Comparative Literature

The Comparative Literature program at Washington University offers an AM; a PhD; a combined PhD with Chinese, English, French, German, Japanese, or Spanish; and a graduate certificate in Translation Studies. Additionally, a track within the PhD program for international writers targets promising authors and public intellectuals from around the world who wish to enhance their career by coupling it with academic training in comparatist literary studies in the U.S. In close cooperation with other humanities programs, Comparative Literature enables students to tailor a course of study appropriate to their areas of interests, strengths, and long-term goals.

At its core, Comparative Literature aims to provide students with a grounding in contemporary and historically significant methodologies and approaches to comparative literature, including especially those pertinent to the following four areas: transcultural studies; translation studies; literature, politics, and society; and new and old media. Students combine this core with thorough study of at least one primary literature, usually nationally or geographically defined, and two secondary fields. Depending on their focus of degree and course of study, graduates typically apply for academic positions in comparative literature programs; language, literature, and culture departments; and such programs as gender studies, theater, performing arts, and area studies. Some graduates may choose to pursue employment in publishing and arts-related fields outside of academia.

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Former Hortense and Tobias Lewin Professor in the Humanities  
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Degree Requirements  
PhD in Comparative Literature  
The PhD in Comparative Literature is a 72-credit program, including 60 units of course work and 12 units of dissertation credit. Course distribution includes at least 12 core credits in Comparative Literature seminars, including Comp Lit 402; 12 credits in one nationally, ethnically, or geographically defined literature; and 6 credits in a second such literature. Drama may be substituted for either the primary or secondary literature. The program also requires the study of a third discipline relevant to the student's intellectual and critical concern, e.g., a third literature, music, the plastic arts, philosophy, history, film. Students who obtain a PhD in Comparative Literature, including those in all of the joint programs, need to demonstrate (as a minimum), in addition to superior skills in English, superior ability in at least a second language and reading skills in a third language. Beyond the minimum, the choice and number of languages required correspond to each student's three areas of concentration. Students interested in pursuing one of the combined degrees should apply to the appropriate language and literature program (Chinese, English, French, German, Japanese, or Spanish), indicating their interest in the joint degree. The application will be vetted by the respective program and by Comparative Literature. The joint degree requires 72 units of course work, 12 of which must be taken in Comparative Literature. 
AM in Comparative Literature  
The AM in Comparative Literature may be earned along the way to the PhD; Comparative Literature normally does not admit students who intend to pursue the AM only. It requires 36 units of course work, including Comp Lit 402 Introduction to Comparative Literature and three additional courses in Comparative Literature on the graduate level. The remaining 24 units of graduate course work may be pursued in Comparative Literature or in affiliated departments or programs. Students desiring to be admitted to the PhD should plan their course of study so as to build a solid foundation for the PhD. All students earning an AM in Comparative Literature must demonstrate superior skills in English and, as a minimum, reading ability in one additional language pertinent to their areas of interest. These 36 hours count toward the PhD requirement. Students funded by teaching assistantships teach in Comparative Literature and/or in one of our allied programs, including language instruction. In order to be qualified to serve as a Teaching Assistant in a language department, students may be required to take the relevant course in language pedagogy. The program strives to give students a variety of teaching experiences that prepare them for the academic market in their areas of concentration. 
Graduate Certificate in Translation Studies  
With its interest in crossing the borders between languages, cultures, and national literatures, the discipline of Comparative Literature implicitly performs and assesses theoretically the function and value of "translation" in the widest sense of the term. The Graduate Certificate in Translation Studies offered by Comparative Literature explicitly supports both the practical turn to translation and the critical and theoretical assessment of translation in the context of globalization, multiculturalism, cultural hybridity, postcolonial theory, and an emphasis on interdisciplinarity. The certificate requires 15 units of course work overall, 6 of which may count toward both the certificate and the PhD degree, and 9 of which may be allocated only to the certificate. Applicants must already be enrolled in a PhD program at Washington University.