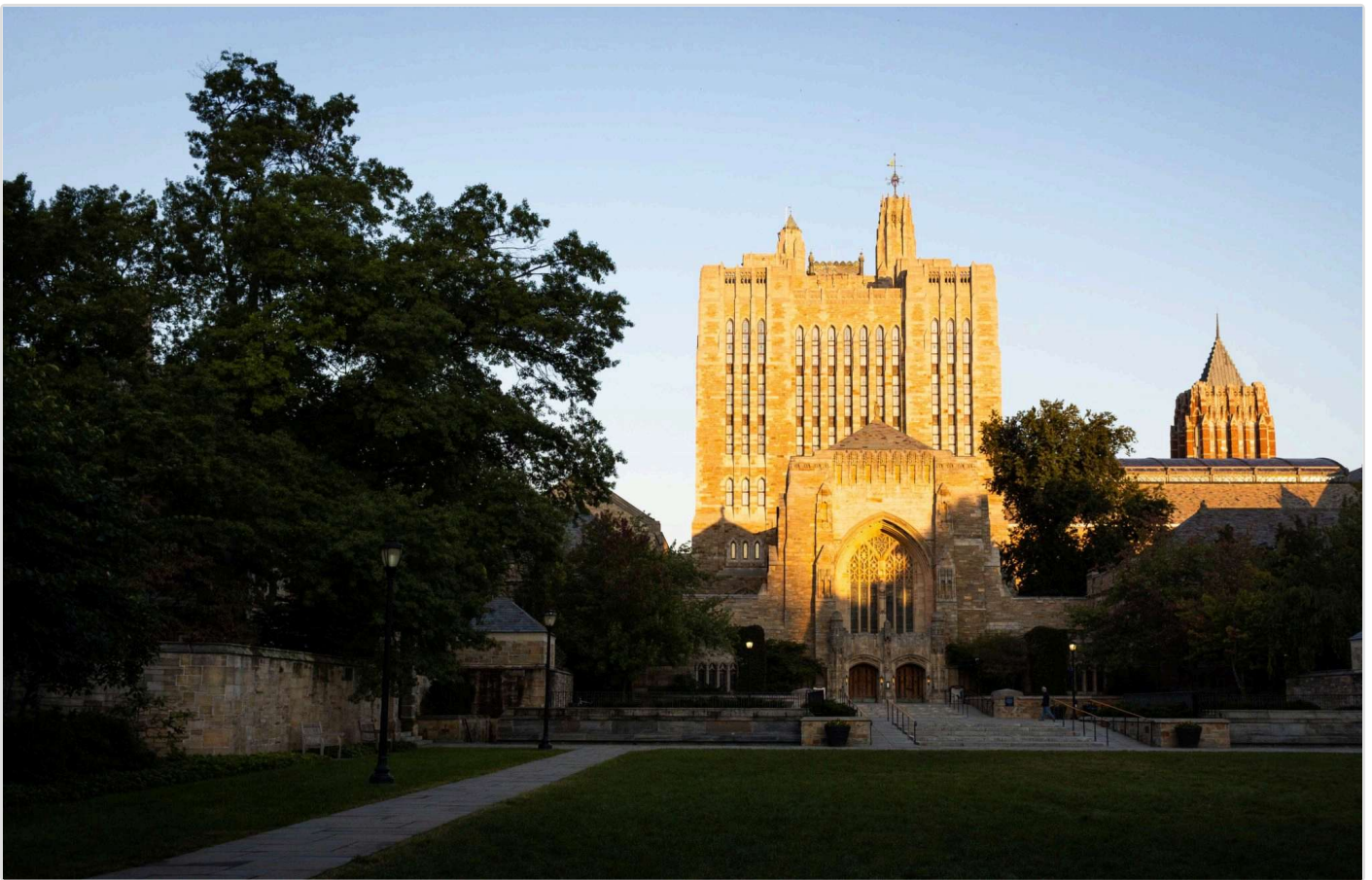


FGLI students and alumni attend family weekend picnic

HELENA LYNG-OLSEN & AUDREY STEINKAMP 12:33 AM, OCT 07, 2019

STAFF REPORTERS



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Laughter and joyful chatter filled the crisp fall air on Cross Campus as undergraduates and their relatives attended the first Students and Alumni Family Weekend Picnic on Saturday.

The event, co-sponsored by the Community Initiative at Yale and 1stGenYale, was the first family weekend event specifically geared toward first-generation and low-income students. The picnic invited all students and their families to play corn hole, eat pizza and get to know nearly a dozen alumni who came back to the University for the event. Chair of 1stGenYale Lise Chapman SOM '81 told the News that the picnic was one of many events the group sponsors to make every student at Yale feel welcomed.

“Our whole goal with this is that we want students at Yale whose families cannot come to Yale to know that they have another family here,” Chapman said. “We want to make an inclusive space where we can help this generation of students navigate and make their time here a success.”

Students brought visiting family members to the picnic, but students whose relatives could not make it to campus for the weekend were encouraged to get to know the alumni and treat them like an extended family and support system.

Suzanne Solensky GRD '94 and Jorge Anaya '19 — co-coordinators of the picnic — said their relatives rarely, if ever, came to family weekends during their time as undergraduates. They said the festivities, tailored to parents, were strange experiences for them because they were unable to participate with their friends.

“As an undergraduate, Family Weekend was very bittersweet for me. I loved the opportunity of meeting my friends’ families, but always lamented that they could not meet my own,” Anaya said. “Though I do not think a picnic can substitute the presence of students’ families on campus, I do think it is a possible way of showing that students are not alone in this institution.”

Solensky added that because her mother did not attend college, she “didn’t know how to deal with college at all” when she first visited Solensky at the University. She reiterated that one of the goals of the picnic was “to make sure families know that their students do belong at Yale.”

Ramona Burkey ’97, an FGLI alumna from Ezra Stiles, said that having groups like the Community Initiative and 1stGenYale during her time on campus would have made her feel more comfortable and could have provided a community to which she could fully connect.

“Although my groups like the [Yale Precision Marching Band] helped me find my sense of community here, a group like this would have provided a community I would have 100 percent related to,” Burkey said. “Sometimes you feel like a fish out of water here. When there isn’t the tradition of higher education in your family, it can be a big, big shift of perspective, but with support like this, I would have been able to breathe a little easier.”

As the FGLI community on campus expands, Chapman noted that many alumni are very eager to support FGLI students. When she sent out invitations three weeks ago, 35 alumni RSVP’d.

Jamie Marrara '22 described the casual setting of the picnic as comforting and refreshing because it felt like an event that was always meant to happen during family weekend. She added she did not feel like she had to go out of her way to find a space for FGLI students like herself.

“It was nice that the event specifically connected FGLI alumni with FGLI students, but it was also nice that it wasn’t super formal and didn’t ask you to bring your whole FGLI experience forward,” Marrara said. “You could go and get pizza and be around people in the same boat as you and meet people who years and years ago were in your same situation, because the point was [creating] a space for you on family weekend.”

1stGenYale was established in April 2016.

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