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## COLLEGE

## Students at Yale Faced Mental Health Crises. Instead of Helping Them, Yale Forced Them Out.

Administrative bloat leads to increased indifference to struggling students.

EMMA CAMP | 12.1.2022 3:30 PM



(Illustration: Lex Villena; Surachat Khongkhut, source image)

Nicolette Mántica was a junior at Yale who seemed to be thriving, maintaining a 3.8 GPA and participating in a variety of extracurricular activities. But she was also seeing a therapist through Yale Mental Health and Counseling. When she told her therapist that she sometimes cut her arms to cope with stress, she found herself thrown into a cruel and complex system—one that would forcibly withdraw her from the university and place a nearly unsurmountable set of obstacles in her way to be reinstated.

As one administrator allegedly told her, she was "a liability to the university."

Now, Mántica's experience is included in a lawsuit against Yale, alleging that the school's policies violate several federal laws, including the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

Yale's policies and practices, as described in the lawsuit, reveal both a stunning callousness on the part of Yale administrators and how ever-expanding university bureaucracies don't improve university life but instead develop methods for seamlessly disposing of problem students.

The lawsuit, filed Wednesday by two current Yale students and a mental health nonprofit, alleges that the university's policies violate a number of federal laws, including the ADA and the Affordable Care Act. It explains that Yale pushes students with mental health crises to withdraw voluntarily, often while covertly threatening that an involuntary withdrawal would "not look good" on an application for readmission. Upon withdrawal, students are given only 48 hours to vacate campus and are often escorted by police to their dorm rooms.

According to the lawsuit, withdrawn students must stay away from campus for at least one full term. They cannot return earlier, even if students' medical providers believe they are ready to return to academic life. Making matters worse, students at Yale must graduate in eight to nine semesters, and, according to the lawsuit, "The semester in which they withdraw is counted against the eight or nine semesters in which they must complete their degree."

After withdrawal, students face "a daunting reinstatement process." They must essentially reapply to Yale, gathering letters of support and writing essays showing they have used their time off "productively." The lawsuit claims that the university "provides little help navigating its confusing policies, which require review of multiple and sometimes conflicting webpages to understand the options and consequences for time off.... Often, Yale does not explain its reasons for refusing reinstatement or provides reasons which are inconsistent with its own policies."

In sum, "Yale's written policy, and the widespread belief among students that seeking mental health treatment risks being pressured into 'voluntary' withdrawal or being involuntarily withdrawn, deters students from seeking the mental health treatment they need and from requesting accommodations for their disability."

While Yale's procedures around mentally ill students are disturbing—in fact, at least two student suicides have been linked to the school's withdrawal policies—they also represent a deep disfunction within the university's administrative apparatus.

Yale had rapidly increased its administrative staff over the past two decades, and the school now employs more administrators than it enrolls undergraduate students. However, rather than fostering student well-being, more administrators have ultimately gone to serve the university rather than students' interests. With such an expansive university bureaucracy, it seems that when a student is struggling, they are shunted through a complex set of policies that treat them as liabilities rather than individuals. When students struggle, large university bureaucracies seem unable to -- the cruelty—and absurdity—their policies often enforce.

"They never asked what they could do to help with the sexual assault and PTSD. Not a single question about how to take into account who I was and what I needed," one withdrawn student told *The Washington Post*. "Their only c

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**EMMA CAMP** is an assistant editor at *Reason*.

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