

Yale Alumni Association's Assembly and Convocation 2022

This year's YAA Assembly took place on Thursday and Friday, November 10 and 11. Its theme, "Yale's Global Initiatives," was reflected in all of the events and presentations, starting with an awards ceremony on Thursday afternoon. YAA's Board recognized about twenty clubs and programs around the world that are working to fulfill Yale's commitment to service both to the University and to their regions. These included larger alumni clubs such as those from Chicago and South Florida as well as smaller localized initiatives in New Haven and as far away as Hong Kong. I was impressed by the very large number of Yale alumni who have found creative ways to further Yale's educational mission through community service. The reach appears to be global.

The next morning President Peter Salovey developed the theme further as he addressed the assembly of several hundred alumni representatives in Sprague Hall. He began by reaffirming Yale's priority to face global challenges with the University's extraordinary resources. The mission has grown more taxing because of an "assault on truth." Expert consensus is difficult to achieve due to the insidious presence of falsehoods and misinformation spread in large part by social media. Trust in science, journalism and government is low; combatting misinformation demands that we engage one another in diverse views, and Yale's educational process involves hearing from, listening to, and respecting a variety of perspectives. Affirming that at Yale "we engage!" and "we have a bias toward openness," Salovey went on to introduce the mission and work of the Jackson School of Global Affairs. The next session was devoted to this newest of Yale's graduate and professional schools, realized within the past year.

After introducing Professor Jim Levinson, the Dean of the Jackson School, President Salovey conversed with him about what took place as the Jackson Institute morphed into a full-fledged graduate school. Both men reinforced the intention of Jackson's faculty and students to engage in a variety of ideas and views drawn from backgrounds truly international. The School consists of 35-40 graduate students and 100 undergraduate majors, with students from throughout the University enrolling in its courses. Of the more than 2000 classroom seats available to students taking Jackson courses, all are full. Half of the 40 graduate students come from North America, with the other half from around the world, with no more than two from any one country. Senior Fellows, invited to complement the teaching faculty, offer at least one course and get to know students informally as well; in recent years Senior Fellows have included John Kerry, John Negroponte, Ryan Crocker, David Brooks, and Robert Ford. Jackson has just completed an invitation to sixteen "climate fellows" who were drawn from among three thousand applicants. The goal here is to give rise to a cadre of "climate leaders" and thus raise Yale's role in confronting climate change. This initiative was described by Ambassador Paul Simons who joined the conversation on a big screen from his perch at the Climate Change Conference at Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt. One of Jackson's Senior Fellows, Simons described Yale's growing role in climate planning and the ways in which Jackson students are making a difference as they study the challenges and help implement solutions. Three of the senior policy presenters at Sharm are graduates of Jackson's programs, and staff members include many Yale alums.

The morning concluded with three members of Yale's Board of Trustees, previously known as the Corporation, discussing their roles as leaders of the University. Senior Fellow Joshua Bekenstein chatted with Marta Tellado and Joshua Steiner. The three described the functioning of the Board's committee system and its interworking with the administration. Recently elected, Ms. Tellado took us through the thorough process that oriented her to the work of the Board and introduced her to the breadth of University programs. With a board of only sixteen members, each individual gets all the more involved and undertakes a greater set of responsibilities. The Senior Fellow described his task as coordinating sixteen opinions and working toward consensus. It's incumbent on the Board to reach decisions rather than try to accommodate every opinion. Each member creates opportunities for candid communications with faculty and students as well as administrators, an essential step when controversial issues arise.

I presume to speak for other YAA assembly reps in thanking Yale's top leadership for their enlightened commitment to the University's welfare in a world distinguished by global challenges.