PEDAGOGY & PROFESSION
NEW CHAUCER STUDIES

Volume 06 | Issue 01 Fall 2025

Introduction: Opening the Conversation on Access

Incifem Sari Tekin
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4156-2080
University of Freiburg, Germany

Victoria Craggs
https://orcid.org/0009-0009-2360-5225
University of Freiburg, Germany

Sari Tekin and Craggs. 2025. Introduction: Opening the Conversation on Access. *New Chaucer Studies: Pedagogy and Profession* 6.1: 1–7.
https://escholarship.org/uc/ncs_pedagogyandprofession/ | ISSN: 2766-1768.

Introduction: Opening the Conversation on Access

Incifem Sari Tekin
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4156-2080
University of Freiburg, Germany

Victoria Craggs
https://orcid.org/0009-0009-2360-5225
University of Freiburg, Germany

Abstract

This issue opens with a reflection on the urgent theme of access in the humanities and continues with essays that address inequities, pedagogy, and global classrooms, alongside creative and experimental contributions that expand the possibilities of teaching medieval studies today.

This is the first time that two graduate students, who are also editorial interns on this issue, have been given the opportunity to author the introduction to *New Chaucer Studies: Pedagogy and Profession*. We are deeply honored and excited by this opportunity, and it seems especially fitting that our special cluster is on *access*. At the same time, it is also a challenging task, given the heavy weight the theme carries. That is because questions of access are not merely theoretical, for they determine who is included and who is excluded, whose voices are heard and whose are silenced. These dynamics can take the form of both concrete and abstract barriers, and some of these barriers are even worth seventy million dollars (Czachor 2025), while others can cost the lives of millions.[1]

While the theme of access invites many avenues of thought and exploration outside pedagogical practice, this issue will focus on access within the profession, and particularly, within the humanities itself. Writing this introduction as early-career scholars is especially meaningful as a first journal publication, but this opportunity is counterbalanced against the growing threat to access within the humanities. The examples are increasing from the sparse to the many: in the United States, the University of Connecticut decided to close its two graduate degree programs in Medieval Studies, the University of Wisconsin suspended or closed 82 programs (mostly in the humanities and social sciences), and Plymouth State proposed shutting down its arts and humanities divisions with around 30 layoffs (Bailey 2025; Beran 2025; Outcalt 2025). In the United Kingdom, universities such as Goldsmiths and Cardiff announced sweeping reductions or closures in modern languages, archaeology, and related humanities fields (Hall 2024; Pitman et al. 2025). While this is a selective list, it represents why this issue of *New Chaucer Studies: Pedagogy and Profession* and the "Access" cluster feel especially urgent. As Paula M. Krebs, Executive Director of the Modern Language Association of America (MLA), reminds us in the most recent issue of *MLA Newsletter*:

> the humanities ecosystem that has been targeted and that now must fight back includes every person in this country who has been touched by reading a book, learning about history, seeing a work of art, watching a play or film, or talking about an idea. (2025, 2)

As graduate students and editorial interns, we are situated at a unique intersection of this humanities ecosystem as both recipients of new and exciting methods of bringing medievalism and medieval studies into the classroom, and as those hoping to apply these pedagogical practices in a future that is seemingly under threat. It is with this in mind that we aim to make a small, but unique, contribution to the much larger and ongoing conversation about access by framing it through our shared perspectives and voices as two international students in a world of worryingly increasing nationalism.

On Access

As a historical entrance point, Christine de Pizan, whose life and work does much to inspire a sense of admiration, offers a striking example of what access could mean in the Middle Ages. As a woman,

[1] For instance, pharmaceutical patents that restrict access to life-saving drugs, strict border regimes that deny refugees safe passage, global inequities in vaccine distribution during the COVID-19 pandemic, or large-scale catastrophes such as the Holocaust, the war in Gaza, the World Wars, and the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, which systematically denied access to safety, rights, and ultimately life itself.

she experienced what it meant to be excluded from knowledge and education and was perhaps one of the first to raise her voice in such a brilliant way. She dared to respond publicly to a man of high reputation, and to speak about women's situation, their right to education, and the barriers they faced (de Pizan 1402; 1405). Her example shows that access has always been structured by borders of permittance that continue to shape definitions of humanity today, and that these borders are often challenged, and dissolved, by intersectional and diverse voices.

