

Article

Making It Matter: Hagiology in a 21st-Century Classroom

Nikolas O. Hoel 

Department of History, Northeastern Illinois University, Chicago, IL 60625, USA; n-hoel@neiu.edu

Abstract: In the early twenty-first century, the humanities are facing attacks on their value. At the same time, colleges and universities in the United States are pressured to retain students as funding models have shifted and become more dependent on tuition dollars, at least in public institutions of higher education. The two go hand in hand because, in this environment, faculty members need to justify what they teach as being relevant to their students, and research has shown that students are more likely to thrive and strive when they see themselves in the curriculum. This is particularly true at Hispanic-Serving and Minority-Serving Institutions. This essay is based on the following question: how do we help students recognize that hagiological texts are relevant to them in a modern world in order to meet both aims? It provides the *Life of Anskar* as a case study to show that when hagiology is read and analyzed in the classroom in accordance with principles of culturally relevant pedagogy, through comparison and the co-creation of knowledge, the texts provide a way for students to better understand themselves, their world, and the possibility for social justice; in other words, they, the students, matter.

Keywords: hagiography; hagiology; comparison; culturally relevant pedagogy; *Life of Anskar*



Citation: Hoel, Nikolas O.. 2024. Making It Matter: Hagiology in a 21st-Century Classroom. *Religions* 15: 139. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15010139>

Academic Editor: Massimo A. Rondolino

Received: 3 October 2023

Revised: 21 December 2023

Accepted: 17 January 2024

Published: 22 January 2024



Copyright: © 2024 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

I love reading hagiographic texts. I am fascinated by the stories, the adventures, and the miraculous they contain. I am constantly intrigued by what these accounts of venerated individuals can tell us about the past. It is one of the reasons that I became a medieval historian in the first place. I also know that not everyone loves these texts the way I do, but I still see them as an important teaching tool. They tell us so much about what people of many societies thought, or at least what they wanted us to believe they thought. Yet, these medieval saints' lives can also tell us about our own world and our place in it. Bringing this out is the way to make hagiology matter to our students in the twenty-first century. Yet, the situation for the liberal arts is tenuous at best in institutions of higher education in the United States. Instructors now need to ensure their subjects and the materials they use to teach them are of value to students. Hagiological and hagiographic texts are just that. To that end, through a case study, I will show that through the process of co-creating knowledge with my students and by using culturally relevant pedagogy it is possible, and perhaps essential, to help them recognize that hagiological texts written hundreds of years ago still matter and can help them better understand themselves and their world.

Hagiology and hagiography have attracted a lot of scholarly attention.¹ They are not always easy to use—filled with tropes, miracles, the unbelievable, and the obtuse. Felice Lifshitz has even questioned the ability to talk of hagiography at all when talking about the Early Middle Ages:

The concept of a genre of 'hagiography' is a historiographical construction and, *ipso facto*, an ideological tool. It is a tool that had no function in the ninth, tenth, and eleventh centuries, and thus as a conceptual category did not exist. It should not be anachronistically applied in our analysis of late Carolingian and early Capetian Francia, because it can only obscure the realities of those centuries, not illuminate them (Lifshitz 1994, p. 113).

In terms of the discussion here, perhaps it is not important if it is a "genre" per say, because the texts still provide useful information, either atomized or as a collective. Students

can still compare them and learn from them, and, at the undergraduate level, perhaps historiographical constructions are not their primary concern. Lifshitz reflected on her original arguments in 2021 and concluded that the hagiography was still “useless after all these years” (Lifshitz 2021, pp. 50, 80). I have to wonder if the question is not whether the genre is useless but rather “what it is useless for?”. Lifshitz very well might be right that the term is useless in terms of definition or construct, but I would argue the texts themselves are indeed useful as teaching tools and vehicles for better understanding the world, both past and present. I should also acknowledge that I work in the Western medieval tradition, so I do not often have to define what I mean by “hagiography” or justify its use in my teaching or scholarship. I understand this is a privilege that those studying other, non-Christian texts do not have. This concern, and its accompanying reality, is another complicating factor in using hagiographic texts in the classroom, especially when comparison is involved.

I have found, however, that my learners actually enjoy reading and thinking about saints’ lives in their many forms over multiple geographies and chronologies. They dive into the adventures and find importance in what they have to say about the past. They also find a reflection of their own life experience and their own world; the texts become relevant in some way to my students when they compare them to their own experience. This is the most valuable pedagogical aspect of these primary sources: the possible lasting effects they might have for students. In the end, some vitae and other hagiological texts work better than others, and it is up to the instructor to discover over time and with trial and error which work best, including the one I used in the case study below. We should confront the students with this type of source, when vetted, because they can relate to them, which in turn facilitates the development of skills, like critical thinking and active reading, and cultivates a better understanding of their world. The texts can matter to the students; but, how do we as teachers help them recognize this and what are the lasting consequences of doing so? A case study may well be the best way to explain the ways in which we can make hagiology matter to our students. Performing such a case study is my aim here.

