



**The FAS Dean’s Office and the Future of the FAS**  
A Report of the Governance Committee of the FAS-SEAS Senate

APPROVED by the FAS-SEAS Senate  
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The 2024-2025 academic year marks a year of transition for the Faculty of Arts and Sciences. In 2015, Yale created the new position of FAS Dean, the first “dean of faculty” in the university’s history. Over the past decade, Dean Tamar Gendler has led a transformation of the processes, structures, and cultures that govern faculty hiring, retention, and working conditions at Yale. In January 2025, the position of FAS Dean passed to Steven Wilkinson, the Nilekani Professor of India and South Asian Studies and Professor of Political Science and International Affairs.

Dean Wilkinson has a long and impressive record of administrative and academic leadership at Yale. The FAS-SEAS Senate welcomes his appointment--not least because it was Professor Wilkinson who, in 2013, led the faculty committees that recommended the establishment of the Senate itself. This report is intended to provide useful feedback, from a faculty perspective, to help guide future decision-making as the dean’s office undertakes its first major transition in a moment of deep uncertainty on our campus and in higher education nationwide. Like the university president, the FAS Dean has an institution to run but also a set of values to uphold--above all, the academic freedom, shared governance, and high intellectual standards that make Yale such a compelling place to teach, research, and learn.

The report recognizes the many ways in which the FAS Dean’s office, under Dean Gendler, has enriched and enlivened the experiences of Yale faculty, including:

- the creation of a more equitable and transparent appointment, tenure and promotion system;
- the expansion of the size of the FAS and SEAS faculty, and the recruitment of a new generation of world-class faculty;
- the expansion of Yale’s commitment to faculty diversity of many kinds;

- improvement in the status and working conditions of instructional faculty;
- and the launch of new faculty programs, such as Scholars as Learners, that have deepened both interpersonal and intellectual exchange among faculty.

Most of all, Dean Gendler deserves credit for inventing the FAS Dean's office from scratch-- and for doing so successfully.

The Senate supports these initiatives and hopes that Dean Wilkinson will carry on the office's best practices. At the same time, faculty have expressed several areas of concern that will benefit from new thinking and attention. Those areas range from general concerns over excessive bureaucracy and paperwork, to specific policies, inequities, and frustrations that affect particular groups of faculty. The greatest concern of all is that a centralized dean's office has created additional layers of hierarchy between the faculty and the university's top decision-makers, thus reducing the FAS faculty's influence and autonomy.

Such faculty concerns are the primary subject of this report. The Senate's goal is to provide a "sense of the faculty" to aid Dean Wilkinson, his office, and the faculty as we plan together for a productive future in a challenging time.

## **Methodology**

This is an informal report, based on interviews, conversations, and email exchanges conducted by members of the Senate with FAS and SEAS faculty during the Fall 2024 semester. It is not intended as a scientific survey of all relevant opinion or as a list of all faculty concerns. It is also not intended to supplant the listening sessions and strategic planning underway at the Dean's office. Rather the report aims to highlight important issues and challenges raised consistently by faculty, across fields and divisions, as they reflect on the last decade of interchange with the FAS Dean's office.

## **History**

Yale created the FAS Dean's office in 2015 for a very good reason: the existing system was producing burnout, overwork, and confusion. Prior to 2015, the work of tenure, promotion, hiring, and recruitment was shared by the Dean of Yale College and the Dean of the Graduate School, who were also responsible for an ever-growing slate of other institutional, curricular, and student-facing concerns. The Office of the Provost controlled and managed the FAS budget. As the Ad Hoc Committee on Decanal Structures noted in its [January 2014 report](#), this system had certain advantages, such as a relatively flat hierarchy and a privileged place for the FAS within the university, including direct exchange between FAS faculty and the provost's office. But all three jobs, according to the report, had grown "unmanageable," especially as Yale moved toward a new and more equitable tenure

system. The report recommended restructuring the decanal system, including the creation of an FAS Dean's office.

While initiated for good reason, the creation of the Dean's office had several immediate institutional effects, both intended and unintended. First, it fundamentally changed the nature of the job for the College and Graduate School deans, who now focus far more on curriculum and student life, and have less contact with or influence over the faculty. Second, it concentrated power over faculty salaries, hiring, leave, research policies, and other important issues within a single office and a small group of individuals. Third, it transformed the FAS from the university's core faculty body, governed directly by the Provost, into something more like an extra-large professional school, with its own governance and budget. Finally, it produced a certain amount of confusion about who ultimately controlled the FAS budget; of the many transitional challenges, this one is perhaps most opaque to the faculty even today.

Faculty in the engineering and applied sciences faced an additional set of transitions. In 2022, after years of planning, Yale established the School of Engineering and Applied Sciences as a separate school within the university, rather than as a division of the FAS. Dean Jeffrey Brock assumed the position of SEAS Dean in that year and will continue to work alongside Dean Wilkinson. Though SEAS has its own culture and challenges, many of the concerns shared in this report apply to faculty experiences in the new SEAS bureaucracy as well.

Those interested in reading more about such institutional shifts may wish to consult the [2021 report](#) of the Ad Hoc Review Committee on the FAS Decanal Structure.

