

FROM THE FRONT

“No duty is more urgent than that of returning thanks.”
VOLTAIRE FRENCH WRITER

Postdocs seek to join grad union

POSTDOCS FROM PAGE 1

National Institutes of Health. For postdoctoral scholars, research funding cuts could lead to losing a job, Laxton said.

Yale's Office of Public Affairs and Communications did not immediately respond to the News' request for comment.

In her speech, Laxton described getting laid off last year and feeling like her life was being uprooted. She was told if she didn't find a new job within 60 days, she would lose her work visa and her ability to stay in the United States. While she was able to find a job before then, she said not being a part of a formal advocacy group made the transition frightening.

"I have talked to postdocs who have uprooted their lives and moved thousands of miles to come to Yale, only to lose their jobs," Maya Emmons-Bell, a postdoctoral associate in cell biology, said.

Others framed unionization as a financial issue. Speakers highlighted the day-to-day financial pressures that shape postdoctoral researchers' lives, and said membership in a union could provide more stability.

Leila Wahab, a postdoctoral associate who studies soils and biogeochemistry, spoke about her daily financial struggles and how membership in a union could help her.

"A raise and affordable health insurance would mean not worrying about every sound my 15-year-old car makes, because if it breaks down, I can't afford another one," Wahab said. "It would mean being able to visit and support my aging parents more often. It would mean being able to save for having children in the future."

The rally was a part of Yale's post-doctoral researchers' efforts to obtain membership in Local 33, so that they can receive the same protections as the graduate students, researchers and staff in recognized unions.

The new effort comes three years after Yale's initial recognition of the graduate student union Local 33. Since then, graduate students have negotiated contracts to ensure adequate health coverage, higher pay and employer-provided pathways for grievances.

"Just like grad workers, postdocs deserve health and safety protections, job security, fair treatment language and a grievance procedure to deal with workplace issues," Waters said.

For Waters, the recognition of Local 33 was an assurance that his voice and any issues he might have with the University would be taken seriously and addressed with proper attention.

Sydney Shuster GRD '27, a fourth-year graduate student in biophysical chemistry and a vice president of Local 33, spoke about how the recognition of Local 33 allowed her to carry out groundbreaking research while simultaneously affording basic living expenses.

"When we won dental insurance, that meant I didn't have to choose between my health and my science," Shuster said.

Lamont, Mayor Justin Elicker and State Senate President Martin Looney also took the podium throughout the night, emphasizing the continued importance of UNITE HERE unions on a state level.

"We know that the effort on behalf of unions is what we need to improve this country's future and to deliver us through the nightmare that we're in right now," Looney said.

"All of us who represent New Haven in the General Assembly are proud to be part of that effort."

Looney stressed the importance of maintaining and strengthening unions as a defense against the federal government's research funding cutbacks.

Lamont expressed similar sentiments, arguing that supporting researchers is key to winning a broader fight for a stable political and economic future.

"Respect means respecting the importance of what you're doing every day and reflecting that in how you're treated. Respect means reminding Donald Trump that you are the future of this country. We're right here, fighting for you every day," Lamont said.

In a rousing speech at the end of the rally, Rev. Scott Marks called for a collective push against cuts to research funding and an underregulated Yale presence in New Haven. Marks, the director of New Haven Rising, argued that securing union membership for postdoctoral students would have a revitalizing effect on New Haven.

"It is the most powerful tool we have to transform the many poverty-wage jobs we have in our city," Marks said. "Union victories are community victories."

DJ Tootskee closed out the downtown rally with "Uptown Funk" by Bruno Mars, as the ensemble of speakers danced on stage.

UNITE HERE represents over 300,000 workers across the United States and Canada, according to its website.

Contact **KADE GAJDUSEK** at kade.gajdusek@yale.edu and **CATHERINE CHENG** at catherine.cheng@yale.edu.



Yale's graduate workers union rallied for the addition of postdoctoral researchers to its membership amid federal research funding cuts. / Carter Cashen, Multimedia Managing Editor

Classes to examine Yale, academia

COURSES FROM PAGE 1

graduation often question what it means to be a Yalie, which affects the popularity of his course. Gitlin has also noticed that the current generation of students often find it more problematic to attend an elite school, which could contribute to the increase in courses on Yale.

