

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

Brian A. Porter-Szűcs, associate professor of history, with tenure, College of Literature, Science, and the Arts, is recommended for promotion to professor of history, with tenure, College of Literature, Science, and the Arts.

Academic Degrees:

Ph.D.	1994	University of Wisconsin, Madison
B.A.	1986	University of Tulsa

Professional Record:

2000 – present	Associate Professor, Department of History, University of Michigan
1994 – 2000	Assistant Professor, Department of History, University of Michigan

Summary of Evaluations:

Teaching – Professor Porter-Szűcs is a dedicated, challenging, and successful teacher who excels in the large lecture format as well as in the smaller undergraduate classroom. He consistently draws the highest praise from students at all levels who are enthusiastic about his inventive use of classroom technologies and who respect his unstinting commitment to critical pedagogy. He is active and generous with his time in the history honors program, supervising on average one thesis a year. Over time he has established Michigan as the premier center in the English-speaking world for studying Polish history and culture.

Research – Professor Porter-Szűcs has become the foremost historian of Poland of his generation and is in the highest echelon of Eastern Europeanists more generally. His recent book, *Faith and Fatherland*, has confirmed and further enhances that standing. Together with his forthcoming co-edited volume, *Christianity and Modernity in Eastern Europe*, his commissioned general history of Poland, and his proposed future project, his scholarship commands the highest respect. Professor Porter-Szűcs has always challenged the conventional orthodoxies of his field, whether in scholarship or common-sense understandings. With his two major books he has rewritten the history of Poland.

Recent and Significant Publications:

*Faith and Fatherland: Catholicism, Modernity, and Poland*, Oxford University Press, 2010.

“Hetmanka and mother: Representing the Virgin Mary in modern Poland,” *Contemporary European History*, 14(2), 2005, pp. 151-70.

“Making a space for anti-semitism: The Catholic hierarchy and the Jews in the early 1900s,” *Polin*, 16, 2003, pp. 415-29.

“Thy kingdom come: Patriotism and prophecy in nineteenth-century Poland,” *Catholic Historical Review*, 89(2), 2003, pp. 213-38.

Service – Professor Porter-Szűcs has an impressive record of service. In the Department of History, he has twice acted as director of graduate studies (2001-02, 2004-05), served a two-year term on the Executive Committee (2008-2010), and performed a wide range of other tasks. He is

vital to the life of the Center for Russian and East European Studies, serving twice on its Executive Committee (1999-2002, 2005-2007) and actively sustaining all things Polish. Since 2000 he has been director of the Copernicus Endowment for Polish Studies.

External Review:

Reviewer (A)

“... Porter-Szűcs already ranks with Jerzy Jedlicki and Andrzej Walicki, senior scholars who did much to shape this field in the second half of the twentieth century. However, I would argue that Porter-Szűcs’ contributions will eventually exceed theirs, primarily because he thinks about the subjects of his research in much larger, more sophisticated comparative contexts.”

Reviewer (B)

“I believe it is one of a dozen or so of the most important works in East Central European history to have appeared in the last 50 years . . . a work of unique value . . . no other book that probes so deeply and broadly into the history of a religious institution in Eastern Europe in the modern period, perhaps in all of Europe.”

Reviewer (C)

“I think it would be generally acknowledged that he ranks alongside Robert Blobaum, Michael Kennedy, Padraic Kenney, and Timothy Snyder as one of the outstanding specialists in modern Polish history among Anglophone scholars.”

Reviewer (D)

“... a remarkable and extremely important work, one that will place Brian Porter securely among the top three or four historians of Poland in his generation . . . an erudite, authoritative study . . . this book will leave a lasting impact on the historiography of Poland, of Eastern Europe, and indeed of European Catholicism. . . Brian Porter is working heroically to make East Europeanists take religious faith and thought seriously.”

Reviewer (E)

“The contribution here is to lay out with great erudition and a sophisticated sense of theological and ecclesiological issues the key concepts that Catholicism provided to the Polish people as they struggled to understand political and social transformation and military catastrophe over the past two centuries. Porter has mastered an enormous body of literature: sermons, catechisms, periodicals, memoirs, official Catholic statements at the episcopal and papal level, and he draws as well on archival materials available since the collapse of the Communist regime. . . I would place Porter’s new book as among the best of a growing field in the history of religion in modern Europe. I know of no other work that lays out with such depth and sensitivity the overall Catholic frameworks that have developed in response to the changes of the last two centuries for channeling the beliefs and feelings of Catholics.”

Reviewer (F)

“Porter succeeds in doing something no one else, I believe, has been able to do, and that is to examine the Catholic church critically, as both an institution and as a collection of actors, while also appreciating its doctrines and scriptural traditions which it cannot, finally, completely ignore. This allows him to understand, again in what I believe to be a wholly innovative way, the ambivalent and

varied relationships the clergy has had with the nationalism movement, with the secular anti-Semitic movement, and with the communist regime . . . unquestionably this is a major, major contribution to the literature, and I will be very much surprised if it does not win multiple book prizes.”

Reviewer (G)


“Porter’s analysis of these problems is both subtle, sophisticated and fair to all those involved. It is a major study not only of the Catholic Church in Poland and the course of Polish politics, but also of this Church generally and of the problems of how a closed religious system adapts to the challenge of modernity and a plural political and economic system. I rarely used superlatives but this is an outstanding book, which I literally could not put down.”

Reviewer (H)

“The book is beautifully written and patiently argued. Porter-Szücs methodological approach is a sophisticated intellectual history of politics, with much of his material made up of hard-to-find Polish works and periodicals. He does not wander among the peaks of intellectual history (though he does this too occasionally), but instead limns the far more telling plateaus of second and third-rank writers who often have a closer feel for the religious pulse . . . I have also written in religious history, and I cannot begin to match his sense for the fine print or religious writing. . . It bears the imprint of the kind of work that speaks to decades of reflection on a series of problems in a country’s history, and will be recognized as milestone work in Polish history. There is no question that it will make Porter-Szücs into one of the two or three leading historians of Eastern Europe working in the United States.”

Summary of Recommendation:

Professor Porter-Szücs is at the top of his field. He is an innovative and dynamic classroom teacher, and his service record is exemplary. The Executive Committee of the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts and I recommend that Associate Professor Brian A. Porter-Szücs be promoted to the rank of professor of history, with tenure, in the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts.



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

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