

April 28, 2021

To the signatories of a petition to Jana Schulman concerning the 2022 Congress:

Thank you for sharing your concerns regarding the format of the 2022 International Congress on Medieval Studies. We appreciate your support of ICMS over the last fifty-six years, and we hope to offer a venue for scholars from around the world to come together to present their research and share their ideas for many decades to come.

The Medieval Institute's decision to hold the 2022 International Congress on Medieval Studies virtually was made by the director of the Institute, deliberately and with the full support of the Institute's dean and the knowledge of the provost. With the information available in February 2021, we made the only call we could. It takes fifteen months to prepare for each Congress. The planning process includes contracts with various on- and off-campus entities that must be made more than a year in advance. They rely on us and breaking those contracts would be expensive for the Institute and our local partners.

Covid cases are surging once again in late April 2021, international travel remains restricted, and global inequities in vaccine distribution are rampant. Rather than host a smaller, less accessible Congress, we will remain true to our name: we are the International Congress on Medieval Studies and when we meet in person again in 2023, we want all who wish to come to be able to do so.

We thank you for acknowledging what the Congress is and has done for so many. As you observed in your petition, "Over many decades the 'Zoo has done an enormous service to our profession by enabling smaller, marginalized fields to hold their own alongside larger ones. It has given independent scholars, underemployed medievalists, and graduate students (even a few undergraduates) a chance to speak alongside established faculty, helping to democratize the field. In short, the ICMS has been at the forefront of making Medieval Studies inclusive, as well as broadening its appeal by welcoming interested members of the public."

We wish to remain at the forefront in terms of both inclusivity and appeal. Our experiences preparing for the 2021 Congress have taught us much about increasing diversity, accessibility, and inclusion in a virtual environment. We will use these lessons to deliver a vibrant virtual Congress in 2022, and we look forward to building an in-person 2023 Congress that combines the camaraderie of past decades with a commitment to expanded global accessibility and reduced environmental impact.

We have to consider the concerns of our fundamental constituents, our exhibitors, and our local stakeholders, at the same time that we need to establish a sustainable economic model that will allow us to continue into the future. We will solicit suggestions and advice from our attendees on how best to achieve this.

We share your desire to see colleagues and friends in person, but we cannot make that happen in 2022. If you truly wish to see the ICMS return to an in-person format, we ask that you support and participate in the virtual 2022 Congress so we can move forward while preserving the spirit of the Congress.



Jana K. Schulman
Professor of English and Director, The Medieval Institute