"I think Yale always likes to be about Yale. It's a corporation. Its responsibility is securing its own legacy," professor Noreen Khawaja said in an interview about why Yale offers courses on itself.

Khawaja will teach the course "What Was the University?" The lecture will examine the "theory of the university as a historical, political institution as well as a spiritual enterprise," the syllabus says.

Khawaja said that her course is a "slight permutation" from others offered on the history of the University. She explained that students will discuss philosophical readings and "more theoretical work" about how to understand the university as a "space sealed off from the rest of society."

Professor Mordechai Levy-Eichel's class, "What is the University?" focuses on a "high-level historical and structural examination of the rise of the research university," per the course description. He first taught the course in the spring of 2023.

Khawaja emphasized the need for a course that "speaks to the present moment" as learning changes with the introduction of artificial intelligence and other factors. She said now is an interesting moment to reflect on the formation of the University as an institution and corporation.

"We tend to ask questions about how we got to where we are and what's worth holding onto as different uncertain horizons meet us," she said. "I think that's just the basic point of doing history in this case and in any other."

Gitlin said that the focus of his upper-level seminar is to use the "lens of Yale people and the things that are happening at Yale" as a way to study American history. He explained that the class is an opportunity for his students to reflect on their experiences at Yale, while providing a space to talk about Yale positively and critically.

"I think it's fun to teach a class about something that people are truly close to and invested in. But at the same time, approach it as historians," he said.

Gitlin said that many students believe in stereotypes about the history of Yale, and he enjoys teaching his course to find out

"what actually happened."

"Why I like teaching any history class, and this one, especially, because it allows me to try to think about: What exactly is this place? What was true then?" he said.

The last time Botsman taught "Yale and Japan" was in the spring of 2023 with professor Hannah Shepherd. The seminar explores the history of Yale's relationship with Japan through analyzing archival records. While Botsman said there was no reason behind the timing of his class returning, he emphasized the importance of studying the history of Yale.

"We have this idea, rightly, that Yale is this very elite, white male school, and I think it's interesting to think about the exceptions to that in the early history," he said.

Benjamin Bernard '11, a post-doctoral associate at the History department, will be teaching "Trust and Veritas: the Public Legitimacy of Universities." The course "investigates the historical origins and contestations of university legitimacy from the Middle Ages to the present," according to its course description.

Bernard is also associated with the Committee on Trust in Higher Education, which was established by University President Maurice McNinnis this April.

"The study of universities is great for an undergraduate research seminar," Bernard wrote to the News. "The topic has immanent value, as many of us are curious to deepen our knowledge of the institutions in which we live and work."

Apart from the topic's relevance to the lives of faculty and students, Bernard also commented on the intellectual importance of "the study of universities." These include the topic's access to a broad range of methodologies, the availability of archival materials preserved by institutions, recent "significant" scholarship in the field and the topic's close connection to democracy and other important social institutions.

"Because universities are some of our oldest extant institutions—far older than, say, modern democracy or urban police—they lend themselves well to longitudinal study across traditionally demarcated periods," Bernard wrote.

Spring term courses will begin Jan. 12, 2026.

Contact **JOLYNDA WANG** at jolynda.wang@yale.edu and **GILLIAN PEIHE FENG** at peihe.feng@yale.edu.

Professors say McNinnis cited risk of provoking Trump

MCINNIS FROM PAGE 1

HoSang's characterization of the administrators' stance.

McNinnis' remarks indicated that her administration's priority was defending Yale, which "meant defending the endowment" to McNinnis and trustees, according to Wenger. However, Wenger acknowledged that preserving the endowment provides the University its foundation to pursue other priorities.

"It kind of starts with that. To them, that is really essential, that you have to defend the finances of the institution in order for the institution to continue, and they wanted to deflect and avoid direct attacks on Yale from the Trump administration," Wenger said in a September interview.

Last fall, McNinnis adopted a report that advised Yale leaders to abstain from speaking publicly on matters of public significance. The guidance noted possible exceptions to this practice for matters of "transcendent importance to the community." In two recent emails to the News, McNinnis cited these recommendations and noted their influence on her public comments.

