

6 July 2010

Members of the Grant Committee
The History Education Network/
Histoire et Éducation en Réseau

Dear colleagues,

This letter comprises my report on MedSTEP 2010 (Medieval Studies Teaching Experience Program), a teaching and recruitment event that was held at Wilfrid Laurier University on Friday, 5 March 2010.

In 2008 THEN/HiER awarded me a grant of \$2,500 to run our first MedSTEP event in March of 2009. The original budget was \$2,090 and the actual expenses turned out to be \$1,788.46, leaving over \$700 from the original grant unspent. In that report I requested that the remaining funds be held over to be applied to a second MedSTEP event to be held in March 2010, and that request was kindly granted.

WLU Participants: The teaching portion of the event involved four 2nd-, 3rd- and 4th-year Medieval Studies students, plus one exceptionally strong 1st-year student who agreed to be an “understudy” to the other four students in case someone couldn’t deliver their presentation (which did not happen, as it turned out). There were also two faculty supervisors, including myself and a doctoral candidate at the University of Toronto who taught several courses last year. All of the student-presenters were students in good academic standing who had taken numerous courses in Medieval Studies and relevant courses in cognate disciplines. Because this event was also treated as a recruitment opportunity, there was also a presentation by a representative from the WLU Student Recruitment Office (SRO) and several Laurier student volunteers working for the SRO conducted campus tours.

High School Participants: Due to budget constraints we invited only two local high schools to participate this year. Our guests for MedSTEP 2010 included the following contingents of grade 11 students and their history teachers from Waterloo-Oxford Collegiate Institute (Ms. Carol Folino) and Eastwood Collegiate Institute (Mr. Darryl Weber).

The Program: The students and teachers arrived at Wilfrid Laurier University by bus between 9:00 and 9:25am (a half-hour earlier than last year) and were led by student volunteers to the first meeting, at which I welcomed them and briefly explained the program for the day and acknowledged that this was all made possible by a grant from THEN/HiER. This was followed by a brief presentation I gave on the WLU Medieval Studies program and then a presentation by Ms. Lindsay Scott on behalf of the WLU Student Recruitment Office. This was followed by campus tours which lasted about 50 minutes.

The students were then led to the first session on the subject of “Medieval Towns”, which was team-taught by a pair of WLU Medieval Studies students supervised by Ms. Alicia McKenzie of the Department of History and the Medieval Studies program.

Following lunch in the Dining Hall, we reconvened for another teaching session on the subject of “Chivalry and Courtly Love”, which was also team-taught by another pair of our Medieval Studies students whom I had supervised myself.

After the conclusion of the second session the grade 11 students and their teachers departed from campus and the student-presenters and faculty supervisors attended a meeting to share our thoughts about how the sessions went and discuss possible improvements for next year.

The Results: Based on the experience of MedSTEP 2009, I made significant changes to the schedule and found that these changes greatly improved the quality of the experience both for our students and for the grade 11 high school students who were our guests. In particular, by starting and ending the day earlier, a larger percentage of the high school students were able to attend because there was enough time to get to their after-school jobs on time. A shorter day was also accomplished by my giving an abbreviated presentation on the WLU Medieval Studies program which was integrated into the welcoming session, rather than a full presentation in its own session as was the case last year. Also, by holding one teaching session before lunch and the other after lunch, the high school students were much more attentive in the second session than they were last year, when the two sessions were held back-to-back after lunch.

In supervising the students’ development of their presentations, Ms. McKenzie and I were careful to make sure that the presentations didn’t assume too much prior knowledge, a problem that we identified last year. Another improvement that was explained in my last report was the institution of a dress rehearsal one week before the date of the MedSTEP event. Unfortunately, I was not able to attend; but Ms. McKenzie and Dr. Robin Waugh, the current Coordinator of the Medieval Studies Program, did observe these practice presentations and offered advice for improving the content and delivery of the material, which the students then incorporated into the final versions of their presentations.

The students who presented the section on “The Medieval Town” did a particularly good job of incorporating short film clips into their presentations and also very cleverly created mock Facebook pages for typical medieval townspeople of various genders, class and profession. This presentation was very well received by the grade 11 students in attendance. The section on “Chivalry and Courtly Love” was also generally successful, but the “Medieval Town” presentation was a tough act to follow and it was clear that the high school students were less impressed with a presentation that was similar to a traditional lecture.

One final “lesson learned” from MedSTEP 2009 has to do with a purely administrative matter. Lynne Doyle, the Senior Administrative Assistant to the Medieval Studies Program, and I decided that it would be much easier for all concerned if the transportation arrangements were made by the organizer of MedSTEP, rather than leaving it to the individual schools. This is because of difficulties we encountered in

reimbursing the schools which had already paid the bus company. This year the transportation arrangements went much more smoothly.

Overall, I am very pleased with the results of this event. On the basis of the two first MedSTEP events, I hope to find a permanent source of internal funding so that this can become an annual event at Laurier.

Dr. Chris L. Nighman
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Appendix

MedSTEP 2009

- 9:30-9:50 Arrival of the Grade 11 history students and their teachers at WLU
- 10:00-10:20 Welcoming remarks by the Medieval Studies Coordinator and a representative from the Student Recruitment Office (Arts 1E1)
- 10:30-11:20 Campus tours by students working for the Student Recruitment Office
- 11:30-12:10 Presentation on the WLU Medieval Studies Program (Peters 1025/27)
- 12:20-1:20 Lunch in the Dining Hall
- 1:30-2:20 Session 1: "History of the English Language to 1500" (Arts 1C17)
"Medieval Religious Women" (Arts 2C15)
- 2:30-3:20 Session 2: "Medieval Warfare & the Crusades" (Bricker 112)
"The Plague & Medieval Medicine" (Bricker 113)
- 3:30 Departure of the grade 11 students and their teachers
- 3:30-4:30 Meeting of the WLU faculty supervisors & student-presenters (Wilfs Pub)

MedSTEP 2010

- 9:00-9:20 Arrival of the Grade 11 students and their teachers at WLU
- 9:30-10:20 Welcoming remarks and presentation on the Medieval Studies Program by Dr. Nighman and a presentation by a representative of the WLU Student Recruitment Office (BA102)
- 10:30-11:20 Campus tours (led by students working for the SRO)
- 11:30-12:20 Session 1: "Medieval Towns" (2C15)
- 12:30-1:20 Lunch Break
- 1:30-2:20 Session 2: "Chivalry and Courtly Love" (BA202)
- 2:30 Departure of the Grade 11 Students and their teachers
- 2:30-3:30 Meeting of the WLU faculty & student participants