MEDIEVAL CONNECTIONS:
ACTIVE LEARNING AND THE TEACHING OF THE MIDDLE AGES

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> A teacher who can creatively set up a dialectic of learning activities in
> which students move back and forth between having rich new experiences
> and engaging in deep, meaningful dialogue, can maximize the likelihood
> that the learners will experience significant and meaningful learning. —L.
> Dee Fink[1]

> The truth of it is that students [in the Middle Ages] were undergoing the
> same formative issues in life that are confronting me directly in the face
> now, and I am now feeling like there is much to be gained from the
> appreciation of their stories. —a student in the Medieval Connections
> course[2]

In the spring of 2004 at Augsburg College, several colleagues and I developed
and taught a course in medieval studies entitled "Medieval Connections."[3] The course
was born out of two desires: 1) to create an introductory course for a proposed major
in medieval studies and 2) to develop an interdisciplinary course for first-year students
in keeping with the goals of Augsburg's newly-revised general education curriculum.
From the beginning, we hoped Medieval Connections would be a model of active
learning. Hence, in developing the course, we set out to create what Dee Fink calls
"rich, new experiences"—in this case concerning the Middle Ages—that would become
the subject of Fink's active learning dialectic, the fodder for the "deep, meaningful
dialogue" we hoped would follow.[4] In this article, I would like to discuss some of the
experiences we developed for the Medieval Connections course, to show how those

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[1]L. Dee Fink, "Active Learning," University of Oklahoma Instructional Development Program,
http://www.ou.edu/idp/tips/ideas/model.html.

[2]Brett Cease, Student Chronicle, 2004, unpublished. Used with permission.

[3]I would like to thank my colleagues at Augsburg College who helped develop and teach this course.
The credit for its success is equally theirs. I would also like to thank colleagues who read earlier drafts
of this article, especially the anonymous peer reviewers, who offered valuable feedback. For other
treatments of the course, see Scott Carlson, "Notes from Academe: 'Vivat Academia,'" *The Chronicle of
Higher Education*, May 7, 2004, A48; Chuck Haga, "A Taste of the Middle Ages," Minneapolis *Star
Tribune*, March 12, 2004, B1; and Marisa Helms, "Augsburg Goes Medieval," Minnesota Public Radio,
April 20, 2004, http://news.minnesota.publicradio.org/features/2004/04/14_helmsm_medievalclass/.

[4]Fink, "Active Learning."

experiences contributed to students' dialogue with the Middle Ages, and to demonstrate how this dialectic between experience and dialogue contributed to students' active learning about medieval life.

The development of the Medieval Connections course was a process that required collaboration and creativity. Our interdisciplinary team for the course consisted of seven faculty members, one each from the departments of history, philosophy, religion, art, music, theatre, and English. We began brainstorming about the course with a moderate constructivist view.[5] Our first task was to discern what our students might know (or think they know) about the Middle Ages. We assumed that the most likely sources of their knowledge about the Middle Ages were popular fiction, television, and movies, and that only a small portion of what they knew about medieval history came from high school courses or other more academic reading they might have done.[6] With this in mind, we gradually established three broad learning outcomes for the course. First, we wanted students to know that the popular conception of the Middle Ages as a "Dark Age" is a cliché, and that the Middle Ages was, like most historical epochs, a diverse and complex period, one that witnessed great brutality and poverty, but also great intellectual and cultural achievement. Second, we wanted them to see the value in studying the past—or for that matter the present—from a range of disciplinary approaches and the advantages of having those disciplines engage in discourse with each other on a common topic. And finally, we wanted our students to develop certain skills that would help them succeed not only in this first-year course, but also throughout their college careers. These skills included developing their memories, learning to read more carefully and critically, and constructing arguments based on the texts they had read.

Our students for this new course would all be in the second semester of their first year, i.e., still at the beginning of discovering their identities as college students. For this reason, we decided to "set" the course in a medieval university classroom. Since the medieval university—with its beginnings in the twelfth century—is the ancestor of our modern institution, setting the course in a medieval classroom would afford our students a good opportunity to ask questions of the past that would have meaning in their own lives. What was it like to be a student in the Middle Ages? What and how

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[5]The basic constructivist tenet uses students' own knowledge as a base, then builds on that base to move students toward the material being taught. See Jacqueline Grennon Brooks and Martin Brooks, *In Search of Understanding: The Case for Constructivist Classrooms* (Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1999).

