Medieval Institute

Spring 2027 Course Descriptions

Graduate Courses

(*as of November 16, 2026)*

MI 60005 01 Latin Paleography — David Gura

The course is an intensive survey of Latin scripts from antiquity through the Middle Ages and Renaissance. Students will be able to accurately read and transcribe Latin scripts, expand systems of abbreviation, identify, date, and localize (when possible) different hands, and defend their interpretations. There will be a strong emphasis on the different varieties of Gothic script (textualis, cursiva, hybrida, etc.). Once the class reaches the twelfth century, students will work extensively with Notre Dame[1]s medieval collection of 288 manuscripts and fragments. Aspects of practical applications and textual criticism will be addressed at the end of the course. All meetings will be held in the Special Collections Seminar Room.

MI 60194 01 Introduction to Syriac — Jeffrey Wickes

This course will offer basic familiarity with the Semitic language of Syriac, a dialect of Aramaic. Participants will learn grammar and vocabulary for basic reading which will serve as a basis for further study of Syriac. Syriac is important for any who are interested in early translations of the Bible, monasticism, patristics, church history, liturgy, hagiography, homilies, Manichaeism, the transmission of Greek philosophy, and Semitic linguistics. No previous experience with Syriac (or another Semitic language) is assumed.

MI 60401 01 Introduction to Medieval Theology — Ann Astell

The high middle ages witnessed tremendous creativity in theology, and the writings of theologians as diverse as Anselm, Bernard of Clairvaux, Peter Abelard, Thomas Aquinas, and Mechthild of Magdeburg have proven to be of enduring significance. This course examines the high medieval achievement in theology, both scholastic and spiritual, through close study of selections from many of the most important theologians from the 12th through the early 14th centuries. While considerable attention will be given to doctrinal development and intellectual disagreement, cultural as well as literary questions will also receive their due - to what extent did institutional and educational changes stimulate theological progress? Why did theologians employ such a broad range of genres, and are different genres better suited to certain theological tasks? How do earlier writings, both Christian (scriptural, patristic, and early medieval), and, non-Christian (especially, but not exclusively, Aristotelian), figure in the high medieval theological enterprise? Heavy emphasis will be placed on the analysis, both oral and written, of primary texts. Thematic continuity will be provided by focusing on medieval discussions of 'theology' as science and as wisdom; the understanding of Scripture; providence and predestination; and, Christology. To facilitate future research, students will also be introduced to the principal scholarly resources for the study of medieval theological history.

MI 60416 01 The Christian encounter with Judaism in Early Modern Europe — Abigail Hayton

This course explores ‘Christian Hebraism’, the study of Jewish literature by Christians, in the early modern period (roughly 1450-1700). Judaism has always been fundamental to Christianity. The recognition of this fact by Christians, however, became a central preoccupation during the Europe-wide Renaissance in which the clarion cry ‘ad fontes’, to the sources, resounded all around. Closely coordinated with the period’s well-known recovery of the classical heritage of Greece and Rome was its critical interest in understanding the biblical past. We will uncover a key

dimension of the religious and intellectual history of Europe at a crucial period in its development, starting with the Renaissance and concluding with the Enlightenment. Students will read key texts in the development of Catholic, Lutheran and Reformed theology, seeking to understand how each engaged the Jewish past of the church and its relationship to contemporary Judaism. The history of Christian Hebraism is a vibrant area of research within both Intellectual History and Historical Theology. We will ask challenging questions as to the meaning of 'Enlightenment', the religious value of biblical scholarship and the ongoing relationship between Christianity and Judaism.

MI 60553 01 Dante II — Theodore Cachey

An in-depth study, over two semesters, of the entire Comedy, in its historical, philosophical and literary context, with selected readings from the minor works (e.g., Vita Nuova, Convivio, De vulgari eloquentia). Lectures and discussion in English; the text will be read in the original with facing-page translation. Students may take one semester or both, in either order.

MI 60632 01 Medieval Latin II: Medieval Latin Survey — Hildegund Muller

The aim of this course is to experience a broad spectrum of Medieval Latin texts. Readings representative of a variety of genres (literary and subliterary), eras, and regions will be selected. Students planning to enroll in this course should be completing Introduction to Christian Latin Texts or they must secure the permission of the instructor. Those with interests in particular text types should inform the instructor well in advance so that she can try to accommodate their interests.

MI 63043 01 Medieval Platonism: the long history of Platonism (c. 270-1499) — Denis Robichaud

This seminar studies fundamental texts from and secondary scholarship on what can be considered as the longue durée of Platonism from c. 270-1499, a period that stretches from the death of Plotinus (270 CE), the ancient Greco-Egyptian philosopher based in Rome who founded a philosophical movement commonly known as Neoplatonism, until the death of Ficino (1499), the Florentine philosopher who single-handedly integrated the largest body of ancient Greek philosophical texts, including Plato and Plotinus, into the Latin philosophy of the fifteenth century. Texts and philosophers that might be covered include the following: late ancient Platonism (Plotinus, Porphyry, Iamblichus, Macrobius, Proclus, Damascius); Early Medieval and Christian Platonism (the Corpus Dionysiacum, the Liber de causis, Boethius, Calcidius, Eriugena); the School of Chartres (Thiery and William of Conches); Byzantine (Psellos, Italos, Petritsi, Pletho, Bessarion); scholasticism (Albert, Aquinas, and Eckhart); Renaissance (Cusanus, Ficino, Pico, Cattani da Diacceto, Abravanel, Patrizi). This list is certainly not meant to be exhaustive, and the key texts studied, which may change on any given year, will be a sample derived from this offering.

