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Department: History
Title: “A Difficult and Dangerous Thing”: Religious Reform in Late Medieval Ulm, 1434-1532
Committee: Dr. Robert Berkhofer, Chair
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This work examines the relationship between mendicant Orders and the city council of Ulm in the period of religious reforms from the fifteenth century to the early Reformation in the sixteenth century. It challenges the view that the Observant reforms were unsuccessful because they failed to reform substantially their Orders, that their reforms were too conservative to respond to current trends in religion, or that they failed to prevent, in some way, the development of the antifraternal or anticlerical policies of the Reformation. This study also considers the nature of the Observant reforms themselves, the problems that religious Orders had in maintaining discipline, and the social unrest within the city of Ulm that influenced the council’s decision to support the reforms as well as informed their expectations of the how they hoped to benefit from supporting the reforms. Using reform tracts, the administrative records of the mendicant Orders and their convents in Ulm, official correspondence of the city council of Ulm, chronicles, broadside literature, and polemical literature from the early Reformation, this dissertation shows that the religious reforms at Ulm were successful, responded to contemporary concerns, and sustained good relationships with the city council and the population of Ulm through the end of the fifteenth century. The process involved in reforming the mendicant communities, however, ensured that the city council could cast itself as a religious
authority in its own right. This religious authority was fully realized to the disadvantage of
the mendicant communities when the city became Protestant in 1531.

The main body of this dissertation is divided into five chapters. They survey the
problems within the mendicant Orders with regard to internal discipline and the problems
involved in implemented their reforms, the legal developments within the city of Ulm that
were intended to neutralize internal conflicts and social dissent, the conditions of the
mendicant communities before the Observant reforms, the process of those reforms, and
the culminations of religious reforms in the early Reformation period.