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Divinity School donations drop

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Staff Reporter

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In the grips of the deepest recession since 1930, the Yale **Divinity School** is asking **alumni** — themselves feeling the pinch — to buck up the school's lagging fundraising targets and sustain dreams of broader financial aid.

Contributions to the Divinity School's Annual Fund — which is earmarked directly for **financial aid** — are down nearly 20 percent through March compared to the 2008 fiscal year, Divinity School Dean Harold Attridge said. The slow pace could leave the Divinity School with a shortfall as it seeks to extend its financial aid coverage despite University-wide budget cuts.

Alumni relations director Carmen Germino DIV '07 said in an e-mail that the current recession has hit Divinity School alumni especially hard.

"Many [Divinity School] alumni work in churches, nonprofits or education," Germino said. "These have never been high-paying fields and now more than ever, they are struggling."

To bolster contributions to the Annual Fund, the school plans to officially announce a fundraising challenge to alumni later this week or early next week, Germino said. The push, called the "25 for 25 Challenge," will try to collect small donations from a vast pool of alumni, rather than press large sums out of a few individuals. If 2,500 alumni contribute to the Divinity School's Annual Fund by June 30 — the school has 1,767 donors so far — a group of alumni has agreed to pledge another \$25,000, Attridge said.

At this time last year, the Divinity School had raised over \$335,000 for the fund. Now, donations stand at about \$279,000, with three months to go before the drive closes. If fundraising continues at its current pace, the Divinity School will raise about \$335,150, well short of its 2008 total of \$412,000.

A reshuffling of **endowment** revenue, coupled with discretionary gifts, should cover any gaps left by waning contributions to the fund, Attridge told the News earlier this month. In the 2008-'09 academic year, the Divinity School budgeted \$4.9 million for financial aid. Next term, that number should rise to \$5.1 million.

But garnering more alumni donations will still be critical in the long-run. The Divinity School draws about 60 percent of its annual operating budget from its own endowment, a restricted portion of the University's larger fund. And these funds, along with the rest of the market, have fallen on hard times: The Divinity School's endowment was last valued at \$325 million in December 2008, though the University has since reported a 25 percent decrease in its own endowment.

Still, administrators remain bullish about the Divinity School's financial aid agenda. Currently, the Divinity School subsidizes 82 percent of total tuition costs for all students at the Divinity School, a 17-percentage point increase over 2007. Anna Ramirez DIV '93, dean of **admissions** and financial aid at the Divinity School, said financial aid at the school "certainly won't go down," adding that it is still on track to increase financial aid to cover 90 percent of total tuition costs within the "next couple of years."

Ramirez contrasted that schedule with the situation at Harvard Divinity School, which announced in January that it would table plans to provide full financial aid to all students with need by fiscal year 2010.

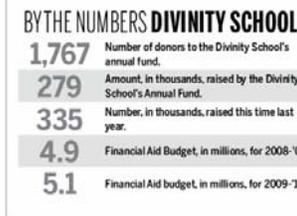
If more schools cut their aid programs, Ramirez said, the Divinity School could see a higher-than-expected yield. That could mean an uncomfortably large class of students for the Divinity School, which is currently hearing back from its admitted students, she explained.

The Divinity School hopes to keep next year's class size in line with the norm — about 135 to 140 students — Ramirez said. Already, the school had to be more selective than in years past, with

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