

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.