2019 Class/Action Survey Report

A Report on Socioeconomic Class as Experienced by Students at Yale Law School

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Yale Law School

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Generously supported by the First Generation Professionals (FGP) at Yale Law School.
Letter from the Authors

To the Yale Law School community:

In spring of 2019, we administered the third Class/Action Survey at YLS, examining how class and socioeconomic status interact with the YLS student experience. The 2018-19 school year brought a wave of student activism, challenging the institution to rethink how it exercises its influential position in the legal community. Students called out the “whisper networks” and gamesmanship that funnel prized opportunities, like clerkships and Coker Fellowships, to those under the wings of a few connected faculty. Those networks were exposed for what they truly reward: savvy over skill, and privilege over equity. In response, the law school organized a set of Working Groups, which delivered wide-ranging policy recommendations in April 2019. Our survey data, collected that same month, captures both a frustration with the status quo and a hope for change.

Since we collected our data, the COVID-19 pandemic has made issues of class and socioeconomic status all the more conspicuous and pressing. Even in the face of an unprecedented pandemic, the law school has made important progress on socioeconomic equity, including changes to the summer income policy, new outreach programs for prospective applicants, and the rollout of the YLS Safety Net. Given the delay between the collection of survey data and publication, and the significant changes during that span, it is important to note this Report is not intended to reflect the immediate student experience, but rather to present a snapshot in time and to examine cross-year trends and trajectories.

Significant advances have been made since the first Class/Action Survey was conducted in 2012. Nonetheless, there are some persistent disparities within the evolving picture of social class and socioeconomic status at YLS. We believe that YLS and similar elite institutions should expand economic opportunity rather than concentrate it. YLS can better serve both its educational mission and the legal profession by cultivating a student body that is more economically representative of the country at large. And with that diverse student body comes a responsibility to sustain lower- and middle-class students throughout their educational journeys. We hope the results presented in this Survey Report will provide a fact base for greater change yet to come.

Thank you for reading,
Paul Healy ’21, Kathryn Pogin ‘20, Sam Whipple ‘20

Acknowledgments

This report would not have been possible without the remarkable assistance of the YLS student body. We are deeply grateful to all 567 students who donated their time and energy to provide us with data, to the affinity group board members who assisted us with revising the survey, and to the other members of the Class/Action Committee: Jamie Lee, Elizabeth Levin, Destiny Lopez, and Kym Tisder.

We want to particularly thank Professors Anne Alstott, Ian Ayres, and Harold Koh, whose good humor and generosity enabled us to offer participation incentives far more valuable than our budget would have otherwise permitted. Professor Ayres also provided helpful feedback on our survey design. We believe the assistance of each played a central role in achieving the survey’s unprecedented response rate.

We are additionally grateful to Dean Gerken, Dean Cosgrove, Dean Ingber, Jackie Outlaw, and Yaseen Eldik for ensuring that we have accurately reported on YLS’s financial aid policies, recruitment and admissions strategies, and student resources.

Finally, we would like to thank First Generation Professionals, the 2012 and 2016 Class/Action Committee members who came before us, and especially Corey Meyer ‘19 and Alda Yuan ‘18, who shared their wisdom and experience with the design team.
I. Executive Summary

Context for this report.

In 2012-13, a group of YLS students produced a survey and report investigating how peers from different social classes experienced law school at Yale. Partly inspired by the 2012 Survey Report, three YLS students from low-income backgrounds who were the first in their families to attend professional school formed a student organization for self-identified “First Generation Professionals” (“FGP”) in Fall 2014. FGP’s mission was and remains to support students, especially those from low-income families, who lack experience and connections in the legal profession. The group now has over 250 students on its listserv. In 2016, FGP conducted another survey on social class at YLS and released the second Survey Report in 2017. In Spring 2019, we administered an updated round of this triennial survey and received the largest response to date, with 567 YLS students responding and 508 completing the survey. We are proud to present our results in this third Survey Report.

Before making sense of the survey results, it is critical to understand the contemporaneous environment at YLS. Controversies flared across the 2018-19 academic year, bringing issues of class and socioeconomic status into open debate. For instance, student protests following the nomination of now-Justice Kavanaugh called on the YLS community to reflect on and engage with the relationship between social power and professional success. These calls to action resulted in the formation of several YLS Working Groups, which met throughout the fall and spring. The main Working Group issued wide-ranging policy recommendations in April 2019 (while this survey was being administered). Many of those Working Group recommendations have since resulted in concrete changes. Even if survey respondents did not explicitly comment on these events, their responses may have been informed by the lingering atmosphere, a mix of angst and opportunity.

1 Available at https://law.yale.edu/sites/default/files/area/department/studentaffairs/document/class_action_report.pdf [https://perma.cc/8RJ2-CQ4V].
2 “First-generation professional” is a self-identified category that includes (but is broader than) first-generation college graduates. In our survey, we provided the following prompt for respondents as they considered whether to self-identify as first-generation professional: “i.e., first in your family to attend post-undergraduate professional school.”
3 Available at https://law.yale.edu/sites/default/files/area/department/studentaffairs/class_action_report_yls_2017.pdf [https://perma.cc/N7D3-ZE86].
4 As in previous years, the Class/Action team administered this survey and wrote this Report as volunteers. In light of the Working Group’s discussion around the significant amount of volunteer labor that affinity groups contribute to YLS, we encourage future authors (and faculty) to consider crediting those Class/Action Survey Reports as Substantial Papers or SAWs. We believe this Report, encompassing a survey of nearly the entire student body, is comparable in scope and ambition to a serious academic paper. A lead author—with full-time focus and faculty supervision—could do more still, yielding a Report that is even more helpful to the school.
Selected findings.

YLS draws students from overwhelmingly “elite” backgrounds.

- YLS students grew up in households that are much more affluent than the U.S. population overall (e.g., more students come from households in the top 4% of the income distribution than from the bottom 40%) and much more highly educated (e.g., 83% of YLS students have parents with a bachelor’s degree or higher, whereas only 36% of the U.S. population aged 25 and older have that level of education).
- In years preceding 2019, rather than broadly diversifying, the student body became more economically “polarized.” The shares of students coming from low- and high-income households each increased (by 4 and 3 percentage points, respectively, since the 2016 Survey), while the middle-class share declined by 6 percentage points.
- YLS students attended a very narrow set of undergraduate institutions. Nearly half attended an Ivy League school for their undergraduate degree, and 27% attended either Harvard, Yale, or Princeton (“H/Y/P”).

Social class and financial need significantly affect the law school experiences and career choices of first-generation students.

- 43% of first-generation students (including both first-generation college and first-generation professionals) “strongly agreed” that social class had affected their experience at YLS, versus 22% of non-first-generation students. The sentiment was widespread and growing among students who identified as lower/working class: 72% of such respondents “strongly agreed,” up from just 48% in the 2016 Survey.
- First-generation students also experienced social class differently: Controlling for income, they tended to identify with a lower social class compared to non-first-generation students. A similar gap appeared between students of color and White students, independent of first-generation status. In the $101-150k income bracket, for instance, 54% of non-first-generation students identified as upper-middle class, versus 39% of first-generation students. Similarly, 55% of White students in that bracket identified as “upper-middle class,” versus 38% of students of color. We suspect this phenomenon reflects underlying gaps, at any given income level, in household wealth and familiarity with elite social networks.
- A sizable fraction (30%) of students agreed that financial needs had influenced their decision to seek medical care during their time at YLS. 22% of first-generation students “strongly agreed” compared to 9% of non-first-generation students.
- 36% of first-generation college students supported dependents and/or non-dependent family while in law school. 39% could not afford an unexpected $500 expense.
- First-generation students were more likely than their peers to “strongly agree” that financial considerations had affected their decisions on summer jobs (36%, versus 15% for non-first-generation) and post-graduation opportunities (44% versus 21%).
- Students across the socioeconomic spectrum reported that class background impacted not only professional access, but also social bonding with peers.
Across income brackets, respondents shared a general view that members of the YLS community were not understanding of socioeconomic differences. Respondents viewed administrators as most understanding (34% favorable), followed by student peers at 26% and faculty at 22%.

**Recommendations.**

Based on the survey data and narrative responses, and in consultation with the FGP Board, Authors prepared 14 policy recommendations (detailed in Part VI) spanning the topics of admissions, financial aid, faculty and curriculum, inclusion, and wellness. These recommendations are offered irrespective of whether or not such work is currently underway, though current efforts are noted where applicable. This is in part because a comprehensive analysis of current advocacy and administration is outside the scope of this Survey Report, and in part to highlight the importance of seeing these efforts through to completion.

1. Further increase recruiting efforts at public universities.
2. Focus on public-school recruiting efforts beyond the “Public Ivies.”
3. Expand the YLS Safety Net to include non-emergency coverage.
4. Match future increases in living expenses and tuition with new scholarship funding.
5. Expand COAP coverage and remove disincentives in the participant contribution.
6. Tie SPIF awards to local cost of living.
7. Implement the recently approved income-tiered financial aid model, with the goal of making YLS tuition-free for its highest-need students.
8. Direct professors to use lower-cost course materials where possible and to provide early notice about required books.
9. Discuss this Report at a faculty training seminar.
10. Develop a standardized bidding form for courses requiring instructor permission.
11. Institutionalize student involvement in school governance.
12. Prioritize cross-sponsorship for student organization events, and increase OSA funding for those events.
13. Incorporate a first-generation experiences panel into fall orientation.
14. Found a Health & Wellness Committee and task it with eliminating the socioeconomic-related health disparities at YLS.
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II. Methodology

Survey design and rollout.

In Spring 2019, the survey design team prepared questions, attached as Appendix B below, based on those from the previous Class/Action Survey. As in both prior surveys, the team intentionally chose not to define “socioeconomic status” or “class.” The design team shared proposed survey questions with members of each affinity group board for feedback on content and terminology, as well as with Professor Ayres for feedback on clarity and rigor. After finalizing the survey instrument, the design team shared a live test version with members of the Class/Action Committee for feedback on technical issues. The team administered the survey through Qualtrics and collected anonymous responses. The survey was distributed to the entire student body beginning April 10, 2019, via emails to the school listserv (the “Wall”). It remained open through May 3, 2019.

To incentivize student responses, the Class/Action Committee offered a number of themed raffle prizes to survey participants. Prizes included opportunities for groups of students to socially engage with professors (e.g., a movie night with Professor Koh, an “escape room” outing with Professor Ayres, dinner and a movie with Professor Alstott), reading period care packages, Google VR Cardboards, a book, and gift cards. The design team also encouraged participation through affinity groups and other student organizations. In the final weeks of the survey window, every student who had not yet entered the raffle received a personal email from the survey team inviting them to complete the survey.6

Contemporaneous events.

The 2018-19 academic year began with confirmation hearings for now-Justice Kavanuagh, which created an atmosphere of political polarization and institutional critique (including student protests) directed at YLS. These events prompted the Dean’s Office to commission a set of Working Groups, which solicited student input on a range of school-wide policies. The primary Working Group issued its final report on April 15, 2019, while our survey was being administered.

Notes on the data presented.

The majority of survey questions were optional in order to encourage participation and give respondents the freedom to provide as much or as little information as they wanted. The number of responses to a question is included in each figure. Some narrative responses have been edited for length or clarity only.

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6 Students were contacted if they had not entered the raffle for participation incentives, which was accessible only to those who completed the survey. Survey responses themselves were anonymous.
The survey design team was particularly concerned with the risk of de-anonymizing students based on their responses. Therefore, where data is cross-tabulated with an identity category (e.g., gender or race) other than self-identified class status, categories with fewer than 15 respondents are omitted.

