

Comparative Literature

Department of Comparative Literature

College of Arts and Sciences
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Overview

**Not a baccalaureate degree program*

Comparative literature offers interdisciplinary and international study of literature, philosophy, and culture, from Plato to *The Matrix*. Rather than specializing in periods and nationalities, we ask fundamental questions about what makes culture work, how language operates, what is the relationship between politics and art, and what are the underlying motives for religion. Our courses thus establish a meeting ground between philosophy, psychoanalysis, feminism, political theory, ethics, and religion. This is why we teach enduring works of literature (e.g. by Cervantes, Flaubert, Dostoyevsky, Woolf, Borges, and Kafka) along with major thinkers, such as Plato, Freud, Nietzsche, Foucault, and Derrida, among others. Artists, whether of 'high art' or the mass media, are central to our curriculum because they have posed indispensable questions about the nature of culture, literature, and community. Our literary and cultural offerings have traditionally been small and intensive, focusing on individualized education. Because Comparative Literature is such a small department, our undergraduate courses are seminar classes. Students sit around a conference table and discuss the texts and ideas in detail. The Comparative Literature department offers the possibility of a small college's intimate intellectual community amidst a huge and multidiverse university setting. Of recent years, an increasing number of UB undergraduates have opted either for the Minor in Comparative Literature or the Special Major offered under the auspices of the College of Arts and Sciences. Many students taking a comparative literature minor find that it provides an indispensable background to almost any major in the College of Arts and Sciences. Because of its rigorous training in analytical and interpretative skills, comparative literature also provides invaluable preparation for graduate school and for careers in law, medicine, psychology, the media, history, sociology, anthropology, and arts management.

About our Degrees

The minor in Comparative Literature consists of two mandatory courses in literary theory (see [COL 301](#) and [COL 302](#)), as well as a choice of up to five additional courses at lower and upper levels. Specific requirements vary slightly according to affiliation with the College of Arts and Sciences as opposed to other divisions. Certain courses from romance languages, English, and media study can be credited toward this minor.

Acceptance Criteria - Minor

Minimum GPA of 2.0 overall.

Degree Requirements

Please see [Degrees and Policies](#).

About our Courses

The mandatory courses for the minor in Comparative Literature, [COL 301](#) History of Literary Theory and [COL 302](#) Contemporary Literary Theory, make splendid elective courses in culture for students in all fields. They afford students a working knowledge of the current models of cultural interpretation (e.g., psychoanalysis, Marxism, feminism, Frankfurt School, post-colonialism, structuralism, and post-structuralism). These courses dramatically enhance the power with which students are able to decode and enjoy, among other things, paintings, films, plays, poems, and performance art. These courses are acceptable for the critical methods component of the English major.

Other comparative literature undergraduate offerings are designed to be in synch with the broader issues, questions, and methods raised in [COL 301](#) and [COL 302](#). From semester to semester, the Department of Comparative Literature offers a wide range of courses in literature, film, popular culture, and gender and post-colonial studies. These courses are constantly being updated to maintain their relevance.

Recent elective comparative literature undergraduate offerings have included: 'The Culture of Rebellion,' 'The Quarrel between Philosophy and Literature,' 'Literature and Desire,' 'Literature into Cinema,' 'The City in Literature,' 'Women and Literature,' 'Literature and War,' and 'Signs and Representation.' These courses all satisfy the General Education Humanities requirement. They also form part of a splendid cultural background, whether taken as part of the comparative literature minor and special major or not.

Comparative Literature

For course descriptions, please see [Courses](#).

About our Faculty

Extracurricular Activities

Over the duration of its history, the department has organized a stellar sequence of lectures by outside guests and a series of annual theme-centered academic conferences. Visitors to the Comparative Literature department have included such world-renowned scholars and intellectuals as the late Paul de Man, Jacques Derrida, J. Hillis Miller, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, Jean-Luc Nancy, Julia Kristeva, Lucette Finas, Samuel Weber, and Dalia Judovitz. Undergraduates as well as graduate students are encouraged to participate in these events, which constitute a significant intellectual resource on campus.

The department also sustains a "Philosophy Goes to the Movies" film series and a Theory Reading Group.

See the [UB Student Association](#).

Practical Experience and Special Academic Opportunities

The Special Major in Comparative Literature is an individualized program of study that students design in conjunction with comparative literature faculty advisors. Participation in this program requires independent studies courses with the Comparative Literature faculty.

The department offers a regular summer study abroad program in Africa, and, in its emphasis on foreign languages and multicultural study, encourages undergraduates to take advantage of any and all appropriate study-abroad opportunities.

