OPINION

GUEST COLUMNIST

BEN ROSENTHAL

Yale is not a democracy. Nor should it be.

Student complaints about university administrations are as old as universities themselves.

A recent grievance at Yale has been aimed at proposed measures to curb grade inflation, in particular by capping the number of A grades available to be awarded in each course. An opinion piece by Ami Gillon '27, citing a similar editorial in The Harvard Crimson, decries "grade caps and Yale's blind bureaucracy." Underlying Gillon's attack on grade caps, however, is an assumption that our administration has strayed from genuine consultation with Yale's student "constituents." While his critiques and analysis of the Yale administration are prescient, Gillon misses the increasing recalcitrance of the student body which itself has failed recently to act thoughtfully or cooperatively.

Yale is not a democracy for, of or by its students. It's an academic institution, meant to create and disseminate knowledge. We, the students, owe it to future generations to steward it well, even at the expense of our own transcripts.

Despite Gillon's claim that grade inflation is an "unfathomably complex" issue, the reality is quite the opposite: Grade inflation is a remarkably simple process — not altogether different from monetary inflation — and is well-explained in a recent News article. As the News correctly notes, grade inflation is fundamentally a collective-action problem: Professors and departments award higher grades in an effort to attract students, and students conversely tend to take courses which will benefit their transcripts and job prospects.

But far from relieving stress, the surge in high grades has made failure all the more painful, with a single non-A grade disqualifying students from first-round Phi Beta Kappa consideration and a minimum 3.90 GPA now standard to achieve any Latin honors. Risk-taking and intellectual humility become nearly impossible when success means perfection, and, as grades go up, the chance to distinguish one's resume through classroom work becomes ever harder. Restoring rigor is not possible without addressing the incentive structure that allows professors to liberally award A's.

Gillon calls grade caps "senseless, misguided and fundamentally myopic," yet the opposite seems to be true. A proposal being considered by Harvard faculty, which would allow professors to offer classes with satisfactory/unsatisfactory grading and which would use course grade distributions to calculate academic honors, is both nuanced and practical. Far from myopic, grade caps make short-term sacrifices for the possibility of bringing back meaningful grades and returning to a status quo where such caps are no longer needed.

While Harvard's faculty has taken concrete steps toward systematically addressing grade inflation, students here at Yale and at Harvard seem unconcerned about grade inflation's detrimental effects. Far from offering solutions, the Yale College Council has instead proposed measures to expand Credit/D/Fail opportunities which would further drive down the value of an A.

Further, criticisms of grade caps without any real alternative proposals reflect a broader trend of students bristling at change without consideration for others or the future. Amidst a wave of necessary budget cuts in response to the very real burden of a $300 million tax hike on Yale's endowment gains, the undergraduate student experience here has stayed remarkably consistent, especially when juxtaposed with staff layoffs, departmental budget cuts and slashed graduate enrollment. Yet, I have heard far more complaints about dining quality and small changes to the student experience than I have heard concern for laid-off workers.

Certainly, our administration is far from faultless, and many complaints are justified. Yale College Dean Pericles Lewis's gaffe telling students "not to buy too much stuff" when ending summer storage funding demonstrates a blatant misreading of student concerns, and the annual parade of dead-on-arrival YCC referenda attests to the opacity of university decision-making with regards to student voices. Gillon himself offers many good critiques of the administration, as well as an insightful analysis into some of its structural issues.

But university administration is necessary, especially given the inability of the student body to look beyond its short-term self-interest. The first universities had no dorms or lecture halls; they were simply guilds of professors or students. Students were key partners in academic life. Recently, as the university has grown to offer more amenities and benefits, the student body has become less of a partner in academia and has acted more like its clientele. If we cannot maintain our role as the custodians of academia, then we cannot blame the faculty and administration for picking up the slack.

As we approach another Yale College Council election season — no doubt to be filled with vague promises pandering for student votes — we should look beyond our own bright college years to consider our part in improving higher education. But until we demonstrate that the student voice deserves to be heard, we should not demand respect.

