
The State of Academic Freedom at Yale:

A Report from the Yale Chapter of the AAUP

Spring 2026

Summary. This report presents findings from a survey of the Yale faculty on the state of academic freedom at the University. The 177 respondents represent faculty members at Yale College and at nearly every professional school. Faculty across ranks and schools report that their academic freedom has noticeably declined since January 2025. More than half (56.3%) reported being “extremely concerned” or “somewhat concerned” that students might file anonymous complaints about them; just under half (44.6%) reported the same about being disciplined by the university for their public-facing speech and engagement; and almost one in five reported the same about being arrested in connection with their teaching. These concerns have translated into changes in professional practice, with nearly half of respondents taking at least one action affecting their teaching. Roughly a third report having avoided topics in lectures that might be deemed controversial, and one in five report having jettisoned scholarship on such topics altogether. Nearly half have stepped back from public engagement.

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AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF UNIVERSITY PROFESSORS

YALE CHAPTER

Although many of these changes are responses to the current federal administration, qualitative data from responses to open-ended questions make clear that the University bears a significant share of responsibility for faculty concerns. While some reporting has taken the view that Yale has successfully defended the institution and its finances from the present administration, our data show that all is not well at Yale. The classroom and critical research across most academic disciplines are being negatively affected, in ways that Yale has not yet begun to address—and that can be seen as in part a consequence of the strategy of public conciliation.

Uncertain that Yale will protect academic freedom when tested, faculty are managing risk alone and making concessions that narrow what Yale teaches, researches, and communicates to the world. This undermines the critical work that faculty at Yale do, like HIV research that saves lives, teaching that instills democratic values, and mentoring that supports young people who change the world for the better. Our survey results make clear that we need a concretely defined academic freedom policy that protects tenured and non-tenured faculty equally. They also make clear that we need a strong process to implement those protections—a group of peers, chosen by faculty, to whom complaints can be brought and decided. Finally, significant levels of faculty mistrust show that Yale needs stronger faculty governance. Yale can take concrete action that will make a significant difference to faculty.

The report concludes with recommendations for urgently needed measures to protect the intellectual environment at Yale during this time of great challenge to academic freedom. Trust on campus is critical, and under enormous strain. To protect it, Yale should immediately work to adopt the joint proposal put forth by the Yale AAUP and FAS-SEAS Senate to amend the academic freedom protections in the Faculty Handbook, provide more job security to contingent faculty, and commit to a stronger role for faculty governance. Faculty groups should work together to respond to the findings of this report, and to explore the creation of a university-wide Senate with governance and policy-shaping—not merely advisory—powers.

I. Background and Motivation

Yale AAUP presents this report to further the ongoing conversations about academic freedom that have come increasingly to dominate discourse about higher education locally, nationally, and globally. Debates about academic freedom have escalated over the last three years and have taken on increasing urgency in the era of the Trump administration's systemic attack on faculty rights and research funding.

Academic freedom is the freedom necessary to accomplish the mission of the university—to advance education, research, and public knowledge. The main facets of academic freedom were influentially codified in 1940 by the AAUP and are well understood. As the AAUP describes:

Academic freedom is the freedom of a teacher or researcher in higher education to investigate and discuss the issues in their academic field, and to teach and publish findings without interference from administrators, boards of

trustees, political figures, donors, or other entities. Academic freedom also protects the right of a faculty member to speak freely when participating in institutional governance, as well as to speak freely as a citizen.

As the 1940 document describes, employment protection and due process are the key structural components of academic freedom protection. For example, after a probationary period, “teachers or investigators should have permanent or continuous tenure, and their service should be terminated only for adequate cause.” Free speech and academic freedom are often conflated but are actually quite distinct. As the AAUP explains, free speech law does not regard some ideas as better than others, but it is in the nature of academic discipline to distinguish between more and less convincing accounts. If someone is denied tenure or is accused of not teaching a subject in responsible fashion, they cannot argue that it does not matter whether their speech was academically meritorious or not. The question academics (and a court) will ask is whether their speech met the standards of their discipline. Academic freedom is a collective right, held by a faculty and upheld by higher education institutions. The faculty must define the appropriate boundaries of academic knowledge, because we are the experts in what counts as disciplinary knowledge. As such, both employment security and explicitly defined, contractually enshrined academic freedom policies subject to peer-to-peer due process are the backbone of any functional higher education institution. Together they provide a foundation for equity across faculty ranks and help to ensure that all faculty can teach and research to the best of their ability regardless of political pressures.

Robust conversations around academic freedom at Yale have developed during the last academic year. In the summer of 2025, a committee led by the Yale AAUP developed a proposal to amend the Faculty Handbook to better define and secure academic freedom protections. In Fall 2025, Yale AAUP and the Yale FAS-SEAS Senate both reviewed and recommended the adoption of these changes to the Yale administration. Yale responded by convening a committee of tenured faculty, the members of which were chosen by the Provost. The committee’s mandate is not to create binding protections but rather to make a statement on principles of academic freedom. Faculty have made clear that this will not suffice. In the months since, Yale students have stated the same, via the joint resolution supporting the proposal and formally asking the administration to adopt it (ratified April 5, 2026). The recently released report from the Commission on the Trust in Higher Education likewise recommends Yale formally adopt 21st-century standards of academic freedom (recommendation 4).

On February 17, 2026, Yale AAUP hosted a meeting to describe the proposal and to educate faculty across Yale’s schools about the nature of academic freedom. The February 17 meeting also provided an opportunity to assess the current state of academic freedom at the University. An anonymous poll conducted in real time at the meeting indicated that faculty in attendance did not feel that Yale’s

current academic freedom policy is sufficient to create an environment in which faculty felt free to teach, research, and engage the world as public intellectuals. The informal results of that poll were concerning, and Yale AAUP followed up with a broader survey inviting faculty to reflect on the state of academic freedom at Yale and its impacts on their professional lives.

As the findings we share below make clear, the results point to critical gaps in Yale’s academic freedom policy and protections, ones that negatively impact the quality of teaching, research, and public engagement across the institution. Together, the findings suggest that Yale’s current policies and procedures fail to meet the needs of the University. They must be revised and strengthened.

II. Survey Design and Findings

The survey was designed by a team of Yale social scientists, with questions intended to gather more systematic information about the chilling effects and concerns that faculty have shared with the AAUP.¹ It was administered online between March 6 and April 18, 2026, and was completed by 177 members of the Yale faculty. Respondents include faculty from Yale College and every professional school except Architecture.

