COMPARATIVE LITERATURE (BA)

College of Arts and Sciences

Program Website (http://complit.cornell.edu)

CIP: 16.0104 | **HEGIS:** 1503.00 | **NYSED:** 79376

Program Description

The Department of Comparative Literature provides a broad range of courses in European as well as non-European literatures. Courses devoted to literary studies variously stress significant authors, themes, problems, genres, historical periods, and theoretical perspectives. The Department also offers an array of courses in visual and media studies and enables the study of literature in relation to the history and theory of film, video, and other arts, as well as media. In cooperation with related departments in the humanities, the department encourages the interdisciplinary study of literature—in conjunction with anthropology, history, philosophy, sexuality studies, psychology, sociology, and so forth. The course offerings reflect current theoretical approaches to literature, media, and the arts—hermeneutics, semiotics, deconstruction, cultural criticism, Marxism, postcolonialism, reception aesthetics, feminism, and psychoanalysis.

Academic Standards

Major Declaration

How to apply: Interested students are invited to complete the online Major Request Form. (https://cornell.ca1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_bejtNyzrWSDsmnr)

Honors Program

Students achieving grades of at least B+ on the senior essay, in course work for the major, and in their overall academic performance at Cornell are eligible for the designation of honors in Comparative Literature. The honors criteria described here will start for all graduates in the 2026-2027 academic year.

An honors essay (COML 4930 Senior Essay - COML 4940 Senior Essay) of roughly fifty pages is optional. It is to be written during the senior year under the direction of a faculty member, preferably from within the department, who has agreed to work in close cooperation with the student. Students are urged to begin research on their thesis topic during the summer preceding their senior year.

Special Academic Options

First-Year Writing Seminars

Most 1000-level courses may be used toward satisfying the first-year writing seminar requirements. The department offers first-year writing seminars on a wide range of topics. Consult the John S. Knight Institute (https://knight.as.cornell.edu/) website for times, instructors, and descriptions.

Program Information

- Program Mode of Delivery: In Person
- Program Location: Ithaca, NY
- Total Credits Required: 120

Program Requirements

- No prerequisites are required to enter the comparative literature major.
- Minimum grade of C for a course to be counted toward the major.
- Students who elect to do a double major with another literature department may count up to three courses from that major toward their requirements in Comparative Literature.
- The department encourages students to study abroad in pursuit of their cultural and linguistic interests, and the number of courses that may be counted toward the major will be determined in consultation with the faculty advisor and with the approval of the director of undergraduate studies.

Note: In addition to the major requirements outlined below, all students must meet the college graduation requirements.

All majors in Comparative Literature are expected to have completed ten, three to four credit courses, with the minimum of 30 credits, half of which must be devoted to the study of works in languages other than English that the student will read in their original language. Five of these courses must be taken in the Department of Comparative Literature and must include the following two courses: a designated course in theory and formerly noted as Core Course, COML 3001 Methods of Comparison, offered in the fall, usually taken in the junior or senior year.

The major enables students to pursue a commitment to a comparative study that includes a substantial non-English component by offering two tracks:

1. Comparative Literary Studies. This track is designed for students who wish to place greater emphasis on literary study in their course work.
2. Literary, Visual, and Media Studies. This track is designed for students who wish to pursue their comparative study of literature and theory by integrating rigorous work on film, video, or other arts and media.

Code	Title	Hours
Core Course		
COML 3001	Methods of Comparison	3
Seminar in Theory		
Students must take one department-designated theory course. [1]		
Students choose one of two tracks for their remaining requirements:		
Comparative Literary Studies Track		
Three (3) courses in Comparative Literature at the 2000-level and above.		
Five (5) courses in literature or other areas of the humanities at the 2000-level and above, to be taken in one or more foreign literature departments. Texts must be read in the original language. A student may offer one advanced-level foreign language course (conversation, composition, etc.) toward fulfilling this requirement.		
Literary, Visual, and Media Studies Track [2]		

Two (2) courses in literary study at the 2000-level or above, offered by the Department of Comparative Literature or other humanities departments or programs.	
Six (6) courses in visual arts or media studies at the 2000 or higher level offered by the Department of Comparative Literature or other humanities departments or programs. [3]	
Honors Requirements (optional) [4]	
COML 4930	Senior Essay
COML 4940	Senior Essay

1 Students will choose among a number of theory courses designated as fulfilling the requirement every year. The designated theory courses for 2026-2027 can be seen at https://complit.cornell.edu/undergraduate.

