FROM THE FRONT

"I wish that every day was Saturday and every month was October."
CHARMAINE J. FORDE AUTHOR

Law School slowly removed legacy preferences, faculty say

LEGACY FROM PAGE 1

Yale College or Yale Law School."

He added: "This has been our consistent practice for many years."

'Merit and not blood'

According to Amar, legacy preferences at the Law School were gradually dismantled over the course of more than a decade by the faculty admissions committee, a group of professors formerly tasked with directly evaluating applicants.

The News could not verify the current workings of the evaluation process.

Amar said that he served as chair of the faculty admissions committee from around 2006 to 2020, for much of the period during which these changes occurred.

For many years, he said, applicants were assessed using an internal "12-point system," in which faculty readers awarded scores based on academic performance, recommendations, writing, work experience and other factors.

Amar recalled that legacy applicants historically received an automatic additional point — a small but potentially decisive boost, he said.

He said that under the previous system, "perhaps five applicants each year" were admitted in part because of their legacy status.

Amar explained that this bonus was first reduced and later eliminated entirely. First, they got rid of the extra point, but gave legacy applicants an additional read. In recent years, the Law School also eliminated questions about family alumni or faculty ties from its application forms. By the end of the process, Amar said, the children of alumni received no preferences at all.

The News could not confirm the exact year that these questions were removed.

Yaffe noted that all faculty members were once required to participate in admissions by reading about 50 applications every year. Each file, he explained, was evaluated by two professors and given a numerical score.

Yaffe also said he does not recall any formal announcement of the change being "publicly available."

"I don't believe it was announced before the change in policy that we did take legacies into consideration," Yaffe said. "Why would you make it publicly available after the change?"

He later added in an email to the News that then-Law School Dean Heather Gerken "was a strong supporter of changing the policy that gave legacies a boost."

Law School spokespeople did not respond to the News' requests for comment from Gerken, who stepped down from the deanship over the summer and does not have contact information available on her Law School webpage. Gerken, now named an emeritus Sterling law professor, is set to become president of the Ford Foundation in November.

Amar said the move away from legacy preference had backing within the Law School's faculty.

"The faculty has been overwhelmingly supportive — focusing on individual merit and not blood," he said.

"Nothing was done without the endorsement of the dean of the Law School, the support of the admissions dean, the general acquiescence, support of the admission faculty admissions committee, in close consultation with the faculty as a whole," Amar said in a later interview.

Eleven Yale Law School professors declined to comment to the News for this story. Miriam Ingber LAW '04, the Law School's associate dean for admissions, did not respond to the News' request for comment.

'It's a surprise to me'

Joel Greenberg LAW '73, a donor to the Law School, shared that he was not aware of the change in admissions policy. Greenberg said he did not anticipate detailed updates from the school unless he actively sought them out.

"If I had children who were possible candidates for the law school, I think I could very easily have gotten information about what the policy was now," he added.

Last December, another Law School alumnus wrote to the Law School admissions office — in an email exchange obtained by the News — that his daughter had applied to the Law School. He noted that he was a "proud member" of his class.

The admissions office responded to the alumnus's email about an hour later, thanking him for reaching out and adding that they would "ensure" his email was added to his daughter's file. The response did not indicate that the school does not consider legacy status in assessing their applicants.

Ferro, the Law School spokesperson, wrote in a statement to the News that alumni who contact the admissions office "receive a courtesy reply and the Admissions Office notes the interaction."

"It has no impact on the assessment of the application and provides no advantage in the admissions process," he wrote.

When the alumnus's daughter was waitlisted from the Law School in March, the alumnus — who, according to his daughter, had consistently donated to the Law School — received an unsolicited, personalized email from Gerken. "I wish matters could have turned out differently," Gerken wrote in the email, adding that if the daughter did well at another law school in the next year, "she might consider the option of transferring to Yale."

Gerken did not mention in her email that the school does not take legacy status into consideration in its review process.

Destiny Lopez LAW '21 worked in the admissions office during her time at the Law School as a diversity representative and was the president of the First Gen Low Income Partnership, a group for students who mark the first generation of their family to attend college. She said she also did not know about the shift away from legacy preference.

"It's a surprise to me," Lopez said.

She said she did not remember admissions office staff members telling her and her colleagues about legacy preferences. She added she had assumed they were in place, as it was a typical practice at her alma mater, Stanford, and at Yale College as well.

"I do think it's something positive that a lot of students support," Lopez said. "It's very confusing why they wouldn't choose to make that known."

Lily Man Lai Fan '01 LAW '04, a donor to the Law School, said she was not aware of the shift but expressed support for it once informed in an interview.

She added that she does not think donor expectations are tied to admission.

"I don't think donors go there or make donations expecting their children to get in, because it's such a small pool and it's such a high bar," Fan said.

As for the lack of an announcement, Fan said, "Do they need to announce it? I don't know. I mean, I think it's hard enough for the Law School to raise money because of the small pool, and most people are professors."

"I'm not offended by it," she added. "I never even knew there was a legacy at one point."

Outside Law School walls

Yale College, by contrast to the Law School, continues to advantage students with legacy status in undergraduate admissions and is transparent about doing so. According to the Yale College class of 2028 profile, 11 percent of students have legacy affiliation.

Yaffe suggested that differences between undergraduate and professional education could explain the divergence.

"Parents play a much more substantial role in the life of undergraduates than they play in the life of graduate students," he said. "So that would be an argument for thinking that there's some kind of good reason to have legacy admissions for undergraduates and no similarly good reason to have it for law students."

A 2022 Pew Research Center survey found that three-quarters of Americans believed that legacy status should not be considered in college admissions decisions, with support for ending legacy admissions cutting across party lines. Amherst College and Wesleyan University eliminated legacy preferences in 2021 and 2023, respectively, while Virginia in July 2024 became the first state to outlaw them entirely at its public universities.

