This course will examine the lyric poetry of the Middle Ages—1100-1350—and the music to which it was sung. We will consider both sacred and secular songs, from both courtly and ecclesiastical culture. We will concentrate on songs created in Latin, French, and Occitan, but will also look at lyrics composed in German, Spanish, Italian, and English. The poets we will study will include the troubadours and trouvères, their imitators and descendents among the Minnesinger and the poets of Spain and Italy, the composers of polyphonic song active at the University of Paris and the Cathedral of Notre-Dame de Paris, and the fusion of these diverse traditions in the urban centers of northern France and elsewhere, in the late 13th and 14th centuries.

We will approach the songs from a variety of standpoints, including the form and versification of the texts; their rhetorical foundation; the content of the poems and their relation to major medieval themes; the design of the music and its interaction with the content and form of the poetry. And we will take up performance: Where and how were these songs sung, and by whom? Were musical instruments used? What did the medieval audience experience when it encountered the song? What did the medieval musical notation communicate to the singer and scribe?

The lyrics will be read primarily in translation, though we will look as much as possible at the original words and forms. We will also listen to many recordings, as we consider how the poets worked with the sounds of their own language and with their musical idiom.

Professors Vitz and Roesner will co-teach the course, which will consist of a blend of lecture and discussion, with some student presentations. Students will also be encouraged to experiment with their own recreations in performance of medieval song.

Although a reading knowledge of modern French and a familiarity with the rudiments of music would be helpful, no prior experience in either area is required. Students will purchase some photocopied materials, and CD recordings will be available. Other material will be provided in class, and students are expected make liberal use of the resources in the Bobst Library.

Book order:
_The Handbook of the Troubadours_, eds. F. R. P. Akehurst and Judith M. Davis, University of California Press.