2 Because of the flexibility and interdisciplinary range of this track, students who select it should work closely with their faculty advisor to organize a coherent plan of study and to determine, with the approval of the Director of Undergraduate Studies, which courses satisfy the language requirement of the major.

3 Where the media involve a large component of speech or writing (such as film, video, or hypertext), the student would need to work with this material in the original foreign language. Where text or speech in a foreign language is peripheral in a course that focuses on visual material (such as art or architecture) from non-English cultures, the student would need to draw on primary and secondary materials in a foreign language for oral reports, papers, and so forth.

4 If elected, Honor Majors will complete thirty-six credits. COML 4930 or COML 4940 may count as one of the required courses in Comparative Literature.

University Graduation Requirements Requirements for All Students

In order to receive a Cornell degree, a student must satisfy academic and non-academic requirements.

Academic Requirements

A student's college determines degree requirements such as residency, number of credits, distribution of credits, and grade averages. It is the student's responsibility to be aware of the specific major, degree, distribution, college, and graduation requirements for completing their chosen program of study. See the individual requirements listed by each college or school or contact the college registrar's office (https://registrar.cornell.edu/service-resources/college-registrar-directory) for more information.

Non-academic Requirements

Conduct Matters. Students must satisfy any outstanding sanctions, penalties or remedies imposed or agreed to under the Student Code of Conduct (Code) or Policy 6.4. Where a formal complaint under the Code or Policy 6.4 is pending, the University will withhold awarding a degree otherwise earned until the adjudication process set forth in those procedures is complete, including the satisfaction of any sanctions, penalties or remedies imposed.

Financial Obligations. Outstanding financial obligations will not impact the awarding of a degree otherwise earned or a student's ability to access their official transcript. However, the University may withhold issuing a diploma until any outstanding financial obligations owing to the University are satisfied.

Additional Requirements for Undergraduate Students

The University has two requirements for graduation that must be fulfilled by all undergraduate students: the swim requirement, and completion of two physical education courses. For additional information about fulfilling University Graduation Requirements, see the Physical Education website (https://scl.cornell.edu/pe/).

Physical Education

All undergraduate students are required to take two credits (two courses) of Physical Education prior to graduation. It is recommended they complete the two courses during their first year at Cornell. Credit in Physical Education may be earned by participating in courses offered (https://catalog.cornell.edu/courses/pe/) by the Department of Athletics and Physical Education and Cornell Outdoor Education, by being a registered participant on a varsity athletic team, or performing in the marching band.

Students with medical concerns should contact the Office of Student Disability Services (http://sds.cornell.edu/).

Swim Requirement

The Faculty Advisory Committee on Athletics and Physical Education has established a basic swimming and water safety competency requirement for all undergraduate students. Normally, the requirement is taken during the Fall Orientation process at Helen Newman Hall or Teagle Hall pools. The requirement consists of the following: jump or step feet-first into the deep end of the pool, float or tread for one minute, turn around in a full circle, swim 25 yards using any stroke(s) of choice without touching the bottom or holding on to the sides (there is no time limit) and exit from the water. Students who do not complete the swim requirement during their first year, during a PE swim class or during orientation in subsequent years, will have to pay a $100 fee. Any student who cannot meet this requirement must register for PE 1100 Beginning Swimming as their physical education course before electives can be chosen.

If a student does not pass the swim requirement in their first Beginning Swimming PE class, then the student must take a second Beginning Swimming PE class (PE 1100 or PE 1101). Successful completion of two Beginning Swimming classes (based on attendance requirements) with the instructor's recommendation will fulfill the University's swim requirement.

Students unable to meet the swim requirement because of medical reasons should contact the Office of Student Disability Services (http://sds.cornell.edu/). When a waiver is granted by the Faculty Committee on Physical Education, an alternate requirement is imposed. The alternate requirement substitute is set by the Director of Physical Education.

College of Arts and Sciences Graduation Requirements

Undergraduate Degrees

Graduation Requirements for the Bachelor of Arts Degree

Credit Requirement

120 academic credits are required, 100 of which must be taken in the College of Arts & Sciences. 100 credits in Arts & Sciences is a minimum number, as is the 120 credit total. A minimum of 80 credits must be in courses for which a letter grade was received. AP, IB, CASE and A-Level credits count toward the 120 total credits but not toward the 100 A&S credits. Transfer credits for non-transfer students cannot count towards

the 100 A&S credits. (See list of courses (https://as.cornell.edu/registrar/courses-that-dont-count) that do not count as academic credit.)