The questions were organized around the three key areas of academic work: teaching, research, and public engagement. In each area, respondents were asked a series of questions about their concerns and any specific actions they had taken in response to those concerns since January 2025. Respondents were also asked about their overall sense of the state of academic freedom at Yale. To help us better understand the answers to the multiple-choice questions, respondents were also given the opportunity to provide narrative responses sharing more detailed information about their experiences. This structure was designed to document the concrete ways in which perceived threats are shaping scholarly practice, with an eye toward some ways in which Yale might address those threats and improve conditions. The full text of the survey is available in Appendix A.

We note that the survey was designed by an interdisciplinary team and conducted with a sense of urgency under non-ideal circumstances, most significantly the lack of access to a university-wide communication channel. We recognize with the smaller sample size it is possible to infer that those who chose to respond to the survey may have done so because they are especially concerned about academic freedom. But it is also possible that many faculty—particularly contingent faculty—

¹The questions animating this report have been covered locally by reporting in the *Yale Daily News*, including coverage of the February 17, 2026 [AAUP meeting](#) on academic freedom, the [Provost’s Committee on the Principles of Academic Freedom](#), the [GPSS and YCC Senate endorsements](#), an [op-ed](#) by members of the AAUP chapter laying out the case for stronger, codified protections, and addressed in multiple sections of the [Report of the Yale Committee on Trust in Higher Education](#).

who are most likely to feel vulnerable did not answer for that reason, or because they are most difficult to reach without an official list of faculty. We note finally that the variations in responses to each question (from “extremely concerned” to “not at all concerned”) indicate that faculty were answering the questions with care and represented a variety of voices and levels of concern about academic freedom.

The results make clear that concerns about academic freedom are by no means confined to the AAUP leadership. Given the conditions under which the survey was fielded—emailed first to AAUP membership and then circulated beyond that list using formal and informal faculty networks—we have reason to believe the number of faculty who share these concerns is larger still.

This report does not explore all of the possible questions one might try to answer with our survey results (for example, cross-tabulating by academic field). Some of these kinds of questions cannot be resolved given the levels of anonymity offered due to the sensitive nature of the questions (as in, not all participants felt comfortable disclosing their department or discipline). Given the urgency of these matters, the report highlights what we see as the main results and defers any additional analysis of the data for a later date.

Respondent Demographics

Respondents were predominantly U.S. citizens (87%; 69.5% US-born) or green-card holding permanent residents (7.3%). Roughly one-third identified as tenured faculty, 11.5% identified as pre-tenure ladder-track faculty, and roughly another third as instructional faculty, with the remainder distributed across other ranks and appointment types. About half of respondents were affiliated with the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, followed by the School of Medicine, the Law School, the School of Public Health, and other professional schools.

It is notable that, on the whole, the respondents are not the most structurally vulnerable members of the Yale faculty. They are not, for the most part, non-citizens on temporary visas, for example, and most respondents were either already tenured or “ladder” faculty on the tenure-track. If this population is reporting the concerns we document below, it is likely that more precariously situated faculty, postdocs, lecturers, and students share those concerns at least as acutely, if not more so.

Faculty Experiences of Academic Freedom at Yale

To begin to understand faculty members’ experiences with academic freedom at Yale, we asked respondents a series of questions about how concerned they are about a range of repercussions when it comes to addressing topics that might be deemed controversial in their (1) teaching/classes; (2) scholarship/research/creative work; and (3) public expression or engagement. We also asked respondents to indicate whether, since January 2025, they have been worried that (1) their

“department or program may be dissolved due to the current political environment;” (2) that they or their colleagues “will lose our jobs because of funding cuts;” and (3) “that Yale will not support my immigration process or the immigration process of colleagues or students.” Respondents could indicate that they were “extremely concerned,” “somewhat concerned,” “not very concerned,” or “not at all concerned.” They were also given the option to respond that they were “not sure” or that the question was “not applicable.”

We have taken a relatively conservative approach to interpreting and reporting the responses to this set of questions, focusing on the proportion of respondents who report what we label “significant concern” about these repercussions. This measure is the sum of those who report being either “somewhat” or “extremely” concerned. That is, it excludes those who selected “not very concerned” and consequently understates, to some degree, the extent of faculty worries. We made this decision to reflect the fact that while “not very concerned” is an expression of concern, it is a milder one than that captured by “somewhat” or “extremely.” But it is also significant that sizable portions of respondents selected this option rather than “not at all concerned.” We interpret these choices as evidence of the unfortunate reality that large majorities of faculty feel that they are contending with an environment of risk in their day-to-day work, one in which they feel that they cannot rule out extreme responses to their teaching, research, and public engagement-related speech. To capture this mood, we also report the percent of respondents who responded that they were “not at all concerned” about the possibility of various repercussions.

The responses to these questions make clear that a significant majority of Yale faculty are concerned that they will face reprisals—either internal or external to Yale—for speech on controversial topics in the classroom, in their research, and in their public expression. The vast majority of respondents expressed concerns about unclear complaints processes, and around forty-five percent are concerned that Yale might discipline them for their speech.

Over half (56.3%) of respondents reported significant concern that students might file anonymous complaints about them, with only 13.2% stating that they were “not at all” concerned about this possibility. Even among tenured faculty, 63.3% reported significant concern about anonymous complaints from students, and over a quarter (26.7%) indicated that they are “extremely concerned” about this possibility.

Considered alongside the 35.6% of respondents who reported significant concern about facing disciplinary actions or other consequences from Yale in response to teaching controversial topics (with only 26.4% saying that they were “not at all” concerned), this finding suggests that faculty do not feel that Yale can be counted on to investigate or assess such complaints fairly. While concern about disciplinary action is fairly similar across ranks (37.7% among tenured faculty and 38.2% among untenured faculty), only 34.4% of tenured faculty and only 21.6% of

untenued faculty said that they were “not at all concerned” about this possibility. Half (50%) of respondents reported being significantly concerned about being fired or not having their contract renewed (only 25% said that they were “not at all concerned”). This proportion is, understandably, even higher among untenued faculty (57.1% had significant concern, and only 20.4% were “not at all concerned”). But even among tenured faculty, almost a third (29.4%) expressed significant concern about this possibility (with only 8.8% “extremely concerned,” compared with 22.4% of untenued faculty). While this might seem surprising, faculty are well aware of the political assaults on academic freedom—and certain academic subjects and departments in particular. Nationally, we have seen colleagues and peers dismissed or demoted in open violation of academic freedom principles. This seems to be having the intended impact, even in places like Yale that seem relatively well-protected by state government.

