

History 103: Introduction to the Medieval World

"Medieval history is always slowly turning into romance."

Instructor Information

Office Hours: Wednesdays, 2:00–3:15 PM, and by appointment **Office Hours Note:** Please email before coming. The instructor is sometimes called away and wants to ensure availability.

Course Description

This course surveys medieval European history from the fall of the Roman Empire to the beginning of the Renaissance. Students will examine political, religious, social, economic, technological, and cultural developments. The course emphasizes the diversity of medieval experiences, including peasants, townspeople, students, clergy, knights, and nobles.

Major Themes

- The decline of the Roman Empire and the rise of Christianity
- Barbarian kingdoms and cultural transformation
- Feudalism and the Crusades
- Chivalry, medieval warfare, and Arthurian traditions
- Cities, education, and daily life
- The Church, heresy, and witchcraft
- The Black Death and late medieval society

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the semester, students should be able to:

1. Demonstrate understanding of major events, figures, and cultural movements of medieval Europe.
2. Explain how interactions among Byzantium, Europe, and the Islamic world shaped economic, intellectual, cultural, and political developments.
3. Analyze medieval sources (texts, images, poetry, documents) and explain their historical context, purpose, and audience.

Course Requirements

Exams

Students will take three in-class exams based on lectures and assigned readings.

Quizzes and Short Writing

Quizzes and short writing exercises occur approximately every third lecture and are completed by hand in class. Missed quizzes or writing exercises may be replaced with extra-credit assignments.

Extra Credit

Extra-credit opportunities will be posted after the first exam. Extra-credit points apply only to the quiz/short-paper portion of the grade.

Grading Breakdown

- Quizzes and Short Papers (including extra credit and attendance): 40%
- Midterm Exam 1: 20%
- Midterm Exam 2: 20%
- Final Exam: 20%

Course Policies

Attendance

Attendance is mandatory. All unexcused absences reduce the final grade. Arriving late counts as an absence.

Classroom Conduct

- Remove earbuds when entering the classroom.
- Silence phones.
- Take notes using pen and paper. Research shows handwriting improves learning.

Academic Integrity

Plagiarism or cheating results in a failing grade for the entire course and a report to the Dean of Students. Submitting AI-generated writing or research as your own is considered academic dishonesty and will be reported to the Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities.

Email Etiquette

Emails to the instructor or TA must use proper etiquette. Begin with a greeting such as “Dear Professor Zook” and end with a closing such as “Sincerely” or “Yours.”

Required Text

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight (Penguin, 2007)

Schedule of Lectures and Discussions

Dates and topics may change. Updates will be announced in class.

January

- **Jan 12:** Introduction to the Course
- **Jan 14–16:** The Late Roman Empire
- **Jan 21–23:** The Birth and Spread of Christianity
- **Jan 26:** Sailing to Byzantium
- **Jan 28–30:** Monks and Missionaries

February

- **Feb 2–4:** Barbarian Nations
- **Feb 6–9:** Islam
- **Feb 11:** Review for First Exam
- **Feb 13:** First Exam
- **Feb 16–18:** The Last Invasions and the Feudal World
- **Feb 20:** Feudalism in Action
- **Feb 23:** The Crusades
- **Feb 25:** Knighthood and Chivalry
- **Feb 27–Mar 2:** The Agrarian and Commercial Revolutions

March

- **Mar 4:** The Medieval City: Dynamic and Dangerous
- **Mar 6:** No Class (Library Day)
- **Mar 9:** Education and the Rise of the Universities
- **Mar 11–13:** World of the Peasantry: Family Formation
- **Mar 23:** Peasant Folkways
- **Mar 25:** Review for Second Exam
- **Mar 27:** Second Exam
- **Mar 30:** Arthurian Legend and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

April

- **Apr 1:** Conflict Between Church and State: Three Dramatic Acts
- **Apr 3:** The Church at Its Height
- **Apr 6:** Women in Medieval Europe: A Golden Age?
- **Apr 8–10:** Minority Groups, Heresy, and Witchcraft

- **Apr 13–15:** Late Medieval Kingship: Success and Failure
- **Apr 17:** The Battle of Agincourt (1415)
- **Apr 20–22:** The Late Middle Ages and the Black Death
- **Apr 24–27:** The Church and Late Medieval Piety
- **Apr 29:** Review for Final Exam
- **May 1:** Final Exam