

# Yale OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

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February 13, 2020

Dr. Barbara E. Brittingham, President  
New England Commission of Higher Education  
3 Burlington Woods Drive, Suite 100  
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Dear Barbara,

I write to offer Yale's formal response to the *Report to the Faculty, Administration, Trustees, and Students of Yale University* submitted to the New England Commission of Higher Education on January 10, 2020. Our first order of business is to reiterate our deep appreciation to President Christopher Eisgruber of Princeton University, who chaired Yale's review, and the members of the visiting team: Dr. Avery August, Ms. Tracy Barnes, Dr. Kim Godsoe, Ms. Ingrid Gould, Provost Sunil Kumar, Mr. Michael Lochhead, Ms. Joann Mitchell, Ms. Leah Rosovsky, and Professor Martin Wybourne. My colleagues and I also wish to convey our special thanks to Ms. Hilary Parker, who staffed President Eisgruber and the review team, and who was an instrumental force behind the success of the November 2019 site visit.

The members of the visiting team were meticulous in their work; the resulting report is a testament to their care. We are gratified that the report highlights Yale's ambitious goals; our commitment to a mission that both permeates the university and looks beyond it; and our emphatic commitment to teaching, research, and the excellence of our faculty and students. In this letter I will share several updates of substance since the time of the team's visit to campus, together with our responses and a few points of clarification regarding some of the key suggestions and insights offered in the report.

In matters of planning and evaluation, the report notes Yale's effective master plan for capital projects—the University Planning Framework, which was first issued in 2001 and updated most recently in 2009—and proposes a renewal of the plan to reflect the university's current physical landscape and academic strategy. I am pleased to confirm that the next iteration of the University Planning Framework will be released in 2020.

Concerning organization and governance, the report comments that some aspects of the organizational relationship between the offices of the provost and of the dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences (FAS) “appear to be in flux or may require further specification.” This is a particularly timely topic. In 2014, when the current FAS organization was set, we committed to a five-year review of the new arrangements; last semester I appointed an Ad Hoc Review Committee on the FAS Decanal Structure chaired by Steven Berry, the David Swensen Professor of Economics, to carry out this review. Professor Berry's committee will consider how the FAS organizational structure is working, and will address the relationship and boundaries between the FAS and the Office of the Provost. The committee's report will be issued before the end of the current academic year, and I look forward to considering its recommendations. I also am pleased

that Scott Strobel, the Henry Ford II Professor of Molecular Biophysics & Biochemistry, became Yale's provost in January of this year. Provost Strobel—who previously served as our vice president for West Campus planning and development, as well as in senior roles within the provost's office—has long been a crucial part of the university's leadership team. He was the architect of the Poorvu Center for Teaching and Learning, of the build-out of the West Campus as a hub of multidisciplinary research and education, and of our university-wide science strategy. With this experience, he is ideally positioned to continue the work of his predecessor, Ben Polak, to develop a provost's office that is truly university-wide in scope.

The report rightly describes the “significant pressures” Yale has faced “to increase mental health and wellness resources, as have colleges and universities across the country.” In late January, we announced the appointment of Dr. Paul Hoffman as Yale's next chief of Mental Health & Counseling (MHC) at Yale Health, effective February 1, 2020. Dr. Hoffman will lead our efforts to meet the surging demand for MHC clinical services, and he will help develop additional campus solutions for student social, personal, and academic issues that are not primarily psychiatric, with a focus on wellness and prevention.

With respect to public disclosure—and university communications in particular—the report mentions our efforts to connect more effectively with Yale's many constituencies, from the on-campus community of faculty, staff, and students to our robust alumni network, and from prospective students, faculty, and staff to a wider global audience. At the beginning of the new year we launched a daily newsletter, Yale Today, initiated by our vice president for communications, Nate Nickerson. We also have a new university podcast (which I host and narrate) called Yale Talk, which debuted in late January.