Residency Requirement
Eight full-time semesters in residence (in person) are expected to complete degree requirements with a minimum of six full-time semesters being required. External transfer students must complete a minimum of four full-time residence semesters.

First-year Writing Seminar (FWS) Requirement
Two courses are required. A 5 on either the AP English Composition or Literature exam, or a 7 on the IB HL English Literature or Language exam will count towards one of these seminars. First-year students should take an FWS during their first semester at Cornell and are required to complete two by the end of their sophomore year.

Foreign Language Requirement
A student must either pass an intermediate Cornell language course at the 2000-level or above (Option 1) or complete at least 11 credits in a single foreign language at Cornell (Option 2). AP and IB credits cannot complete this requirement, but usually indicate that a student can place into a higher level course. Note: Native speakers of a foreign language may be exempted from this requirement. For a list of language offerings and placement, see Language Study at Cornell.

Distribution Requirement
Must take a minimum of 8 courses of at least 3 credits to fulfill 10 distribution categories. How an individual course is categorized is indicated with the appropriate abbreviation in its course description. It is important to recognize that only courses with the proper designation in the catalog can be used toward fulfilling the distribution requirements in Arts and Sciences. Unless otherwise specified, variable credit courses, including independent study courses, may not be used for distribution credit.

Arts & Sciences Distribution Requirement Categories:
- Arts, Literature, and Culture (ALC-AS)
- Biological Sciences (BIO-AS)
- Ethics and the Mind (ETM-AS)
- Global Citizenship (GLC-AS)
- Historical Analysis (HST-AS)
- Physical Sciences (PHS-AS)
- Social Difference (SCD-AS)
- Social Sciences (SSC-AS)
- Statistics and Data Science (SDS-AS)
- Symbolic and Mathematical Reasoning (SMR-AS)

To review distribution requirement definitions and course lists, please visit the College of Arts and Sciences Distribution Requirement List (https://catalog.cornell.edu/enrollment-credit-requirements/distribution-codes/arts-sciences/) section of this catalog.

Major Requirement
Students must complete the requirements for at least one major in A&S. See individual major listings for major requirements.

Policies on Applying Cornell and Non-Cornell Courses and Credits to Distribution Requirements
Restrictions on Applying AP/Test Credit and Courses from Other Institutions to the Distribution Requirements
- Students may not apply AP/test credit or transfer credit from another institution to the distribution requirements.
- Students who transfer to the college from another institution are under the above rules for advanced placement credit, but are eligible to have credit for post–high school course work taken during regular full-time semesters (not summer terms) at their previous institution count toward all distribution requirements. Transfer students receive a detailed credit evaluation when they are accepted for admission.

Restrictions on Applying Cornell Courses to the Distribution Requirements
- First-year writing seminars and ENGL 2860 Creative, Lyric, and Expository Writing or ENGL 2880 Expository Writing taken to satisfy a first-year writing seminar requirement may not count toward any other college or major requirement.
- Only courses with the proper designation in the Courses of Study can be used toward fulfilling the distribution requirements in Arts and Sciences.
- Students may not petition to change the category of any given course, nor may any faculty member change the category of a course for an individual student. Faculty members wishing to change the category for a course in which they are the primary instructor must petition the Educational Policy Committee for a change in category. If granted, the new category must be applied to the course as a whole and not for an individual student.

Courses That May Fulfill More Than One Requirement
- A course may fulfill more than one college requirement in any of the following situations:
- A course may be used to fulfill distribution and a major requirement (except if prohibited by one of the restrictions noted on applying AP/test credit, transfer credit, and Cornell courses to distribution requirements).
- A course may satisfy a maximum of two distribution categories. Students can only double-count distribution requirements on a maximum of two courses.
- A one-semester course in foreign literature (not language) or culture that is acceptable for certifying Option 1 in that language may also be applied to the relevant distribution requirement.
- Courses may count toward any other requirement except first-year writing seminars.

Credit Requirement

Credits and Courses

Students must earn a minimum of 120 academic credits (which may include AP/test credits). Of the 120, a minimum of 100 must be from courses taken in the College of Arts and Sciences at Cornell.

Courses that do not count toward the 120 credits required for the degree
The College of Arts and Sciences does not grant credit toward the degree for every course offered by the university. Courses in service as a teaching assistant, physical education, remedial or developmental training, precalculus mathematics, supplemental science and mathematics, offered by the Learning Strategies Center, and English as a second language are among those for which degree credit is not awarded. Students can view the list of courses that do not count for academic credit here (https://as.cornell.edu/registrar/courses-that-dont-count).