[6]The *Harry Potter* series and *Lord of the Rings* trilogy have a definite medieval flavor, though they obviously inhabit the realm of fantasy. The recent film adaptations of these works have made them even more popular, and add to a long list of films with medieval themes, including *Braveheart*, *First Knight*, *A Knight's Tale*, *Timeline*, and *King Arthur*, a movie that purports to tell "the truth behind the legend," to name only a few.

did medieval students learn? How was being a medieval student different from being a student today? To establish the context of a medieval college student's life, our modern students would need to learn a great deal about the Middle Ages—its social structures, belief systems, and cultural products. They could take these things for granted when it came to their own lives, but they would need to understand this disciplinary content in order to enter imaginatively into a dialogue with the past.

To make the course more engaging, we decided to add "costumes and location." Faculty would teach wearing academic regalia, and students in the course would wear robes that identified them as college students, just as medieval professors and students had done.[7] We asked to hold class in the City of Augsburg Room, a wood-paneled reception room on our campus that is usually reserved for meetings and receptions. The room has large wooden tables that can be moved together to form one large, square meeting table, with dark stained wooden chairs. The walls are decorated with woodcuts of Augsburg, Germany, as well as framed copies of the *Augsburg Confessional* (in keeping with our college's Lutheran heritage). There is also a replica of a stained-glass window, ca. 1100, from the Augsburg Cathedral. The replica was made as a replacement during World War II bombing raids on Germany, while the original piece was stored elsewhere for protection. There is also a large, framed folio from a thirteenth-century choir book, in Latin, with neumes instead of modern musical notation. The room has electric chandeliers and outlets, but otherwise is not fitted with any modern classroom technology.[8] Although we hoped these theatrical elements (costume and location) would engage students and encourage active learning, we were clear with our students that we did not intend the course to be a "re-enactment," in the way that Civil War re-enactors operate. We did not think of the class or conceive of

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[7] A colleague in philosophy was quick to point out that our modern academic robes bear little resemblance to the robes worn by medieval professors, which were sleeveless and often trimmed with fur. We conceded this point, but found the differences between medieval and modern academic robes were, well, academic, and something easily explained to our students. For a full treatment of medieval academic dress, see Hastings Rashdall, *The Universities of Europe in the Middle Ages*, 3 vols., ed. by F.M. Powicke and A.B. Emden (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1895 [1936, 1969]), vol. I, 194–5, 200, 300, 446; II, 113; III, 194, 208, 385-93.

[8] The lack of instructional technology in the Augsburg Room led us to question our own dependence on such technology. We agreed we would try to go as low-tech as possible—no video or PowerPoint—but compromised in using CDs for the music history section. For art history, we photocopied handouts—not a perfect solution, since this used modern technology to make the copies, but we justified this by claiming that if we had enough scribes, we could have hand-made a copy for every student. All but one of the faculty for the course taught without the aid of a chalkboard, which had not been introduced into American classrooms until the early 1880s. See Charnel Anderson, *Technology in American Education, 1650–1900* (Washington, DC: U.S. Dept. Of Health, Education, and Welfare, Office of Education, 1963). As for other forms of technology, laptops, cell phones, and wristwatches were checked at the door. Since the Augsburg Room does not have a clock, we purchased an hourglass, and assigned a different student each week with the task of turning the glass (three times for the three-hour class).

our students as being "in the Middle Ages," yet we did want somehow to take them out of their own experience and offer them an experience similar to that of their medieval counterparts for the purpose of critical comparison. The specific experiences we designed for the course fell into two categories: rituals and reading practices.

Rituals: Salutations, Tonsure, and the Saint of the Day

At the first class meeting, all of the professors for the course made a ritual entrance into the Augsburg Room wearing their academic regalia. After some of the usual, first-day-of-class business, we explained our plan for requiring students to attend class in academic robes and the connections this had to the experience of medieval students.[9] Obviously, none of the students had purchased robes yet, but they seemed to appreciate the theatrical aspect of this exercise. Whether or not they immediately appreciated dressing like quasi-medieval students, the idea of wearing a costume engaged them in the class, and for the moment this was enough. Next we taught them a ritual salutation in Latin for professors entering the classroom. When professors entered, students were to rise from their seats and greet them with the phrase, "*Salve magister*" ("Greetings, teacher."). The professors would respond with the phrase "*Salvete discipuli*" ("Greetings, students."). This ritual greeting added a formality to the class decorum that the students recognized as something different from the norm. It also helped to establish a group identity for participants in the course. Throughout the semester, many students and professors connected with the class would greet each other with the salutation outside the classroom, wherever they happened to meet on campus.

