



ABOUT THE PROGRAM

What is comparative literature? It is a study that emphasizes a way of approaching literature, rather than a specific body of knowledge about literature. We explore literature beyond and across the boundaries of single nations, languages and cultures, often in conjunction with the historical, political and social realities that lend life and variety to any art. Because comparative literature embraces all of world literature in all periods of history, no one person could possibly embody the field. As a result, the comparative approach is a highly dynamic, interdisciplinary and collaborative endeavor, which is reflected in the diverse interests of our students and faculty.

What makes the program distinctive?

“Comparing Literatures: Theory and Practice,” the program’s core course, introduces students to the diversity of approaches possible within the field. Uniquely, the course focuses on acquiring the research and writing skills specific to the comparative

study of literature. Comparative literature is inherently multicultural and dynamic. We are constantly shaping our curriculum to fit the interests and needs of the changing student body and encourage student input at all levels of program planning.

FAST FACTS

Number of faculty: 18

Can you minor in this program? Yes

Emphasis within the major:

The program’s core course is the jumping-off point for students’ exploration of literature from across the globe, from a wide variety of perspectives.

Popular second majors:

European cultural studies, international and global studies

Website:

brandeis.edu/programs/coml

ACADEMICS AND RESEARCH

Teaching opportunities

Students can take advantage of peer teaching assistant opportunities. Teaching assistants work closely with the professor to get an inside view of how courses are created and conducted.

Independent research

Recent students have researched and written honors theses on topics as diverse as translation, comparative feminism, the influence of folklore on “high” literature and literary responses to chaos in the wake of World War II.

Interdisciplinary study

A great strength of the comparative literature program is that it is interdepartmental, which means that students can draw on the expertise of world-class faculty from across the humanities curriculum.

BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

Diverse internships

Comparative literature and history double-major Michael D. '11 was funded by a Brandeis stipend to intern at Confluir in San Miguel de Tucuman, Argentina. He worked in community outreach and event planning at Confluir, which offers free legal advice and fights for the rights of minorities (specifically indigenous groups), women and those struggling with poverty.

Study abroad

The department has a partnership with Boston University for Brandeis students to go on a study abroad program in Madrid and apply the methods they learn in a real setting. Comparative literature majors also have studied with other programs all over the globe.

Special events

Comparative literature sponsors and cosponsors a variety of student-oriented events on campus, including lectures, film screenings and informal talks.

Student clubs

Because our students are active in multiple departments, they bring the comparative perspective to a wide variety of student clubs and organizations, with interests ranging from Southeast Asia to Russia, from film to dance and many more.

AWARDS AND RECOGNITION

Distinguished faculty

Susan Lanser, professor of English and comparative literature, also chairs the women’s and gender studies program. Her interests encompass 18th-century studies, the French Revolution, feminist thought, narrative theory, and the history of gender and sexuality. Her most recent book is “The History of Sexuality: Sapphic Subjects and the Making of Modernity.”

David Powelstock, associate professor of Russian, East European and comparative literature, chairs the comparative literature program. His current research explores expressions of selfhood in lyric poetry, combining literary theory with cognitive linguistics, philosophy of mind and cognitive neuroscience.

AFTER BRANDEIS

Real jobs

Recent comparative literature alumni have gone on to careers such as a writer and editor for Houghton-Mifflin, a program director at a youth center, the vice president of Mesirow Financial, a self-employed director and actor, a trial attorney at the U.S. Department of Justice, and the deputy director for Pakistan and Bangladesh at the U.S. Department of State.

Graduate studies

Our alumni have gone on to graduate study in comparative literature, linguistics, sociolinguistics, education and many other fields.

“It was nice to see how all the assignments were designed to build on one another. I saw my short writing pieces evolve into a writing- and research-intensive final paper. So it made writing research papers significantly less daunting and actually exciting to write. I will definitely save the pieces I wrote for this class, because I want to remember this class as a steppingstone in my college writing career!”

Student evaluation of COML 100a



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