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Group seeks investment disclosure

BY SARAH MISHKIN
Contributing Reporter

Reiterating demands that Yale disclose information on its endowment investments, approximately 20 students delivered a petition to Yale Chief Investment Officer David Swensen Tuesday afternoon requesting that he meet with them to discuss the ethics of Yale's investment strategy.

The concerns of the group named UnFarallon -- including undergraduates, Undergraduate Organizing Committee members, graduate students and Graduate Students and Employees Organization members -- center upon Yale's involvement with Farallon Capital Management, a hedge fund which privately manages equity capital for Yale and other colleges' endowments, UOC member Phoebe Rounds '07 said.

The petition UnFarallon delivered Tuesday asked for a meeting with Swensen to discuss investment disclosure. The petition was circulated in response to the failure of the Investments Office to respond to another letter delivered to Swenson on Oct. 12, Rounds said. The second petition was signed by 175 students.

Farallon itself responded Monday to a letter sent to it Nov. 9 by UnFarallon. The letter asked Farallon to disclose investment information.

"As investors, we cannot comment on the appropriate approaches for universities to take regarding issues of community oversight," Thomas Steyer '79, a senior managing member of Farallon, said in a written response to UnFarallon's letter.

UOC member Josh Eidelson '06 said before Steyer's response UnFarallon members worried Farallon might penalize universities for disclosing information on investments made through their hedge fund. Students said they were heartened by Steyer's response.

"Fortunately they've said the decision is up to the individual universities, which rightfully increases the pressure on Yale," Eidelson said.

Andrea Johnson FES '05 said that UnFarallon wants to start small, by first opening a dialogue with the Investments Office about what the group sees as a lack of transparency.

"Yale needs to acknowledge that there is a need for more information, for more transparency," Johnson said. "We'd like to have a dialogue because, yes, the Investments Office knows more about what the risks and what are the opportunities of disclosing more information."

Johnson said she is frustrated by UnFarallon's inability to persuade the Investments Office "to acknowledge our existence."

UnFarallon has chapters at over 10 universities, including Stanford and the University of Pennsylvania.

Other universities responded more proactively to letters sent to them by their campus' chapters of UnFarallon,

Johnson said. At the University of Pennsylvania, she said, UnFarallon was able to arrange a meeting with the university's Board of Trustees.

Tuesday's events, which included a "teach-in" and a small skit, were part of a National Day of Action which took place on nine campuses.

"We want to discuss a way that Yale's investments are in line with Yale's goals as an educational institution and to work out a way that we all, as stakeholders, can know that its investments are socially and ethically responsible," Rounds said.

Before marching to the Investments Office, UnFarallon held a panel discussion about the importance of socially responsible investing.

Once at the building, the UnFarallon group performed a small skit dramatizing the negative social impact of four of Farallon's investments, including its investment in Pacific Gas and Electric, the company featured in the movie "Erin Brockovich."

Students from UnFarallon were not allowed upstairs to Swensen's office, and Rounds said they left the petition at the building's front desk.