Next we explained the ritual of clerical tonsure, the special haircut that medieval students received, as a sign of the medieval university's strong connections to the church.[10] We suggested that, to really get a sense for the life of medieval students, our students should also receive a tonsure—not a full-blown "Friar Tuck" cut, but a ritual snipping of a few centimeters of a few strands of hair, as a way of initiating them into the class. There was much shifting in seats at this proposal, which was understandable enough, for little expresses a young person's identity more than his or her hair. For the moment, we left this thought hanging, instructed the students to purchase commencement robes (available in the bookstore), and moved on to other matters.

By the next class meeting, students in black robes were rising from their seats and greeting their professors in Latin. We again raised the issue of tonsure. I explained to

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[9]This explanation of the robes included the caveats concerning re-enactment and experience for the purposes of critical comparison, mentioned above.

[10]Both teachers and students in the Middle Ages received tonsures in order to secure ecclesiastical immunities or to receive benefices, though the practice varied from place to place. For example, it was not required at Oxford or Paris. See Rashdall, I, 91, 181; II, 119n; III, 393n, 394–5.

the students that we had adapted a tonsure ritual from the Catholic Rite.[11] My colleague in the religion department would lead the call and response of Psalms and other prayers, while I would snip hair. More nervous shifting and laughter. I assured them that I was not kidding, but that this part of the class was entirely voluntary. I also suggested that it might give them an experience of entering into a class unlike any they had yet had, and promised that no student would lose more than the tiniest snippet of hair. Still no volunteers. During our introductions at the first class meeting, when asked to say something about themselves, one of the students revealed that she liked to cut hair (this was long before any discussion of tonsure). Finally, I volunteered to go first and asked this student to come and cut a lock of my hair. She rose with some hesitation, but came forward and took the scissors I had brought to class. I kneeled down in front of her and closed my eyes—it was now my turn to feel some of the students' anticipation. Once she had given me the "tonsure," I rose and motioned to her that she might kneel and receive hers. After a bit of uneasy giggling, she complied. Slowly, one or two other students got in line. My colleague began reciting the tonsure ritual, and the students picked up their parts. Before we knew it there was a line of students, everyone in the class, with the other professors bringing up the rear, waiting to kneel and receive their modified tonsure as Psalms echoed through the room.

This might seem like little more than a bit of theatre, and our modern students could certainly have learned about the tonsure of their medieval counterparts without actually receiving one. Yet there was something marvelous that happened during that tonsure ritual that turned that group of students into a cohort in a way that no "getting to know you" icebreaker exercise has ever done—at least not in our experience. Such group coalescence was not our intention when the faculty first discussed the tonsure idea. In fact, most of my colleagues did not believe the students would even participate, and if they did, it would at best be a brief experience. It turned out to be one of the highest rated exercises in the class.[12]

The clerical tonsure was a one-time ritual. A regular ritual, performed at the beginning of every class, was the prayer to the "saint of the day." At the first meeting (January 14), this ritual was demonstrated with Saint Sava (d. 1237), a Serbian abbot who was "noted for his light and effective touch in training young monks."[13] The prayer included the hope that all professors in the course might also demonstrate such a light touch, and be just as effective as Saint Sava in teaching the students in our charge. The prayer ended with the phrase, "And now, to Saint Sava, and Saint Thomas Aquinas, the patron saint of all students, we say …" at which point the students were

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[11]See A. Biskupek, S.V.D., *The Catholic Rite of Holy Orders* (Techny, IL: Mission Press, 1954).

[12]An explanation of this rating can be found below.

[13]Michael Walsh, ed., *Butler's Lives of the Saints* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1991), 13.

instructed in their Latin response, "*Ora pro nobis*" ("Pray for us."). This became the formula that would end all the class prayers: invoking the saint of the day, then Saint Thomas Aquinas, patron saint of all students, and asking them to pray for us. The saints for each respective class meeting were assigned to teams of two to three students, who would be responsible for researching the life of the saint, and then composing a prayer that related the saint's life to our own endeavor, whether that be as learners or as people living in a complex world.

