

Bryan Paul:

Laura Noble, welcome to the Higher Ed Now Podcast. It is wonderful to have you with us today.

Lauren Noble:

Well, thank you so much, Bryan, for having me. It's a pleasure to be with you.

Bryan Paul:

I for one am supremely stoked to have the privilege to interview you, Lauren. Your resume is staggering to say the least. When I look at your description, an alumna of Yale, founder and executive director of the William F. Buckley Jr. Program, someone who has worked in political campaigns, has worked for women's organizations whose work has appeared in numerous publications online and in print. Where to begin? Well, I want to begin first with getting to know you, Lauren. Tell us a little bit about you. Your bio says so much, but what else would you like our listeners to know about you?

Lauren Noble:

Sure. Well, I'm originally from the Greater Boston area. I grew up in Lexington and then Concord, Massachusetts. I came to Yale as a freshman in the fall of 2007. I was a history major and graduated in 2011. I then worked on the Romney campaign in Boston and then in January 2013, I came back to New Haven to work on expanding the Buckley program on a full-time basis. I had started the Buckley program as a student during my senior year, and I've been doing that in the little over a decade since.

Bryan Paul:

That is incredible. Most students, like myself, spend a lot of college coming to realize what they wanted to do with their lives or, in my case, learning what they ended up not wanting to do with their lives. I was on the law school track for the longest time before I saw the light, so to speak, and realized I wanted to do something else. You had a lot of success forming groups, being engaged. What motivated you to do all that you did? What was the driving force behind Lauren Noble?

Lauren Noble:

Sure. Well, I had a good experience at Yale, but I would say one thing I felt was missing from my Yale experience was really any significant diversity of thought. There was the Yale Political Union and there were conservative groups as part of that, but I felt that in the curriculum with regard to the faculty and just in general, the speakers that were otherwise brought to campus, that something was missing. And so, that was around my junior year that I had started to think, "Oh, wouldn't it be great if we could start a simple speaker series with the express purpose of bringing intellectual diversity to campus?"

In the fall of my senior year, this is the fall of 2010, there was actually a seminar on William F. Buckley Jr. in the rise of modern conservatism. And so, I'd already been thinking of starting this speaker series, but it was that class that inspired me to name it for William F. Buckley Jr. Obviously, he got his big start with the publication of *God and Man at Yale* in 1951. It made a lot of sense and we got started with our first events in January 2011. We had about a half dozen events that first semester. It was really just a few of us students in a basement planning some events and talking about what we wanted to do with the group. Now, it's been really quite amazing to see the growth of the organization over the past decade. We're now at 526 student members. We call them student fellows. It just started as just a few of us.

Bryan Paul:

Got it. That is amazing. You have had the unique experience not only of seeing Yale firsthand, but have also had the opportunity to work with students who are currently at Yale. What was your experience at Yale like as a student? On top of that, what have you heard from students about their Yale experience today?

Lauren Noble:

Sure. I had a good experience at Yale during my four years on campus. I certainly had a number of professors whose classes I enjoyed and I got a lot out of. I was a history major. One thing that I think I see as being different today than when I was an undergraduate is the prevalence of self-censorship by students. Of the 526 students I mentioned who are involved in the Buckley program now, we hear from a good number of them that there's really this culture of self-censorship, that people hold back what they want to say both in the classroom and on campus generally because they're concerned about the reaction of their peers and classmates and professors. I think that that's one way in which things are a little bit different now. I certainly find that trend to be something that we should all be very concerned about.

Of course, this problem isn't unique to Yale. The Buckley program does a national survey every year, and we've been doing that survey since 2015 and the results we got back this year point to some really alarming trends. We had 63% of students nationwide report that they often feel intimidated from expressing a viewpoint in class because it defers from their peers. That's the highest reading that we've seen in the eight years we've been doing this survey. Nationwide, things seem to be headed in the wrong direction. While we weren't doing that survey when I was a student, I suspect the numbers were a lot lower just based on the trend and my own experience.

