

# THE PROGRAM IN COMPARATIVE & WORLD LITERATURE

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## The Program

The Program in Comparative Literature (CWL) was founded more than fifty years ago, first as a graduate program and then as an undergraduate program. We excel at work that crosses boundaries — national languages, literatures and cultures; literature and other disciplines — but we also excel at preparing graduate students for what we think will be enduring areas of study as well as emergent scholarly possibilities. Our Ph.D.s have gone on to stellar careers in academia and beyond (advising, publishing, documentary filmmaking, and more). Our graduate seminars enroll students not only from CWL, but from across the humanities and arts (English; foreign language and literature programs; anthropology; art history; history; and more). Our undergraduates take classes that range from large lectures (Indian Cinema, Masterpieces of Western Culture, Global Consciousness and Literature) to small seminars for advanced undergraduates and graduate students.

### Whom do I need to meet right away?

Entering graduate school means learning a lot of new names, but we would suggest getting to know several people right away, and returning to talk to them frequently. First off, the **Director of Graduate Studies** (usually “the DGS” — you’ll also have to learn some new acronyms) will be someone you will want to see at least once every semester; they talk to you about your classes, remind you about upcoming milestones you need to hit (like exams), answer questions, and help you out with any concerns you may have. Until you declare your **Advisor** (i.e., the person who will direct your dissertation), which usually happens in year 3, the DGS is your official advisor, and will need to sign off on your courses and be consulted about pretty much everything. You will

also want to see, at least once per year, the **Director** of the Program, who monitors all the students in concert with the DGS and the rest of the faculty. More importantly, the Director also decides, in consultation with the faculty, how the Program supports its students (fellowships, research assistantships, teaching assignments) and is the contact between the Graduate College and the Program. You will definitely also get to know the Program's **Office Manager**, who handles some of the paperwork you'll need to complete, as well as the third floor staff, who handle **Human Resources**, **Student Services** and **Admission and Records**.

## Languages

Languages are really, really important to Comparative Literature as a discipline; your goal is to have multiple languages at a high level of sophistication—good enough to read, analyze and discuss sophisticated works of literature in the original. Language learning is a major part of the discipline and something we all work on, all the time. Remember that for your primary (and possibly secondary) literatures, you may one day be seeking a faculty position in a national literature department dedicated to that language. Some disciplines (such as French) set a particularly high value on the pursuit of linguistic perfection, and you should work to develop a sense of the professional norms for each of your fields and strive to meet them.

At Stage One, you should have two languages besides English, one of which, at this stage, may be a research language (reading knowledge, in other words). Knowledge of the “literary” languages should be at a sufficiently advanced level so as to allow you to take advanced courses in the respective literatures in other literature departments at UIUC. The languages you present must coincide with the literatures chosen for the major and minor literatures.

There are several ways of certifying competence in a research language. In our Program, competence in many commonly taught European languages (German, French, Italian, Spanish, etc.) is normally defined as the equivalent of having completed two years of college study in that language (that is, through the 104 level). Competence in these languages may be certified by actually completing the fourth semester of language study at UIUC with a grade of B or better, or with “credit”. Merely completing the 500 and 501 language sequence (reading knowledge for graduate students), if offered, is not considered sufficient for research competence in the respective language. The student who chooses the 500-501 sequence must subsequently certify competence by passing the equivalent of the final exam in 104 with a grade of B. Competence in other languages is measured by the equivalent ability to read and adequately comprehend a literary text of average difficulty in that language, and may take longer (Arabic, Chinese, Russian, Basque, and so on).

For students majoring in European and/or American literatures before 1800, Latin is generally required either as a research language or as a literary field. Students concentrating on the earlier periods of a national literature (before 1500 in the case of European literatures; a different chronology is applied in the case of other literatures) are responsible for the earlier forms of the respective language (which does not necessarily count as a separate language for the purposes of fulfilling the research language requirement; this is at the discretion of the DGS). Students concentrating on the modern periods of their literatures

are not required to know the linguistic history of their literatures but are encouraged to do so. The presentation of a classical language either as a field or as a research language relevant to the student's specializations is encouraged though not required. Classical languages are, for instance, Greek, Latin, Sanskrit, Classical Chinese, etc.

Applicants for whom English is not a native language should present one of the following TOEFL scores as a minimum: 103 on the TOEFL iBT exam; 257 on the computer-based TOEFL; or 613 on the paper-based TOEFL. Note that these scores are above those set by the Graduate College for general admission to a number of other fields. This minimum-score policy will be reviewed periodically and adjusted if necessary. If English is not your native language, you will absolutely need to make sure that you work towards professional-level competence in it. We prepare our students for the US job market, in which you will need very strong English, even if you are being considered for positions in a national literature department other than English.