Career Information and Further Study

In the context of a rapidly and dramatically changing society, the skills that comparative literature teaches - interpretation, analysis, communication, the deciphering of cultural codes, written expression, and foreign language - give students in this competitive job market a decisive cutting edge. Current economic trends suggest a high value on intellectual and entrepreneurial independence, which the discipline of comparative literature stresses. While the workplace and even the nature of jobs themselves may change, these fundamental skills, abilities, and international perspectives that students gain are sure to retain their value.

Degrees Offered

Undergraduate: Special Major (through [Special Majors](#) Program), Minor

Links to Further Information About this Program

- [Undergraduate Catalog](#)
- [Undergraduate Admissions](#)
- [Graduate Admissions](#)
- [Department of Comparative Literature](#)
- [College of Arts and Sciences](#)

Comparative Literature - Minor

Acceptance Criteria

Minimum GPA of 2.0 overall.

Comparative Literature

Advising Notes

Our minor complements a variety of major courses of study in the social sciences and humanities. All students interested in the minor in comparative literature are encouraged to discuss possible courses of study with the department's undergraduate advisor.

For current courses, see <http://wings.buffalo.edu/academic/department/AandL/col/courses/cd.html>.

Required Courses

[COL 301](#) Literary Theory: Twentieth Century

[COL 302](#) Literary Theory: History

Electives and Course Groupings

Students select five additional courses at upper and lower levels. Specific requirements vary slightly according to affiliation with the College of Arts and Sciences. Certain credits from the Departments of English, Media Study, Philosophy, and Romance Languages and Literatures can be credited toward this minor.

The Department of Comparative Literature offers a wide range of courses in literature, film, popular culture and gender, and post-colonial studies.

COL 130: Introduction to the Twentieth Century

Credits: 3
Type: SEM

Offers the student who is beginning to read modernist texts an overview of the various movements that shaped and influenced the cultural scene in the early part of the century. Attempts to distinguish between modernism and the avant-garde with reference to such movements as futurism, dadaism, surrealism, expressionism, and socialist realism.

COL 150: World Literature: the Fantastic

Credits: 3
Type: LEC

An international survey of the literature of the fantastic. Pays particular attention to modernism's fascination with the eerie and the uncanny. Asks why the fantastic seems to serve as such a suitable emblem for our age through a reading of international texts in a comparative context. Also considers the way in which the fantastic serves as a social commentary on the society that produces it.

COL 226: Special Topics

Credits: 3
Type: LEC

The content of this course is variable and therefore it is repeatable for credit. The [University Grade Repeat Policy](#) does not apply.

Course content varies according to the interests of the instructor. Topics may explore a specific philosophical, literary, and/or cultural issue or problem.

COL 251: Masterpieces of World Literature

Credits: 3
Type: LEC

The content of this course is variable, and, therefore, it is repeatable for credit. The University Grade Repeat Policy does not apply.

Invites students in all fields to explore the study of literature. Introduces a wide variety of texts, both in terms of historical breadth and genre. The courses are not a survey with a program of systematic, obligatory coverage. Rather, in readings that run from Homer to contemporary cinema and that investigate the epic, poetry, political documents, fiction, and film, we consider the ways in which such texts function and why the place of such works is crucial to understanding ourselves.

COL 255: Crime and Punishment

Credits: 3
Type: LEC

Considers a range of major literary and philosophical texts dealing with crime, guilt, retribution, and punishment. Students discuss these texts in their social and literary contexts.

COL 275: Special Topics

Credits: 3
Type: LEC

The content of this course is variable and therefore it is repeatable for credit. The [University Grade Repeat Policy](#) does not apply.

Course content varies according to the interests of the instructor. Topics may explore a specific philosophical, literary, and/or cultural issue or problem.

COL 280: City in Literature

Comparative Literature

Credits: 3
Type: LEC

The city has undergone revolutionary changes in recent times, yet has itself always been a witness to progress and a site of history and storytelling. Studies the city in a modern or postmodern manner by examining the way in which it serves as a model for design, government, and policing. Examines the commonality and differences linking the modern city to its predecessors. While drawing mainly on literary works, we also work in the fields of history, sociology, anthropology, and philosophy.

COL 301: Literary Theory - Twentieth Century

Credits: 3
Type: SEM

Examines the most recent, and often controversial, developments in literary theory. As well as covering theoretical strains, such as formalism, New Criticism, structuralism, poststructuralism, Marxism, and the Frankfurt School, the course interpolates literary texts as examples of interpretive possibilities. Part of a two course module with [COL 302](#).

COL 302: Literary Theory - History

Credits: 3
Type: SEM

Charts the development of the theories of culture and literature, which both reflect and, in turn, shape the great works of our literary tradition. Students read aesthetic theory from the ancient Greeks through to the nineteenth century, covering such diverse periods as the Middle Ages, the Enlightenment, and Romanticism. Also studies literary texts for the way in which they help elucidate some of the issues being covered in the theory. Students should expect to develop an awareness of the historical import of such notions as genre, the beautiful, and so forth. See [COL 301](#).

