What do we mean by "Medieval Civilization"? The historical period known as the "Middle Ages" spans more than a thousand years (from approximately 400 to 1500 AD), and covers the many different political, cultural, and ethnic communities of Europe and the Mediterranean. There was not one medieval civilization, but many medieval civilizations, related in some ways to each other, but distinct and constantly changing. This class will be an introduction to the history of the Middle Ages through its culture and ways of life.

Because the period to be covered is so vast, we will focus our attention on six moments in time and space that are representative of some of the communities of the Middle Ages. We will look at villages and cathedral towns, monasteries and manor houses and cities, and for each, we will consider who lived in the community, what activities they took part in, what the community looked like physically, and what aspects of medieval life, politics, and culture are represented there. Honors students will read short selections from primary sources and also theoretical assessments of different types of medieval communities, and will use this information to write four short (4-6 page) papers; will meet a few times with the instructor for additional discussion; and will also take a midterm and a final exam.