

PROMOTION RECOMMENDATION

The University of Michigan  
College of Literature, Science, and the Arts

Michael McGovern, associate professor of anthropology, with tenure, College of Literature, Science, and the Arts, is recommended for promotion to professor of anthropology, with tenure, College of Literature, Science, and the Arts.

Academic Degrees:

Ph.D.	2004	Emory University
M.A.	1998	University of Oxford
B.A.	1988	Columbia University

Professional Record:

2012 – present	Associate Professor, Department of Anthropology, University of Michigan
2012	Associate Professor, Department of Anthropology, Yale University
2006 – 2012	Assistant Professor, Department of Anthropology, Yale University
2004 – 2006	West Africa Project Director, Regional Project, International Crisis Group

Summary of Evaluation:

Teaching – Professor McGovern teaches a wide range of courses at all levels. Although they all fit within the broad rubric of sociocultural anthropology, and most concentrate on some aspect of the study of politics and/or economy, they include creatively framed topics and timely themes, as well as broader courses in anthropological theory and method. Professor McGovern’s teaching style is very interactive, emphasizing student engagement and discussion. He serves on many student advisory committees and has a reputation of being a helpful academic counselor. As the director of undergraduate studies, he was careful and judicious in decisions about curriculum and student projects, and he has taken an active role in discussions about content and pedagogical approaches. He also proposed and implemented a revision to the methods used in training graduate students.

Research – Professor McGovern is a socio-cultural anthropologist who studies war, civil conflict, and the relationship between cultural politics and ethnic identities. His African work is based on long term, intensive field research in Guinea, with additional research in West Africa. He is currently engaged in fieldwork in Myanmar funded by NSF and the Wenner-Gren Foundation. His publication record is extensive. Since receiving tenure, he has published two more monographs, and several academic journal articles. The post-tenure books make major contributions to anthropology and to African studies, political science, and history. Together they present an ethnographically informed historical study of Guinea, exploring the dynamic interplay between local and ethnicized allegiances on the one hand, and a national sense of belonging on the other. Professor McGovern’s current project in Myanmar promises to extend his work on the cultures of war and violence into new terrain, and to enable him to develop broad comparative analyses.

Recent and Significant Publications:

A Socialist Peace? Explaining the Absence of War in an African Country, University of Chicago Press, 2017.

“China-Africa encounters: Historical legacies and contemporary realities,” *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 46, 2017, pp. 337-355.

Unmasking the State: Making Guinea Modern, University of Chicago Press, 2013.

“‘History is stubborn.’ Talk about truth, justice, and national reconciliation in the Republic of Guinea,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 55, 2013, pp. 198-225.

Service – Professor McGovern has taken on a disproportionate amount of departmental service since 2012. In the department, he has served as the director of undergraduate studies, served on the Advance Inclusiveness and Equity team, and more. He also contributed service in the Center for Southeast Asian Studies. His many contributions to the broader discipline include reviewing grant proposals and manuscripts, as well as board memberships for top-tier publications and foundations. A model of meaningful public engagement, he has served as advisor to national and international policy makers (U.S. Ambassadors, the U.N. Security Council, the World Bank, among others), and contributed op-ed pieces for the New York Times and Le Monde, and made TV appearances (CNN, BBC, PBS).

External Reviews:

Reviewer (A)

“Professor McGovern’s vita is very impressive. It demonstrates a range of contributions in ethnography, in area studies, in theory, in peace and conflict analysis, the politics of identity (including ethnicity) and a very sophisticated use of history. His publication record is excellent including three books with the University of Chicago Press...”

Reviewer (B)

“...I have the highest opinion of his achievements. The excellence of his research and publications, and the innovating and challenging character of his work until now make me convinced that in the future as well he will further prove himself as one of the absolute leaders of his generation in the fields of African studies and anthropology in general.”

Reviewer (C)

“McGovern’s work has been prolific, varying across the important spectrum from scholarship to active involvement, covering more than one continent, and being attentive to crucial issues that deeply affect the lives of ‘the common people’ in the twenty-first century...”

Reviewer (D)

“McGovern has, in a relatively short period of time, acquired a national and indeed international reputation as one of the leading scholars of the political anthropology of contemporary Africa. ... The questions he asks and attempts to answer...are remarkably original windows into considerations of violence and of state power (or powerlessness).”

Reviewer (E)

“The file evidences a scholar with a tremendous range – someone as comfortable with classic anthropological theory and methods as cross-disciplinary approaches to visual culture,

embodiment, or security. The results of this range and of his triangulation between anthropology, history, and political science are works that are meticulous in their articulation and measured in their claims, leading to moments of astonishing insight.”

Reviewer (F)

“I am overwhelmingly impressed not just with the quantity of his scholarly output but with the very high quality and theoretical significance of his work. The topics he addresses are of the utmost significance...”

Reviewer (G)

“This pair of books - *Unmasking the State*, and its twin, *A Socialist Peace* - is a tour de force. I know nothing quite like it in the Africanist archive, in the way that they each speak to and complement one another.”

Reviewer (H)

“McGovern is a major national and international figure in the field of political anthropology, and is well known across disciplines for his research in West Africa.”

Summary of Recommendation:

Professor McGovern is an internationally recognized anthropologist whose published work focuses on politics, violence, and war in contemporary Africa. His record is remarkable for the quality and quantity of research, for timely and appealing course offerings at all levels, and for exemplary service and public outreach. The Executive Committee of the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts and I recommend that Associate Professor Michael McGovern be promoted to the rank of professor of anthropology, with tenure, College of Literature, Science, and the Arts.



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Andrew D. Martin, Dean  
Professor of Political Science and Statistics  
College of Literature, Science, and the Arts

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