On the subject of graduate education, the report discusses the “variability [in] expectations for undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in the same course; some courses make no distinction and others [carry] more rigorous expectations for graduate students.” Yale stipulates that these dually listed courses should carry distinct workloads and levels of rigor for graduate students, and the deans of Yale College and the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences (GSAS) intend to work together to ensure that the practice is carried out consistently across all courses offered jointly at the undergraduate and graduate levels. However, in response to the report's further recommendation that graduate courses be subject to committee approval (as undergraduate courses are), we wish to underscore Yale's firm commitment to departmental autonomy in the oversight of graduate programs. That is, we believe that review of graduate-level courses is most appropriately handled by experts in the field—the departmental leadership. Finally, as a small matter of clarification, graduate courses at Yale enrolling five or more students use the same course evaluation system as do undergraduate courses.

Another point of clarification concerns faculty retention statistics. The report indicates, correctly, that seven tenured women and twenty-two tenured men left the FAS in 2017, but of those, only eight left for positions at other universities; the other twenty-one were long-serving members of the faculty who retired to emeritus status in that year. Over the last fifteen years, tenured faculty resignations from the FAS to pursue jobs at other institutions have averaged 6.5 per year. So, although retention of tenured faculty remains a pressing issue, it is not a concern of the magnitude that the report might seem to suggest. Moreover, we continue to meet our expectations for faculty recruitment. The rearticulated FAS system of departmental and “pool”

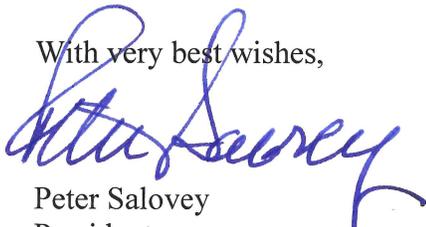
slots—administered with oversight from the FAS Faculty Resource Committee, now in its sixth year—has proved highly effective in enabling us to pursue strategic hires in support of our academic priorities. And, beginning at the start of the last academic year, we have allocated new university funds (\$50 million over a five-year period) to ensure competitive compensation of both new and existing faculty, supporting our efforts to recruit and retain preeminent scholarly leaders across the disciplines.

Another aspect of the report that we will continue to address is the suggestion that “the processes by which individual academic departments are evaluated...might merit some additional consideration.” Each FAS department chair has an annual meeting with FAS leadership, conducted by the respective divisional dean. In preparation for those meetings, chairs are encouraged to look at the full set of course evaluations for their respective departments. Each department also has an annual meeting with the GSAS academic leadership to review strategy and planning at the graduate program level. The GSAS recently implemented a system for teaching fellows to evaluate their experience in the classroom, including the mentoring they receive from faculty instructors. More broadly, external reviews of FAS departments are conducted on a rotating basis, with the aim of reviewing roughly five departments each year; this allows a review of each department, on average, once every ten years.

We thank the visiting team for its particular attention to Yale’s commitment to teaching and learning—the very first goal I articulated when I came into this role. The team undertook an extensive review of course syllabi and schedules across the academic enterprise, concluding that we should consider “a project to ensure that all syllabi clearly state course expectations, assignments, and grading policies.” We agree that this is a crucial area of emphasis, as focus group and survey data from the Committee on Teaching, Learning and Advising in Yale College have revealed that the lack of transparency about learning expectations is a barrier to success in some courses. The Poorvu Center for Teaching and Learning is developing, based on input from new faculty, a pilot syllabus template; this template will include a prompt for learning goals with links to resources on how to develop them, in addition to sample language for statements about diversity, inclusion, and accessibility accommodations. Further, our planned switch to a new registration system in 2021 will open the door to introducing an early summary listing for each course, well in advance of completion of full syllabi at the start of each semester. This course précis—less detailed than the final syllabus—would focus on providing a high-level summary of the course content and requirements, thereby enabling students to make better-informed decisions about their course enrollment plans.

I hope this brief letter makes evident how greatly Yale has benefited—and will continue to benefit—from the process of peer review. I look forward to the pleasure of seeing you and meeting with the commission on March 6, 2020.

With very best wishes,



Peter Salovey  
President

Chris Argyris Professor of Psychology