Comparative Literature at UCSB keeps abreast of developing interests and emerging fields of study relevant to our discipline. Recent courses such as “Robots,” “Science Fiction,” “Media History and Theory,” “Technotheory” and “Embodiments: Mind and Body” indicate one of the important directions in which Comparative Literature is evolving, namely, into a discipline that examines the relationship between literature and technology. This spring Professor Jocelyn Holland will teach a course about the relevance of technology to late eighteenth-century aesthetics. Her class will examine Romanticism in light of scientific innovations in physics, biology, and optics which took place in Europe around 1800. By studying a literary movement in light of the scientific discoveries of the time, students will be encouraged to complicate their understanding of the traditional distinction between art and science.

There are two developments in our undergraduate major requirements that also reflect the dynamic nature of our field. Majors may now choose to pursue either a “Foreign Language” or an “Interdisciplinary” track. The latter track enables our students to integrate fields such as Art History, Film, Sociology, and Psychology into their study of Comparative Literature. But regardless of which track our majors pursue, they all achieve proficiency in a foreign language and familiarity with at least one national literature, features that remain at the heart of comparative literary studies.

The second change in our undergraduate program concerns the prerequisites for the major. Students may now choose to take survey courses in World History, European History, Art History or Religious Studies. The latter two disciplines have been added to the list of acceptable prerequisites in an effort to provide students with greater flexibility through more interdisciplinary choices.

With our second newsletter, we invite all our friends and alumni to keep in touch. As our program continues to grow, your gifts will help us to maintain our program’s standard of excellence. On behalf of our faculty, students and staff, I want to encourage your to support our program and thank you for your willingness to do so.

Enjoy a good winter,
Susan Derwin, chair
Fatima Mujcinovic, PhD 2000: Currently an assistant professor at Westminster College in Salt Lake City, her book, Postmodern Cross-Culturalism and Politicization in U.S. Latina Literature was recently published by the Peter Lang Publishing company.

Rebecca Mitchell, PhD 2003: Currently a lecturer in UCSB’s Writing Program, she just published a review of Bernard Paris’s “Rereading George Eliot” in George Eliot and George Henry Lewes Studies, Sept 2004. She also presented her paper, “Prometheus Meets the Parents: Connecting Pop Culture with the Mythic in the Composition Classroom” at the Pop Culture Association of the South Conference held in New Orleans.

During my four weeks there I lived with a traditional and strict Guatemalan family (I was supposed to be home by ten every night!). Their stern morality was outweighed by the superb food prepared by the two K’iche’ housekeepers, as well as by Don Guadalupe, the family’s abuelo, who, at 86, still makes the daily climb up the mountain to work in the cornfields. Helping him tend his fields, I learned much about the realities of life in a country whose civil war ended only eight years ago. Yet despite the hardships that Guatemala faces today, its people struck me as some of the warmest and most welcoming in Central America.

Special thanks are due to our very own Guatemalteco, Nathan Henne, who showed me places that few tourists ever get to see (an account of our adventures will have to wait till the next update). Lastly, I would especially like to thank the Comp Lit program; without its generous assistance this trip would not have been possible.

As far as my travels are concerned, I want to thank the U.S. Border Patrol in Tecate/Tecate for allowing me to enjoy an extra day at a Mexican market-place with Vida y Obra de Sor Juana Inéz de La Cruz while I waited for my travel companion to pick up the financial statement which I had unforgivably forgotten at home. Traveling through California was also great fun - everything seems to have a different dimension: the waves and the trees as well as people’s cars and smiles.

A season in Spain
by Lisa Swanstrom

Through the generous funding provided by the Comparative Literature Program, I was able to spend Spring and Summer quarters in Sevilla, Spain, studying Spanish at CLIC (Centro de Lenguas e Intercambio Cultural). After completing a course in Advanced Spanish, I took two additional Spanish literature classes at CLIC, both which served to improve my Spanish immensely. While in Sevilla, I also presented a paper, “Healthy Lies and Downcast Eyes: Marketing Ethnic Identity in Sandra Cisneros’ Caramelo,” at the IV Congreso internacional sobre literatura chicana at University of Sevilla.

In addition to practicing and refining my language skills, I ate lots of ice cream, traveled to Barcelona and Paris with my husband Scott when he came to visit in July, and am pleased to report that I can now make a Spanish tortilla. Since this is the only dish that I can cook with any sort of competency, I am, perhaps, excessively proud, feeling the need to mention it whenever given an opportunity to do so. It is quite an accomplishment!

The Llama Connection
by Danielle LaFrance

I was fortunate enough to visit South America for the first time this summer. I visited some family in Guayaquil, Ecuador and then traveled to Cuzco, the Vale Sagrada, and Macchu Picchu in Peru before reaching my destination, Buenos Aires. Cuzco felt magical to me - and that’s saying a lot for someone who isn’t used to having to wear a thick scarf and tights under her jeans, especially in July. I toured as many Inca ruins as I could and listened to the fascinating history on tours conducted by indigenous guides who spoke Spanish as well as their native Quechua. I climbed Huayna Picchu in order to get a better look at the ruins of Macchu Picchu from above.

Argentina felt more like home, maybe because my studies kept me in the city, or because I fit in with all of the people of Italian ancestry who speak Spanish. The architecture, population, and theatres of Buenos Aires are all very European, but the people of Italian ancestry who speak Spanish. The architecture, population, and theatres of Buenos Aires are all very European, but the people of Italian ancestry who speak Spanish.

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A Student of Letters
by Ben Speer, sophomore

“What’s your major?” each new face would ask, as if trying to rub in my apocalyptic fate of nothingness, underachievement, and even worse, eternal dependence on the philanthropy of my parents. “I’m undeclared,” I’d respond, turning my eyes toward the ground in shame. As an incoming freshman, the choice of a major becomes the source of endless anxiety, fear, and personal misgivings. After all, it is the single most important decision of your life.

Or at least, that is how it seemed to me. Wanting to eventually pursue an MBA and one day open my own business, I felt lost at a school that, I believed, offered little to help me achieve my career goals. After speaking with numerous business-econ majors, however, I realized that they were forfeiting their intellectual pursuits in order to get a jump-start on the all-too-inevitable “real world.”

I chose Comp Lit as my major not because I enjoy academia, and not even because I long to spend 40 hours a week annotating paperbacks, but instead for one simple reason: I enjoy knowledge. This degree allows me to study literature, language, and philosophy. It allows me to replace the ignorance of my childhood with the wisdom of the great minds that came before me. Most of all, it allows me to feel passionate about my education, knowing that I am genuinely enriching my mind, and not just training for a job.

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