, are able to theorize ways of trying to ameliorate systemic issues," George said.

George said their interests have been shaped by his experiences in community organizing. Through their work as Ward 2 Co-Chair for the Dwight neighborhood of New Haven, they said, they have seen the impact of collective action in addressing systemic issues such as poverty.

"If you aren't able to go to the drawing board and reinvent the way that we do things, then we're liable to repeat the same errors in the past," George said.

Beyond their organizing work, George serves as the editor in chief of DOWN, a Yale undergraduate magazine focused on people of color. They said their interest in writing informs how they think about politics, particularly the role of storytelling in bringing people together in social movements.

Koda, a former Sci-Tech editor for the News, is a mathematics and philosophy major and a journalist whose work focuses on science and health communication. While still undecided on which master's program to pursue at Oxford, Koda said, she is committed to attending the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai through the early admissions program. Koda is also a 2026 Truman Scholar.

Koda said in an interview that her interest in healthcare journalism stems from seeing how limited access to scientific information can affect medical decisions. Through her reporting, she said, she has encountered the consequences of misinformation in healthcare, and at Oxford, she hopes to explore how institutions can rebuild public trust and how people can distinguish credible information, especially in the age of AI.

"Why I was first drawn to journalism was that it gave me all these different ways to think about the world, and how to construct my own perspective, through writing something quite objective," Koda said.

She added that her appreciation of education is shaped by her family's history. She noted that her grandparents in Japan and Taiwan, and particularly the women in her family, did not have the opportunity to attend college, which she said has made her conscious of the educational opportunities and privileges available to her.

"I think learning for the sake of learning is such a unique feeling that is so innately human," Koda said. "So I really want to give back to people who are seeking either similar opportunities or looking for advice on how to make the best out of their education."

Soriano, a history of art major, spent two years at Citrus College, a community college in Southern California, before transferring to Yale. She is interested in art research, curation and museums.

In a text message to the News, Soriano wrote she was in "complete shock" while also feeling an "overwhelming sense of gratitude" when she was announced as the second Rhodes Scholar from her district after waiting for nearly two hours with the other finalists.

"When I heard my name, I couldn't help but think that this honor was not mine alone," Soriano wrote in a text message to the News. "To me, this recognition belongs just as much to all those people who have shaped my life as it does to me."

Soriano wrote that her interest in art history developed after transferring to Yale, where she joined the Yale University Art Gallery's guide program. She added that her internship at the J. Paul Getty Museum in summer 2025 helped her recognize curatorial work as a potential career path and inspired her to pursue further study in art history.

Last year, three Yale students — Noah Tirschwell '26, Aruna Balasubramanian '26 and August Rios '26 — received the United States 2026 Rhodes Scholarship.

Correction, Nov. 16: This article was updated to clarify that Asuka Koda '27 has grandparents in both Japan and Taiwan.

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Jack Ennis / Contributing Photographer
On Saturday, three Yale College seniors learned that they were part of the 32 Americans selected this year for the scholarship, which recognizes students for character and academic achievement and funds two years of graduate study at Oxford.