

# GRAD starter

**PROJECT TITLE:** 15<sup>th</sup> annual Vagantes Conference on Medieval Studies

**PROJECT TAGLINE/CAPTION** (160 characters): Vagantes is the largest graduate student conference for medieval studies in North America.

**IMAGE:**



Primary Contact: [Kyle G. Sweeney, Ph.D. candidate](#)

Primary Contact Email: [kgsweene@rice.edu](mailto:kgsweene@rice.edu)

Primary Contact Department: [Art History](#)

**Name of Group/Organization:** There is no formal student organization associated with the conference; however, the conference is overseen by a committee of twelve Rice graduate students from the departments of Art History, English, Religion, and Philosophy. Two Art History Ph.D. candidates, Kyle G. Sweeney and Carolyn Van Wingerden, are co-chairs of the organizing committee and co-directors of the conference. Faculty sponsors include Dr. Linda Elaine Neagley (Chair and Associate Professor, Art History) and Diane Wolfthal (David and Caroline Minter Professor of Humanities, Director of Medieval and Early Modern Studies, and Professor of Art History).

## **PROJECT DETAILS**

Provide a description of the project.

In June 2014 the graduate medievalists in the Department of Art History in collaboration with their colleagues across the School of Humanities won a national competition to host the 15<sup>th</sup> annual Vagantes Conference on Medieval Studies in February 2016. Established in 2002, Vagantes is North America's largest and most successful medieval studies conference for graduate students. The annual conference travels to a different host school each spring. Hosting the conference is a significant honor, as Rice will join an elite list of Vagantes host institutions, which includes Harvard University, Cornell University, the University of Notre Dame, and the University of California, Berkeley. The primary aim of this international conference is to provide graduate students from all fields and disciplines the opportunity to discuss their research on any aspect of medieval studies while highlighting the resources of the host institution. In addition to some 30 student presentations, our conference will feature two keynote speakers, a workshop with two conservators from the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, and a tour of the Menil Collection's medieval and Byzantine collections with Dr. Annemarie Weyl Carr, University Distinguished Professor of Art History Emerita at Southern Methodist University.

# GRAD starter

**Timeline:** If the project will take place at a specific time and place, please give details. Is it a one-time event or a series?

The Vagantes Conference on Medieval Studies travels to a different university each year in order to highlight the resources of that institution and the work of its graduate students and faculty. After consulting the Rice academic calendar, Rice faculty and administrators, and the City of Houston's calendar, we have decided to host the conference on **February 18-20, 2016**. A new university will host the conference in spring 2017. The conference sessions will be hosted in the **Kyle Morrow Room in Fondren Library**. A special excursion for conference attendees to the **Menil Collection** with senior scholar Annemarie Weyl Carr has been arranged and booked. We are in talks with the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, to develop an event with them, and have begun collaborating with the **Woodson Research Center** to install an exhibition of Rice-owned medieval objects in Fondren Library that will be curated entirely by Rice doctoral students on the Vagantes conference organizing committee.

**Audience:** Who is your target audience? (e.g. program-specific, interdisciplinary, or university-wide? Will undergraduates, faculty, staff, or postdocs be involved? Any off campus participants?)

Although our interdisciplinary conference is free and open to the public, our target audience is graduate students, university faculty, and staff from area museums and libraries. Graduate students from any discipline are eligible to submit proposals to present their research in the form of a twenty-minute talk in thematic sessions. Paper proposals are peer-reviewed and selected by the Vagantes Board of Directors. Senior faculty members from Rice and Southern Methodist University will give our keynote lectures. The Menil Collection and Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, are currently involved as events and programming sponsors. Online registration is required to attend the conference; there is no registration fee.

How many people do you anticipate will participate?

Past conferences have drawn approximately 100 participants per day.

**Marketing Plan:** How do you plan to publicize the project?

We have been marketing the conference for several months; those efforts will increase dramatically in late August when the Call for Papers is issued. Our scope is international, and we use both digital and print marketing materials. A summary of our marketing tools is below.

## *Digital*

- Dedicated **conference website** ([www.vagantesconference.org](http://www.vagantesconference.org))
- Dedicated conference **Facebook** page
- A new **Twitter** account for the conference (#Vagantes2016)
- **Academia.edu** for Call for Papers
- **Rice Calendar of Events**, with embedded posts to Rice departmental and school websites (<http://events.rice.edu/index.cfm?EventRecord=23730>)
- The Vagantes Board of Directors will send a digital version of the Call for Papers flyer to a **listserv** containing hundreds of academic contacts
- Professional organizations such as the **Medieval Academy of America** and **International Center of Medieval Art** are publicizing the event through all their digital media channels

## *Print*

- **"Save the date" postcards** were distributed at the world's largest International Congress on Medieval Studies in Kalamazoo, MI (3,500+ attendees)

# GRAD starter

- 11" x 17" full-color **Call for Papers flyers** will be mailed to selected universities across North America, Europe, and beyond in late August
- The Rice campus; Menil Collection; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; and University of Houston will also receive flyers
- **Personal invitations** to Rice faculty and area museum professionals will be issued one month prior to the conference

## ADVANCEMENT

What are the goals of the project? Briefly explain the need for the project and how it will promote excellence in scholarship, training, and/or development?

