NEWS

"You can cut the flowers but you cannot keep spring from coming."
PABLO NERUDA POET

Changes expedited performance reviews for Berkeley, JE, Murray deans

BY OLIVIA WOO
STAFF REPORTER



TIM TAI / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

According to Yale College Dean Pericles Lewis, adjustments to the review process for residential college deans resulted in both earlier and quicker evaluations for three deans.

This academic year, the review process that determines whether the contracts of residential college deans will be renewed was moved a semester earlier — beginning four semesters into a dean's term instead of five, Yale College Dean Pericles Lewis said in a Wednesday interview.

The length of the review process was also halved for the three deans most recently evaluated, taking three months instead of six, Lewis added. Together, the changes resulted in the conclusion of three deans' performance reviews about a year earlier than would previously have been expected. Deans are hired on three-year contracts.

Evaluations of former Berkeley College Dean Bárbara Cruvinel Santiago '17, Jonathan Edwards College Dean Yaser Robles and Pauli Murray College Dean Aaron King — all of whom began in their roles in August 2024 — began in January and recently concluded, Lewis said. Before this year's changes to the review process, those reviews would have begun this coming September and ended next spring.

The changes to the review timeline occurred in the months leading up to Cruvinel Santiago's mid-semester departure from her role as dean of Berkeley College during spring break. In response to the News' questions regarding Cruvinel Santiago's departure, Lewis said in an email last Thursday that he could not "offer any information about individual staff members."

On Wednesday, he added that some Yale College employees announcing their departures mid-year might opt to "wait and leave in the summer," while others may "have some reason they have to leave sooner, and we try and just fill in as appropriate."

Lewis said that the system under which deans were evaluated at the beginning of the third and final years of their contracts left them "waiting on tenterhooks during the academic year" in which their reviews occurred.

"We decided to move it to January of the second year," Lewis said. "If a person is not going to renew — and, of course, it's a two way street, they might tell me, 'I'm not interested in renewing' — it's good for them to have a year to think about where they're going to go next."

Feedback for deans currently in the third years of their terms was solicited last September. Both the reviews involving that feedback and the reviews that began in January have "just been completed," Lewis said.

Lewis said residential college deans' contracts are renewed "more often than not."

He added that the process for determining whether a dean will be reappointed involves the collection and analysis of feedback from members of the residential college community they serve, including students, faculty, staff, college fellows and the head of college. The offices with which they interact at the University are also consulted, he said.

Administrators solicit feedback from students, staff and fellows through a survey distributed via email at the beginning of each dean's review process.

As part of the review cycle that began most recently, members of the Murray and JE communities received emails from Lewis inviting them to offer anonymous feedback about their respective deans' "professional performance." Those emails were sent on Jan. 15, and the surveys accepted responses until Jan. 30.

Nearly two weeks later, on Jan. 28, Berkeley students, staff and fellows received an email — identical to the other two save for the names of relevant administrators — asking them to provide feedback on Cruvinel Santiago by Feb. 13.

According to those emails, review committees consisting of three administrators "gather comments from the community" and write a report to inform Lewis' decision about the reappointment of each respective dean. "Your observations and experiences," Lewis wrote, "are central to this process."

He did not specify in those emails how feedback from different members of the residential college community would be weighed in the decision-making process.

On Wednesday, Lewis said that during a typical review, he receives "100 different comments, and maybe half of those would be from students, and half would be from colleagues or fellows, roughly speaking."

In making his decisions about whether to extend a dean's tenure, Lewis said in a Wednesday email that he tends to "place the most weight on detailed comments, whether those come from students, staff, faculty, or fellows."

Multiple students interviewed by the News said they wanted more transparency around how their feedback is used to determine whether a dean's contract will be renewed.

"To an average Berkeley student who is not actively looking into the depths of the situation, Dean Santiago's feedback process felt a lot like a black box because we were never really told how our feedback would end up being perused," Andrey Sokolov '27, a Berkeley student, wrote in a Wednesday text message to the News.

Sokolov said in a Sunday interview that he had completed the survey Lewis sent in January, in which he conveyed a "hope that Dean Santiago remains" in her role.

Kelly Tran '27, a JE student, received the January email asking for feedback on Robles but said she did not complete the survey. She said she would have been more likely to respond had its importance been made clearer, either by bodies such as the Jonathan Edwards College Council or the Yale College Council or from additional messaging from the administration.

Tran said that if students aren't aware of how their comments are used, then it is difficult for them to know how "to best fill it out to better serve themselves and other students."

"Just generally, maybe the college should be more transparent about the role students play in dean renewal and other things that they really actually want student feedback on," Tran said, adding that "maybe a survey is or is not the best thing."

Elizabeth Swaine '27, who is in JE, suggested that feedback about residential college deans' performance should be solicited two semesters after they begin in the role, "so that the dean can implement" the feedback that they are given before they are up for review.

"If you know that your opinion that you give is directly impacting whether or not your dean gets hired, I think it's difficult to be critical because you don't want to be the reason why your dean is being hired or fired," Swaine said.

Daniel Landry '28, a student in Berkeley, said he provided feedback for Cruvinel Santiago because he feels it is his duty "to be a helpful student."

He said he mainly interacted with the former dean at Berkeley events and intramural games, or while walking around campus. It was "always fun to just talk to her," he added.

Residential college deans are also able to suggest certain individuals from which they wish to receive feedback, Lewis said in a Wednesday email. Those individuals receive a "special invitation" to complete the same survey that is initially sent out to the residential college community.

According to the Careers at Yale website, the salary for a residential college dean ranges from $68,000 to $120,500.

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Silliman dean to leave post for Yale College administration role

BY ANNA KOONTZ
STAFF REPORTER

Tycie Coppett, the dean of Silliman College, announced in a Tuesday email to Silliman students that she will be departing from her role in June.

Coppett, who has been the dean of Silliman since 2023, will step into a new position as an interim assistant dean in Yale College and help with academic advising initiatives, she wrote in her email. Coppett's departure was announced after Bárbara Cruvinel Santiago '17 recently left her position as dean of Berkeley College over spring break.

"It was my honor to serve as your dean and to watch you develop as scholars and young adults. Thank you for trusting me and allowing me to share this monumental moment in your lives," Coppett wrote.

Coppett, who is associated with the sociology department and teaches the class "Have We Lost Faith in Higher Education," was previously an administrator at Harvard University, as well as an athlete and a body builder.

Head of College Arielle Baskin-Sommers and Yale College Dean Pericles Lewis will form a committee to hire a new Silliman College dean by the fall semester, Coppett wrote.

In her email, Coppett thanked Baskin-Sommers and members of the residential college, dining and facilities staff. She also shared words of encouragement for current Silliman students.

"I look forward to the many memories we will continue to make and share," Coppett wrote. "Now, and always, I am here to support you."

Silliman College occupies the block surrounded by College, Grove, Temple and Wall Streets.

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