



The Alumni Fellow Election Petition Process

outside groups above those of the organization.³ Effective university governance depends on recruiting trustees with experience in a variety of professional sectors, such as leadership positions in the business, government, and non-profit sectors, law and medicine, higher education, research, cultural and healthcare institutions, and other complex organizations.⁴ For these reasons, governance experts emphasize the importance of vetting trustees through a nominating committee, which nominates candidates whose different and combined experiences are complementary, and as a group provide the university with appropriate oversight and leadership.⁵

Distinctive Governance Model

Yale is the second smallest fiduciary board in the Ivy League, and among the smallest of any leading research university in the United States. Its full membership comprises the president of the university, sixteen volunteer trustees, and the governor and lieutenant governor of Connecticut *ex officio*. Unlike many boards, it does not delegate its work to an executive committee but rather convenes as a committee of the whole. Discussions and deliberations are extensive and substantive. Intentionally, board members are selected for their diverse perspectives and different points of view. They come together to listen to each other, to debate and discuss, and to sharpen collective understanding from the exchange.

A *all* of the volunteer trustees are alumni. While there is no *requirement* either in the Charter or the Bylaws that the Successor Trustees be graduates of Yale, which may partially explain why an election of six Alumni Fellows was added to the Charter in 1871, it has been longstanding custom for them to be. The Yale board, more than most, is an alumni board, with the Alumni Fellows specifically chosen by the volunteer alumni association and elected by the alumni.

Yale is also distinct in the proportion of seats that may be filled by petition candidates, who can bypass the nominating process and gain access to the ballot by number of signatures. This is a function of the number of seats open to petition and the overall size of the board; six of sixteen

³ See, e.g., [http://www.yale.edu/officeofgovernance/charterandbylaws/charterandbylaws.htm](#) (last visited 12/12/12).

University Council president (also an alum), the Secretary of the university (also an alum), and the Vice President for Alumni Affairs and Development. The committee currently has fourteen members, twelve of whom are alumni volunteers.

An important part of the nominating process, in place since the first Alumni Fellow election in 1871, has been the ability of alumni to propose candidates for the ballot. In keeping with that tradition, the YAA annually calls for nominations from alumni, and these are reviewed by the AFNC.

significantly increased, and the AFNC now accepts suggestions throughout the year via the Yale Alumni Association website, <https://alumni.yale.edu/alumni-fellow-nomination-form>. Nominations are also solicited in all Alumni Fellow election materials, and each year the chair of

the world, asking them for names. There are no barriers to participation in this process, and in recent years the number of nominations has increased. Moreover, there is no limit to the number of people who can nominate a person for Alumni Fellow, nor is there a limit to the number of alumni a person may nominate.

For the 2021 ballot, the AFNC received approximately eighty new nominations, along with duplication and further endorsement of previous names. In all, the AFNC considered over 100 potential candidates for the 2021 ballot, including nominees carried forward from previous years. Staff researches each individual, and the AFNC reviews a short bio on each. The AFNC considers how professional expertise complements and expands the areas of expertise of the current trustees. After initial review and decision-making, a short list is developed, and the AFNC conducts a deeper review based on more detailed information before identifying finalists for further vetting. The rigor of the AFNC research and vetting processes has resulted in the selection of outstanding individuals from diverse backgrounds as candidates on the Alumni Fellow ballot each year.

Looking Forward

With the foregoing considerations in mind, and based on the deliberations of the Trusteeship Committee over the past two years and the focused review conducted this year, [the Board voted on May 18, 2021](#), to process as an avenue to the Corporation.

This change means that all Alumni Fellows will be selected by vote of the alumni on a ballot determined by the AFNC nominating process, thus ensuring uniform consideration and vetting of all candidates. It will also ensure that voters have comparable information available about every candidate without requiring that any candidate spend financial resources or exceptional amounts of time campaigning.

ni who have stood as petitioners and those who have supported them. The issue at hand is one of process and governance structure, and after careful study we concluded that a petition process is no longer in the best interests of the university.

Yale is an extraordinary institution. To be so, its governance practices have had to evolve over time; to remain so, its governance must continue to adapt, aligning with best practice and supporting the needs of a complex organization in a higher education landscape whose pace of change is accelerating.

As trustees of Yale, we are entrusted with positioning the university for a future as bright as its past. With the decision described here, we seek to advance that vital goal.

Yale Board of Trustees
May 2021