

# STUDENT CENTER AT YALE

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Yale College Council  
Graduate and Professional Student Senate  
Graduate Student Assembly

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Prepared by the Joint Ad Hoc Committee on the  
Student Center at Yale



## **I. Executive Summary**

The report - an unprecedented partnership by the three student governments on campus that, together, represent every Yale student - calls for creating a student center accessible to all undergraduate, graduate, and professional students at Yale. Although creating a large, centrally-located, and campus-wide student center represents a significant undertaking, it will bring Yale in line with its peer institutions, all of which have either already built such facilities or are in the process of constructing them. A student center will provide new opportunities for collaboration, mutual learning, and connection between students. It will offer additional activity space, concentrate student life resources, facilitate interdisciplinary interactions, and expand the diversity of extracurricular activities for students. In particular, it will improve alcohol-free social programming on campus. The formal and informal relationships nurtured in such an environment will make Yale a more creative, healthy, and unified community.

## **II. Vision and Rationale**

In 1878 Yale's only campus-wide student organization, the Linonia Society, closed, setting off a fierce debate about inclusive student life at Yale. More than half the students declared themselves in favor of the society's immediate revival, and the Yale Club of Washington, DC passed an emphatic resolution calling for its resurrection.<sup>1</sup> Much has changed at Yale in the intervening years, to be sure. Yet demand for student life space accessible to all on campus has recurred throughout Yale's history.

Since introducing coeducation in 1969, Yale has undertaken more than a dozen initiatives to improve student life programming. The McDougal Center, the Graduate and Professional Student Center at Yale (GPSCY), the Office of International Students and Scholars, the campus cultural centers, the Office of LGBTQ Resources, the Yale Women's Center, and many other outlets provide important student life resources for the student body. However, from the founding of Dwight Hall at the end of the nineteenth century to the inauguration of the new Native American Cultural Center (NACC) building last fall, Yale's approach to student life has been the same. When students and administrators have created new student life opportunities, their efforts have focused mainly on the needs of specific groups on campus. Many of these institutions have survived, broadened their appeal, and grown into integral parts of campus. Nonetheless, Yale lacks a campus-wide facility that serves all students.<sup>2</sup>

As a result, student life divides into exclusive enclaves along residential college, school, demographic, and geographic lines. This divided approach has many virtues. Small communities provide a setting for rich relationships. They bring students with similar interests and backgrounds together in mutual support. We value the unique experiences offered by the numerous smaller communities provided by the undergraduate colleges, the academic departments, and the professional schools.

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<sup>1</sup> Yale Daily News, 1.14 (February 12, 1878).

<sup>2</sup> As the NEASC observed in its 2009 re-accreditation report, Yale does not do enough to integrate the various parts of campus and pays insufficient attention to the student life experience. Although positive steps have been taken since 2009, among them the creation of the Vice Presidency for Student Life, the lack of a central student life facility continues to limit the sorts of student life activities available to all students.

Yet in the absence of a unified center of student life, these smaller institutions hinder cross-school and cross-campus relationships from developing, which can have substantial negative repercussions for interdisciplinary scholarship.

Students, recognizing these limitations, have called repeatedly for a large, centrally-located campus hub for student-directed and student-oriented programming.<sup>3</sup> Indicative of a strong and durable student consensus, this report has grown out of a two-year collaboration between the Yale College Council (YCC), the Graduate Student Assembly (GSA), and the Graduate and Professional Student Senate (GPSS). It is the first proposal ever produced in conjunction by all three groups working as equal partners, and it integrates the concerns of our three constituencies on an equal footing.<sup>4</sup>

Yale needs a campus-wide center that bridges the boundaries between undergraduate, graduate, and professional students. Building a student center - an investment all of Yale's peer institutions have made - will bring Yale into line with student life standards across the country. Such a facility will also tangibly improve the Yale experience for all students academically, professionally, and socially. In short, a student center open to all students at all times will make us a more accessible, more unified, more excellent Yale.

