Comparative Literature

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

The major in Comparative Literature leads to a BA degree and 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.

One student might come to the University of Chicago 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 in 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 work with the Director of Undergraduate Studies to design a plan of course work that will suit his or her individual goals and that will take advantage of the rich offerings of the University.

Program Requirements

The requirements outlined below are in effect as of Autumn Quarter 2018 and will apply to all students in the Class of 2020 and beyond. Students in the Classes of 2018 and 2019 may request to switch to the new requirements if the updated program suits their interests and fits within their graduation plans.

Students interested in applying to the major in Comparative Literature should review the following guidelines and consult with the Director of Undergraduate Studies in Comparative Literature. These guidelines are to assist students in developing a balanced and cohesive interdisciplinary plan of study.

The major is comprised of seven literature courses selected in consultation with the Director of Undergraduate Studies, one foundational course in comparative literary theory and methodology, two courses in literary theory, methods, or special topics in Comparative Literature, and a BA project workshop that serves as a capstone to the major.

A student works with the Director of Undergraduate Studies to identify a primary field (four courses) and secondary field (three courses). A student wishing to work in two literatures might choose two literatures as the primary and secondary fields (note: the second literature can be English). The secondary field might be a particular national literature or a portion of such a literature (e.g., poetry, drama, novel); another discipline (e.g., mathematics, history, film, performance studies, music); or literary theory.

Study abroad offers an attractive means of fulfilling various aims of this program. More than half of the major requirements must be satisfied by courses bearing University of Chicago numbers.

Summary of Requirements

Three language courses in a single language at the intermediate level or above 300
Four courses in a literature other than English, one of which can be in a closely related field 400
Three courses in a secondary field, which can be literature in another language (including English), another discipline (e.g., mathematics, performance studies, music), or literary theory 300
CMLT 20109 Comparative Methods in the Humanities 100
Two 20000-level courses in literary theory, methods, or special topics in Comparative Literature 200
CMLT 29801 B.A. Project and Workshop: Comparative Literature (See BA Project for details) 100
Total Units 1400

Foreign Language Requirement

The Comparative Literature major requires three language courses in a single language at the intermediate level or above. Students who come in with high proficiency in a language other than English may instead substitute three courses in a third language, at any level.

A student can provide proof of high proficiency in two ways:

1. A student may pass one of the College's Practical Language Proficiency Assessments in a foreign language, if available for the relevant language; for more information, see languageassessment.uchicago.edu/page/foreign-language-proficiency-certifications.
2. A student can demonstrate high proficiency on the basis of the student's formal schooling experience in a country outside the United States at the high school (secondary) level. Students should write a brief description of their schooling and submit it, along with a transcript showing at least two years of high school study in the relevant language, to the Director of Undergraduate Studies in Comparative Literature.

Though all majors must demonstrate proficiency in a single language through at least the second-year sequence in a foreign language (or by providing proof that they enter the program with high proficiency in either of the two ways...
noted above), they are encouraged to continue their language study beyond the minimum required for the major. The Department of Comparative Literature works closely with the University of Chicago Language Center and will help students achieve their individual goals in language acquisition by suggesting programs of study that will add to their language expertise as appropriate.

BA Project

The BA capstone project is to be completed in the student’s last year of study. The project should be approved by the Director of Undergraduate Studies and is supervised by a faculty member of the student’s choice in Comparative Literature. It may be co-advised by a faculty member from another department. Students must complete their formal application to the major by spring of third year and should identify a faculty advisor at that time.

One obvious choice for a BA project is a substantial essay in comparative literary study. This option should not, however, rule out other possibilities. Alternative examples are 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 https://complit.uchicago.edu/undergraduate/undergraduate-program for more 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 approval from both program chairs. 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.

Participation in the Program

Students should express their interest in the major as early as possible. The first step is to meet with the Director of Undergraduate Studies to consult about a program of study. Applicants must submit an application form which consists of 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. Finally, students will need to formalize their declaration through my.uchicago.edu with the assistance of the College adviser.

Comparative Literature majors should demonstrate literary proficiency in a 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. Proficiency is measured by the completion of a second-year sequence (or above) in the language or by demonstration of an equivalent skill. Language ability is essential to work in comparative literature of whatever sort.

Grading

All courses to be used in the major must be taken for a quality grade of B– or higher, except for the BA Workshop course, CMLT 29801, which 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

Students must consult on an ongoing basis with the Director of Undergraduate Studies for selection and approval of course work for the major. Students will need to regularly provide documentation of any approvals for the major to their College adviser for the necessary processing. 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.

Comparative Literature Courses

CMLT 20109. Comparative Methods in the Humanities. 100 Units.

This course introduces models of comparative analysis across national literatures, genres, and media. The readings pair primary texts with theoretical texts, each pair addressing issues of interdisciplinary comparison. They include Orson Welles’s "Citizen Kane" and Coleridge’s poem "Kubla Khan"; Benjamin’s "The Storyteller," Kafka’s "Josephine the Mouse Singer," Deleuze and Guattari, Kafka; Mario Vargas Llosa’s The Storyteller; Victor Segalen’s Stèles; Fenollosa and Pound’s "The Chinese Character as a Medium of Poetry" and Eliot Weinberger’s Nineteen Ways of Looking at Wang Wei; Mérimée, "Carmen," Bizet, Carmen, and the film adaptation U-Carmen e-Khayelitsha (South Africa, 2005); Gorky’s and Kurosawa’s The Lower Depths; Molière, Tartuffe, Dostoevsky, The Village Stepanchikovo and its Inhabitants, and Bakhtin, ‘Discourse in the Novel’; Gogol, The Overcoat, and Boris Eikhenbaum, "How Gogol's Overcoat Is Made."

Instructor(s): Olga Solovieva Terms Offered: Autumn

Equivalent Course(s): ENGL 28918
CMLT 24111. The Soviet Empire. 100 Units.
What kind of empire was the Soviet Union? Focusing on the central idea of Eurasia, we will explore how discourses of
gender, sexuality and ethnicity operated under the multinational empire. How did communism shape the state’s regulation
of the bodies of its citizens? How did genres from the realist novel to experimental film challenge a cohesive patriarchal,
Russophone vision of Soviet Eurasia? We will examine how writers and filmmakers in the Caucasus and Central Asia
answered Soviet Orientalist imaginaries, working through an interdisciplinary archive drawing literature and film from
the Soviet colonial ‘periphery’ in the Caucasus and Central Asia as well as writings about the hybrid conception of Eurasia
across linguistics, anthropology, and geography.
Instructor(s): Leah Feldman Terms Offered: Autumn
Equivalent Course(s): NEHC 24110, REES 24110, REES 34110, CMLT 34111, NEHC 34110

CMLT 29801. B.A. Project and Workshop: Comparative Literature. 100 Units.
This workshop begins in Autumn Quarter and continues through the middle of Spring Quarter. 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 is assigned in the Spring Quarter, based partly on participation in the
workshop and partly on the quality of the BA paper. Attendance at each class section required.
Terms Offered: Autumn Spring Winter
Note(s): Required of fourth-year students who are majoring in CMLT. Students should register for this course in the term
where it best fits in their schedule.
Font Notice

This document should contain certain fonts with restrictive licenses. For this draft, substitutions were made using less legally restrictive fonts. Specifically:

- Times was used instead of Trajan.
- Times was used instead of Palatino.

The editor may contact Leepfrog for a draft with the correct fonts in place.