

Library documents students' pandemic experiences for future researchers



May 24, 2021

On March 10, 2020, Yale president Peter Salovey announced classes would be moved online and students would not be returning to campus due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Recognizing that this was a watershed moment, Yale University Library staff quickly began planning how to document the impact of the pandemic on the Yale community.

In early April, the University Archives distributed an anonymous online survey to Yale College students. More than 200 responses provided a frank, unfiltered look at how students were coping with the crisis, the impact on their studies, and their feelings about the future.

One student described studying from home as a “juggling act” as she cared for her siblings and grandparents, while her parents were out at work. “While I have found a certain comfort in being surrounded by loved ones during quarantine, COVID-19 has ripped away any sense of normalcy,” she wrote. “My last semester of my first year at Yale was supposed to be full of memories with my friends, and events like spring fling.”

Another student expressed increased appreciation for the people in their life. “Without my family, friends, and others, my life isn’t what I actually think it is,” the student wrote. “I have realized how much I treasure these people.”

Spending more time outdoors and greater appreciation for resources were other positive outcomes highlighted by students.

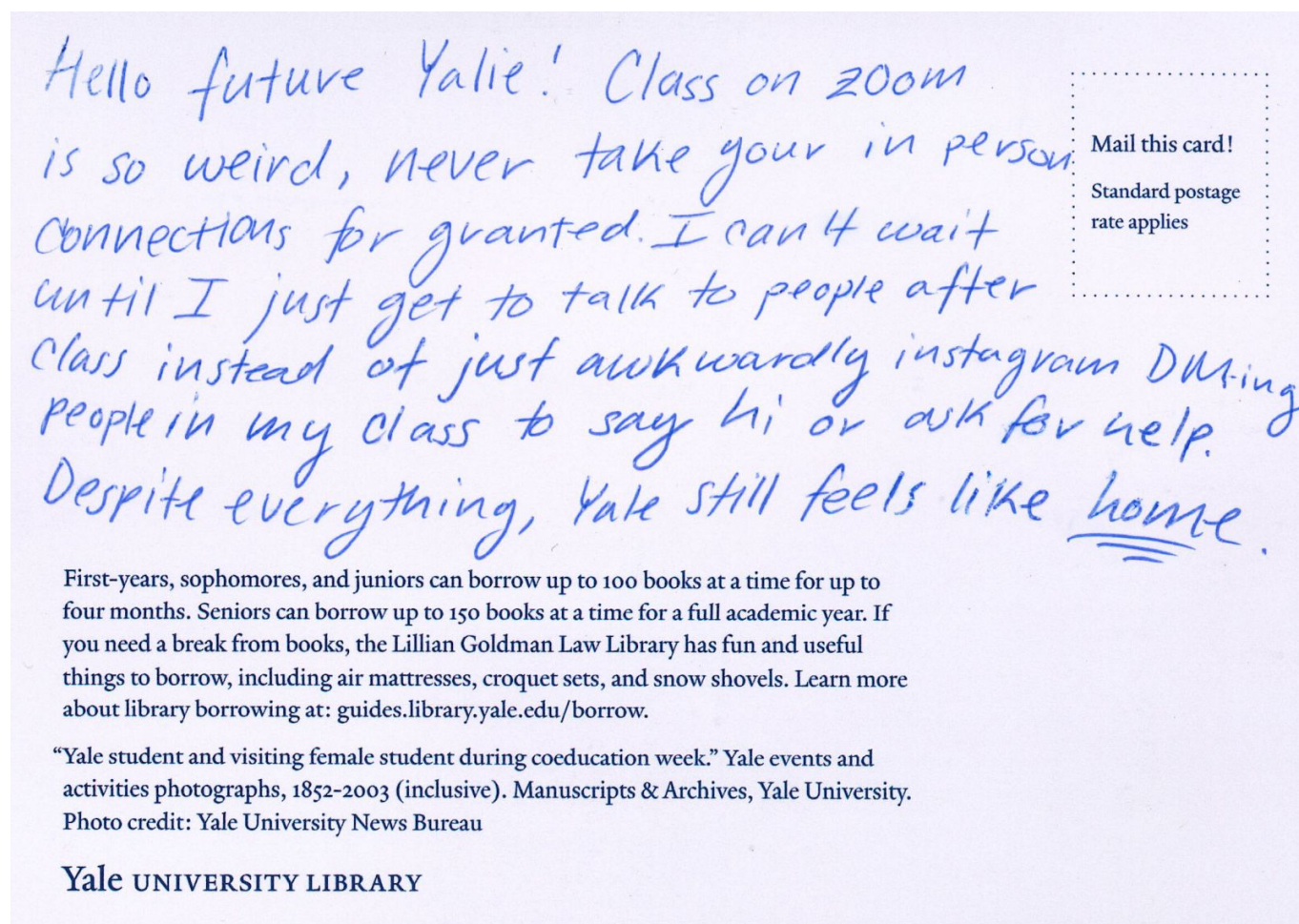
Inspired by the survey’s success, the University Archives launched the [Help Us Make History](#) [1] project in May. With assistance from the library’s Digital Humanities Laboratory, a website was developed where students could upload responses to a series of online prompts. The first prompt, [“Share a picture of your study space”](#) elicited 66

