

# Wilfrid Laurier University

## *Robin Waugh*

Smaller universities can preside over profound achievements in disciplines such as medieval studies through the fostering of commitment and focus. For instance, the profile of medieval studies has developed significantly in the last three years at Wilfrid Laurier University, where, in December of 2002, an interdisciplinary program in medieval studies was approved by the university's senate. Prior to the development of this program, medieval material was taught largely within the traditional disciplines. The new program is designed to include course subjects from a variety of national and religious traditions. It will have four core courses: History 101, Medieval Europe 500-1100; History 102, The High Middle Ages; Medieval Studies 100, Discovering the Middle Ages (Knights, Saints, and Dragons); and Medieval Studies 200, The Medieval World View. The last two courses are designed to be team-taught by faculty members from various disciplines, such as Classics, History, Religion and Culture, Music, Fine Arts, Languages and Literatures (particularly French and Spanish), and English and Film. Participating faculty members have contributed many of their existing courses and research interests to the program, together with many new ideas for lectures, fourth-year seminars, and innovations in teaching. The program will also include courses in medievalism, that is, the study of representations of medieval cultural materials within contemporary cultures and sensibilities. Though these kinds of offerings, such as a "Tolkien and Fantasy" course, are growing at Laurier and are currently more popular among students than the more traditional medieval-themed courses, the former variety of course is not pushing aside the latter. In fact, an interdisciplinary medieval studies program should help the existing medieval courses at Laurier appeal to more students.

The establishment of a medieval studies program runs parallel to recent efforts to expand the disciplines within WLU's graduate school and to develop more

specialized programs in Cultural Studies and Interdisciplinary Studies. The potential, within all of these initiatives, for collaborative research of all kinds is very encouraging. For instance, The Canada Foundation for Innovation and The Ontario Innovation Trust have granted funding support for equipment and infrastructure to an Oral Studies Research Site to be based at Laurier. Research at the site will include study of the relationships between oral-traditional narratives from the medieval era and oral-traditional narratives from the present day. This site holds much promise for collaborative research among academics and students in a national and an international context.

Faculty members at WLU have also been granted funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for projects that concern medieval studies. Alma Santuosso has recently received a further standard research grant for her project “Music Theory in Mediaeval Normandy and Southern Italy.” Her research has been funded by SSHRC for the last 15 years and has resulted in several books. Robin Waugh has recently received a standard research grant for “The Gendering of Medieval Patience Literature.” Ongoing projects at Laurier also include research into medieval gender roles, sermons, images of saints, Augustine’s *Confessions*, and the Middle English romances of Thomas Chestre. Since the library at WLU is linked to the libraries of the Universities of Waterloo and Guelph, research resources are quite easy to obtain, while researchers at Laurier also typically make use of the larger research libraries in Toronto and London.

Recent tenure-track hirings in medieval studies include Kirsten Yri, whose specialty is medieval culture in pop and art music, and Robin Waugh, who specialises in Old English, Middle English, and Old Norse literature. James Weldon, of the Department of English and Film Studies, has recently been elected Vice-President of the Canadian Society of Medievalists.

All evidence suggests that the field of medieval studies is international, influential, and growing, while many strongly-committed students are expressing curiosity about the vast and varied cultural material of the Middle Ages. Through conversations with them, with university administrators, and with the various specialists in medieval studies at Laurier, I have gained the impression that there is broad optimism concerning this discipline, and deep dedication to it, both inside and outside the Laurier community.