COL 311: Special Topics

Credits: 3
Type: LEC

The content of this course is variable and therefore it is repeatable for credit. The [University Grade Repeat Policy](#) does not apply.

Course content varies according to the interests of the instructor. Topics may explore a specific philosophical, literary, and/or cultural issue or problem.

COL 315: Signs and Representation

Credits: 3
Type: SEM

The content of this course is variable, and, therefore, it is repeatable for credit. The University Grade Repeat Policy does not apply.

Introduces theories of the sign and representation, and the development of these accounts in the twentieth century. The course is divided into three parts. Part one introduces basic concepts and pioneering theories: the work of Saussure and Peirce, formalism and structuralism (Levi-Strauss, Piaget, Jakobson, Benveniste),

their similarities and differences, and the debates their works have engendered. Part two considers developments and refinements of their work, particularly in various analyses of social power; among the figures analyzed here are Roland Barthes and his examination of bourgeois cultural life, and Michel Foucault and his understanding of social power and its investment in the production and control of discourse. Part three discusses poststructuralist critiques of structuralism, concentrating particularly on the work of the Derrideans, including a session on Kristeva, Cixous, and the writing of otherness.

COL 320: Literature and Desire

Credits: 3
Type: LEC

The content of this course is variable, and, therefore, it is repeatable for credit. The University Grade Repeat Policy does not apply.

The psychological thrust of many literary works is a long-established truism. This is a course situated on the interstice between literary works, mostly fictive, and the intricate web of social and psychological factors involved in desire, whether for love, power, or wealth. Combines philosophical and psychological approaches to literature.

COL 328: Rethinking Bodies

Credits: 3
Type: SEM

The content of this course is variable and therefore it is repeatable for credit. The [University Grade Repeat Policy](#) does not apply.

Introduces various philosophical and theoretical accounts of the body. The concept of the body is generally relegated to a secondary or subordinate category relative to the privilege of mind or Reason in the history of Western thought. Examines the work of a number of theorists who have questioned and problematized the subordination of body to mind. The course is divided into four parts. Part one introduces and selectively surveys the ways in which the body (and mind) have been formulated in modern Western thought. Part two focuses on phenomenological and psychoanalytic concepts of the lived body, the body of experience or the corporeal schema. Part three examines the body as a (writing) surface, a surface of social inscription, marking, and training. The fourth and final part explores the implications of acknowledging the sexual specificity of the body for notions of knowledge and representation.

COL 340: Berlin, Paris, and Vienna at the Turn of the Century

Credits: 3
Type: SEM

Involves a general introduction to twentieth-century culture and art. Focuses on three centers of modernism: Vienna, Paris, and Berlin, and reaches toward that moment when innovations in linguistics, psychoanalysis, logical analysis, and radical literary works were at the peak of ferment. Literary texts, clinical texts, and visual texts form the material for the course, which aims to develop a notion of modernity equally applicable to all.

COL 345: Special Topics

Comparative Literature

Credits: 3
Type: LEC

The content of this course is variable and therefore it is repeatable for credit. The [University Grade Repeat Policy](#) does not apply.

Course content varies according to the interests of the instructor. Topics may explore a specific philosophical, literary, and/or cultural issue or problem.

COL 387: Freud and Feminism

Credits: 3
Type: SEM

Introduces some of the central concepts in the writings of Sigmund Freud, focusing mainly on his understanding of the development of the ego or sense of self, the operations of the unconscious, and the genesis of sexual drives in the constitution of male and female subjects. The course explains these basic Freudian concepts through the central feminist question of sexual difference.

COL 443: Literature and War

Credits: 3
Type: LEC

Analyzes some of the most important war novels, both European and American, from the perspective of the major theories of war. Theoretical texts include Sun Tsu, Huisinga, Clausewitz, and Freud. Literary texts include Swift, Crane, Flaubert, Tolstoy, and Junger.

COL 451: Modernism

Credits: 3
Type: LEC

Pursues the great experiments of modernism in Europe and the United States over the period 1890 - 1945. Emphasizes the culture of combination, expansion, and distortion that characterized not only literature, but art, music, drama, and architecture. Readings by Rilke, Kafka, Proust, Joyce, Freud, Stein, Woolf, Barnes, and Borges.

COL 452: Romanticism

Credits: 3
Type: LEC

Examines studies in British and European Romanticism across genres (poetry and the novel) and disciplines (philosophy, historiography, literature, music, and art). Particularly concerned with Romantic conceptions of language and subjectivity.

COL 470: Special Topics

Credits: 3
Type: SEM

Course content varies. Topics are generally related to the research interests of the specific instructor. Could be entirely devoted to particular literary, philosophical or theoretical problems that range across centuries, or could be devoted to the study of a single author, period, or genre of literature, philosophy, or theory.