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GILBERT: Securing Humane Values at Yale

Bennett B. Gilbert

Portland State University, bbg2@pdx.edu

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humane values at Yale

BENNETT GILBERT | 11:51 PM, NOV 14, 2022

GUEST COLUMNIST

For four days in the first week of November, the Yale administration closed the Schwarzman Center and the Good Life Center in the Schwarzman Center to celebrate Stephen Schwarzman and his donation to renovate the building he wanted named after himself. The Commons at the Schwarzman Center used to be called University Commons, a name that indicated its place at the center of Yale life as common ground. As he did in giving money for the renovation of the New York Public Library, when he insisted that his name be carved on its stone entrance beneath the names of the Astor, Tilden and Lenox Foundations, Yale was obliged to replace “Commons” with “Schwarzman.” I trust people still call it Commons.

Around the same time that this was afoot, the administration renamed the Association of Yale Alumni. It is now the Yale Alumni Association, and the AYA Assembly is now the YAA Assembly and Alumni Fund Convocation. These changes mark the assimilation of alumni relations to development and the subsumption of Yale identity to fundraising. Alumni relations are no longer independently directed toward the affects binding us to Yale and



In short, money seems to have overtaken other values at Yale, just as the financialization practiced by people like Schwarzman is crowding out all other human values in this society. Furthermore, Yale is honoring this unhappy development by honoring Schwarzman, who supports for president a man who has the worst possible values because he expects to become even wealthier than he is under another Trump presidency. Since he gives greater gifts than he gives to Yale to other universities for projects for which Yale approached him, suspending activities of the Good Life Center for this purpose might not be fruitful in addition to being surely an insult to Yale students, staff and faculty.

And yet today, Yale is wealthier than ever. When I entered Yale in 1970, the endowment was \$600 million. It has increased 50-fold in just under 50 years. I propose that there is a connection between the increase of wealth and the degradation of other purposes and values. There need not be such a link, but it seems that the way Yale is developing causes some of the good things to be neglected or disposed of.

It is particularly galling that it is in this time that Yale is using more and more adjuncts, rather than appointed faculty, in its instructional staff. Universities should use adjuncts for last-minute or unexpected needs or because they are too poor to afford as many appointments as they need. The more permanent use of adjuncts often begins during times of financial strain; then those strains never seem to go away, while administrative staff bloats; and finally becomes endemic as senior faculty are brought off into retirement. There is no financial emergency at Yale. The use of adjuncts except upon occasional need or for special purposes, is inexcusable. It deprives students of perduring access to their faculty, it degrades research activities, and it creates an atmosphere of arbitrary



in exchange for fees. Teaching requires a kind of intimacy between instructors and students, and this intimacy must have time to grow and be nourished. Yale often has done this superbly well, as when a student can walk by her professor's office and drop in to chat or sit next to her professor at lunch. But this requires security, not precarity.

And what is the Yale endowment for? Is it for security, or is it a remorseless engine of precarity that it generates in order to prolong the appetite for monetizing the community it is supposed to serve?

Bennett Gilbert '72 is an alum who teaches history and philosophy at Portland State University. Contact him at bbg2@pdx.edu

BENNETT GILBERT ✉

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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

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