DISTRIBUTIONAL REQUIREMENTS

The distributional requirements, described below, are intended to assure that all graduates of Yale College have an acquaintance with a broad variety of fields of inquiry and approaches to knowledge. These requirements are the only specific rules limiting the selection of courses outside a student’s major program. By themselves, the distributional requirements constitute a minimal education, not a complete one, and represent the least that an educated person should seek to know. They are to be embraced as starting points, not goals.

DISTRIBUTIONAL REQUIREMENTS FOR THE BACHELOR’S DEGREE

Students must fulfill disciplinary area requirements by taking no fewer than two course credits in the humanities and arts, two in the sciences, and two in the social sciences. Students must also fulfill skills requirements by taking at least two course credits in quantitative reasoning, two course credits in writing, and courses to further their foreign language proficiency. Depending on their level of accomplishment in foreign languages at matriculation, students may fulfill this last requirement with one, two, or three courses or by certain combinations of course work and approved study abroad.

Area requirement in the humanities and arts (two course credits) Study of the humanities and arts—those subjects that explore the broad range of human thought, expression, and endeavor—cultivates an educated recognition of the greatest accomplishments of the past and enriches the capacity to participate fully in the life of our time. Exploration of other civilizations, ancient and modern, gives students insight into the experiences of others and informs critical examination of their own culture. Those who create or perform works of art experience firsthand the joy and discipline of artistic expression. By rigorously and systematically examining the value and purpose of all that surrounds them, students of the humanities and arts can acquire essential preparation for many different kinds of careers. But independently of any particular application, study of these subjects fosters understanding of, and delight in, the reach and sweep of the human spirit.

Area requirement in the sciences (two course credits) 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. These include an ability to evaluate the opinions of experts, to distinguish special pleading and demagoguery from responsible science, and to realize which things are known and which unknown—which are knowable and which unknowable—to science. The theoretical inquiry, experimental analysis, and firsthand problem solving inseparable from studying a science give rise to new modes of thought. To know science is to appreciate a thousand intricacies in nature and the universe, which are hidden from casual observation but which, once revealed, lend richness to everyday life.

Area requirement in the social sciences (two course credits) Insights gained through the study of the social sciences take on a critical significance at a time when the world’s population is increasing rapidly and diverse cultures are coming into closer contact and even conflict. Among the major subjects of inquiry in the social sciences are international and area studies. Those who have been educated in the United States ought especially to acquire knowledge of the societies of Africa, Latin America, Asia, the Middle East, and eastern and western Europe, as well as broaden their familiarity with the range of cultures in North America. Questions of class, gender, public health, justice, and identity are also central to work in the social sciences. Methods in the social sciences test for connections between the familiar and the exotic, the traditional and the contemporary, the individual and the group, the predicted result and the anomalous outcome. Social science theories propose explanations for the entire range of human phenomena: from governments and economies to social organizations, communicative systems, cultural practices, and the psychology of individuals.

Skills requirement in foreign language (at least one course, depending on preparation) The study of languages has long been one of the distinctive and defining features of a liberal arts education, and in the world of the twenty-first century, knowledge of more than one language is increasingly important. The benefits of language study include enhanced understanding of how languages work, often resulting in heightened sophistication in the use of one’s own language; unmediated access to texts otherwise available only in translation, or not at all; and the ability to recognize and cross cultural barriers.

All Yale College students are required to engage in study of a foreign language, regardless of the level of proficiency at the time of matriculation. Depending on their preparation, students take one, two, or three terms of foreign language study at Yale. Details of the foreign language distributional requirement are listed under Distributional Requirements (http://catalog.yale.edu/ycps/academic-regulations/requirements-for-ba-bs-degree/#distributionalrequirements) in the Academic Regulations (http://catalog.yale.edu/ycps/academic-regulations).

Skills requirement in quantitative reasoning (two course credits) The mental rigor resulting from quantitative study has been celebrated since ancient times, and applications of quantitative methods have proven critical to many different disciplines. Mathematics and statistics are basic tools for the natural and the social sciences, and they have become useful in many of the humanities as well. Information technology and the rigorous dissection of logical arguments in any discipline depend on algorithms and formal logical constructs. An educated person must be able to use quantitative information to make, understand, and evaluate arguments.
Many quantitative reasoning courses are taught through the departments of Mathematics, Statistics, and Computer Science. Such courses may also be found in Astronomy; Chemistry; Economics; Engineering; Environmental Studies; Geology and Geophysics; Global Affairs; Linguistics; Molecular, Cellular, and Developmental Biology; Philosophy; Physics; Political Science; Psychology; and Sociology.

Skills requirement in writing (two course credits) The ability to write well is one of the hallmarks of a liberal education and is indispensable to advanced research in most disciplines. As students strengthen their writing skills, they develop intellectual practices that distinguish active from passive learners.

The English department in particular offers many courses that focus on writing clearly and cogently, and courses in other departments stress writing skills within the context of their disciplines. Over 130 courses, spanning approximately 40 different academic programs, give special attention to writing. Such courses, designated WR in the course listings, do not necessarily require more writing than other courses; rather, they provide more help with writing assignments. Some characteristics of WR courses include writing to discover ideas, learning from model essays, detailed feedback, and reviewing writing in small groups. Note that credit toward the writing requirement cannot be earned in courses in creative writing (specifically poetry, fiction, and playwriting) nor in courses conducted in a language other than English.