NEWS

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Yale Hospitality pilots South Asian-themed dinner at two colleges

BY ASHLEY SKINNER
CONTRIBUTING REPORTER



ASHLEY SKINNER / CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER

Morse and Ezra Stiles colleges' hospitality staff hosted a South Asian-themed dinner on Sunday, after the Yale College Council proposed an event honoring the Hindu celebration of Diwali, though the event could not carry an official religious designation.

The Yale College Council collaborated with Ezra Stiles and Morse colleges' dining halls to pilot a dinner celebrating South Asian culture and the Hindu festival of Diwali on Sunday.

After a student emailed Yale Hospitality requesting a dinner celebrating Diwali, YCC Chief of Staff Brendan Kaminski '28 outlined a proposal for the event last February.

Kaminski said the initial proposal called for the dinner to span the residential college system, but that Yale Hospitality recommended hosting the dinner in one or two dining halls as a trial before expanding the event in future years.

"We're hopeful that this pilot can serve as a model for expanding it across the different residential colleges, and hopefully this is a celebration that people in each college get to celebrate in future years," Kaminski said.

The dinner, which was open only to Morse and Stiles students, featured dishes like chicken tikka masala, chana masala and kheer rice pudding, as well as mango lassi, a yogurt-based mango drink. The Stiles side of the connected dining hall was decorated with candles and colorful garlands, and the Bollywood film Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham was displayed.

Sudarshan Krishnan '28, who celebrates Diwali and attended the event, said in an interview that he felt the food was good but not perfectly authentic.

"In terms of accuracy, I feel like it tasted different to the Indian food I am used to. The chana masala and the potato and cauliflower both had slightly different flavor profiles to what I am used to," Krishnan said. "So, not my favorite, but decent."

Divya Agarwal '30, a student in Benjamin Franklin college who celebrates Diwali, said she was disappointed upon finding out that the event was not open to all students..

"I think it's good that they're trying to start some initiative like this and have more representation, but I think it's a little bit unfortunate that it's only limited to students in Morse and Stiles," Agarwal said.

According to YCC Cultural and Religious Community Co-coordinator Gian Lombeyda '28, the council reached out to multiple residential colleges to host the event, but the communication with the Stiles and Morse dining halls was "the quickest, the easiest and the most efficient," he said.

A Holi celebration in spring, also known as the Hindu festival of colors, has been held on the Morse and Stiles lawn for the past few years.

"I think the way that Stiles and Morse hospitality were discussing the event with us, they're very much on board that as soon as this is done and as soon as it works well, it'll probably be a very easy process to be able to get it expanded to all the different colleges," Lombeyda said in a phone interview.

Ezra Stiles Assistant Director of Operations Marc Levenson said he was happy to make the event possible.

"Stiles is very much about the way we make this a home is through food and fun and being friendly," Levenson said. "So in various ways, this fits into the broader approach of making this feel like a home."

The YCC proposal initially designated the event as a dinner celebrating Diwali, the Hindu Festival of Lights, which is celebrated each fall.

But according to Kaminski, the dinner could not be officially branded as a Diwali event due to University regulations and was instead framed as a South Asian-inspired dinner.

"We're not allowed to have an event that's funded with those resources that so explicitly promotes a religion," Kaminski said.

According to Kaminski, YCC representatives worked with the University Chaplain, the Hindu Chaplain and the Yale Hindu Students Organization, among others, to ensure the cultural authenticity of the event, including its food, music and entertainment.

The YCC proposal also cited precedent for past culturally-themed dining hall meals, including those for Black History Month, Latinx Heritage Month and Native American Heritage Month.

Nana Bhambi '28, the religious affairs chair of the Yale Hindu Students Organization, said she was excited to have a "wide representation of the various foods" of South Asian culture.

"I think it's very important that students become familiar with this aspect of the world that's growing because, not just here at Yale, but when you enter the real world," Bhambi said in an interview during the event. "It's important to know about all sorts of cultures that really makes us up as a very diverse country."