Faculty are concerned about their personal security and about the security of their employment. Remarkably, almost a fifth of all respondents (18.1%) reported significant concern about being arrested in connection with their teaching. We can only speculate about the possible reasons for these worries, but they likely reflect a sense that the rule of law itself is in question today (as prosecution and detention are increasingly being used to target political opponents) alongside worries about the recent unlawful detention of students and travelers by the Trump Administration and the crackdowns on campus against Gaza protestors, which led to many arrests.

Concern about damage to one’s professional reputation due to teaching controversial topics is, if anything, slightly more pronounced among tenured faculty (35.6%) than among the full sample (31.8%), which stands as a useful reminder that tenure is not a vaccine against these anxieties and that academic freedom protections must be stronger across all ranks and schools. In addition, nearly 40% of untenued faculty reported being worried about their department or program being dissolved due to the current political environment.

The patterns are broadly similar to those for the questions about public engagement. Worries about anonymous complaints (61.6%) and issues like disciplinary actions (44.6%) up to and including losing one’s job (53.2%), visa issues and deportation (70%, of non-US Citizens), doxxing or other public harassment (59%), and damage to professional reputation (38.1%) were all reported by significant proportions—in some cases strong majorities—of respondents.

Our quantitative data confirm what we already know about working conditions across higher education more broadly, as visa denials, content restrictions, and tenure erosion infringe on scholars’ individual and collective rights. The qualitative responses also help to illuminate important issues that the closed-ended questions could not fully capture in ways that speak to the unique and enviable community at Yale. Tenured respondents, for example, repeatedly reported worrying not only about themselves, but about their non-tenured colleagues, their

graduate students, their international colleagues, and their colleagues in other departments. One respondent wrote:

I worry equally or more about PhD students in my department, especially the many who are international students and who have to worry about having visas denied or revoked, especially if their research could be flagged.

This community is at risk and strained under the pressure of the current moment. Another captured the gradual, cumulative character of the shift:

I think any of the items listed could happen in a way that simply would not have been the case five years ago. It has not been like a flip switching for me in terms of things that I previously taught or researched overnight becoming not ok. It's more gradual: I feel like a frog in a pot of water on the stove, with the temperature slowly heating up. The line between what is acceptable and unacceptable is changing, slowly, over months—for what counts as controversy, for what assumptions and beliefs students bring to the classroom, for how Yale regards the value of what I teach and research. But it's not like there's a clear new line. [...] All this to say, it does not feel like we are collectively meeting the moment. We are slowly moving in the opposite direction of fulfilling a university mission to generate and disseminate knowledge.

Yale faculty report that their academic freedom has markedly declined since January 2025. To gauge faculty experiences with academic freedom, we asked two questions:

- “On a scale of 1–5, where 1 is none and 5 is a great deal, how much academic freedom would you say you currently have at Yale?”
- “Since January 2025, would you say that your academic freedom at Yale has [Decreased a great deal; Decreased somewhat; There has been no change; Increased somewhat; Increased a great deal].”

Responses to these questions suggest that our colleagues have a nuanced understanding of this issue, one that recognizes the current challenges but that is not alarmist. On the one hand, the mean answer to the first question was 3.65, with only 1.7% of respondents indicating that they had no academic freedom. At the same time, this mean self-rating sits below four on the 1–5 response scale. In addition, in response to the second question, well over half (68.4%) of respondents across ranks indicated that their academic freedom has decreased either somewhat (53.7%) or a great deal (14.7%) in recent years.

In other words (and echoing the open-ended response quoted above), faculty do not describe an environment in which academic freedom has been abolished. Rather, they describe an environment in which it has become noticeably more fragile, eroded enough that they feel it and that feeling has created an ecosystem of

concern that negatively affects their ability to fulfill their commitments to teaching, research, and public outreach.

Faculty Concerns About Reprisals

% of 177 Yale faculty reporting "extremely or somewhat concerned" about each potential consequence since January 2025

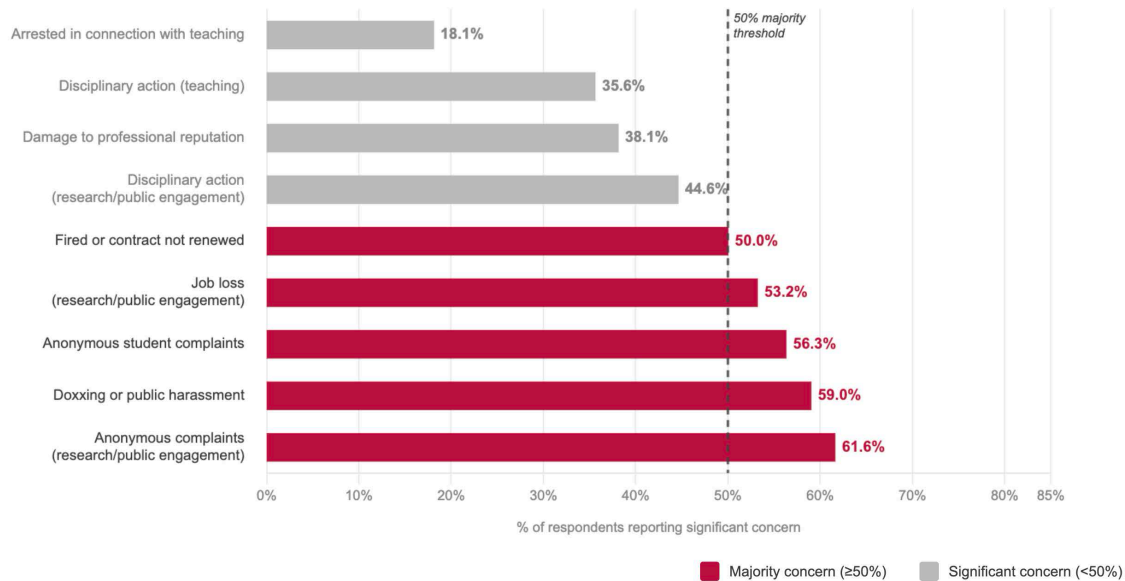


Figure 1. Yale Faculty Concerns About Academic Freedom — percentage who are “very concerned” or “extremely concerned.” Source: Yale AAUP Faculty Survey, Spring 2026 (n = 177).

How Teaching, Research, and Public Engagement Are Changing

Concerns of the magnitude described above have necessarily shaped individual decision making. To try to understand the ways in which faculty are navigating this terrain, we asked a series of questions about actions they may have taken since January 2025 “in response to the Trump administration’s higher education directives and actions and in light of the general climate of attacks on higher education.” As we did in our question about faculty, we asked these questions about actions they have taken in their (1) teaching/classes; (2) scholarship/ research/creative work; and (3) public expression or engagement. We also asked respondents to indicate whether, since January 2025, they have (1) “been asked by my department chair, Deans, or others in university leadership to make changes to my courses, research, website, etc.,” and (2) “changed or thought about changing my teaching plans (e.g., taught seminars rather than lectures, or added ‘instructor permission’ to my courses).”