Some readers, way back at the beginning of the previous paragraph, might have questioned the potentially controversial notion of beginning class with a prayer. Since Augsburg is a college affiliated with the Lutheran church, the idea of starting class with a prayer was certainly easier to suggest than it might have been in a state university or public high school. In fact, there was some joking among the faculty that we might be violating Lutheran practice, which does not invoke the saints in the same manner as was done in the pre-Lutheran Middle Ages. It should also be said that Augsburg is a college intentionally committed to diversity, and many of our students and faculty are non-Lutheran, some are even non-Christian. It was therefore never our intention for this prayer to be used as a tool to proselytize. The biography and prayer to each saint was a means of demonstrating the importance of the saints to Christians in the Middle Ages. As far as I know, there is no evidence that medieval students began class with prayer, although there are examples of masses scheduled around classes for students to attend.[14] The idea of praying in class to a particular saint on his or her feast day is actually a bit of a stretch, since such feast days in medieval times would more likely have been occasions to cancel classes.[15] Yet, even with limited historical evidence on which to base this practice, the outcomes were worth the effort, and we were once again forthright with our students about the differences between this classroom ritual of ours and actual historical practice. The purpose of this exercise was to learn something about the importance of the saints in medieval life, and we saw this outcome fulfilled.

Reading Practices: The Chained Codes

The second kind of experience we designed for the course concerned reading practices, and these became the centerpiece of the course. The faculty agreed that we should teach from primary sources, but there was much discussion about how our students should read these. Almost as a joke, one colleague suggested a chained book.

[14]The chapel at the University of Bologna held two daily masses, one before and one after the lectures. Students were required to attend at least one of these. It also seems to have been a custom that students attend a Mass of the Holy Spirit upon completion of every "book" in lecture. The statutes of New College at Oxford were the first to require students' daily attendance at mass. See Rashdall, I, 201, 209n; III, 400.

[15]At the University of Bologna, doctors were forbidden from lecturing on saints' days, though students practicing their lectures could do so at any time they pleased. See Rashdall, I, 219.

During the Middle Ages, before the advent of the printing press, book production was time consuming (everything had to be copied by hand) and materials were costly (the basic recording medium was parchment or vellum, skins for which one first needed to raise live animals). Because books were so expensive, they were often chained to a library shelf or lectern to prevent them from being stolen. One of the most famous examples of these is the chained library at Hereford Cathedral.[16]   The idea of a chained book had great appeal in terms of "rich new experiences" for our students, but it also raised several questions. Would there be one book or several? Where would we put it? How would students gain access to it? We considered the consequences of a single text for an entire class, which we hoped would number between 25 and 30 students.[17] One colleague immediately expressed concern about student access to the book, which, if we kept it in the library, would only be possible during library hours. Some argued that a chained book was just another form of readings put on reserve. Others countered that with reserve readings students could make photocopies if they wanted to, and then read the material at a later time of their choosing. A chained book, to have any impact, would have to be chained someplace far from the copy machine, a place where students would be forced to do the readings *in situ*. Otherwise, what was the point?

The issue was how to afford students a more or less authentic reading experience, something similar to what their medieval counterparts had to endure. Medieval texts are full of marginalia written by scholars who describe their "sore backs" or "weary eyes," scholars who could not wait to finish their reading. This was the experience we wanted for our students, one that would help them appreciate the scarcity and preciousness of books in the Middle Ages, and the pains their medieval counterparts would endure to acquire knowledge. We also theorized that this might improve the reading skills of first-year students. If they read in a place that did not have blaring music and constantly interrupting roommates, surely their retention would improve. And since they did not have their own copy of the readings, they would have to learn to take good readings notes, and not rely on highlighting passages. Returning to the question of marginalia, we wondered whether this might not also be a good method for engaging students in the reading, by requiring them to gloss the readings with their own definitions, explanations, and interpretations of the text. Could this not also act as a forum for students to interact with each other, a kind of medieval discussion board or

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[16]See Henry Petroski, *The Book on the Bookshelf* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999); Burnett Streeter, *The Chained Library: A Survey of Four Centuries in the Evolution of the English Library* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1931 [New York: B. Franklin, 1970]); and Frederick Morgan, *Hereford Cathedral Library (including the 'chained library') its history and contents* (Hereford, England: Sayre Bros., 1952).

