

FROM THE FRONT

“Play that funky music, white boy”
PLAY THAT FUNKY MUSIC WILD CHERRY

Lewis cites budget cuts for few layoffs

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to the University’s endowment returns beginning in July. He said at the time that a cut to the Yale College budget resulting from the tax required staff reductions.

Yale College Senior Associate Dean Burgwell Howard said that the Office of the Provost’s Budget Advisory Group “provides guidance” to help administrators meet budget targets. However, he said the committee does not issue specific directives at the employee level that unit leaders must follow.

“They don’t say, you can’t hire that person. They’re saying, okay, you have to get to this target of FTEs,” Howard said in a Thursday interview, referring to full-time equivalent employees.

Since President Donald Trump signed the slated endowment tax increase into law last summer, Yale administrators have announced several University-wide measures intended to reduce staff sizes, including a 90-day hiring pause that expired in September and a one-time retirement incentive offered to certain employees. Eligible staff members were able to opt into the incentive between Nov. 1 and Dec. 31 of 2025.

Lewis said Thursday that his office has “plenty of people who were eligible” for the retirement incentive and that “some of them took it,” though he declined to provide specific numbers quantifying the effects of the program on Yale College staff.

“I do think we had enough people take advantage of the retirement incentive that it really minimized how many layoffs we would actually have,” Howard said, though he added that it was “a combination of retirement incentives and leaving posi-

tions unfilled” that helped shrink staff sizes.

Layoff decisions were “very much a last resort,” Lewis said.

For “programs where we’ve decided that we just don’t have the funds to keep them going at the same scale or where there’ve been changes in the nature of the program or the work that they do, we’ve had to reduce staff,” he said, adding, “I wouldn’t say any programs have been eliminated.” He declined to say the exact number or positions of the staff members laid off.

Lewis said on Thursday that he “would expect” layoffs to occur in other parts of the University. A University spokesperson did not respond to repeated requests for comment on layoffs at the University.

In early December, senior administrators announced that “layoffs may be necessary” as budgetary units work to meet their targets, though they added that “leaders are working hard to minimize them wherever possible.”

“We hope to substantially complete any downsizing efforts by the end of calendar year 2026, provided there are no additional significant financial changes,” read the December statement from Provost Scott Strobel, Senior Vice President for Operations Geoff Chatas and Stephen Murphy, the University’s vice president for finance and chief financial officer.

The endowment tax hike, set to take effect on July 1, will raise the tax on the University’s endowment returns from 1.4 percent to 8 percent.

Isobel McClure contributed reporting.

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Reno led Elis to five Ivy titles



Liza Kaufman / Staff Photographer

Yale Athletics announced on Tuesday morning that Tony Reno was leaving his position as head football coach. In his 14 years leading the Bulldogs, the program won five Ivy League championships.

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Harvard, the Bulldogs found themselves with their first chance to compete in the Football Championship Subdivision playoffs, which — after Ivy League teams had been prohibited from competing in the postseason since 1946.

Following the 2025 season, Reno was named Jack Grinold Division I Coach of the Year by the New England Football Writers for the second time.

“Coach Reno’s leadership has been truly transformational. His impact on Yale Football, our department, and the university extends far beyond championships and wins—it lives in the countless people he has inspired,” Athletics

Director Vicky Chun said in Yale’s press release.

“Coach Reno led with integrity, humility, and an unwavering commitment to excellence, giving his whole heart to this program every day. He cared deeply about his players as people, challenging them to excel on the field, in the classroom, and in life,” she added.

As the news of Reno’s departure spread, his athletes mourned and celebrated his tenure at Yale.

“It’s an unreal feeling, the legacy he has built here will be forever lasting, and the main focus is to make sure all is well with him and his family,” Abu Kamara ’27, the captain chosen for Team 153 this year, wrote to the News. “We will

continue to run this program the way we know how to through the culture and standards that Coach Reno has built.”

Reno’s son and starting quarterback Dante Reno ’28 posted to X following his father’s announcement: “Dad, you are my role model, my best friend and my coach.”

“From your first year to playing with you last year, you have put your heart and soul into coaching. Your legacy will last forever,” Dante Reno added.

Yale Athletics announced that it would conduct a national search to find the next head football coach.