Bryan Paul:

Indeed, it is an alarming trend, something that other scholars and researchers have observed. The Buckley program did release its eighth annual college student survey like you mentioned just recently in October. The results are truly concerning in the main areas such as on free speech, the number in favor of using violence to stop speech jumped from 5 points to 41% in 2022. For the first time in the survey's history, a plurality, 48% versus 44% disagree that hate speech is protected by the First Amendment. A record 63%, reading straight from your summary report here, of students reported being intimidated in sharing an opinion that differed from their peers.

That is perhaps one of the more revelatory parts of these kind of surveys is that it's less coming from faculty, though certainly faculty can play a part in this self-censorship. It's more so that students feel pressure from their peers to self-censor lest they be condemned or criticized by their peers. How have students involved with the Buckley program expressed this fear or this self-censorship to you? What have they said about it?

Lauren Noble:

Well, they say that there's really a culture of shaming on campus, and I think a lot report feeling that they can't express a viewpoint, even viewpoints that are considered centrist moderate viewpoints. I think increasingly, we get students across the political spectrum. It's not just conservative students saying that they feel that they can't voice their opinion in class or on campus without a significant backlash. It's students from across the political spectrum. And so, that's certainly something that we've seen increasingly over the past five, six years. It's a trend that we're watching closely, but you can also watch it play out in the news too at Yale. There have been a couple incidents at the Yale Law School alone in the past year.

About a year ago, in the fall of 2021, there was a Native American law student who had written in a party invitation to a Constitution Day party. The party was co-hosted by the Native American Law Students Association and the Federalist Society. Some students were offended by how he had worded the email and he was brought into the dean's office and they pressured him to apologize and threatened him with professional consequences if he didn't apologize. Actually, even Yale administrators had pre-draft an apology letter from him, which he refused to sign.

I think there's the high profile incidents that you hear about like that, but then there's just the everyday interactions which you don't hear about as much sometimes. I mean, we see it in the survey data, but students choose not to speak up or I hear from a lot of students that they pick their spots. There might be certain situations and certain classes where they really don't feel comfortable speaking freely, but perhaps that a Buckley program event or somewhere else that they do feel more comfortable speaking up and really sharing their viewpoints. It's certainly a really concerning trend, and I think more needs to be done at Yale and nationwide to combat this.

Bryan Paul:

Understandable, truly astounding. Yale has been in the news a lot as of late. I mean, just recently, the Yale Law School announced that they would pull out from the US News & World Report as far as the reports of accounting or rankings for law schools. Other schools like Harvard, even recently Michigan State have followed suit. You mentioned that the Yale Law School experiencing issues of viewpoint diversity and free expression as well. I have to ask though, and this is a question I feel like I already know the answer to, but why should we care about what's happening in Yale? Obviously, Yale is considered by many to be the premier American university next to Harvard and other universities in the Ivy League, but it is arguably one isolated university. Why should we care about what's happening at Yale?

Lauren Noble:

That's a really important question, and there's certainly nowadays, there's a strain of pundits and intellectuals and even Yale alumni who think that Yale is lost to wokeness, to cancel culture, to this suffocating orthodoxy that makes real learning impossible. As you said, the 14 federal judges have said as much in their announcement that they're not going to hire Yale law clerks. And so, there's certainly a lot of concerning developments here but the fact of the matter is the future leaders of this country are being shaped by Yale and institutions like it.

Those future leaders, whether in the private sector, whether they're CEOs or whether they're in government, senators, presidents, they are passing through Yale's classrooms and courtyards. And so, what they learn at Yale and how they're shaped at Yale isn't going to stay at Yale. What happens on campus doesn't stay on campus. It's something that you often hear said, but I think it's especially true at a place like Yale, which does set some trends in higher education. You mentioned the announcement about Yale no longer participating in the US News & World Report rankings. Well, Yale was the first institution to make that big announcement, and other institutions followed suit. Yale is certainly a leader in the higher education space, but its graduates are leaders who are having and going to have a big impact on this country's future. I think that even though there's a lot to be concerned about with what's happened at Yale, we really need to fight for Yale's future and those students are certainly worth fighting for.