To examine how to make hagiology relevant in a twenty-first-century classroom, we must realize that the question must be framed in terms of context. In other words, relevant for whom? It might be a clear assumption, but a valid one nonetheless, that each contributor to this volume will have a different environment in which they teach using this genre of texts. This simple yet important factor will affect the make-up of the students we face on a daily basis, and their varied experiences will shape how we attempt to make hagiology matter to them.

For me, I teach at a regional comprehensive public institution in a large urban area in the American Midwest. Regional public colleges have drawn a lot of attention in recent years, perhaps because of the challenges they have been facing.² Yet, Lee Gardiner has stated that “Regional public colleges are the backbone of American higher education and, somehow, also one of its best-kept secrets” (Gardner 2023b, July 28). My university is an ideal type for this statement, as well as the dire conditions facing these kinds of schools. I am primarily housed in the Department of History, which is situated in the College of Arts and Sciences, and I do the vast majority of my teaching there, although I do teach in other programs. The department grants bachelor’s and master’s degrees, as well as having a minor and working closely with the College of Education to provide access to the Master of Arts in Teaching Program.

In terms of enrollment, in Fall of 2022, the total headcount of students at the university as a whole was 5756 full-time equivalent (FTE) students, with 4207 of those students being undergraduates as compared to 1549 FTE graduate students across all three colleges.³ Of the 53,902.5 Credit Hours taken at the university, the history department accounted for 1079 of them, making us a mid-sized department compared to others in the College of Arts and Sciences.⁴ We had 39 majors and 12 MA students.⁵ What may be most important to realize is the change over time in these enrollments. The Department of History faced a 31.6% undergraduate decline from Fall 2021, and the five-year trend was a drop of nearly 51.9%.⁶ While these numbers are sharp, they are about average for the college and the

university as a whole. These trends are also not unique to my institution as many regional public colleges are facing similar problems and may well need to develop more creative ways to fix their enrollment gaps (Gardner 2023b, July 28). I certainly do not want to imply that these types of schools are the only ones facing challenges, but it is particularly acute as the line for survival of regional public colleges is thin. As Lee Gardner argues, “Losing even relatively few students can present challenges for a regional public college. Not only are many state-funding formulas based on enrollment, but with state dollars per full-time student effectively flat from two decades ago, public colleges are more dependent on tuition dollars than ever” (Gardner 2023a, February 13). The realities of enrollment and the pressure to retain students is very real and felt almost daily. Many of these conditions are particularly serious for the humanities in universities such as mine, but making the subjects and the texts, such as hagiography, relevant might be a way to help alleviate the stresses on departments in the arts and sciences.

The fact of the matter is that we have to justify our fields as humanists, and the competition for scarce funding between departments has clearly intensified in recent years, perhaps decades. At a public institution, the situation is even more dire as state legislatures debate the necessity of providing adequate resources for higher education; we truly have switched from state-funded institutions to institutions funded by the state (it might be a subtle difference, but it is an important one).⁷ The debate continues as to whether the humanities ought to be funded. Scholars, political leaders, and educational leaders still contend that a college degree is still one of the best methods of upward mobility and offers political and socio-economic status (Castellanos and Jones 2003).⁸ Yet, not all education appears to be created equally. Technical training and STEM seem to be of greater value to many people than the humanities and many social sciences. The attack on the liberal arts has become incredibly intense in recent years. A recent move at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point is merely one example. The idea was to cut thirteen programs, primarily in the liberal arts, in an attempt to solve a budget crisis (Zamudio-Suaréz 2018, March 5). The number of programs to be cut was then reduced to six but still included Art, French, German, and History, which can be considered important parts of medieval studies. In the end, the university announced that there would be no cuts at all, but many onlookers believed the damage was done at the school (Nguyen 2019, April 18). The whole effort reeked of mismanagement and violations of shared governance, but the rhetoric used by the administration echoed that used by the governor of California over fifty years before. When the president of the school announced that the university could no longer “be all things to all people”, he sounded eerily like Ronald Reagan when he stated in 1967 that the taxpayer and the state should not “subsidize intellectual curiosity” and the people could do without certain “intellectual luxuries” (Shastri and Hovorka 2019, April 10; Berrett 2015, January 26). More recently, the West Virginia University in the face of declining enrollments and budgetary mismanagement, has proposed cutting several programs, most of which are in the liberal arts.⁹ The issue of higher education has become political in recent years. A 2017 study by the PEW Research Center found that 58% of Republicans and those leaning towards conservative believed that higher education had a negative effect on the United States, while 72% of more liberal-leaning individuals believed it had a positive effect on the country (Pew Research Center 2017, July 20). As the attack on higher education (in general) and the liberal arts (more specifically and intensely) rages on, the disciplines that make up Medieval Studies need, in many ways, to fight for their existence. The success of this fight may well hinge on whether we can prove that the field is relevant in a changing world and to an increasingly diverse population of students.

