

Yale Firsts

Adapted from the Association of American Colleges & Universities' *Handbook of the Undergraduate Curriculum* (ed. Gaff Ratcliff; Jossey-Bass, 1996), a timeline of Yale "firsts" in American education:

- In 1745, knowledge of arithmetic is made an entrance requirement at Yale. Previously, no American colleges had required arithmetic at entrance.
- In 1783, Yale rejects an otherwise fully qualified woman applicant for admission because of her sex.
- In 1785, President Ezra Stiles adopts one of the first grading systems in the American Colonies. It is a four-point scale that comprises the following categories: *optimi*, *secundi optimi*, *inferiores boni*, and *peiores* [best; second best; less good, and worse].
- In 1828, the famous *Yale Report* is issued, in which the purpose of a college education is declared to be to provide "the discipline and furniture of the mind." This report is characterized as a rebuff to other institutions that had begun to offer technical subjects or slighted the classical languages, the latter of which, according to the report, provided "the most effectual discipline of mental functions."
- In 1846, Yale makes two faculty appointments in agriculture (apparently "firsts" at a liberal arts college).
- In 1847, Yale takes first steps towards establishing a graduate school — the first such steps in the U.S.
- In 1852, Yale and Harvard engage in the first intercollegiate sporting event, a boat race.
- In 1861, Yale awards the first Ph.D. in the U.S.
- In 1899, Yale permits undergraduates to include law and medical courses in their programs of study.

And so forth.

You might also be interested to know

- Bowdoin is the first college at which a **blackboard** or chalkboard was used in a classroom by an instructor (1823, or thereabouts)
- Kenyon was the first college at which each student was assigned a **faculty adviser** (about 1828) — a step previously considered unnecessary in the context of a curriculum with strict requirements and few electives
- Johns Hopkins is the first school to make use of the terms **major** or **minor** in its publications (1878)
- Harvard's catalogue **listed courses for the first time by subject area** rather than by the student class (freshman, sophomore, etc.)