

Comparative Literature

The undergraduate program in Comparative Literature is an honors concentration rooted in the multilingual study of literature across cultures, media, and disciplines. Working in more than one national literature in the original language, our students investigate critically and creatively the interconnections among literatures, cultures, and media to explore the human experience in a comparative and interdisciplinary context.

Comp Lit students make connections and comparisons in unexpected places and think nimbly across linguistic, cultural, and disciplinary borders and boundaries. The flexible nature of the program allows concentrators to develop an individualized program of study based on their particular languages and interests. Many students focus their interests on multilingual literary topics, such as world literature, translation studies, and comparative arts. But many also extend a broadly comparative methodology to use literature and other media to examine topics beyond the strictly literary. They build programs of study around medical humanities, game studies, refugee studies, and urban studies, to name a few recent program fields. Additionally, student work often marries critical theory and thinking with critical and creative media practice. Comp Lit students are makers as well as critics, producers of cultural artifacts as well as cultural interpreters.

Comp Lit students work with any number of languages; Hindi, French, Spanish, Chinese, Arabic, Hebrew, Yiddish, Latin, and ASL are some current examples. We welcome work in any foreign language in which a student has an interest. In cases where a student does not have the necessary linguistic competence to undertake literary study, we are happy to help make arrangements toward fluency.

In consultation with the Director of Undergraduate Studies (DUS) and the student's academic advisor, undergraduate concentrators develop an individually tailored and carefully structured program of study that brings together their particular interests and languages and allows them to take courses in a variety of departments across the humanities and beyond. Central to each student's curriculum is the tutorial program. The one-semester sophomore tutorial seminar introduces students to various disciplinary methodologies and forms of literary and cultural analysis. The junior tutorial offers students the rare opportunity to design their own reading course in which they work one-on-one with a tutor and ultimately develop their junior essay project. (Students may opt out of the junior tutorial in order to take additional courses in a non-English language or in Comparative Literature; see details in the concentration requirements outlined below.) The senior tutorial is also an individual course of study, largely devoted to the research and writing of the senior thesis, which is required of all students. All tutorials are reading and writing intensive and form the core around which a student develops a larger program of study. For more information about students' junior essays and senior thesis projects, students should see the "Undergraduate Concentration" link on our website, www.complit.fas.harvard.edu.

Comp Lit students pursue a variety of professional endeavors after graduation. They hold significant positions in academic, literary, and creative professions—as professors and teachers; writers of fiction and nonfiction, editors, and cultural critics; filmmakers, screenwriters, showrunners, and actors; and theater and dance company directors. But they also pursue professional fulfillment as doctors, lawyers, therapists, entrepreneurs, business leaders, rabbis, architects, and landscape designers, to name just a few. For a list of our alumni, students should consult the "Lit Alumni" link on our website, <https://complit.fas.harvard.edu>.

In order to help students determine whether they can meet their academic and intellectual goals in our department, we ask interested students to submit a “Declaring Comparative Literature” form at least one week before the official concentration declaration date. Students are encouraged to meet with the Director of Undergraduate Studies to learn more about the concentration.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Comp Lit graduates leave the department as active, culturally fluent citizens who have lifelong critical and creative thinking skills that allow them to make a difference in, and make meaning of, an increasingly complex global world, whatever their professional path.

REQUIREMENTS

Comparative Literature

Concentration Requirements: 14 courses (56 credits)

