

Students write postcards for Yale's COVID-19 archives



October 21, 2020

What would you like future students to know about being a Yale student in 2020?

The simple question, posed by University Librarian Barbara Rockenbach in an email to students this week, struck a chord.

On Wednesday, 205 students stopped by Sterling Library over the course of several hours to scribble their answers on postcards that will be preserved in the university archives. Many others chose to answer the prompt online, uploading responses to the library's [Help Us Make History website](#) [1], developed earlier this year by the library's Manuscripts and Archives department as part of an extensive effort to document the student experience during COVID-19.

With pens and postcards provided by the library, students fanned out across the plaza in front of Sterling to reflect and write, using stone walls and even Maya Lin's iconic Women's Table as impromptu desks. They dropped the finished postcards in a paper-wrapped box destined for the University archives.

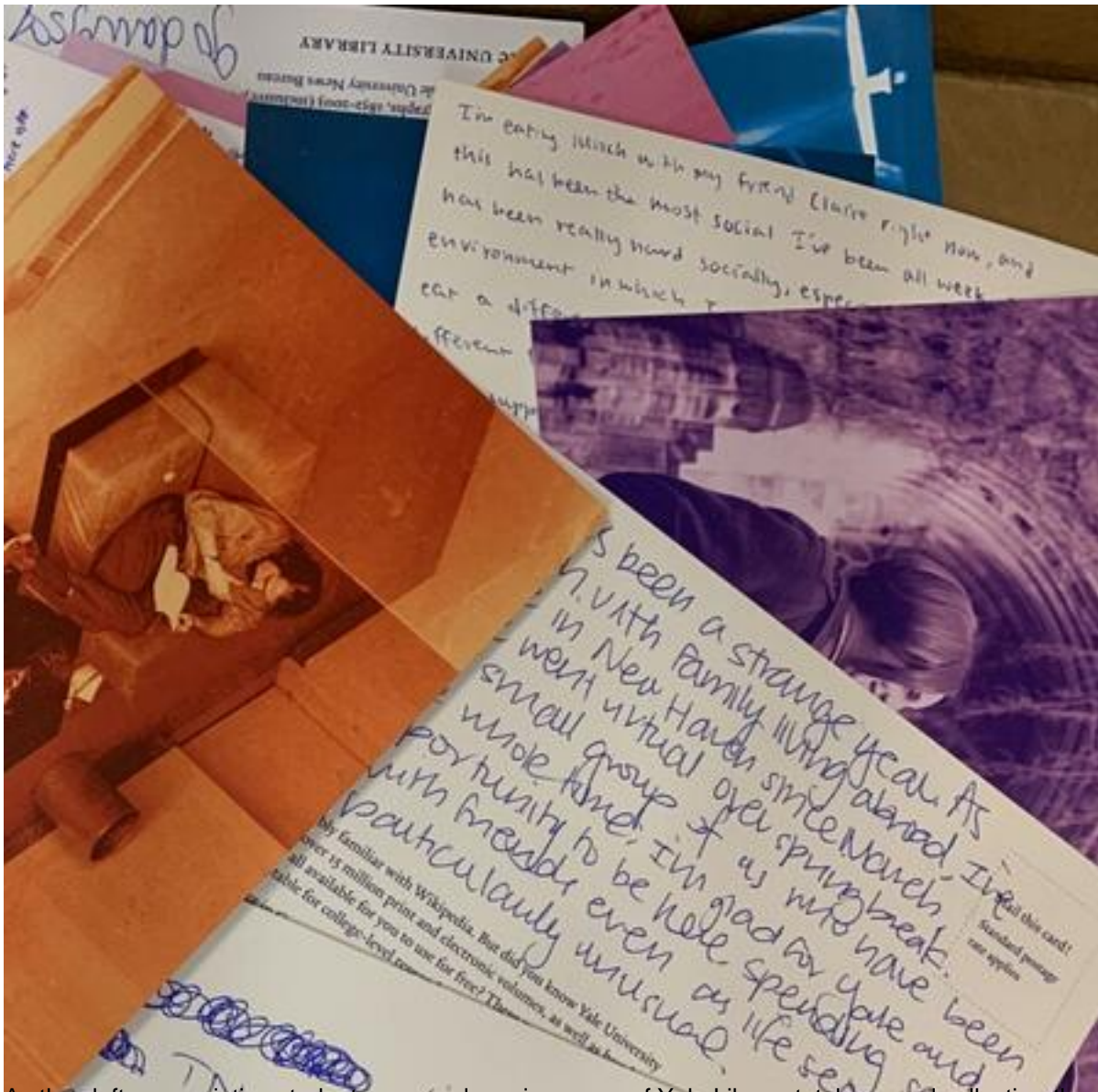
"Congratulations, you just became a primary source," said Laura Sider, director of Frontline Services for Sterling and Bass Library.

The postcards are packed with emotion, including poignant comments like these:

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Published on Yale University Library (<https://web.library.yale.edu>)

- “Life is miserable, my parents are unemployed, and this recession is horrible. School is hard but I think life will get better.”
- “COVID has been really hard socially, especially in a college environment in which I used to go to parties and eat a different meal at a different dining hall with a different friend every day... The politicized environment has been really scary, and I’m scared for the future.”
- “I miss the random small-talk before/after lecture and bumping into people on the street (and being able to see their entire face without a mask!) Yale has been keeping COVID cases very low, though, so I feel very lucky to be able to be on campus, with my friends, in person.”



As they left, appreciative students scooped up giveaways of Yale Library totebags and collection-themed coloring pages—but they seemed even more grateful for the opportunity to process their experiences so far this year, including how to maintain a sense of community within the constraints of the pandemic.

“For many of us, it was a really hard decision to come back and we’ve been wondering whether our decision to be here was the right one,” one student said. “This event makes me feel like I did the right thing. It makes me feel like we’re all in this together.”

-- Tricia Carey

Photos: Laura Sider

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Links

[1] <https://makehistory.library.yale.edu/>