Bryan Paul:

Definitely. This is nothing new. I see behind you on your desk a copy of William F. Buckley, Jr.'s classic God and Man at Yale. You append an article for the National Review titled God and Woman at Yale. This

is actually something you wrote just toward the end of your Yale graduation in 2011 and how you undertook one of the easiest fundraising campaigns ever you wrote, raising money for a student organized conference promoting women leaders at Yale. You wrote this at the time when you were a Yale graduate and were the business chair of the Women's Leadership Initiative at Yale. You took that language clearly from Buckley's book. I wonder from your perspective, how has what Buckley observed way back then continued or is seen today at Yale?

Lauren Noble:

Well, Buckley took on the establishment in his time and he bemoaned the orthodoxy that existed at Yale. I think things over the past 70 years have gotten a lot worse since Buckley's time in terms of intellectual orthodoxy and groupthink on campus, these are real challenges. But I mean, certainly, Yale has also changed in positive ways too. In Buckley's time, there were no women undergraduates and so the first women were admitted to Yale in the 1960s. But there's other ways in which the campus has changed and it goes beyond an intellectual academic factors, although the curriculum has also changed since Buckley's time.

But even from when I was a student, one big change I was thinking about recently is tuition room and board at Yale is now \$80,700. When I entered as a freshman, it was just over \$43,000. That wasn't that long ago. That was 15 years ago. And so, in 15 years, tuition room and board at Yale has almost doubled. That's really a remarkable thing... There was some other good or service that increased in price that much, we would be certainly talking about it a lot. There's many ways in which the Yale of Buckley's time is a lot different from our time.

Bryan Paul:

How did you manage to make your way through Yale with those kind of costs?

Lauren Noble:

Well, I guess my parents were certainly very supportive of me, and Yale has really good financial aid, and that's something that has, I'm sure, improved significantly since Buckley's time, but the reality is for many families, 80 something thousand dollars is just a lot of money. Like I said, Yale's a trend setter. And so, when you're elite institutions, when the costs keep going up and going up, I think it's going to keep happening elsewhere too. Again, what happens at Yale does not stay at Yale, and that's true I think on many, many levels.

Bryan Paul:

Hopefully, it doesn't descend into the similar kind of degradation as a Las Vegas that holds that very line of what happens there stays there. Intellectually though, sadly, it does seem that there has been that degradation insofar as viewpoint diversity and free expression are concerned. ACTA is very much invested in that area of interest, not to mention on aspects of spending and academic excellence that you were referring to, but I would like to take it specifically to the Buckley program now. We've talked a little bit about the Yale climate and some elements around that. Let's bring it back to the Buckley program that you are leading here. How is the Buckley program striving to correct course as it were at Yale University?

Lauren Noble:

Well, the Buckley program is just thriving right now. Like I mentioned before, we have now a record level of student members. We have 526 student fellows now, and that's about 8% of the Yale undergraduate student body. It really is a significant presence among these students in terms of our programming. We have usually at least one event a week during the academic year. Sometimes, we have multiple events range from multi-day seminars to firing line debates where students can hear different points of view, engage with one another in a civil and reasonable fashion, and hopefully learn something from it. We have an annual conference every year. One of my favorite events that we have is a annual disinvitation dinner where we invite a speaker who has been disinvited or disrupted on typically another campus, although now this trend of disinvitation, disruption is ever expanding.

Bryan Paul:

Unfortunately, yes.

Lauren Noble:

We invite them to share their views with an audience that's not too afraid to hear those views. And so, that's always a fun event. We had Bari Weiss earlier this year in May, and she was terrific. One of the things that she says in a number of writing by her that I've seen is, we got here with cowardice, we get out with courage. And so, that's one of the things that I think that the Buckley program is really trying to do, to equip students not only with different points of view that they might not otherwise encounter in the classroom and on campus. We certainly do that, but also to really equip them with the tools that they need and the confidence to express, to speak freely elsewhere. And so, that's a growing part of the work that we do.

We also fund internships for students every year at various publications in think tanks, so internships that are otherwise not funded. Those have been great opportunities for students. We've had actually a number of students intern at the foundation for individual rights and expression among others. That's certainly an area of interest for students.

