

Yale Alumni Support 92 First-Year Scholars at Yale in 7th Annual Program

By Michael Watson '81 | Posted September 23, 2022



Twenty-five alumni arrived at Yale to engage with 92 incoming first-generation, low-income first-year students in the seventh annual [“Alumni Perspectives: Navigating Yale & Beyond” on Saturday, July 23, 2022.](#) This full-day program, hosted by [1stGenYale](#), [First-Year Scholars at Yale \(FSY\)](#), the [Yale College Dean’s Office](#), and [Yale Summer Session](#) provides first-gen low-income alumni the opportunity to help incoming first year first-gen low-income students transition to Yale. The alumni addressed their fears and concerns, shared their experiences, and answered student questions.

The day began with a lunch for first-gen low-income alumni from all Yale schools where Yale faculty and staff gave an overview of FSY and other support programs. Following, a panel of four alumni shared their Yale College experiences and advice on how to take advantage of Yale's resources with the students. To top it off, students and alumni met for a reception in the Presidents' Room at the Schwartzman Center where students confidently approached alumni to ask questions about how to pursue a career in specific fields, like consulting and finance, and how to give back to the community.

Alumni and FSY students were welcomed to Yale by Lise Chapman '81 MBA, Founder and Chair, 1stGenYale; Jeanne Follansbee, Yale Summer Session Dean and Associate Dean of Yale College; Pericles Lewis, Dean of Yale College; Faculty Director, FSY, and moderator for the alumni panel Professor Albert Laguna, Associate Professor of American Studies and Ethnicity, Race, and Migration; and Weili Cheng '77, Executive Director of the Yale Alumni Association.



First-Generation Alumni Panelists Yonas Asfaw-Cooper '17, Incoming Law Clerk at WilmerHale; Christian Milian-Santiago '21, Woodbridge Fellow in the Office of the Secretary and Vice President for Student Life; Allie Ossa '11, Vice

President, Diversity & Inclusion Consultant II, Global Banking & Markets and the Americas, Bank of America; and Suzanne Solensky '83, Executive Director, Literacy Volunteers of Southern Connecticut, shared powerful stories about the challenges and pressures they faced during their time at Yale.

Their stories included dealing with affluent student peers, maintaining the straddle between life at Yale and the reality of family members back home who faced challenging circumstances, and their fear of asking for help. They described how they overcame these challenges, discussed their successes during and after Yale, and offered students insights they could use to improve their experience at Yale.

Student questions and concerns were similarly aligned with themes raised by panelists. In addition, they had questions about Yale's relationship with the New Haven community and expressed interest in how they could work with Dwight Hall to volunteer.

Hearing from first-generation alumni who made it through Yale and succeeded reassured students about the future.

Giselle Cucufate '26 confided that “talking to the alumni made me realize that I belong here, and I can do a lot of things here at Yale.”

Alumni, too, were enthusiastic about their time with students, who they found to be highly curious and focused on how to make the most out of their time at Yale. Alumna Suzanne Solensky '83 reflected, “When I was an FGLI student at Yale, I would have loved to have these kinds of conversations with alumni who shared experiences similar to mine... Nothing brought home to me how much Yale has embraced greater diversity in its student body than seeing and talking with the FSY students this year. I am thrilled and honored, as part of 1stGenYale, to help make Yale more welcoming and inviting for them.”

In conclusion, bringing first-generation alumni and incoming FSY students together benefited both groups. FSY students are now better positioned to make a positive contribution to Yale and the broader society. They know that Yale alumni are there for them throughout their journey.

For more information on how alumni can participate in the 8th annual event next year, email [1stGenYale](#).

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