

2024 1stGenYale Alumni Perspectives: Navigating Yale & Beyond for First-Year Scholars at Yale

By Ted Jaditz '79 | Posted July 25, 2024



Alumni attendees



The 9th annual 1stGenYale program, “Alumni Perspectives: Navigating Yale & Beyond” at First-Year Scholars at Yale (FSY) was held on Saturday, July 13, 2024, in the recently renovated Kline Biology Tower in New Haven. FSY provides a cohort of incoming first-year students with the opportunity to engage early in the Yale experience for six weeks in the summer. 1stGenYale is an alumni organization in support of first-generation and under-resourced alumni and students. The program is an occasion for first-year students to meet others who have made a similar journey. Over forty-five alumni from Yale College and the Graduate and Professional schools – classes of 1956 to 2024 – met with

93 FSY students in an all-day program co-hosted by FSY, Yale Summer Session, and Yale College. Over 30% of the alumni were from the Classes of '22, '23, and '24, many had been in the FSY program.

Lise Chapman '81 MBA, 1stGenYale president, kicked off the program by welcoming everyone at the lunch, followed by Dean of Yale College Pericles Lewis, FSY Faculty Director Prof. Albert Laguna, and YAA Executive Director Alison Cole '99.



Yale College Dean Pericles Lewis addresses attendees

Dean Lewis discussed the importance of diversity in the student body. “One of our goals is to educate the leaders of the future. The leadership of the country must reflect the entire country.” There are many ways the current student body is more diverse than the Yale of the '70s and '80s; one is that over 20% of Yale undergraduates are the first generation in their family to attend college and who are also Low-income (FGLI). Dean Lewis discussed the programs and support that comprise Yale’s efforts to ensure that all students can succeed.

Prof. Laguna updated the group on the experiences of current undergraduates. In his remarks, he discussed his role as “a bridge between students and faculty,” the kinds of issues he encounters in his meetings with students, and the recovery from the disruption of COVID.

Afterward, Cole shared, “It was such a pleasure to attend the 1stGenYale gathering during FSY. To see the commitment of our alumni to make our students feel welcome, supported, and connected was inspiring. The impact of the alumni presence will be felt by our students for years to come and foster a perpetual cycle of engagement.”



L to R: FSY Faculty Director Prof. Albert Laguna, Solomon Gonzalez '23, Xiaoyan Huang '91, Marv Berenblum '56, and Michele Moorman '90

Following lunch, a panel of four first-generation alumni discussed their experiences at Yale. Prof. Laguna moderated as Solomon Gonzalez '23, Xiaoyan Huang '91, Marv Berenblum '56, and Michele Moorman '90 presented and then fielded questions from the

FSY students present. Questions included, “How do I figure out a major?”, “Should I go home for summer after the first year?”, “How do I learn about graduate programs?” and “How do I learn about all of Yale’s resources for students?”

Huang, the immediate past chair of the YAA Board of Governors, noted, “I was deeply touched by the genuine and earnest interest and inquiry from the students on career and life advice from the alumni. This was one of the best alumni-student events I have ever attended.”

Gonzalez echoed that sentiment. “I received so many insightful questions throughout the panel in which I was able to use my own experiences to provide advice and knowledge that I didn’t have when I was first entering Yale. It was so nice to see and hear from all these passionate incoming First-Years who will help define the future of Yale and I am grateful for being able to support their journey as an alumnus!”

Moorman added, “What struck me most about my discussions with the students - both as a panelist and an attendee - was their intentionality, curiosity, and excitement to embark on their college journey at Yale. The students are committed to creating an academic and social experience that allows them to be their authentic selves while taking advantage of Yale’s resources and opportunities and giving back to the Yale community as well.”

Berenblum shared, “I remember how difficult it was to find myself in a culture that was unlike anything I had experienced before I began my freshmen year. I see in this year’s incoming class of First Gen students a sense of awe and bewilderment as to what lies ahead. We are tied together through our common experiences and challenges that we can now face together.”

Following the panel was a two-hour networking reception for first-year students and alumni. During this time, students shared their interests and backgrounds with alumni.

Recent graduates highlighted program impact. Josh Beale ’23 related, “My journey at Yale started with FSY. It gave me tools, mentorship, and guidance as I made the transition from living on my family’s farm to pursuing a degree in MCDB. Alongside academics, research was a critical part of my Yale story, beginning with the Summer Bulldogs program and continuing through my later work in the Nachtergaele and Goodell labs. In the coming fall, I plan to continue my studies to earn a PhD in biology at Johns Hopkins in the fall.”



Alumni and students connect at the networking reception

To top off the day, 20 alumni enjoyed dinner together at a local New Haven restaurant!

Next year's conference will again be held in New Haven in mid-July. It is open to all Yale alumni to participate. For more information about 1stGenYale, [visit their website](#) or [email 1stgenyale@1stgenyale.org](mailto:1stgenyale@1stgenyale.org).

[1stGenYale](#) is a Yale alumni volunteer-led Shared Interest Group of the Yale Alumni Association (also a 501(c)3 non-profit organization) that supports the university's first-generation and under-resourced alumni and students. It provides resources in a variety of ways, including career panels, mentoring opportunities, local social gatherings, and the Summer Bulldogs Internship program for Yale College students. *All 1stGenYale activities are open to all Yale students and alumni.*

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