1. *Required courses:*
 - a. COMPLIT 97: Sophomore Tutorial; COMPLIT 98A and 98B or tutorial alternative (see “Tutorials” below); COMPLIT 99A and 99B (see “Tutorials” below).
 - b. Three courses from among the courses listed under “Comparative Literature.” Each of these courses must be passed with a grade of B- or above.
 - c. Three courses in one or more non-English literature(s), each passed with a grade of B- or above. Note: A student may petition the DUS to take one non-English course at the advanced language level for concentration credit in this category.
 - d. Three courses drawn from a variety of related departments. These may include, but are not limited to, additional courses in Comparative Literature; English literature; non-English or classical literatures or folklore and mythology (including additional courses in the literature[s] chosen above); Philosophy; Art, Film, and Visual Studies; Study of Women, Gender, and Sexuality; and Linguistics. Students may also choose to use this requirement to pursue study of another non-English language. Students should consult with the DUS to determine whether a specific course will count for concentration credit in this category.
2. *Tutorials:*
 - a. Sophomore year: COMPLIT 97. A grade of B- or above is required.
 - b. Junior year: COMPLIT 98A and 98B. Graded SAT/UNS. A grade of SAT in both semesters is required in order to continue on to COMPLIT 99A and 99B. Alternatively, junior concentrators in Comparative Literature can petition to substitute one or two courses in place of the junior tutorial. These courses must be from the Comparative Literature departmental listings or courses that support non-English language learning at any level. Students must petition the DUS by the end of the second semester of sophomore year.
 - c. Senior year: COMPLIT 99A and COMPLIT 99B (the writing of the senior thesis). Graded SAT/UNS. In order for a student to receive a grade of SAT for the first semester of senior tutorial, one chapter of the thesis must be submitted by the end of the semester in which the thesis work is begun.
3. *Essay:* A junior essay of 20–25 pages (5,000–6,250 words) is required of all students enrolled in the junior year tutorial. Students who do not enroll in the junior tutorial must, make arrangements to complete a junior essay in consultation with the DUS.
4. *Thesis:* A senior thesis of 45–70 pages (11,250–17,500 words) is required of all concentrators in the senior year.
5. *Oral examination:* A 75-minute oral examination at the end of the senior year is required of all primary concentrators and includes a thesis defense, an intellectual autobiography, and an examination in a number of topics and texts determined by the student. The examination committee consists of three members and ideally includes the student’s

junior tutor and one reader of the senior thesis.

6. *Study abroad*: Comparative Literature encourages study abroad for one semester of the junior year. Students who study abroad take only one term of junior tutorial, although they must still complete the junior essay and 14 total concentration courses.

Comparative Literature Joint Concentrations

Many students have successfully pursued a joint concentration with Comparative Literature in many fields, including in the departments of Philosophy; Computer Science; Linguistics; Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations; Art, Film, and Visual Studies; Religion; Chemistry; and Physics.. Each joint concentration is tailored specifically to a student's particular interests and to whether Comp Lit is the primary or allied field, but a joint concentration ordinarily allows for a reduction in the concentration requirements listed above. Courses indicated under "Required Courses" above (specifically item 1d) may be drawn entirely from the other department, and the junior essay and the senior thesis should incorporate both fields of study.

Interested students are encouraged to meet with the DUS to discuss joint options.

ADVISING

Each Comparative Literature concentrator is assigned a tutor who also functions as the student's advisor. In the sophomore year, this tutor is assigned by the DUS, but in following years a student may request a tutor from among the faculty members of the Department of Comparative Literature and the Tutorial Board, or the student will be assigned a tutor (generally a member of the Tutorial Board) by the DUS according to the student's interests. Generally, this tutor changes from year to year as the student's program and interests change. In certain cases, however, a student may request the same tutor for more than one year.

The department offers a variety of courses that might be of interest to first-year students and first-semester sophomores, but it has no specific course that is a prerequisite. Students who are interested in the program might wish to take any of the 100-level courses listed in Comparative Literature in the course search in my.harvard.edu. Students interested in comparative literature might also wish to take a language course in their language of choice if they wish to improve their non-English language competency.

For up-to-date information on advising in Comparative Literature, students should see the Advising Programs Office website at <https://advising.college.harvard.edu/concentrations>.

HOW TO FIND OUT MORE

Students interested in learning more about Comparative Literature should contact Dr. Sandra Naddaff by email (snaddaff@fas.harvard.edu) or should make an appointment to see her during office hours. For detailed information about office hours and to sign up for an appointment visit <https://complit.fas.harvard.edu/people/naddaff-sandra/>

For general information, contact Dr. Sandra Naddaff, Director of Undergraduate Studies, or Ms. Isaure Mignotte, Comparative Literature Program Coordinator, at Dana Palmer House, at 617-495-4186.

ENROLLMENT STATISTICS

Number of Concentrators as of December 2023

Concentrators	AY 2014– 2015	AY 2015– 2016	AY 2016– 2017	AY 2017– 2018	AY 2018– 2019	AY 2019– 2020	AY 2020– 2021	AY 2021– 2022	AY 2022– 2023	AY 2023– 2024
Comparative Literature	26	27	15	21	16	20	10	13	12	15
Comparative Literature + another field	4	2	5	5	7	10	6	12	6	5
Another field + Comparative Literature	3	3	3	5	6	8	4	5	5	4