

Module 4, Discussion 2: Medieval University

Main Topic

From our assigned reading, it seems that many of the fundamental parts of a University were the same in medieval times as they are now. One of the more obvious differences is that the number of available disciplines has increased dramatically over the centuries. It isn't surprising that only a small number were available in the beginnings, as the idea of higher learning was still new and very much unexplored. Some disciplines such as psychology and sociology could not have been mature enough for academia, if they were around at all, while others like chemistry and physics would not be formally established and practiced for quite some time. However, the trivium (which included grammar, logic and rhetoric) and the quadrivium (which included geometry, music, arithmetic, and astronomy) made up the Seven Liberal Arts and allowed students to earn bachelor's and master's degrees, respectively.

For additional perspective, it helps to be reminded that the percentage of educated people in medieval societies was paltry at best when compared to the present day. Great numbers of people never received any formal education at all. Even something as "simple" as having a high literacy rate in a society is a relatively recent accomplishment, and many countries still have a long way to go in achieving this.

As for me, I probably would have worked towards a master's degree in music because it would have been the most interesting of the available disciplines. Although it's a little hard to imagine what I would have done with it because the musical landscape was entirely different than what it was in the 18th centuries and beyond. Perhaps I would have been a traveling minstrel, visiting faraway lands.

Re: Medieval College Kids Partied Too (by Hillary Ferrell)

He describes each field of discipline and what kind of work a student could do after receiving his degree. He finally says that modern education is all about financial security, achieving financial success with a job after graduation, whereas medieval education was about achieving intellectual advances and piety.

It's interesting how much any form of higher education would set a person apart back in medieval times. Today, going to college is still very important, but the majority of people we run into on a day to day basis can read, have at least rudimentary math and writing skills, and know how to operate sometimes complex machines—it certainly doesn't set a person apart from the rest of the world as much as it used to.

Back in those days, just knowing how to read was entirely uncommon. Having completed courses at a University was even more special.

Re: Wooden tablets to PC's (by Brandon Cardenaz)

Medieval students often sat together on the floor, scrawling notes from lessons using a bone or ivory stylus on wooden tablets coated with green or black wax. Knights were also educated and looked down upon if they could not read and write.

Two interesting characteristics of medieval times: no paper and very few literate people. I believe our textbook mentioned that the Chinese invented paper nearly one millennia before Europeans did. Paper may have been brought over from the East during the time of the Mongolian conquests, although I might have some of this a little mixed up.