Bryan Paul:

Well, the Buckley program is certainly living up to its designation as an oasis of excellence, as ACTA has so designated it, which as we say on our website, this type of program, and Oases of Excellence is one that shares a commitment to educating students for informed citizenship in a free society by maintaining the highest academic standards and introducing students to the best of the foundational arts and sciences, teaching American heritage and ensuring free inquiry into a range of intellectual viewpoints.

I commend you for living up to that because just from your description, it sounds like you really are striving to do that. But now, I'm going to play devil's advocate here for a moment because I have to ask, clearly, the Buckley program, bearing the name of William F. Buckley, Jr. shares perhaps a certain, shall we say, ideological standpoint or perhaps a bent as it were. How would you respond to someone who questions whether the Buckley program is truly a place of viewpoint diversity where it bears the name of a prominent conservative intellectual?

Lauren Noble:

Well, I think I would encourage people with that point to really look at the programs that we host. We host firing line debates where there'll be a conservative speaker and a liberal speaker. We very often in our programs incorporate different sides of an issue. I think that that's a very important thing, but I also

think if you look at the students who joined the Buckley program, it's really quite a range of political views that get involved. We'll do informal surveys of our student fellows every once in a while, and the last one we did showed something like 30% of students who are student fellows in Buckley self-identify as moderate politically. Something like 18% identified as being progressive.

Of course, for an organization named for William F. Buckley is going to have a sizable contingent of conservative students who are involved, libertarian leaning students. Those numbers, I think libertarian conservative students combined, it's probably something like 40 something percent. And so, it's a sizeable contingent for sure, but we're very welcoming to different points of view. Because this problem of self-censorship, remember, it's not just conservative students who are experiencing this on campus. We've had, I would say over the past 3, 4, 5 years, more and more moderate and progressive students joining the Buckley program because they feel that it's a space that they can engage in an open discussion.

The other thing I would point to is we do a faculty prize. We just launched this initiative last year and it's called the Lux et Veritas Faculty Prize. It's a \$10,000 award for a professor at Yale who really fosters intellectual diversity and robust debate in the classroom and on campus and does so in a way that inspires others, be it students and other faculty members. We got a great response to that initiative. The professor who got the award was nominated by a number of students. I mean, we received 21 different faculty members across Yale and different departments were nominated for this award. Then a committee of judges went through the nominations and selected the winner. The professor who won this award, he's not a political conservative, but he really believes in these ideals of open robust debate and discussion. I think those initiatives and that kind of outreach is very, very important.

Bryan Paul:

Let's be honest, a place like the Buckley program definitely stands out in an atmosphere like Yale University. The fact that you are there to round out the conversation in an arguably more liberal progressive environment is what the point is, that it's important at a university to have places where multiple voices can be heard and the facilitation of discussion among numerous points of view. You seem to be doing that, living up to that no less than in your efforts to provide students with copies of the Woodward Reports. Tell us a little more about your efforts there why... Well, first of all, tell us about what the Woodward Report is and about your efforts at the Buckley program to make it accessible and available to students.

Lauren Noble:

The Woodward Report is Yale's official free speech policy. It was published in the 1970s, 1974 to be precise, and it was shortly thereafter adopted as Yale's official free speech policy. It's a very strong statement in support of free speech on campus that the Woodward Report calls for, the right to think the unthinkable, discuss the unmentionable and challenge the unchallengeable. It really-

Bryan Paul:

That's a splendid turn of phrase there.

Lauren Noble:

Yeah, absolutely. It really gets to the heart of what the mission and purpose of an institution like Yale is, but many students and alumni and faculty have felt that in recent years, Yale has not always lived up to those principles. There was the infamous incident in 2015 where students got upset over an email about

Halloween costumes. There's been the more recent issues at the Yale Law School. I mentioned the student being pressured to apologize. In March of this year, there was also a bipartisan panel at the law school on free speech that was disrupted by about 100 students.

The Foundation for Individual Rights and Education gave Yale its lifetime censorship award this year. In its most recent ranking of schools for free speech, Yale fell to the 198th spot out of just over, I think it was 202 or 203 schools. Yale is really seen as struggling in terms of these issues of free speech on campus. And so, there are a number of steps that we would like to see Yale take to address what's happening on campus and really improve the climate.