In general, the term “first-generation” will encompass both first-generation professionals (i.e., first in your family to attend a post-undergraduate professional school) and first-generation college students (i.e., first in your family to attend a college or university). Where there are meaningful differences between the groups, the Report will specifically refer to “first-generation professional” or “first-generation college.”

Finally, please note that some questions allowed respondents to select multiple options, so the percentages will add up to over 100%. This will be clear in context of the figure or question. Rounding may also lead to totals slightly above or below 100%.

III. Demographic Responses

A. Comparison of survey sample to YLS student body.

In this section, we compare the sample of J.D. candidates who responded to the survey against the law school’s overall composition, per its official reporting to the ABA (the 2018-19 “Standard 509 Information Report”). 7 567 students started the survey and responded to at least one question. 508 students finished the survey (i.e., answered all the required questions). We gathered a very large (nearly complete) and representative sample of J.D. students. The 481 J.D. students who finished the survey represented 77% of total J.D. enrollment. 82% of 1Ls completed the survey, while 79% of 2Ls and 71% of 3Ls completed it. 14 LL.M. students and 14 students from other programs (J.S.D. or Ph.D.) responded to the survey. The ABA report does not cover students outside the J.D. program, so we assume for these purposes that the LL.M., J.S.D., and Ph.D. respondents are similarly representative.

The gender breakdown of survey respondents was within two percentage points of the overall student body. Of the J.D. candidates who completed the survey and identified with a binary gender, 52% identified as women and 48% identified as men (versus an even split for the school’s total J.D. enrollment).

Broadly speaking, our sample is representative along racial categories. The comparison to YLS’s reported student population is imperfect because our survey did not use identical racial categories to those in the ABA report. Additionally, our survey allowed respondents to

select multiple racial categories, whereas YLS assigns each student to one category in its reporting to the ABA. The figure below compares our sample to YLS’s reported racial breakdown.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YLS &quot;Standard 509 Information Report&quot; (2018-19)</th>
<th>2019 Class/Action Survey (J.D. candidates who completed the survey)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or African American</td>
<td>Black or African American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>East Asian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>South or Southeast Asian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian or Native Alien</td>
<td>Hispanic or Latinx</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or more races</td>
<td>Native American/American In</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiian or Pacific Is</td>
<td>Middle Eastern or North Afric</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonresident alien</td>
<td>Biracial or Multiracial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race and ethnicity unknown</td>
<td>Native Hawaiian or Other Pac</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>129%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Additionally, 12% of our survey respondents identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, asexual, pansexual, queer, and/or transgender. 10% identified as international students, and 19% listed degrees held in addition to a bachelor’s degree. None of these demographics are included in the ABA reporting.

B. Socioeconomic class.

We asked respondents to classify their own socioeconomic background along the familiar categories of lower/middle/upper class. As shown below, self-reported socioeconomic status skewed overwhelmingly toward the middle and upper categories.
Compared to the 2016 Survey, the student body in 2019 was somewhat more diverse. Notably, there were more lower/working class students at YLS (+4 percentage points), but upper-class representation grew almost as quickly (+3). The growth in both categories was enabled, however, by a reduction in middle-class representation (-6). The chart below presents full cross-year data.

For a more objective measure of social class, we also asked respondents to estimate their annual household income during their pre-college years. As the figure below shows, the YLS student body came from very affluent households. More students at YLS came from households in the top 4% of the income distribution than from the bottom 40%.\(^8\) While 30% of U.S. households with children have incomes below $50,000, and 61% have incomes below $100,000,\(^9\) the figures for our respondents were roughly half that—16% and 36%, respectively. The differences were even more extreme at the highest incomes. Only about 1% of U.S. households earn above $500,000,\(^10\) yet the figure for our respondents was 9%.

\(^8\) This statistic is calculated from U.S. Census data: Household Income Percentile Calculator for the United States [2019], Dqydj.com (last visited Apr. 27, 2020), https://dqydj.com/household-income-percentile-calculator.


Again, the survey results reflected some mixed progress, as shown in the year-over-year comparison below. The declining share in the $51k-$100k income band corroborates the aforementioned reduction in middle-class representation.

As we would expect, the two measures of class that we elicited from survey respondents were highly (but not perfectly) correlated. The figure below shows how survey respondents in different income groups classified themselves among the categories of lower/middle/upper class.
We found that students of color and first-generation students were more likely to self-identify with a lower social class relative to White and non-first-generation students, respectively, of comparable incomes. Take the $101-150k income bracket, for instance. As detailed in the figure below, 55% of non-POC students who reported that income range identified as “upper-middle class.” Among students of color in the same bracket, only 38% identified as “upper-middle class”; the majority identified instead as “middle class.” We observed a similar effect for first-generation status. 54% of non-first-generation students in the $101-150k income range identified as “upper-middle class,” compared to just 39% of the first-generation students (where, again, a majority identified as “middle class”).

Per the scatter plots below, these effects held across income levels; students of color and first-generation students tended to identify with a lower social class than the White and non-first-generation students, respectively, with whom they shared an income bracket. Importantly, this effect happened separately for each of these two characteristics: When controlling for race, first-generation status still had a statistically significant effect on self-reported class, and vice versa. We provide a detailed data analysis in Appendix A, including linear regressions controlling for race, first-generation status, gender, and

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11 As throughout this Report generally, the “first gen.” variable includes students who identified as first-generation college and/or first generation professional.
geographic region. We found that there was no “gender gap” in self-reported class: Men and women did not exhibit statistically significant differences in self-reported class.\textsuperscript{12}

What explains this apparent “under-reporting?” We think differences in wealth and social capital (family/social connections and cultural fluency) are the most likely answer. It is well documented that high-income families of color have less wealth than White families at the same income level.\textsuperscript{13} Consequently, students of color (as a group) likely arrive at YLS with

\textsuperscript{12} The sample size was too small to investigate the effect for other/non-binary gender options.

fewer resources and connections than White students of comparable income. In other words, class and race are intersectional. Our results suggest a similar and independent effect for first-generation status.

C. Race and ethnicity.

The figure below shows the racial distribution of YLS students. The Millennial generation is approximately 56% White, 21% Hispanic, 14% Black, 6% Asian, and 3% other. Compared to the Millennial generation overall, YLS students were more likely to be Asian, slightly more likely to be White, and slightly less likely to be Hispanic or Black. This discrepancy in racial composition likely reflects the myriad ways in which household income (and even zip code) affect educational opportunity in America.

The percentages above add to more than 100 because survey respondents could identify with more than one racial category. To understand which groups of students were more likely to identify with multiple racial categories, we also looked at the racial distribution of students who selected only one category and compared this to the overall number of students selecting that category. These results, in the chart below, show that White and South/Southeast Asian students were the most likely to identify exclusively with that race, while Hispanic/Latinx students were the least likely.


15 Keep in mind that our survey figures are not perfectly comparable to Census data. Our survey allowed respondents to identify with multiple racial groups, whereas the Census allocates each person to a single one.

The chart below presents income distributions for each racial group at YLS. Consistent with national patterns, White and Asian students were more likely to come from households in the middle or upper segments of the income distribution, while Black and Hispanic/Latinx students were more likely to come from the middle or lower segments. As discussed above, however, all racial groups at YLS were disproportionately more affluent than in the population overall.

The next figure presents the racial composition of each income group. This figure is less intuitive. Percentages sum to more than 100 because respondents could select more than one racial group. Therefore, the way to read the below chart is as follows: Reading across each row, the figures tell you what percentage of students in that income group selected the race in each column. This figure makes a similar point as the one above: Among YLS students, the higher-income groups were more white than the lower-income groups.
Nonetheless, the most affluent YLS students were much more racially diverse than the most affluent American households. The chart below shows the racial composition of students who grew up in “top one percent” households (i.e., with incomes above $500,000). 77% of these students identified as White (and, not shown, 64% identified as only White). Across the U.S., Whites account for a 96% share of the “top one percent” households.  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Household income above $500k (“Top 1 percent”)</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black or African American</th>
<th>East Asian</th>
<th>South or Southeast Asian</th>
<th>Hispanic or Latino</th>
<th>Middle Eastern or North African</th>
<th>Biracial or Multiracial</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>47</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>119%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**D. Geography and region.**

A plurality of YLS students came from nearby in the Northeastern U.S. Other students were spread fairly evenly across the Midwest, South, and West.

The chart below shows the geographic composition of each income bracket. Wealthy students were more likely to come from the Northeast or Midatlantic, while less wealthy students were more likely to come from the Southeast or outside the U.S. At a high level, these patterns seem to track regional differences in income and likely do not reflect any particular distortions of the YLS admissions process. They may, however, be useful in improving the school’s targeted recruiting directed at low- and middle-income applicants.

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We also gathered data on parental education level for the primary income-earner. As the figure below shows, our survey respondents were even more skewed toward the top end of the distribution on parental educational attainment than they were on household income. 36% of Americans aged 25 and above have a bachelor’s degree or more, but 83% of primary earners in the households of YLS students did.

Cross-year comparisons, presented in the figure below, show a decreasing share of parents or guardians with doctoral, professional, and master’s degrees, which is consistent with the increase in first-generation professionals. Most of the shift was absorbed by bachelor’s degrees (+4 percentage points from the 2016 Survey/+7 percentage points from the 2012 Survey), though the figures for high school degree or equivalent increased as well (+4/+3).

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F. Undergraduate institutions.

The breakdown of YLS students' undergraduate background skewed heavily toward private universities, with a plurality (27%) attending H/Y/P. A combined 17% attended a public university—though five “Public Ivies” accounted for over one-third of that total.20

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20 For purposes of this report, the term “Public Ivy” refers to UNC-Chapel Hill, UT-Austin, University of Virginia, University of Michigan, and the University of California system. In colloquial use, the exact list of schools varies and is subject to debate; but usually, only the most elite, selective, and (often) expensive public schools are included.
In general, this data remained fairly constant since the 2016 Survey. (The 2012 Survey did not collect this information.) For 2016, 25% of respondents attended H/Y/P, 19% attended another (non-Ivy) private university, 14% attended another Ivy, 18% attended a public university, 18% attended a small liberal arts college, 6% attended university outside the U.S., and 2% responded “Other.” The total share of public-university students has remained stable (17% here, versus 18% for 2016), but our survey split the category into “Public Ivy” and “Other public university.” This distinction proved worthwhile, indicating that there is still significant work to be done in improving the breadth of public-school recruiting. Authors have reason to believe that the share of public-university students has increased since we collected our data, given recent initiatives in admissions and recruiting discussed in Section V.1. The effects of these initiatives should become apparent in the next Class/Action Survey.

There were substantial differences in undergraduate background by race. The figure below shows the breakdown of undergraduate institutions attended within each racial group. Most notably, when compared to the student body as whole:

- East Asian students were far more likely to have attended H/Y/P or another Ivy than the student body as a whole.
- South/Southeast Asian students were more likely to have attended H/Y/P than the student body as a whole.
- Black students were far more likely to have attended a public university.
- White students were more likely to have attended a liberal arts college.

We also observed differences in undergraduate background by household income. As the figure below shows, the most affluent students (i.e., with household income above $300,000) were more likely to have attended an Ivy League institution and less likely to have attended a public university. Public universities sent a stream of students that was less affluent as a group, skewing toward the lower- and middle-income brackets.
G. Financial resources.

We asked students a series of questions about their current financial resources and pressures. For this section, in addition to examining the experiences of first-generation college students and first-generation professionals, we also decided to break out the data for “first-generation Americans” (defined broadly as either immigrants or the American-born children of immigrants). Accordingly, the data in this section includes figures for first-generation professionals, first-generation college students, immigrants or naturalized immigrants, and American-born children of immigrants.22

First, we asked how students were financing their law school education. As one might expect, students from first-generation backgrounds—including immigrants and American-born children of immigrants—were much more likely to use loans and much less likely to have a parental contribution than non-first-generation peers. The effect was magnified among first-generation college students.