YCC, GSA, and GPSS are committed to working with the administration to plan, create, and maintain a building that encourages vibrant, significant, and inclusive social interaction at Yale. We urge the administration to make the creation of a campus-wide student center a priority, and to involve students in the planning and direction thereof.

### **III. Environmental Scan**

The committee undertook an extensive environmental scan of Yale and our peer institutions to identify the general and Yale-specific needs a campus-wide student center should address.

Repeated surveys of the student body and focus groups at Yale have revealed that students across the university want 24/7 access to on-campus meeting and study space, dining alternatives, resource parity and centralization, and alcohol-free programming.

These desires conform to the designs of and services offered by existing student centers. Conversations with other Ivy League institutions have emphasized the importance their centers have for student life. More than mere gathering places, they centralize core student services. They usually include multiple dining options, recreational gathering facilities, retail, meeting rooms, organizational offices, and multi-purpose spaces.

The table below describes these services in greater detail. It also demonstrates clearly that our peer institutions find substantial value in a central space for students to gather, meet, access resources, innovate, and collaborate.

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<sup>3</sup> In 1994, President Richard Levin formed the Student Center Planning Group charged with designing plans for a student center (Yale Daily News no. 66, January 11, 1994).

<sup>4</sup> In addition, the committee has benefited immensely from conversations with various parts of the administration and the Corporation.

School	Students	Student Center	Meeting Rooms	Multipurpose Spaces	Performance Spaces	Univ. Resources	Student Groups	Dining Options	Retail	Other
<b>Penn</b>	24,630	Houston Hall	Yes	Yes	Class of '49 Auditorium	Yes	Yes	Cafeteria + Cafes	Yes	N/A
<b>Cornell</b>	22,400	Willard Straight Hall	Yes	Yes	Memorial Room	Yes	Yes	Cafeteria + Restaurant + Cafe	N/A	Cinema, Computer Labs, Post Office, Tickets Office, TV Lounges, ATMS
<b>Princeton</b>	7,783	Frist Campus Center	Yes	Yes	Frist Performance Theater	Yes	Yes	Cafeteria + Cafes	Yes	Cinema, Computer Labs, Post Office, Tickets Office, ATMs
<b>Dartmouth</b>	6,144	Collis Center	Yes	Yes	Common Ground	Yes	Yes	Cafes	No	Game Room, Computer Lab, TV Lounges
<b>Brown</b>	8,619	Stephen Roberts '62 Campus Center	Yes	Yes	Kasper Room	Yes	Yes	Cafeteria + Market	No	Game Room, Art Gallery, TV Lounge
<b>Columbia</b>	28,824	Alfred Lerner Hall	Yes	Yes	Roone Arledge Auditorium	Yes	N/A	Cafeteria + Cafes	Yes	Post Office, Banks, Computer Labs, TV Lounges, Theater, Cinema
<b>MIT</b>	11,189	Stratton Student Center	Yes	Yes	Coffeehouse Lounge	Yes	Yes	Multiple 3 <sup>rd</sup> party vendors	Yes	Post Office, Banks, Computer Labs, TV Lounges, Art Gallery
<b>Harvard</b>	21,000	Richard & Susan F. Smith Campus Center	Expected	Expected	Expected	N/A	N/A	Expected	Expected	N/A
<b>Harvard</b>	Undergrad Only	Student Organization Center at Hilles	Yes	Yes	Performance Hall	No	Yes	Café	No	Recording Studio, Cinema, TV Lounges
<b>Harvard</b>	Grad Only	Dudley House	Yes	Yes	N/A	No	Yes	Cafes	No	Game Room, Computer Lab, Library
<b>Stanford</b>	18,136	Tresidder Memorial Union	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Café + Restaurant + 3 <sup>rd</sup> Party Vendors	Yes	Fitness Center, Bike Shop, ATMs, Open until 2 am everyday

#### **IV. Plan for Yale**

A student center serves as a nexus for student life. It encourages interdisciplinary and interscholastic engagement formally by housing campus-wide services and resources, and informally by creating a centralized space for spontaneous interactions. Based on extensive surveying of our constituent populations, a Yale student center should be a place on campus to meet, learn, eat, congregate and coordinate throughout the day and night. Without such a space, Yale cannot realize the full potential of its student body and capitalize on the academic benefits that interdisciplinary interactions have to offer.