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Faculty group launches campaign for new protections

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ulty Handbook, peer institutions’ policies, and consultation with Yale Law faculty,” according to the Yale AAUP website.

Joe Cohn, a panelist and the executive director of Yale Law School’s Center for Academic Freedom and Free Speech, said in a phone interview that the faculty handbook is “the most straightforward place” for these protections to academic freedom that “would be generally applicable to all faculty at all levels.” He also said that faculty members at Yale “can’t rely exclusively” on the First Amendment for free speech and academic freedom because Yale is a private institution.

HoSang agreed that “enshrining” these protections in the faculty handbook instead of having them as a “separate, standalone statement from the administration” would make them more binding as a contractual right, although the faculty handbook may not provide as “robust” guarantees as a collective bargaining agreement could.

According to Yale spokesperson Karen Peart, University Provost Scott Strobel made a statement at a meeting with the Faculty of Arts and Sciences and the School of Engineering and Applied Science faculty last week that he and McInnis are “unequivocally committed to Academic Freedom and we view this as a central element of our purpose and our mission.”

The statement said that the faculty handbook in its current form does make an explicit commitment to academic freedom, recognizing that “Academic freedom and the spirit of free inquiry are fundamental to Yale’s mission,” and that faculty “have the right and obligation to criticize their colleagues, staff members, and the university.”

It also reads that the handbook already “guarantees specific procedural safeguards for faculty who believe their academic freedom has been improperly restrained.”

“In other words, the Faculty Handbook recognizes the importance of academic freedom both by name and by the principles that

underpin those faculty rights and responsibilities,” Strobel’s statement said, according to Peart.

The statement further notes that Strobel and McInnis are “grateful” for the attention that faculty were directing toward academic freedom.

According to his statement, Strobel has met with the faculty senate leadership, the deans of all Yale’s schools and “the world’s leading scholars on academic freedom” who are at Yale to better understand academic freedom and how to best protect it, and deliberations on next steps “will continue in the coming days.”

In the first step of the AAUP’s new campaign, faculty members who attended the Tuesday event wrote postcards to McInnis.

History professor Deborah Coen, who was one of seven panelists on Tuesday, said in a phone interview after the event that the postcards were meant to share with McInnis “why each of us personally cares about academic freedom, whether or not we signed our name, so that she gets a sense of the range of personal commitments to this principle.”

The collective nature of sending postcards allows instructional and untenured faculty “who probably don’t feel comfortable making statements themselves” to voice their concerns, Coen added.

Coen also said that when she attended the meeting with Strobel last Thursday, she felt that “the administration just isn’t hearing about a lot of faculty experiences, about the threats that many faculty are feeling.”

Cohn said that Yale has a “real opportunity to lead” other universities in making commitments to free speech and academic freedom. He mentioned a 2023 federal court ruling that affirmed the dismissal of a lawsuit against Yale by Bandy Lee MED ’94 DIV ’95, a former School of Medicine affiliate who alleged that she was wrongfully terminated over her 2020 comments on President Donald Trump.

“Yale is an institution that just went to federal court to argue that its promises of academic freedom and free speech in the faculty handbooks are too broad and general to confer any particular meaningful rights,” Cohn said. “So they’ve kind of made that bed. And to make sure that real meaningful protections are offered to faculty, they now need to be more specific in its binding documents about what protections it will offer and stand behind.”

While there is “clearly work to be done,” Cohn added, he said that Yale is an institution with “people of good faith.” The University can show the rest of the nation how to “breathe life” into academic freedom, he said.

Amy Kapczynski, a Yale Law School professor who is on the AAUP’s executive committee, also said in an interview that the campaign is “very clearly in Yale’s best interest.”

“There is a commitment to academic freedom here, but it needs to be made more meaningful at a time when there’s so much real risk around it,” she said.

Faculty agreed that this campaign is particularly important today due to increased government threats to academic freedom.

“People are alarmed. People are afraid,” Rod Ferguson, a panelist and the chair of the Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies department, said in an interview. “There are

so many looming threats to what we do, to what we study. WGSS departments around the country are being canceled, and so this moment represents a real existential threat.”

Coen said that she told attendees stories of threats to academic freedom on behalf of her colleagues who feel like “they would jeopardize their jobs by describing these experiences to the administration.”