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21 This was the first edition of the Class/Action Survey that collected demographic data related to immigration. We chose this section on finances to test whether responses by first-generation Americans differed meaningfully from the student body overall. Our results suggest the inquiry was worthwhile. In most respects, first-generation Americans exhibited a gap between financial resources and needs that was similar to (but smaller than) the one between first-generation professionals and their non-first-generation peers. Future Class/Action Committee members may wish to collect immigration data again and analyze how first-generation Americans responded to a broader suite of questions.

22 Note that respondents could identify with multiple categories (e.g., first-generation professional and naturalized immigrant). Thus, the sum of the “Total” column is greater than the 508 responses we received.
We further asked whether students had the liquid assets to meet an unexpected $500 expense. First-generation professionals, and especially first-generation college students, were much less likely than non-first-generation peers to have adequate funds. We observed similar (but smaller) gaps for immigrants and American-born children of immigrants.

In such an emergency, first-generation professionals and first-generation college students were much less likely than non-first-generation students to say that they would be able to borrow from a parent. The same was true for immigrants and American-born children of immigrants, but to a lesser degree. A sizable percentage of each group answered “none of the above,” meaning they could borrow from nobody in their social network to pay an emergency expense.
Since this survey was administered, YLS implemented a Safety Net to provide emergency grants for unforeseen expenses. This program, developed with FGP and launched as part of the COVID-19 response, is a critical service that directly addresses the observed need.\textsuperscript{23}

Substantial shares of first-generation students—again, including immigrants and American-born children of immigrants—supported dependents or non-dependent family members while in law school. Notably, 28\% of first-generation college students indicated that they financially supported non-dependent family members.\textsuperscript{24}

\textsuperscript{23} The Safety Net was in planning stages well before the COVID-19 pandemic, but its rollout was accelerated to assist students who faced unplanned expenses related to the pandemic. The Safety Net is not limited to COVID-19 hardships, and it will remain a permanent program. More details about the Safety Net are available online at https://law.yale.edu/admissions-financial-aid/financial-aid/Yls-safety-net [https://perma.cc/ZJ26-E7ZC].

\textsuperscript{24} Percentages in this chart add to more than 100 because respondents could check all that apply. The share of first-generation college students that support dependents \textit{and/or} non-dependent family was 36\%.
With appropriate documentation of financial support by the student, the Financial Aid Office adds an $8,000 line item to the student’s basic budget. This is available both for dependents and non-dependent family members.\textsuperscript{25} However, while our survey asked students whether or not they financially support dependents or non-dependent family, we did not gather data on how many of those students were aware of, or had availed themselves of, this additional financial support available from YLS.

**IV. Narrative Responses**

**A. Student experiences.**

Broadly speaking, most YLS students (73%) across the class spectrum agreed that class and socioeconomic status had affected their YLS experiences. As one might expect, students at the lower end of the socioeconomic spectrum agreed more strongly with this statement. We observed a dramatic shift among students who identified as lower/working class: 72% of our respondents “strongly agreed,” up from just 48% in the 2016 Survey.

The following chart shows the same question broken down by first-generation status.\textsuperscript{26} First-generation students were nearly twice as likely (43% versus 22%) to “strongly agree” that class and socioeconomic status has affected their YLS experience.

\textsuperscript{25} This Report gives the terms “dependent” and “non-dependent” the same meaning as the IRS. The financial aid policy refers to both groups as “dependents,” in the sense that these family members depend on the student for financial support. Authors have confirmed that the $8,000 allowance is available to students supporting other family members (such as siblings or parents) who might not qualify as “dependents” on a tax return.

\textsuperscript{26} As throughout this Report generally, the “first-gen.” variable includes students who identified as first-generation college and/or first generation professional.
In students’ narrative responses to this question, five distinct themes emerged—and also reemerged in response to later survey questions. Those themes concerned the effects of socioeconomic status on (1) social bonding with peers, (2) educational development, (3) institutional access or knowledge, (4) career options, and (5) self-consciousness.

First, students reported that differences in class background and socioeconomic status affected social bonding with peers. For instance:

- “My first semester of 1L, I felt completely lost. Not only because law school itself is challenging, but because I felt like I didn’t fit in at all . . . Money has kept me from participating in social events with my classmates.”
- “One way to divide the social scene in the 2L class is to divide the group of people who take lavish trips during school not on Yale’s dime and those who don’t.”
- “I have a hard time connecting with my peers . . . I think friend groups at YLS tend to be very segregated by socioeconomic status.”
- “Often my small group would go out to dinner and not seem concerned about the price, but it was more than I could really afford to spend.”
- “I avoid a lot of social events because of how much people spend.”
- “Because of socioeconomic background, I was comfortable at YLS from day one.”

Concerns regarding the intersection of socioeconomic status and peer bonding were raised more frequently than in previous surveys. This may be due to the timing of our survey, coming at the conclusion of a school year filled with activism and reflection around the role of class at YLS. It is possible these controversies made more salient the ways in which class and socioeconomic status can contribute to social fissures or isolation. However, it is also possible that the socioeconomic polarization discussed in Section III.B has influenced students’ social experiences.

Second, students reported that class and socioeconomic status impacted the amount of time they were able to dedicate to schoolwork and professional development. For instance:

- “During my time at YLS, my mother has been overwhelmed trying to manage dealing with multiple public agencies while undergoing several medical procedures. She receives SSI benefits for a mental disability and a Section 8 voucher. I’ve had to advocate on her behalf significantly throughout my time in law school.”
- “I have to work to make ends meet which makes it difficult to study or participate in extracurricular activities.”
“I’ve spent hours others haven’t needed to scanning reading material because books are too expensive. I live far from campus to save money, and traveling back and forth doesn’t seem that burdensome day-to-day, but over the course of two years that’s hours and hours of time that I’ve spent walking and waiting for shuttles, that I could otherwise spend studying.”

“My socioeconomic status has allowed me to focus solely on school.”

“Not having to worry about loans and having the safety net of my parents made everything from living in New Haven to choosing summer jobs easier.”

Third, students reported that differences in class and socioeconomic status impacted “soft skills” and informal institutional knowledge. Several students specifically reported being unsure of professional norms regarding, for example, resumes and dress codes. Others reported more general differences in the availability of family assistance with navigating law school. For instance:

• “Yale Law School is not designed to remedy inequities in information access regarding professional opportunities, expectations, or status. Those whose parents were lawyers or high-earning professionals with extended networks, especially those that attended an Ivy League undergrad, come into law school with a greater understanding of what is necessary to get the most elite and competitive post-law school opportunities. That baked-in advantage can be overcome, but it takes successful navigation of the underground information economy.”

• “Not having professionals in my family frequently led me to feel like I was missing information about how to succeed.”

• “I have often felt alienated at school networking events when my classmates have gone to the same prep schools as speakers' kids, etc.”

• “I came from a family with multiple lawyers, and felt familiar with many of the elements of law school. For areas that were unfamiliar, I had friends and family members who had been through YLS or similar law schools whom I could comfortably ask for advice.”

• “Coming from a fancy background, both in terms of previous universities, jobs, and class background, meant that I felt at home in the upper-class environment of YLS.”

Several students expressed confusion or dismay regarding institutional culture (e.g., the “schmoozy cocktail party game”). While this was a persistent theme in student responses to previous Class/Action Surveys, it was less dominant in our survey.

Fourth, students’ narrative responses reported varying consequences of class and socioeconomic status on career choices. For instance:

• “Stress about loans is real! It affects job prospects, where I can live in summer, etc.”

• “My grandparents have paid for my law school, so I don’t have to worry about debt and can focus on public interest work.”
• “I have almost $300k in loans from UG and law school and the burden of this debt is crushing. Because of my loans and my parents’ decreased income during my time at YLS, I feel pressured to work at a big firm until I feel more financially stable . . . I also came into YLS with no prior connections and no lawyers in my family, which made me feel like I was at a significant disadvantage compared to my peers who had lawyers, judges, politicians, professors, etc. in their families or friend circles.”

• “I am at liberty to pursue public interest work because I know I don’t need to worry about cataclysmic events; I would be rescued. I don’t have to provide for family. My family members were able to provide valuable feedback on my application materials.”

Fifth, students reported feelings of self-consciousness or displacement due to their class or socioeconomic status.

• “Before coming to YLS I considered myself to be the poster child of privilege. But since arriving on campus I feel like I’ve consistently been treated like an intellectual lightweight and a second-class student. Professors and classmates have repeatedly insinuated that my state school education makes me somehow intellectually inferior to other students. I frequently see students wearing ‘Harvard,’ ‘Chicago,’ ‘Cornell’ or other elite school gear in the halls. And yet I always feel self-conscious and get weird looks when I wear clothes from my state school . . . 2Ls and 3Ls have repeatedly and explicitly reminded me that my state school background will foreclose certain academic and professional opportunities including clinics, classes, FIP interviews, clerkships, and government jobs. This elitism problem may have more to do with the legal profession in general than YLS in particular, but YLS feels more like a prestige factory than a learning institution. My law school experience so far has been defined by a series of competitions that seem to favor those that come from the most prestigious backgrounds. Honestly, the culture at YLS often feels toxic and gross.”

• “I remember realizing all in the same day early in 1L fall that you could get free sparkling water in the dining hall and that several of my classmates’ families spent more on their high school tuition than I paid for college and feeling like I had landed on another planet.”

• “I have not been negatively impacted by my socioeconomic status. If anything, I am very conscious that people automatically assume I am less well off than I am because of my race. I am uncomfortable discussing finances with other students because I feel some guilt about my privilege.”

• “I’m often afraid of people knowing how privileged I am because I worry they won’t respect me.”

A minority of students expressed that class and socioeconomic status have either not shaped their experience at YLS (e.g., “I don’t find myself thinking about class much at all.”), or that socioeconomic disadvantage has had positive effects alongside the challenges (e.g., “I think I’m confident in ways that students who grew up in elite education are not. That is,
my sense of self-worth is just not tied to my performance in the same way it is for those who come from more prestigious backgrounds, it seems to me.

B. Attitudes and awareness.

Students across income brackets generally disagreed with the proposition that members of the YLS community “are understanding of people from all socioeconomic backgrounds.” Survey respondents viewed administrators as most understanding, with 34% “agreeing” or “strongly agreeing,” followed by student peers at 26% and faculty at 22%.

Students’ narrative responses regarding class attitudes and awareness raised two kinds of concerns across the community at large: (1) explicitly disparaging comments or behavior, which reveal hostile attitudes toward class, and (2) implicitly unwelcoming comments or behavior, which indicate a more benign lack of awareness.

Below we examine the survey responses that reveal how well faculty, students, and administrators do (or do not) understand socioeconomic differences at YLS. As YLS continues to admit more students from lower-income and first-generation backgrounds, it will be critical for all members of the community to increase their awareness of socioeconomic diversity and to root out the explicit or hostile attitudes.

