

FROM THE FRONT

“Every moment is a fresh beginning.”
T.S. ELIOT POET

Non-renewals of lecturers’ contracts draw criticism

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“The decision to not renew some appointments following the end of their contracts was a hard one,” Wilkinson wrote. “We have a responsibility to meet the critical teaching needs of the College, which necessitates difficult trade-offs given the unprecedented budget challenges caused by the increased tax on Yale’s endowment income.”

Last year, Congress passed a bill that included a tax hike on elite universities’ endowment investment returns that will go into effect this July. Yale’s administration, which has projected that the tax increase will cost the University about \$300 million annually, has responded with austerity measures such as staff layoffs and cuts to graduate school enrollment, as well as budget-tightening across schools and divisions.

While Wilkinson emphasized that the administration considered the College’s “most urgent teaching needs” in making contract renewal decisions, faculty and students criticized some non-renewal decisions, saying that the departing instructors contributed greatly to Yale’s educational mission and suggesting that administrative staff would be a better target for budget tightening.

Faculty also told the News that the recent contract non-renewals — and the lack of formal justification for them — highlight the precarious nature of short-term contracts among instructional faculty.

Yale’s faculty handbook notes that these shorter-term appointments, which are between one semester and three years, “carry no presumption of reappointment and no expectation of long-term employment,” and reappointment depends on “continued need for the position, the availability of resources for the position, and the performance of the faculty member.”

Wilkinson wrote that the non-renewed appointments make up less than 4 percent of the full-time equivalents among total instructional faculty. He declined to comment on the individual cases

of faculty whose contracts were not renewed.

According to Wilkinson, the number of instructional faculty full-time equivalents will still be greater in the 2026-27 school year than it was in the 2024-25 school year.

Yale’s Teaching Resource Advisory Committee “carefully” considers each renewal decision with “teaching needs” in mind and input from department chairs, Wilkinson added. In some cases, his office has hired new lecturers and lectors to teach courses necessary for major requirements and graduation, Wilkinson wrote.

In an interview with the News, Lewis also said that curricular need is the “highest priority” for hiring decisions for lecturers.

“In all of these budget decisions, we’re trying very hard to have the minimum possible impact on students’ educational experience, but that doesn’t mean there’s no impact,” Lewis said.

Daphne Joyce Wu ’26, who is in Bhagchandani’s upper-level seminar and organized the letter, said in a phone interview that Bhagchandani told her students that her contract was not renewed because of the budget pressure the University is facing in light of the endowment tax hike.

Bhagchandani declined to comment for this article.

The letter describes Bhagchandani, affectionately called “Professor Shakti” by students, as “one of Yale’s most beloved and respected professors.”

“Without Professor Shakti, we are deeply concerned on how students who came to the FMS major with a love for the writing behind films will be able to continue their creative journey,” the letter also says, referring to the Film and Media Studies program. “Many of us chose to pursue FMS precisely because of the opportunity to learn from her.”

The letter also recognizes “the financial pressures that Yale is currently facing” and notes that the request is made not lightly, but “out of a sincere belief that losing Professor Shakti and the

screenwriting program would be a profound and irreconcilable loss for generations of film students and Yale undergraduate education at large.”

Alex William Chen ’28, the speaker of the Yale College Council, wrote in a text message to the News that the petition is “evidence that the student body fundamentally disagrees with some of the choices that were made.” Some of this year’s non-renewals have been “genuinely confusing and disheartening for many in the student body,” Chen added.

Linden Skalak ’26 also said in a phone interview that Bhagchandani’s departure is “devastating.” Many students are worried about their thesis process without a screenwriting professor to guide them, she added.

Wu pointed to an alternative group of employees that Yale could downsize.

“The bureaucracy at Yale is just insane,” Wu said. “They take up so much money, and they’re so bloated that it’s inefficient. So why are we cutting the professors that students love and not turning towards the bureaucracy? Like, let’s cut some of the bureaucrats in the system.”

University spokesperson Karen Peart did not respond to the News’ request for comment about students’ criticism of the number of administrative employees at Yale. In a January email to the News, Peart wrote that staff positions, “including those that support the university’s academic, operations, and clinical enterprise, are crucial to faculty work and to Yale’s ability to carry out its mission.”