## The Ph.D., Stage One (formerly the M.A.)

All graduate students enter the program as Ph.D. students, and all of them at Stage One (see overview on last page), which is essentially a probationary period so we can assess the student's level, aptitude for Comparative Literature, and whether the Program and the student make for a good "fit." If you enter with an M.A. in an appropriate literary field (like Comparative Literature, a regional field like Romance Languages and Literatures, or a specific national literature like Japanese or French), you may choose to take the M.A. Exam at the end of your first year and move to Stage Two. Otherwise, students remain in Stage One for their first two years, and take the M.A. Exam at the end of their second year.

### How many classes do I need to take each semester?

Generally speaking, the norm is that you will take 2-3 seminars while you are teaching, and 3-4 seminars if you are on fellowship. (Taking fewer than eight units is generally not an option, because it's not considered a full load.) In any given semester, you should consult with the DGS and your Advisor, balancing out your teaching, your courses, your life and your language work. You need to be careful and ensure that you maintain the required minimum of courses to satisfy visa or fellowship requirements (some classes are less than 4 units, for example, or simply may not count toward your visa or fellowship requirements, like language courses).

### Which classes do I need to take? How many?

To advance past Stage One of the Ph.D., you will need to take a minimum of 8 courses (32 units), fulfilling the requirements in the checklist below, but we expect everyone (especially fellowship students) to take more. These courses will generally be 500 level graduate seminars, but a few (a maximum of 3) 400-level courses are acceptable. *You should always seek out courses taught by the faculty you think you might want to work with*, in CWL and in your various fields. There are also some specific requirements that you will need to fulfill at Stage One:

_____ CWL 501	_____ 1 course in major literature
_____ CWL 502	_____ 1 course in minor literature
_____ 1 CWL seminar (55I, 56I, 57I or 58I)	_____ 1 course in CWL or major or minor lit
_____ 1 CWL seminar (55I, 56I, 57I or 58I)	_____ 1 course in CWL, major lit, minor lit or a non-literary field for cultural or historical context

## A typical course of study:

Let's take the case of Cameron, a US student who majored in French in college and is now also pursuing Japanese. French at Illinois needed an extra instructor, so Cameron was supported by language teaching the first year; they then went on to work as a teaching assistant in CWL 114 in the second year. Cameron's first two years of coursework might look something like this:

FALL 1	SPRING 1	FALL 2	SPRING 2
CWL 501 (Theory)	CWL 502 (Methods)	–	EALC 415 (Japanese Lit)
FRENCH 505 (Lang. Pedagogy)	FRENCH 574 (19th c. Fr. Lit.)	FRENCH 578 (20th c. Fr. Lit)	CWL 504: (Film Theory)
CWL 581 (Ecocriticism)	–	CWL 581 (Nation & Gender)	CWL 561 (Lyric Poetry)
JAPN 203 (Intermediate)	JAPN 204 (Intermediate)	JAPN 305 (Advanced)	JAPN 306 (Advanced)
Teaching: FR 101 (1 section)	Teaching: FR 101 (2 sections)	Teaching: CWL 114 (3 sections)	Teaching: CWL 114 (3 sections)

At the end of two years, Cameron has gotten Japanese to an advanced level (which is farther than is strictly necessary at this stage), ticked all of the required boxes, and taken an additional class (note that FR 505 is a required pedagogy class, and does not count toward the 8 required courses).

## The M.A. Exam

You take this in your fourth semester in the Program, at the end of your second year (unless you enter with an M.A. in an approved field and choose to take it at the end of year one). **All M.A. exams are taken during the first week in March, with exceptions only for medical or family emergencies.** You will need a committee of three people, each one the primary examiner for one of the three parts of the exam. The DGS will need to approve your examiners once you've chosen them, and at least one of them must be **core faculty** in CWL (this person will serve as chair; make sure to let them know that they have that role). You should print out **Instructions for M.A. Examiners** (downloadable separately), and give it to each member of your examining committee so that they know what they are supposed to do (email them a copy as well!). After the exams, you must meet with your committee to discuss the results, and your future plans in the program.