1. Faculty.

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<thead>
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<th>Somewhat agree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree</th>
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<td>28%</td>
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<td>19%</td>
<td>27%</td>
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<tr>
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<td>17%</td>
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<td>30%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>4%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>18%</td>
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</table>

Total respondents: 817
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In the category of explicit behavior, narrative comments from 18 different students referenced the same individual faculty member by name. We reproduce those comments below, with the faculty member’s name redacted. Authors note that the behavior of this one faculty member was brought to the attention of the Dean, and to the best of Authors’ knowledge, no similar conduct by this one faculty member has been reported to the law school since.
• “There are obvious examples of professors who display basically zero understanding or interest in understanding issues of class (e.g., [REDACTED]). With that said, I think the obvious ignorance of those people tends to obscure the fact that there are many professors who do understand the challenges of coming from less privileged class backgrounds from their personal experience.”
• “[REDACTED] needs to stop.”
• “[REDACTED].”
• “Depends on the faculty, which is not a monolith. You’ve got egregious culprits (see [REDACTED]), but there are many faculty who operate with an incredibly welcoming attitude.”
• “What is especially disheartening is that there are professors in this school who are known to dislike students from underprivileged backgrounds, and yet they continue to be considered ‘distinguished’ members of the faculty. One such example is [REDACTED]. I’ve never taken a class from them for this reason. It is well-known that they strongly favor students from Ivy League schools and generally will not go to bat, so to speak, for students from public schools. Yale does nothing about it and seems to turn a blind eye because it’s [REDACTED]. It is a slap in the face to students who come from this type of background. That Yale does nothing about these types of issues because of these professors’ accomplishments is quite frankly sad.”
• “I think some but not all of the faculty believes students with fancier pre-law resumes are smarter, without considering the role class privilege plays. I don’t think this is just a [REDACTED] problem.”
• “[REDACTED].”
• “[REDACTED] says what others think.”
• “All you need to do is read the class reviews for [REDACTED] or their small groups.”
• “[REDACTED] tells students from state schools that they shouldn’t come to YLS. [REDACTED] seems like an outlier, but it’s hard to know for sure.”
• “I should preface by saying that many faculty here work hard to make this community more welcoming to people of all classes. That said, there are exceptions. For example, I have never spoken a word to [REDACTED] and will not until I graduate, because I went to a state school for undergrad and I know that they will assume (and perhaps tell me) that I am therefore intellectually inferior to them and my classmates who went to fancy private colleges.”
• “[REDACTED] says that students who aren’t from Ivy backgrounds won’t succeed at Yale. The failure of the rest of the faculty to adequately respond to such a statement is an indictment of all of them.”
• “While I have not heard them personally, everyone has heard about Professor [REDACTED]’s awful comments regarding ‘lesser’ schools. It’s shameful and embarrassing for the school.”
• “I think at least 50% of the faculty really do understand. I think 5% actively undermine the experiences of lower socioeconomic students (seriously, what the hell is wrong with [REDACTED]?). I think 25% understand poverty in theory and think that’s good enough.”
• “Professors who say things like ‘students from state schools should not come to YLS’ should not be allowed to teach. Cough cough [REDACTED].”
• “Get [REDACTED] to stop saying dumb shit to fgp kids during admit weekend Jesus Christ.”
• “Remove [REDACTED] from any and all roles regarding admissions.”
• “Professors who openly discriminate against students from state schools/students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (e.g., [REDACTED]) should not be allowed to teach or hire RAs.”

Additional narrative responses raised similar concerns without naming a particular faculty member. It is worth noting that these reports of specific experiences were not isolated; they appeared across several survey responses. These nameless comments likely did, in fact, relate to the same redacted faculty member. For example: “I (who attended a state school) was told by a professor that students from state schools aren’t prepared enough to attend YLS,” and “There are faculty who prize students that come from Ivy League institutions over public universities/lesser-known liberal arts colleges.” One respondent also reported that “a professor made an off-hand comment about how poor people eat pet food during class time.”

Regarding implicit behavior on the part of faculty members, narrative responses contained several recurring examples. These, we stress, are not nefarious like the explicit comments and behavior above; but regardless of intent, they still have a negative effect and evidence the need for greater awareness.

• Downplaying or ignoring the financial strain of textbook prices, especially when requiring students to have the newest editions.
• Expecting students to spend money on small group trips and events, or to bring food to share with the class.
• Assuming shared points of reference that may alienate students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. One student wrote: “On the first day of small group 1L, our professor made a comment about ‘next time you’re in London,’ and I realized just how out of touch almost every professor here is.”
• Asking for student CVs and inquiring what students’ parents do professionally, either in a social context or as part of the course bidding process.²⁷ As one student wrote: “For the course selection process, professors should not be able to request resumes or any personally identifiable information. Perhaps requesting generic statements of interest is ok, but space in limited courses should be allocated on a basis that does not reflect academic or socioeconomic background.”

²⁷ We recognize that some faculty members likely ask these questions because they are genuinely interested in getting to know students. For many academics and professionals, these may seem natural starting points for conversation—but asking these questions as a means of getting to know students can appear alienating and reductive rather than inquisitive, especially to first-generation and low-income students. CVs and family background are often themselves shaped by socioeconomic opportunity. These concerns are only heightened in the course bidding process, which implicates equality of opportunity at YLS.
2. Students.

Narrative responses explained that while most YLS students attempt to be understanding, and while many have a good intellectual grasp of class differences, a lack of personal experience created a gap between intent and impact. These largely fell into the category of implicitly unwelcoming comments or behavior. For example:

- “Wealthier students are not mean or rude, but they lack an understanding of what it is like for most people to grow up in America. Because they haven’t experienced it, they cannot understand what it is like to have a utility cut off, a home foreclosed on, or to simply not be able to go on a family vacation while growing up. They don’t understand what it is like to have the pressure to support family members or what YLS is like for a person who did not grow up wealthy and well-connected. They also do not understand what it is like to turn down opportunities or... social engagements merely because you cannot afford them.”
- “Many students have assumptions about other students’ ability to pay for certain activities.”
- “People here regularly assume that you can afford to go out to eat, go out to drink, put something on a credit card and get reimbursed later, ask your parents for help if you’re broke—I find it both totally shocking and totally alienating. Just as an example, I wasn’t sure if I had something appropriate to wear for a meeting for clinic, and another student was totally confused as to why I wouldn’t just go buy something new. When I first got here, my small group—including at many events organized by my Cokers—would go out together for expensive activities... People just thought I was being anti-social because the idea that I didn’t have $20-50 to spend just for fun (for all 1L fall, never mind every couple of weeks) just wasn’t in their imaginative capacities.”
- “The vast majority of students here come from backgrounds where financial obligations to their family are not a part of their future planning.”
- “People here have wildly unrealistic understandings of how 95% of the world lives.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q26</th>
<th>YLS students are understanding of the experiences of people from all socioeconomic backgrounds.</th>
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<td>Upper class</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total respondents</td>
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</tr>
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</table>
• “Lots of YLS people strive to be class-conscious, but the social activities (e.g., spring break trips) and conversations assume a level of resources and cultural capital.”
• “I think that many students are understanding, but I have also witnessed great insensitivity. For example, public interest students can be judgmental about a peer’s decision to take a high paying job at a firm.”

3. Administrators.

In narrative responses, many students reported that the administration’s awareness and understanding of socioeconomic status has improved significantly. Several explicitly commented that they appreciated the improvements made to the financial aid policies during the 2018-19 academic year. However, students also commented on persisting challenges and noted that understanding is uneven across various administrative offices. Many comments described school policies and practices that, even without malintent, are structurally unwelcoming to students from lower-income backgrounds. For example:

- “Many administrators—shoutout to Jackie Outlaw—are acutely aware of the stress that finances can put on YLS students. And I really believe that they do their best, within sometimes rigid institutional constraints, to make this school more equitable. But some administrators do betray a lack of understanding of students’ financial backgrounds. E.g., I once had an administrator urge me to take a TA position where I would lose money (because of Financial Aid’s now-revised term-time employment policy) for ‘the experience.’ That administrator didn’t understand that my family and I cannot afford to pass up thousands of dollars, the quality of ‘the experience’ notwithstanding. The most frustrating justification I hear from the administration regarding problems with its financial aid is that ‘we match our peer institutions.’ Yes, it sucks that low-income/FGP students at Stanford and Harvard are also having trouble supporting their parents. But YLS’s US News ranking is the worst reason I can imagine to not set the bar higher.”
• “It is remarkable and telling that eliminating tuition at Yale remains a peripheral proposal in discussions about YLS’s future.”
• “Regressive financial aid policies allow students who don’t require financial aid to keep their FIP summer salaries but not students that require financial aid (and most likely, need the money more).”
• “The grabbing of law firm money from poor people on scholarships is pretty gross.”
• “I struggle with the idea of people being reimbursed for expenses because it assumes that those people have the disposable income to make certain purchases in the first place.”
• “I’ve been told to put things on my credit card until being reimbursed that I could not afford to put on my credit card.”
• “I think the Administration does make some efforts to support and understand how people from less-privileged backgrounds experience this campus. The improvements to financial aid policies in response to FGP’s advocacy are one example. That said, the financial aid policy overall and its emphasis on loans and large tuition increases each year demonstrate that the Administration still does not understand fully how much of a burden it is putting on its poorer students. And SPIF is incredibly inadequate in the major cities many of us work in.”

Several students also specifically mentioned an email from the administration which suggested that students who rely on loans to cover their cost of living could forego buying holiday gifts for family or friends in order to stay within their budget. While the content was framed as intended to “ease stress” by aiding in planning, multiple students commented that they found it insensitive. Notably, though, conversations between Authors and the administration revealed that shortly after this email went out, the relevant office identified the problem, realized that some annual communications repeatedly incorporated material from previous years, and revised their communications process accordingly to prevent the issue from arising again.

C. Financial needs.

Students generally viewed the room/board/personal portion of the budget—which was $17,595 for the 2018-19 academic year—as inadequate to meet actual expenses. Predictably, lower-class students responded most negatively. Since our survey, the allowance increased to $18,915 for the 2019-20 academic year, met partially by additional scholarships and partially by a higher unit loan amount. It then increased to $20,333 for the 2020-21 academic year.28

Separately, as part of the COVID-19 aid and response, students received additional scholarships for the 2020-21 academic year: $4,000 for those receiving a need-based scholarship or stipend, or $2,500 for those receiving loans only. See COVID-19 Financial Aid FAQ, available at https://law.yale.edu/sites/default/files/area/department/finaid/document/fa_faq_covid_final_7.1.20.pdf [https://perma.cc/K9UE-X7UK].
Narrative responses captured this frustration as well:

- “I believe I ran over the entire year book estimate by buying half of my books in one semester . . . That should capture it.”
- “The YLS financial aid basic budget estimate is strong evidence for the cliché that lawyers can’t do math.”
- “The budget is not adequate, and note: I do not believe the increased budget is especially great either. It’s a real improvement and I understand not wanting to send us into even more massive debt—but then lower tuition, increase grants and scholarships, or work to go tuition free.”
- “I have up to $100 of prescriptions per month, plus debt from a pre-law school hospital stay that were not covered in the basic budget estimate. The estimate does not adequately account for people with chronic medical conditions (e.g., monthly prescriptions) nor people who need glasses and/or contacts!”
- “Simply purchasing health insurance coverage for 2.5 months of summer outside of New Haven would blow the budget; should students be expected to choose between fiscal responsibility and basic healthcare??”

A sizable fraction (30%) of students agreed that financial needs had influenced their decision to seek medical care. The chart below shows that first-generation students were much more likely to hold this concern.

In narrative responses, most students explained that either they had not faced significant medical costs while enrolled at YLS or they had access to sufficient resources (parental
assistance, outside insurance, etc.) when costs arose. Among those students who had been impacted by the costs of medical care, chief concerns included coverage outside of New Haven, co-pays, dental and optical care, and dependent care. For example:

● “The summers away from New Haven are currently poorly covered by the Yale Health Plan (with the exception of emergencies). This has meant, for instance, that I’m not getting post-surgery physical therapy.”
● “I forewent certain medical care, including dental visits, check-ups, and optical check-ups due to financial pressure.”
● “Cost of copays limits what medication can realistically be prescribed to me.”
● “My domestic partner is not covered and that is a huge challenge to our family.”