Hinkley, who teaches the course “Marx, Nietzsche, Freud,” also learned recently that his contract would not be renewed. Hinkley said in an interview that he was “already kind of living on borrowed time” because he was told upon being hired in 2023 that he would only be able to renew his contract for one more year, but his department advocated for a third-year contract at the end of last school year.

“I think there were hopes that we could find a way for me to continue here, but with the budget-

ary situation as it is, that is definitely not possible,” Hinkley said, adding that he was “told informally” by departmental colleagues that “they had been trying to figure something out for me and that the administration has stonewalled their attempts.”

Adam Bear ’27, who is in Hinkley’s lecture, said in a phone interview that he found the news of Hinkley’s non-renewal “upsetting” and that many of his best classes have been taught by lecturers like Hinkley.

“If somebody’s hired primarily for the purpose of being a teacher as opposed to also for their research, I think that maybe there’s more of an impetus to be a great teacher,” Bear said. “So the fact that they’re the first people on the chopping block when budget cuts come around feels antithetical to the idea of Yale College as a liberal arts institution meant to teach people.”

While he recognized that Yale is navigating budget constraints and “you can’t really get rid of tenured faculty,” Bear said there are employee groups besides lecturers, such as administrators, whose salaries could be reduced.

“I have to imagine there are people who contribute less to Yale than Austen Hinkley who are probably paid much more than him,” Bear said.

Felix Fein ’26, who has had both Hinkley and Morrison as instructors, said in a phone interview that the impacts of contract non-renewals among “beloved” instructional faculty will be “immense and regrettable for the University and the whole undergraduate experience.”

Morrison — who added in his email to students that whether he is brought back or not, it has been “one of the greatest gifts” of his life to be their teacher — wrote in an email to the News that all he can say is that he is “endlessly grateful for my students for my time here.”

Fein said instructional faculty members’ jobs, by definition, are to teach and mentor undergraduates, and “if any faculty are

being cut,” not renewing these contracts would have “the most impact” on undergraduates.

“Frankly, I think the issue is higher up,” Fein said. “Why is the University asking faculty, but specifically the dean of faculty, to be making cuts? I think if cuts need to be made, this area is unacceptable.”

Hinkley also said that his position as lecturer was “sort of set up” to be impermanent and that administrators could easily “cut” his job under budget pressure. Amid “great uncertainty about the future,” he said, he has to constantly apply for other positions and produce research while teaching full-time.

Daniel HoSang, the president of Yale’s chapter of the American Association of University Professors, wrote in an email to the News that instructional faculty are “central” to Yale’s undergraduate curriculum and broader academic mission.

“It is demoralizing to see the university respond to budget pressures in ways that disproportionately affect those who are often the lowest paid and have the least job security,” HoSang wrote. “Non-tenured faculty play an essential role in meeting the needs of our students, yet their contracts are structured in ways that make them especially vulnerable during moments of financial strain.”

HoSang mentioned that other institutions, such as Brown and Northwestern, have carried out salary freezes or reductions for senior administrators during periods of budgetary pressure, “explicitly framing those decisions as a form of shared sacrifice and leadership.”

“It is not clear whether comparable measures were seriously considered here before moving forward with this wave of non-renewals for our most vulnerable colleagues,” HoSang wrote.

Yale employs 12,058 staff members, according to its fact page.

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Official’s department has investigated Yale

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ment to be eliminated. The department has investigated Yale for alleged campus antisemitism and, more recently, for a partnership with a program the department accused of racial discrimination.

McInnis said Tuesday that she was not “aware of” plans for her to meet with McMahon during the secretary’s upcoming visit.

When asked if she believed the Education Department should be scrapped, she stopped short of clearly answering affirmatively or negatively.

“I don’t believe — I — the U.S. Department of Education serves many wide and diverse functions, many of which serve our students very well,” she said, mentioning Pell Grants as an example. “I certainly think that those functions are absolutely vital and need to continue,” she added, emphasizing the word “functions.”

When asked what she would most want to convey to McMahon if given the chance, McInnis said she would highlight the University’s commitment to open inquiry.

“I would stress what an extraordinary educational opportunity Yale was able to provide to students who have wide ranges of views,” McInnis said.

McInnis added that Yale provides “open opportunities for debate and dialogue.”

Last month, McInnis met with members of the Yale Political Union — another group she has pointed to as an example of Yale’s culture of open debate.