Medieval Studies and its component disciplines are often among those targeted. In answering the question “why study the Middle Ages?”, Tracy quotes Hugh of St. Victor, who stated in the *Didascalicon* that no subject of study will be seen as superfluous once the learning is completed (Tracy 2022, p. 1). Instructors of Medieval Studies largely agree and are working to improve the way the various aspects of the Middle Ages are taught.¹⁰ The field is addressing the period as more global, while taking a more inclusive and anti-racist

approach to the materials.¹¹ Different groups of people and greater variety of topics are being considered as worthy objects of study. Comparison of hagiological texts is a way to facilitate a more inclusive and less Euro-centric pedagogical approach to the Middle Ages.¹²

The situation is even more challenging for the study of hagiology, which may be seen as a niche topic within an already challenged field. For undergraduates, it is possible to focus on skill development in general education courses that feature surveys of broad chronologies and geographies. At institutions like mine, upper division courses that are more topical rarely, if ever, focus on something as narrow as hagiography. I should note that my course enrollment is high, but I refer to that as the *Game of Thrones* phenomenon. I contend that the long string of movies and television shows that draw on the Middle Ages for inspiration, which stretches from *The Lord of the Rings* to *Game of Thrones* to *Thor* of the Marvel Universe, create a desire in students to learn more about the period. There are even video games that focus on the fall of the Roman Empire and Old Norse Mythology. Yet, often these students are interested in battles, dragons, damsels in distress, and the stereotypes that have populated the modern, public imagination. Seldom do they think they want hagiography; but in the end, if taught right, they find it is exactly what they are looking for.

So, why study hagiology and why is it relevant to our students?¹³ I can only speak from my own experience. Even though I am contingent faculty, I have had the luxury of being able to teach a wide variety of courses, including many of my own design. I use hagiographic texts in nearly all of them to some degree. The students in my introductory Western Civilization class, medieval survey, and “Women in Medieval Society” course read about saints’ lives because of the importance of these texts to the people living in the Middle Ages and to scholars looking back at them, regardless of whether we lump them into a single genre or not. I have also been fortunate to teach the history department’s capstone research seminar, in which I choose to have my students write on hagiography. This was a particularly interesting course because I allowed my students to examine sainthood and veneration in many different contexts, ranging from late antique saints to early modern artistic representation to Elvis, superheroes, and firefighters. The work conducted in this class specifically demonstrates the potential for helping students recognize that hagiology is relevant for them in the twenty-first century.

Here, I begin the case study by proposing one method for helping undergraduates approach a hagiographic text, generally, and a set of outcomes that may well make it relevant to their own life experience. I have chosen a ninth-century text called the *Vita Anskarii*, or *Life of Anskar*, in part because it is very accessible in translation. I most often use the edition in a primary source reader entitled *Carolingian Civilization: A Reader* (Rimbert 2004). The book includes many primary sources from a multitude of genres and, thus, can give students a thorough look into the Early Middle Ages. Sections of the text are also readily available in translation online.¹⁴ The *Vita Anskarii* was written by Rimbert, a priest and later archbishop of Bremen–Hamburg about his mentor, Anskar. The story relates Anskar’s multiple missions to Scandinavia. The text is full of adventures, mishaps, pagans, miracles, and even monsters. As a result, aside from being accessible to students, I also use the text because it clearly articulates the important themes necessary to understand the period, and it quickly becomes relatable to the many undergraduate readers.

To help students relate to a hagiographic text, I would propose the following method. For this work, I rely on in-class and online discussion, a variety of different types of writing exercises, and virtual, multi-media presentations and assignment. These involve reflection, analysis, synthesis, comparison, and argumentation. I work to employ high-impact learning practices while using multiple types of assignments to facilitate different learning styles. I start with the question of whether students liked the vita, what they enjoyed, and what made the text challenging for them. I have found that addressing the gut reaction and the emotions surrounding the source first facilitates later critical thinking. Next, I have the learners “introduce themselves” to the text, asking the following: who wrote it; when did they write it; where did they write it; and who was the intended audience? We look at

the actual storyline and then ask the analytical questions. My students specifically look for what the document says about the society that produced it and why the author wrote the text in the way in which they did in an attempt to ascertain authorial intent and to problematize that concept more generally. One example that I have used in the past asks students to compare what the *Life of St. Genovefa* relates about early medieval Gaul to what the *Life of St. Brigit* reveals about Ireland at the same time. Finally, I ask them to reflect not just on what they learned from the text and what preconceptions it challenged but also how they related to it—that is where much of the fun lies. It should be noted that the *Life of Anskar* is but one example of a text that works for this method of analysis by students. The fact that there are so many of these sources across cultures, time, and location allows for productive comparison and further critical thought, which challenges students to explore definitions, categorizations, and taxonomy in new ways (Rondolino 2019).