Some narrative comments in response to earlier Class/Action Surveys raised similar concerns about access to healthcare. This was the first Class/Action Survey to collect specific data on the issue.

Financial concerns also bled over into academics and cocurriculars. A majority of lower-class students indicated that financial needs had “played a major role in [their] decision to pursue an RA/TA position, Coker Fellowship, clinical experience, teaching fellowship,” or similar opportunity. Upper-class students generally were not laden with that consideration. In December of 2018, just a few months before our survey data was collected, a new term-time employment policy went into effect, creating a $5,000 earnings shelter. Excess earnings are allocated first to expenses unmet in the basic budget, then to reduce loans; they no longer result in a scholarship offset. This change is an improvement over the previous policy; but at the time the survey was conducted, it would have only affected respondents’ term-time earnings from the 2018-19 academic year. Consequently, there may be a lag before opinions are attributable solely to the new policy.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Q38</th>
<th>Financial needs have played a major role in my decision to pursue an RA/TA position, Coker Fellowship, clinical experience, teaching fellowship, or any other activity at YLS.</th>
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<td></td>
<td>2019</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

In addition, a sizable minority of students (12%, almost entirely from lower- or middle-class backgrounds) agreed that financial needs had played a role in their decision to take a
particular course (e.g., due to the cost of materials or course timing). This may be a smaller share than other questions, but it still indicates a troubling disparity in educational opportunity affecting entirely too many YLS students.

**D. Career decisions.**

A large majority of students from lower-class backgrounds reported that financial concerns had affected their career decisions, both for summer positions and jobs after graduation. This concern was much less prevalent among students from upper-class backgrounds.

1. **Summer jobs.**

Overall, 46% of students agreed that financial needs had played a role in their summer job search. This was up from 38% in the 2016 Survey. Responses correlated with income, showing a particularly acute concern among lower- and lower-middle class students.
The following chart shows the same question broken down by first-generation status. First-generation students were more than twice as likely (36% versus 15%) to “strongly agree” that financial needs had played a major role in their summer job search.

Authors note that the summer earnings policy has undergone subsequent (and favorable) revisions. The current policy provides for a savings allowance equal to 15% of net income for weeks 1-10 and 75% of net income for weeks 11 and on.29

243 students provided narrative responses on the summer job search. The comments reflected mixed views on the adequacy of SPIF funding, with some reporting that it had steered their job search away from particular markets.

- “I limited my searches to places where I could find housing at a decent cost or stay with friends/family at a lower than market rate.”
- “The SPIF funding is more money than I earned prior to law school, so I wasn’t worried about the funding amount.”
- “I have tried to avoid high-cost cities, since I wouldn’t be able to SPIF away a summer in the Bay Area.”

About 11% of survey respondents discussed a need, pressure, or motivation to earn law firm income over the summer. We cross-referenced these comments against reported household income and found that students shared this sentiment across income levels. In fact, a plurality of the comments came from students whose self-reported household annual income, pre-law school, fell between $101k-150k.

2. Post-graduation jobs.

An even greater share of students (58%) agreed that financial needs had played a major role in their search for post-graduation jobs. This, too, correlated strongly with reported income.

29 Policy FAQs are available online at https://law.yale.edu/system/files/area/department/finaid/Faq_summer_employment_policy_21-22.pdf [https://perma.cc/C7GN-EH49].
The following chart shows the same question broken down by first-generation status. Again, first-generation students were more than twice as likely (44% versus 21%) to “strongly agree” with the statement.

234 students provided narrative responses on the post-graduation job search. Lower-income students frequently discussed a perceived need to work in a high-paying law firm, even if they would prefer to work in public-interest law or academia.

- “I do not want to work for a firm, but I will.”
- “I need money to support myself and my family. My bank accounts are currently overdrawn while I’m trying to study for finals.”
- “I am only considering law firms because of how much money I will owe to Yale, on top of the financial needs of my parents, which precludes using COAP to simply pay off my loans.”
- “In the words of the Law Revue sketch, ‘We All End Up in Biglaw.’”
- “I need to feed my family, and COAP sucks for married people.”
- “I have $100k+ in loans. Doing a clerkship for the ‘network’ or for the ‘learning’ had no incentive to me, especially after I heard how little you make, despite working law firm hours, and how your loans aren’t covered by COAP during your clerkship. I don’t tell people which firm I’m going to because I feel judgment, but a huge factor is the paycheck. One year after law school, I am earning more than my parents’ combined income over multiple years. Watching how hard my parents worked for money and the stability that money bought, how could I turn down a law firm job?”
• “YLS doesn’t allow COAP to cover your payments while you’re in school; while I’m interested in academia, I feel there is a lot of pressure not to go that route because COAP will not support me while I am there (and if I were to pursue a Ph.D. that would be 4-7 years of struggling to pay off interest).”

This was not, however, exclusive to lower-income students; several students from the higher income brackets also reported discomfort about choosing lower-paying jobs, albeit for different reasons.

• “To be brutally honest, I’m not sure how I’d feel about being in a household making less money than my parents.”
• “Making money is important to me. That interest has little to do with need though.”
• “I want to make sure I can provide my dependents with the same opportunities I have had.”

E. Student recommendations.

We also presented survey respondents with an open-ended question asking if there were ways that the YLS student body, faculty, or administration could be more supportive of students from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. 217 students provided narrative responses to this question, with most suggesting concrete changes to financial policies. Many, but not all, echoed narrative responses provided to earlier questions. Below, we identify some of the recurring themes from student recommendations, as well as any recent policy changes that speak to those issues.

1. Summer income.

One common theme in students’ narrative responses was, as one student put it, that YLS’s financial aid policies surrounding summer income “expand the wealth gap at this school rather than narrow it.” Such responses focused specifically on the impact of summer income on financial aid and on the challenges of fitting a rigid SPIF program to students’ individual circumstances. Since this survey, the SPIF amount has increased to $8,000 ($667 per week for up to 12 weeks), up from $7,500 for summer 2018. As noted above, the summer earnings policy also has changed to deduct a savings allowance equal to 15% of net income for weeks 1-10 and 75% of net income for weeks 11 and on.

• “The fact that almost all summer earnings are deducted from future grants is an abomination. Given that I have to pay for childcare, it is more cost effective for me to not work at all during the summers (thus losing out on valuable professional and networking experience), than to work and have all of that deducted from my future grants. Yale’s system creates a travesty: rich kids can make, and keep, upwards of 30k every summer. After 3 years of this, they can make enough for a down payment
on a nice piece of real estate. Meanwhile poor kids have to work just as hard, and then duly send that money straight back into Yale’s coffers.”

- “I see no reason why students should not be allowed to use a significant portion of summer earnings to offset existing/future loans and living expenses. Instead, YLS seems to hope to capture as much money as possible from students to reduce the amount of grant aid given to students (which already falls far short of the scholarships most YLS students turned down from other schools).”
- “Government summer internships often take a long time to grant security clearances or background checks, which results in lower-income students not being able to secure summer housing in advance, when rents are more affordable . . . YLS’s lack of flexibility [regarding SPIF amounts] given this reality only serves to make government summer internships less accessible to those relying on SPIF.”

2. **Expanding COAP.**

While students expressed gratitude for COAP, they also reiterated that elements of the program may exacerbate class differences in access to clerkships, graduate education, regional opportunity, and marriage. For instance:

- “YLS should count clerkships towards COAP.”
- “Change COAP policy to support PhD candidates and fund students during their clerkships.”
- “COAP should cover graduate school. It’s shocking that it doesn’t. Peer institutions’ equivalent loan assistance programs do, and Yale is supposed to be the pre-eminent academic law school.”
- “YLS should cover graduate students in COAP funding so that students’ choices to pursue academic careers post-YLS are not as class-biased as it currently is.”
- “COAP should be adjusted for the cost of living where alums are working.”
- “I’m seriously considering delaying marriage to my lovely partner because of COAP’s marriage penalty.” [That is, the policy of counting spousal income above a certain shelter toward the threshold for COAP eligibility.]

3. **Moving assistance.**

Students noted that moving expenses (both at the beginning and end of their time at YLS) can be especially difficult to manage. They called on YLS to account for moving expenses in its calculation of the basic budget. Authors note that, under the current policies, incoming students can reduce their student asset contribution (if any) by the amount of their expenses associated with moving and setting up for law school (e.g., furniture purchases). As an example, if a student has assets of $5,000 but needs to use $2,500 for moving and setup, the student asset contribution would decrease to $2,500 since the other funds are not available to pay for law school. Still, this policy does not assist students who arrive at YLS with minimal savings and thus do not have an asset contribution to reduce.
• “Front the cost of security deposits for incoming 1Ls.”
• “Moving costs when entering YLS should be included in financial aid considerations—there should be a fund or something where people can apply if they face extreme hardship with moving costs.”
• “Improve the public interest fellowships to help students with the up-front costs of a move to a new city, and to ensure that students who aren’t getting various forms of support from parents or guardians can have a decent standard of living.”


Several students implored YLS to do more to mitigate the socioeconomic disparities in health and wellness. Mental health\textsuperscript{30} was frequently mentioned among these comments. Since our survey was administered, YLS has hired an in-house, non-clinical counselor; however, the core need expressed by respondents was improved access to clinical care.

• “I cannot sleep at night because I’m worried about my finances. No matter how many jobs I take or how many meals I skip, I feel unable to meet my financial obligations . . . I cannot afford to eat anywhere besides the free meals provided at lunch talks. Healthy food would be much appreciated as I feel my health is suffering because I only eat pasta or arepas for lunch.”
• “The dismal state of Yale’s medical mental health resources puts a significant stress on the most vulnerable members of our community, which I believe intersects with socioeconomic disadvantage in compounding ways.”
• “Fund mental health care at the law school so all students have access, not just those who can afford to pay for their own outside therapist.”

5. Caring for dependents.

Additionally, students across academic programs specifically mentioned the challenges of supporting dependents. For instance:

• “The State of Connecticut gives healthcare to young children. The families of JSD students currently are not eligible because, in order to qualify, their visa has to run

\textsuperscript{30} A different survey of the YLS student body, conducted in 2014, found evidence of socioeconomic disparities in access to mental healthcare. *Falling Through the Cracks A Report on Mental Health at Yale Law School*, Yale Law School Mental Health Alliance (2014) at 18, https://law.yale.edu/sites/default/files/area/department/studentaffairs/document/falling_through_the_cracks.pdf [https://perma.cc/68YW-DDQ3] (“Although the two cohorts experienced mental health challenges at similar rates, respondents whose families earned less than $200,000 annually were less likely than their wealthier peers to use mental health services (26% vs. 38%), more likely to consider but ultimately refrain from seeking mental health services (28% vs.15%), and more likely to report having unsuccessfully attempted to use mental health services (7% vs. 3%). This divergence seems to be due to wealthier students’ superior access to outside mental health resources.”). A more recent survey, conducted in 2019, also examined YLS students’ access to mental healthcare, but it did not collect socioeconomic data. *Navigating Without a Map*, Yale Law School Working Group on Mental Health and Wellness (2020).
from January - January. Yale insists on issuing a visa from May - May for financial aid reasons, which means that JSD students have to pay exorbitant childcare costs - even though they could avail of free state services.”

- “Free childcare for YLS students.”
- “Financial aid should award more front-end grants to students with difficult family financial backgrounds. Students like myself will not only have to support themselves and their children, but also their parents when they leave here.”


Finally, several students expressed that YLS's current financial aid programs should be not just reformed, but replaced with a tuition-free model. Since our survey data was collected, YLS has taken steps in this direction, with the faculty recently approving an income-tiered financial aid model that will aim to cover tuition fully for the highest-need students.

