

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

Approved by the Regents

May 17, 2007

Sara B. Blair, associate professor of English language and literature, with tenure, College of Literature, Science, and the Arts, is recommended for promotion to professor of English language and literature, with tenure, College of Literature, Science, and the Arts.

Academic Degrees:

Ph.D.	1989	Stanford University
M.A.	1984	University of Essex
B.A.	1982	University of Virginia

Professional Record:

1999 – present	Associate Professor, Department of English Language and Literature, University of Michigan
1996 – 1997	Visiting Associate Professor, Department of English Language and Literature, University of Michigan
1995 – 1999	Associate Professor, Department of English, University of Virginia
1989 – 1995	Assistant Professor, Department of English, University of Virginia

Summary of Evaluation:

Teaching – Professor Blair has taught a variety of courses in her department. Many of them were in the undergraduate curriculum, but a substantial number were at the graduate level. Focusing on subjects ranging from nineteenth and twentieth century British and American fiction to the nexus of photography and Jewish culture, her courses are uniformly rigorous, cohesive, inventive, and well-organized. Her courses were highly praised by graduate students and consistently rank in or near the highest quartile in the undergraduate forms.

Research – Professor Blair’s forthcoming book, *Harlem Crossroads: Black Writers and the Photograph in the Twentieth Century*, is a major contribution to the study of American modernism. It brings together scholarship on photography, forms of American and African American artistic representation, and the complexity of modern Western identities to investigate the confluence of images and descriptive prose in the multi-media genre of the photo-text. Additionally, she has published six essays in prestigious peer-review journals, almost all of which present research independent of *Harlem Crossroads*. These essays are on topics ranging from the implications for literary studies of theoretical approaches to the study of space and place to the modernist dimensions of Abraham Cahan’s “fictions of Yiddish.” They are strong evidence that her reputation as one of her generation’s most imaginative scholars of American modernism is well-deserved.

Recent and Significant Publications:

*Harlem Crossroads: Black Writers and the Photograph in the Twentieth Century*, Princeton University Press, forthcoming, 2007.

“Photography’s other histories,” *English Language Notes*, 44(2), Fall 2006.

“Whose Modernism is it? Abraham Cahan, fictions of Yiddish, and the contest of Modernity,”  
*Modern Fiction Studies*, 51(2), Summer 2005, pp. 258-284.

“Ellison, photography, and the origins of invisibility,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Ralph Ellison*, R. Posnock (ed.), Cambridge University Press, 2005, pp. 56-81.

Service – In addition to her fine work as director of the English Honors Program (2000-2005) and her contributions as coordinator of the new “Visual Culture” Workshop that she initiated, Professor Blair has served for three years as a member of the faculty executive board of the University of Michigan Press. She has been elected to serve on the departmental Executive Committee for five separate terms, has contributed to American Culture promotion and evaluation committees, and has been a guest co-editor of the *Michigan Quarterly Review*’s special two-volume issue on “Jewish in America.” This was subsequently reprinted in book form by the University of Michigan Press. In each of these endeavors, her work has been exemplary.

#### External Reviews:

##### Reviewer (A)

“Sara’s critical project, as evidenced in her key term “crossing[,]” involves looking at the way that various media (the novel and the photograph, for example) as well as various groups (blacks and Jews, for example) intersect and shape one another. This focus on “crossing” also entails an attention to space and place... The new book, *Harlem Crossroads*...marks the culmination of these efforts. ...[it] will be read as a major rethinking of African American literary production at mid-century.”

##### Reviewer (B)

“She is a fine writer and a penetrating critic, whose prodigious research into both primary and secondary sources leads her to original perspectives on her subjects. ... Her forthcoming book...is a magisterial survey of the relations between African American writers—from 1935 to the 1990s—and documentary photography.”

##### Reviewer (C)

“Working at the intersection of visual and literary culture, Blair achieves nothing less than a new definition of black modernism. ... At the most fundamental level, *Harlem Crossroads* will be a seminal study because its archival research consolidates a whole new body of knowledge about the photographic engagements of modern African-American writers. But the study goes further, offering a set of boldly original arguments that will surely shift our understanding of U.S. modernism, the visual tradition of documentary, and modern African-American literature.”

##### Reviewer (D)

“...Sara is a distinguished scholar of British and American modernism...an original thinker who is in the process of expanding and redefining the very boundaries of her field. ... Her account [of the photo-texts she examines in *Harlem Crossroads*] is nuanced, thoughtful and filled with rich and original readings of images and of the ideological imperatives that motivated their production.”

Reviewer (E)

"I was a great admirer of Professor Blair's first book, *Henry James and the Writing of Race and Nation*. With the completion of *Harlem Crossroads*, her wonderful new book on black writers and photography, Prof. Blair now stands at the very head of the profession. The field as a whole will be galvanized and transformed by the debates revolving around her work."

Reviewer (F)

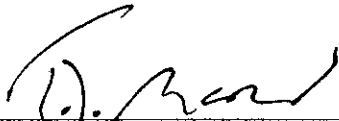
"...*Harlem Crossroads*...strikes me not only as a striking advance in ambition and accomplishment but one of the most original and exciting works that I have read in years. ...Blair has discovered a neglected area of major significance..."

Reviewer (G)

"...'Harlem Crossroads' seems to me a major contribution to literary and cultural history; it provides a good demonstration of Professor Blair's striking ability to convey depth and complexity, interwoven layers of critical meaning, in concise and inviting prose. Along with the other essays at hand, and building on the early record, with the Henry James book at the center, Blair has established herself as a leading figure in contemporary literary criticism."

Summary of Recommendation:

Professor Blair is an exceptional teacher and a conscientious contributor to the intellectual and administrative life of the Department of English Language and Literature. The Executive Committee of the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts and I recommend that Associate Professor Sara B. Blair be promoted to the rank of professor of English language and literature, with tenure, in the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts.



---

Terrence J. McDonald  
Arthur F. Thurnau Professor,  
Professor of History, and Dean  
College of Literature, Science, and the Arts

May 2007