#### **Meet**

Student organizations have difficulty obtaining adequate space for their social, service, and academic activities. Segregation of most meeting space by school, and the corresponding absence of a centralized booking procedure, unnecessarily complicates the process of organizing meetings and events. Groups find meeting spaces overbooked or poorly matched to their needs. This arrangement also means that students have unequal access to resources and facilities.

The McDougal Center, for example, offers only a single room for student groups to reserve. Groups affiliated with the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences receive priority, and the room is often booked, requiring several months of advanced notice to secure. Yale Law School has few rooms to reserve, all of which are booked well in advance.

Graduate and professional students cannot reserve rooms in other schools or in the residential colleges. Undergraduate students lack even the centralized facilities offered by the McDougal Center and can only reserve space in their own residential colleges, often having to contend for space with academic activities. The few spaces open to the entire university - such as rooms in Bass Library - are inaccessible when the library is closed and are booked frequently. This leaves campus-wide organizations without a clear means of reserving adequate meeting space.

A student center should have multi-purpose space of sufficient scope and diversity to meet the needs of the student body. Students have identified need for a few large spaces, such as a ballroom and theater, for sizable campus-wide events. Additionally, student groups routinely seek mid-sized event rooms with capacities between fifty and one hundred people.<sup>5</sup> Last, but by no means least, students have requested meeting and conference rooms with capacities below fifty people. Space should be reservable through a centralized process and at least some of it should be available 24/7. Such an arrangement would enable programming by student groups, interdisciplinary academic conferences, major speakers, and community events.

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<sup>5</sup>Recently, the Native American Cultural Center had difficulty securing space for a conference with over 70 expected attendees.

## Learn

Groups and individual students often struggle to find sufficient study space. Three campus-wide libraries - Bass, SML, and CSSSI - are open to all students. Of these, only CSSSI keeps a small common area open 24 hours a day during the semester. No circulation desk stays open later than 11:45 pm Sunday through Thursday nights, after 10:00 pm on Fridays, and after 8:00 pm on Saturdays. The large, collaborative spaces housed in the three campus-wide libraries close after 1:45 am (and only that late on weekends). For many individuals, working at home is not an option and, as office space is not universally available, the libraries provide the space that is necessary for their studies.

In addition, the campus-wide libraries reduce hours according to the undergraduate calendar, meaning graduate and professional students frequently find them closed while still in session. For the many departments in the graduate school where office space is in short supply, this complicates the process of holding TA office hours, and diminishes the benefit of these sessions to undergraduates. Limited access to space in the varying schools exacerbates this problem. For example, many departments in the humanities, and even some in the social sciences, do not have designated space to meet with students and with each other. Due to the separation of space, academic groups that might traverse schools, do not have a central location to meet. Therefore the current organization discourages interdisciplinary work across departments and schools.

Creating a location for free interdisciplinary and interscholastic exchange between students will considerably enhance the academic development of the student body. Last year, the School of Engineering and Applied Science opened the Center for Engineering Innovation and Design (CEID), an engineering- and design-focused space available to any Yale student. It has been a resounding success, with over 1,300 students fulfilling the membership requirements as of October, 2013. Of these students, 65% are undergraduates, split almost evenly between STEM-related and non-STEM majors. CEID's success suggests strong student interest in a collaborative academic environment oriented towards interdisciplinary projects.