Access has always been selective and political. In the era of AI and the posthuman, the problematic definition of *the human* within humanism is becoming relevant once again. The human subject of humanism is, according to Rosi Braidotti, "based on an assumption of superiority by a subject that is male, white, Eurocentric, practicing compulsory heterosexuality and reproduction, able-bodied, urbanized, speaking a standard language" (2022, 10). As in the case of de Pizan, this biased definition of the human only included the privileged few with access and power, who have not only failed to see the barriers, but also created new ones, while those who did not fit this definition were excluded as *the others*. In the case of Large Language Models, such as ChatGPT, the machine is being trained on a corpus of information with a biased tendency towards the "male, white, Eurocentric," showing that the generative politeness of GPT-5 is merely a humanist with a paint job. This very construction demonstrates that access has always been operating selectively and politically, and that the access promised in the age of AI is just as selectively canonical as it is generatively infinite. Over six hundred years ago, de Pizan already reminded us that exclusion comes not from a lack of ability, but from a lack of opportunity. However, de Pizan's struggle for intellectual access reminds us that exclusion has a long history, and it is the continued afterlife and persistence of this history that shapes our own experiences as students in the twenty-first century.

Access is as much personal as it is political. The main reason for continuing our studies in Europe was the hope of a more accessible education and profession. Even though we now have greater access in many respects, being international students still comes with disadvantages. For example, the state of Baden-Württemberg charges 1,500 euros per semester for international students, a fee which is still the subject of ongoing debate (Kukral 2025). Another example is one of our module requirements: an excursion to England. For non-EU students, the cost of obtaining a visa alone is nearly the same price of the trip itself, and there is no guarantee it will even be granted. Alternatives such as completing multi-week online courses are not equivalent to an academic excursion. Moreover, we know many international students who struggle with visas, residence permits and other bureaucratic obstacles during their studies in Europe or in the United States. One of us comes from Turkey, a land caught between Europe and Asia—not only geographically but also ideologically—a place that belongs to neither. That was the main reason why she had to apply three times for a German visa before it was finally accepted. Due to similar financial and bureaucratic reasons, many bright minds who are admitted to world-class universities today cannot begin their journey and some have been forced to abandon their studies because their visas were revoked. Globally, new regulations continue to further limit access to education and the profession each day, both physically and financially. The latest example is the U.S. policy to limit international students' and scholars' visas to a maximum of four years (Anderson 2025). These examples are simply a reminder that access is never guaranteed or universal, but always conditional and exclusive. Such examples may seem small, yet they are evidence of how inaccessible education, and the profession, can become for some of us. That is

why, in answering Krebs's call for action, the least we can do is write, since it is what we do best in our discipline.

Turning to the etymology of access reveals a built-in duality. The word first appears in the early fourteenth century with the meaning "an attack of fever" (Douglas n.d.) It comes from Old French *acces* "onslaught, attack; onset (of an illness)," which in turn derives from Latin *accessus* "a coming to, an approach, an entrance." *Accessus* is the noun form of the past participle of *accedere* "to approach," itself a compound of *ad* "to" and *cedere* "to go, move, withdraw" (from the PIE root *ked- "to go, yield"). That same duality is evident in today's academic landscape. We have managed to gain entry to universities, at considerable cost, but will we be able to remain? Our entry now feels jeopardized by increasingly nationalistic and ideologically insular policies that echo the word's original sense of "attack." The rise of such policies, a déjà vu of last century's surge of fascism**,** threatens to turn the opening that *access* once promised into a barrier. In short, the very term that historically signified an opening now also reminds us of the forces closing it.

And yet, this is certainly not the first time our humanities ecosystem has faced a globalized crisis. We want to draw attention to a line from the very first editor's introduction for *New Chaucer Studies: Pedagogy and Profession*: that is, that the COVID-19 pandemic had "thrown a wrench" into the plans of the journal (Lampert-Weissig et al. 2020, 4). Even five years ago, the warning signs were being addressed:

> Briefly put, we were then—and in light of the pandemic, are more so now—concerned about the sustainability of medieval studies. [...] Last, but certainly not least, we fear the impact of rising nationalism and xenophobia (exemplified by various executive orders from the Trump administration in the U.S., hardline immigration policies in Australia, and by Brexit in the U.K.). (2)

A wrench is a very peculiar thing. It can tighten: by this, it can both be a metaphor for holding together, and being steadfast, in the face of an *acces*, an attack on the humanities. But this tightening can also be a metaphor for insularity, for binding up, for restriction. Like the original use by the editorial team in 2020, an unexpected wrench can be a challenging thing. It can undo and unscrew plans set in motion, and yet, it can also loosen up what needs to open. It can free up space. As we all (as individuals and as collectives, as students and as teachers, as interns and as editors, as writers and as readers) find that there is, once again, a wrench being thrown in the works, we might take pause and consider how best to use it. After all, the very first volume of this journal was a great testament to the power of resilience and community in a time of global insularity, and with the following articles, we hope to show that this testament to access is still holding strong.