- “YLS should consider eliminating tuition.”
- “End tuition. ($250 million is 1% of Yale's endowment. I reject the argument that it’s a pie-in-the-sky number.)”
- “YLS should be seriously working to go tuition free. Obviously, there are lots of things we can and should spend money on, and this would be a huge undertaking—but genuinely, we *could be* the vanguard of socioeconomic justice in the legal profession, and we’re not.”
- “FREE TUITION—NYU med does this, we have a billion-dollar endowment, why can't we make this happen?”
- “Consider free tuition for all students or for students with the lowest incomes.”
- “There's no good reason this school shouldn't be tuition-free or at least reduce its tuition substantially.”
- “The school could afford to go tuition-free, which would be huge.”
- “Make tuition free for the poorest students instead of waiting until we have enough money to make tuition free for everyone.”
- “It is insane that the university with a $30B endowment charges tuition at all. The high-tuition high-aid model has been a complete failure.”
- “Ideally, YLS should be tuition-free.”
- “The school still charges tuition (which is ridiculous; this school has a massive endowment).”

V. Progress on 2017 Recommendations

Below we list the recommendations made in 2017 by the previous Class/Action Report Authors, based on the 2016 Survey, followed by the current status of each recommendation.

1. Admissions.
1.1. The Admissions Office should either internally or with an outside consultant regularly reassess its admissions criteria and procedures to identify barriers for students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, including practices that may have a disparate impact on students from such backgrounds.

➢ Dean Ingber stated these goals in her first meeting with FGP and has implemented programs (detailed below) to increase the number and yield of low-income applicants.

1.2. The Admissions Office should hire a full-time employee to oversee recruitment of underrepresented students and may want to hire more diversity representatives.

➢ Complete. The Office hired an Associate Director of Admissions and Diversity Initiatives (previously Quinn Brown, now Jon Perdue).

1.3. The Admissions Office should collect data regularly and monitor outreach to and yield from low-income, first-generation, and FGP applicants. The Admissions Office should especially collect data on why low-income admits decide not to matriculate.

➢ Complete. The YLS application now allows students to self-identify as first-generation, and the Admissions Office retains aggregate data to measure and improve the yield rate. Dean Ingber reported to Authors that the observed yield rate for first-generation applicants is about equal to the overall figure.

1.4. The Admissions Office should publish a timeline, with numeric goals, for increases in the number of low-income and working-class students as a percentage of the student body.

➢ Socioeconomic diversity has increased in recent classes. Per the Admissions Office: “While increasing the diversity of the student body along SES lines is a priority for the Law School and the Admissions Office, no timeline has been published nor are there specific numeric goals.”

1.5. The Admissions Office should advocate that LSAC allow all law school applicants to self-report socioeconomic and/or first-generation status and then encourage such applicants to apply to the law school, possibly using similar practices to the way URM applicants are recruited.

➢ Dean Gerken and the Admissions Office facilitated student input for the LSAC working group and have asked LSAC to provide prospective applicants with the opportunity to report first-generation status. To our knowledge, LSAC has not yet made this change.
1.6. The Admissions Office should expand its pre-application outreach to public universities with diverse populations, especially in underrepresented regions of the country.

➢ Admissions launched a webinar series directed at flagship public universities with diverse student bodies. FGP students have joined these webinars to assist with Q&A from hundreds of potential applicants. In addition, Admissions implemented a new inquiry form and database that allows them to identify first-generation prospective applicants. These applicants are then connected to a variety of recruiting materials and events, often in conjunction with current FGP students. When travelling to a city or region for on-campus recruiting, Admissions has worked wherever possible to visit public universities as part of the trip, so as to connect with a more diverse range of prospective students. In addition, school visits regularly involve a recruiting event specifically for first-generation and low-income prospective applicants (in addition to the general events for all prospective applicants).

1.7. The Admissions Office should affirmatively encourage applicants and admits taking advantage of fee waivers and travel reimbursements for visiting the law school.

➢ Complete. The Admissions Office now discusses fee waivers during the aforementioned webinars. The Financial Aid website links to the fee waiver application and states: “Need-based fee waivers are generously granted, and parental information is not requested as part of the fee waiver application . . . Please note that neither the request for, nor the granting of, a need-based fee waiver has any bearing on admissions decisions.” When discussing with Authors, Dean Ingber described the fee waivers as “basically available for the asking.” Regarding travel, the Admissions Office sends FGP a list of admits who self-identified on their YLS applications. FGP reaches out to these admits before ASP and assists with travel reimbursement.

1.8. Faculty members should be trained in reading applications through the lens of socioeconomic diversity. The Admissions Office should circulate guidance or best practices.

➢ To date, no such training or guidance is provided.

2. Finances.

2.1. The law school should seriously consider measures to limit increases to student debt so that financial needs do not become an even larger factor in students’ career decisions.

➢ In 2017-18, the annual unit loan amount ranged between $44,700 and $46,700 (depending on class year). By 2019-20, the annual unit loan amount had increased by
$3,600, for a new range of $48,300 to $50,300.

2.2. The law school should lead the way by meeting 100% of financial need for low-income students, possibly with grants that cover the full cost of attendance. The minimum loan amount should be eliminated for students below a certain wealth threshold.

➢ All students are still expected to take out a unit loan before receiving YLS scholarships. However, after a faculty vote last December, YLS is undertaking a multi-year fundraising effort to eliminate tuition for its highest-need students. As a first step, students from families earning less than the federal poverty line will receive $4,000 Horizon Grants, starting in fall 2021.

2.3. The law school should increase financial aid and improve COAP for married students and students with dependents.

➢ Beginning in 2017-18, the Office of Financial Aid increased the dependent care allowance from $5,000 to $8,000 per dependent. This allowance increases scholarship by $8,000. The COAP policy has not changed.

2.4. The law school should provide additional funding for J.S.D. candidates to cover the average number of years it takes to complete the degree, which we understand to often be more than the two years currently funded.

➢ In March 2020, the Graduate Office accepted applications for a limited number of J.S.D.s to receive third-year funding. To Authors’ knowledge, however, no permanent policy change has yet resulted.

2.5. Instead of allowing students to take out an additional COAP eligible loan during a clerkship, clerkships should be treated like any other eligible employment and immediately covered by COAP. Such COAP payments could be subject to reimbursement by the student if their post-clerkship income is too high to be COAP-eligible (e.g., biglaw associates).

➢ Students who clerk continue to receive COAP-eligible loans, rather than general COAP disbursements.

2.6. The committee should also consider the expansion of emergency loans and grants and the elimination of the summer earnings cap for some if not all students. Emergency loans should be better publicized and easier to access.

➢ The summer earnings policy has been improved to deduct a savings allowance equal to 15% of net income for weeks 1-10 and 75% of net income for weeks 11 and on. In
addition, the Dean’s Office launched the YLS Safety Net to provide emergency grants. This fund was developed in conjunction with FGP and unveiled as part of the school’s COVID-19 response.

2.7. SPIF and the summer earnings cap should be adjustable based on the city where students are working, with a floor of $7,500. We also recommend regularly reviewing SPIF funding and the summer earnings cap every three years.

➢ The SPIF amount has risen to $8,000 ($667 per week for up to 12 weeks), up from $7,500 for summer 2019, but there still are no adjustments for local cost of living.

2.8. The annual budget for cost of attendance should increase its estimate for cross-country or foreign travel and, separately, moving costs at the beginning and end of each term.

➢ The Office of Financial Aid adds a transportation component to the cost of attendance, “from the student’s permanent home address (as reported on FAAST and/or FAFSA) to New Haven based on a universal assessment of average travel costs on a state-by-state or country-by-country basis.” Dean Gerken, in coordination with FGP, has fundraised for a “home for the holidays” initiative, whereby donors can support students’ long-distance travel.

2.9. The law school should explore financing options for students to use during the transition between loan disbursements. Possible topics to explore include additional grants or partnerships with financial institutions.

➢ In 2017-18, the Financial Aid Office reinstated the Short-Term Advances and Emergency Loan Program, which allows students the opportunity to request up to $3,000 of their anticipated credit up to 10 days before the start of classes. Then, effective Fall 2020, the University changed the disbursement date for credit refunds. Students now can receive their full refund 10 days before the start of the term (which is the earliest allowed by federal regulations).

3. Coker Fellowships and TA/RA positions.

3.1. Increase funding for Coker Fellowships and RA positions to match University Teaching Fellow jobs to curb the phenomenon of students foregoing job opportunities at the law school because of financial considerations.

➢ To Authors’ knowledge, no change has occurred; however, several other policy developments have advanced socioeconomic equity in YLS student employment. First, the Office of Financial Aid collaborated with FGP on a new term-time employment policy. All student employees now receive a $5,000 earnings shelter—which is more
than the pay for a Coker Fellowship, but still less than the standard pay for one-semester as a Yale College Teaching Fellow (a position often available to law students). Above that, term-time earning will either offset documented expenses that are unmet in the basic budget or reduce the student’s loan burden (not YLS scholarships, as was previously the case). Furthermore, if a student opts for graded RA work (i.e., foregoing pay), the grading basis now will be “Credit/Fail” rather than “Honors/Pass/Fail.” This levels the playing field for students who, for financial reasons, must take paid rather than graded work.

3.2. Increase transparency regarding applications for RA positions, Coker Fellowships, Clerkships, Public Interest fellowships, etc.

➢ In response to Working Group recommendations, the law school launched a new hiring platform at http://studentpositions.law.yale.edu. Furthermore, the law school hosted earlier information sessions for Coker Fellows, encouraged all small group professors to publish a statement describing what they seek in a Coker, and extended the Coker interview period from one week to two.

3.3. Refuse to process RA applications if the professor has not made a public posting of the RA position, subject to certain exemptions (e.g., working with previously employed students).

➢ Dean Gerken has strongly encouraged faculty to use the new hiring platform linked in 3.2. If faculty do hire outside the platform, they nonetheless must set clear expectations about the work they are seeking.

4. Faculty and curriculum.

4.1. The Faculty Hiring Committee should consider class as it intersects with racial and gender identity in targeting and recruiting entry level and lateral hires from underrepresented backgrounds. As of Spring 2017, only two full-time faculty members identify as first-generation professionals.

➢ Authors know anecdotally that recent hires have improved faculty diversity, and the figure has at least doubled. However, faculty were not surveyed for this Report.

4.2. Students from low-income backgrounds, especially students of color, students from underrepresented undergraduate institutions, and older students, should be brought into the faculty hiring process both to help recruit those who have received offers as well to establish mentorship relationships for those students who may lack access.

➢ The Faculty Hiring Committee now invites students to participate in the faculty hiring process. Members are chosen by the Student Representatives.
4.3. Assign faculty mentors outside of the small groups, and set a required number of meetings between each advisee and advisor.

➢ No formal mentorship program has launched. However, student organizations have expanded faculty lunches, and OSA piloted a similar program in Spring 2020.

4.4. The faculty and administration, with student input, should develop and implement best practices for creating inclusive classroom environments for students from low-income backgrounds, including training about implicit bias and assumptions so that professors do not embarrass or marginalize students based on class background, geography, university attended, or experience with the legal profession.

➢ During Spring 2020, the Law Teaching Program offered joint faculty/student workshops on pedagogy. The Deputy Dean (first Professor Kysar, and later Professor Ayres) also incorporated equitable teaching practices into their semesterly memorandum, “Our Educational Environment.”

4.5. Faculty should reconsider requiring instructor permission for course enrollment; and if they do teach such courses, they should be transparent about what is being considered in a candidate’s resume, writing sample, etc.