One of the significant ways that we've identified where Yale has fallen short is the Woodward Report calls for education of students in the value of free expression. That's right there in the report, but unfortunately, the Woodward Report, a lot of students don't know what it is. And so, we felt it would be important to really get this in front of students as they're entering Yale and starting out on their college career. This fall, we distributed just shy of 1,600 copies of the Woodward Report to freshmen. We have this booklet that we had commissioned back in 2016 called Campus Speech and Crisis: What the Yale Experience Can Teach America. It includes both the Woodward Report, the Chicago Principles and some commentary about those. I think it's an important document that students are aware of and understand and really take to heart.

Bryan Paul:

I love reading this booklet. I took the liberty to read Campus Speech and Crisis in preparation for this. I would highly recommend it to our listeners. Feel free to go online and pick up a copy of Campus Speech and Crisis: What the Yale Experience Can Teach America. Buy it online and feel free to reach out to our friends at the Buckley program for a copy or even active for a copy. We have plenty in our back storage room that we are happy to share with folks because it really is an important read. To put it into context as well, historical context, the Woodward Report preceded the Chicago Principles. A lot of people seem to know about the Chicago Principles now that those appeared in 2014. The Kalven Report on institutional neutrality, which also came out of Chicago, appeared in 1967, so even before the Woodward Report and the Chicago Principles. It's fascinating how these reports came out at specific times.

Of course, in the case of the Kalven Committee Report and the Woodward Report, in the midst of, and at the end of great political social tumult in the United States and abroad with the war in Vietnam, with the sexual revolution, with protests on and off campus so much that led to the creation of these vital documents. The Woodward Report certainly falls in that camp of groundbreaking foundational documents, which while they don't necessarily say anything that is not appreciated by many in higher education or in our society, to actually articulate them in written form allows us a solid reference point for when we start to lose our bearings to come back to what truly matters in higher ed.

Lauren Noble:

Right. I think comparing the Woodward Report and the Chicago Principles, I think that there's a very important lesson there. The Chicago principles are less than a decade old, whereas the Woodward Report is almost 50 years old. They're both sound free speech principles, but You Chicago is seen as the real leader on free speech issues in this country and rightfully so, whereas Yale is made fun of on the Simpsons.

Bryan Paul:

Anything but.

Lauren Noble:

And so, it really, I think, underscores the point that having sound principles and good robust principles in support of free speech is really important, but it's not enough. These institutions need to live up to those principles even when it might be difficult or unpopular to do so. My hope is that Yale really takes some steps to reaffirm with more than just lip service, really reaffirm and implement the very good principles behind the Woodward Report.

Bryan Paul:

Right in line with what ACTA has been striving to do as well with our campus freedom initiative and the launch of our new gold standard for freedom of expression was something that we are striving to see implemented at a number of universities and I would hope that Yale would follow suit with other universities such as UNC and the UT system, University of Texas system that have all recently adopted these statements in one form or another. Hopefully Yale, which technically already has the Woodward Report and as part of its policies will then just reinforce it to recommit to the principles there.

You and I both are directly involved in efforts on and off campus to make that happen, which is where I would love to discuss further your involvement with the rising alumni movement. I would be remiss if I didn't mention this. In my role here at ACTA as Director of Alumni Advocacy, I work very closely with a number of people in this movement, yourself included, Lauren. It's been a real pleasure to work with you in this so far. Tell us a little more about your involvement in the National Alumni Movement.

Lauren Noble:

Sure. I've organized a group called Fight for Yale's Future. It's an initiative of the Buckley program really pushing in trying to unite alumni and push for change around these issues that we've been talking about related to institutional reform. There are several areas we feel that Yale needs to improve in. We've talked a lot about free inquiry already. That's obviously a big one for Fight for Yale's Future, really actually living up to the Woodward principles. There have been a lot of concerning developments there. We talked about the law school incident and in the aftermath... well, multiple law school incidents. In the aftermath of those, Yale and Yale law have had a lot of good rhetoric, I would say, on the topic of free speech, but some of the actions taken have been, I think, a step in the wrong direction.