In addition to creating a space for collaborative academic projects, a student center would facilitate mentorship between graduate and undergraduate students. Surveys indicate that both communities want to expand these sorts of opportunities. In particular, constituent feedback suggests that students share strong, overlapping interests in public service, business, environmental science, technological innovation, and biomedical sciences, to name only a few fields. Currently, undergraduate students have no easy way to tap the knowledge and experience of graduate and professional students pursuing careers and educational options of interest. Shared academic space would add tremendous value to the Yale College experience. Graduate and Professional students looking to pass on their experience and gain pedagogical knowhow stand to gain much as well.

The student center should contain technologically-enhanced collaboration spaces for groups of varying sizes. Some of these can easily overlap with the meeting facilities outlined under the previous subheading. In addition, the facility will need a workplace that allows for seamless integration of computer technology and printing services which is accessible 24/7. These spaces will also ease demand for group and individual study space.

## Eat

Undergraduate students have access to all of the college dining halls seven days a week. In addition, the college butteries provide limited late night dining options. However, changes to the dining schedule have complicated dining for students taking evening courses. Athletes continue to face scheduling challenges around dining.

Graduate and professional students can only access a limited number of dining halls during the week and none on weekends. As a result, graduate and professional students living in on-campus housing must buy meal plans containing weekend dining they cannot access.<sup>6</sup>

A dining option with extended hours, accessible to all students, would provide healthy meals on the weekend and later in the evening in a safe environment. Dining would increase the utility of a student center and draw students to the other resources provided.

## Congregate

Undergraduate-specific social spaces exist almost entirely within the residential colleges. Yale rightly treasures its college system, which offers many amenities to the Yale College population. The college lounges foster a small, intimate atmosphere appropriate to a liberal arts education. However, without campus-wide supplements, they can limit the breadth of the undergraduate social experience. Students have indicated that they face high barriers to socializing and sharing ideas beyond their individual residential colleges. A centralized location for congregating and hosting social activities, especially alcohol-free programming, would increase cross-community interaction and address a primary concern of the administration.<sup>7</sup> This issue is particularly salient for international students who, aside from the offices in OISS, have no dedicated area to socialize and discuss past travels. While the cultural centers are a fantastic resource, this absence of a general space for international students and others interested in a broad set of cultures hampers the formation of a true community. Along with the broader group of frequently-traveling students, this community would benefit substantially by having a space to organize and share their experiences traveling, make future travel plans, and get to know the international students at Yale.

The social experience for graduate and professional students varies considerably across the various schools and departments.<sup>8</sup> Nonetheless, last year's GPSS survey found that recreational space ranked as the third most pressing need for students, trailing only 24/7 access to study

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<sup>6</sup> The Graduate and Professional Affiliate program is a selective process to identify graduate and professional students to be affiliated with the participating residential colleges. For more on the program, visit <http://yalegradaffiliates.blogspot.com/>.

<sup>7</sup> The issue has become a major concern among Yale College. The Yale College Dean's Office Task Force on Alcohol and Other Drugs "have already received their charge: to help Yale College make the undergraduate experience safer, and to protect that experience from the risks that alcohol and other drugs present." See <http://yalecollege.yale.edu/content/student-focused-alcohol-and-drug-initiatives>.

<sup>8</sup> Some schools, notably the School of Management, have a vibrant social life featuring a wide range of activities. Others, like the School of Music, offer almost no programming opportunities. Most schools and departments fall somewhere in between these two poles.

space and additional meeting rooms - both potential aspects of a student center.

Undergraduates at Yale, who are frequently concerned about the scope of their social experience, are increasingly turning to Greek Life. This is an exclusive option, and an expensive one. The process is selective and biannual dues deter others from even considering participating. A common social space, free and inclusive, and without the social pressure to drink alcohol, would greatly enrich the undergraduate experience by allowing students to interact with individuals they would not meet otherwise.