The results make clear that our colleagues are taking a range of concrete actions in response to their concerns. While the percentage for any single action is smaller

than the percentage reporting any given concern, of particular note is that almost half of respondents reported taking at least one action with regard to their teaching.

Academic Freedom at Yale Is Declining

"Since January 2025, would you say that your academic freedom at Yale has..."

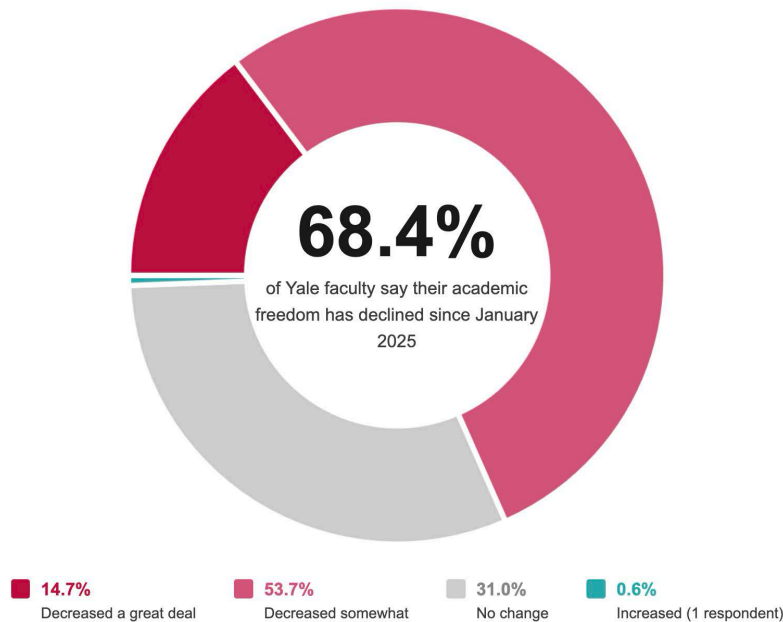


Figure 2. Share of respondents who have self-censored in at least one domain (teaching, research, or public engagement) since January 2025. Source: Yale AAUP Faculty Survey, Spring 2026 (n = 177).

Some respondents are changing language and titles associated with their research and teaching. Roughly one in six respondents (16.4%) reported changing the title of a scholarly talk, project, or manuscript, and a similar share (15.8%) reported changing language in a syllabus or other course documents. Although these changes may seem like minor or largely semantic ones, they strike at the heart of academic freedom and what it is meant to protect. As scholars and teachers, we know that how we speak about a problem changes how we approach it. Faculty cannot do their best teaching or research if they are pressured to conform to political or cultural pressures or if they feel they must avoid controversial “buzzwords” or issues.

Still more are changing the substance of their teaching and research. The changes to titles and language would be troubling on their own, but the survey data reveal that faculty are also making more consequential and substantive changes. Nearly a third of respondents (32.2%) reported avoiding topics in class discussions, lectures, or seminars that might be deemed controversial, and a similar proportion (31.6%) reported changing or thinking about changing their teaching plans. One in five

(21.5%) reported jettisoning or otherwise not pursuing scholarship, research, or creative work on controversial topics altogether, and a similar proportion (21.5%) reported that they had been asked by a “department chair, Deans, or others in university leadership” to make changes to their courses, research or website. Smaller but meaningful shares reported removing readings from syllabi that might be deemed controversial (7.3%), declining to offer a course on such a topic (3.4%), or canceling a scholarly talk or conference presentation on such a topic (4%).