The goals of the Vagantes conference are much the same as those stated by the GradStarter initiative. Indeed, as explained below, we believe our conference will improve graduate and postdoctoral scholarship and promote intellectual community at Rice, enhance the stature of Rice graduate students and postdocs, and garner strong community support. By hosting the Vagantes Conference on Medieval Studies, we will promote intellectual community building among graduate medievalists; create opportunities for polishing presentation and writing skills; gain valuable practical experience organizing and administrating a major conference; facilitate networking and interdisciplinary ventures; and reach out to the community's institutions, including the Menil Collection and Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, and the public.

**A) Intellectual justification.** This major annual graduate student conference presents many professional opportunities for all involved parties related to research, networking, discovery of new resources, and collaboration. In addition to the invaluable opportunity to present and share one's research on an international platform, our conference will facilitate many intimate opportunities for networking among graduate students, Houston area faculty members, and museum staff. For example, private guided tours of local museums with Rice faculty or Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (MFAH) curatorial and conservation staff members will be available to all Vagantes participants by appointment. In addition, the Menil Collection, which boasts an internationally renowned collection of over 2,000 Byzantine and Russian Orthodox icons and artifacts, has agreed to host an exclusive gallery event for conference participants. We have arranged for Dr. Annemarie Weyl Carr, who published a catalog of the Menil's icons in 2011, to return to the collection to lead this event targeted towards visiting graduate students. The Houston Metropolitan Research Center's Finnigan Collection is also available to conference attendees interested in Arabic manuscripts, codices, and late medieval books of hours. In addition, the Rice Collections will be open to all Vagantes participants. This includes the resources of the Woodson Research Center, such as their illuminated medieval manuscripts and high-quality facsimiles of the *Très Riches Heures du duc de Berry*, *Le livre d'heures de Jeanne d'Évreux*, and large-scale *mappae mundi* that will be on display as part of an exhibition curated by Rice doctoral students. Conservation staff from the MFAH will also be available to facilitate intimate hands-on exploration of medieval sculptures on display in Herring Hall, home of the Art History and English departments. Moreover, the Collegium Musicum, organized by the Rice Shepherd School of Music, will be invited to perform a brief selection of medieval works during the Vagantes conference. All of these integrated resources, speakers, and events will serve to attract medievalists to Rice and the city of Houston. Indeed, hosting an international medieval studies conference in Houston is long overdue. To make the most of this opportunity,

# GRAD starter

the Rice organizing committee proposes a dynamic conference schedule that balances research, networking, and discovery.

## **B) Capitalize on the long-standing reputation of the conference to draw international attention to our excellent humanities programs, faculty, and students in medieval and early modern studies.**

The Vagantes Board of Directors selected Rice University to host the conference in February 2016 based on the submission of an application prepared by Ph.D. candidates Kyle Sweeney and Carolyn Van Wingerden. Hosting the conference is a significant honor, as Rice will join an elite list of Vagantes host institutions, which includes Harvard University, Cornell University, the University of Notre Dame, and the University of California, Berkeley. Indeed, this is a major accomplishment for Rice and is evidence of the high caliber of scholarship produced by our medieval and early modern studies faculty and graduate students. We have made meticulous plans for a dynamic and diverse conference of the highest quality, which will ensure that Rice will be remembered as the distinguished host institution of the fifteenth annual Vagantes conference long after the event concludes.

**C) Community building at Rice.** The departments of Art History, English, History, Philosophy, and Religion all have active doctoral students specializing in medieval or early modern topics. The Shepherd School of Music and Rice School of Architecture also enroll graduate students who contribute to the variety of exchanges in medieval studies across the Rice campus. Currently, there are few opportunities for these students to work collaboratively and cross traditional disciplinary boundaries. Hosting the Vagantes conference provides an excellent opportunity for Rice graduate students to form a sense of community while providing them with the practical professional experience of organizing and hosting a major scholarly conference. Those on the organizing committee are planning sessions, developing proposals to present their own research,<sup>1</sup> collaborating with museum staff, inviting guest speakers to campus, and moderating sessions. Indeed, hosting the international Vagantes conference will help strengthen interdisciplinary ties among Rice premodernists while highlighting our resources and sharing our expertise with a broad scholarly community of invited guests.