The *Life of Anskar* contains a number of themes that my students often relate to in interesting ways. Perhaps the first way the text is relevant to them is in the way it was used to create the “other”. Anskar and his fellow missionaries travelled to a place they had never been to before and encountered people that Rimbert wants us to believe were much different from themselves. Many of the learners in the classroom see the experience of being a stranger in a strange land eerily familiar. Interestingly enough, they can relate not just to the saint but to those being converted, the so-called “other”, as well. A potentially fruitful writing assignment for learners would be to reflect on their experience and compare it to the dominate narrative of the missionaries. It would be an exercise in exploring the different interpretations of events, which lies at the heart of the practice of history and of their lives. This activity works because the students largely know what it is like to be different and many are actually foreign in some way to where they now live; “self” and “other” are realities of their lives. Moreover, they know what it is like to be in the cold of Scandinavia, living in Chicago themselves. Furthermore, early in the *Life of Anskar*, Anskar is promised martyrdom but never gets it in the form that he thought he would. My students understand very well what it is like to not get the things promised in the way you expected them to present themselves. They relate to the uncertainty of promises made and broken, or at least reimaged. In Anskar, they see a figure whose legacy has been preserved through time despite this disappointment. As they read, they start to think about how they will be remembered and whether what they are doing is worthy of such. In the monasticism present, my students see that monks are driven by the desire to be left alone to be oneself and to pursue something greater than oneself; who of us has not at some point wanted to be left alone to do as they see fit. They wonder at the miracles and the monsters. Examining texts such *Life of Anskar* as the can also introduce students to the idea that there is more than one way to look at a piece of writing. For example, they can move between a classical approach to hagiography and an aspectual one.¹⁵ My students are very used to being confronted with multiple interpretation of reality in the age of “Fake News”. Finally, the student historians realize that the story of Anskar may or may not be the “Truth” but that it serves a different purpose. They understand that it is a model for ideal behavior—a model that is, ultimately, unobtainable. They understand the people reading the texts in the Middle Ages a little better, because they too face unrealistic expectations in their daily lives, and it affects the way they think and exist. In the end, my students start to see a diverse landscape of people, ideas, opportunities, and challenges, which in many ways mirror the themes they witness in the modern age. Bartlett’s (2013) analysis of reflections in the last chapter of his book can help shape the discussion here. The exercise in not simply applying the text to one’s own life as a simple corollary; rather, similarities and differences between the past and the present through the analyses of textual evidence allow of the insight of students’ own experiences. They truly can see themselves and their world in the vita.

Now that I have isolated the themes in this particular text that students might be able to relate to, I want to take it one step further, because of the last key characteristic of my institution: it is a Hispanic-Serving Institution, or HSI, and a Minority-Serving Institution, or MSI. The designation of “Hispanic-Serving Institution” is granted by the US Department

of Education. In order for an institution to become an HSI, it must have an enrollment of undergraduate full-time equivalent students of at least 25% Hispanic students and be an eligible institution (U.S. Department of Education n.d.). In addition, at least 50% of those students must be eligible for need-based Title IV aid (Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities n.d.). At my institution, 37% of the students identify as Hispanic, 10.9% as Black, 9% as Asian, and 28.6% do so as White.¹⁶ Originally, HSIs were lumped together with Historically Black Colleges and Universities under the Title III program. This grouping created much competition for Congressional attention and hence Congressional financial support (Mulnix et al. 2002, p. 178). A major victory for Latinx higher education came in 1999 when Congress established a separate entitlement program aimed to specifically aid HSIs (Mulnix et al. 2002, p. 178).¹⁷ Today, the designation allows the institutions to apply for both Title V and Title III Part A grants to better meet the needs of Latinx students, who are part of an ever-growing population at colleges and universities (Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities n.d.). Census numbers and enrollment figures clearly demonstrate a need for the increase in the number of and funding for HSIs. With the focus on retention at many schools, HSIs and others alike, it is worthwhile to ponder the best ways to serve Latinx students and all their other traditional under-represented counterparts. Here is where relevancy comes back into the conversation. Many recent studies have demonstrated that students take classes and remain in college when they can see themselves in the curriculum, and my anecdotal evidence confirms their findings (Gray 2017; Gray et al. 2020; Deslauriers et al. 2019; Kuh et al. 2006).

Yet, it might not be enough to simply make the texts we use in our teaching relevant in a general sense; the key to reaching all students, in particular those from traditionally under-represented populations, is to make our teaching culturally relevant. Being culturally relevant may well be the key to the very survival of Medieval Studies and the humanities in general, given the challenges facing the liberal arts. In recent years, how we teach has been explored in great depth. Most of us would agree that the days of the lecture, at least in isolation, are in the past. High-impact practices rule the day and active student involvement has risen to the fore.¹⁸ This alone is a culturally relevant pedagogy, but we can go further. In an ever-changing world that is becoming ever more diverse, we should strive to better know who is in our classrooms. Culturally relevant pedagogy is more than acknowledging and embracing difference; it is about the way teachers view their students and their art. For teachers that practice culturally relevant pedagogy, teaching is an art and they are artists (Ladson-Billings 2009, p. 45). Moreso, they ought to see their students as artists as well, working together in the creative process. The art is in essence the creation of knowledge. Drawing on Ladson-Billings, “culturally relevant teaching views knowledge as something that is continuously re-created, recycled, and shared” (Ladson-Billings 2009, p. 88). What we know and how we know it is constantly changing as we discover more about the world around us. In my case as a historian, we re-create the past because we learn more about both the people who lived then and, almost more importantly, ourselves. No student needs to be left out of this process and the more voices we have at the table, the more we learn; history is a collection of interpretations after all. Those teachers who employ culturally relevant practices, thus, encourage **all** students to be part of the process of knowledge production, truly include them in it, and celebrate their contribution to it.