Bhambi added that one way to expand the event in the future might be to feature student performances alongside the dinner at some dining halls.

Last year, Connecticut became the second state to recognize Diwali as a state holiday.

Contact
ASHLEY SKINNER *at*
ashley.skinner@yale.edu.

Yale launches annual $10 printing subsidy following YCC advocacy

BY EMILY AKBAR
STAFF REPORTER

The Yale College Council unanimously passed on Sunday two proposals to expand financial assistance for low-income students during breaks, as well as a measure to add digital student IDs to Apple Wallet and a proposal to expand Dean's Extensions to non-varsity sports commitments.

The first piece of legislation asked the University to increase the eligibility for Thanksgiving food vouchers from $5,000 to $10,000 parent share — the amount Yale expects a student's family to contribute annually toward their education. Last year, the University lowered that eligibility from $10,000 to $5,000 without advance notice, the proposal said. The current program provides two $40 Uber Eats vouchers to eligible students who remain on campus during Thanksgiving break.

"I think it's like a very useful resource because if you don't have the money to go home for a break then you probably don't have a lot of money to spend on food over a break," delegate Luke Huck '29 said. "I think programs like these help people that are trying to meet that discrepancy in funding."

The sponsors of that proposal said that they also considered keeping dining halls open during breaks but that administrators had indicated that the financial costs made that option unfeasible.

The YCC also passed a proposal introduced by Speaker Kyler Parker '29 to keep Yale's Safety Net emergency assistance program open during winter and summer breaks.

For students with parent shares below $10,000, Safety Net provides financial support for eligible emergency expenses, including medical care, emergency travel and computer repairs. Last academic year, the program funded more than 1,000 requests — 80 percent of requests received — per the proposal. The program currently does not accept requests or cover expenses incurred during winter and summer breaks.

"Basically put, the safety net system is pretty sloppily run, I'd say, at this school, and there's major gaps in what safety net covers and major gaps between the rationale for what Safety Net covers and doesn't," Parker said.

Administrators expressed willingness to discuss opening Safety Net during winter recess, Parker said. Under the proposal, the University would also remove the New-Haven-area restriction on medical assistance during breaks and designate a staff contact for students facing emergencies.

A third proposal, sponsored by Kevin Cano '30, Alex Park '30 and Parker, called on Yale to introduce digital student IDs compatible with Apple Wallet and Google Wallet.

Cano said Yale IT administrators have expressed they have all the necessary infrastructure to support the technology required for the addition, but the University has not yet implemented the feature.

During the discussion, Senator Christopher Johnson '29 raised concerns that introducing digital IDs could render physical cards obsolete or create opportunities for students to share their cards with others.

Senator Eugene Covington '28 responded that the two mediums would be "interchangeable," comparing them to physical and digital credit cards. He argued that mobile access would provide additional convenience for students who forget or lose their physical IDs. The proposal unanimously passed.