[17]We eventually enrolled 28 students.

chat room in the margins? We decided on a single book, with primary sources both written and visual, which the students would gloss with their own marginalia.[18]

Working with a professor from the art department, we created a book that looked as medieval as we could make it. Although the texts were set on a computer, we tried to copy the format of a medieval codex. We set the type in two columns, in a "medieval" font (Lucida Blackletter), with wide margins to accommodate student marginalia. We included visuals from historiated initials to full-page illustrations, many of which had originally appeared in medieval manuscripts. The pages were photocopied on 11" x 17" parchment-like paper, and hand-bound between heavy, black book covers. We left the spine exposed to reveal the hand stitching, but reinforced this with strips of real parchment so that students could see and feel the material from which, in the Middle Ages, the entire book would have been made. It turned out to be a beautifully crafted piece of work, which from a distance and barring close inspection, could easily pass for a medieval codex. Since it would be housed in our campus's Lindell Library, we dubbed it the *Codex lindellensis, no. 1*. We chained the book to a podium behind the library's reference desk, near the reference works our students would need to consult to write their marginalia. Because the codex was in a public place, where any library patron could have access to it, we established a ritual for reading the codex. Students in the Medieval Connections course would have first claim to use of the book, but would need to be wearing their commencement robes to make that claim, and to continue wearing their robes while reading the book. Like the tonsure ritual, students eventually embraced this practice, and the chained book became one of the highest rated experiential elements of the course.

Assessment by Instructors: The Chained Codex and Active Learning

Assessment of student learning in the Medieval Connections course was important to us, and we used a variety of methods to accomplish this. For example, to assess student engagement in the classroom, we observed attendance levels and student participation, both of which remained high throughout the semester. To assess student note-taking, reading comprehension, and interpretive skills, we had the students keep journals, which in the spirit of this course we called "chronicles." After every class meeting, we asked students to reflect on two questions in their chronicles: 1) What would the material from that class meeting mean to them if they were medieval students? and 2) What does it mean to them as modern students? Although there was a range of responses, many students made remarkable connections between their own lives and those of their medieval counterparts. To assess student analytical and writing

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[18]We used texts and images linked to the Fordham University Center for Medieval Studies, Internet Medieval Sourcebook, at http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/sbook.html, which provides primary source materials in the public domain. A list of the specific primary sources we used is included at the end of this article.

skills, we assigned a paper that was to take the form of a written "scholastic debate," which required students to use evidence from texts in the *Codex lindellensis* as their "authorities." To assess overall student learning in the class, we required each student to stand for an individual oral exam, for which they had to become an "expert" on one of the texts they had read for the course, and also to discuss the concept of medieval "connections," both in terms of interdisciplinary approaches and in terms of the "students—then and now" theme we had raised at the beginning of the semester. These are all fairly traditional means of assessment, though we adapted some to fit the medieval flavor of the course. In contrast, the *Codex lindellensis* presented a number of unique opportunities for assessing student learning, which warrant more detailed discussion.

We used the codex to assess student research skills and interaction with the readings on a continuing basis by requiring students to gloss the codex at least ten times over the course of the semester. We underlined hundreds of terms in the codex, to signal that these would be good terms for glossing, but students could also gloss items that were not underlined, such as images, or entire passages that required interpretation. We assessed this assignment by the number of glosses students contributed (some did more than the minimum of ten), and by the quality of their glosses based on level of difficulty, as listed in the following outline, from most to least difficult.

1. Glossing an entire passage that is not underlined, where your gloss offers your own interpretation of the passage.
2. Glossing an entire passage written in a foreign language.
3. Glossing an illumination (image).
4. Glossing a single term or passage underlined in red, where your gloss is based on the research of others (e.g., from an encyclopedia).
5. Glossing a single term not yet underlined by providing a definition from the dictionary.

Only a few students attempted glosses of types 1 through 3. Most of the students chose to do glosses of type 4. Type 5 glosses were the second most prevalent, and, interestingly, these revealed the poor vocabulary of some of our students.[19] A weak point of this assignment was the fact that students only had to do ten glosses over the course of the entire semester, leading about five of the students to wait until the last minute to complete the assignment. A better strategy, which we intend to employ in the future, is to assign at least one gloss every week, and to require students to attempt each type of gloss at least once.