Culturally relevant pedagogy is but one side of the proverbial coin; the material must be culturally relevant as well. It does not take a massive exercise of imagination to see that perhaps students may not want to learn about people who they have been told did not look like them, did not have the same background as them, and did not face their challenges. Thus, as medievalists, we need to find a way to make our subjects “matter”. There are a number of ways to complete this task, which may in reality be an obligation. I have tried to show above that this is possible when using hagiographic texts, because students really can relate them to their own experiences. In the end, helping students see their experience in the world both past and present is culturally relevant teaching and should be the goal of our pedagogy:

Specifically, culturally relevant teaching is a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes. These cultural references are not merely vehicles for bridging or explain the dominant culture; they are aspects of the curriculum in their own right (Ladson-Billings 2009, p. 20).

What better way to challenge the dominant narrative than to empower all students to see their experience as important and related to the greater world, in all its facets, both past and present.

As educators, we medievalists and humanists can buck the dominant narrative and create what has been called the “third space”, which is the place where competing discourses and epistemologies collide as multiple views come together to create new scripts (Gutiérrez et al. 1995, p. 451). In the third space power and authority are reconsidered and, thus, identity can be re-examined, re-understood, and re-created. The classroom is a modern third space if constructed correctly; it may well be a laboratory for identity formulation and re-formation. Yet, identity is not just created in the moment, but is the result of the entirety of human experience. The past is just as much as lab as is modernity and can be a third space in and of itself. Comparison is one of the tools that can be used in that lab. The self can be seen and identity created, recognized, and reaffirmed by examining how others lived in both similar and very different situations. The Latinx students in my classes do not have to have explicitly “Latinx material” in order for the classroom to be culturally relevant. In one sense, Anskar can *become* Latinx through the process of knowledge and identity co-construction.¹⁹ On the other hand, Anskar is foreign to all in the class because, after all, none of us are medieval in any sense of the word. Although difference is also an important pedagogical tool, which can help us to see the arbitrariness of our own assumptions and worldviews,²⁰ I choose to focus here on the similarities as a starting point to draw students in. In the end, the analyses I am asking my students to conduct are, in fact, possible because people face similar issues over time and, as a result, medieval studies can be used as the material to examine issues that face students from a distance, perhaps removing some of the emotion associated with those issues. Through an intersectional approach to the medieval world, social justice can be learned from the past. Students can learn to recognize injustice and become agents of social change by looking at the past when the odds might not be so high (they are not directly affected). By learning what injustice looks like, they can recognize it in their own lives and in their own world and can stop it (García 2019, p. 117). Stopping injustice, understanding the wonderful diversity of the world, and promoting all students is in its essence culturally relevant teaching, which is of utmost importance not just at Hispanic-Serving Institutions but at all universities and colleges.

The last question that we must ask is as follows: what then does all this matter in terms of teaching hagiology? Hagiography can be a vehicle for understanding that the Middle Age was not all-male, all-white, all-cis, all-Christian, or any other “all-”. It was diverse and beautiful in its diversity. Students can use these texts to examine issues they too face at arm’s length, perhaps a little more safely and slowly over time, bringing them to bear on their own experiences in their diverse, complicated world. Making the texts and the subjects relevant may well help save the humanities and Medieval Studies; but that is just a desirable side effect. In the end, the ultimate relevance of hagiology in the classroom and why the texts should be used, even if in very small number alongside other primary sources, is that they help students learn to think critically and better understand the past as well as their own world and maybe, just maybe, change it for the better.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: No new data were created or analyzed in this study. Data sharing is not applicable to this article.

Acknowledgments: This study is a product of working in and reflecting on what it means to be a part of a Hispanic-Serving institution, what it means to serve, and why what we, as scholars, do matters in that context. My thinking on this topic, which led to this article, was greatly influenced by many of my colleagues, including by not limited to Isaura Pulido, Gabriel Cortez, and Sarah Cordell, conversations with and source recommendation from whom were invaluable. Thank you to Katrina Bell-Jordan for putting “serving-ness” at an HSI front and center in my thought world. I also want to thank Massimo Rondolino for the opportunity to be part of this project and for his guidance on all things hagiology. I greatly appreciate the time and energy the other contributors to the volume gave in reading and providing feedback on the draft of this project. Finally, I want to thank Rachel Birmingham-Hoel for reading and commenting on multiple stages of this essay and for her constant support and encouragement.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

