COMPARATIVE LITERATURE
A bi-college interdisciplinary major program at Haverford and Bryn Mawr

What is the field of Comparative Literature?
The study of Comparative Literature situates literature in an international perspective rather than studying
the literature of a single national tradition; it is concerned both with particular works of literature and with
literary history and literary theory; it works towards an understanding of the ways literature functions in its
social and cultural context.
Comparative Literature is an interdisciplinary field not just because it works with a variety of literature and
languages, but because it also draws on interpretive methods from other disciplines broadly concerned with
cultural discourse; among these are philosophy, history, religion, classical and area studies, Africana
studies, feminist and gender studies, anthropology, music, and the history of art.

What is the nature of the Haverford/Bryn Mawr major program?
Ours is a joint interdisciplinary program at the two colleges. We require students to take three central
courses (an introductory course and a two-semester senior seminar), to do work at the advanced level in
each of two language/literature departments, one of which may be English, and to take at least one course
in literary theory and two electives that are themselves comparative in nature. We recommend (but do not
require) that majors study abroad during one or two semesters of the junior year, and that students with a
possible interest in graduate school begin a second language other than English before they graduate.

Why do students choose the major?
Majors are drawn to the program by several features, the most frequently cited being these: that it allows
them to work with two languages and literature without giving preference to either (as a major/minor
combination would); that it readily allows interdisciplinary work with other fields such as anthropology,
religion, or art history; and that the flexibility of the program, within the requirements, allows students to
have a great deal of choice in designing their own major. The fact that the program allows and encourages
study abroad also appeals to many students.

What should a freshman interested in Comp. Lit. do?
Freshmen may take the introductory course, Comp. Lit. 200, offered in both the fall (at BMC) and spring
(HC) semesters, though most students take this course as sophomores; they may also try out any of the
various Comp. Lit. Electives open to first-year students. What is most important is that they make sure they
are doing work in a language that will allow them to reach a sufficiently advanced level (normally the 200
level, though there are exceptions) by their junior year. We recommend that students who think they might
be interested in the major talk to the Chair at some point during their freshman year.

How many students major, and what are their programs like?
The number of majors at the two colleges in a given year has ranged from 6 to 19, with an average of 10.
The most common combination of languages is English and Spanish, with English and French a close
second, but we regularly have students working in English and German or Italian and have also had a
number who work with other combinations, such as English and Russian, French and Arabic, English and
ancient Greek, English and Japanese, French and Italian, French and Latin.
Some students follow a fairly traditional model, working with two bodies of literature, while others make
use of the flexibility of the major to develop a program that has a strong language component but allows
them also to pursue interests in other areas, such as music, art history, anthropology, or film; a number of
Comp. Lit. students combine the major with a minor in another field. Probably about two-thirds of our
majors study abroad for a semester or a year during the junior year. In their senior year (as part of the work
for the senior seminar) all students write a senior thesis on a topic of their own choice (see below for the
range of senior thesis models in Comp Lit).

What do students do after they graduate?
Comparative Literature alumni/ae are engaged in pretty much the same range of post-graduate activities as
other majors in the humanities. Our students have gone on to do graduate work in Comparative Literature
and related fields (French, Spanish, German, etc.), have pursued advanced degrees in business, law,
medicine, and journalism, and have undertaken a variety of careers including publishing and teaching at
the primary and secondary levels.

**Who are the faculty?**
The program is run by two co-chairs, one at each college, and by a “steering committee” of faculty from different departments, including those who have taught or are teaching the three central courses in the program. Current members of the steering committee hold degrees in a variety of fields: Comparative Literature, Classics, English, French, German, Russian, Spanish, Italian, and Philosophy. The affiliated faculty (those who teach one or more courses cross-listed with Comp. Lit.) broaden our reach still further to include art history, music history, and cultural anthropology.

**Requirements for the major:**
Comparative Literature 200, Introduction to Comparative Literature (should be taken no later than the sophomore year)
Six literature courses in the original language at the 200 level or above, divided between two literature departments (of which English may be one). At least two of these (one in each literature) must be at the 300 level or above, or its equivalent as approved by the advisor.
Two electives in Comparative Literature
One course in critical theory
Comparative Literature 398 (Theories and Methods) and 399 (Senior Seminar)

Notes:
Students planning to go on to graduate school are encouraged to begin another language.
Students working in less commonly taught languages may under some circumstances substitute a course taught in translation.

**Requirements for the minor:**
Comparative Literature 200, Introduction to Comparative Literature
Four literature courses in the original language at the 200 level or above, divided between two literature departments (of which English may be one). At least one of these must be at the 300 level or above.
Comparative Literature 398.
Note: Comp. Lit. minors are encouraged to choose their national literature courses from those with a comparative component.

**Senior Thesis Models in Comparative Literature**
Each Senior major in comparative literature defines his/ her thesis topic in consultation with the faculty members who teach the capstone seminars, Comp Lit 398 and 399. The subject of the thesis should build on languages, literary and cultural interests and/ or competencies cultivated in coursework at Bryn Mawr and Haverford or abroad. Although the field of comparative literature has undergone major transformations in the past twenty years, its abiding interests remain rooted in textual specificity (close readings of texts) and in intellectual and linguistic diversity. As befits work in this field, the thesis topic should be broadly comparative in nature. Given the broad range of contemporary scholarship in comparative literature, the senior thesis could entail one or several of the following models:
- A study of a critical problem as exemplified in authors or works from two different literary and linguistic traditions (for instance, a comparison of the disintegrating dramatic self in Eugène Ionesco and Tom Stoppard; gender relations in El libro de buen amor and the Canterbury Tales; the representation of AIDS in African and Latin American fiction).
- An exploration of generic or transnational issues in different media (for instance modernist poetry and jazz; Dante Gabriel Rossetti's Early Italian Poets and its illustrations; representing the First World War in poetry and film; trauma in film and the novel).
- A critical examination of a problem in literary or cultural theory or literary history (for instance, the “author function” in fictional and ethnographic personal narratives; the representation of gender transitivity in medical discourses and photography).
- A study and translation of a literary work or a critical examination of the cultural and ideological implications in translation (for instance, the role of Jewish translators of Arabic texts into Castilian and the invention of Spain).

Regardless of the model of comparative work adopted, the thesis should represent a well-rounded approach.
to relevant theoretical approaches; this will often be a synthesis of various theoretical approaches. Queer theory and trauma theory, for instance, might both inflect a reading of poets of the First World War; Foucault's Discipline and Punish and other works would allow for interpretations of writing under censorship in the Middle East or Latin America; an understanding of the use of tropes (allegory, irony) or satire might illuminate the narrative strategies employed in offering resistance to censorship; diasporic writers might be approached through theories of translation, cultural memory, or both.

If you have further questions —
Please get in touch with the chair of Comp Lit. Professor Maud McInerney, Email: mmcinern@haverford.edu Office: Woodside 203

Comp Lit Courses, Fall 2017
(100- and 200-level courses taught at Haverford; Comp Lit 200 will be taught at Bryn Mawr by Shiamin Kwa)
142a - Introduction to Visual Studies - C. Knight
203a - Writing the Jewish Trajectories in Latin America – A. Huberman
210a - Spanish and Spanish American Film Studies - G. Michelotti
223a - Writing Nations: Africa and Europe - I. Brust
229a - Topics in Visual Studies: Roland Barthes and the Image - J. Muse
268a - Artists Under the Policing Gaze of the State: Politics, History, and Performance - A. Szucs
293a - Translation and other Transformations: Theory and Practice - D. Roberts