

FROM THE FRONT

“My gift is my song, and this one’s for you.”
YOUR SONG ELTON JOHN

Dean foresees fresh effort to address prevalence of A’s

GRADING FROM PAGE 1

grades awarded to Harvard undergraduates dropped from 60.2 percent in the 2024-2025 academic year to 53.4 percent in the fall, according to the Crimson. Yale College has not released grading data for any academic year since 2022-23, when, according to a report obtained by the News, the average GPA at Yale was 3.70.

That school year, 64 percent of grades awarded to Harvard undergraduates were A's, according to the Crimson, while 58.26 percent of grades awarded to Yale undergraduates were A's. When accounting for both A and A- grades, Yale saw 78.97 percent awarded and Harvard saw 83 percent awarded.

“When we looked at it a few years ago, our numbers were very similar,” Lewis said, referring to grading data for undergraduates at Harvard and Yale. “I’m just going to study what happens at our peer institutions, and we’ll have some recommendations for the faculty within a year or so.”

On Jan. 30, a week before the Harvard faculty proposal was released, Lewis told the News that he had asked Yale College’s Standing Committee on Teaching, Learning and Advising to “advise” him on the issue of grade inflation. Last Wednesday, he added that the committee’s members are “aware of what’s going on at Harvard and will be looking closely at it.”

The standing committee, which is chaired by economics profes-

sor Benjamin Polak, is composed of nine faculty members, seven College administrators and two undergraduate students.

Lewis said that the College has “good reason to keep an eye on what happens” at peer institutions like Harvard and Princeton.

“We’re competitors, and so we stay competitive with them,” he added. “We’re in a marketplace where I’m very much aware of what an A means at Yale and how that compares to A’s at other places, and I don’t want an A at Yale to be seen as a lesser A.”

This concern is particularly relevant for graduate school admissions, Lewis said, where a disparity between Yale and its peer institutions in terms of grade cap policies could lead to A’s awarded by Yale not being considered “worth as much” as those awarded by its peers.

Though the grading data revealed in November 2023 prompted faculty members to express concerns about rising grade inflation, the College did not announce any plans that academic year to target the issue.

The last time such policies were considered was during the 2012-13 academic year, when Lewis’s predecessor Mary Miller created an Ad Hoc Committee on Grading to address issues including rising grade averages in Yale College, the News reported at the time. The most recent grading data at the time showed that 62 percent of grades awarded to undergraduates were in the A range.

The committee recommended in February 2013 that the College transition from a letter-grade system to a 100-point scale and suggested a set of guidelines that would award 35 percent of grades in the 90 to 100 range and 40 percent in the 80 to 89 range, with a mean grade of 85.5 percent, the News reported.

The proposed overhaul of Yale College’s grading system was met with overwhelming backlash from undergraduate students.

A Yale College Council survey at the time found that 79 percent of 1,700 respondents were opposed to the changes, and Joshua Kalla ’14 GRD ’14 — now a political science professor and member of the Standing Committee on Teaching, Learning and Advising — began a petition protesting the changes that garnered over 1,200 signatures in three days, the News reported at the time.

At a faculty meeting that April, professors tabled the proposal to switch to a numerical grading system. In the fall of that year, economics professor Ray Fair, who chaired the Ad Hoc Committee on Grading, announced that the committee would not pursue the switch any further. Fair was also the professor who, a decade later, authored the report showing that 78.97 percent of grades awarded to Yale undergraduates in the 2022-23 academic year were in the A range.

On Monday, Fair wrote in an email to the News that grade inflation “is an important issue at Yale,” but said

he could not comment on potential changes to Yale’s grading policy.

A week before the recent Harvard faculty proposal was announced, Lewis said that the discourse around Fair’s 2023 report on Yale College grading led to an understanding that the College would circle back to the issue.

“People who are knowledgeable recognize that we had the same kind of conversation a few years ago here in Yale College, and then we agreed we would continue to monitor the situation,” Lewis said. “I think the time is coming soon for us to do something more specific about it.”

Lewis added that he will continue to “encourage faculty to use the full range of grades” and raise awareness among professors about how grading at Yale compares to that of its peers.

Philosophy professor Shelly Kagan has long been a proponent of a stricter approach to grading by Yale faculty. Kagan said he did not think that the Harvard proposal, which, if passed, would halve the number of A’s given to undergraduates, would sufficiently address the issue of grade inflation.

“It simply means that all the students that would have been given A’s are no longer given A’s, but are going to be given A-’s. I don’t want to say that it’s not worth anything,” Kagan said in a Wednesday interview over Zoom, but he added that this change would not offer enough “fine-grained discrimination” between

grades to inform students about their performance in a class.

“Now, you’re going to ask me, so what’s my solution?” he continued. “And sadly, you know, the only real solution is for other people to grow a spine, and be prepared to give out B’s, and B-’s, and C’s, and C-’s, and D’s.”

The prevailing issues regarding trust in higher education have some bearing on the discussion around rising GPAs, Lewis said last Wednesday.

