Medieval & Early Modern Studies

Medieval & Early Modern Studies (MEMS) 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 & 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 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 work 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 & 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., history, Yale University.

**DEVAN BATY**

Professor of French
Teaches courses in medieval and Renaissance French literature. Ph.D., French, University of Wisconsin.

**JOHN GRUBER-MILLER**

Professor of Classical Studies
Teaches a course on Medieval Latin and Renaissance women writers. Ph.D., classics, The Ohio State University.

**ALYSSA SELMER**

Assistant Professor of Spanish
Teaches courses including Golden Age Spanish Literature. Ph.D., Hispanic literatures and linguistics, University of Minnesota.

**JAMES MARTIN**

Professor of Music

**CHRISTINA PENN-GOETSC**

Professor of Art History
Teaches courses on gender studies and the art and architecture of early modern Europe. Ph.D., art history, University of Iowa.

“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
CURRICULUM HIGHLIGHTS

Majors work with a faculty advisor to develop an individualized major plan in medieval & 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 (see below)

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 (two blocks). Majors may also participate in the semester-long program at the Newberry, sponsored by the Associated Colleges of the Midwest.

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 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 Bergantzela ‘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, and now works at Macalester College. She also consults with the Mount Vernon Historical Preservation Commission on its 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 Gione ‘12 worked at the Minnesota Historical Society as a reference assistant in its research library and also as a library assistant at the Newberry Library in Chicago, where she now lives. She completed her master’s degree in library and information science in 2017 and 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.

Laura Michelson ‘16 served as an Appalachian Forest Heritage Area AmeriCorps member at Arthurdale Heritage, a historically based nonprofit organization in West Virginia, and is now studying for a master of arts in library and information science and a certificate in book arts at the University of Iowa. She reports, “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—at Arthurdale I learned our 90-minute tours over the course of two days.”

Sara Renaud ‘18 completed her MEMS major and a French minor with a senior thesis on the 15th-century French writer Christine de Pizan. She is now pursuing a master’s degree in museum and artifact studies at Durham University in the United Kingdom.

Faculty Bios & Courses

Katy Stavreva
Professor of English
Teaches courses on Shakespeare, Dante, medieval and early modern literature of England, and early modern cultural studies. Ph.D., English, University of Iowa.

Jama Stilwell
Professor of Music
Teaches about Gregorian chant and early music. Ph.D., musicology, University of Iowa.