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[19]We expected students might need to look up obscure words like seneschal or reliquary, but we were surprised when they glossed terms like omnipotent, impious, or infirmity.

Student glosses also became fodder for class discussion. One of the wonderful curiosities of medieval marginalia is that they are not restricted to grandiose critique, but also include very personal responses to the human condition (the scribes' sore backs and tired eyes, mentioned above), as well as commentary on the events of the day (visits of the king, sightings of a comet). Once our modern students became comfortable writing in the codex, similar glosses started to appear. For example, we assigned a reading by Gervaise of Canterbury describing the fire that devastated Canterbury Cathedral in 1174. Coincidentally, in the same week of this assignment, a fire broke out in one of our campus dorms, in which one of the students in our class was living. She offered the following gloss: "Oh man, it seems like everything is about fires! On the news, in my dorm ... feels like a bad omen."[20] No one was injured in the dorm fire, and students were able to return to their rooms after about two weeks. For the purpose of the class, however, this was another teachable moment. Without instruction or foreknowledge, our modern students had started writing marginalia in a very medieval fashion. We explained that this was exactly the sort of thing medieval scholars would write in their codices. Henceforth, the *Codex lindellensis* was more than just a text they used for class. It became a chronicle of their lives during that semester.

The codex also provided the opportunity to teach our students some rudimentary paleography and codicology skills, e.g., how pages are called folios, how these are numbered differently, the terms recto and verso. From the very first day of class, when describing medieval manuscript culture and how the codex was set up, we discussed the preponderance of forgeries in medieval document collections. To assess their understanding of this material, we included a "forgery" in the codex, and told students that extra credit would go to whoever discovered and could explain the nature of the forgery.[21] Our forgery was comprised of a palimpsest (text that had been scraped away, then written over), which we made by using a poor quality photocopy of one text, and then photocopying over it with another. The palimpsest text, which was faded and difficult to read, was a selection from Dr. Seuss's *Green Eggs and Ham*, the presence of which signaled the anachronistic text in our "medieval" codex. The student who successfully found the forgery explained her discovery in the marginalia.

We also used the codex as a means of testing student knowledge learned in the course. Around the tenth week of the semester we faked the abduction of the codex, claiming that it was most likely some wily junior and senior history majors who had kidnapped the book as a challenge to the first-year students in the Medieval Connections course. A ransom note was left chained to the lectern where the codex had

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[20]Sophie Gray, gloss in *Codex lindellensis, no. 1*, folio 24r, 2004, unpublished. Used with permission.

[21]On some level, the entire *Codex lindellensis* is a forgery, and we used this fact to remind students that the Medieval Connections course consisted of a set of experiences designed to help them learn about the Middle Ages, not a re-enactment of the Middles Ages, *per se*.

once rested, with clues that led students on a treasure hunt across campus. Answering each clue required knowledge of content from the codex and the course in general, as well as research methods specific to the course. Immediately following the announcement of the book's abduction, at the end of class period, teams of students went searching for their now cherished book. We thought it would take at least a couple of days for them to solve the clues and recover the codex, but within two hours it was returned to the library staff. This exercise not only tested students' knowledge of material in the course—without which they could not have recovered the codex—but also acted as a community building exercise.

Another community building aspect of the codex grew out of its limited availability. As mentioned above, the codex was chained to a lectern, which necessitated students reading it during library hours. These restrictions on their time forced students to come up with some creative reading strategies. Many students worked in pairs, reading silently together, then strategizing on the marginalia they would include. Some worked in larger groups, with one student softly reading to the others, and all of the students discussing difficult passages. A few students, more clever than their professors, found the readings on the internet, read the texts in their dorm rooms or wherever, and were only discovered, *in flagrante delicto*, as they transferred glosses from their computer printouts to the codex. Yet even those students attempting to subvert the experiential portion of the assignment were still participants in the active learning the codex provided, since their glosses, once transcribed as marginalia, became part of the lively discourse unfolding in the margins of the book.

