



# COMPARATIVE LITERATURE

Cultivating a global perspective on literature, language, and culture

The Department of Comparative Literature is a magnet for innovative research and teaching in graduate and undergraduate courses that encourage multilingual, international, and interdisciplinary perspectives on literature and culture. In existence for over 85 years, we are one of the best-established centers for the study of comparative literature in the country. Our faculty and students teach and write on topics from the modern reception of classical literatures around the world to the literature of the Black diaspora and the culture of Detroit. Comparative Literature is a campus hub for initiatives on translation, including an undergraduate minor and graduate certificate, with a new undergraduate major in translation expected to launch in September 2025. We connect our students to the world through department-supported internships. Since 2014, Comparative Literature has been the publisher of the literary journal *Absinthe: World Literature in Translation*, edited by the department's graduate students. As we say in the department, "Dare to Compare!"

Recent gifts to comparative literature have supported innovation in the undergraduate curriculum, such as the creation of new courses; translation initiatives, including student translation projects and prizes; community engagement; research abroad by graduate students; and visits by distinguished scholars for lectures and work with students. Support from alumni and friends inspires us to keep Comp Lit in the top ranks of the field.

## UNDERGRADUATE CURRICULUM SUPPORT

Faculty in Comparative Literature are creating exciting new courses. “Great Performances at Michigan” teaches writing to first and second year students through a series of performances in music, theater, and other arts that changes every year. “City of Champions: Detroit Sports Culture in Context” introduces students to social and cultural history of Detroit through pivotal moments in the city’s sports history. Gifts allow the department to continue its tradition of curricular innovation in order to meet students where they are today. Gifts of \$5,000 – \$10,000 would remove financial barriers and create additional curricular opportunities for students of all backgrounds.

Tyler Berndt’s path to Comp Lit started even before he realized it, when his high school teacher assigned the class *Crime and Punishment*, his first exposure to world literature outside the English canon. His was a road with several twists and turns: after high school he took three years off to work, enrolled in community college, took French lessons, transferred to U-M and participated in a Summer in Europe program that changed his course from the English major he was planning on. “If you like other languages, why not do Comp Lit?” was the question that brought him to Tisch Hall. He took several classes, found great advisors and professors who support his curiosity and language learning, and declared his major in Comparative Literature.

His honors thesis focused on a modern Russian novelist, Eugene Vodolazkin, who’s more relevant now than ever. “It’s a comparison of two different kinds of views within Russia, of Russian history, especially given the conflict that’s been going on recently, which is almost unavoidable. Vladimir Putin has been taking a lot of medieval literature and things from the medieval past of Russia and using them as weapons in order to justify this war. What Eugene Vodolazkin does in his book *Laurus*, is the exact opposite of that, using this kind of anachronistic style in order to talk about healing. I wanted to compare those two competing ideas about the past and how it gets used.”



“When people ask, ‘What is Comparative Literature?’ I say, ‘Comp Lit is what you make it.’”

## TRANSLATION INITIATIVES

Comparative Literature offers an undergraduate minor and a graduate certificate in translation studies, and we award annual student prizes for literary translation. Translating Michigan is an ongoing public humanities project on the state's multilingual past and present. We are developing a new major in translation, expected to launch in September 2025, that features hands-on training to prepare students for careers in the field. Gifts support class units taught by professional translators, opportunities for on-the-job experience, and department prizes for students. An endowed gift of \$200,000 would allow us to support some of these initiatives each year.

## INTERNSHIPS AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The department is working with LSA Opportunity Hub to create internships for Comparative Literature students and future translation majors. Many of our majors and minors now pursue community engagement projects in schools and with nonprofit organizations as their capstone project. Gifts of \$5,000 - \$10,000 each year would help us expand these high-impact opportunities for undergraduate students. An endowed gift of \$300,000 would allow us to guarantee support for undergraduate students each year.

Our graduate students complete internships in the private and nonprofit sectors. Gifts of \$25,000 - \$50,000 each year would help us expand these career-oriented opportunities for graduate students. An endowed gift of \$600,000 would allow us to guarantee support for a graduate student each year.

## IMPACT

**After announcing the news he has been named a 2024 Rhodes Scholar, Emmanuel Orozco Castellanos said about his path with Comparative Literature: "I am infinitely thankful to the U-M Department of Comparative Literature. It is a small community of empathetic, brilliant individuals. The Department offered intellectual rigor and unconditional support to all of its students. I am especially thankful to Professor William Stroebe, who generously took time out of his research leave to advise my capstone project, and to professors Yopie Prins and Kristin Dickinson, whom I have the honor to call my colleagues. Likewise, thanks to the rest of the Comparative Literature family."**

**Emmanuel worked on his capstone project with Dr. William Stroebe and led a workshop with bilingual high school students on Stories of Migration. As an undergraduate he also worked as Comparative Literature research assistant for our Mellon Sawyer Seminar Series on Translation in the Multilingual Midwest.**

**Since his graduation, Emmanuel has been working on our Comparative Literature public humanities initiative for Translating Michigan with Dr. Yopie Prins and affiliate faculty Dr. Kristin Dickinson. His most recent project traces the connections between Mexican muralism, migration, and Detroit's Hispanic community.**



## GRADUATE RESEARCH ABROAD

After passing rigorous examinations, many of Comparative Literature's graduate students go abroad to conduct research in libraries and archives for their dissertations. Gifts of \$25,000 or more help support an individual student conduct research in far-reaching locations from the Dominican Republic to Korea. We typically have two or three students each year who could benefit from research support like this.

## DISTINGUISHED LECTURES

Faculty and students in the humanities consider Comparative Literature a center of intellectual life. The department brings distinguished speakers in fields such as literature, film, art history, and translation to campus for its monthly Comparative Literature Colloquium and workshops with students. Annual gifts of \$5,000 - \$10,000 would help us introduce new directions in teaching and scholarship to the department, the college, and the university.

## STRATEGIC FUND

Gifts to the Strategic Fund play a vital role in upholding and advancing our research and teaching. Expendable, undesignated gifts of any amount are instrumental in providing a flexible response to emerging opportunities and pivotal needs. These funds provide resources to undergraduate curriculum enhancement, lectures, research and study abroad programs, graduate internships, and translation programs. Through these efforts, we are equipping the brightest minds to excel in a liberal arts education, confront contemporary challenges, and drive ideas and breakthroughs that resonate not just in Michigan but across the globe.

## WAYS TO FUND YOUR GIFT

Your partnership connects the college's rich past to a boundless and bright future. You can change lives with gifts of cash, pledges, or appreciated securities, and create a meaningful legacy through your bequest, trusts, gift annuities, and other planned gifts. Your generosity makes an impact on what's next, for a better tomorrow.

*for what's next ▶*

**Look to Michigan**

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