

Propaedeutics for Comparatists



Spring Term 2021
Time: TBA
Weldon Library 107 [The Pride Library]

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i. Course Description

Having passed through the Gate of Hell, Dante abruptly recoils at the confused sound of “diverse tongues, horrible speeches, painful words, cries of rage, voices loud and faint” [diverse lingue, orribili favelle, / parole di dolore, accenti d’ira, / voci alte e fioche: *Inf.* 3.25-27]. Replace Dante with yourself at the start of your Comparative Literature MA program, and you’ll soon find serious grounds for empathizing with his state of polyglot panic. Having crossed over the threshold of graduate studies, you are bound to face an intimidating confusion of course requirements, research instructions, multilingual bibliographies, thesis statements, scholarship applications, theoretical jargons, clashing arguments, illogical conclusions, and voices loud and faint telling you what you need to accomplish en route to your degree. Where is Virgil when you need him? Fortunately a trustworthy guide is at hand, marching beside you in the form of this required course on research methodology, thesis writing, and academic professionalization. The course is divided into four units. The first unit covers Research

Methods appropriate for the discipline of Comparative Literature. You will learn how Comparatists have historically distinguished their discipline from other kinds of literary studies; why Comparatists are careful to formulate specific research questions within a broad topic and a broader field of inquiry; and what dialectical strategies contribute to the strength of a Comparative Literary argument. The second unit will consider the complex overlapping histories of the three main cultural institutions – the Library, the Archive, and the Internet – to which Comparatists routinely turn for sources in the search for answers to their research questions. The third unit focuses on the various academic genres which serve to shape the critical expectations of the educated readers for which Comparatists commonly write their works. And the fourth unit concentrates on the prospective form and organization of the first important work – the Major Research Paper – that an MA student of Comparative Literature is expected to produce in the third term of study.



ii. Grading Method / Assignments

CL9503B is graded PASS / FAIL. If you submit the four brief written assignments by posting them on the course website in accordance with the submission schedule, and if you attend class regularly and participate thoughtfully and constructively, then you will pass the course. There are two ways to fail the course: (1) don't attend class; and (2) don't submit completed assignments.

There will be one assignment for each of the four units: (1) a set of well formulated research questions within a defined research topic; (2) an analytical précis of the argument of one chapter from any of the assigned books on Comparative Literature and its research institutions; (3) a review of any thesis in Comparative Literature archived at the MLL departmental office; and (4) a draft prospectus of your Major Research Paper.