Comparative Literature
A bi-college interdisciplinary major program at Haverford and Bryn Mawr

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.

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.

Our program 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 foreign language before they graduate.

Students considering the major or minor in Comp. Lit. should take the introductory course, Comp. Lit. 200, by the end of the sophomore year. The course is also open to first year students. It is offered twice this year (2013-14), at Bryn Mawr College in the fall and at Haverford in the spring. Another entry point into the program is through any of the Comp. Lit. elective courses 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.

The Chair of the Program in Comparative Literature is Professor Israel Burshatin (iburshat@haverford.edu; 610.896.1065; Hall 205); if you have an interest in Comparative Literature, it’s a good idea to speak with him before the end of your first year.