➢ This practice remains unchanged. The net effect is unclear: some faculty may use it to curate a seminar with diverse student experiences, while others may (in effect) dissuade lower-income students by placing undue weight on a ritzy resume.

4.6. Faculty should endeavor to make all readings available electronically, or as much as possible. Faculty should at least make scans of the readings for the first two weeks of class accessible to all students in their classes on the Inside Site or Canvas.

➢ Canvas fluency has improved, and most faculty now make first-week reading scans available online. In addition, the library has a Scan and Deliver service, which provides PDF scans within 48 hours.

4.7. The registrar should eliminate fees for late course changes.

➢ No change. A $20 course-change fee applies after week 2, which increases to $40 after week 8 and $80 after week 12.

5. **Inclusion.**

5.1. FGP should amend its constitution and policies to make it clear that the group is a space for low-income and lower-middle income students, [even] if their parents are
professionals. FGP should also work on a guide for students from low-SES backgrounds, available to all students to reach those who may be low-income but do not want to join the group.

➢ **FGP’s Constitution now states that it is open to first-generation professionals, “as well as students from lower-income and working class backgrounds.” In publicizing the organization to new students, FGP opens its membership to “all who identify.” FGP has also started hosting sub-group events for first-generation college students, students from lower-income or working class backgrounds, and first-generation Americans. A 2014 guide titled “Yale Law Secrets: An Outsider’s Guide to YLS” is periodically circulated to the Wall, although it would benefit from a modernizing update.**

5.2. Other student groups should either partner with FGP or develop programming and support for members of their group that are also low-income. Student groups that organize trips, retreats, or other large events should make sure to cover all costs of the event or else make clear what contributions participants are expected to make in advance.

➢ **Affinity groups in particular have strengthened their relationships with FGP through the Alliance for Diversity, which serves as a forum for cross-group coordination and co-sponsored programming.**

5.3. Student groups and the school's program offices should plan alternative events that cater to more diverse student interests (versus the usual “wine-and-cheese” receptions).

➢ **Themed all-school happy hours largely have supplanted the wine-and-cheese receptions. In addition, FGP replaced its ASP wine reception with a luncheon.**

5.4. The Public Interest Auction should contain more raffles or reduce public bidding, so that events become more inclusive.

➢ **Authors of the 2016 Survey Report presented these concerns and options to IPILY.**

5.5. OSA should eliminate fees for school-sponsored activities (e.g., trips during orientation).

➢ **Complete. Dean Cosgrove eliminated this policy when she arrived at YLS.**

5.6. OSA should publicize (or, if necessary, construct) a map of the entire law school so that professors’ offices are more accessible and navigation isn’t a secret.
➢ Incoming students receive a map of the first floor, detailing the main hallway, seminar rooms, and administrative offices. The map does not include professors’ offices on the upper floors. Some professors describe their office location on the syllabus (e.g., “Office XX, on the second floor along York Street”). Authors consider this a best practice that should be emulated.

VI. Our Recommendations from the 2019 Survey

A. Admissions.

1. Further increase recruiting efforts at public universities. Students from these schools clustered in the lower- and middle-income ranges, whereas students from private schools (and H/Y/P especially) clustered in higher income brackets. Increasing the share of public-school recruits would likely lead to a more socioeconomically diverse admit class.

2. Focus on public-school recruiting efforts beyond the “Public Ivies.” As this survey revealed, five elite university systems accounted for one-third of all matriculated public-school recruits. This neglects other public schools, which have an untapped reservoir of lower- and middle-income students. Broader public-school recruiting could enhance racial diversity as well: For example, “other public universities” accounted for 18% of all Black students at YLS, whereas “Public Ivies” accounted for a mere 2%.

B. Financial aid.

3. Expand the YLS Safety Net to include non-emergency coverage. The Safety Net is a significant step forward and a necessity for the 39% of first-generation college graduates and 25% of first-generation professionals who could not afford an unexpected $500 expense. Our data also indicated substantial need for a non-emergency complement to assist with one-time expenses (such as moving and purchasing winter clothing) that are not built into the basic financial aid budget. As a benchmark, Yale College currently provides a $2,000 grant to incoming first-year students whose household incomes fall below $75,000 annually, in order to assist with the costs of beginning a new educational program. Our survey respondents indicated that these expenses posed particular hardships for low-income and first-generation students.

4. Match future increases in living expenses and tuition with new scholarship funding. The recent increase in the basic budget was necessary and welcome, as our survey revealed that the 2018-19 budget was not sufficient to meet students’ actual needs and expenses. When the cost of attendance increases, proportionate new
scholarship funding must also be available; otherwise, unit loans will increase by even more, and scholarships will account for a diminishing share of total need-based aid. Ideally the entire increase should be matched by scholarship funding, so that scholarships account for a growing share of total aid.

5. **Expand COAP coverage and remove disincentives in the participant contribution.** The lack of coverage for clerkships and graduate degrees makes these opportunities less available to students from lower-income and first-generation backgrounds, as compared to their upper-class peers. The current approach of offering COAP-eligible loans does little to close this opportunity gap, since students are asked to add to an already stressful loan balance. We recommend making clerkships and graduate programs eligible for COAP payments, just like other jobs. Further, the treatment of marital income and dependent care costs effectively disincentivizes those life decisions—with disproportionate impact on students from lower-income and first-generation backgrounds.

6. **Tie SPIF awards to local cost of living.** About 50% of lower- and lower middle-class students “strongly agreed” that financial needs played a major role in their summer job searches. Narrative responses showed students avoiding high-cost markets, such as the Bay Area, where the local cost of living exceeds available SPIF funding. Tying SPIF awards to local cost of living would solve this problem (and at a lower cost than increasing SPIF across the board).

7. **Implement the recently approved income-tiered financial aid model, with the goal of making YLS tuition-free for its highest-need students.** Authors are glad to report that these efforts are already underway. The faculty received an FGP report advocating for an income-tiered financial aid model, and in December, they voted to approve a phased adjustment of financial aid policies to reduce the loan burden for students of the greatest need. This effort will require a significant, multi-year fundraising campaign—one that Dean Gerken is committed to beginning expeditiously. The Dean has already announced $4,000 “Horizon Grants,” starting in fall 2021, to students from families earning less than the federal poverty line. As fundraising continues, the ultimate goal will be to make YLS tuition free for its highest-need students. Authors wish to add momentum to these ongoing efforts, which will directly remedy our observation that high debt burdens had an outsized effect on the career decisions of students from lower-income backgrounds.\(^\text{31}\)

\(^{31}\) Student responses to our survey also expressed significant support for eliminating tuition entirely. While we leave this discussion for another day, we believe there are good reasons to adopt this more ambitious goal in the long-term. For instance, at the undergraduate level, high tuition—and even the perception of high tuition—deters students from applying to a school in the first instance. *How America Values College*, Sallie Mae (2018) at 10, https://www.salliemae.com/assets/research/HAV/HAV2018_Report.pdf [https://perma.cc/69XH-VGT3] (noting that 65% of college students decide not to apply to certain schools based on cost, without having researched the school in question, and that 70% eliminated schools from consideration based on cost after some research but before applying). This effect is exacerbated by first-generation status. *Id.* However, given that our survey was conducted before even the announcement of tiered financial aid, we cannot be certain our survey respondents
C. Faculty and curriculum.

8. **Direct professors to use lower-cost course materials where possible and to provide early notice about required books.** Despite a virtually identical recommendation appearing in the 2012 Survey Report, over one-quarter of lower- and lower middle-class students still responded that the cost of course materials has factored into their course selections.

9. **Discuss this Report at a faculty training seminar.** Many of the concerns related to faculty attitudes about socioeconomic class—especially the implicitly unwelcoming behavior discussed in the narrative responses—could be redressed with awareness and reflection. Authors are grateful for the Dean’s intervention regarding explicitly disparaging behavior by the one unnamed faculty member. We also encourage public-facing steps, not only to redress past instances but also for the norm-setting power of rejecting attitudes that are inimical to socioeconomic diversity at YLS.

10. **Develop a standardized bidding form for courses requiring instructor permission.** This would replace the practice of professors requesting student CVs, which may deter or disadvantage students without a gold-star, Ivy League resume. A standardized bidding form could elicit information useful to professors in curating their seminars (such as prior research and academic interests), without all the socioeconomic telltales of a CV (such as undergraduate institutions, unpaid internships, and co-curricular activities). We recognize there has been some inertia around this issue: both of the prior Class/Action Reports also called for a rethink of the bidding procedures for instructor-permission courses. Accordingly, we encourage FGP and the administration to draft a proposed bidding form and present it for faculty consideration.

D. Inclusion.

11. **Institutionalize student involvement in school governance.** Across income levels, respondents indicated that faculty and administrators were not understanding of students’ socioeconomic differences. This is likely a root cause for the high number of policies and practices that respondents identified as structurally unwelcoming to students from lower-income backgrounds. The best permanent remedy is to put students from diverse backgrounds in the room for decision making—much like the Working Groups of 2018-19. Students currently have access to only a handful of committees, and representation is notably lacking on the major decision-making bodies (e.g., the Fiscal Committee). These committees should add

would still advocate for the elimination of tuition as the next appropriate goal in light of intervening developments. We encourage future Class/Action Committees to investigate this question further, once the tiered model has been implemented.
student members, to be chosen via a formal application process coordinated by the Student Representatives and taking into account interest, capacity, and diversity. We also recommend converting most committee proceedings into public meetings, open to any stakeholder in the YLS community.

12. **Prioritize cross-sponsorship for student organization events, and increase OSA funding for those events.** Appendix A gives empirical support for class/race intersectionality among YLS students. Student groups should strive, with school backing, to create more settings where these intersectional identities are supported.

13. **Incorporate a first-generation experiences panel into fall orientation.** In some years past, FGP has hosted a lunch event, intended for the broader student body, where members share their experiences being first-generation at YLS. Our survey respondents indicated there is still significant work needed to improve student understanding of socioeconomic diversity. We recommend institutionalizing this FGP panel and taking it to a broader audience at fall orientation. As an added advantage, orientation aligns with a formative time for the social landscape, when inadvertent misunderstandings can cut off peer relationships at the root.

**E. Wellness.**

14. **Found a Health & Wellness Committee and task it with eliminating the socioeconomic-related health disparities at YLS.** A substantial share of students, and especially first-generation students, reported that financial considerations have affected their decisions about whether to seek medical care. Our survey responses suggested a number of starting topics to consider: adequacy of insurance, coverage outside of New Haven, nutrition, childcare, and access to clinical mental healthcare.
Appendix A: Controlling for Income, POC and First-Gen Students
Self-Identified with a Lower Social Class than their Peers

To understand the influence of various demographic factors on respondents’ self-reported social class, we ran the following simple regression:

\[ \text{Class}_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \times \text{Income group}_i + \beta_2 \times \text{POC}_i + \beta_3 \times \text{FGP}_i + \beta_4 \times \text{Female}_i + \beta_5 \times \text{Region}_i + \epsilon \]

where \( \text{Class}_i \) is respondent \( i \)'s self-reported class (converted to a 1 to 5 numerical scale, where 1= “lower/working class,” 2 = “lower/middle class,” and so on); \( \text{Income group}_i \) is the respondent’s income group converted into a numerical value (i.e., 1 for household income “$15k or below,” 2 for “$15k-$30k”, and so on); \( \text{POC}_i \) is a dummy variable equal to 1 if the respondent selected any non-white racial identification; \( \text{FGP}_i \) is a dummy variable equal to 1 if the respondent selected either first-generation professional or first-generation college student; \( \text{Female}_i \) is a dummy variable equal to 1 if the respondent selected female as their gender; and \( \text{Region}_i \) is a categorical variable for the geographic region in which the respondent grew up.