Undergraduate Dean of Admissions and Financial Aid Jeremiah Quinlan said he does "not comment on admissions policies at other schools, including Yale's graduate and professional schools."

The News reached out to Yale's other graduate and professional schools about their admissions policies. Representatives of the David Geffen School of Drama, the School of Medicine's M.D. program, the School of the Environment and the Divinity School all said they do not consider legacy status.

Maureen Farrell, a spokesperson for the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences wrote in a statement to the News: "While admissions decisions in the Graduate School are made by departmental admissions committees, the Graduate School application does not collect legacy information."

Jared Liu, the assistant admissions dean at the Jackson School of Global Affairs, wrote in an email that the school likewise does not consider legacy status, noting that it was founded in 2022.

"So it would be unusual for there to be a legacy situation that quickly," Liu wrote.

Spokespeople for the University's remaining graduate and professional schools — the School of Public Health, the School of Management, the School of Art, the School of Architecture and the School of Music — as well as Yale's central media office did not respond to the News' requests for comment on their admissions policies.

Yale Law School is located at 127 Wall St.

Contact
SASHA HUROWITZ at

At Buckley talk, former British PM hails academic freedom

JOHNSON FROM PAGE 1

of all creativity and prosperity and, as I've argued to you before, there's nowhere, if you look at the record, where that spirit blazes more brightly than Yale University."

Johnson also discussed foreign policy, arguing that the United States and the United Kingdom should stand up together against what he described as autocratic states. His wide-ranging speech also touched on topics ranging from the Israel-Hamas war to how the Boston Tea Party relates to Brexit.

The event was organized by the Buckley Institute and the Young America's Foundation. The Buckley Institute brands itself as the "only organization dedicated to promoting intellectual diversity and free speech at Yale."

Around 400 people attended the talk, which took place in Sheffield-Sterling-Strathcona Hall's large lecture space. The event was accompanied by heavy security: Attendees were scanned by metal detectors upon entrance, and liquids, foods and bags were prohibited.

Introduced by William Barbee '26, the president of the Buckley Institute's student program, Johnson started his speech by praising Yale's "amazing record" of intellectual prudence and alumni distinction, including William Howard Taft to Hillary Clinton -- "and JD Vance," he added enthusiastically. The Western liberal intelligentsia has lost its models, Johnson said, and an institution like Yale could provide inspiration.

The former British prime minister also condemned pro-Palestinian protests, which he said go against Israel's "legitimate attempts" to stop attacks like that of Oct. 7, 2023, from happening again. He also condemned Russia, China and North Korea for their involvement in the war in Ukraine. After more than three years of the Ukrainian war, Johnson added, the West is "doing nothing like enough to prove Putin wrong," referring to Vladimir Putin, the president of Russia.

Johnson then praised Trump, whose attacks against the late-night TV host Jimmy Kimmel -- "never heard of him before," Johnson said -- and other news outlets are incomparable to Putin's suppression of journalists in Russia.

"We have to remember the difference between our side and their side," he said. "You listen to the moaning of the liberal media about Donald Trump's sometimes boisterous treatment of journalists. It's a terrible problem, but I'm one of the very, very few European politicians who's willing to say that I like Donald Trump."

Towards the end of his speech, however, Johnson emphasized the importance of academic freedom at universities. Since taking office, Trump has cracked down on universities, freezing federal research funds and pushing schools such as Penn, Columbia and Brown into financial deals and settlements with the White House.

The topic of academic freedom also came up during the subsequent question-and-answer period. University students in the West should campaign for intellectual and academic freedom, Johnson said, as well as the rights of every student, lecturer and professor to say and write "what they always think in their heart -- the facts."

Yale has a good record when it comes to intellectual and academic freedom, Johnson said, as exemplified by the Buckley Institute's mission.

Johnson also dedicated a portion of his speech to praising what he described as American values, recounting that he sat next to Apple CEO Tim Cook, Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg, Amazon founder Jeff Bezos and "chief bunny of DOGE" Elon Musk at Trump's inauguration and listing their respective net worths.

"And then it was me! I slightly brought down the average," Johnson quipped, mentioning his career in public service and journalism.

After talking to these "tycoons of American capitalism," Johnson said, he realized that the United States has an "extra sense" of freedom and possibility. The American concept of freedom was exemplified 250 years ago during the American Revolution, he said, adding that he "would have done" the Boston Tea Party, too. The spirit of the Boston Tea Party -- not wanting to be ruled overseas by unaccountable politicians -- was one of the reasons why he favored Brexit, Johnson added.

When asked about a problem faced by youth in both the United States and the United Kingdom, Johnson pointed to the difficulty that British youth face in climbing the "property ladder," such as by acquiring homes. When he asked the audience whether a similar problem exists in the United States, too, the audience generally agreed, with various nods and verbal "yes" responses.

"How do you believe in capitalism, how do you support the capitalist system if you struggle to acquire capital in that way?" Johnson asked. "That, I would say, is the single biggest problem. We got to fix it."

Daniel Jung '28, who attended the talk, said that Johnson was a charismatic speaker with "many anecdotes to talk about."

"He definitely is able to control the room," he said. "He very much showed his appreciation for the students and intellectual prowess this university has, which is a good way to be welcomed."

Last year, the conservative political commentator Ben Shapiro visited Yale as part of the lecture series jointly hosted by the Buckley Institute and the Young America's Foundation.

Contact
JAEHA JANG at
jaeha.jang@yale.edu



The former British prime minister also condemned pro-Palestinian protests and called for Western countries to support Ukraine in its war against Russia. / **Courtesy of Bill Morgan Media/Buckley Institute**