

Medieval Studies and the Augsburg College Mission

Since the History Department has been asked to reflect on how it fits into and/or fulfills the college mission, it seems appropriate to add something about the role of Medieval Studies, which is an interdisciplinary major housed in the History Department.

Medieval Studies reflects the mission of the college in three ways. First, it provides our students with a further variation on the theme of “high quality education based in the liberal arts.” Since the liberal arts were first cultivated as a university curriculum during the Middle Ages, the Medieval Studies major offers an ideal context in which to pursue the liberal arts in the modern world. Second, it affords our students the occasion for a deeper understanding of the faith and values of the Christian church. The Church was one of the most powerful forces of the Middle Ages, a force which was radically altered during the Protestant Reformation. Students in Medieval Studies examine the development of Christian values over time and in historical context. Third, Medieval Studies, by its very nature, addresses issues of diversity. Current scholarship concerning the Middle Ages is no longer a Euro-centric exercise, but is more often conceptualized as the study of communities in contact and/or in conflict. This includes recognition of the important contributions of Islam to the medieval West, as well as examinations of the marginalized “other” in medieval society (e.g., Jews, lepers, homosexuals).

The Medieval Studies major is in keeping with the ideal expressed in *Augsburg 2004* to provide our students a “transforming education that unites the liberal and practical.” The methods of the Medieval Studies major foster close reading (not just of texts, but of images), precise analysis, careful writing, and vigorous discussion. Perhaps more than any other curriculum, Medieval Studies comes closer to the original ideal—the medieval ideal—of the liberal arts as an integrated program of study that prepares the heart and mind for life beyond college. Since it is by necessity interdisciplinary, it exposes students to, and demands that they find the connections between, history, religion, philosophy, literature, and the visual and performing arts. Graduates will be prepared to pursue advanced degrees in medieval subjects, but will also have a solid foundation for

entering into business, law, and other professions. Hence, the Medieval Studies major provides not only a solid foundation for graduate study, but also a superb liberal arts education relevant to a wide variety of personal and professional goals. Medieval Studies is also the ideal vehicle for experiential pedagogies. Visits to museums to view medieval and Renaissance art, attendance at concerts of medieval and Renaissance music, and introduction to archival work at the U of M's Rare Book Collection or the Hill Monastic Manuscript Library are just a few of the possibilities.

In addition to the emphasis on experiential learning and interdisciplinary study, discussed above, the Medieval Studies major is a prime venue for students to engage in the dialogue between faith and reason. After all, the historical seed of this discourse was planted in the Early Middle Ages (with Augustine), and came into its own in the High Middle Ages (with Peter Abelard and Thomas Aquinas). Last but not least, Medieval Studies provides the ideal basis for international education and study abroad, especially in Europe, but also in the Middle East, Russia, even China (think Marco Polo).

Respectfully submitted by

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