Assessment by Students: The Small Group Instructional Diagnostic

In addition to the assessment of student learning conducted within the class, we also wanted the students to assess the course as a whole. To this end, we asked a colleague not associated with the course to conduct a Small Group Instructional Diagnostic (SGID). For those unfamiliar with the SGID assessment method, it is a five-step process: 1) students are given time to write comments or answer questionnaires, 2) students discuss their answers in small groups, 3) the small groups report to the entire class, 4) key points are rated, and consensus must be reached, 5) the results are shared with the instructor.[22] One advantage of the SGID is that outlier opinions are treated as such, rather than allowing them to disproportionately skew the results, as can happen with other assessment instruments. The questionnaire we distributed asked students to rate the experiential elements of the class according to engagement and educational value in combination, one with the other. The results are as follows:

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[22]Tom Creed, "Small Group Instructional Diagnosis," *The National Teaching & Learning Forum*, vol. 6, no. 4, May 1997; available at http://www.ntlf.com/html/pi/9705/sgid.htm.

	Not engaging, not educational	Not engaging, but educational	Engaging, but not educational	Engaging and educational
Wearing robes	8%	4%	54%	34%
Prayers before class	0%	8%	34%	58%
The chained book	4%	12%	4%	80%
Tonsure ritual	4%	8%	19%	69%
Visit by water clockmakers[23]	4%	32%	16%	48%
Field trip to churches	0%	4%	12%	84%
Visit by real-life monk	0%	23%	0%	77%
Visit by swordsmith	0%	0%	4%	96%
Visit by "leper"	4%	4%	20%	72%
Visit by "heretic"	0%	16%	20%	64%
"Riot by townspeople"	8%	4%	38%	50%

Responses to the questionnaire seem to demonstrate that most students found the experiential aspects of the course to be both engaging and educational.[24] Yet in small group discussions and reporting to the entire class, many students expressed

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[23]Although not discussed in this paper, to show the range of possibilities in designing a course such as this, I have included student responses to classroom "visitors from the past." These visitors ranged from a practicing Benedictine monk to a maker of replica medieval swords to colleagues and students who played the roles of clockmakers, lepers, heretics, and townspeople rioting over the bad behavior of college students in their town.

[24]We also asked students their overall evaluation of the course, with the following results: excellent (50%), good (38%), fair (12%), and poor (0%). Finally, since we had designed the course with the development of a medieval studies major in mind, we asked the students to comment on their level of interest in such a major, with the following results: Definitely interested (23%), somewhat interested (46%), not interested (31%).

ambivalence about some of these aspects. For example, students liked "the idea of the chained book," and thought it was educational, but also found many drawbacks: inconvenience, noise level (because of the book's location next to library reference desk), and the public nature of marginalia.[25] One student who had taken ill during the semester found it especially difficult to catch up with the readings. Students enjoyed the classroom visitors, some of them more than others, but overall this seemed a successful method of presenting and interacting with the material. One student wished the class "could be a little more focused, without as much 'candy' [meaning the experiential elements]," but this view was rare. Our colleague who conducted the SGID had this overall impression:

> Students very much enjoy the course. Yet there is considerable tension
> between the advantages and disadvantages of living history; learning is
> both enhanced and constrained by experiential components.[26]

The problem we are still struggling with as we plan to teach the course again, is finding the optimum balance between hands-on and mediated study. To read a long passage from a chained book, seated at a lectern on an uncomfortable stool, wearing an academic robe, might give one a sense of a medieval college student's life, even if one only does so for an hour. Is it necessary that one do so for an entire semester? This is not a question of whether we should use experiential methods, merely a question of degree.

Conclusion

The response to this course among colleagues, on our own campus and elsewhere, has been interesting and varied: Most seem to really love the idea, but a few have voiced concerns about our approach. Reservations fall into two categories. The first is that this kind of class could only work at a place such as Augsburg, but not at most other liberal arts colleges, and certainly not at large public institutions. In my opinion, two factors contributed to the course's success: a faculty dedicated to collaboration and interdisciplinary teaching and an administration supportive (financially and otherwise) of that faculty. This combination of factors is not present on every college campus, but it is certainly not restricted to Augsburg. Large or small, public or private, this kind of course could work on any campus, provided the faculty are committed to the idea and the administration is willing to back it. The second

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[25]To keep track of assignments, students had to initial their glosses. Although no grades were recorded in the codex, students did not like their work being on public display.

