

<http://admissions.yale.edu/majors-and-academic-programs>

A Liberal Arts Education

Even before our nation's founders immortalized their eloquent vision of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, Yale College was instilling similar values in its students. Since our founding in 1701, generations of undergraduates have sought education and enlightenment at Yale in a dedicated pursuit of knowledge and leadership skills.

Yale is committed to the idea of a liberal arts education through which students think and learn across disciplines, literally liberating or freeing the mind to its fullest potential. The essence of such an education is not what you study but the result – gaining the ability to think critically and independently and to write, reason, and communicate clearly – the foundation for all professions.

There is no specific class you have to take at Yale, but you are required to learn broadly and deeply. Depth is covered in your major. Breadth is covered in three study areas (the humanities and arts, the sciences, and the social sciences) and three skill areas (writing, quantitative reasoning, and foreign language). A Yale education instills in students the values, goals, skills, and knowledge they need to pursue inspiring work, to take joy in lifetime learning, and to lead successful and meaningful lives.

Majors and academic programmes

True to the mission of liberal arts, the curriculum at Yale is arranged to allow students the flexibility to achieve both breadth across the curriculum and depth in one or two areas of study.

Dozens of Majors, Thousands of Courses: Blaze Your Own Trail

Yale students will take at least thirty-six courses on their way to earning a degree from Yale College. Yalies typically take four or five courses each fall, and another four or five each spring. There are roughly 2000 courses offered every year. At that rate, there are enough classes to last you for more than 200 years! The paths to graduation are practically limitless.

Each year, fully three-quarters of all courses enroll fewer than twenty students. Almost thirty percent have fewer than ten. The student-to-faculty ratio is 6:1. Many of

the majors at Yale include a senior requirement (essay, project, or portfolio) that allows students to work closely with a professor on an issue that interests them.

Yale students have seventy-five majors from which to choose. If you're feeling a little overwhelmed by all the options, this might help: about twelve of your thirty-six courses will be within your major.

Not yet sure what you want to do with your life? Don't worry. You have time. Most Yale students wait until sophomore year before declaring a major.

Indulge your curiosity. Explore.

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 attained through 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 sometimes into conflict. One major field of inquiry in the social sciences is international and area studies. Those who have been educated in the United States ought especially to acquire knowledge of cultures outside North America and western Europe, as well as broaden their understanding of the societies they know. Questions of class, gender, and identity are also central to work in the social sciences, whose methods 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 individual psychology.

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 to fulfill the distributional requirement. Students may complete an approved study abroad program in lieu of intermediate or advanced language study at Yale. Details of the foreign language distributional requirement are listed under Requirements for the B.A. or B.S. Degree in the 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 Architecture, Astronomy, Chemistry, Economics, Engineering, Environmental Studies, Geology and Geophysics, Global Affairs, Linguistics, Molecular, Cellular, and Developmental Biology, Operations Research, Philosophy, Physics, and Psychology.

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 150 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.

“Shopping” for Classes

Yale is one of the only universities in the country that lets you try out your classes before you register. The first ten days of each semester are known as “Shopping Period” – a time when you can visit dozens of classes that interest you to decide which ones you want to take. The challenge of course is not finding a class you like, but winnowing your choices down to a reasonable number.

During Shopping Period, students meet with academic advisors to sort through a breathtaking number of academic opportunities. They gather together at “Blue Book parties” to collaboratively tackle Yale’s massive course catalog, a.k.a the “Blue Book.” They build their class schedules as they shop, sitting in on lectures or seminars to get a feel for the teaching styles, syllabi, class dynamics, and subject matter that best match their intellectual tastes and goals for a given semester.

Practically speaking, shopping for classes gives students time to craft their most fulfilling academic semester. Philosophically, the practice upholds Yale’s commitment to each student – to challenge, expand, and ultimately better understand the life of one’s own mind through undergraduate study.