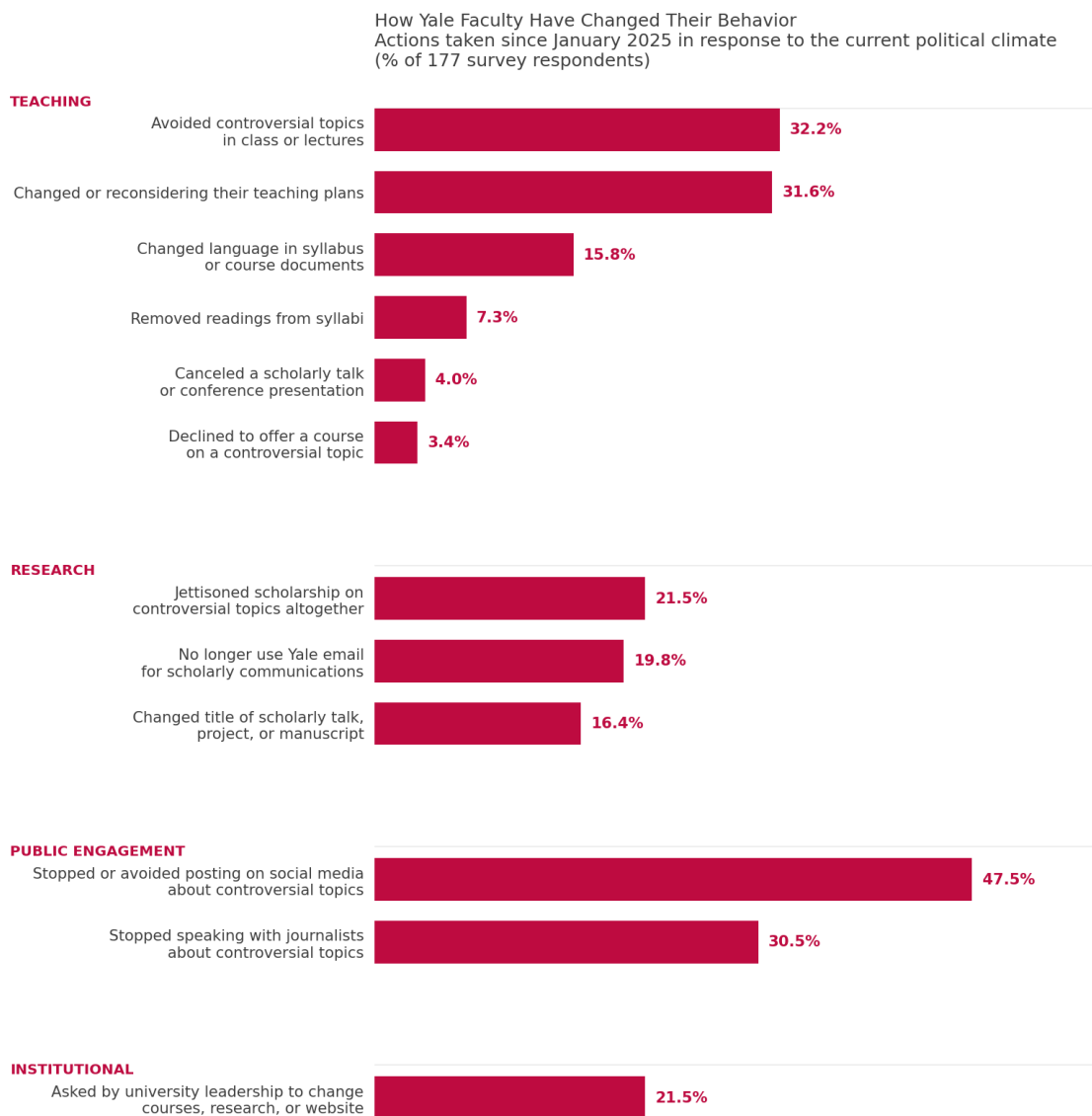


Figure 3. How Yale Faculty Have Changed Their Behavior — actions taken since January 2025 in response to the current political climate (percentage of 177 survey respondents). Source: Yale AAUP Faculty Survey, Spring 2026.

Taken together, these figures describe a measurable contraction in what is being taught to Yale students and in the research and creative work being produced by Yale researchers. The survey documents a narrowing of the knowledge being generated and disseminated at this University, both internally to our students and externally to our peers and the public. These results are particularly noteworthy given the praise that Yale’s administration has garnered for their “careful messaging” credited with keeping Yale out of the Trump administration’s “crosshairs.” While some reporting has taken the view that Yale has successfully defended the institution and its finances from the present administration, our data show that all is not well at Yale. The classroom, and critical research across most academic disciplines are being negatively affected, in ways that Yale has not yet begun to address—and that can be seen as in part a consequence of the strategy of public conciliation.

Many faculty do not trust Yale to support or defend them. The erosion of academic freedom and respondents’ increased skepticism about whether Yale will stand by its principles also affects the ways in which faculty conduct and communicate about their work. Nearly one in five respondents (19.8%) reported that they no longer use their Yale email to communicate about their scholarship, research, or creative work. We cannot say for sure whether this is because faculty do not trust Yale not to share our email if it were demanded by the federal government or outside organizations, or if faculty worry that their emails are being internally monitored for various reasons. Either way, this suggests that a nontrivial share of faculty no longer trusts their own employer to protect the privacy of the communications they need to conduct as part of their professional and scholarly lives and responsibilities. This erosion of institutional trust is echoed by the findings of the recent Committee on Trust in Higher Education report, and it should be understood as another facet of the same phenomenon surfacing in a different instrument.

Once again, the qualitative evidence illuminates some of the ways in which the erosion indicated by the quantitative data plays out on the ground, particularly in faculty’s understanding about the individualization of risks. Some respondents expressed frustration that Yale was neither helping them to navigate the new terrain, nor reassuring them that it would help or defend them should something happen to them:

I also feel somewhat confused about how best or appropriately to pursue international collaborations, given new scrutiny of international relationships, and a sense that the perception of different locales could take a dramatic, unexpected turn. It feels like uncertain terrain. I don’t have a sense that the university will defend me or the value of the scholarship I do if push came to shove, either materially or symbolically.

Another wrote:

[T]o teach topics I have always focused on, like racial inequality in the U.S., I feel like I'm taking on more risk now as a scholar and teacher, but that this is seen as an individual choice, to be managed by me alone. I'm less concerned about disagreements from or with students in my classes (which I see as part of my job), and more concerned about navigating a larger ecosystem of people who are not taking the class—a potential digital peanut gallery looking to pick fights or raise controversy. [...] I'm concerned about what recorded snippets can be taken out of context or AI generated in my likeness or in my voice, and what would happen if they were. I have no idea what the process would be if there were complaints about my teaching, scholarship, or public expression.

The qualitative responses show faculty actively negotiating a range of uncertainties in real time and without guidance. These uncertainties about how the university will respond in these situations and concerns about whether they will receive support are leading faculty to take measures to protect themselves. These responses also demonstrate that many of our colleagues are opting to resolve these uncertainties by removing material rather than risking a complaint, and that they are doing so in large part because they lack confidence that the institution would consider such complaints fairly or in good faith if it caused any amount of external scrutiny.

Faculty are retreating markedly from the public sphere. The effects on teaching and research are measurable, but the effects on public engagement are even more apparent. Nearly a third of respondents (30.5%) reported that they have stopped or begun to avoid speaking with journalists about topics that might be deemed controversial. More than a third (37.3%) reported that they have stopped or have begun to avoid signing public letters on such topics. And nearly half (47.5%) reported that they have stopped or begun to avoid posting on social media about such topics. The gap between tenured and non-tenured respondents is especially pronounced in the responses to this question, with 9% of tenured faculty, but almost double that proportion—17.3%—of untenured faculty reporting that they have taken this action. These data underscore the reality that faculty are concerned about external attacks and may also be aware that universities themselves have begun to surveil faculty social media postings.

A quieter faculty may seem like a more manageable faculty from an administrative standpoint, particularly at a moment when the University's broader strategy has been to adopt a conciliatory posture toward the federal administration and avoid headlines that would draw ire from right-wing pundits. But a quieter faculty is not the faculty of a great research university. Self-censorship is not conducive to extraordinary teaching and scholarship, and it is not how Yale will fulfill its obligation to the public that supports and is served by higher education. The channels through which the ideas, innovations, and knowledge of Yale faculty reach the broader world—interviews, commentary, op-eds, public letters, even social media posts—are narrowing as scholars fear that they cannot count on Yale

Self-Censorship by Faculty Status
 Selected behaviors, % reporting change since January 2025
 (% of 177 survey respondents)