HoSang said in a Wednesday interview that he does not recall McNinnis mentioning the University's policy on institutional voice in the February faculty meeting he attended.

Since Trump took office, Yale has remained one of two Ivy League schools whose federal grants have not been punitively frozen. Over the summer, the University navigated a federal proposal that would increase the tax on its endowment investment returns. The bill, signed into law on July 4, established an 8 percent endowment tax for Yale.

Wenger said that she and other AAUP members "felt a great deal of respect for the dilemmas" McNinnis was navigating. According to Wenger, McNinnis said at the meeting that she had not made any deals with the Trump administration, referring to "speculations" around campus about how Yale has avoided significant crackdown from the federal government.

"President McNinnis was very clear that had not happened, that she had not been in any talks with the Trump administration, but that she was spending a lot of time in D.C. advocating with members of Congress against endowment taxes," Wenger said.

Asked whether she had since been in talks with the Trump administration, McNinnis wrote in an email last Thursday that she continues "to make the case for Yale and higher education more broadly."

"As I have done last year, I regularly meet with legislators, policymakers, and leaders in Washington, DC, to speak about the contribu-

tions of colleges and universities and to discuss Yale's mission. Nothing has changed since last spring," McNinnis wrote last Thursday.

Inside the meetings

According to HoSang, McNinnis's two spring meetings with professors followed letters from faculty demanding that Yale administrators publicly defend research and academic freedom at Yale in the wake of federal scrutiny towards higher education.

McNinnis wrote in a Tuesday email that she invited faculty members affiliated with the letters to meet with her and Provost Scott Strobel during the spring semester. She noted in a later email that her meetings were with the letters' senders and were "not organized around faculty groups."

"I think she and other University leaders understand the importance of at least hearing faculty concerns," HoSang said. He added that McNinnis was the only administrator at the February meeting in the University President's Office.

According to HoSang, two other members of the AAUP executive committee attended the Feb. 24 meeting, alongside faculty from the School of Public Health and the School of Medicine, who spoke on the impacts of widespread cuts to federal research grants. HoSang said that professors at the meeting did not make

any concrete demands beyond the concerns outlined in their February letter, which called on McNinnis to make more prominent public statements and collaborate with other universities in defending higher education.

McNinnis was "open to listening" and candid about the constraints that the University was facing, HoSang said. However, in light of funding freezes at other institutions and threats of an endowment tax hike on universities, he said, McNinnis conveyed her concerns about the University's budget.

Since adopting the Committee on Institutional Voice's guidance, McNinnis has condemned the National Institute of Health's cuts to research funding, and during summer recess, she urged members of the Yale community to advocate against the endowment tax hike proposal.

According to HoSang, McNinnis met with faculty members for a second time on May 2, following an April faculty letter jointly presented by the Faculty of Arts and Sciences and School of Engineering and Applied Science Senate and Yale's AAUP chapter.

HoSang said that while he was not present at the second meeting, other members of the AAUP executive committee and senior members of the FAS-SEAS Senate met with McNinnis and Strobel. Wenger, the AAUP chapter's secretary, said she attended the meeting.

According to Wenger, some faculty members wanted Yale to take a "stronger, more public stand in defense of every member of our community, and in the sense of the research that happens here, the value of the University, academic freedom and freedom of speech on campus, which are values that seem to be too easily under attack from the right at this point."

However, she said "many" others also believe that University leaders making public statements would be "counterproductive." Wenger's impression was that Yale administrators appreciated faculty and community members' voices and were not aiming to prevent individuals from "speaking out" on issues.

HoSang said that McNinnis's spring meetings with faculty made it clear to him that "the decision had been made" by administrators to refrain from more prominently defending Yale in the public sphere. He said the AAUP has since shifted its priorities away from demanding public statements.

"They've made the decision not to do that, and it's not something, from my perspective, was going to be terribly productive to keep pressing on," HoSang said.

The AAUP chapter at Yale was revived last November.

Contact **ISOBEL MCCLURE** at isobel.mcclure@yale.edu and **JAHA JANG** at jaeha.jang@yale.edu.