[26]Frankie Shackleford, SGID for Medieval Connections course, 2004, unpublished. Used with permission.

concern is that adopting a playful attitude toward the material to be learned somehow makes those involved in the course (teachers and students) less rigorous in their approach or less thorough in the content they are able to teach and learn. One colleague suggested that "a brief and contrived experience [in a course such as this] does not mean that one understands very much of the medieval world." This is true, but the same could also be said of a semester-long course taught with traditional methods. In either case, there is, and must be, more to it than that. We believe our students learned quite a lot, and even came to the start of some understanding of the medieval world. But more than this, Medieval Connections has ignited their interest in the period, which is what any introductory course ought to do. Since we first ran the course, the faculty at Augsburg has approved the interdisciplinary major in Medieval Studies, and students are signing up to declare it.

Developing and teaching Medieval Connections was tremendous fun. It not only engaged students in an imaginative study of the past, but also invigorated the faculty involved with the course, and in some ways energized the entire campus—when robed scholars cross the quad months before commencement or read and conduct research in the library, people notice. It should be said that this course was labor intensive and economically complicated.[27] For example, as I prepare to teach the course again, I am in the middle of editing and supervising the binding of a new codex for the students to read and mark up with their glosses. This will have to be done every time we teach the class, unless we move to a more advanced medieval model where students gloss the glosses of their predecessors. In spite of the time needed to produce the new, chained book—roughly fifteen hours of labor—we think the effect is worth the effort.

At the final class ritual, students participated in a medieval feast, for which they began preparing around the fourth week of the semester. Their assignments included researching and cooking the meal from authentic medieval recipes, reciting troubadour or Goliard student poetry, performing a medieval play written by a tenth-century nun, juggling, or performing medieval music. All of these assignments involved research and practice. And because of the presentational aspect—even the various dishes were presented to the diners—the feast was a huge success. Especially in the atmosphere of the Augsburg Room, students continued to learn actively from each other during what otherwise seemed to be a festive occasion. Many students commented that the entire course came together for them in this event. The medieval feast would be the last time these first-year students would wear their robes until they graduated. Before the feast ended, I suggested to them that when they put their robes on again for commencement,

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[27]The eternal problem of teaching interdisciplinary courses is how to pay all the instructors involved. We solved this by asking the administration for two part-time overload allotments, and dividing these among the faculty according to the number of times they presented to the class. This worked out to roughly $250 per appearance, but faculty often came and participated in the course even during class periods for which they were not being compensated. The regular teaching load on our campus is three courses per semester, so this was a partial overload for everyone involved.

they would wear them with a different understanding, not only of the medieval roots of the modern university, but of their lives as students, connected to the past, and, in some way, to the future.

It is our hope that some of the ideas we developed in our course will inspire others to incorporate active learning when teaching the Middle Ages, or even more distant periods of history. Would a class that recreated Plato's academy—students in togas, reading from papyrus scrolls—be going too far?

Appendix: Primary Sources Used in This Course

In addition to the primary source readings, we put on reserve several short histories of the Middle Ages, as optional reading that students could use for the basic narrative.

Peter Abelard, *History of My Calamities* (excerpts)
_____, *Sic et non* (excerpts)
Pope Adrian IV, *Letters to the German Emperor*
Anselm of Canterbury, *Proslogium*
Benedict of Nursia, *Rule for Monks*
Andreas Capellanus, *Rules of Courtly Love*
Ana Comnena, *Alexiad*
Robert de Courçon, *Statutes for the University of Paris*
Francis of Assisi, *Canticle to the Sun*
_____, *Rule of the Franciscan Order*
Fulcher of Chartres, *Capture of Jerusalem* (also the Gesta version)
Geoffrey of Monmouth, *History of the Kings of Britain* (excerpts)
Gervais of Canterbury, *On the Burning and Reconstruction of Canterbury Cathedral*
Goliard poems (*Carmina burana* and others)
Bernard Gui, *On the Cathars*
Hildegard of Bingen, *Song 71: On the Blessed Virgin Mary*
_____, *On the Interdict against Chanting*
Hroswitha, *Dulcitius*
Peter John Olivi, *On the Seven Periods of Church History*
Peter of Blois, *Description of Henry II*
Solomon bar Samson, *Crusaders in Mainz*
Abbot Suger, *Life of Louis VI* (excerpts)
Troubadour and Trouvères Songs (Countess of Dia, Casteloza and others)
Orderic Vitalis, *Ecclesiastical History* (excerpts)
Jacques de Vitry, *Life of Students at Paris*