

The Program in Medieval Studies, Princeton University

The doctoral students in The Program in Medieval Studies at Princeton University invite abstracts for the 24th Graduate Conference on “Vulnerability in the Middle Ages,” which will take place on Friday, April 28, 2017. Sharon Farmer (UC Santa Barbara) will deliver the keynote lecture this year and will join Eleanor Johnson (Columbia) in conversation on vulnerabilities in medieval scholarship.

Vulnerability in the Middle Ages

At a moment that has brought economic, political, and physical vulnerabilities (new and old) abruptly to the surface, we invite papers on the topic of vulnerability and insecurity in the Middle Ages. Recent scholarship in medieval poverty, gender, disability, and racial difference has greatly enhanced our sense of the variety of vulnerable experiences, and we seek to connect these conversations through their shared perspective on power. We welcome proposals from a variety of disciplines on vulnerability and the concepts that surround it, including weakness, insecurity, injury, disability, and difference. Papers might consider both the portrayal and the experience of the vulnerable life, as well as the systems that lead to vulnerability. We are interested both in the conditions that made individuals vulnerable within communities, and in those that threatened communities within larger polities. In a period where vulnerability typically precluded creating and maintaining records, unfamiliar readings of familiar sources are especially necessary, as are approaches that access vulnerable experiences in imaginative ways. Such approaches might challenge more conventional relationships between scholars and their objects of study, and ask how scholarship itself can perpetuate, create, or mitigate vulnerabilities in the past and present.

Some themes might include, but are not limited to:

- Contradictory perspectives on vulnerability (sympathy/revulsion, admiration/contempt)
- How difference (racial, gender, physical, economic, geographic) contributes to vulnerability
- Vulnerabilities specific to catastrophes, including war, famine, disease, and panic
- The relationship of systems of power to vulnerability
- The experience and portrayal of physical vulnerability
- The treatment (medical or otherwise) of vulnerable conditions
- Religious practices and perspectives on weakness
- “Vulnerability” in other words, such as vernacular translations and terminologies
- Documenting vulnerability and (materially, philologically, hermeneutically) vulnerable documents
- Populations vulnerable to scholarship, via origin or identity myths, institutions, and ideologies

In order to support participation by speakers from outside the northeastern United States, we are offering limited subsidies to help offset the cost of travel to Princeton. Financial assistance may not be available for every participant, with funding priority going to those who have the furthest

to travel. Every speaker will also have the option of staying with a resident graduate student to assist further in this regard.

Please submit your abstract (250 words) for a fifteen-minute presentation to the conference organizers (medievalvulnerabilities@gmail.com) by **February 15th, 2017**.

All abstracts should be in English, and include your name, contact information, and academic affiliation.