

Forum: L. Armstrong: Ancillary Disciplines: A Report from Canada
by Lawrin Armstrong

I am grateful to Eva Schlotheuber and Rüdiger Bösch for launching this discussion about the ancillary disciplines and digital humanities. There is, as the initial intervention suggests, a degree of irony in the fact that just as cultural resources are becoming readily available in digital form in unprecedented quantities, instruction in the skills needed to interpret them is in catastrophic decline at many German universities and, indeed, elsewhere.

I have no desire to enter the larger debate about digital humanities as such, but want to take up a point raised by Henrike Lähnemann in her recent contribution to the forum, where she quotes David D'Avray lamenting the decline of Latin instruction at the secondary and tertiary levels but nevertheless notes some signs of hope in London and Oxford. To echo D'Avray, without wishing to speak *pro domo*, I in turn want to emphasize that, though under pressure because of retirements, the Centre for Medieval Studies at the University of Toronto, an exclusively graduate department for students at the MA and PhD level in all areas of medieval studies, remains committed to instruction in the ancillary disciplines.

In Germany Latin is not considered an ancillary discipline, but in North America it must be classified as such because of the decline of Latin instruction at the secondary school level; if students have any Latin at all, they have acquired it at university. At CMS instruction in post-classical Latin therefore forms a core element of our programme: a student entering the MA year with inadequate Latin – and this is increasingly the case – will receive a total of 240 classroom hours of instruction over two years, and is required to pass two examinations of increasing difficulty without the aid of dictionaries or grammars before proceeding to doctoral dissertation research. Typical texts on the Level 2 examination are Augustine, *City of God*; Poggio Bracciolini, *Facetiae*; Otto of Freising, *Gesta Friderici*; Justinian, *De conceptione digestorum*; and the decrees of Gregory IX. Enrolment in Medieval Latin 1 this

year is 22. Doctoral candidates in the Department of History studying medieval topics are also required to pass the CMS Level 2 examination.

Any student who wants to work with manuscript sources will receive a further 72 hours of instruction in palaeography over a year, during which they will prepare weekly transcriptions which are corrected and form a component of the final grade in the course. Enrolment in this course is normally 20-25.

Those working with documentary sources will then usually enrol in the seminar on diplomatic, where they receive 24 contact hours over one term and prepare editions of eight documents drawn from England, France, Germany, Italy, and the papal chancery in accordance with the norms of the International Commission on Diplomatic. Students who study literary or philosophical texts receive 24 contact hours in a seminar on recensionist editing, where they edit three texts from classical antiquity and the Middle Ages. Codicology provides 24 contact hours on understanding and describing the physical composition of manuscript books. In all three courses, weekly assignments are assessed and form part of the final mark. The programme is very labour-intensive and absorbs most of the efforts of the four professors dedicated to these disciplines.

A (hypothetical) student who enrolled in all of the courses I have described would receive a total of 384 hours of classroom instruction in what might be broadly described as the ancillary disciplines necessary to interpret the flood of material that is becoming available in digital form. I should add that students at CMS are required to demonstrate at least a reading knowledge of French and German, tested by examination.