The three parts of the exam are as follows:

1. A **critical theory exam** based on materials covered in CWL 501-502 and your area of specialization, covering several different critical approaches (4 hours in length). The reading list consists of 20 works divided into 4 categories, selected in consultation with the examiner. The exam consists of 3-4 essay questions covering various aspects of the reading list. You choose only two questions and answers them in a coherent essay of no less than five double-spaced pages each (2 hours per question). Your examiner here will likely be your instructor from CWL 501 or 502.
2. A period exam in the **major literature** (4 hours in length), based on a reading list of 20-25 works. The exam consists of two parts. First, two or three essay questions on any aspects of the reading list. You choose only one question and answers it in a coherent essay of no less than five double-spaced pages (2 hours). Second, a passage in the *original language*, chosen by the examiner from any single work on the reading list, which you explicate in no less than four double-spaced pages. The passage can be in the form of a short poem or a prose passage of about 500-700 words, and it should be sufficiently rich to allow for a nuanced analysis that draws out not only the specific features of the passage and the work to which it belongs, but also general characteristics of the period and the literary or cultural tradition in question, showing “the universe in a grain of sand” (2 hours).
3. A period exam in the **first minor literature** (2 hours in length), based on a reading list of 15-20 works. The exam consists of a passage in the original language, chosen by the examiner from any single work on the reading list, which you explicate in no less than four double-spaced pages. The passage can be in the form of a short poem or a prose passage of about 500-700 words, and it should be sufficiently rich to allow for a nuanced analysis that draws out not only the specific features of the passage and the work to which it belongs, but also general characteristics of the period and the literary or cultural tradition in question, showing “the universe in a grain of sand.”

Exams are graded **high pass, pass, low pass, or fail**. A passing grade on the M.A. exams does not guarantee admission to Stage Two of the Ph.D. Program. You will meet with your committee two weeks after the exam to discuss the exam results, the student’s overall trajectory in the program, directions for future research, and potential dissertation committee members and directors.

If a student fails one or more of the parts of the M.A. exam, they may re-take the examination(s) in question. A second failure results in no degree being granted and dismissal from the Program.

A student may elect to receive a terminal M.A. rather than continuing in the Program. In this case, the request should be made in writing prior to taking the first of the M.A. examinations, and a petition must be made to the Graduate College in the third semester or at the start of the fourth semester. Otherwise, it is assumed that the student wishes to be considered for admission to Stage Two of the Ph.D. Program.

Do keep in mind that these are timed exams, so have a rough plan before you begin writing so you can deliver a finished, coherent response; the faculty, however, understand that timed exams will not produce the polished prose of a seminar paper.

## The Ph.D., Stage Two

The faculty in CWL meet every Spring, typically in late April to review all graduate students, but particularly to decide on students continuing on to Stage Two of the Ph.D (see overview on final page). They look comprehensively at exams, coursework, and teaching — but also at how good of a fit the Program is for the student (for example, are there CWL and Illinois faculty who are competent and willing to direct a dissertation in the student’s area? Assuming all the assessments are positive, the student is admitted to Stage Two of the Program, which means more courses and more exams, and which culminates in the generation of a dissertation prospectus, a detailed plan that outlines the argument, the archive, the stakes, the theoretical underpinnings, and a chapter by chapter plan for what the dissertation will be.

### How many classes do I need to take each semester?

As before, the norm is that you will take 2-3 seminars while you are teaching, and 3-4 seminars if you are on fellowship. (Taking fewer than eight units is generally not an option, because it’s not considered a full load.) In any given semester, you should consult with the DGS and your Advisor, balancing out your teaching, your courses, your life and your language work. As before, *you* need to be careful and ensure that you maintain the required minimum of courses to satisfy visa or fellowship requirements.

### Which classes do I need to take? How many?

To advance past Stage Two of the Ph.D., you will once again need to take a minimum of 8 courses (32 units) *beyond* the courses that satisfied Stage One, fulfilling the requirements in the checklist below, but we expect everyone (especially fellowship students) to take more. These courses should be 500 level graduate seminars if at all possible (not all national literatures offer graduate level courses). *You should always seek out courses taught by the faculty you think you might want to work with*, in CWL and in your various fields.

_____ CWL 582 (Proseminar, professional skills)	_____ 1 course in major literature
_____ 1 CWL seminar (551, 561, 571 or 581)	_____ 1 course in major literature
_____ 1 CWL seminar (551, 561, 571 or 581)	_____ 1 course in minor lit 1
_____ 1 CWL seminar (551, 561, 571 or 581)	_____ 1 course in minor lit 2

### A typical course of study:

Cameron has been accepted to Stage Two, and has added Italian as a reading language after taking an intensive summer course between year two and three. Cameron continues to be supported by a mix of teaching in French and CWL, and well as a partial RA-ship (research assistantship) one semester. The next two years of coursework might look something like this:

FALL 3	SPRING 3	FALL 4	SPRING 4
–	CWL 582 (Proseminar)	–	CWL 593 (Exam Prep)
FRENCH 576 (Francophonie)	FRENCH 552 (Fr. Comp Cinema)	ITAL 413 (Dante)	CWL 504: (Film Theory)
CWL 581 (Memory)	CWL 571 (East-West)	CWL 581 (Nation & Gender)	–
ITAL 103 (Intermediate)	ITAL 104 (Advanced)	EALC 590 (Ind. Study Japan. Lit)	–
Teaching: 241 (2 sections)	Teaching: FR 101 (1 sect) + RA	Teaching: CWL 114 (3 sections)	Teaching: CWL 114 (3 sections)

At the end of Stage Two, Cameron has fulfilled all of the requirements, plus two extra courses, and has brought a third language up to the appropriate level. Italian 413 is a 400-level class, but 500-level seminars are offered in Italian only sporadically. In Spring of Year 4, Cameron takes an independent study (CWL 593) to prepare for the preliminary exams and prospectus defense that cap Stage Two of the Ph.D.

## The Prelims

By the end of year three, you should have chosen your Major Advisor, who will chair the exam committee for your Prelims and Prospectus Defense, and will typically go on to be your dissertation director. You will need at least four faculty members for your exam committee, one of whom should be from the area represented by your second minor literature, and at least one of whom must be from the **core faculty** in CWL. You should print out the **Instructions for Ph.D. Examiners** (downloadable separately), and give it to each member of your examining committee so that they know what they are supposed to do (email them a copy as well!).

In the semester in which you take your prelims, you may choose to sign up for an independent study (4 units) of exam preparation; this may be with your Major Advisor, any member of the committee, or the DGS, if necessary; this course should be used exclusively to prepare for the exams.

The examinations consist of two written exams (the Preliminary Exams) and one oral exam (the Prospectus Defense). First, the **Preliminary Exams**:

1. A take-home exam on the dissertation field, including secondary sources, and related critical theory (approximately 50 titles). The exam is to consist of 4 questions, each written by one member of exam committee, each question addressing the dissertation broadly, so you will draw on multiple languages and cultural traditions in answering. The Chair of the exam committee collects the questions from the three other examiners and assembles the exam. You choose only two questions, answering each of them in an essay of approximately 5-10 double spaced pages. Graduate Services will email the exam to the student as close to 9 AM as feasible, and the answers are due by 5:00 PM of the same day.
2. A period exam in the second minor literature (2 hours in length, to be completed in graduate student services in FLB), based on a reading list of 15-20 works. The exam consists of a passage in the original

language, chosen by the examiner from any single work on the reading list, which you explicate in no less than four double-spaced pages. The passage can be in the form of a short poem or a prose passage of about 500-700 words, and it should be sufficiently rich to allow for a nuanced analysis that draws out not only the specific features of the passage and the work to which it belongs, but also general characteristics of the period and the literary or cultural tradition in question, showing “the universe in a grain of sand.”

The literatures and periods chosen should have a coherent rationale within the field of Comparative Literature. In the case of European and American literatures, both minor literatures should cover similar periods (for instance, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance through the Enlightenment, Romanticism through the 19<sup>th</sup> century, or the 20<sup>th</sup> century). If one or two classical literatures are combined with more modern literatures, then the requirement of similar periods for both minor literatures may not apply. In the case of other literary traditions, a different periodicity may apply. If your work crosses rather different cultures and civilizations, then other criteria of comparativity must be established. Students are urged from the start of their graduate careers to enter into a conversation with the DGS and then with the Major Advisor on which combinations of literatures and periods make the best professional sense in light of their interests.

The **Prospectus Defense** is an oral exam (2 hours) that normally occurs within a month after the successful completion of the student’s last examination. This exam covers two areas:

1. The written examinations, revisited. You may be asked to address the answers given in the written examinations. In order to review for this part of the orals, you will have copies of the questions and your answers on the written examinations. Comments and evaluations by the professors, however, will remain confidential.
2. The dissertation proposal. You submit the proposal to all the members of the committee at least two weeks before the date of the orals. A suitable proposal is generally about 10-15 pages long, those pages covering several areas: a statement of the topic itself, giving the grounds for comparison as well as the critical approach(es) to be used, and detailing what the student expects to find or to prove (5 or 6 pages, single-spaced); a topical outline (no more than 2 pages, single-spaced) giving a firm sense of the structure of the dissertation and its argument; a bibliography (no more than 2 pages, single-spaced) of the most relevant primary and secondary works.

