

# University of Alberta

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Apart from numerous survey courses such as the Histories of Medicine, of Technology, of Art, and the Literature of the European Tradition—all of which span several centuries including the Middle Ages, and are offered by various departments of the Faculty of Arts, there is a fairly strong contingent of special topics courses in medieval studies at the University of Alberta. For example, Martin Tweedale of the Department of Philosophy offers an undergraduate course on early medieval philosophy. There are currently three medievalists in the Department of History and Classics. Andrew Gow regularly teaches courses on late medieval and early modern Europe. John Kitchen is a specialist in medieval religion, medieval intellectual history, the history of Christian holy women and medieval Latin literature. Kitchen currently teaches an undergraduate course on early medieval Europe. Thirdly, J.L. Langdon, a specialist in British Medieval history, teaches a course on the formation of England in which he covers the political, social, economic and religious developments of England from the fifth to the twelfth century.

In my home department, the Department of Modern Languages and Cultural Studies (MLCS), medieval studies used to be quite visible across the board. Unfortunately, after several rounds of cutbacks and restructuring, the periods from the Middle Ages to the eighteenth century were gravely reduced in teaching and research. This is perhaps symptomatic of many modern languages departments. I was hired three years ago in French in an attempt to begin replacing these lost positions, and we are currently recruiting an early modernist in Spanish Peninsular culture and literature. My department is becoming increasingly interdisciplinary, which allows for movement within the various disciplines and the eleven languages offered. As for me personally, I have greatly benefited from this development and have been able to introduce students to innovative courses tying in medieval texts and topics with

contemporary issues. I teach senior undergraduate courses (often cross-listed with graduate studies) on late medieval cultural phenomena and their continued existence or reflection today (such as the persona of Joan of Arc, proverbs, xenophobia), the transition from manuscript to the printed page and how it can or cannot be compared to the internet and hypertextuality. I taught a graduate seminar on French medieval women writers and a senior undergraduate/graduate seminar on female mysticism in the German Middle Ages. Further, there are several other courses which deal with the Middle Ages scattered among various language sectors in the department, including courses on Old Norse mythology, Scandinavian sagas, the occasional teaching of Dante in Italian, the history of the German language, and Arthurian adaptations in German. Following our curriculum reform in French, which will come into effect in 2003-04, we will be able to offer in most years one course on medieval studies at the 300- and one at the 400-level. Courses at the graduate level are offered sporadically at best. On the brighter side, efforts are underway to create interdisciplinary courses on specific medieval/early modern topics within the comparative MLCS-stream taught in English as well as across departments.

One can safely say that it is the Department of English that offers the highest volume of courses in medieval studies at the undergraduate and the graduate level alike. Though the English department's strong points are postmodernism, postcolonialism and feminism, Garrett Epp, Larry McKill, and Stephen Reimer offer—in addition to five undergraduate survey courses (The Earlier Middle Ages, The Later Middle Ages, Middle English Literature, Chaucer, Old English Language and Literature)—a broad spectrum of special topics courses. In the main these courses reflect the research interests in which they are actively engaged. Epp teaches medieval and Tudor drama at the undergraduate and the graduate levels. Reimer teaches a graduate course on medieval dissent as well as the occasional 400-level course on medieval romances or “Robin Hood.” Moreover, each year there is usually at least a half-course in medieval non-dramatic literature at the graduate level. McKill teaches Old English language and literature at the 300- and on occasion at the 400/graduate-level. In addition to this, Ian Munro offers a course on popular culture and the rise of print and John Considine includes medieval texts and topics in his courses on the history of language and will teach a new course on manuscript culture at the end of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. According to Reimer, in an ordinary year there are at least 3 full-course equivalents in “focused and intensive” courses in medieval subjects (and sometimes rather more) at the undergraduate level, and usually at least 1 FCE at the graduate level. Honours students regularly choose a medieval topic for

their one-term honours tutorial. The courses taught encompass conventional courses focusing on canonical works as well as courses which attempt to tie in specific topics, such as theatre performance, sodomy, popular culture, humour, and other topics which compare medieval and modern texts. Postmodern theories are frequently used to extrapolate critical knowledge from medieval literary texts and drama.

The Department of English was the driving force in the creation of the SSHRC-funded Medieval and Early Modern Institute. In existence for three years, it hosted a very successful and well-attended conference at the University of Alberta. The publication of the proceedings is currently underway, as is an effort to renew the existence of the Institute. Unfortunately, the English department recently lost two medievalists to American universities; however, it has just hired Michael Fox in this field.

The current focus of the Faculty of Arts pivots on the creation of interdisciplinary courses and programs, which undoubtedly is an area where medieval studies could play an important role. At the same time, I think it has become increasingly more important to establish links between the culture and literature of the historic periods with modernity or postmodernity, be it within the framework of reception studies, comparisons of literary themes or specific cultural icons. By bridging the historical and the modern we can help students to contextualise and to arrive at a deeper understanding of current cultural and literary phenomena.