Yale’s distributional requirements stipulate two course credits in each of three disciplinary areas: the humanities and arts, the sciences, and the social sciences. A brief description of each of these areas follows.

HUMANITIES AND ARTS

Study of the humanities and arts—the subjects that explore how we chronicle and interpret the expression of human experience—cultivates an appreciation of the past and enriches our capacity to participate in the life of our times. By engaging other cultures and civilizations, both ancient and modern, students gain insight into the experiences of others while also obtaining an opportunity to critically examine their own. Through the study and practice of the arts, students analyze, create, and perform works allowing them to explore or experience firsthand the joy and discipline of artistic expression. Rigorous and systematic study of the humanities and the arts fosters tolerance for ambiguity and sophisticated analytic skills that provide essential preparation for careers in most areas of contemporary life. But independently of any specific application, study of these subjects teaches understanding and delight in the highest achievements of humanity.

SCIENCE

Science is the study of the principles of the physical and the natural world through observation and experimentation. The theoretical inquiry, experimental analysis, and first-hand problem-solving inextricably linked to scientific inquiry give rise to new modes of thought. Acquiring a broad view of what science is, what it has achieved, and what it might continue to achieve is an essential component of a college education. Close study of a science develops critical faculties that educated citizens need to evaluate natural phenomena and the opinions of experts, and to make, understand, and evaluate arguments about them. Scientific literacy teaches students to appreciate the beauty of the natural and physical worlds often hidden from casual observation but which, once revealed, lends richness to everyday life.

SOCIAL SCIENCES

Broadly conceived, the social sciences study human social behavior and networks using a variety of methodologies and both qualitative and quantitative analysis. Anthropology, economics, psychology, sociology, and all of the disciplines in the social sciences teach us about who we are as social beings and help us appreciate the perspective of the other as well as the particularities of society. Methods in the social sciences test for connections between the familiar and the foreign, the traditional and the contemporary, the individual and the group, the predicted result and the anomalous outcome. Their theories propose explanations for the entire range of human phenomena. Study of the social sciences prepares students for lives of civic engagement and develops a nuanced sense of the world around them.