Other cases in which a course may not receive credit include the following:

- A course identified as a prerequisite for a subsequent course may not be taken for credit once a student completes that subsequent course.

- A repeated course. (For more information, see "Repeating courses," below.)
- A "forbidden overlap," that is, a course with material that significantly overlaps with material in a course a student has already taken. Students should consult the list of Forbidden Overlaps for more information.

Courses that count toward the 100 required Arts and Sciences credits
May include liberal arts courses approved for study abroad during a semester or academic year of full-time study (not summer abroad study), courses taken in certain off-campus Cornell residential programs, and a maximum of three courses that majors may accept from other colleges at Cornell as fulfilling major requirements. A&S courses taken in Cornell's summer session may count towards the 100 A&S credits.

Courses that do not count toward the 100 required Arts and Sciences credits
Include credits earned in other colleges at Cornell (except in the cases specifically noted in this section), transfer credits earned in any subject at institutions other than Cornell, and advanced placement/test credits. AP/test credits count as part of the 120 credits required for the degree but not as part of the 100 Arts and Sciences credits and may not be applied to distribution requirements. AP credits are posted on the transcript. If, subsequently, a student takes the course out of which they had placed, the AP credit will be removed because of the overlap in content. Students may use up to 12 credits of college approved ROTC courses as electives counting towards the 120 degree credits.

Repeating Courses

Students occasionally need to repeat courses. Some courses, such as independent study, some music and performance courses, and specific topical seminars, in which content is significantly different, do grant credit when the course is taken more than once. For all repeated courses, both grades appear on the transcript and are included in both the term and cumulative GPA. For repeated courses that do not grant credit more than once, only one instance counts toward degree credits and requirements.

Residency Requirement

The College of Arts & Sciences is a residential community and students typically spend eight semesters of full-time study in residence to earn the B.A. degree.

The completion of a fall or spring term as a full-time registered student at Cornell counts as a semester in residence. Summer and winter terms at Cornell, study in Cornell's School of Continuing Education and at other institutions do not count as semesters of residence.

The residency requirement has two components: a minimum number of semesters in residence and a requirement to spend the last full-time semester of study in residence.

Students matriculating into the College of Arts & Sciences as first-year students must have a minimum of six semesters in residence before graduating. First-year matriculants into A&S can count up to two semesters in an approved off-campus program as semesters in residence. Approved off-campus programs include A&S approved study abroad programs, Cornell in Washington, Cornell in Rome, Cornell in Los Angeles, and the Cornell-China & Asia-Pacific Studies (CAPS) Program.

Students who transfer into the College of Arts & Sciences after matriculating in their first-year in another Cornell college (internal transfers) must have a minimum of six semesters in residence, and a minimum of two semesters in the College of Arts and Sciences before graduating. Internal transfers can count up to two semesters in an approved off-campus program as semesters in residence.

Students who transfer into Cornell from another institution (external transfers) must have a minimum of four semesters in residence, and a minimum of two semesters in the College of Arts & Sciences, before graduating. External transfers can count up to one semester in an approved off-campus program as a semester in residence.

In addition to the minimum number of semesters in residence, all students must complete their final full-time semester of study (i.e., the last semester in which at least 9 academic credits are needed to meet graduation requirements) in residence. Students who have fewer than 9 credits to complete degree requirements, and have met the minimum number of semesters residency requirement, may elect to complete their degree requirements during Cornell summer and winter terms registered as an A&S student or at another institution with approved transfer credit. Students cannot meet final degree requirements registered as an extramural student at Cornell.

Exceptions to the residence requirement are not petitionable.

Foreign Language Requirement

The faculty considers competence in a foreign language essential for an educated person. Studying a language other than one's own helps students understand the dynamics of language, our fundamental intellectual tool, and enables students to understand another culture. The sooner a student acquires this competence, the sooner it will be useful. Hence, work toward the foreign language requirement should be undertaken in the first two years. Students postponing the language requirement for junior and senior years risk not graduating on time. Courses in foreign languages and/or literature are taught in the College of Arts and Sciences by the following departments: Africana Studies and Research Center, Asian Studies, Classics, Comparative Literature, German Studies, Linguistics, Near Eastern Studies, and Romance Studies. For a list of languages and placement see Language Study at Cornell.

The language requirement may be satisfied in one of the following ways:

Option 1 (FLOPI-AS)

Passing (a) a non-introductory foreign language course of 3 or more credits at Cornell at the 2000-level or above or (b) any other non-introductory course at the 2000-level or above conducted in a foreign language at Cornell. These courses are labeled in the roster with the distribution code FLOPI-AS (Foreign Language Option 1).