Like undergraduates, graduate and professional students want alcohol-free programming space. Other than the residents of Helen Hadley Hall, graduate and professional students do not have access to activity rooms suitable for alcohol-free recreation. The staff at Gryphon's Pub at GPSCY have worked hard to facilitate graduate student life in the absence of other options. However, GPSCY cannot meet current demand for social space. More student groups request space at GPSCY than the facility and its all-student non-custodial staff can support during the day.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, the operations of the pub on nights and evenings limit the possibilities for alcohol-free programming. A space, where alcohol-free activities could be provided and organized day and night, would markedly enhance the breadth of academic and social options available to graduate and professional students. Yale's peer institutions have found that non-alcoholic events in "activity rooms" that allow for additional entertainment yield a sizable turnout,<sup>10</sup> demonstrating clear interest in *fun* alternatives to drinking.

A student center with compelling alternatives to drinking would disentangle campus-wide social interaction and alcohol consumption. A centralized game and activity area, containing performance spaces and a location for watching televised events, would allow students to interact comfortably with their peers beyond the college, school and department structure. This facility will foster a greater sense of community across the university. Broadening social opportunities will enhance, not detract from, Yale College's residential college system and relieve pressure on GPSCY.

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<sup>9</sup> Because the space also functions as a very successful bar, Connecticut state law further limits use of the facility.

<sup>10</sup> UMI at University of Michigan

## Coordinate

Yale offers many of the services normally housed in a student center, but scatters them across the campus, isolating services from one another (see Figure below). A student center would serve as a central hub to coordinate and access student services and organizations.

Centralizing resources in a single building improves access and usage by students. Increased usage allows service staff to learn from students using their resources and innovate new, more efficient and efficacious procedures.<sup>11</sup> In this manner, a student center will help Yale improve underperforming services, and continue to set the standard for universities around the world.

Organizations such as the cultural and community centers, support offices, student affairs administrative offices, student government, and service organizations would benefit from the central coordination of student life that a student center would provide. Many of the following services and offices have expressed that a student center would augment their present efforts. By allowing a central hub for the advertising of events, these organizations can reach a broader population than they might otherwise be able to access, bringing the campus together in a way that is not currently possible. Other services listed could have the option to be relocated to the student center or to maintain a satellite office in the student center to better facilitate their use by students.

### *Student Life Organizations*

Student Organization Offices  
Student Government Offices  
Student meeting space  
LGBTQ Center  
Women's Center  
OISS  
Cultural Centers  
Dwight Hall  
Student radio station  
Computer lab  
AYA drop in

### *Support Offices*

ID Center  
Student Affairs Dean  
Career Center  
Writing Center  
Student Wellness  
SHARE Satellite Office  
Bursar  
Legal Aid  
ITS Help Desk  
Bookstore  
Student Financial Services/Aid

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<sup>11</sup> When meeting with a committee member, Haley McCarthy, Health Educator for Yale Student Wellness, noted that placing student services in a shared space can “help to reduce barriers to accessing resources and increase usage,” and can also assist with facilitating a “more unified collaboration between students and those who provide student services”.

