

University of Guelph

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The study of the medieval world has declined considerably in the last decade at the University of Guelph. Medieval studies has traditionally been discipline-based rather than interdisciplinary here; as a result the low priority accorded to the medieval period in various departments meant that retirements or departures by faculty during the 1990's led to the loss of most medievalists at the university.

The bottom of the trough was probably reached in 2001. At present there is one full-time medievalist in History who works on Scottish social and gender history (Elizabeth Ewan) and a faculty member in Classics with research interests in Patristics (Pdraigh O'Clairigh). Hiring is now underway for a medievalist in philosophy. The Dean of Arts, appointed in 2001, is a medieval historian, working in the area of gender, family, and sexuality (Jacqueline Murray). Both historians are also on graduate faculty at the Centre for Medieval Studies, University of Toronto, and this has enabled them to make links with medievalists at that university and to supervise medieval doctoral theses there. There is more strength in the Renaissance area, with several faculty and courses in Languages (Italian and French), English and Drama, and Art History. Guelph faculty and graduate students are encouraged to participate in a medieval research group with faculty from Wilfrid Laurier, Waterloo and other southern Ontario universities.

Medieval courses are still being taught, although mainly as part of survey courses or by faculty whose main research interests lie outside the medieval period. Student demand for such courses continues to be high, despite the lack of proper faculty resources for offering them. This demand often comes from students taking electives, suggesting that the interest in the medieval world is not confined to students in the humanities.

In History, there are two second-year survey courses, one of medieval Europe, the other of the British Isles 1066-1603. A third-year course covers Celtic Britain to 1066, while two fourth-year seminars examine selected topics in Medieval History. Two medieval courses, The British Isles 1066-1603 and Celtic Britain to 1066, are also offered as Distance Education courses. History students are required to take one pre-1500 course as part of their degree program. Recent hirings in Islamic and African history have resulted in offerings of survey courses with pre-1500 content. In Philosophy, a third-year course in medieval philosophy attracts good student enrolment and will be taught by a medievalist from 2003. A course in Medieval Italian literature is offered, although it may not continue beyond the faculty member's retirement. In other departments, several medieval courses are on the books, but only offered infrequently. An interdisciplinary first-year seminar on Modern Myths of the Middle Ages is being offered in 2003 as part of a pilot project on first-year seminars.

At the graduate level, medieval studies is largely confined to History, which is part of the Tri-University Graduate Program (with Wilfrid Laurier and Waterloo). The Guelph faculty are the only medieval historians in the three universities, although the hiring of a medieval/early modern historian at Wilfrid Laurier this year may bring another medievalist in 2003. English has a joint Ph.D. with Wilfrid Laurier which has medievalists on its faculty—the majority of Guelph students, however, work on more modern literature. Philosophy has a joint Ph.D. with McMaster and Wilfrid Laurier. There is a medieval philosopher at McMaster and may be a new one at WLU shortly, so it is possible the program may attract graduate students in this area in the future.

Graduate students in medieval studies are mainly in Scottish history, due to the University's Scottish Studies program and its extensive Scottish Collection of books and manuscripts, unique in North America. The last few years have seen the acquisition of a number of medieval Scottish manuscripts, dating from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Generally there are two to three M.A. students and one to two Ph.D. students in medieval Scottish history in any one year. Comparative thesis topics are also encouraged, with the result that students have also completed theses on medieval Irish, Welsh, and English history.

Overall, the position of medieval studies is weak at the University but there are some encouraging signs that this may change in the future.