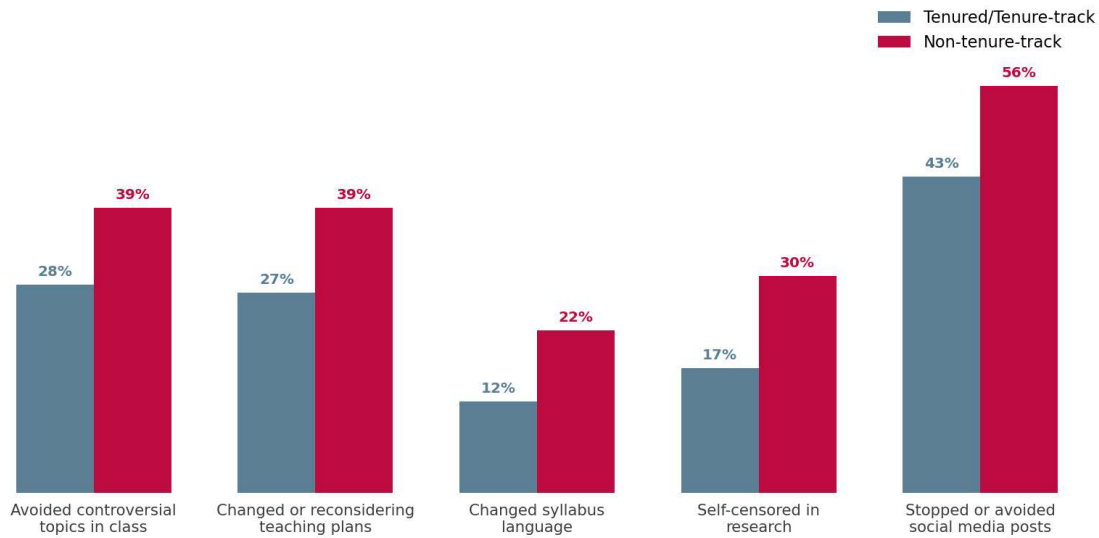


Figure 4. Self-Censorship by Faculty Status — selected behaviors, percentage reporting a change since January 2025. Source: Yale AAUP Faculty Survey, Spring 2026 (n = 177).

to defend them and conclude that the risk of speaking is higher than the cost of silence.

Yale’s Role and Future Responsibility

While many of the changes reflected in the data are responses to the current U.S. federal administration’s policies, respondents also made clear that Yale bears some responsibility for the degradation of the research and teaching environments in direct and indirect ways. For example, 21.5% of faculty reported that they had been asked by a “department chair, Deans, or others in university leadership” to make changes to their courses, research or website. Alternatively, as one respondent wrote:

Almost all of the changes are self-imposed in light of perceived threats to academic practices and given lack of clarity of protections at Yale: were I or the admin clearer on just what academic freedom existed at Yale and to whom it extended, I would be less likely to change on the basis of self-censorship.

At the same time as respondents long for clarity, they also display a nuanced understanding about the real federal constraints on scholarship and were careful to distinguish them from Yale’s responsibilities. As another commented:

There are impermissible federal constrictions on my scholarship, but in no way do I feel like those are Yale's fault. I am lucky to be at a place where my teaching and scholarship can continue.

These two quotes are metonymic of the broader landscape at Yale and speak to a faculty that remain hopeful we can collectively meet the moment. Faculty are not asking Yale to single-handedly neutralize federal pressure. They are asking Yale to do what only Yale can do: define, in operational and enforceable terms, what academic freedom at Yale means, to whom it extends, and what processes, push-back, and protections faculty can expect from Yale if it is challenged. In the absence of that clarity, faculty are managing risk alone and making concessions that, aggregated across the institution, materially narrow what Yale teaches, researches, and communicates to the world.

Other respondents described the impact that the posture of the current Yale administration has had on their academic freedom, describing

...a sense that university administrators would willingly throw some of us (especially those of us in non-ladder, non-union positions) under the bus to maintain the goodwill or at least inattention of the government.

A faculty member in the Medical School raised a related structural point about how academic freedom cannot be assessed apart from how research is funded and whose commitments underwrite it:

The last time I looked at the Faculty Handbook, it did not commit the University to anything at all in support of teaching or research. Re freedom, being at the Medical School means that a) Yale pays 0% of our salary; it all comes from grants, mostly federal. b) Therefore our academic freedom is dictated by what the federal government can fund (greatly decreased in the last year); will fund (they don't really want to fund knowledge at all); and lets grant review study sections approve (which always has been low-risk, incremental studies rather than true academic freedom).

For these faculty members and, indeed, faculty across the institution, academic freedom requires both substantive changes to the Handbook and a commitment to funding the research and teaching they were hired to do regardless of federal de-funding campaigns.

These accounts describe an institution in which the absence of clear and enforceable protections has left faculty feeling like they have to manage the present crisis alone. The costs of such isolation, crucially, do not stop with the faculty. They run through to the students, whose education is a crucial component of the enterprise:

The biggest threat to freedom of speech affects my students, who are understandably holding back from writing about controversial topics in their essays and speaking their minds during class.

Restoring a functional sense of trust and protection is a precondition of Yale’s research and teaching missions. Without that trust, Yale cannot foster an environment that allows scholars to do their best research or offer students one of the best educations in the world.

* * *

The foregoing survey findings, especially the qualitative data, illustrate an atmosphere saturated with worry—worry for personal job security, for the safety of international colleagues, for the well-being of untenured and instructional colleagues, and worry for and about students. Most significantly, the data point to a collective worry that the interrelated missions of research and teaching are at odds with the University’s attempts to financially weather an increasingly politically charged environment. Whether concerns stem from funding cuts or online harassment, there is a broad sense that faculty must self-censor to avoid attracting student complaints or ending up in headlines. These conditions are a travesty, one that has critically undermined the incredible work that faculty at Yale do to improve nearly every aspect of public life.

Recommendations

We recognize, of course, that Yale cannot unilaterally change the broader political environment. It can, however, reinvigorate its longstanding role as a leader in the ever-evolving experiment of higher education. The Yale AAUP recognizes that the institution has taken some important measures to respond to the attacks on higher education. For example, Yale’s Office of International Students and Scholars has worked tirelessly—sometimes with our AAUP’s prompting—to support immigrant and international faculty and students over the past several years. Yale can and should take other similarly concrete actions to better express, and make real, its commitment to academic freedom. Doing so would expand both individual and institutional protections for research, teaching, and policy making now and for the future.

Towards those ends, we ask the administration to adopt, in its entirety, the following recommendations of the joint Yale AAUP and FAS-SEAS Senate proposal to amend the Faculty Handbook:

- **Update and concretize the definitions of academic freedom in the Faculty Handbook**, and affirm that the University bears responsibility for upholding conditions under which academic freedom can flourish. The current language

in the Handbook states: “Yale faculty bears primary responsibility for preserving the conditions necessary to advance [the institution’s educational] mission, including protection of the freedom of inquiry” (Section II.B). But faculty cannot protect what does not exist. For the faculty to assume the incredible responsibility of protecting freedom of inquiry, the University must first explicitly define and enshrine those protections in our employment contract. Many universities already provide such protections, and representative bodies of Yale faculty have already proposed appropriate provisions. Speech in both the classroom and public discourse is already being chilled—there is no time to wait. The administration should act expeditiously on the basis of the proposal already submitted by representative faculty groups, and not wait for the report of a non-representative committee. Doing so would also give Yale clear legal grounds on which to resist external pressures that seek to infringe on our collective rights to teach, research, and engage to the best of our professional abilities.