[photographs](#) [2] of students' remote learning spaces. Other prompts asked students to comment on distance learning, virtual social activities, and other personal and academic experiences.

In November 2020, the library invited students to stop by Sterling Memorial Library to write a postcard for the archives in answer to the question: "What do you want future students to know about being a student at Yale in 2020?" More than 200 students showed up to share their thoughts, fears, and hopes.

"I do miss lectures in person, but I think it's had some interesting perks," wrote a first year MD/PhD student. "We did a virtual hackathon! I feel less guilty about getting takeout since it supports the economy, and personally, I prefer small group hangouts. That being said, I do look forward to post COVID days. I miss hugs!"

Including the postcards, Help Us Make History has collected 345 responses to eight prompts. In December 2020, University Archivist Mike Lotstein discussed the project with President Peter Salovey on the podcast "[Yale Talk](#) [3]," which also featured students reading some of the postcards.



As the pandemic progressed, the University Archives found additional ways to collect and preserve pandemic experiences at Yale, including:

- Working with the Poorvu Center for Teaching and Learning to collect pandemic-related student classwork. To date, 186 papers, essays, oral histories, short films, and personal diaries have been received. The collaboration expanded in March 2021 with an invitation to faculty and graduate students to contribute recorded lectures and other pandemic-related content they developed for teaching.
- Working with Saybrook College students to produce a podcast series, "Say and Seal: Lives at Yale During COVID-19." Henry Jacob, '21, Micah Young, '21 and graduate student Adam Haliburton produced two episodes featuring pandemic-related news and interviews with students and faculty. The first episode focused on students taking a gap year during the pandemic. [Listen to the podcast](#) [4].

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- Partnering with Yale's Parents' Fund to invite Yale parents to share their perspectives on how the pandemic affected their students. Sixty seven submissions have been received.
- Archiving yale.edu websites related to the University's pandemic response and activities. Forty-eight websites have been archived from the Yale School of Public Health, the Yale School of Medicine, the Office of the President, the Office of Public Affairs and Communication, and many more.

Help Us Make History will continue to gather pandemic-related resources and perspectives through December 2021.

This article was written by [University Archivist Michael Lotstein](#) [5]. Contact him for more information on the Help Us Make History project.

Images: A student writes a postcard in Sterling Memorial Library for the Help Us Make History project. Photo by Sydney Holmes.

One of nearly 200 postcards filled out by students about their pandemic experiences. Photo from Manuscripts and Archives.

Source

URL: <https://web.library.yale.edu/news/2021/05/library-documents-students-pandemic-experiences-future>

Links

[1] <https://makehistory.library.yale.edu/> [2] <https://campuspress.yale.edu/mssa/help-us-make-history-at-the-yale-university-archives/> [3] <https://president.yale.edu/president/yale-talk/students-and-university-library-help-write-yales-history> [4] <https://yalemssa.aviaryplatform.com/collections/1124> [5] [#109;#97;#105;#108;#116;#111;#58;#109;#105;#99;#104;#97;#101;#108;#46;#108;#111;#116;#115;#116;#101;#105;#110;#64;#121;#97;#108;#101;#46;#101;#100;#117;](#)