BEN ROSENTHAL *is a senior in Morse College studying History and Ancient Egyptian. He can be reached at benjamin.rosenthal@yale.edu.*

STAFF COLUMNIST

ARI SHTEIN

Yale is finally headed in the right direction

Linda McMahon, the United States' secretary of education, is coming to campus this Thursday for a Buckley Institute event; she'll be telling us how she intends on "restoring American education." Many are skeptical of her motivations, given that the Trump administration appears to be intent less on restoration and more on evisceration when it comes to American universities. I too find it unlikely that McMahon has got Yale's best interests in mind.

But does this make the substance of her critique — and those from others on the right — invalid? Does it mean that our country's institutions of higher education, Yale among them, have done nothing wrong? Surely not.

In the last decade or so, Yale has indeed become more of a safe space-loving, identity politics-obsessed echo chamber than a serious research university or liberal arts college. Why is it that only 2.4 percent of our faculty are Republicans, according to a report based on voter data? It cannot merely be, as some have advanced in the News, the result of a qualification or intelligence gap.

Further, how strange is it that when we teach "Intermediate Portuguese II," we cannot help but subtitle it, "Decolonizing the Gaze"? Good-faith criticism and good-faith reform of our university must take place on these grounds or their bad-faith equivalents will instead.

This brings me to a recent piece in the News decrying "Yale's institutional contradiction." Manu Bosteels '28, the piece's author, appears to disagree with me completely. He thinks that Yale's new commitment to institutional neutrality has undermined itself in making several "concessions to the American right."

> WHY IS IT THAT ONLY 2.4 PERCENT OF OUR FACULTY ARE REPUBLICANS, ACCORDING TO A REPORT BASED ON VOTER DATA?

I'm skeptical of Bosteels' narrative. I think not one of President Maurie McInnis' acts that he lists — not hiring David Brooks, nor failing to make a campus-wide statement after the Brown University shooting in December, nor applauding the Buckley Institute last week for inviting McMahon to speak — constitutes a "contradiction" or a lapse or an unevenness in our institutional neutrality. Rather, each represents a reasoned and prudent shift away from a status quo which has been hurting Yale for years.

> RATHER, EACH REPRESENTS A REASONED AND PRUDENT SHIFT AWAY FROM A STATUS QUO WHICH HAS BEEN HURTING YALE FOR YEARS.

First, let's take McInnis' supposed failure to make a statement after the Brown shooting. Is it really true that she thought "speaking about the murder of university students would violate Yale's new model of neutrality," a standard Bosteels finds "chilling"?

No, of course not! The complaint at the time was that the Yale administration only informed students about how it was tightening security protocols in the wake of the shooting, without also providing "an emotional response." Now, is that really something which a university president ought to be accountable for? Or is there a sense in which we Yale students are legal adults with the faculties of emotional regulation necessary to make it through a scary news story? Perhaps the new standard, which frees us to feel and to cope without institutional handholding, is more respectful to our maturity — a change for the better.

What about McInnis' applause for McMahon? Well, I think it's been taken out of context. McInnis didn't release a statement out of the blue; rather, a News reporter asked her for comment and made a story out of it. McInnis praised some various functions of the Department of Education and then applauded the invitation insofar as it served the general Buckley Institute ethos of "inviting leaders to come speak on consequential topics." Not so objectionable in the end.

And finally — Brooks. Is he a hack, since he once wrote offhand that Thai restaurants are easier to find in blue-voting cities? Has his legacy been tarnished by virtue of a single appearance near Jeffrey Epstein at a TED conference in 2011? Bosteels calls Brooks a "journalist of less-than-perfect renown" on account of these failings. Brooks' appointment, according to Bosteels, was not a change from politically-motivated hiring practices to blind meritocracy, but a blatant attempt by McInnis "to placate conservatives who think Yale is too lefty."

