

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

Michael Witgen, assistant professor of American culture, and assistant professor of history, College of Literature, Science, and the Arts, is recommended for promotion to associate professor of American culture, with tenure, and associate professor of history, with tenure, College of Literature, Science, and the Arts.

Academic Degrees:

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| 2004 | Ph.D. | University of Washington |
| 1998 | M.A. | University of Washington |
| 1998 | B.A. | Texas Christian University |

Professional Record:

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| 2004 – present | Assistant Professor, Program in American Culture and Department of History, University of Michigan |
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Summary of Evaluation:

Teaching – Professor Witgen is an excellent teacher whose focus is to help students arrive at their own knowledge and interpretation of primary source documents. He is thus able to draw students into the practice of history so they can better understand the potential as well as the limits of our knowledge. He has taught eighteen different courses, including six new preparations. These have included a mix of larger classes and smaller recitations and seminars. In his signature class, American Indian history, his scores are now approaching the top quartile in the college and university. He is currently the chair of one dissertation committee in American Culture and three in History. He sits on four additional dissertation committees and has supervised an honors thesis in the Department of History.

Research – Professor Witgen is a leader in a powerful movement of scholars who are reshaping the field of Native American history by recuperating the importance of a dynamic, indigenous North American interior. In his case that history comprises an independent cluster of “indigenous social formations” that controlled a vast interior stretching from Lake Huron westward to the Northern Great Plains and northward to the Canadian subarctic and Hudson’s Bay. This was an American Indian world that for centuries sustained its independence beyond European or Euro-American authority. Professor Witgen is a terrific ethnohistorian, proceeding with the utmost seriousness from the available ethnographic, archaeological, and historical data. His published article is on many graduate course syllabi across the country, and he has won a fellowship for work on future projects. His book is forthcoming from the University of Pennsylvania Press.

Recent and Significant Publications:

An Infinity of Nations: How the Native New World Shaped Modern North America, Early American Studies, D. K. Richter and K. M. Brown (series eds.), University of Pennsylvania Press, forthcoming August 2011.

“The rituals of possession: Native identity and the invention of empire in seventeenth century western North America,” *Ethnohistory*, 54 (4), 2007, pp. 639-668.

Service – Professor Witgen is a valuable contributor to the administrative functioning of History, American Culture, and Native American Studies (NAS). For History, he has twice served on the ad hoc Admissions Committee for the Americanist caucus, twice on the Fellowships Committee, and three times as an undergraduate advisor. For American Culture, he has served twice on the Fellowships Committee, twice on the Graduate Admissions Committee, and once on the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee. His ongoing involvement with the NAS includes mentoring of Native American students as well as non-native students interested in the topic. He helped coordinate a major symposium in 2005 and another major program in 2006. He regularly attends events sponsored by the Native American Student Association. He has been active in both the Society for the Historians of the Early Republic and the Committee for Institutional Cooperation’s American Indian Studies Program.

External Reviews:

Reviewer (A)

“*An Infinity of Nations* is particularly impressive as a first book, but it would be an important book anywhere in a scholar’s career. ... His analysis of this region is a *tour de force*... His work here is a superb piece of ethnohistory. His decoding of the ‘infinity of nations’ involves an infinity of hard and impressive labor. ... His union of the Great Lakes country of the middle ground, the worlds of the Dakota and the Anishinaabeg, and Hudson’s Bay is unique and tremendously important.”

Reviewer (B)

“Witgen is an expert on Native American history and culture... This is a sub-field of growing importance to the broader field of early American history as it has featured some of the most innovative and influential scholarship in the past two decades. His book manuscript promises to advance that influence. In the above area of expertise, Michael stands out as one of the most creative, careful, and insightful scholars.”

Reviewer (C)

“Witgen’s book will be an important intervention in early American Indian history, and he is part of a group of scholars who have produced books that are transforming our understanding of early American and American Indian history. ... Witgen’s book... will be the first ‘new’ word on Anishinaabe history in the western Great Lakes on a grand scale. ... I’m sure I will teach the book when it is out, and I already teach the article.”

Reviewer (D)

“In his manuscript, *An Infinity of Nations*, Dr. Witgen, in perhaps on[e] of the most successful efforts at such that I have ever had the pleasure of reading, joins the ranks of landmark works demonstrating just how much Indian and European affairs transformed not only Indians, but Europeans as well. ... This book is a brilliant, exciting, and deep study... Every now and then a scholar [of his generation] emerges with a first book that blows us away. I think Dr. Witgen has written such a book.”

Reviewer (E)

"...[Native New World history] is a history that remains largely untold, and Witgen defines his task as telling it in a way that will transform the way in which early American history is narrated. ... It demonstrates an impressive mastery of the secondary literature. ... When it is published, Witgen's book will make a solid contribution to the historical literature of early America."

Reviewer (F)

"The manuscript is ambitious, seeking nothing less than a reorientation of the writing of North American history in a way that fully takes account of the histories of Native peoples. ...the point he makes... leads to an important observations about how Native people conceived of space, not as a clearly demarcated territory, but as a "constellation of lived relationships."

Reviewer (G)

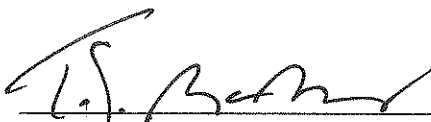
"With a depth of research no previous scholar has managed, Witgen argues that the vocabularies usually employed by scholars and the sources they rely on cannot grasp the amorphous, often simultaneously defined, political configurations that were the world in which Anishinaabe and Dakota people lived. ...I am confident that...the book will be a stunning contribution to the field."

Reviewer (H)

"Michael Witgen's *Ethnohistory* article is certainly among the most significant essays on the history of American Indians in the North American interior to have appeared in recent years. ...his book will also win wide attention. His scholarly achievements would make him a strong candidate for tenure and promotion at [my institution]... "

Summary of Recommendation:

Professor Witgen is an established leader in his field who will continue to produce outstanding research over the course of his career. His contribution to the teaching and service missions of the College has been substantial. The Executive Committee of the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts and I recommend that Assistant Professor Michael Witgen be promoted to the rank of associate professor of American culture, with tenure, and associate professor of history, with tenure, 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

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