- ¹ For more hagiography generally speaking, especially as it applies to this essay, see Bartlett (2013); Brown (1971, 1998); Fouracre (1990); Head (1990); Kreiner (2014); Lifshitz (1994, 2021); and Rondolino (2017).
- ² For example, see Gardner (2023a, February 13; 2023b, July 28). Many of this challenges include funding issues as well as declining enrollments. These issues are discussed in further depth in the following paragraphs.
- ³ For more information regarding the data, see (Northeastern Illinois University, “Enrollment Fact Sheet—Fall” 2022), <https://www.neiu.edu/sites/default/files/documents/2022/09/13/Fall%202022%20IRA%20Fact%20Sheet.pdf> Accessed on 15 December 2023.
- ⁴ For more information regarding the data, see (Northeastern Illinois University, “Data Index—Fall” 2022), <https://www.neiu.edu/sites/default/files/documents/2022/09/08/F22%20Course%20Section%20and%20Credit%20Hours.pdf> Accessed on 15 December 2023.
- ⁵ For more information regarding the data, see (Northeastern Illinois University, “Fall Enrollment—Five-Year Trend Data” 2022), https://www.neiu.edu/sites/default/files/documents/2022/09/08/F22%20Data%20Digest%20Enrollment_%205-Year.pdf Accessed on 15 December 2023.
- ⁶ For more information regarding the data, see Ibid.
- ⁷ This distinction refers to the decrease in reliance by public universities on funding that comes for state governments and the increase in reliance on tuition dollars for the past few decades. For more on this phenomenon, see The Pew Charitable Trust (2015, 2019) and Lim (2019).
- ⁸ I want to thank the Ronald Williams Library at Northeastern Illinois University for purchasing this e-book on very short notice so that it could be used in this essay. Special thanks need to go out to Edward Remus, the history library at NEIU, for facilitating this purchase. This essay is stronger as a result of his efforts.
- ⁹ For more on the situation at WVU, see Hanlon (2023) and Helm (2023).
- ¹⁰ For more on approaches to teaching Medieval Studies, see Black (2013); Gulley (2018); Rajabzadeh (2023); Ramey et al. (2019); and Serrano (2010).
- ¹¹ For more, see Heng (2021) and Hsy (2022).
- ¹² For more on the possibility of hagology in this regard, see Keune (2019) and Rondolino (2019).
- ¹³ In addition to my work here, the other contributors to this volume have addressed many similar issues in relating hagiology to pedagogy from their own perspective.
- ¹⁴ One example is “(Rimbert: *Life of Anskar, Apostle of the North, 801–865* 1996)”, Fordham Internet Medieval Sourcebook, <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/basis/anskar.asp> Accessed on 15 December 2023.
- ¹⁵ For more on aspecual hagiography and potential for further study in this regard, see Parzych-Blakiewicz (2019a, 2019b).
- ¹⁶ For more on the data see, (Northeastern Illinois University, “Data Index—Fall” 2022).
- ¹⁷ Throughout this essay, I use two related terms “Hispanic” and “Latinx”. While it may seem that I do so interchangeably, I do not. “Latinx” is in many ways a more encompassing term and I use it as such. I use “Hispanic” particularly when referring to areas where the term is more specifically used such as in Department of Education designations and Census data.
- ¹⁸ For more on high-impact teach strategies, see among others (Langdon et al. 2019; Kirby and Thomas 2022; Wray et al. 2022; Hensel 2023).
- ¹⁹ I very much want to thank Will Sherman, who observed this idea and the next in the process of reading and commenting on the draft of this essay.
- ²⁰ For more on this issue, see French and Self in this volume.

