To qualify for the award of the bachelor’s degree, a student must successfully complete thirty-six term courses or their equivalent. Yale College does not measure credit by credit hours, but by course credits—normally one credit for each term course. The course load of a Yale undergraduate is somewhat heavier than that of students in other colleges or universities, many of which require only thirty-two course credits for graduation. The thirty-six-course-credit requirement reflects Yale College's educational policy of endorsing the principle of distribution in studies as strongly as it endorses the principle of concentration.

In earning thirty-six course credits, the student must fulfill the distributional requirements of Yale College as well as the requirements of a major program. The distributional requirements are described in the Undergraduate Curriculum section of the YCPS. The requirements of the seventy-odd majors available in Yale College are described in the introductions to the departmental offerings under Subjects of Instruction in the YCPS.