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 preparation 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 the focus of their 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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Degree Requirements

PhD in Comparative Literature

The PhD in Comparative Literature program requires 60 units of course credit plus a dissertation. Course distribution normally entails the following: at least 12 core credits in comparative literature seminars, including Comp Lit 502; 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 concerns, e.g., a third literature, music, the plastic arts, philosophy, history, film. Students 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. Beyond taking courses, students will take three comprehensive examinations that have both a written and oral component and that will help guide the student toward the dissertation; the third examination is a dissertation proposal.

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 students to complete all requirements in the home discipline plus four courses in core categories in Comparative Literature, including Comp Lit 502. Students in the
joint degree programs are expected to include a comparatist component in their dissertations.

**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 credit, including CompLit 502 and three additional courses in Comparative Literature on the graduate level. The remaining 24 units may be pursued in Comparative Literature or in affiliated departments or programs. 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 units count toward the PhD requirement. Students participating in a mentored teaching experience may teach in Comparative Literature and/or in one of our allied programs, including language instruction. In order to be qualified to serve as an assistant in instruction 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 interdisciplinarity. The certificate requires 15 course credits 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.