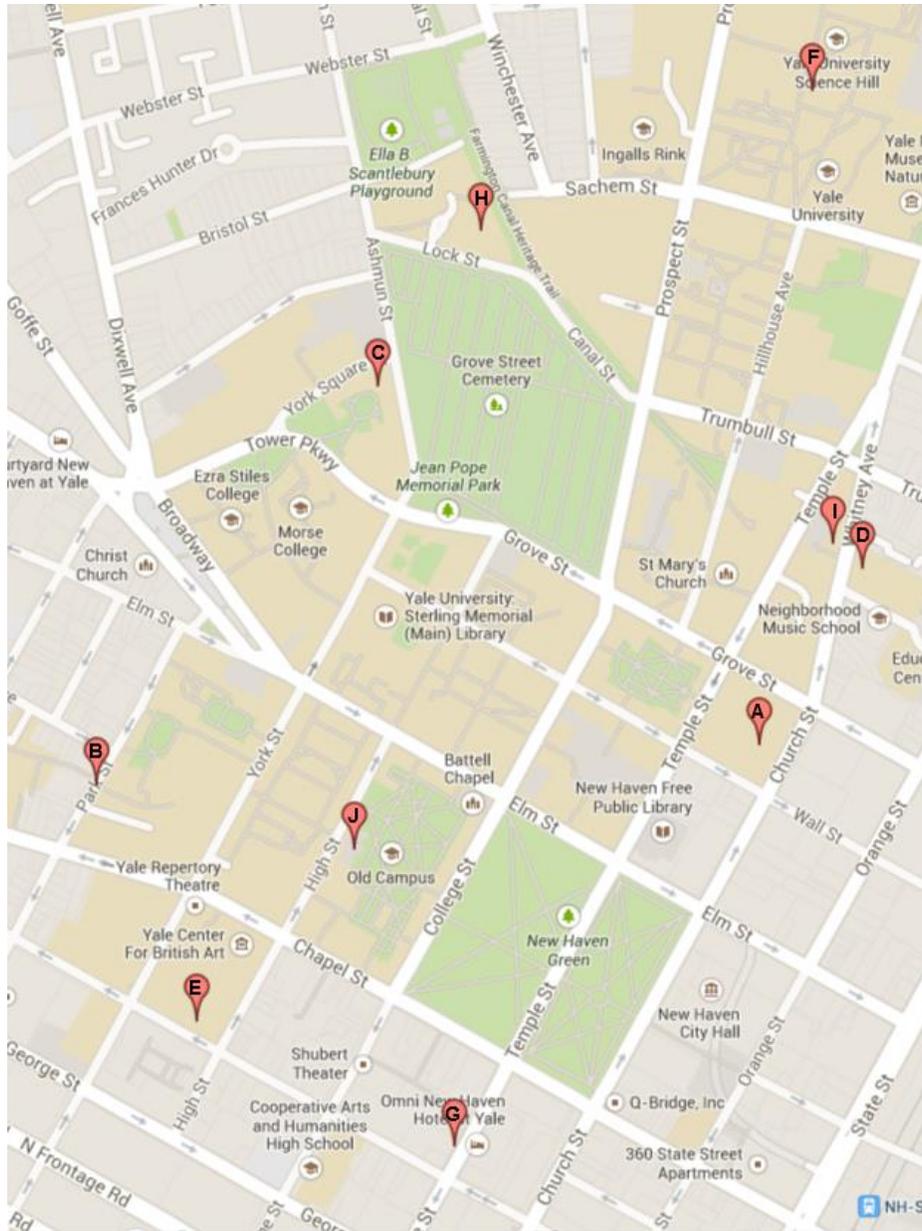


Figure: Map of Yale campus with markers indicating services which are important to student groups and student life. Marked are the Student Financial Services/Registrar (A) the Afro-American Cultural Center (B), the Office of LGBTQ Resources (C), Undergraduate Career Services (D), Cultural Centers (E), CSSI (F), WYBC (G), SHARE (H), OISS (I), and Dwight Hall (J).

## **V. Conclusion**

To properly address the issues raised by students, a student center will need to provide many centralized services that are currently non-existent or distributed across the campus. Alongside usable and available meeting spaces, the inclusion of larger, multi-purpose rooms for conferences and performances, available at all hours, would increase the breadth of activities available to students and the space accessible to student groups. Additionally, the facility would act as a hub for student affairs, making it convenient for students to coordinate activities across disciplines. A centralized location also increases the awareness of student governments and organizations (eg. YCC, GSA, and GPSS), and improve resource utilization. Half-measures may meet some student needs, but will not foster a greater sense of community nor improve effectiveness. These are not issues that will diminish over time. Indeed, as Yale expands into the two new residential colleges, these problems will only become more pronounced.

To be successful, a student center must draw students to the services and facilities it houses. To attract use, the space needs to provide compelling alternatives to other university activities. All of our constituent populations have indicated emphatically that they want centralized meeting spaces, student offices, and study space. They have asked for new dining options and an alcohol-free social environment for congregating. These factors strongly indicate that students would whole-heartedly embrace a new student center.