In the case of failure in one or more of the written examinations, the oral examination is postponed. The student is given one more chance to pass the examination(s) in question. A second failure results in dismissal from the Program. The oral examination will then not be necessary. In the case of failure in the oral examination, the student is given one more chance to pass it. A second failure in the oral examination results in dismissal from the Program.

Assuming you complete the Prelims and Prospectus Defense successfully, you are advanced to candidacy (Stage Three), also referred to as ABD (All But Dissertation).

## The Ph.D., Stage Three

For Stage Three (see overview, final page) you will need to declare your dissertation director and PhD committee. It is very strongly encouraged that the director or co-director be from the core faculty of CWL, but **at least one member** of the committee must be (and this member must chair the committee). Stage Three is in some ways the easiest and in other ways the hardest stage of the Ph.D. You will typically enroll in 8 units of 599 (Thesis Research) each semester with your dissertation director, but you will not take many classes, if any at all. Your advisor is no longer the DGS, but your director. You will of course research and write, but you will also continue to hone your languages, acquire greater proficiency in professional skills, meet with your director and committee members from time to time, teach, apply for fellowships, attend and present at conferences, quite possibly working on publishing some of your research, and eventually begin to apply for academic positions. What makes this stage difficult, however, is that it is relatively open-ended and without a rigorously defined timeline or milestones. On a daily basis, it is up to you to achieve a structure (*I write every day from 9 AM until noon*), schedule your milestones (*I will finish chapter 2 by the end of April*), and deal with balancing out teaching, research, writing, and life (*go for a run, get to work on chapter 3, prepare tomorrow's class, spend some time in the library, or wash those dishes that have been sitting there?*). Many students report feeling lonely during this stage; their cohort of fellow students are all off on their own, and you have to adjust for the fact that you don't see all your peers and colleagues daily anymore. There are ways to deal with this, some of which we discuss in the FAQ below, but mainly, you will need to be very proactive and structured and develop a certain amount of self-discipline that you may have relied on the institution to provide before.

### Support during Stage Three

If you entered with a fellowship, the chances are very high that you saved a year of it for this stage, which is what we typically recommend. The Program has limited funds that it uses to provide research assistantships and fellowships when possible, but these funds are not automatically renewed or renewable, so we are cautious about handing them out. There are, however, sources of funding that are available from outside of the department, and we encourage and in some cases require our students to apply for them. Applying for fellowships should not be seen as something "extra," but a typical and even necessary professional skill (it is also tremendously helpful on the job market, because fellowship applications require you to learn how to pitch your dissertation project to a variety of audiences and at varying levels of detail.) In particular, students preparing to enter or already at Stage Three should discuss with the DGS and the Director about possible fellowships, including the annual competition for fellowships from the Humanities Research Institute (**HRI**, formerly the IPRH), which funds a number of graduate students in the humanities and arts each year, organized around a broad theme. In preparation for their final year in Stage Three, all students should also apply for a **Dissertation Completion Fellowship**, offered both through the **School of Literatures, Cultures and Linguistics**, and through the **Graduate College**.

In addition to stipend support, graduate students should begin to apply for, travel to and present at national conferences in their chosen fields. The Graduate College has a competition each semester for funding to help defray the costs of attending such conferences; the Program requires students who wish

for financial assistance for conference travel to apply to the Graduate College; we will, however, provide \$250 for conference travel reimbursement to any student who applies, regardless of whether they receive funding from the Graduate College. You must be presenting a paper to qualify (not attending, chairing, or responding). In general, we will only reimburse for major conferences such as the ACLA, SCMS, MLA, C19, etc. — major professional venues where people can see your work and notice what you do, not conferences organized by and for grad students (these have their place, but we do not ordinarily offer reimbursement for them. In the case of travel to the MLA, the program will offer \$500 if you have an interview, regardless of whether you are presenting (it is very rare, however, for universities to use the MLA for interviews).

### A typical course of study:

Cameron advances to Stage Three, and spends the next two years working on a dissertation about forms of Japonaiserie in contemporary French literature and film, taking one more seminar because the topic seemed so relevant to the dissertation project. Cameron is supported by a mix of teaching and fellowship funding, having applied for a Dissertation Completion Fellowship at the end of year 5 (which, alas, did not come through), as well as an HRI fellowship (which happily was successful). The last two years might look something like this:

FALL 5	SPRING 5	FALL 6	SPRING 6
CWL 599 (8 units)	CWL 599 (8 units)	CWL 599 (8 units)	CWL 599 (8 units)
CWL 581 (Borders)	–	–	–
–	–	–	–
Department Fellowship	Teaching: CWL 242	HRI Fellowship	HRI Fellowship

## Overview of CWL Ph.D. Program