**D) Augment the growth of Medieval and Early Modern Studies at Rice.** Medieval and early modern studies is a growing field of study at Rice. Collectively, the work of our faculty now encompasses the entire Middle Ages—from the Early Christian period through the sixteenth century, from northern Europe to Italy, Spain, Africa, the Middle East, Far East, and New World. Moreover, Rice's Medieval and Early Modern Studies program links faculty from eleven different departments, offers courses, and is in the process of inaugurating an annual Minter International symposium on medieval and early modern society. Unlike many of our larger peer institutions, however, Rice's Medieval and Early Modern Studies program lacks a graduate component or division. As a result, there is no center or institute on campus that links its faculty, graduate students, and undergraduate students together on a formal or regular basis. By convening a multidisciplinary graduate student organizing committee and working with the Director of Medieval and Early Modern Studies on this project, it is our hope that the Vagantes conference in February 2016 will serve as the spark needed to unite all medievalists and early modernists

---

<sup>1</sup> Rice paper proposals will be evaluated anonymously with all other proposals received by the Vagantes Board of Directors. In general, proposals are judged on cogency and clarity, the originality of the research, and contribution to medieval studies. Rice students must compete with their peers in all of these categories as there is no quota set aside for Rice presentations.

# GRAD starter

on campus and lead to the formation of a much more robust and inclusive institute or center for medieval and early modern studies fueled by the research activities and energy of our graduate students. Perhaps the Vagantes conference will add additional momentum to the Minter International symposium, which would benefit from annual graduate student participation.

**E) Promote Diversity and Increase Exposure.** In the past, the multiday Vagantes conference has featured over thirty student presenters representing at least twenty institutions from across the country in addition to numerous visiting lecturers and faculty members. We aim to attract the most outstanding student presenters regardless of their proximity to Houston since Rice University has generously agreed to award travel relief stipends to any non-resident student presenters unable to obtain funding from their home institutions. Because of strong financial support from Rice, we seek to host the most diverse Vagantes conference to date and bring together students from the East Coast, the southern states, the Midwest, and the West Coast here in Texas. We are confident we can achieve these goals due to our outstanding resources, excellent faculty, dedicated graduate student organizers, and our close ties with Houston's major museums. In addition, our conference will help introduce scholarly and cultural resources to the broader West University/Museum District community since the event is open to the public and does not charge a registration fee. As an example, Dr. Annemarie Weyl Carr will offer a free *public* tour of the Menil Collection's Byzantine icons following her more specialized program for Vagantes conference participants.

**F) Encourage Interdisciplinarity.** The Vagantes conference was conceived as an interdisciplinary conference; the fifteenth annual conference will be no exception. To model and promote this fundamental tenet of the conference, our organizing committee is comprised of 12 graduate student participants from the departments of Art History, English, Philosophy, and Religion. The organizing committee will play a crucial role in disseminating information about the conference through appropriate disciplinary channels. We expect presenters from disciplines as varied as comparative literature, archaeology, art and architectural history, classics, history, anthropology, English, philosophy, manuscript studies, musicology, and religious studies will come together to exchange ideas at our conference. However, our call for papers will encourage submissions involving interdisciplinary research between two or more traditionally defined fields. Furthermore, we especially seek proposals for papers that consider the Middle Ages in Central Europe, Africa, the Middle East, Far East, and other geographic regions outside western Europe. Thematic papers on topics such as multiculturalism, diaspora studies, urbanism, gender and sexuality, periodization, and digital approaches to the study of the Middle Ages are all welcome. Indeed, our goal is generate and sustain an open dialogue among junior scholars in all areas of medieval studies. All Rice University faculty in medieval and early modern studies will receive individual invitations to attend and to moderate sessions as appropriate.

If this is an existing project/event or a similar one exists, describe how the project/event is being expanded or enhanced.

The Vagantes Conference on Medieval Studies is an annual event but it is not an existing event at Rice. No similar medieval studies conference of this scale has been hosted at Rice in the past. An archive of past conference hosts is available here: <http://vagantesconference.org/past-conference-archive/>

If your proposal is for a pilot project, suggest how it might develop over a three-year period.

# GRAD starter

The Vagantes Conference on Medieval Studies travels to a new host institution each year. We are confident that we have put together a stellar team of graduate student organizers from across the humanities and arts at Rice, and we can guarantee that conference participants will be deeply impressed by the high level of scholarship produced by Rice graduate medievalists and by all that Rice and Houston have to offer to the larger academic community of medieval scholars. If awarded sufficient funding for this venture, we promise a thought-provoking, dynamic, and memorable conference experience that Rice University will be proud to call its own.

