Comparative Literature

Department Website: http://complit.uchicago.edu

The major in Comparative Literature leads to a BA degree. This program is designed to attract students who wish to pursue an interdisciplinary plan of course work focused on the study of literature as written in various languages and in various parts of the world.

Such a student might come to the University with a strong background in languages other than English and want to work in two or more literatures (one of which can be English). Another student might have a strong interest in literary study and wish to address general, generic, and/or transnational questions that go beyond the boundaries of national literature offered by English and other literature departments. Or, a student might wish to pursue an in-depth study of the interrelationship of literature and culture, as well as issues that transcend the traditional demarcations of national literary history and area studies.

These descriptions of academic interest are not mutually exclusive. Each student will design a plan of course work that will suit his or her individual goals and that will take advantage of the rich offerings of this university.

Program Requirements

The aim of the following guidelines is to help students develop a balanced and coherent plan of study. The Director of Undergraduate Studies in Comparative Literature is available to discuss these guidelines with students who are interested in comparative literature.

1. In addition to the thirteen courses counted toward the major, students must complete a second-year sequence in a language other than English or demonstrate language ability of an equivalent skill through accreditation. Students should have completed this requirement, or be well on their way to its completion, by the time they apply to the program, typically the end of their second year. See Participation in the Program below for further details.

2. Six courses in a primary field, or in closely integrated subject areas in more than one field, are required.

3. Four courses in a secondary field, or in closely integrated subject areas in more than one field, are required.

4. All students will be asked to take two quarters of a sequence that introduces the theoretical, scholarly, and critical practices relevant to comparative literature. The first quarter, taught by a Comparative Literature faculty member, will be CMLT 29701 Introduction to Comparative Literature I: Problems, Methods, Precedents. The second quarter will be a free-standing but related course taught by an advanced graduate student. Students are expected to take both courses in the same year. Critical methods classes taken prior to the 2012–13 inauguration of this sequence may count as the equivalents to one or both of the two new required courses.
Students who are majoring in Comparative Literature are required to complete a BA project. The project will be supervised by a faculty member of the student’s choice, with that faculty member’s consent and the approval of the Director of Undergraduate Studies; that faculty member may be, but need not be, on the faculty of Comparative Literature. A graduate student in Comparative Literature will serve as preceptor for all BA projects through the BA workshop, moderating discussions, working with students on the mechanics of writing, and providing tutorial assistance. For details, see the following information on the BA workshop and the BA paper.

As part of the process of writing the BA paper, fourth-year students are required to register for CMLT 29801 BA Project and Workshop: Comparative Literature and attend its meetings. The workshop begins in Autumn Quarter with readings and discussion of themes and methods in Comparative Literature. It continues through the middle of the Spring Quarter with workshops in which students provide written and oral feedback on each other’s work in progress toward the BA project. While the BA workshop meets in all three quarters, it counts as a one-quarter course credit. Students may register for the course in any of the three quarters of their fourth year. A grade for the course will be assigned in the Spring Quarter based partly on participation in the workshop and partly on the quality of the BA paper.

### SUMMARY OF REQUIREMENTS

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<tr>
<th>Requirement</th>
<th>Units</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6 primary field courses</td>
<td>600</td>
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<tr>
<td>4 secondary field courses</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 critical/intellectual methods courses</td>
<td>200</td>
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<tr>
<td>CMLT 29801 BA Project and Workshop: Comparative Literature</td>
<td>100</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total Units</strong></td>
<td>1300</td>
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The department encourages students to pursue further language study by taking courses in a second or third language. NOTE: Those language courses will be approved for use in the major only if they are at an intermediate or advanced level; elementary-level courses cannot be counted toward the total number of courses needed to complete the major.

Additional courses in critical/intellectual methods may be counted toward the six courses in the primary field or toward four courses in the secondary field if their materials are appropriate for those purposes, but the total number of courses presented for the major must total thirteen.

A student wishing to work in two literatures (one of which can be English) might choose two literatures as the primary and secondary fields. A student interested in literary study across national boundaries with a focus on generic and transnational questions might create a primary field along generic lines (e.g., film, the epic, the novel, poetry, drama, opera); the secondary field might be a particular national literature or a portion of such a literature. A student interested in literary and cultural theory might choose theory as either a primary or secondary field, paired with another field designed along generic lines or those of one or more national literatures.
Courses in the various literature departments and in Interdisciplinary Studies in the Humanities are obviously germane to the building of any individual program. A student is likely to find courses in the Humanities Collegiate Division and in the Department of History that extend beyond the usual definitions of literature (e.g., film, art, music, history) to be appropriate to her or his individual program of study. Study abroad offers an attractive means of fulfilling various aims of this program as well.

Participation in the Program

Students should express their interest in the major as soon as possible, typically before the end of their second year. The first step is to meet with the Director of Undergraduate Studies to consult about a program of study. Thereafter, students are required to submit a written proposal of about one thousand words in length that consists of two parts:

1. a statement explaining how the proposed plan of study will take advantage of existing College offerings and meet departmental requirements
2. a list of proposed courses (as well as alternates) and indications of how they will fulfill the department’s requirements

Applicants must also submit a list of completed courses and a list of courses in which they are currently registered. Special mention should be made of language courses or other language training that affirms a student’s level of language proficiency. Each proposal will be evaluated on the basis of the interest of the student and his or her achievement in the languages needed to meet the goals of the intended course of study. Students will be notified by email of their acceptance to the program.

Comparative Literature majors should demonstrate proficiency in a literary language (other than English) that is relevant to their proposed course of study (as indicated in requirement number one above). This requirement must be met at the time of application or shortly thereafter. Such proficiency is measured by the completion of a second-year sequence in the language, or by demonstration of an equivalent skill. Language ability is essential to work in comparative literature of whatever sort. The Department of Comparative Literature takes language preparation into consideration when evaluating applications, but it will also help students achieve their individual goals by suggesting programs of study that will add to their language expertise as appropriate.

BA Project

One obvious choice for a BA project is a substantial essay in comparative literary study. This option should not, however, rule out other possibilities. Two examples might be a translation from a foreign literature with accompanying commentary, or a written project based on research done abroad in another language and culture relating to comparative interests. Students are urged to base their project on comparative concepts, and to make use of the language proficiency that they will develop as they meet the program’s requirements. Visit complit.uchicago.edu/undergraduate for details on the BA project.
This program may accept a BA paper or project used to satisfy the same requirement in another major if certain conditions are met and with the consent of the other program chair. Approval from both program chairs is required. Students should consult with the chairs by the earliest BA proposal deadline (or by the end of third year, when neither program publishes a deadline). A consent form, to be signed by both chairs, is available from the College adviser. It must be completed and returned to the College adviser by the end of Autumn Quarter of the student’s year of graduation.

GRADING

All courses to be used in the major, except for CMLT 29801 BA Project and Workshop: Comparative Literature, must be taken for a quality grade, which must be a B- or higher. CMLT 29801 is graded on a Pass/Fail basis.

HONORS

To be eligible for honors in Comparative Literature, students must earn an overall cumulative GPA of 3.25 or higher, and a GPA of 3.5 or higher in the major. They must also complete a BA essay or project that is judged exceptional in intellectual and/or creative merit by the first and second readers.

ADVISING

In addition to their College adviser, students should consult on an ongoing basis with the Director of Undergraduate Studies. Further advice and counseling will be available from the preceptor for the program and from the faculty member who supervises the student’s BA project.