References

- Bartlett, Robert. 2013. *Why Can the Dead Do Such Great Things? Saints and Worshippers From the Martyrs to the Reformation*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Berrett, Dan. 2015. The Day the Purpose of College Changes. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, January 26. Available online: <https://www-chronicle-com.edgewood.idm.oclc.org/article/The-Day-the-Purpose-of-College/151359> (accessed on 15 December 2023).
- Black, John. 2013. Building Bridges to the Past: Personal Reflections on the Understanding of Audience, Welcoming Inquiry, and Establishing Contexts. *Literature Compass* 10: 908–12. [CrossRef]
- Brown, Peter. 1971. The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity. *The Journal of Roman Studies* 61: 80–101. [CrossRef]
- Brown, Peter. 1998. The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity, 1971–1997. *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 6: 353–76. [CrossRef]
- Castellanos, Jeanett, and Lee Jones, eds. 2003. Latina/o Undergraduate Experiences in American Higher Education. In *The Majority in the Minority: Expanding the Representation of Latina/o Faculty, Administrators, and Students in Higher Education*. Sterling: Stylus Publishers, pp. 1–14.
- Deslauriers, Louis, Logan S. McCarty, Kelly Miller, Kristina Callaghan, and Greg Kestin. 2019. Measuring Actual Learning versus Feeling of Learning in Response to being Actively Engaged in the Classroom. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 116: 19251–57. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
- Fouracre, Paul. 1990. Merovingian History and Merovingian Hagiography. *Past & Present* 127: 3–38.
- Garcia, Gina Ann. 2019. *Becoming Hispanic Serving Institutions: Opportunities for Colleges and Universities*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Gardner, Lee. 2023a. Flagships Prosper, While Regionals Suffer: Competition Is Getting Fierce, and the Gap Is Widening. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, February 13. Available online: <https://www-chronicle-com.eu1.proxy.openathens.net/article/flagships-prosper-while-regionals-suffer> (accessed on 15 December 2023).
- Gardner, Lee. 2023b. “Regional Public Colleges Are Affordable—But Is That Enough to Draw Students? *Chronicle of Higher Education*, July 28. Available online: <https://www-chronicle-com.eu1.proxy.openathens.net/article/regional-public-colleges-are-affordable-but-is-that-enough-to-draw-students> (accessed on 15 December 2023).
- Gray, DeLeon L. 2017. Is psychological membership in the classroom a function of standing out while fitting in? Implications for achievement motivation and emotions. *Journal of School Psychology* 61: 103–21. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
- Gray, DeLeon L., Tamika L. McElveen, Briana P. Green, and Lauren H. Bryant. 2020. Engaging Black and Latinx Students through Communal Learning Opportunities: A Relevance Intervention for Middle Schoolers in STEM Elective Classrooms. *Contemporary Educational Psychology* 60: 1–17. [CrossRef]
- Gulley, Alison, ed. 2018. *Teaching Rape in the Medieval Literature Classroom: Approaches to Difficult Texts*. Leeds: Arc Humanities Press.
- Gutiérrez, Kris, Betsy Rymes, and Joanne Larson. 1995. Script, Counterscript, and Underlife in the Classroom: James Brown Versus *Brown v. Board of Education*. *Harvard Educational Review* 65: 445–72. [CrossRef]
- Hanlon, Aaron R. 2023. West Virginia University is Everything That’s Wrong with Higher Education Today. *The New Republic*, October 23. Available online: <https://newrepublic.com/article/176202/west-virginia-university-higher-education-enrollment-cliff-cuts> (accessed on 15 December 2023).
- Head, Thomas. 1990. *Hagiography and the Cult of Saints: The Diocese of Orléans*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Helm, Mya. 2023. Everyone at West Virginia University Knew Something Was Up. I Hate That We Were Right. The Student Population Gort Smaller and Smaller While Fancy New Buildings Appeared. *Slate*, August 18. Available online: <https://slate.com/human-interest/2023/08/west-virginia-university-cuts-programs.html> (accessed on 15 December 2023).
- Heng, Geraldine. 2021. *The Global Middle Ages: An Introduction*. Cambridge Elements: The Global Middles Ages. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hensel, Nancy H., ed. 2023. *Course-Based Undergraduate Research: Educational Equity and High-Impact Practice*. London: Taylor & Francis.
- Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities. n.d. Hispanic Serving Institutions Definitions. Available online: https://www.hacu.net/hacu/HSI_Definition1.asp (accessed on 4 August 2023).
- Hsy, Jonathan. 2022. *Antiracist Medievalism: From “Yellow Peril” to Black Lives Matter*. Leeds: Arc Humanities Press.
- Keune, Jon. 2019. Comparative vs. Hagiology: Two Variant Approaches to the Field. *Religions* 10: 575. [CrossRef]
- Kirby, Lauren A. J., and Christopher L. Thomas. 2022. High-Impact Teaching Practices Foster a Greater Sense of Belonging in the College Classroom. *Journal of Further and Higher Education* 46: 368–81. [CrossRef]
- Kreiner, Jamie. 2014. *The Social Life of Hagiography*. Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought, Fourth Series; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kuh, George D., Jillian L. Kinzie, Jennifer A. Buckley, Brian K. Bridges, and John C. Hayek. 2006. *What Matters to Student Success: A Review of the Literature*. Washington, DC: National Postsecondary Education Cooperative, vol. 8.
- Ladson-Billings, Gloria. 2009. *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teacher of African American Children*, 2nd ed. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Langdon, Jody, Diana T. Botnaru, Megan Wittenberg, Amy Jo Riggs, Jessica Mutchler, Matthew Syno, and Manuela C. Caciula. 2019. Examining the Effects of Different Teaching Strategies on Metacognition and Academic Performance. *Advances in Physiology Education* 43: 414–22. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
- Lifshitz, Felice. 1994. Beyond Positivism and Genre: “Hagiographical” Texts as Historical Narrative. *Viator* 25: 95–114. [CrossRef]