“I think there is the perception, which I think is unfair, but just the caricatured version of it would be, well, you admit students, and then they don’t have to work. They’ll get A’s and we’ll help them find jobs, but they haven’t actually learned anything in their classes. That’s not true,” Lewis said.

“In a situation where everybody got an A on everything, you would lose something,” Lewis added. “And so I think we need to have a working grading system. We do have standards for what grades should mean, and I’m going to be reminding the faculty of what those are at the faculty meeting in March.”

The next Yale College Faculty Meeting will occur on March 5, according to a provisional schedule on the website of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences.

Contact **OLIVIA WOO**
at olivia.woo@yale.edu.

Brooks to address schools’ reput

BROOKS FROM PAGE 1

political climate,” but at the time, they did not discuss the presidential senior fellow position.

Brooks said he generally speaks to university presidents about “what the hell is going on” in Washington, and he has spoken to several university leaders since Trump returned to office.

He said presidents want reforms to fall into three buckets: more intellectual diversity on campuses; less pre-professional culture and a return to the “humanistic core of the university”; and more education about how to live after college.

In an email to the News, McInnis wrote that she created the Presidential Senior Fellowship program in response to what she heard at listening sessions with students, faculty, staff and alumni. She wrote that one of the program’s “areas of focus” emerged from those sessions, including “enhancing and expanding educational opportunities for students and welcoming diverse viewpoints.”

“Over the decades, Mr. Brooks has examined issues from a range of perspectives, and he has convened experts to explore topics across differences,” McInnis wrote.

Brooks said he traces his “intellectual lineage” back to Edmund Burke, who is widely regarded as a father of modern conservatism, and Alexander Hamilton. Brooks has critiqued higher education in the past, including in an article in The Atlantic called “How the Ivy League Broke America.”

Now, he is working on a piece for The Atlantic — where, in addition to his position at Yale, he will be a staff writer — about positive aspects of the current state of universities, Brooks said.

“I thought I should acknowledge the things that are going right,” he said.

Brooks emphasized that he was particularly “attracted” to the opportunity at Yale because McInnis seemed open to new ideas and projects.

“There are some people who lead major organizations that are bureaucrats. They are ‘no people.’ They want to make sure nothing bad happens,” Brooks said. In contrast, he described McInnis as less guarded and willing to try new things, saying, “she struck me as a yes person.”

Brooks said McInnis gave him broad leeway in shaping his role at Yale. This semester, he will deliver a series of lectures and host the podcast with The Atlantic, which is supported by Yale, according to Anna Bross, the senior vice president of communications at The Atlantic.

Brooks’ podcast will feature Yale professors and scholars to discuss “great books” and give listeners a glimpse of what Yale and other top universities do, he said.

“I’d love to give people out there in podcast land a sense they are on a college campus,” Brooks said. “So I’m looking for one of those old classrooms or old rooms where it feels like you’re on a college campus.”

Around half the episodes will be recorded on Yale’s campus, while the other half will be recorded across the country, Brooks said.

According to Brooks, this spring he plans to lecture on why he still considers himself a conservative, how America can recover from “this mess,” how to fall in love and how to be ambitious without being a jerk, which he said “applies to a lot of Yale students.” Next fall, he said there will be a “big launch event.”

Brooks said he is still working to conceive the details of his daily routine at Yale. He mentioned that he will be having dinners with Yale professors to decide how he can be most helpful at the University.

“Mostly, I’m up here this term to ask people at Yale, ‘what should I do?’” he said.

Brooks said he chose Yale because of its “mixture of intellect and worldliness.” Brooks arrives at a time when universities are being widely critiqued for lack of intellectual diversity — though Brooks says he hopes he could help remedy concerns as they relate to Yale.

“Trump is not entirely wrong about his critique of the university and there’s some kernel of truth in there,” Brooks said, “but he’s widely overreacting” and being “very destructive.”

With the prevalence of conversations about how “woke the universities are, you can be seduced by that media narrative,” Brooks said, “and I would even include myself in this.”

However, visiting Yale and meeting with faculty made him realize that “there’s intellectual diversity here to some degree, and it’s not a super woke, revolutionary place,” Brooks said.

Brooks said that “the answer to the problems of the university are already in the university.”

He added that Yale would benefit from a pro-Trump voice. He said outlets like The Atlantic or The New York Times would also benefit, but that it can be hard to find Trump supporters who “follow the journalistic standards that we insist on.”

This is not Brooks’ first stint at Yale. According to a Jackson School webpage, he was a senior fellow at the University from 2012 to 2018 and 2021 to 2022 and has also taught courses over the years, including one on humility.

“I thought it would be hilarious to have a New York Times columnist teach about humility,” Brooks said.

When Brooks taught at Yale in the past, he loved “the atmosphere” and “hanging around the students,” he said.

“I used to hold what I call office hours at the Study bar,” he said. His “office hours” would start at 9:30 p.m. and stretch well past midnight, he said.

McInnis wrote that one aspect of Brooks’s fellowship is “to share the conversations we have on our campus more widely with the nation and the world, which will help to bridge the academy with society at large.”