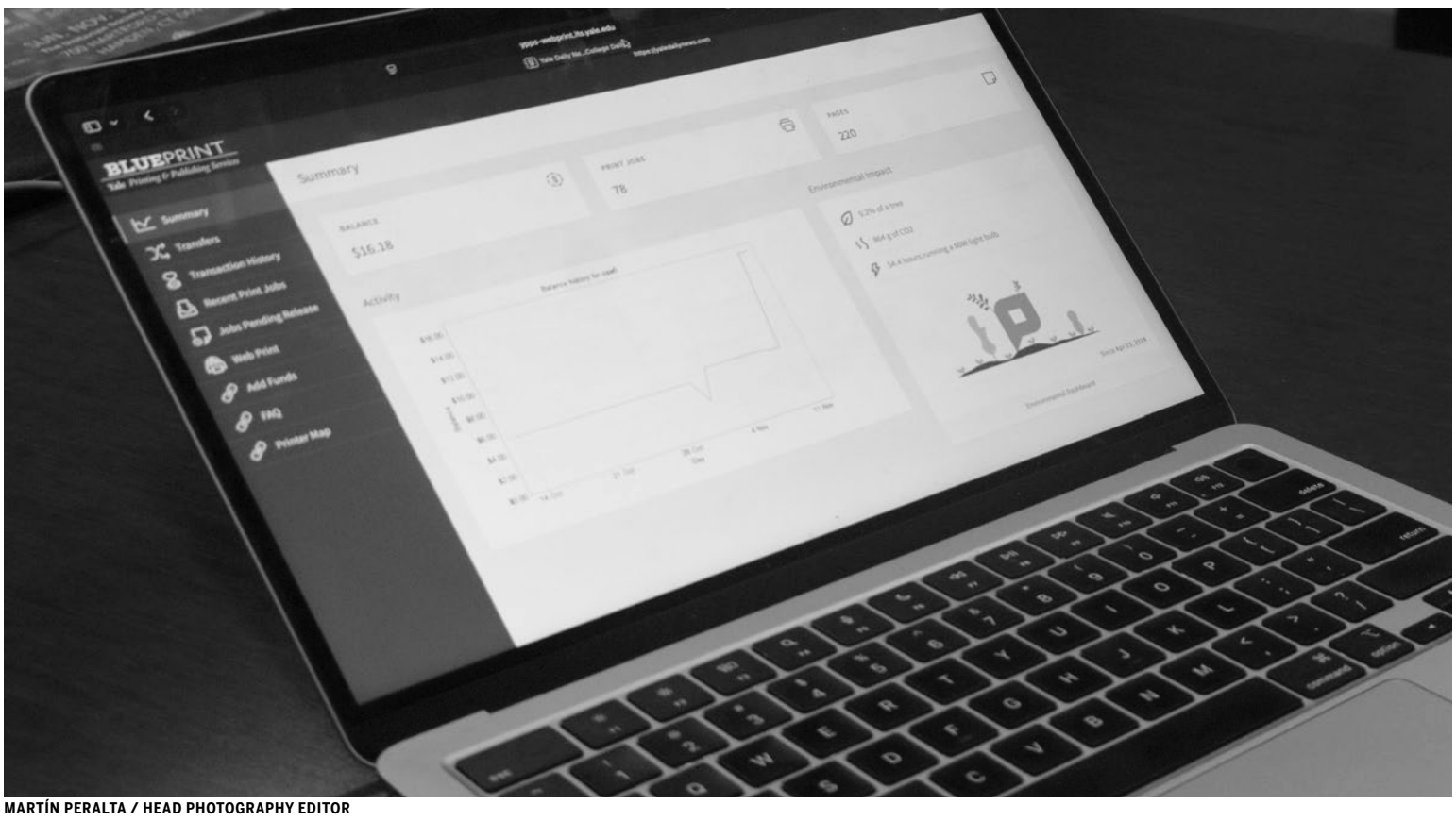
A final proposal, sponsored by Senator Maneet Mehta '29, called on Yale to expand Dean's Extensions to students with significant non-varsity extracurricular commitments. Under current Yale College academic regulations, residential college deans may grant extensions for circumstances including incapacitating medical conditions, family emergencies, religious observances and varsity athletic competitions.

Mehta argued that students participating in activities such as a cappella performances, theater productions, debate tournaments and academic research conferences are not covered, creating an inequity between varsity athletes and students with similarly demanding extracurricular responsibilities.

"I think it's kind of unfair to have a pathway for Dean's Extensions that's only applicable to around 10 to 13 percent of the Yale population, when the rest of us also have incredibly important obligations," Mehta said.

The next YCC meeting will take place on Dec. 6.

Contact
EMILY AKBAR *at*
emily.akbar@yale.edu.



MARTÍN PERALTA / HEAD PHOTOGRAPHY EDITOR

The subsidy, which the YCC estimated will cover approximately 80 percent of students' annual printing needs, arrives as more professors require printed copies of reading materials due to the popularity of artificial intelligence tools.