At a Family Weekend talk in October, McInnis raised both the YPU and the Buckley Institute as possible reasons why the Trump administration has not targeted Yale with the punitive funding cuts that have hit many peer institutions, adding that there was “no obvious answer” to the question. In the interview

on Tuesday, she said she had not been courting the political union to stave off future cuts.

In March, McMahon’s department opened a Title VI investigation into Yale and other universities’ partnerships with the PhD Project, an organization that assists members of underrepresented groups at business schools.

The department announced in February that Yale and 30 other universities had reached deals with the government to end their partnerships with the PhD Project after the department alleged the organization unlawfully “limits eligibility based on the race of participants.”

McInnis said on Tuesday that she did not know the specifics of Yale’s relationship with the PhD Project or the terms of the resolution the University reached with the Education Department.

“I do not know the exact details of that. It’s an association with the School of Management,” McInnis said, when asked about the nature and extent of Yale’s former relationship with the organization.

A School of Management webpage, whose text was captured by an internet archive and later removed, described the school’s diversity programs and said that in 2020 the school had “increased its engagement with the PhD Project.”

McInnis suggested that Yale’s Office of the General Counsel could provide information about the resolution. A University spokesperson did not respond to the News’ request for comment from the office.

The U.S. Department of Education was founded in 1979.

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McInnis met with YPU students

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day that she was not courting the group in an effort to avoid future cuts.

McInnis said students told her about their experiences on campus and with the union specifically, and she denied drawing the political union closer to stay out of the federal government’s crosshairs.

“I’m not,” McInnis said when asked if she was courting the union’s members for that purpose. “I am meeting, as I often do, with different groups of students about a variety of different topics to hear about their perspectives as Yale students.”

McInnis added that students at the meeting spoke “about what they’re majoring in and what they’re studying” and told her about “their Yale experiences.”

The post on Yale’s Instagram account, which was shared jointly by the accounts of the political union and Lewis, stated that the student leaders discussed “their work fostering dialogue across different perspectives.”

The political union comprises seven parties. This semester, guest speakers at weekly debates have included Curtis Sliwa, the former Republican candidate for mayor of New York, and Kevin Roberts, the president of the conservative Heritage Foundation.

“Ever since President McInnis joined Yale University as its president,” union president Mór Szepesi ’27 said Tuesday, “she has frequently referred to the Yale Political Union in very public forums in order to point at the unique debate culture and free dialogue and expression that we have at this university, which really sets us apart.”

At a Family Weekend talk in October, McInnis suggested that the Yale Political Union, which offers students opportunities for debate, may be a potential reason for why Yale has avoided the same pressure from the Trump administration that other peer institutions have faced alongside funding freezes.

“Whether it is that long tradition, the long tradition we have of encouraging open debate from something like Yale Political Union or the Buck-



Ellie Park / Senior Photographer

After suggesting in October that the Yale Political Union could be why Yale has avoided targeted federal funding cuts, University President Maurice McInnis met with the group’s leaders last week.

ley Institute, or whether it’s we’re at the end of the alphabet, I don’t have that answer,” McInnis said at the Family Weekend talk.

In a February interview with the News, McInnis denied credit for keeping Yale out of the Trump administration’s crosshairs. Dartmouth and Yale remain the only Ivy League universities that the Trump administration has not singled out for federal funding cuts.

An Instagram post about the Yale Political Union’s meeting with the administrators, made by the union, stated that the group’s representatives had discussed with McInnis and Lewis “the state of the Union, its impact on Yale, and its needs for the future.”

Szepesi declined to comment on the details of what they discussed but talked about their broader goals in setting up the meeting. Other student attendees declined to comment on the meeting, deferring to Szepesi’s statement.

“We wanted to be able to meet with President McInnis for multiple reasons,” Szepesi said. He added that another part of the reason was for the union to provide context about the

organization and highlight their ideals, values and missions.

Szepesi spoke about rising costs, particularly “with respect to security” as financial concerns for the union. He said that part of the reason for having a long-term relationship with Yale administrators is to increase their awareness of the union’s issues and to “hopefully be able to count on their support should it be needed in the future.”

“We are very thankful for the president’s office for extending this opportunity,” Szepesi said, adding that he appreciates that the door is “open for future collaboration.”

McInnis, along with Yale Corporation members, met with student leaders at an invite-only event in February ahead of the Corporation’s first meeting of the semester.

The Yale Political Union was founded in 1934, according to its website.

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