

MEDIEVAL STUDIES, CERTIFICATE

Medieval studies offers students interdisciplinary perspectives on the history of Europe and the Mediterranean rim between ca. 300-1500. Courses spanning 18 departments allow students to explore the medieval world from the standpoints of art, visual and material culture, history, law, languages and literature, music, philosophy, religious studies and the history of science and medicine. The certificate in medieval studies is designed to encourage pursuit of interdisciplinary work among several departments.

The Middle Ages was a dynamic period of trans-continental trade and travel that fostered cultural, technological and scientific interactions among the kingdoms and city states of Western Europe, the Byzantine (East Roman) Empire and the Islamic caliphates that eventually encompassed much of Spain, north Africa and the Middle East. It is also known that the Norse (Vikings) established settlements in North America as early as ca. 1000, some 500 years before Columbus.

In Western Europe, the Middle Ages laid the foundations of constitutional government and modern nation-states, instituted a system of trial by jury, and developed the first universities along with the concept of a liberal arts curriculum (encompassing both arts and sciences). The period also saw the development of English, Germanic, Scandinavian and romance languages and literature, which came to eclipse Latin by the end of the fourteenth century as vehicles for secular poetry and prose. Further east, Greek dominated the territory of the Byzantine Empire, while the foundation of the Kievan Rus coincided with the development of Cyrillic script used by Russian and other Slavic languages. The Islamic world saw the wide diffusion of Arabic languages and literature, including scientific works which served to mediate knowledge of Greek natural philosophy and medical science to Western Europe.

Other significant cultural developments include the development of the codex or book often with elaborate programs of visual imagery and diagrams, the innovation of musical notation and early forms of polyphony in Europe, the application of optical science to urban planning and of one-point perspective to painting especially in Italy, and the refinement of structural engineering that led to the soaring light-filled architecture of Gothic cathedrals in Western Europe and expansive centralized domed spaces in the Byzantine Empire and related Orthodox states, as well as in the Islamic world.

The program's focus is embodied in the interdisciplinary courses offered under the auspices of medieval studies. The program cross-lists a number of courses on particular aspects of medieval history and culture that are offered by participating departments, helps to publicize courses with medieval subject matter that are not permanently cross-listed, and offers opportunities for students to undertake independent-study projects with participating faculty members. It also regularly organizes public programming on specific themes under the auspices of the Borghesi–Mellon Workshops administered by the Center for the Humanities.

In addition to departments and programs that cross-list courses with Medieval Studies—Art History, CANES (Classical and Near Eastern Studies), English, French and Italian, German, History, History of Medicine, History of Science, Religious Studies, Scandinavian Studies, Spanish and Portuguese, Women's Studies—the following departments and programs occasionally offer courses and seminars in the medieval area: African

Languages and Literature, Comparative Literature, Folklore, Languages and Cultures of Asia, Music, Philosophy, and Political Science.

Like a minor, the certificate documents a rigorous course of study in addition to the major(s). It attests ambitious intellectual goals as well as the ability to imagine historical problems in transnational and transcultural perspectives. As a credential, it demonstrates a capacity for comparative critical thinking and analysis, skills that appeal to a wide range of potential employers.