MI 63455 01 The Hesychast Controversy — Alexis Torrance

This course focuses on later developments in Byzantine theology, particularly as they relate to the tumultuous theological debates over Hesychasm in the fourteenth century. To many Byzantines, at stake in these debates was nothing less than a correct understanding of God and the knowledge of God, a sentiment that has carried through into modern Eastern Orthodoxy. By way of introduction, key theological sources directly preceding the Hesychast Controversy will be examined, including Gregory II of Cyprus, Nikephorus Blemmydes, Gregory of Sinai, and Theoleptus of Philadelphia. From here the historical and theological contours of the Controversy itself will be studied, with an emphasis on the works of Gregory Palamas, Barlaam of Calabria and Gregory Akindynos. Together

with analysis of the theology on both sides of the debate, special attention will be paid to the thought of perhaps the most peaceable theologian of the period: Nicholas Cabasilas. The latter part of the course will involve the study of the afterlife of the Heyschast Controversy in Eastern Orthodoxy, and its ramifications for modern theological discourse.

MI 66020 Directed Readings — Graduate [Varies by section.]

Offers graduate students a possibility, normally in their second or third year, to work closely with a professor in preparing a topic mutually agreed upon. Student and professor must sign a form that records the readings.

MI 77001 Field Examination Preparation [Varies by section.]

Offers students a possibility, normally in their second or third year, to work closely with a professor in preparing for one of their field examinations.

MI 77002 Dissertation Proposal Preparation [Varies by section.]

Offers students the opportunity to work with their adviser in preparing their dissertation proposal.

MI 83323 01 Early Scholastic Philosophy Therese Cory

This course will study philosophy from the early Scholastic period (roughly, from the late 12th century to 1250), including figures such as Gundissalinus, Philip the Chancellor, William of Auvergne, Robert Grosseteste, Adam of Bocfield, Jean of La Rochelle, Richard Rufus, Alexander Hales, and more. We may also find it opportune to examine the earlier works of Kilwardby, Bonaventure, and Albert the Great. These thinkers are among the "early adopters" of Greek and Arabic philosophy in the Latin West, and provide particularly interesting insights into how the debates emerged that came to characterize medieval philosophy in the second half of the thirteenth century and onward into the fourteenth century. We will focus mainly on metaphysics and anthropology, with specific themes to be determined by group interest. CAVEAT: This is an advanced seminar. Prior coursework in medieval philosophy and at least some basic reading knowledge of Latin is strongly recommended. (English translations of this material are rare or nonexistent. There are tools we can use to generate rough translations for those who would be assisted by having the English side-by-side with the Latin, but during the seminars we will need to refer regularly to the Latin.) Consult with the instructor if you're unsure.

MI 88001 Resident Dissertation Research [Varies by section.]

Independent research and writing on an approved subject under the direction of a faculty member.

MI 88002 Nonresident Dissertation Research [Varies by section.]

Required of nonresident graduate students who are completing their theses in absentia and who wish to retain their degree status.

MI 90103 01 How we (should) view the Middle Ages — Michelle Karnes

There has been a lot of attention lately to how we study the medieval past, above all because of white supremacists who seek to coopt the period. We will consider their misunderstanding of the Middle Ages alongside other approaches. For instance, it used to be conventional, even a few decades ago, to turn to the period as a point of origin, whether for universities, common law, or the profit economy. Now, it is more often understood as a "premodern" period, home to monsters and plagues and distanced from the modern world. We'll think about the factors that drive those changes. We ask for different things from the past at different points in history, and so it changes along with the present. We will try to understand some of the dynamics at play by evaluating the ways in which the Middle Ages is used to support different agendas. We will read primary texts from medieval England including some of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, Mandeville's Travels, Floris and Blancheflour, and other pieces of romance and travel literature. Alongside those readings, we will read pieces from theory and popular culture and consider the ways that the different sources correspond or not with the period as it represents itself.

MI 93287 01 Historical Writing in the Byzantine Empire — Alexander Beihammer

Historiography is one of the primary genres of Byzantine literature. No doubt, authors like Michael Psellos, Anna Komnene, or Niketas Choniates count among the most accomplished historians of the medieval Mediterranean world, being read and appreciated far beyond the field of Byzantine studies. The late antique genres of secular political and ecclesiastical history writing persisted, merged, and developed in various forms throughout the Byzantine millennium and found continuators even after the fall of Constantinople in 1453. We thus have an almost unbroken sequence of historical works providing the essential information for all significant developments in the empire's political affairs. However, historical narratives were not confined to these texts. They can be found in many other genres of Byzantine literature, such as encomiastic speeches and poems, letters, saints' lives, foundation charters of monasteries, and legal documents. All these text types significantly deepen our understanding of Byzantine historical thought. This course explores how the Byzantines thought about and made sense of their past in different periods and historical circumstances. It focuses on authors and their social and intellectual environment on the one hand and problems of source criticism on the other. Thus, we will discuss the socioeconomic circumstances in which historical narratives were produced and the living conditions and experiences that shaped approaches to and perceptions of historical events and actors. Analyzing literary conventions, rhetorical devices, and historical concepts will lead us to possible ways of deciphering modes of expression and uncovering underlying realities. This course invites not only advanced students of Byzantium but also those who would like to learn more about Byzantium and the Eastern Mediterranean through some of its most appreciated primary sources in modern translations.

MI 98200 Dissertation Complete — Ann Astell

This course is a required course for graduate students who have completed 8 years of study.