- **Make a commitment affirming that no school, department, or program will be terminated without consulting an elected and representative body of the faculty.** In our survey, some Yale faculty clearly worry less for themselves than they do for their colleagues. Worries that departments may be dissolved disproportionately impact untenured and, especially, instructional faculty. Recent fights over budgetary closures at other institutions, like the University of Oregon, testify to the importance and legal precedence of faculty consultation in decisions of this magnitude.
- **Clarify that faculty members’ individual contracts are with the University, not with a specific department or program.** We believe that this is already the case, but it is not stated explicitly in the Yale Faculty Handbook. Such a clear statement is standard at other institutions and provides critical support for academic freedom.
- **Commit to consulting with an elected, representative body of faculty before future revisions to the Faculty Handbook.** No protections for academic freedom enshrined in the Faculty Handbook now are secure if they can be undone unilaterally by the Provost’s office. To ensure that the University continues to maintain the conditions of academic freedom it must also commit to robust faculty consultation before future Handbook changes.

The foregoing recommendations are in line with the requests and recommendations issued by the joint Yale AAUP and FAS-SEAS Senate Report, the FAS-SEAS Senate Open Letter, the YGSS and YCC joint resolution, and in the Report from the Committee on the Trust in Higher Education.

- **A committee, elected by faculty, must be created, and charged with hearing**

and deciding upon complaints brought under the new academic freedom policy. The existing AAUP/FAS-SEAS proposal does not address this procedural element. But our survey findings demonstrate that commitments to academic freedom are only useful if procedures to support it are well defined and applied rigorously and fairly by those with academic expertise. Faculty across schools and ranks are concerned about anonymous complaints and facing disciplinary action from Yale as a result of teaching, researching, or publicly engaging with controversial topics. Clearly, faculty do not trust the current process for investigating or adjudicating complaints about violations of academic freedom or the faculty code of conduct. The AAUP's Recommended Institutional Regulations on Academic Freedom and Tenure makes clear that professional standards require that complaints implicating academic freedom be heard in the first instance by an elected body of faculty peers qualified to assess whether the work in question meets disciplinary standards. Vesting that judgment unilaterally in a dean or in the Provost's office, as the current Handbook largely does, concentrates the authority to define and police academic freedom in the same administrative offices whose decisions faculty may need to contest. An elected faculty adjudicative body, with clear procedures for notice, evidence, representation, and appeal, is a structural precondition for any academic freedom language to be legally binding rather than aspirational.

- **Yale must better protect non-tenured faculty**, including with more job security and reasoned explanations of any adverse actions. Currently, there is no policy in place to protect non-tenured faculty from being dismissed, or not reappointed, on the basis of their speech alone. An academic freedom policy will help but is not a cure-all for untenured faculty. People on short-term contracts have reason to feel more at risk because of their speech. Yale has begun to implement budget cuts, and has signaled that more may be coming, but has not provided any reasoned explanation of these cuts as applied to particular faculty. It has not, for example, explained why the FAS salary budget had to receive such deep cuts before other avenues were explored, like the standard practice of freezing or temporarily cutting administrative salaries as Brown recently did, or use of flexible funds from elsewhere in the budget. A reasoned-explanation requirement for non-reappointments and adverse actions, combined with baseline job-security protections for instructional and other contingent faculty, would do more to shore up academic freedom in practice than any amount of handbook language directed at tenured ranks alone. Yale should do more to protect job security, and explain non-appointments, to provide more structural protection for academic freedom.

Finally, we conclude with two recommendations for Yale's representative faculty bodies, which include the FAS-SEAS Senate, the School of Medicine Faculty Advisory Committee, and Yale AAUP.

- **Faculty bodies should take seriously the concerns of this report, and work to address the urgent concerns faculty describe.** The recommendations we make to Yale above all could be reflected in recommendations to our own bodies—to work insistently until all Yale faculty have conditions suitable to the excellent teaching and research to which we aspire.
- **Representative faculty groups at Yale should gather to consider a proposal for a strong university-wide senate that has more than advisory powers.** Yale has no university-wide Senate, and its two elected representative bodies (the FAS-SEAS Senate and FAC in the Med School) are only advisory. Most faculty committees are appointed by either the Provost or the President, and also mainly advisory. Advisory-only governance has produced the outcomes we would expect. President McInnis’s commentary and recent actions in response to the Report from the Trust Committee, for example, selectively adopt suggestions that seem to serve the administration’s strategic priorities vis-à-vis the Trump administration while not embracing the suggested reforms that would redistribute meaningful authority to the faculty. The recent round of budget cuts follows the same pattern.

A university-wide senate with real policymaking and other powers would change what the administration can do unilaterally and limit whose voices it can ignore. The joint Yale AAUP and FAS-SEAS Senate Report on academic freedom, the FAS-SEAS Senate Open Letter, and the joint GPSS and YCC resolution on academic freedom all ask the administration to do one thing: revise the Faculty Handbook. The administration’s response has been to create yet another advisory committee tasked with producing yet another report, effectively a Woodward Report 2.0, rather than make the revisions those representative bodies of faculty and students have already requested. Paired with the administration’s refusal to act following the YCC referendum on divestment in December 2024, this pattern makes clear that in the current configuration of university governance the upper administration do not see the faculty or the students as their partners or even as their constituents. The purpose of a university-wide senate with policy-making and budgetary-shaping authority is both to redistribute shared governance and also to strengthen the relationships across the University—among faculty across ranks and schools, between faculty and students, and between the faculty who do the teaching and research and the administrators who set the institution’s course—on which shared governance depends.

Appendix A: Survey Questions

1. Are you a faculty member or researcher at Yale? *Yes/No*

2. Since January 2025, have you taken any of the following actions in your **teaching/classes** in response to the Trump administration's higher education directives and actions and in light of the general climate of attacks on higher education? Please check all that apply.
 - a. Changed a course title;
 - b. Changed course content;
 - c. Decided not to offer a course on a topic that might be deemed controversial;
 - d. Modified language on syllabi or other course documents;
 - e. Removed readings that might be deemed controversial;
 - f. Avoided topics that might be deemed controversial in class discussions, lectures, or seminars;
 - g. None of the above.

