

Medieval and Early Modern Studies

“MEMS is an exciting opportunity for self-starting students to build their own major around a passion for the Middle Ages and challenge themselves through reading and research.”

Michelle Herder, Associate Professor of History

Medieval & Early Modern Studies is an interdisciplinary program that spans a diverse array of subject areas ranging from history to literature to the arts. Cornell's One Course At A Time curriculum enables our students to delve deeper into their studies through a number of opportunities. These include research seminars led by Cornell faculty at Chicago's Newberry Library, research fellowships through the Cornell Fellows Program, and off-campus semesters in Florence or London/Florence.

The Medieval and Early Modern Studies Program and the courses that make up its offerings are designed to help students gain an awareness of the interconnectedness of historical, cultural, and artistic developments in Europe from the eighth through the seventeenth centuries.

Courses offered in this program range from the study of revolutions in religious belief to the impact of the printing press on literature and culture, from artistic representations of she-devils to the writings of political and moral philosophers, from Charlemagne to Falstaff.

The Medieval and Early Modern Studies program is truly interdisciplinary. Faculty from seven different disciplines offer courses pertinent to the major. Majors are guided to choose the course of study best suited to their interests. The capstone course is an opportunity for students to do an independent research project under the guidance of faculty mentors.

Outside the classroom the Medieval and Renaissance Club (MeRC) holds a small renaissance festival to provide a forum for learning about life in 600-1700 CE Europe, with a live steel reenactment group, fighting, and artistry demonstrations.

BENEFITS OF ONE COURSE AT A TIME

One Course At A Time allows immersive study of this part of the distant past, letting the student really dig into the exciting and unfamiliar culture of the European Middle Ages and Renaissance. In a course on the Crusades, students worked together to develop a map-based website exploring the history of the Crusades; students experience Renaissance politics through immersive simulations in which they play the roles of Florentine politicians or members of Parliament; other students have adapted medieval French romances into digital games. Some courses include simulations to help students dive into the world of the Middle Ages and understand it. The One Course schedule has allowed for off-campus study opportunities in places such as Italy, England, and the Newberry Library in Chicago.

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Faculty Bios & Courses

MICHELLE HERDER

Associate Professor of History

Serves as advisor to the Medieval and Early Modern Studies program; also teaches a range of courses focusing on Europe from 800-1700, including the topics courses Women in Medieval Europe and Persecution, Tolerance, and Violence. Ph.D. and M.Phil., Yale University; B.A., Carleton College.

DEVAN BATY

Associate Professor of French

Teaches courses in medieval and Renaissance French literature. Ph.D., University of Wisconsin; M.A. and B.A., University of Iowa.

JOHN GRUBER-MILLER

Professor of Classical Studies

Teaches a course on Medieval Latin and Renaissance women writers. Ph.D. and M.A., The Ohio State University; B.A., Xavier University.

ALYSSA SELMER

Assistant Professor of Spanish

Teaches courses including Golden Age Spanish Literature. Ph.D., M.A., University of Minnesota; B.A. in English and Spanish, Lawrence University.

JAMES MARTIN

Professor of Music

Teaches the history of opera. D.M., Northwestern University; M.M., University of Illinois; B.M., Butler University

CHRISTINA PENN-GOETSCH

Professor of Art History

Teaches courses on gender studies and the art and architecture of early modern Europe. Ph.D. and M.A., University of Iowa; B.A., University of Virginia.

CURRICULUM HIGHLIGHTS

Majors work with a faculty advisor to develop an individualized major plan in Medieval and Early Modern Studies, including work in languages, history, arts, and literature, and culminating in a capstone research or creative project.

Students are encouraged to study off-campus, especially as a participant in semester-long courses sponsored by the Associated Colleges of the Midwest. The college also offers block-long research seminars, taught by members of the faculty, at the Newberry Library in Chicago. Majors may also participate in the semester-long program at the Newberry, sponsored by the Associated Colleges of the Midwest.

NEWBERRY LIBRARY OPPORTUNITIES

Cornell maintains a close relationship with Chicago's Newberry Library, home of one of the country's finest collections of work from the medieval and early modern eras. Students in the English course Medieval and Renaissance Drama: Shakespeare's Rivals spend a block at the Newberry, and a recent student earned a Cornell Fellowship to conduct independent studies at the Newberry for eight weeks or two blocks.

AFTER CORNELL

MEMS majors often go on to graduate and professional study. The experience of research and of planning an individual course of study is excellent preparation for graduate work. Below are a few profiles that exemplify how former students' careers have evolved over time.

Amanda Langdon '07 completed the University of Iowa's library and information science program as well as the U of I's graduate certificate for the Center for the Book. She ended up continuing the kind of work she did as a graduate work study student: access services and circulation librarianship in a medical-academic library. She's in her third year at the Health Sciences Library at the University of Colorado Denver's Anschutz Medical Campus. As an extracurricular aside, the research methods learned and historical resources accumulated at Cornell have served Amanda well in researching her medieval-based historical fantasy writing.

Brooke Bergantzel '08 completed a master's in library and information science with a concentration in archives management at Simmons College in Boston, Massachusetts, where she worked as the Dean's Fellow for the

Graduate School for Library and Information Science West and the Massachusetts Center for the Book. She returned to Cornell as the reference and technical services librarian before being promoted to instructional technology librarian. She also consults with the Mount Vernon Historical Preservation Commission on their online database of historic images. She has also served as a coach at the Institute for Digital Liberal Arts Scholarship, working alongside faculty from a variety of institutions to pursue projects in the Digital Humanities.

Ellie Gionne '12 worked at the Minnesota Historical Society as a reference assistant in their research library and also as a library assistant at the Newberry Library in Chicago, where she now lives. She plans to complete her master's degree in library and information science in 2017. In the past year she has presented at three academic conferences: the Newberry Multidisciplinary Graduate Conference, the Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies Conference at Arizona State University, and the Sixteenth Century Society Conference in Bruges, Belgium. Her presentations were a continuation of her MEMS senior thesis. She plans to pursue doctoral work in Early Modern England in the next two years.

Laura Michelson '16 is serving as an Appalachian Forest Heritage Area AmeriCorps member at Arthurdale Heritage, a historically based nonprofit organization in West Virginia. She plans to pursue her interest in historic book culture and is considering graduate school. She reports that, "My MEMS program (and Cornell in general) has prepared me in being able to multitask and balance multiple projects; to schedule and prioritize tasks; to research and to place aspects of history into a relevant context; to think critically; to write and speak effectively; and to learn a massive amount of information quickly and to retain it—I conduct most of our site's tours which are 90+ minutes and I learned over the course of two days."

Faculty Bios & Courses

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KATY STAVREVA

Professor of English

Teaches courses on Shakespeare, Dante, medieval and early modern literature of England, and early modern cultural studies. Ph.D., University of Iowa; Specialist (combined B.A. and M.A. degree), Sofia University, Bulgaria.

JAMA STILWELL

Professor of Music

Teaches about Gregorian chant and early music. Ph.D., University of Iowa; M.M., Northwestern University; B.M., University of Iowa.