Ferguson also said that he shared with attendees his experience of receiving threatening emails — hundreds daily — between April and May 2024 about his department’s sponsorship of a proposed conference on “pinkwashing” or the practice of deploying superficial sympathetic messages about the LGBTQ+ community. The emails contained slurs and were copied to lawmakers and then to former University President Peter Salovey, Ferguson said.

The proposed Women’s Center conference that year, “Pinkwashing and Feminism(s) in Palestine,” was indefinitely postponed by the center’s board.

Ferguson said that in June 2024, he received emails calling him a racial slur, and in November that year — a week after Trump was elected — his department received a voice-mail, again containing slurs, about its course on Beyoncé and Black music.

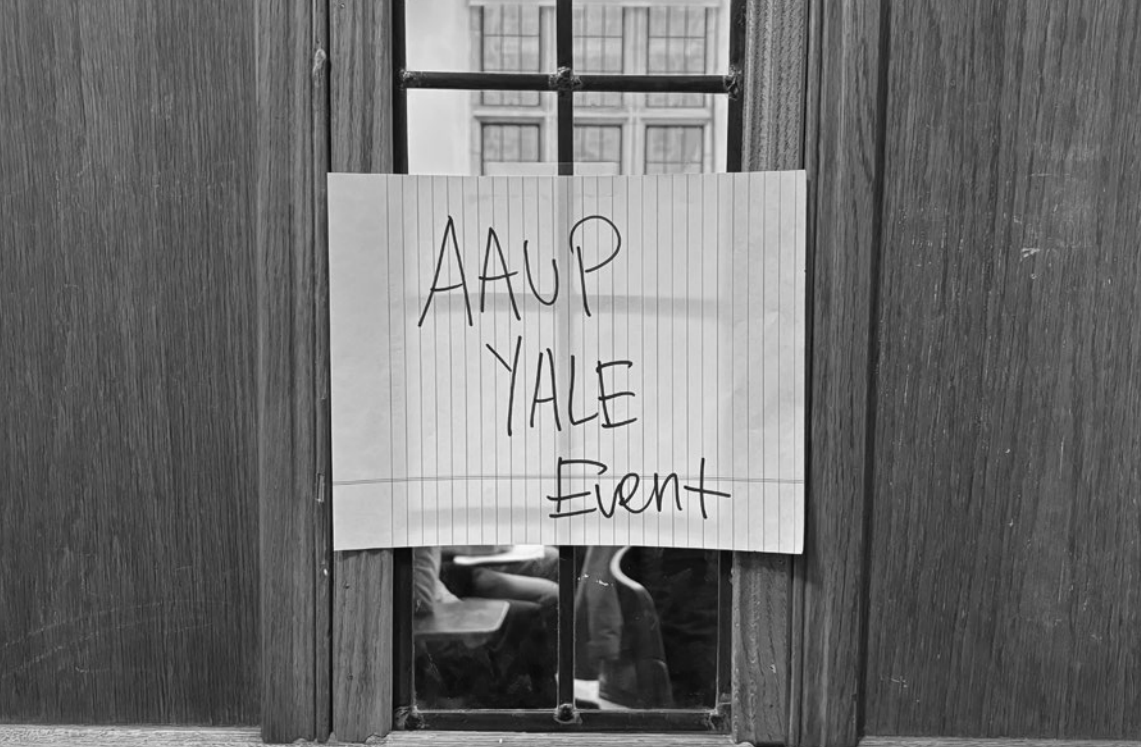
Ferguson added that it would benefit not only faculty but also Yale and other universities “if we can get the administration to partner with the AAUP around academic freedom, which includes our historic right as faculty members to teach according to our interests and our expertise, to research according to our interests and expertise, for the administration to not back away from the rights that have been inherent for faculty for hundreds of years.”

Coen said that she thinks the high turnout for Tuesday’s event demonstrates that academic freedom is a “major concern” on Yale’s campus.

Kapczynski also said that “it was a moment of kind of coming together because people are concerned right now and want to work together to try to protect each other and our students and this place that we love.”

The national AAUP was founded in 1915, according to its website.

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Jaeha Jang / Contributing Photographer

In a Tuesday meeting closed to the press, Yale’s chapter of the American Association of University Professors launched its new campaign advocating for the addition of academic freedom protections to the faculty handbook.