For instance, Yale Law School has now implemented a policy banning surreptitious recordings, but it was a recording that that student who was being pressured, he recorded that interaction with the administrators pressuring him. Had he not recorded that, and Yale backtracked once that was released, saying, "Of course, he's not going to be punished for his protected speech." But if he hadn't recorded that, I don't know what would've happened.

That change is concerning in the sense that it seems like less designed to protect free speech on campus and more so designed to protect administrators who run afoul of those principles from accountability. There's several other areas that Fight for Yale's future is focused on, so whether it's the ballooning bureaucracy, there are a lot of concerns about that, that alumni and others and even the faculty are concerned about this. There was a big report by the faculty senate at Yale expressing concerns about the growth in administrative bloat at Yale.

But what really led to the creation of Fight for Yale's future were a lot of concerns about governance and transparency at Yale. Since 2016, the Buckley program has been pushing for reform of the alumni fellow election at Yale. What that is is every year, alumni are asked to vote for one of the trustees who serves



on the Yale Corporation, which is Yale's board of trustees. As an alum, you would get your ballot and it would just contain a picture of the person and a short bio, and you wouldn't get any information about what does this candidate stand for? Are they concerned about free speech on campus? What issues motivate them? What are they going to be really focusing on as a trustee?

And so, in 2016 and 2017, we started to call on the Yale administration to release some more information so alumni could actually make an informed choice in this annual election. That, unfortunately, those calls fell on deaf ears, so in 2015, we started backing petition candidates who were running for the Yale Corporation, often really focused on free speech on campus, but also transparency. The Yale Corporation embargoes its minutes for over 50 years.

There are a number of, and really just the concept of having some information about who you're being asked to vote for in this election. No petition candidate had made the ballot since 2002 until in 2020, we were successful in getting an alum on the ballot. That alum lost the alumni fellow election, which is, it happens. But what happened next was even more unfortunate, Yale just completely eliminated this petition avenue to get on the ballot for the Yale Corporation.

And so, after that, we had spent several years gathering and uniting alumni to care about all these issues of institutional reform and the path that we thought could make a difference on that front was taken away from us, but it led to this Fight for Yale's Future initiative, which has tried to carry forward those important efforts because that's what the work... The work that the Buckley program does with students is very, very important. But the institution at which these students are being educated, there's a number of concerning factors there that my hope is that our efforts with Fight for Yale can help to address.

Bryan Paul:

This is fantastic, Lauren. It's just awe inspiring to hear about alumni rising, not only at Yale, but across the nation. Would you say in the case of Yale, that it has been a swelling tide of a movement from alumni coming out of the woodwork and rallying together? Has it been more of a steady stream that has grown with time? What has been the experience at Yale with alumni rising?

Lauren Noble:

Most recently, I would say it's been a steady stream, but there have been, I think, big moments over the past five, six years where alumni have really woken up and started to pay attention and be concerned about what's happening on campus. I mentioned the big incident related to an email about Halloween costumes back in 2015. I remember around then, I started to hear increasingly from alumni who were concerned with the direction of Yale.

Then there've been smaller incidents along the way, but then a big moment was when Yale eliminated this petition process for the Yale Corporation. I think a lot of alumni felt disenfranchised by that move. And so, we've gotten a very positive response to our efforts in this area. Right now, there's a petition over at [fightforyale.com](http://fightforyale.com), which it calls on the Yale administration to take some specific steps to reaffirm its commitment to the Woodward report. That's been our focus over the past couple of months. But we've seen very, very positive interests from alumni.

Bryan Paul:

I remember signing that petition not too long ago. I would invite our listeners to check out the petition there. It can be found on the Buckley programs website, yes? Or is it on the Fight for Yale's future-

Lauren Noble:

It's at [fightforyale.com](http://fightforyale.com).

Bryan Paul:

Excellent.

Lauren Noble:

You can find it there. There's a link to it on the homepage, so I would encourage our listeners to check it out.

Bryan Paul:

I'm no Yale alumnus by any stretch of the imagination, and I was able to sign the petition. It's open to anyone who cares about the nature of higher ed, right?