OR

Option 2

Passing at least 11 credits of study in a single foreign language (taken in the appropriate sequence) at Cornell.

Any exceptions to these rules will be noted elsewhere in individual department descriptions.

Students whose speaking, reading, and writing competence in a language other than English is at the same level we would expect our entering first-year students to have in English (as shown by completing high school in that language or by special examination during their first year here at Cornell) are exempt from the college's language requirement.

Major Requirement

Most departments and programs specify certain prerequisites for admission to the major; they are found on the pages for each department and program available at Degree Programs.

Students may apply for acceptance into the major as soon as they have completed the prerequisites and are confident of their choice. This may be as early as the second semester of their first year, and must be no later than the end of the second semester of sophomore year. A student without a major at the beginning of the junior year is not making satisfactory progress toward the degree and risks not being allowed to continue in the college. Undeclared first-term juniors must file a Late Declaration of Major form with Student Services and may be placed on a leave of absence during their junior year if they have not yet declared a major.

Double Majors

Completion of one major is required for graduation. Some students choose to complete more than one major. No special permission or procedure is required; students simply become accepted into multiple majors and are assigned to an advisor in each department. All completed majors are posted on the official transcript. Students are not allowed to continue their studies past their eighth semester to complete additional majors.

Early and Delayed Graduation

Graduating Early

A student may elect to graduate early if they are able to complete all graduation requirements in fewer than eight semesters.

Students must still satisfy the college's residency requirement as part of the graduation requirements. This residency requirement requires that students who are first-year matriculants into Cornell spend a minimum of six semesters in residence, external transfers must spend a minimum of four. To request an early graduation, students must notify the A&S Registrar's Office in KG 17 Klarman Hall or at as-studentservices@cornell.edu (as-studentservices@cornell.edu?subject=Early%20Graduation%20Request).

The earliest a student can request to graduate early and officially change their graduation date is immediately following the pre-enrollment period for their anticipated final semester. The student should have pre-enrolled in the classes required to meet the graduation requirements by the requested graduation date. The student must then complete Part I in DUST and have Part II completed by their major advisor.

Graduating Late: Ninth Term Enrollment

The Bachelor of Arts degree is expected to be completed in eight terms. If degree requirements cannot be completed in eight terms, students may seek permission to continue their studies. Requests will only be granted for students who have found themselves in emergent circumstances beyond their control which have prevented them from completing the degree in eight terms. Requests cannot be made until a student's final expected graduation term and will not be reviewed and approved until after the university drop deadline for that semester. Study beyond the eighth term is not automatically granted for the purposes of changing a major. Such requests must be discussed with a college academic advisor and require registrar approval. Requests to add an additional major or minor will not be approved for study beyond the eighth term.

If approved, students in the ninth and tenth term will be on a conditional status and will have restrictions placed on their enrollment to ensure successful completion of their degree. To request a ninth term, students must have their faculty advisor update Part II for any remaining major requirements. They will also need to submit a study plan to their college advisor listing the specific courses that will meet degree requirements for one major.

Student may elect to prorate credits if enrolling in 9 or fewer credits or take a full-time load if they desire. However, enrollment will be limited to 18 credits for the term so students can focus on their remaining required courses. In the rare case where a student may need to enroll in a tenth term to complete their degree, they will be required to prorate tuition and their enrollment will be limited to only the courses/credits needed for successful completion of one major. Additional enrollments will not be allowed.

Graduation Procedures

Application to Graduate

In the first semester of their senior year, students are prompted by Arts & Sciences Student Services to complete an online application to graduate. The application is intended to help seniors identify problems early enough in the final year to make any necessary changes in course selection to satisfy those requirements. Nonetheless, ensuring graduation requirements are fully met is the student's responsibility and any problems that are discovered, even late in the final semester, must be resolved by the student before the degree can be granted. Students are responsible for checking their DUST (https://data.arts.cornell.edu/as-stus/degree_reqts.cfm) reports and transcripts each term and alerting Student Services of any problems with their academic record. To check on their progress in the major, students should consult with their major advisors.

Degree Dates

Cornell has three official degree conferral dates in the year: December, May, and August. Students who plan to graduate in August may attend commencement ceremonies in the preceding or subsequent May. Students graduating in December are invited to a special recognition ceremony in December and may also attend Commencement the following May. All academic work must be complete by the official conferral date in order to receive a degree on that date. Incomplete academic work will result in a later conferral date.