Such a claim is almost laughable. Brooks is an incredibly accomplished and capable figure — he's worked at The New York Times for almost a quarter of a century and written several bestsellers. He's given three lectures here at Yale already — I was in attendance at the second and found him insightful and inspiring.

Brooks is not an ideological diversity hire. He's not a hack, and he's not a pedophile. He's simply more conservative than the average Yale professor. He thinks identity politics are bad and damaging. True, Yale would not have likely hired a guy like him 10 years ago — but isn't it good that that's changed?

I love Yale, and I want it to survive and to prosper. And that means taking conservative criticism seriously. It means adapting and reforming; it means neutrality and openness and restraint. Yale's administrators are fallible, and I expect them to fail often — but hiring Brooks is not a failure, and the project of institutional neutrality has so far been a successful one.

ARI SHTEIN *is a first year in Saybrook College. His column mostly consists of the airing of grievances. He can be reached at ari.shtein@yale.edu.*

STAFF COLUMNIST

THOMAS MULUGETA

The diversity conservative students want

Recent columns in the News debating the reason for Yale's dearth of conservative voices miss the greatest issue at hand: contemporary conservatives' hypocritical disregard for conversation. At Yale, political discussion has become a battle for ideological superiority. The relative absence of conservative students and faculty in academia is concerning. But it is not caused by discriminatory behavior against conservatives.

Contemporary conservatives advocate for ideological diversity at universities while denigrating diversity, equity and inclusion — DEI — initiatives, demonstrating a hypocritical tendency. By misrepresenting racial and queer identities, claiming them to be part of a "woke agenda," conservatives seem to reject diversity in academic settings, while simultaneously using the language of diversity to push for their political ideology to be embraced and given credence as an identity-based characteristic.

As an African American student, I find that the current public response to DEI initiatives demonstrates the need for racial visibility. If contemporary conservatives choose to be "color-blind," why don't they also adhere to ideological blindness — making the issue of lacking conservative representation in academia a non-issue? Contemporary conservatives must pick their battle: a crusade against diversity initiatives, or an acknowledgment that pushes for diversity can include race alongside ideology in order to fully promote inclusivity. We must either be blind to all or take notice of everything.

In her column for the News, Hannah Owens Pierre '28 described "progressivism" as the major intellectual root of many of Yale's courses — particularly those offered by the Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies program. She seems to describe these classes as almost overbearing to conservative thought, instead of welcoming debate from student participants.

As an avid fan of WGSS classes, my experience has been that such "progressive" courses do not ask students to regurgitate concepts and connect them to a liberal framework. Instead, they call on us to intellectually reframe and question our perspectives. The papers we write in these classes welcome conservative thought as long as a student grounds it appropriately in intellectual discussion.

Conservative thought has always been — and still is — welcomed in academia; it intellectually contributes to Yale's grand ideological spectrum. Conservatives are welcome to challenge the prevailing narratives of Yale's courses and departments. However, conservatives cannot dismiss progressive areas of academia on grounds of ideological superiority. Intellectual conversation requires a code of ethics, independent of political ideology, to which all must adhere: a code that calls for conservatives to not dismiss progressivism as inferior — or under a reductive term such as "woke."

In order for conservatives to be more present in institutions like Yale, there needs to be conversation. But conversation cannot be based on an intent to win. I think about the essay question on how students handle disagreement included in the application to Yale College — the question is a testament to understanding how a student engages with opposition. Conservatives have the right to refute an argument, but are they refuting the argument at hand because of critical reasoning, or because of a fear of perceived intellectual hierarchy?

When conservatives converse at Yale, and engage with opposing views without the intent to assert political superiority, students will bear witness to a more ideologically diverse academic environment.

THOMAS MULUGETA *is a first year in Branford College. He can be reached at thomas.mulugeta@yale.edu.*

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YALE DAILY NEWS PUBLISHING CO., INC. 202 York Street, New Haven, CT 06511 (203) 432-2400
Editorial: (203) 432-2418 editor@yaledailynews.com Business: (203) 432-2424 business@yaledailynews.com

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