Topics in History: Medieval Civilization

3 Credits
Counts towards a History minor, an upper division course in a History BA major and as a ‘S’ course (social sciences).
Type: Lecture-Discussion

Location: UAF
Meeting times: Monday-Saturday, January 4-9
12:45-5:45 pm (including the break)
Instructor: Yelena Matusevich Phone: 5851
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Office: Gruening 609C

Course description:

This course offers an unforgettable journey into the past where we will try, together, to get in touch with medieval civilization and its main achievements. Rather than stuffing students with enormous amount of data, my intention is to invite them to reflect on the medieval period as still highly relevant to many aspects of modern life, including their own. Why medieval themes and attributes remain so attractive and popular? Why medieval themes inspired more books (J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, J. K. Rowling, to name just a few), films (Lord of the Ring trilogy, Excalibur, Hurry Potter etc.), and followers (Society of Creative Anachronism, Medieval Academy of America etc.) than any other historical period? Why, on the other hand, everything backward and dark is often referred to as ‘medieval’? The course is structured thematically with each day centered on 2 interrelated topics such as medieval university and scholasticism, theology and the role of the Church and so forth. By integrating
the most current historical research, the course integrates a wide variety of disciplines while offering visual/audio support to selected readings from the time period.

**Course readings/materials:**

Class-pack (at the library on reserve 2 weeks prior to the first day of classes) containing 9 dossiers with reading selections to be read each day. Selections come from publications by the most celebrated medievalists such as Jacques Le Goff, Patrick Geary, Miri Rubin, Aron Gurevich and others. Each dossier is accompanied by guiding questions. Guiding questions have two objectives: helping students with the reading at home and channeling the discussion in class. Each class period will begin with the discussion of the homework reading and the guiding questions.

**Homework** consists in reading assigned pages following the guiding questions provided for each dossier, and making personal notes that students are expected to share with the class during the discussion. The first dossier is assigned for the first day of classes, January 4, and must be prepared in advance.

**Quizzes**, very brief and clearly defined, are based on homework and the guiding questions.

**Presentations:** Presentations will be discussed on the first day of classes. Students can choose a presentation according to their interests, and later present it to the class. The length of the presentation is no longer than 10 minutes. Visual support is encouraged.

**Assessment of Required Elements:** The course is interdisciplinary, and based on the analysis of primary and secondary historical sources.

**Additional/suggested sources:**

Miri Rubin, The The Middle Ages: A Very Short Introduction, 144 pages (the book will be available at the UAF bookstore).

http://www.medievaleuropeonline.com/general.html

http://www.netserf.org/History/

http://www.timeref.org/
Course Goals and Student Learning Outcomes:

- To provide students with the opportunity to link disciplines within the liberal arts in the context of medieval and early modern periods.
  
  **Assessment:** Studies of medieval and early modern culture, probably the most naturally cross-disciplinary among humanities, offers the best opportunity to see the interconnected nature of liberal arts.

- Introduce students into disciplines otherwise absent or underrepresented in the UAF curriculum: religious studies, theology, historical anthropology and medieval studies.
  
  **Assessment:** The instructor will use her background in medieval studies, Catholic and Protestant theology, Church history, medieval philosophy and comparative literature, as well as relevant historical sources.

- Address causes of both popularity and prejudices attached to medieval period.
  
  **Assessment:** Explain the gap between scholarly research and outdated perceptions recurring in college textbooks, and familiarize students with contemporary trends in recent scholarly research on medieval & early modern periods.

- Help students think independently making their own judgment based on primary sources and critical literature.
  
  **Assessment:** By introducing various, sometimes contradictory, perspectives on the subject and encouraging free discussion both in the classroom and in written essays.

- **Policies:**
  
  - Because it is a compressed course this class has a zero absence policy. Only in case of documented illness may a student be excused.
  
  - Students are expected to read all texts on time.
  
  - No make-up for classes or quizzes due to the course’s compressed nature.
  
  - Students are expected to read all texts on time. Short quizzes in the beginning of each class will serve to check whether the texts have been read. No make-up for quizzes is possible.
• No chewing gum, food, or beverages! No pagers, cell phones are allowed.
   A special break will be provided between two parts of the class daily.

**Evaluation:**
Grade will calculated as following:
Homework (personal notes)  20%
Participation in discussions  15%
Quizzes:                   15%
Presentations             15%
Final exam                15%
Final paper:              20%

Final paper is due: January 16\(^{th}\)

**Grading Scale:**

- 97-100% A+
- 93-96%  A
- 90-92%  A-
- 87-89%  B+
- 83-86%  B
- 80-82%  B-
- 77-79%  C+
- 73-76%  C
- 70-72%  C-
- 67-69%  D+
- 63-66%  D
- 60-62%  D-
- less than 60 – F

I will work with the Office of Disabilities Services (203 WHIT, 474-7043) to provide reasonable accommodation to students with disabilities.

**About the instructor:** I have published extensively on the late medieval period, including two books (2004 & 2010), and over thirty articles. I am currently pursuing my second doctorate in history (habilitation) at the University of Paris, Sorbonne, France.
Course Calendar  (subject to change)

Day 1:

Part 1: Middle Ages in Images and Concepts.