Introducing the Issue

Building on these reflections, our special cluster on "Access," curated by Lisa Lampert-Weissig, features five essays and extends the conversation on access into specific contexts, from academic labor to pedagogy, from local classrooms to global ones. As editors, we are inspired by how each contribution illustrates that access is never complete and must be continually rethought and reimagined. Pedagogical practices within the profession can begin with the individual instance of

writing an article, which in time can inspire a new method of bringing medieval studies into new and exciting landscapes—for both students and teachers alike.

In this special cluster, Richard H. Godden reminds us that access is never a finished project, and we need to work hard if we are to build more accessible futures. This short essay shows what it is like to run into barriers in everyday life that mostly remain invisible to others. Katie Little extends the theme of access beyond pedagogy to academic labor. Reflecting on her experience with Colorado's Equal Pay for Equal Work Act, she exposes the structural inequities that persist in faculty salaries and calls for greater transparency and solidarity within the profession. Her article is not only a call against misogynistic economic practices within academic institutions, but a call to scrutinize a deeper and enduring symptom of this practice: the "star" culture.

Kisha G. Tracy demonstrates how open educational resources can expand access to the medieval classroom. By compiling and creating open textbooks that center disability studies and diverse cultural perspectives, she shows how affordability, representation, and flexibility together shape more inclusive teaching practices. In conversation with an international cohort, Sophia Yashih Liu considers access in a different register: teaching medieval English literature in Taiwan. She illustrates how students connect with medieval texts through films, games, and tarot decks. These projects make the field relevant across linguistic and cultural contexts, underscoring how global classrooms invite us to rethink what it means to encounter the medieval—and, importantly, where we encounter it. Finally, Stephen M. Yeager outlines four ways to integrate video games into medieval studies classrooms, emphasizing a student-centered engagement through different approaches.

Together, these five essays respond to Paula Krebs's call for action, showing that fighting back in academia does not need to be done with the same tools and rhetoric used against us, but with the resilience and kindness afforded through creativity and community within pedagogy. While reading, we were amazed not only by how clearly these authors identify barriers to access but also by the creative, hopeful, and inspiring strategies they offer to resist, reimagine, and reshape the conditions of our profession and classrooms.

In addition to the essays in the "Access" cluster, we are delighted to include contributions from our open call and our regular column, which broaden the conversation by exploring creativity, pedagogy, and adaptation in the medieval studies classroom. These contributions bring equally fresh perspectives and innovative approaches to enrich this issue. Hannah Lucas reframes frustration in the classroom as a productive moment of learning. Taking *The Book of Margery Kempe* as her case study, she argues that irritation and discomfort can become opportunities to reflect on scholarly methods and the affective dimensions of reading. Karen Elaine Smyth, in her article, offers a model that positions students as both scholars and creative participants in the Arthurian tradition. Through various activities the piece emphasizes experiential learning. Seeing how this model encourages both analysis and creativity, it is our hope that similar approaches will be taken up more widely.

Mohamed Karim Dhouib once again contributes to our journal's regular column, "Conversations," this time with a pedagogical focus through an interview with Kim Zarins. Their conversation centers on Zarins's young-adult novel, *Sometimes We Tell the Truth* (2016), a retelling of *The Canterbury Tales*. The interview highlights how contemporary adaptations can serve as powerful tools for student-centered engagement in the medieval studies classroom. Kristen Haas Curtis's contribution to the "How I Teach" column invites us to reconsider on many levels the importance of

play and of playing with form. "How I Teach: Shenanigans are allowed," reminds us that to "teach and delight" is not only the preserve of poets. It can inspire us all. Her piece includes a game sheet for teachers to guide us in bringing fun into our classrooms.

