

External Review of the Medieval Studies Program

The University of Victoria

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Review Committee

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Executive Summary

The interdisciplinary Medieval Studies (MEDI) program at the University of Victoria deserves to be recognized for its remarkable contributions to the students enrolled in the program, the instructors who teach its courses and lead its other programs, and the broader community both in Victoria and beyond. Since being established in 1987-88, the program has developed a strong reputation, and it is especially known for the impact of its annual conference.

While there are several other programs in Canada that allow students to study the medieval period from an interdisciplinary perspective, the MEDI Program at the University of Victoria is one of the few programs in Canada to offer undergraduates the opportunity to pursue a Major and an honours option. Instruction in the program is provided by 21 regular faculty members and one sessional instructor drawn from departments across several faculties. The size of this program is therefore comparable to the Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies at Ohio State (a much bigger school with 65,000 students) and surpasses the size of most other medieval programs in Canada—not just those at comprehensive or primarily undergraduate institutions but also U15 institutions. Moreover, the program's offerings, its outreach, and its scholarly standards are of the highest quality.

The Medieval studies program offers an impressive array of courses. These include offerings in Byzantium, Hebrew & Arabic literature, late imperial China, medieval musicology, Islamic art & archaeology, Japanese theatre. These types of courses are usually considered to be the domain of “niche” programs at much larger universities, but the MEDI program has identified a strength and a need in teaching the Global Middle Ages, and its course offerings so far reflect that aim. The members of the program recognize this is an area where more work remains to be done, and they also recognize a need to introduce courses that align with the University's attempt to foster respect and Reconciliation.

Although it is primarily designed to deliver undergraduate instruction, the MEDI program does much more than that. It already functions in part like a Centre for Medieval Studies by undertaking extensive outreach to the city and environs through its annual conference. It provides a sense of community for the scholars involved in the program as well as medieval enthusiasts—including many alumni—in the Victoria region. It also provides a range of remarkable opportunities for students to learn by doing research and presenting their findings outside of the classroom (especially with annual undergraduate conference).

The University and Faculty of Humanities responded to two of the key recommendations of the previous external review by resolving the issue with EETs returning to the department and including the director in meetings of the Dean of Humanities and the Faculty's department chairs. The program has been able to maintain stable course offerings and enrolments in the face of considerable budgetary pressure since the last external review thanks to the sustained efforts of those who see its value. We hope that the University and Faculty of Humanities will take this opportunity to enhance the program and ensure its continued success by responding to some of the additional recommendations made by the external review in 2012 and reiterated in this report. These recommendations address the following concerns: the risk and uncertainty caused by not appointing a permanent faculty member dedicated to teaching in Medieval Studies; the insufficient remuneration for the director; and the inadequacy of the program's budget for some of its administrative needs and enhanced outreach.