- Lifshitz, Felice. 2021. Still Useless after All These Years: The Concept of “Hagiography” in the Twenty-First Century. In *Writing Normandy: Stories of Saints and Rulers*. Variorum Collected Studies. Edited by Felice Lifshitz. London: Routledge, pp. 50–81.
- Lim, Gerry. 2019. State Funded vs Self Funded Higher Education. *Medium*, December 4. Available online: <https://medium.com/age-of-awareness/state-funded-vs-self-funded-higher-education-4146bdeba13a> (accessed on 15 December 2023).
- Mulnix, Michael William, Randall G. Bowden, and Ester Elena López. 2002. A Brief Examination of Institutional Advancement Activities at Hispanic Serving Institutions. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education* 1: 178–90. [CrossRef]
- Nguyen, Terry. 2019. 6 Majors Were Spared the Ax at Stevens Point. But the Damage Might Be Done. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, April 18. Available online: <https://www-chronicle-com.edgewood.idm.oclc.org/article/6-Majors-Were-Spared-the-Ax-at/246138> (accessed on 15 December 2023).
- Northeastern Illinois University, “Data Index—Fall”. 2022. Available online: <https://www.neiu.edu/sites/default/files/documents/2022/09/08/F22%20Course%20Section%20and%20Credit%20Hours.pdf> (accessed on 15 December 2023).
- Northeastern Illinois University, “Enrollment Fact Sheet—Fall”. 2022. Available online: <https://www.neiu.edu/sites/default/files/documents/2022/09/13/Fall%202022%20IRA%20Fact%20Sheet.pdf> (accessed on 15 December 2023).
- Northeastern Illinois University, “Fall Enrollment—Five-Year Trend Data”. 2022. Available online: https://www.neiu.edu/sites/default/files/documents/2022/09/08/F22%20Data%20Digest%20Enrollment_%205-Year.pdf (accessed on 15 December 2023).
- Parzych-Blakiewicz, Katarzyna. 2019a. Hagiologia “aspektowa” jako perspektywa integracji badań teologicznych i nieteologicznych. *Studia Warmińskie* 56: 249–64. [CrossRef]
- Parzych-Blakiewicz, Katarzyna. 2019b. Warmińska hagiologia (2010–2018). *Studia Elbląskie* 20: 285–300.
- Pew Charitable Trust. 2015. Federal and State Funding of Higher Education: A Changing Landscape. June 11. Available online: https://www.pewtrusts.org/-/media/assets/2015/06/federal_state_funding_higher_education_final.pdf (accessed on 15 December 2023).
- Pew Charitable Trust. 2019. Two Decades of Change in Federal and State Higher Education Funding: Recent Trends across Levels of Government. October 15. Available online: <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/issue-briefs/2019/10/two-decades-of-change-in-federal-and-state-higher-education-funding> (accessed on 15 December 2023).
- Pew Research Center. 2017. Republicans Skeptical of Colleges’ Impact on U.S., but Most See Benefits for Workforce Preparation. July 20. Available online: <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/07/20/republicans-skeptical-of-colleges-impact-on-u-s-but-most-see-benefits-for-workforce-preparation/> (accessed on 15 December 2023).
- Rajabzadeh, Shokoofeh. 2023. Fighting for the Middle: Medieval Studies Programs and Degrees within Higher Education. *Boundary 2*: 123–44. [CrossRef]
- Ramey, Lynn, David Neville, Sahar Amer, Jonathan deHaan, Maxime Durand, Brandon Essary, Rob Howland, Mubbasir Kapadia, Felix Kronenberg, Brett E. Shelton, and et al. 2019. Revisioning the Global Middle Ages: Immersive Environments for Teaching Medieval Languages and Culture. *Digital Philology: A Journal of Medieval Cultures* 8: 86–104. [CrossRef]
- Rimbert. 2004. Life of Anskar. Translated by Charles H. Robinson. In *Carolingian Civilization: A Reader*, 2nd ed. Readings in Medieval Civilization and Culture 1. Edited by Paul Edward Dutton. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, pp. 400–51.
- Rimbert: Life of Anskar, Apostle of the North, 801–865. 1996. Fordham Internet Medieval Sourcebook. Available online: <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/basis/anskar.asp> (accessed on 15 December 2023).
- Rondolino, Massimo. 2017. *Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Hagiographical Strategies: A Comparative Study of the Standard Lives of St. Francis and Milarepa*. Sanctity in a Global Perspective. London: Taylor & Francis.
- Rondolino, Massimo. 2019. Some Foundational Considerations on Taxonomy: A Case for Hagiography. *Religions* 10: 538. [CrossRef]
- Serrano, Jorge Sáiz. 2010. What Kind of Medieval History Should be Taught and Learned in Secondary School? *Imagio Temporis. Medium Aevum* IV: 357–72.
- Shastri, Devi, and Alan Hovorka. 2019. UW-Stevens Point backs Away from Controversial Plan to Cut Several Liberal Arts Majors. *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*. April 10. Available online: <https://www.jsonline.com/story/news/education/2019/04/10/uw-stevens-point-announces-new-majors-not-cuts-its-future/3411347002/> (accessed on 15 December 2023).
- Tracy, Kisha G. 2022. *Why Study the Middle Ages? Past Imperfect*. Leeds: Arc Humanities Press.
- U.S. Department of Education. n.d. Definition of Hispanic Serving Institutions. Last Modified. 11 April 2006. Available online: <https://www2.ed.gov/programs/ideshsi/definition.html> (accessed on 15 December 2023).
- Wray, Emma, Umesh Sharma, and Pearl Subban. 2022. Factors Influencing Teacher Self-Efficacy for Inclusive Education: A Systematic Literature Review. *Teaching and Teacher Education* 117: 103800. [CrossRef]
- Zamudio-Suaréz, Fernanda. 2018. U. of Wisconsin at Stevens Point Proposes Cutting 13 Programs, Mostly in Liberal Arts. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, March 5. Available online: <https://www-chronicle-com.edgewood.idm.oclc.org/article/U-of-Wisconsin-at-Stevens/242745> (accessed on 15 December 2023).

Disclaimer/Publisher’s Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.