Lauren Noble:

Yep. Anyone, because I mean, most of our signers naturally are Yale alumni, or we've even had a good number of students and faculty sign, so it's not just alumni who are concerned with what's happening.

Bryan Paul:

You are not alone in this fight, that's what's so beautiful. I would hope our listeners and others out there who are concerned about these issues realize they are not alone. There are others out there who are engaged in fighting for free expression, academic freedom, and viewpoint diversity on college and university campuses. A big partner ACTA has in this fight is the Alumni Free Speech Alliance. I understand that Fight for Yale's Future is a key part of that alliance. Lauren, you yourself are on the board of the alliance, are you not?

Lauren Noble:

Yep, that's correct. I am.

Bryan Paul:

What has your experience been like working with alumni from other universities? What kind of insight have you gleaned from your partners in this movement?

Lauren Noble:

Well, it does seem like there's been a good trend in terms of more and more alumni being interested in what's happening on campus. Over the years, I've gotten a number of different inquiries from faculty, students, alumni asking, "Oh, I see what you're doing with the Buckley program. I like it. How could I do something similar on my campus?" But I would say, over the past six months, those sorts of inquiries have really increased in number. That's something that I'm very glad to see because even if we're successful in solving all of the challenges at Yale, this is a big country with a lot of different colleges and universities that are facing real challenges in terms of intellectual freedom on campus.

I'm delighted to see that alumni are stepping up and being engaged and active on these issues. One thing I appreciate especially about the mission of the Alumni Free Speech Alliance is it's concerned with both freedom of speech, but also viewpoint diversity. In my mind, those two things go hand in hand. I think advocating for free speech on its own terms is certainly quite important, but where you really

need free speech is when you have diverse viewpoints. I think that we have a problem in this both on campus and in this country more broadly with we need to develop a more robust free speech culture. I think intellectual diversity, viewpoint diversity, whatever term you want to use, is an essential component to solving that challenge, so I'm very glad to see that.

Bryan Paul:

Alumni have been concerned for years now. From your experience at Yale to other universities throughout the country, they have been striving to figure out how to best deal with the growing illiberalism that is plaguing our universities. Stuart Taylor Jr. and Edward Yingling, also part of the Alumni Free Speech Alliance, in fact, the co-founders of it penned the op-ed in The Wall Street Journal that took flight to greater heights than even they comprehended. In this very op-ed that they penned, they mentioned how they believe that alumni are really the front line of defense, or in effect, the last hope for universities. If universities are to truly preserve and even restore their primary mission of seeking truth in a context of free expression, academic freedom, and viewpoint diversity, alumni must rise to the occasion. What would you tell alumni from Yale or elsewhere who are concerned but don't really know what to do, what would be your message to them, Lauren?

Lauren Noble:

Well, I think they should reach out to the Alumni Free Speech Alliance or any of the member groups who they observe as doing things that they appreciate and are making a difference. Every campus I think is different. Sometimes, we've been asked, "Would you franchise the Buckley program?" But I think that the Yale environment is different than some other campuses. And so, I think alumni really do have a valuable and important role to play. As we discussed earlier, our national survey shows that a record level of students are uncomfortable voicing their viewpoints in class. I mean, it was 63% this year. I think that we've reached a point that we really need to do something about this trend.

I think my advice would be you can start small and really build from there. The Buckley program didn't get to where it is now overnight. We started with a half dozen events in that first semester, and there were just a few of us students at the time. And so, what started off small has really blossomed into something meaningful and significant. I would say alumni should do what they can to make their campuses have better intellectual climates. I think that's very important. There's a lot that can be done when people unite together around a cause. I'm the leader of the Buckley program, but we had just around 1,100 donors last year in 2021. I'm not doing this alone and I think alumni will find that there are many fellow alumni who will support them and want to help in some way or another, whether it's time or resources or connections. There's a lot of work to do, but I feel optimistic when I see people stepping up.

