

Program to donate formal attire and winter wear for Yale FGLI students in California

Joanne Siu '90 started a clothing drive slated to happen this January, in hopes of helping first-generation, low-income students at the University access formal attire and winter coats.

BRIAN ZHANG 12:50 AM, DEC 07, 2022

STAFF REPORTER

Vaibhav Sharma, SeniorP hotographer

With the closure of the Asian American Cultural Center's [career closets program](#) because of the COVID-19 pandemic, it has been over two years since low-income students have been able to receive free formal wear from the University. But now, due to an initiative led by 1stGenYale, California students can get and keep suits, skirts and dress shoes, along with winter clothing.

This “SF Bay Area Warm Up and Suit Up” giveaway — slated to occur on January 7 from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. — will be localized to California residents, with future hopes for future expansion. About half of the clothing — which consists of everything from winter coats to interview-appropriate attire — is new, and the other half is second-hand. The event will take place at Live Oak School on 1555 Mariposa St. in San Francisco, and prospective attendees should RSVP [here](#).

“I imagine many of us [alumni]... had excess clothes in [our] closets from the pandemic,” said Joanne Siu ‘90, who spearheaded the organization and collection efforts. “There are a lot of alums that are



very interested in helping students, and especially first-gen, low-income students — [and] there are a lot of us whose [own] lives [were]

so transformed [by Yale].”

Siu, a first-generation college student herself, still remembers the days when she was just beginning to adjust to Yale after coming from a public high school in California with a large dropout rate. Among her most immediate needs was one for winter wear, she stated, describing the rough transition from warmer weather to New England’s bitter winters. She described challenges like these as recurring ones in the FGLI college student experience, and she looks forward to giving back to the university that once supported her as a struggling student.

Siu was pleasantly surprised by the number of volunteers and alumni who jumped to help her, both in terms of sending in clothing and promoting the event. These past few months, Siu created several dropoff sites where people can donate their new or gently used outfits. Several alumni also emailed gift certificates and clothing directly to her.

A pilot program for clothing distribution was launched in August of 2022, but the demand was lower than expected.

“[The giveaway has since] expanded it to meet the needs of more students who will be home on winter break,” 1stGen Yale President Lise Chapman ’81 SOM wrote to the News. “Knowing Joanne, there is much more to come connecting Yale alumni [and] students in meaningful ways.

In the email, Chapman noted that the drive is still accepting submissions and thanked campus organizations such as the Community Initiative at Yale and Yale First-Gen and/or Low-Income Advocacy Movement for their efforts in promoting the initiative.

Joanna Ruiz ’25, an FGLI student at the University, was delighted by the news and looks forward to potentially seeing alumni clubs across

the country and world to coordinate similar initiatives for students in their region.

Often, it is not the amount or breadth of resources available at the University that's a problem, according to Siu. It is accessibility, she said, encouraging first-generation, low-income students to both find safe, relatable spaces within other FGLI students as well as branch out into other communities with different stories and experiences.

“When I went to Yale, it was very intimidating,” Siu said. “I didn’t go skiing with a bunch of people. I didn’t go to the Harvard- Yale game and I didn’t go to Mory’s until ... somebody’s parent took me, but there are a lot of other things to do and I just want you guys to think of Yale as your sandbox to play in.”

The [University’s separate winter clothing grant](#) is accepting applications through January.

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