McInnis wrote that there would be more senior presidential fellows at Yale, but she did not say who they might be. The fellows will be connected to specific parts of Yale based on their professional focuses, she added.

“Presidential Senior Fellows are matched to a home program, department, or school based on the topics and areas they have covered in their distinguished careers. I will continue to work with deans and other university leaders to identify opportunities for future presidential fellows,” McInnis wrote to the News on Wednesday.

In November 2025, Brooks wrote an article in The New York Times called “The Epstein Story? Count Me Out.” He argued that politicians were paying too much attention to and trying to exploit renewed outcry about the sex offender Jeffrey Epstein. The piece received pushback, some of which The New York Times also published.

“I could rewrite that column. I would amend it and say I think it’s a cultural story. It shows something rotten among a lot of people in the elite, but it’s not representative of the elite, I don’t believe,” Brooks said when asked about his stance on the issue.

Brooks said he has “some regrets” about the story, and underestimated how many elites sent emails to Epstein that were “wildly inappropriate.” Files of Epstein’s email correspondence were recently released by the Justice Department.

In December, The Guardian reported that Brooks appeared in photos from a dinner that Epstein also attended at a conference in 2011.

In his interview with the News, Brooks said that about three dozen people were at the dinner gathering, which Brooks said was at a TED conference, and that he had no interactions with Epstein and did not know about him at the time.

Brooks said he will continue to live in Washington, D.C. and will commute to Yale for “a few days every other week.”

David Brooks graduated from the University of Chicago in 1983 with a degree in history.

Contact **KYIA LYNN-SKOV** at aria.kynn-skov@yale.edu and **LEON NYBERG** at leo.nyberg@yale.edu.

Measures follow chief’s departure

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enacting new accountability mechanisms on Wednesday night.

The order will enable the program to restart its operations in the next two weeks, Mayor Justin Elicker said at a Thursday afternoon press conference. Elicker temporarily had paused the program last month in the wake of Jacobson’s alleged theft.

In early January, Zannelli and two other assistant chiefs confronted Jacobson with the allegations of misappropriating city funds, prompting the former police chief to concede to having stolen \$10,000 from the confidential informant program, Elicker and Zannelli have said.

The fund, which contains approximately \$50,000 and is usually overseen by the assistant chief of investigations — a position Jacobson held from 2019 to 2022 — is used for controlled, undercover purchases of weapons and narcotics and to pay individuals who provide useful and credible information to aid in criminal investigations, according to Elicker. Jacobson had maintained his management of the fund upon his appointment to his chief of police position in 2022.

“Our confidential informant program has been critical to our success in reducing crime and contributed to the department’s success in solving crimes and bringing people to justice,” Elicker said at Thursday’s press conference.

The mayor explained that the police department has a “general order” which delineates how to handle the program, but that the department violated those protocols at Jacobson’s direction. Upon discovering these irregularities, city officials “acted immediately” to engage the state’s attorney’s office, who, alongside the Connecticut State Police, are investigating Jacobson’s alleged misconduct.

Zanelli declined to provide an update on the ongoing investigation.

According to Elicker, the city has implemented three key measures to overhaul the oversight mechanisms for the program. First, the city has enlisted the Police Executive Research Forum, a national law enforcement organization, to analyze the department’s policies and practices. PERF members will interview relevant police officers and city staff, review current policies and observe department practices. The organization will then issue a report that will be used to draft a

new general order to manage the fund in line with best practices.

The city will pay \$87,000 to hire PERF to conduct its investigation over six months, Elicker said. The city has not yet finalized a contract with the organization.

In the interim, Elicker said, the city has enacted a new temporary confidential informant special order — replacing the current general order, which came into effect in 2016 — to resume the program’s operations as PERF carries out its probe.

The new special order will implement “significant new accountability measures, increased supervision and enhanced procedures to ensure responsible oversight” of the program’s funds, Elicker said. “It’s very thorough and exhaustive — an emphasis on exhaustive.”

Under the new order, the police department will keep the program’s funds in a digital safe in a restricted room at department headquarters. The safe will be monitored by video surveillance at all times, according to Zannelli.

“Designated” individuals will have “badge in” access to the funds to create a video record timestamp and an “audit trail,” Elicker added.

The municipal Chief Administrator’s Office, which supervises the police department, will now replenish the program’s funds — an authority previously reserved for the city police chief.

Police officers will also have to provide the office with documented proof of the use of existing, confidential funds before they are replenished, and these replenishments will occur “in smaller increments,” rather than annually, Elicker said. And audits of the program — within and outside the police department — will become more frequent.

“We have gone to extremes here to ensure that the temporary special order has exhaustive oversight and accountability while PERF goes through their process,” Elicker said. “These processes and procedures may change clearly with the general order.”

Zannelli reflected that the department should review and update its policies and best practices every one to two years, but that this “just wasn’t the case” for the management of the confidential informants program.

The New Haven Police Department is headquartered at 1 Union Ave.

Contact **REETI MALHOTRA**
at reeti.malhotra@yale.edu.