Bryan Paul:

This is a rolling tide that is picking up speed. The Buckley program started in 2011. Fight for Yale's Future came thereafter. Stuart Taylor Jr. and Edward Yingling, along with others, founded the Alumni Free Speech Alliance. In 2021, after they posted or published their Wall Street Journal op-ed, hundreds of people started coming out of the woodwork to learn more and to want to join the movement. Here we are a year later, and it's fantastic to see where the Buckley program is, where the alumni movement is, alumni are rising, students are starting to feel through programs like the Buckley program, that they can pursue truth in an environment that allows for free expression and viewpoint diversity. Just huge kudos to you, Lauren, and your work on this front.

Lauren Noble:

Well, thank you so much, and thank you for all that ACTA does in this area as well. We certainly appreciate it.

Bryan Paul:

Absolutely. As we wrap up here soon, I just have to ask quickly, you are someone who has written extensively, and I am amazed at how much you have written and taking time to write. You are someone who is clearly motivated. Is there a particular experience or story that comes to mind from your life about why you are so motivated and care so much about Yale and this movement?

Lauren Noble:

I mean, I would say that just as I think the need for programs like the Buckley program was very strong when I was a student, but I think even more so now, whenever when I talk to students all the time and when I hear about their experience on campus, it concerns me. I have a young daughter, and so, I'm concerned about what's happening in the country more broadly in terms of having a robust culture of free speech.

Speaker 1:

No, we got to do that last question again. We got to end this conversation on an up note.

Bryan Paul:

It's okay.

Speaker 1:

That's my producer's hat going on.

Lauren Noble:

That's fine.

Speaker 1:

Take a breath.

Lauren Noble:

Let me just think for one second.

Bryan Paul:

Absolutely.

Speaker 4:

Just think of a closing sentence to end on. So whatever else you say, you swing back to that. It should be, like you said, inspirational, upbeat, confident in the future, something like that.

Lauren Noble:

Okay.

Speaker 1:

You've already given a lot into the conversation, a lot of energy and thought. It's been very good. It's been excellent. All I'm saying is let's end on a closing strong up note.

Lauren Noble:

Yes, okay.

Bryan Paul:

I'm planning to end with just reiterating the right to think the unthinkable, discuss the unmentionable and challenge the unchangeable. But maybe for what it's worth, Lauren, you spoke, I think right here, and I agree with Doug tapping into the pathos of the moment. You mentioned your daughter, wanting to fight for her future. And so, just be thinking about what was it that you've valued so much about higher ed and why it should matter, why you care about it so much that you're willing to fight for it as much as you are for your daughter.

Lauren Noble:

Can you give me one minute while I think about it?

Bryan Paul:

Of course. Why this matters so much, yeah.

Speaker 1:

Why it matters to you. Not the whole world, to you.

Lauren Noble:

Right. I just want to ask Ari one question about the whole one second.

Bryan Paul:

Of course, which is fine. Whenever you're ready.

Lauren Noble:

Well, look, I got a great deal out of my Yale experience, but I think things are taking an alarming turn at both Yale and other in institutions. When I see the numbers of 63% of students who feel intimidated from sharing their points of view in class, I want to do something about that. What's happening at Yale really matters for the country. The future leaders of this country, whether they're in the private sector or in government, are being shaped by institutions like Yale.

On a positive note, as we've continued to grow the Buckley program, the student demand has really been there. That's something that's very motivating to me as we've expanded what we've done on campus. We've now grown to 526 student members, plus there's many more young alumni beyond that. We had about 1,100 supporters last year. Those things really keep me motivated that yes, there is a real problem, but there is something that we can do to address this problem. As the mother of a young

daughter, I'm concerned about what higher education is going to look like in the decades to come, and I think we need to do something about it now, not just for higher ed, but for the country more broadly.

Bryan Paul:

I for one am so grateful that someone like yourself is involved in this movement, Lauren. Lauren Noble, Executive Director and Founder of the Buckley Program at Yale University. Founder, leader of the Fight for Yale's Future, board member of the Alumni Free Speech Alliance, alumni rising across the country, helping us remember to fight for the right to think the unthinkable, discuss the unmentionable, and challenge the unchangeable. Lauren Noble, thank you for being here with us today.

Lauren Noble:

Thank you so much for having me, Bryan.