This Senate report focuses on how faculty have experienced those changes from their vantage points as scholars, teachers, and university citizens. What follows are key areas of concern and frustration raised by faculty, both formally and informally, during interchanges with the Senate:

### **1. Centralization v. decentralization**

Many faculty recognize the benefit and efficiency of a single, centralized office responsible for the FAS at large. At the same time, they express frustration about many aspects of a centralized administration--or, as some would put, an "over-centralized" one. Those frustrations include:

- **Hierarchy.** Many faculty perceive a troubling increase in the layers of administration between faculty members and the university's top decision-makers, including the president and provost.

- **Paperwork.** As processes have become more regularized, department officers and search committee chairs have found themselves filling out additional forms and spending time adhering to new bureaucratic requirements.
- **Speed of decision-making.** In a centralized system, faculty have been frustrated at their lack of control and influence over the decision-making timeline, especially in hiring, recruiting, and retention. Division deans often seem to lack the authority or resources for rapid decision making.
- **Internal culture.** As a tight-knit, hard-working place, the FAS Dean's office can sometimes project a clubby quality; certain faculty seem to be "in," while others are "out."
- **Departmental autonomy.** While thoughtful and equitable uniform policies can be desirable, many faculty have experienced centralized processes as a loss of departmental autonomy and authority, even in field-specific scholarly and curricular decisions.
- **Excess caution in hiring and retention.** Particularly in the sciences where faculty searches may fail to attract the top candidate, the Dean's office has been reluctant to permit multiple simultaneous offers, preferring to proceed sequentially, which is rarely successful. Retention offers frequently start low and slow, and have resulted in the loss of prominent faculty. Even where retention is successful, the process can result in ongoing ill will.

## 2. Salary, leave, and working conditions

As the university's climate surveys regularly attest, FAS faculty acknowledge and appreciate the many forms of support, inspiration, flexibility, and excellence that come with working at Yale. In several areas, though, faculty have expressed concerns over unnecessary obstacles, inconsistent treatment, and policies that are out-of-step with Yale's peer institutions, including:

- **The "slot book."** Yale's faculty allocation system relies on a "slot book" that determines the number of positions available to a given department--except when it doesn't. Some faculty question whether the slot book is the most useful way of allocating resources. Others points out that adherence to the slot book seems to wax and wane depending on circumstance and administrator. Still others point out the obstacles that a department-based slot book system creates for interdisciplinary work and hiring, especially at Yale's many new cross-disciplinary centers. Suffice it to say that the slot book is not very popular.
- **Leave policy.** Compared to its peers, Yale seems to have an unusually (and unnecessarily) restrictive faculty leave policy. While faculty appreciate the

university's commitment to undergraduate teaching and on-campus interaction, instructional and ladder faculty of all ranks have expressed frustration with an unusually (and unnecessarily) restrictive faculty leave policy.

- **Salary differentials.** Yale's non-transparent approach to setting salaries and negotiating offers has led to suspicions of inequity and favoritism among faculty. Some chairs affirm the reality of inappropriate disparities; as one humanities chair put it, "the gender gap is real." Teaching-load disparities among faculty also appear to be more frequent than in the past.
- **Perverse incentives.** In order to receive a substantial raise, even at moments of landmark intellectual achievement, Yale encourages faculty to seek outside job offers and then renegotiate a retention package. Faculty expressed concern that this creates perverse incentives, in which the university most values those who want to leave.
- **Administrative support.** Faculty perceive a decline in the degree of clerical and administrative support (departmental registrars, administrative assistants, business managers) available at both a departmental and individual level.
- **Graduate student support.** Faculty in the sciences at times struggle to accommodate salaries and expenses for graduate researchers, who are paid by outside faculty research grants rather than by the university itself, as in the humanities and social sciences.

### 3. Communication and governance

By many measures, Yale is a remarkably faculty-driven institution, especially in matters of hiring, promotion, and teaching. At the same time, faculty have expressed frustration about the limits of shared governance, including:

- **Institutional culture.** Faculty describe a lack of respect in some conversations and negotiations with the dean's office, as if faculty are mere supplicants rather than valued members of a scholarly community. As one faculty member put it, "It feels like we work for them, rather than the other way around."
- **Communication.** Faculty expressed confusion about the strategic vision of the FAS, and about which office--the divisional dean, the FAS, the provost, etc.--is ultimately responsible for which decisions. Many faculty said they often do not know whom to contact about even routine matters such as institutional space and tech support.
- **Us vs. them.** Faculty often feel that the Dean's office is primed to say "no" rather than "how can I help you?" Allocation of resources need not be a zero-sum game, in which granting one request means denying another.

- **Physical space and faculty interaction.** Unlike many peer institutions, Yale has no central space, such as a faculty club or dining room, where faculty can meet each other informally and create a common scholarly culture across disciplines. The lack of such a space--even within individual fields and divisions--creates unnecessary barriers for interdisciplinary work and the sharing of ideas.

The Senate looks forward to working with the Dean's office on best practices for resolving these issues to create a campus where all faculty can thrive.

#### FAS-SEAS Senate Governance Committee, 2024 – 2025

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