The figure below reports the results of this regression. As we would expect, income group has a highly significant and positive relationship to self-reported class. Of most interest to us here, though, is the fact that \( \text{POC} \) and \( \text{FGP} \) have significant negative relationships to self-reported class. This suggests that being a person of color and being a first-generation student exert separate, negative influences on students’ self-reported class. It is also worth noting that \( \text{Female} \) does not have a significant coefficient, suggesting that there is not a “gender gap” in self-reported class.

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32 NB: The same results held when we used the actual dollar value of income rather than the numerical value of which income bracket the respondent reported.
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<td>0.017</td>
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<tr>
<td>POC1</td>
<td>-0.254***</td>
<td>0.061</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FGP1</td>
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<td>Residual Std. Error</td>
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<tr>
<td>F Statistic</td>
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Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01
Appendix B: Questions from the 2019 Survey

Class/Action Survey 2019-20

I. Background

This survey is intended to assess the attitudes of current Yale Law School students about class and socioeconomic status. YLS students who complete the survey and submit their Yale e-mail in the follow-up submission form will be entered into a raffle. Your email address will not be tied to your responses to the survey. Thank you for taking the time to complete the survey.

If you are not a current Yale Law School student, please do not proceed.

Note: Preserving your privacy is important to us. In the interest of ensuring anonymity, if any demographic group has less than 15 respondents, their responses will not be attributed to them in association with that group identity, e.g., if less than 15 women were to respond, we would not share their responses in association with their gender identity.

If you have any questions, please contact kathryn.pogin@yale.edu

Q3 Current Class Year

- 1L (1)
- 2L (2)
- 3L (3)
- LLM (4)
- Other (please specify, e.g., JSD) (5) __________________________________________

Q4 Are you pursuing or planning to pursue a joint degree?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q59 How do you identify your gender? (Note: This question has two sub-parts)

Q5 How do you identify your gender? (Sub-part I) (Please select all that apply)

- Woman (1)
- Man (3)
- Non-binary (4)
- Genderqueer (2)
- Other or Refuse to Disclose (5) __________________________________________

Q60 How do you identify your gender? (Sub-part II) (Please select all that apply)
Transgender (1)
Cisgender (2)
Gender non-conforming (5)
Other or Refuse to Disclose (3)

Q6 How do you identify your sexual orientation? (Please select all that apply)

Straight (1)
Gay/Lesbian (2)
Bisexual (3)
Pansexual (4)
Asexual (5)
Queer (7)
Other or Refuse to Disclose (6)

Q67 Do you identify with, or as, any of the following? (Please select all that apply)

Disabled or as a person with a disability (1)
Deaf or hard-of-hearing (2)
Blind (3)
Neurodiverse or neurodivergent (4)
Autistic, as a person with autism, or on the autism spectrum (5)
Chronically ill or as having a chronic illness (6)
Mentally ill or as having a mental illness (7)
Learning impaired, as a person with a learning impairment, or nontraditional learning style (11)
As one or more of the above, but I do not want to specify (8)
Other or Refuse to Disclose (9)
None of the above (10)

Q7 Race/Ethnicity (Please select all that apply)

Native American/American Indian or Alaska Native (1)
East Asian (2)
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (3)
South or Southeast Asian (4)
Middle Eastern or North African (5)
Black or African American (6)
Hispanic or Latinx (7)
Q8 Are you an international student?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Skip To: Q9 If Are you an international student? = Yes

Skip To: Q10 If Are you an international student? = No

Display This Question:

If Are you an international student? = Yes

Q9 What continent or geographical region are you from?

________________________________________________________________

Q10 Undergraduate Institution

- Harvard/Yale/Princeton (1)
- Other Ivy (2)
- Other Private University (4)
- Liberal Arts College (3)
- Michigan/UNC-Chapel Hill/UT Austin/UVA/The UC system (8)
- Other Public University (5)
- University Outside the US (6)
- Other (7) ________________________________________________

Q11 Other Degrees (Please list degrees other than an undergraduate degree that you hold; leave blank if none)

________________________________________________________________

Q12 II. Class Background

Q13 I would describe my background as...

- Lower/working class (1)
- Lower middle class (2)
- Middle class (3)
Q14 What is the highest level degree any of your parent(s) or guardian(s) received during your pre-college years?

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</table>

Primary Parent/Guardian Earner (1)

Secondary Parent/Guardian Earner (2)

Q15 What was the average size of your household during your pre-college years?

- 1 (only you) (1)
- 2 (you and one other person, e.g., a parent or guardian) (2)
- 3 (you and two other persons) (3)
- 4 (you and three other persons) (4)
- 5 (you and four other persons) (5)
- 6+ (you and five or more other persons) (6)

Q16 How many persons in your pre-college household were your parent or guardian?

- 1 (1)
- 2 (2)
- Other (3) ____________________________

Q17 Please estimate your family’s average household income during your pre-college years.

Please use your best estimate.
Q18 Was your family's average household income during and after your college years, roughly the same as, or different than, your pre-college years?

- Same (1)
- Different (2)

Display This Question:

If Was your family's average household income during and after your college years, roughly the same... = Different

Q19 Please estimate your family's average household income during and after your college years.

Please use your best estimate.

- $15k or below (1)
- $15k-$30k (2)
- $30k-$50k (3)
- $51k-$100k (4)
- $101k-$150k (5)
- $151k-$200k (6)
- $201k-$300k (7)
- $301k-$500k (8)
- $501k-$1m (9)
- Over $1m (10)

Display This Question:

If Was your family's average household income during and after your college years, roughly the same... = Different
Q66 What was the average size of your household during and after your college years?

- 1 (only you) (1)
- 2 (you and one other person) (2)
- 3 (you and two other persons) (3)
- 4 (you and three other persons) (4)
- 5 (you and four other persons) (5)
- 6+ (you and five or more persons) (6)

Q20 Which of the following best describes the region where you lived during the majority of your pre-college years?

- Outside the US (1)
- Northeast US (including NY) (2)
- Northwest US (3)
- Midatlantic US (4)
- Midwestern US (5)
- Southeastern US (6)
- Southwestern US (7)
- West US (including HI and AK) (8)
- Puerto Rico or US Territory (9)

Q21 Which of the following best describes the community where you lived during the majority of your pre-college years?

- Rural (1)
- Suburban (2)
- Urban (3)

Q22 Which of the following accurately describes you? Please select all that apply.

- First generation professional (i.e., first in your family to attend post-undergraduate professional school) (1)
- First generation college student (2)
- An immigrant or a naturalized immigrant (not inclusive of those on, e.g., a J or F visa) (4)
- American-born child of an immigrant (11)
- None of the above (12)
Q23 III. YLS Experience

Q24 Class and socioeconomic status has affected my YLS experience.

- Strongly agree (1)
- Somewhat agree (2)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Somewhat disagree (4)
- Strongly disagree (5)

Q25 Please explain your answer to the question above.

________________________________________________________________

Q26 YLS students are understanding of the experiences of people from all socioeconomic backgrounds.

- Strongly agree (1)
- Somewhat agree (2)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Somewhat disagree (4)
- Strongly disagree (5)

Q27 Please explain your response to the question above.

________________________________________________________________

Q28 YLS faculty are understanding of the experiences of people from all socioeconomic backgrounds.

- Strongly agree (1)
- Somewhat agree (2)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Somewhat disagree (4)
- Strongly disagree (5)

Q29 Please explain your response to the question above.

________________________________________________________________

Q30 YLS administration is understanding of the experiences of people from all socioeconomic backgrounds.

- Strongly agree (1)
- Somewhat agree (2)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Somewhat disagree (4)
Q31 Please explain your response to the question above.

________________________________________________________________

Q32 The basic budget estimate that YLS financial aid provides for room, board, and living expenses for 1 person accurately captures my cost of living expenses for the academic year.

- Strongly agree (1)
- Somewhat agree (2)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Somewhat disagree (4)
- Strongly disagree (5)

Q33 Please explain your answer to the question above.

________________________________________________________________

Q34 Financial needs have played a major role in my job search process for my 1L and/or 2L summers.

- Strongly agree (1)
- Somewhat agree (2)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Somewhat disagree (4)
- Strongly disagree (5)

Q35 Please explain your answer to the question above.

________________________________________________________________

Q36 Financial needs have played a major role in my job search process for my post-graduation job. Please include decisions about clerkships, fellowships, and firm jobs.

- Strongly agree (1)
- Somewhat agree (2)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Somewhat disagree (4)
- Strongly disagree (5)

Q37 Please explain your answer to the question above.
Q38 Financial needs have played a major role in my decision to pursue an RA/TA position, Coker Fellowship, clinical experience, teaching fellowship, or any other activity at YLS.

- Strongly agree (1)
- Somewhat agree (2)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Somewhat disagree (4)
- Strongly disagree (5)

Q39 Please explain your answer to the question above.

________________________________________________________________

Q40 Financial needs have played a role in my decision to take a particular course (e.g. cost of course materials or course timing).

- Strongly agree (1)
- Somewhat agree (2)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Somewhat disagree (4)
- Strongly disagree (5)

Q41 Please explain your answer to the question above.

________________________________________________________________

Q64 Financial need have played a role in my decision to seek medical care while at YLS (e.g., cost of co-pays)

- Strongly agree (1)
- Somewhat agree (2)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Somewhat disagree (4)
- Strongly disagree (5)

Q65 Please explain your answer to the above.

________________________________________________________________

Q42 IV. Financial Resources and Expenses

Q43 When applying to law schools, did you pay for or use LSAT prep courses, admissions consultants, or private LSAT tutors?
(If yes, please name the type of preparation.)

- Yes (1) ________________________________________________
- No (2)

Q44 How are you paying for your YLS education? (Please include funding for tuition as well as personal experiences.) Please choose all that apply.

- Loans (1)
- Grants (YLS Funded) (2)
- Outside scholarships (3)
- Personal savings (4)
- Parental contribution (5)
- Spouse/Partner contribution (6)
- Non-Parent relative contribution (7)
- Other (i.e., working during school year) (8) ________________________________________________

Q62 Have you ever considered leaving law school due to financial considerations?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q63 Please explain your answer to the question above.

________________________________________________________________

Q70 Do you have $500 in liquid resources that you could put towards an emergency expense?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Refuse to Disclose (3)

Q45 If I had an emergency expense, I would be able to borrow from (check all that apply):

- Parents or guardians (1)
- Other family members (2)
- Friends (3)
- None of the above (4)

Q46 Do you financially support dependents or non-dependent family while at YLS? (Please select all that apply)

- Yes, dependents (1)
- Yes, non-dependent family (2)
- No (3)
Q47 Please explain your answer to the question above.

Q48 Are your parents' or guardians' resources included in your financial aid calculation for this academic year? For purposes of the law school, if you were 26 or younger on December 31, 2018, parental resources would be included in your expected family contribution. If you were 27 or 28 on December 31, 2018, the expected parental contribution would be decreased by 50%. If you were 29 or older on December 31, 2018, no parental contribution would be expected. For the purposes of FAFSA, you are considered an independent student if you are 24 or older.

- Yes, fully (i.e., you were under the age of 24 on December 31, 2018) (1)
- Yes, partly (i.e., you were between the ages of 24 and 28 on December 31, 2018) (2)
- No (i.e., you were 29 or older on December 31, 2018) (3)
- No, I did not apply for financial aid (5)
- Refuse to disclose (4)

Q49 V. Miscellaneous

Q50 Are there ways that YLS students, faculty and the administration could be more supportive of students from all socioeconomic backgrounds and students' financial need? Are there specific programs or policies you would like to change? If so, please explain.

Q71 What new policies or initiatives should YLS pursue with regard to socioeconomic backgrounds?