1. Syllabus and distribution of presentations.
2. Brainstorming/free discussion: what do you already know? What are your ideas/conceptions concerning the Middle Ages? What do you associate with Middle Ages? Let’s make an approximate list as our point of departure on rediscovering the medieval mentality and civilization.
3. Quiz on homework.
4. Discussion of the guiding questions in the class-pack.
5. Lecture “Main Chronology of the Middle Ages.”

BREAK

Part 2: Two Sources of Medieval Civilization. Or, maybe, three?

6. Brainstorming: what do you already know?
7. Lecture “Sources of Western Civilization.”

Homework: Dossier 2 in the class-pack. Mark/copy your favorite passages.

Day 2

Part 1: Man and His God.

1. Discussion of the homework and personal notes.
2. Impressions of the assigned text.
3. Quiz on homework.
4. Brainstorming. Introduction to theology. What do you already know? What are your ideas/conceptions concerning theology? What is sacred in our society? Is there anything sacred to you? Is our sacred collective or individual or both?
5. Lecture “Introduction to Medieval Theology.”
BREAK

Part Two: Medieval Church and religious orders.
6. Read and discuss together of short samples of theological texts. Your first reactions, questions, clarifications. Discussion.
7. Lecture “Misconceptions about Medieval Church.”

Homework: dossier # 3 in the class-pack. Mark/copy your favorite passages

Day 3

Part One: Economics and Society
1. Quiz on the homework.
2. Presentation of favorite passages from the homework reading. Discussion of personal notes and guiding questions.
3. Brainstorming: what do you already know or imagine about medieval social structure?
4. Lecture “Medieval Social Body.”

BREAK

Part 2: Kings, warriors and kingdoms.
1. Reading from original sources. Discussion.
2. Knights of the Round Table: a potent legend with a secret message. Discussion.
3. Lecture “Peasantry: the silent majority.”

Homework: Class-pack 4. Mark/copy your favorite passages

Day 4

Part 1: Medieval Learning
1. Quiz on the homework.
2. Presentation of favorite passages from the homework reading. Discussion of personal notes and guiding questions.
3. Lecture “Carolingian Legacy.”
BREAK

Part 2: The University.

5. What is a university? How do you understand this concept? Discussion.
6. Lecture: “Medieval university: library, lecture, chair, cap and gown,
degrees, ceremonies, departments, colleges and diplomas etc.”

Homework: Dossier #5. Mark/copy your favorite passages.

Day 5

Part 1: Medieval City.

1. Quiz on the homework.
2. Presentation of favorite passages from the homework. Discussion.
3. Size, population, organization of medieval cities. The phenomenon of
the Hansa League and free cities.

BREAK

Part 2: Medieval professionals.

5. Lecture: Guilds, masterpieces and artisans.
6. Film fragment.

Homework: Dossier #6. Mark/copy your favorite passages.

Day 6

Part 1: Medieval Art

1. Quiz on the homework.
2. Presentation of favorite passages from the homework. Discussion.
3. Can you formulate, without recurring to the received ideas, what is
the main feature of medieval art forms? What is the place of art in
our society? Is it more or less prominent than in medieval society or
less? Discussion.

BREAK
Part 2: Expressions of the Sacred.

5. Discussion: Romanesque art. What are the main characteristics of the Romanesque art? What does it tell us about medieval man, man in general and ourselves? What do you find attractive and/or incomprehensible in this art?

Homework: Dossier #7. Mark/copy your favorite passages.

Day 7

Part 1 Women and Family in the Middle Ages.

1. Quiz on the homework.
2. Presentation of favorite passages from the homework. Discussion.
3. What do you think you know about women’s life in the middle ages? Discussion.
4. Lecture: women and the ambiguity of their status in the middle ages.
5. Famous and powerful medieval women: presentation of original texts and discussion.

BREAK

Part 2: Witches and Witch-hunt.

1. Brainstorming/free discussion: what is a witch? How do you imagine a witch: age, occupation, and social status?
2. Lecture-presentation: the latest findings about the realities of witch-hunts.
3. Film fragment.

Homework: Dossier #8. Mark/copy your favorite passages.

Day 8

Part 1: Minorities in the Middle Ages.

1. Quiz on the homework.
2. Presentation of favorite passages from the homework. Discussion.
3. The age of intolerance? Going beyond the simple blame: causes and consequences. Discussion.
4. Lecture “Medieval community, calendar, holidays and theater.”

BREAK

Part 2: Attitudes toward nature, disease and animals. Discussion.

6. Sample of medieval poetry.

Homework: Dossier #9. Mark/copy your favorite passages.

Day 9

Part 1: Medieval Ideal

1. Quiz on the homework.
2. Presentation of favorite passages from the homework. Discussion.
4. Courtly Love and the Code of Honor: are they still relevant?

Part 2: Medieval Legacy.

5. Discussion: What remains of the Christian medieval world-view now? Which spheres of culture or everyday life still bear traces of medieval mentality? How this class changes your ideas about the middle ages? Concluding discussion.
6. Final paper discussion.
7. Final Exam.