3. Since January 2025, have you taken any of the following actions in your **scholarship/research/creative work** in response to the Trump administration's higher education directives and actions and in light of the general climate of attacks on higher education? Please select all that apply.
 - a. Changed the title of a scholarly talk, project, or manuscript;
 - b. Changed the content of a scholarly talk, project, or manuscript;
 - c. Cancelled a scholarly talk or conference presentation on a topic that might be deemed controversial;
 - d. Stopped using your work email to communicate about your scholarship/research/creative work;

- e. Chosen to jettison or otherwise not to pursue scholarship/research/ creative work on controversial topics;
 - f. None of the above.
4. Since January 2025, have you taken any of the following actions in your **public expression or engagement** in response to the Trump administration’s higher education directives and actions and in light of the general climate of attacks on higher education? Please check all that apply.
- a. Stopped or avoided posting on social media about topics that might be deemed controversial;
 - b. Stopped or avoided speaking with journalists about topics that might be deemed controversial;
 - c. Stopped or avoided signing public letters about topics that might be deemed controversial;
 - d. None of the above.

The following four questions asked respondents to indicate one of the following options: “Extremely concerned;” “Somewhat concerned;” “Not very concerned;” “Not at all concerned;” “Not applicable;” or “Not sure.”

5. How concerned are you about the following possible repercussions when it comes to addressing topics that might be deemed controversial in your **teaching/classes**?
- a. Having students file anonymous complaints about you;
 - b. Getting negative or poor teaching evaluations;
 - c. Facing disciplinary actions or other consequences from Yale;
 - d. Being denied tenure;
 - e. Being fired or not renewed;
 - f. Being doxed or otherwise publicly harassed or intimidated;
 - g. Being arrested;
 - h. Losing your visa or getting deported;
 - i. Damaging your professional reputation.
6. How concerned are you about the following possible repercussions when it comes to addressing topics that might be deemed controversial in your **scholarship/research/creative work**?

- a. Having people file anonymous complaints about you;
 - b. Facing disciplinary actions or other consequences from Yale;
 - c. Being denied tenure;
 - d. Being fired or not renewed;
 - e. Being doxed or otherwise publicly harassed or intimidated;
 - f. Being arrested;
 - g. Losing your visa or getting deported;
 - h. Damaging your professional reputation.
7. How concerned are you about the following possible repercussions when it comes to addressing topics that might be deemed controversial in your **public expression or engagement**?
- a. Having people file anonymous complaints about you;
 - b. Facing disciplinary actions or other consequences from Yale;
 - c. Being denied tenure;
 - d. Being fired or not renewed;
 - e. Being doxed or otherwise publicly harassed or intimidated;
 - f. Being arrested;
 - g. Losing your visa or getting deported;
 - h. Damaging your professional reputation.
8. In January 2025, did you have one or more active grants from a federal funding agency? *Yes/No/Not sure*
9. If you answered “yes” to the previous question, have any of your current federal grants been terminated by the current administration, before their term was complete?
- a. Yes, one or more grants were terminated and not restored.
 - b. Yes, one or more grants were terminated but at least some of that funding was subsequently restored.
 - c. No, none of my grants were terminated.
 - d. Not sure.

- e. Not applicable.
10. If you answered “yes” to the previous question, have you taken any of the following actions? Please select all that apply.
- a. Continued to apply for federal funding for the same project(s);
 - b. Continued to apply for federal funding but revised the way you describe your research to eliminate language that might be deemed controversial;
 - c. Continued to apply for federal funding but only for topics that might be deemed less controversial;
 - d. Decided not to apply for federal grants for now;
 - e. None of the above;
 - f. Not applicable.
11. Since January 2025 I have... (please check all that apply):
- a. ... worried that my department or program may be dissolved due to the current political environment;
 - b. ... worried that I or my colleagues will lose our jobs because of funding cuts;
 - c. ... worried that Yale will not support my immigration process or the immigration process of colleagues or students;
 - d. ... been asked by my department chair, Deans, or others in university leadership to make changes to my courses, research, website, etc.;
 - e. ... changed or thought about changing my teaching plans (e.g., taught seminars rather than lectures, or added “instructor permission” to my courses);
 - f. None of the above.
12. On a scale of 1–5, where 1 is none and 5 is a great deal, how much academic freedom would you say you currently have at Yale?
13. Since January 2025, would you say that your academic freedom at Yale has:
- a. Decreased a great deal.
 - b. Decreased somewhat.
 - c. There has been no change.

- d. Increased somewhat.
 - e. Increased a great deal.
14. Our questions have focused on changes since January 2025. Would you say you also began to modify your behaviour around any of the other following dates? Please select all that apply.
- October 2023
 - April 2024
 - September 2024
 - September 2025
 - Other (please specify):
15. If you are willing, please provide the following information so that we can better understand variations in our colleagues' experiences. (We will only present aggregate results; no information will be shared in identifiable form.)
16. What is your school at Yale? (Please select all that apply.)
- a. Architecture
 - b. Art
 - c. Divinity
 - d. Drama
 - e. Environment
 - f. FAS
 - g. Jackson
 - h. Law
 - i. Medicine
 - j. Music
 - k. Nursing
 - l. Public Health
 - m. SEAS
 - n. SOM

17. What is your department at Yale?
18. Does your research and/or teaching address any of the following topics or issues? Please check all that apply.
- a. Disability;
 - b. Environment/Climate Change;
 - c. Gender;
 - d. HIV/AIDS;
 - e. Immigration/Migration;
 - f. Indigeneity;
 - g. LGBTQ people;
 - h. Race/racial inequality;
 - i. Sexuality;
 - j. Trans issues;
 - k. Women;
 - l. None of the above.
19. Does your research and/or teaching address any particular geographic regions or countries (e.g., the U.S., the Middle East, Russia, Palestine, the U.S./Mexico border, etc.)?
20. What are your current rank and tenure status?
- a. Tenure-track Assistant Professor
 - b. Associate Professor on Term
 - c. Tenured Associate Professor
 - d. Tenured Full Professor
 - e. Instructional Faculty
 - f. Postdoc
 - g. Another type of non-ladder faculty or researcher position
 - h. Other (please specify):
21. How would you describe your race/ethnicity?

22. How would you describe your religious identification?
23. How would you describe your gender?
24. How would you describe your sexuality?
25. What is your citizenship or visa status in the US?
 - a. U.S. citizen (U.S.-born)
 - b. U.S. citizen (Naturalized)
 - c. Permanent U.S. resident (“Green card” holder)
 - d. Visa holder (J-1, H1-B, etc.)
 - e. Other (please specify):
26. Yale’s AAUP chapter would like to collect more detailed descriptions of faculty members’ experiences of and responses to federal threats. We would be grateful to hear about any of your experiences in more detail in writing below. You are also welcome, but not required, to share your name and/or email address, if you would like someone to follow up with you. If you are willing to share more details about your experiences but would prefer to do so in another way, please reach out to [Yale AAUP](#).