

MEDIEVAL STUDIES, CERTIFICATE

The Medieval Studies certificate offers students interdisciplinary perspectives on the history and culture of Europe and the Mediterranean rim between ca. 300–1500. Courses from 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 the pursuit of interdisciplinary work across several departments.

The Middle Ages was a dynamic period of transcontinental 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 (Italian, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Romanian), which by the end of the fourteenth century came to eclipse Latin as vehicles for secular poetry and prose. Further east, Greek dominated the territory of the Byzantine Empire, while the foundation of the Kyivan Rus coincided with the development of Cyrillic script used by many Slavic and non-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, 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 the expansive centralized domed spaces of the Byzantine Empire and related Orthodox states, as well as the Islamic world.

The program's focus is embodied in the interdisciplinary courses devoted to the history and culture of the Middle Ages that are regularly offered across campus by participating departments and programs. The program cross-lists many of these courses, 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 with the support of the Anonymous Fund, the Center for the Humanities, the Institute for Research in the Humanities, and affiliated departments and programs.

In addition to departments and programs that regularly offer courses counting towards the Medieval Studies certificate—including Art History, Classical and Ancient Near Eastern Studies, English, French and Italian, Integrated Liberal Studies, German/Nordic/Slavic+ (including Folklore

and Scandinavian Studies), History, History of Medicine, History of Science, Jewish Studies, Religious Studies, and Spanish and Portuguese—the following departments and programs occasionally offer courses on medieval topics: African Studies, Asian Languages and Culture, Music, Philosophy, and Political Science.

Like a minor, the certificate documents a student's pursuit of a rigorous course of study in addition to the major(s). It attests to 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.