**Describe how you will measure the success and impact of this project. Please, provide quantitative targets, if possible.**

Electronic surveys, which have already been written and developed, will be sent to all conference attendees within two weeks of the conclusion of the conference. The data is transmitted to the Vagantes Board of Directors and the host institution. The results are used to improve future conferences and to help provide the conference organizers with valuable feedback documenting their commitment to professional service. In terms of raw quantitative targets, the number of paper proposals received from applicants and total attendance of the event *could* be one metric to gauge the impact of the project. The last iteration of the Vagantes conference held at the University of Florida in Gainesville in February 2015 garnered 50 paper proposals. Our goal is to double that amount in hopes that more proposals will translate into a greater number of disciplines and institutions being represented at our conference. We feel equal access to student travel relief funding will increase submissions from students who do not have access to conference travel funding from their institutions. Similarly, the availability of such funds will encourage proposals and participation from across the country and beyond. Last year, papers were presented by authors from Canada, Italy, France, Poland, and the UK--a trend we would like to see continue. We are confident that Rice's location, accessibility, reputation, faculty, and resources will help us attain our goal. In addition, the significant collections at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, and the Menil Collection will draw much scholarly interest.

As is the case with all conferences, there are "intangible" metrics of success. For example, Rice has already received and will continue to receive international attention. After the conference concludes, presenters might be enticed to apply for internships or postdoctoral fellowships at Rice or area museums. Master's students could learn about our Ph.D. programs. Advanced Ph.D. students will be able to network with our renowned faculty and curatorial staff at area museums. Collaborations between Rice graduate students and our guests are bound to happen. Indeed, quantifiable metrics will only tell a small part of the success of the Vagantes conference.



**BUDGET**

**Itemized Budget**

Please, provide an itemized budget. List each item, a description, and the anticipated cost.

Item	Description	Amount
Catering	three breakfast receptions, two catered lunches, one gallery reception, one happy hour, one closing reception dinner, two private visiting keynote dinners	\$7,000
Student travel relief fund	travel stipends awarded based on merit and demonstrated need to domestic and international students accepted to present papers	\$5,000
Keynote speakers	honoraria, lodging, airfare, per diem, and incidentals for three keynote speakers	\$6,030
Folders and stationary	supplies for conference packets	\$745
Marketing	flyer design, postage, shipping; program design and printing; invitations; digital marketing	\$2,136
Miscellaneous	funding for travel to Vagantes at UFL, exhibition installation fees, rental furniture, shuttles, incidentals, etc.	\$5,964
Total Expenses		\$26,875

**Funds from other sources**

Please, provide any information on funds from other sources that you have secured or potential funds that you plan to apply for.

Source	Status	Amount
Department of Art History	Awarded	\$14,000
Medieval and Early Modern Studies	Awarded	\$2,339
Humanities Research Center (HRC)	Awarded	\$3,000
Medieval Academy of America Graduate Student Development Grant	Awarded	\$500
Rice School of Architecture	Awarded	\$250
English Department	Awarded	\$500
Shepherd School of Music	Awarded	\$500
Department of Religion	Awarded	\$500



# GRAD starter

Department of History	Awarded	\$500
Total Amount		\$22,089

A proposal for \$500 was made to and rejected by the Department of Philosophy.  
A proposal for \$500 was made to and rejected by the Boniuk Institute for Religious Tolerance.  
A proposal for \$500 to the Chao Center for Asian Studies was sent 4/24; no response.  
A proposal for \$500 to the Center for the Study of Women, Gender, and Sexuality was sent 4/24; no response.

We will submit a proposal for a GSA Enrichment Grant in the amount of \$1,000 to the Rice Graduate Student Association in November 2015 (their deadline). We will ask the Dean of Humanities Office for funding to help meet our final goal after all other possibilities have been exhausted.

**We are requesting funding in the amount of \$3,500 from the GradStarter initiative.**

If the project/event has been offered in the past, how was it supported?

The Vagantes Conference on Medieval Studies has never been hosted at Rice University in the past. **The University of Florida** hosted the conference in February 2015. The following departments, centers, and offices supported the Vagantes Conference at University of Florida:

- The Center for the Humanities and the Public Sphere (The Rothman Endowment)
- The UF History Department
- The English Department
- George A. Smathers Libraries
- The UF Department of Anthropology
- The Richardson Endowment of the Center for Women's Studies and Gender Research
- The UF Office of Research
- The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences
- The Center for Medieval and Early Modern Studies
- The Department of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures
- The Department of Classics Rothman Family Endowment
- The Center for Greek Studies
- The Medieval Academy of America
- The Alexander Grass Chair in Jewish Studies
- The Harn Eminent Scholar Chair in Art History
- The Isser and Rae Price Library of Judaica
- TEAMS: The Consortium for the Teaching of the Middle Ages