Looking back across this issue, from the "Access" cluster to the contributions from our open call and regular column, what strikes us most is how the medieval persists through the new. Each piece, in its own way, reminds us that our disciplines are at their best when they are open and inclusive. As students of Eva von Contzen, who is an editor of the journal, we have already benefited a great deal from her own exciting and diverse teachings on medievalism within Freiburg; whether this is on the afterlives of medieval women to Middle Scots reinventions of Troy, we have had firsthand access to how pedagogy can do more than educate. To borrow again from Horace, it is both a profit and a delight. With Lisa Lampert-Weissig, we have accessed the diversity of the editorial landscape—from the line edit beginnings to the wonders (and headaches) of how to navigate eScholarship. It is through this experience that we have had the privilege of conversations with the authors and editors of this issue, and we can only hope that in time, we can match their commitment to the continuing pedagogy of medievalism in the classroom. We invite you to join us in thinking about how we can all contribute, in big or small ways, to building a more accessible future and a more inclusive humanities ecosystem—whether you are a teacher, a researcher, or a pair of international students in Germany with a vast repository of new ideas from this journal, and an infinite amount of hope.

We would like to thank Caleb Mertz-Vega for his helpful comments on the essay.

Works Cited

Anderson, Stuart. 2025. "Trump Deals a New Immigration Blow to International Students." *Forbes*, August 28. https://www.forbes.com/sites/stuartanderson/2025/08/28/trump-deals-a-new-immigration-blow-to-international-students/

Bailey, Kay. 2025. "PSU Administration Plans to Strike Humanities, Laying Off 30 Full-Time Faculty." *The Clock*, March 3. https://www.plymouth.edu/theclock/psu-administration-plans-to-strike-humanities-laying-off-30-full-time-faculty/

Beran, Liam. 2025. "Humanities, Social Sciences among Most Cut UW Programs." *Isthmus*, September 5. https://isthmus.com/news/news/humanities-social-sciences-among-most-cut-uw-programs/

Braidotti, Rosi. 2022. *Posthuman Feminism*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Czachor, Emily Mae. 2025. "First Border Wall Contract Awarded under Trump's Second Term." *CBS News*, March 16. https://www.cbsnews.com/news/first-border-wall-contract-president-trump-second-term/

de Pizan, Christine. [1402] 2018. "Christine's Reaction to Jean de Montreuil's Treatise on the *Roman de la Rose*." Translated by Christine McWebb. In *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, edited by Jeffrey J. Williams, T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, John McGowan, Laurie A. Finke, William E. Cain, and Vincent B. Leitch, 3rd ed., 211–18. New York and London: W. W. Norton and Company.

——. [1405] 1998. *The Book of the City of Ladies*. Translated by Earl Jeffrey Richards. New York: Persea Books.

Hall, Rachel. 2024. "Goldsmiths Academics to Strike over Incomprehensible Redundancies." *The Guardian*, March 28. https://www.theguardian.com/education/2024/mar/28/goldsmiths-academics-to-strike-over-incomprehensible-redundancies

Harper, Douglas. n.d. "Etymology of access." *Online Etymology Dictionary*, accessed September 14, 2025. https://www.etymonline.com/word/access

Krebs, Paula M. 2025. "Faith in Solidarity." *MLA Newsletter* 57 (1): 1–2.

Kukral, Tim. 2025. "Studiengebühren für Nicht-EU-Ausländer in Baden-Württemberg: Wirtschaft und SPD fordern Abschaffung." *Südwestrundfunk*, March 20. https://www.swr.de/swraktuell/baden-wuerttemberg/forderung-abschaffung-studiengebuehren-nicht-eu-auslaender-100.html

Lampert-Weissig, Lisa, Katie Little, Eva Von Contzen, and Candace Barrington. 2020. "Editors' Introduction." *New Chaucer Studies: Pedagogy and Profession* 1 (1): 1–5. doi.org/10.5070/NC31150568

Outcalt, Jenna. 2025. "Programs Closed and Executive Actions Discussed at UConn Board of Trustees Meeting." *The Daily Campus*, February 27. https://dailycampus.com/2025/02/27/5-programs-closed-and-executive-actions-discussed-at-uconn-board-of-trustees-meeting/

Pitman, Thea, Emma Cayley and Ronan McLaverty-Head. 2025. "The Deep Cultural Cost of British University Job Cuts." *The Guardian*, February 5. https://www.theguardian.com/education/2025/feb/05/the-deep-cultural-cost-of-british-university-job-cuts