

LETTRES

2009

To study literature is to come face to face with the richness and infinite possibilities of writing, to expose and learn to operate the levers of literary creation. Because literary forms and genres occur in a particular historic, linguistic, and social context and are in some sense expressions of that context, to study literature is also to explore the wider world of culture, where the reader encounters other artistic disciplines from which literature often mines its raw material. Students must have the sensitivity to appreciate a work on its own merits, but also the tenacity to peer inside the work to see what makes it tick. Students of literature must have the flexibility to switch back and forth from a microscopic focus on the words that make up the text and a much broader vision of the author and his work.

The study of literature is a prelude to professional programs in cultural analysis, publishing, and other fields that require knowledge of cultural life, mastery of the tools of cultural management and communication, or the acquisition of methods to carry out cultural projects—in short, activities that require a keen interest in and appreciation of the contemporary literary and cultural world in its creative, economic, and sociological aspects.

The study of literature requires, and further amplifies, the ability for critical thought. It rewards the student by teaching clear thinking, cogent analysis, and good writing. It allows students to acquire the cultural capital they bring into careers in teaching, publishing, journalism, or civil service.

Field: Languages and literature

Also see the following profiles: *Communication and journalism, Languages, Cultural heritage and historic preservation, Humanities and social sciences.*

Professional opportunities:

teaching, communication, research, journalism, publishing, public service, human resources, archives, cultural management.

ORGANIZATION OF STUDIES IN FRANCE

Universities

Whether they begin by earning a licence at a university or by completing 2 years of preparatory classes, most students of literature go on to complete at least 5 years of postsecondary education.

Both of the two basic licences in letters (classic and modern) prepare students to take a civil service exam (such as the national teachers' exam), to tackle a professional program (in journalism, communication, or publishing, for example), or to earn a professional or research master's degree in communication, publishing, multimedia, human resources, cultural management, or another field.

Of the two licence options, classic letters is the more literary. The curriculum emphasizes French literature from the Middle Ages to the present day. Students spend considerable time on Latin and Ancient Greek.

This licence is commonly used as a springboard to CAPES, the secondary-school teaching exam, or the CRPE, the primary-school teaching exam. It may also be used as a stepping stone to a professional or research master in literature, publishing, or library science and document management.

The licence in modern letters is more focused on the French language. The curriculum includes French literature from its origins to the present day, linguistics, style, poetics, one ancient language, courses in essay methods, and grammar.

Preparatory classes

The uniquely French preparatory classes are all very exacting but not necessarily closed to students below the very top rank. A few of the lycées (secondary schools) that offer the classes are extremely selective, but most admit students with solid if not stellar records (averages of 12/20 in the French grading scheme).

In the second year, familiarly known as khâgne, students choose their courses (Latin, Greek, a second modern language, geography) with a view to the entrance exams they plan to take.

The classics track prepares students for the arts and letters exam of the École Normale Supérieure (ENS) Ulm-Sèvres, <http://www.ens.fr/>, while the letters and humanities track preps them for the exams of the ENS Cachan and ENS Lyon. Students in that track who choose the political science option may also elect to take the entrance exams for France's institutes of political studies (IEPs). Those who choose the economics option in the letters and humanities track may end up taking the exams for business schools (such as HEC, ESSEC, or ESC) or for ENSAE, the national school of statistics and economic administration.

Graduate study

- EHESS (École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, school of advanced study in social sciences), <http://www.ehess.fr>

EHESS offers research-oriented degree programs in the humanities and social sciences.

- École Nationale des Chartes, <http://www.enc.sorbonne.fr/>

The 3-year program (following 2 years of preparatory classes) trains archivists and conservators who will be responsible for preserving the nation's artistic and documentary heritage.

International students, admitted by examination, follow the same curriculum as French students, except that they do not have the status of civil servants in training. Nondegree students and auditors who wish to take only a few courses are also admitted. Auditors do not receive a degree but may request a certificate of attendance.

- CELSA (École des Hautes Études en Sciences de l'Information et de la Communication, school of advanced study in information and communication sciences) <http://www.celsa.fr/>

CELSA offers 2 degrees: a professional master in information and communication techniques, and a research master in information and communication sciences.

- IEP (institutes of political studies)

All of France's IEPs (institutes of political studies) offer a track in communication and human resources.

- INTD (Institut National des Sciences et Techniques Documentaires, national institute of documentary sciences and techniques),

http://intd.cnam.fr/jsp/fiche_pagelibre.jsp?STNAV=&RUBNAV=&CODE=81769436&LANGUE=0&RH=

- CNAM (Conservatoire National des Arts et Métiers, national conservatory of arts and crafts), http://www.cnam.fr/jsp/fiche_pagelibre.jsp?STNAV=&RUBNAV=&CODE=36392593&LANGUE=0&RH=

CNAM offers a 1-year degree program at the second-year master level that prepares graduates to lead documentary consulting projects.

- ENSSIB, <http://www.enssib.fr/> ENSSIB (the École Nationale Supérieure des Sciences de l'Information et des Bibliothèques, national school of information and library science) trains library conservators and librarians for national, regional, and local government collections. Admission by examination after completion of licence.

RESEARCH THEMES

The panorama of French research in literature is rich and varied. Research teams from the nation's universities, grandes écoles, and CNRS work in every field of literary endeavor: French, foreign, and comparative literature; literary history and analysis from antiquity to the present day; literary theory and criticism; and the study of authors and their works in the light of current historical, sociological, and anthropological paradigms.

INTERNATIONAL STANDING

Some French winners of the Nobel prize for literature:

- Anatole France 1921
- André Gide 1947
- Albert Camus 1957
- Jean-Paul Sartre 1964
- J.-M. -G. Le Clézio 2008

Numerous literary prizes are awarded in France. Among the major awards are the Goncourt, Médicis, Femina, Interallié, and Renaudot prizes, as well as the prize of the Académie Française.

Useful Web sites

- Information on literary studies and courses in literature <http://www.etudes-litteraires.com/filiere-litteraire>
- Fabula, literary research <http://www.fabula.org/>
- Persée <http://www.persee.fr/web/guest/home/>
- Europeana (digital library) <http://www.europeana.eu/portal/> <http://search.theeuropeanlibrary.org/portal/fr/index.html>
- Bibliothèque Nationale de France (national library of France) <http://www.bnf.fr/>

Keywords

ancient literature – art – art history – arts – audiovisuel – author – business – cinema – civilization – classics – comic art – commerce – communication – comparative literature – culture – documentation – economics – editing – film – foreign language – French language – geography – grammar – graphic novel – Greek – history – human and behavioral sciences – humanities – information – information science – interpreting – language – law – letters – lexicology – literary – literature – modern literature – management – media – music – philology – philosophy – poetics – political science – representation – semiotics – social sciences – terminology – text – translation – writer – writing –