



LIPKA: Alumni agonistes and the election

ANDREW LIPKA | 10:30 PM, APR 20, 2021
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The election of the alumni fellow to the Yale Corporation is upon us. A strange “gag order” imposed on candidates “nominated” by the Yale Alumni Association has raised issues of transparency. In truth, the election process appears bizarre because the entirety of Yale’s approach to alumni is wrong headed and corrupt. The energetic petition candidacy of Victor Ashe ’67 pushed the election out of its comfort zone, revealing the depths to which Yale’s administration has sunk in their mistreatment of Yale alumni — far beyond the election. The rot extends through much of the infrastructure of Yale’s alumni “relations.” By examining the “inside” of the YAA nomination process, previously shrouded in secrecy but now ironically revealed via its own hypocrisy, the corruption will lay exposed.

In a quixotic action, the “volunteer alumni members of the AFNC” — YAA’s nominators — penned a [missive](#) which paints a lovely picture of the election: alumni “leaders,” “elected or appointed by fellow alumni” to “govern” and “serve” through the “Board of Governors,” conduct a “just” selection process “as the AFNC has always done.” Their criteria? “Humility, leadership and objectivity.” The field was “robust and impressive.”

This portrayal of a representative body governing alumni affairs, representing alumni interests, presenting alumni with a slate for a



fiction. Not one of the committee's self characterizations are presented honestly; they are either misleading or outright falsehoods.

Start with the Board of Governors. This board does not "govern." It is merely advisory to the Yale Alumni Association, which is neither an association nor is composed primarily of alumni. Voltaire would be proud. YAA is staffed by Yale employees. The board advises the YAA executive director, and is not "elected;" farcically, a compliant board committee submits an incestuous slate for a "vote" — on the entire, unopposed slate.

Out of this unelected, unrepresentative board comes the Alumni Fellow Nominating Committee. But this committee is not one of autonomous alumni. The AFNC, in a rare moment of openness, admits that there are also "University leaders" on the AFNC. Given the Yale Corporation's role in hiring Yale's president, who appoints "University leaders," the self dealing is self evident. This is no "just" process. Candidates that pour out of this neutered system are pre-approved by the president and rubber stamped by a committee of a powerless board that themselves were rubber stamped.

The process, then, is entirely unrepresentative of alumni and alumni interests. In this sense it is a mirror of the YAA — a mirage intended to pacify and exploit alumni.

Just in case a candidate with backbone squeaks through, there is another "safeguard" — the administration has gagged their YAA puppet candidates. Aside from a sanitized video and canned bio, no statements are allowed. No debate. No interviews. Yale's [instructions](#): "We ask you to not campaign or otherwise advocate for your candidacy or ask others to do so."

It is difficult to imagine a policy more infantilizing and insulting to Yale alumni. The notion that a campaign of discussion, debate and inquiry would somehow be inferior to propagandistic pablum is the antithesis of



trust its alumni; indeed, it fears them.

An exception to this faux trustee election provides for a petition candidate if certain high hurdles are cleared, as Victor Ashe '67 has done. Ashe's open approach triggered a wave of YAA hypocrisy. AFNC, which has nominated two candidates every year in memory, suddenly nominated only one. It cannot be that David Thomas is the only candidate that met the AFNC's standards — after all, AFNC tells us the field was “robust and impressive.” What happened to conducting business “as the AFNC has always done?”

The answer: under the usual procedures, “inside” candidates might not be elected. But the job of the AFNC is to nominate, not to elect — a concept they may have forgotten as they took their unopposed seats on the board.

Furthermore, the AFNC has long been sworn to secrecy. In 2020, the YDN asked “multiple committee members” who “did not respond” beyond “he ‘simply can’t’ discuss the committee’s activities.” Yale proclaims “the committee’s deliberations remain confidential.” But when “victory” is threatened, suddenly we see AFNC columns in the YDN, advocating for a particular candidate and telling the world of their processes.

But this is not the AFNC's “victory” to seek. Partisanship and the betrayal of alumni interests are laid bare. The committee is a farce, a tool of an administration that seeks to marginalize alumni.

As for AFNC nominee David Thomas '78, he may well be a fit individual for service. We will never know through this process; he has submitted to the gag. Now, with the extensive corruption of this process exposed, I call upon him to demonstrate that he is the person of integrity he appears to be, to renounce this misuse of his good name, to defend his fellow alumni and to withdraw his candidacy. I invite him to seek nomination by demonstrating alumni support, via petition.



marginalized. YAA, ostensibly representative, is instead undermining. The many-layered structure of deceptive practice, muting the alumni voice, is part of a much larger problem. Let us begin to fix it here. David Thomas — join your fellow alumni, reject this illegitimate process. Withdraw.

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