COMPARATIVE LITERATURE AND FOLKLORE STUDIES

OVERVIEW

Admissions to the Comparative Literature and Folklore Studies program has been suspended as of summer 2018. If you have any questions, please contact the department (complit@lss.wisc.edu).

The Department of Comparative Literature and Folklore Studies offers a major in comparative literature and a certificate in folklore.

Comparative literature is the study of literatures in their original languages from a transnational, cross-cultural perspective.

Comparative literature students and majors study texts from a range of historical periods, geographical and cultural areas, and literary and artistic movements. They learn to critically pose and respond to fundamental questions about the place of literature in society and in cultural and historical traditions.

Majors are introduced to specific modes of literary analysis as well as to general concepts of “literariness.” They explore the interaction of literature with other arts and disciplines as well as with the political, social, and intellectual contexts of literature. In this way, students acquire important intellectual skills in critical comparative reading, thinking, and writing.

The small size of most comparative literature classes allows ample opportunity for the discussion and exchange that are essential to the development of such skills. Comparative literature classes also offer challenging research and writing projects that can be carried out individually and in small groups.

A major in comparative literature is valuable preparation for a career in a wide range of fields that demand careful analysis, clear writing, the presentation of logical arguments, and the critical assessment of the written and oral opinions of others—law, business, communications, politics and diplomacy, journalism, technical writing, or publishing. It is ideal for students interested in teaching at the secondary level or in pursuing graduate degrees.

The program welcomes students with a diverse range of backgrounds and interests, and with literary reading competence in a language in addition to English. Literary fluency in a language other than English is the basis for work in the comparative literature major.

To declare the major in comparative literature, students must have sophomore standing, have taken at least one 200-level course in the department, have a minimum 3.00 GPA, and have established the foundations of literary fluency in a language other than English.

Prospective majors should meet with the undergraduate advisor to discuss the requirements in advance of declaring the major. Declared majors are strongly encouraged to meet with the undergraduate advisor in planning their courses each semester. Juniors should arrange a meeting early in the spring semester to assess whether they will have met all requirements for graduation.

Folklore is a multidisciplinary field of study concerned with the documentation and analysis of verbal, customary, musical, material, and performance traditions, primarily as they are practiced within cultures, but also as they are revived, modified, even invented by artists, educators, entrepreneurs, activists, communities, and states. The program offers courses on folklore forms, practitioners, performances, theory, methods, and public presentation, with an emphasis on cross-cultural and interdisciplinary approaches. Students interested in folklore as an area of concentration typically major in an arts, humanities, or social science discipline. No formal undergraduate major is offered in folklore, but by planning a course of study with the undergraduate advisor, a student may design an individual major with a folklore concentration. Undergraduate students may also earn a certificate in folklore.

ADDITIONAL PROGRAM INFORMATION

Courses in Comparative Literature (COMP LIT) fall into four general classes:

Introductory courses (201–299) are based entirely on English-language texts or English translations of foreign language texts. These courses are open to first-year students and restricted to undergraduates.

General courses (300–400) are open to undergraduates. The course texts are in English, but majors and other students who are able to do so are expected to work with one foreign literature in the original language.

More specialized courses (400–699) are open to both undergraduate and graduate students (with the exception of the proseminar, COMP LIT 690) graduate students. Texts used in these courses typically require the knowledge of at least one foreign language.

Graduate courses (700–999) involve increasing use of foreign literatures both in the classroom and in individual work.