



Centre for Medieval Studies  
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

28 January 2016

Barbara Newman, President  
Medieval Academy of America  
The Medieval Academy of America  
17 Dunster Street, Suite 202  
Cambridge, MA 02138  
USA

Dear Professor Newman,

I am writing in two capacities: first, as a long-time member of the Medieval Academy of America, and the Chair of the Organizing Committee for the 2017 annual meeting of MAA, to be held in Toronto; and, second, as one of a large number of medievalists who are eager for our professional organizations – in this case, the MAA – to take a clear and proactive stand in support of ethical practices in research, teaching, and professional conduct. This letter is therefore signed by not only me but by other concerned medievalists, coming from a range of perspectives – faculty members (at all levels), publishers, graduate students, and independent scholars.

These undersigned medievalists include not only current members of MAA, but also prospective members of MAA, including some who left the organization in disappointment over the decision to hold the 2011 annual meeting in Arizona in spite of significant opposition from the membership, including members of the 2011 Organizing Committee. This diversity among the signatories reflects a real opportunity for the MAA to demonstrate to the larger community of medievalists that it is responsive, as an organization, to concerns in our community that threaten the values of academic integrity that we hold dear. In other words, handling this situation poorly might cause a renewal of that disappointment that caused members to leave the organization in 2011; handling this situation well might lead to an expansion of membership, and even enhance its generational and visible diversity. This is an enhancement that I am sure many of our current members, including those in leadership roles, would welcome.

We note with approval and gratitude the explicit statements posted on the MAA website to indicate policies and procedures that relate to allegations of sexual harassment (<http://www.medievalacademy.org/?page=harassmentpolicy>) and bullying (<http://www.medievalacademy.org/?page=antibullying>). These are important statements that provide a good foundation for the responsible and supportive academic community that MAA does so much to nourish. As you know, however, recent events (and subsequent media coverage) have drawn attention to particular situations of harassment and bullying in the medieval community. Allen Frantzen, a prominent medievalist, published an anti-feminist and explicitly misogynist website (<http://www.allenfrantzen.com/>) in September 2015, which elicited strong responses from our scholarly community. These have been reported in the media, most widely via the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (<http://chronicle.com/article/Prominent-Medieval->

[Scholar-s/235014](#)) and the popular mass media online journal *Jezebel* (<http://jezebel.com/should-academics-fear-the-manosphere-1754937735>). Beyond this,

Perhaps even more importantly, there is a wider conversation that has arisen as a result of this affair, centering on the need for what we might call ‘truth and reconciliation’ in the conduct of academic medieval studies. Responses to Allen Frantzen’s website generated this wider conversation, conducted in person, by phone, and on social media, about the ways in which our academic culture – and even our learned societies – have for too long tacitly (or even explicitly) tolerated sexual harassment and other abusive behaviors. The MAA’s statements on harassment and bullying testify eloquently to the commitment of our membership, and our leadership, to end that culture of abuse, but more needs to be done. Silence or failure to act will further marginalize those who have had to endure these violations of trust.

We the undersigned would like specifically to request that the MAA issues a public statement before the conclusion of the February 2016 meeting in Boston reaffirming our commitment to creating and maintaining a culture that does not tolerate harassment, bullying, or other forms of abuse. It is not enough to simply have these policies on the webpage: this commitment must be visible, it must be inclusive, and it must be a part of our activities in the annual conference of the membership. This might be carried out as a forum of some kind at the upcoming meeting in February, and should also include a follow-up event at the annual meeting in April 2017 at the University of Toronto.

The basis for this request lies in the MAA’s own Advocacy Statement (<http://www.medievalacademy.org/?page=advocacy>) which states that “MAA advocacy statements are made by the President upon consultation with and by the approval of the majority of the Council. The Council may decide to move the question to the vote of the entire membership. The MAA should be strategic in selecting matters on which to speak out, and public statements should address matters of clear and common professional interest and concern. They should be issued only on matters about which the members have special knowledge and/or expertise. The statement itself should include language that demonstrates such special knowledge.” Among the areas that are identified as appropriate for advocacy statements is “Promoting the profile of the humanities and humanistic disciplines in public culture.” As a result of Allen Frantzen’s website and the ways that it has exposed a culture of abuse, the field of medieval studies has been identified as a site of intolerance, where harassment is covered up and bullying is the norm. Such perceptions are now widespread in the media. If the Medieval Academy is to fulfill its mandate to “promote the profile of the humanities,” and in particular the field of medieval studies, it must take a strong and public stand against abuse, and work to create a renewed sense of inclusive and welcoming community.

We look forward to your response, and your leadership, in this challenging time – and we hope that the MAA leadership takes up this opportunity to signal with its words and actions that it welcomes a more diverse membership and stands strongly with those who oppose harassment, bullying, and other forms of abuse.

Respectfully submitted,



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Jonathan Hsy (George Washington University; lapsed MAA member)

Eileen A. Joy (punctum books; lapsed MAA member)

Alex Mueller (University of Massachusetts, Boston; MAA member; member, Program Committee, MAA 2016)

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[UPDATED Mon Feb 1, 11:00 AM EST]

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