

THE UNDERGRADUATE CURRICULUM

Yale College, founded in 1701, is a coeducational undergraduate institution offering instruction in the liberal arts and sciences to about 5,200 students. The College is the oldest and the largest school of the University, which also comprises the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences and ten professional schools.

Yale College offers a liberal arts education, one that aims to cultivate a broadly informed, highly disciplined intellect without specifying in advance how that intellect will be used. Such an approach to learning regards college as a phase of exploration, a place for the exercise of curiosity, and an opportunity for the discovery of new interests and abilities. The College does not seek primarily to train students in the particulars of a given career, although some students may elect to receive more of that preparation than others. Instead, its main goal is to instill knowledge and skills that students can bring to bear in whatever work they eventually choose. This philosophy of education corresponds with that expressed in the Yale Report of 1828, which draws a distinction between “expanding [the mind’s] powers, and storing it with knowledge.” Acquiring facts is important, but learning how to think critically and creatively in a variety of ways takes precedence.

To ensure that study is neither too narrowly focused nor too diffuse, the College stands behind the principle of distribution of studies as strongly as it supports the principle of concentration. It requires that study be characterized, particularly in the earlier years, by a reasonable diversity of subject matter and approach, and in the later years, by concentration in one of the major programs or departments. In addition, the College requires that all students take courses that develop certain foundational skills—writing, quantitative reasoning, and foreign language—that hold the key to opportunities in later study and later life. People who fail to develop these skills at an early stage unknowingly limit their futures. In each skill, students are required to travel some further distance from where they were in high school so that each competence matures and deepens. The best high school writer is still not the writer he or she could be; students who do not use their mathematics or foreign language skills in college commonly lose abilities they once had and can graduate knowing less than when they arrived.

In a time of increasing globalization, both academic study of the international world and firsthand experience of foreign cultures are crucial. No Yale College student can afford to remain ignorant of the forces that shape our world. Yale College urges all of its students to consider a summer, a term, or a year abroad sometime during their college careers.

A student working toward a bachelor’s degree takes four or five courses each term and normally receives the B.A. or B.S. degree after completing thirty-six term courses or their equivalent in eight terms of enrollment. To balance structure with latitude and to achieve a balance of breadth and depth, a candidate for the bachelor’s degree is required, in completing the thirty-six term courses, to fulfill the distributional requirements described in this bulletin as well as the requirements of a major program.

ADVISING

What students ultimately take away from their four years at Yale largely depends on the careful planning they apply to their programs of study. It would be premature—and unrealistic—for beginning students to map out a fixed schedule of courses for the subsequent four years, yet it is advisable that they think ahead and make plans for the terms to come. There will be time and opportunity for students to revise such plans as their academic ideas develop.

Yale College does not prescribe a set program of study, in the belief that students who select their own courses are inevitably more engaged with them. As students shape their educational goals, it is important that they seek informed advice. For incoming students, who have not yet developed relationships with academic advisers on campus, Yale College furnishes a unique constellation of advising linked to the residential colleges. Parts of this constellation include the residential college deans, college advisers, and first-year (peer) counselors. It is not any one adviser’s job to mandate a particular set of courses but, rather, to help students gather information in order to craft an effective program of study.

A college adviser’s appointment may last between one and four terms. Students may choose to stay with their college adviser for all four terms, until the end of sophomore year, or until such time as they declare a major. However, as the interests and needs of first-year students evolve, they may also choose a new college adviser after completion of their first term. By the end of sophomore year, students are expected to declare a major, at least provisionally, and their primary academic adviser then becomes the director of undergraduate studies or a designated departmental representative in that major. Moreover, seniors in most majors have the opportunity to select a senior essay or senior project adviser from among the faculty members in their major department or program.

In addition to these advisers, students often seek advice about academic matters, internship and research opportunities, student life, study abroad, and post-graduation options from other offices on campus, including the Center for International and Professional Experience, the Health Professions Advisory Program, the Office of Career Strategy, the University Libraries, the Yale College Dean’s Office, and the cultural centers.