

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

Ryan W. Szpiech, assistant professor of romance languages and literatures, and assistant professor of Judaic studies, College of Literature, Science, and the Arts, is recommended for promotion to associate professor of romance languages and literatures, with tenure, and associate professor of Judaic studies, without tenure, College of Literature, Science, and the Arts.

Academic Degrees:

Ph.D.	2006	Yale University
M.Phil.	2004	Yale University
M.A.	2002	Yale University
M.A.	1997	University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign
B.A.	1995	University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign

Professional Record:

2007 – present	Assistant Professor, Department of Romance Languages and Literatures and the Jean and Samuel Frankel Center for Judaic Studies, University of Michigan
2006 – 2007	Assistant Professor, Department of Modern Languages and Literatures, Beloit College

Summary of Evaluation:

Teaching – Professor Szpiech has demonstrated teaching excellence in a wide range of undergraduate and graduate courses. His undergraduate courses provide a solid historical, cultural, and linguistic overview of Medieval Iberia, and help students familiarize themselves with its major literary, cultural, and social trends. Professor Szpiech has a high level of commitment to students and is an outstanding mentor and advisor. He has worked with numerous students in the Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program (UROP), and he has collaborated with graduate students by participating in their dissertation committees and professional training.

Research – Professor Szpiech’s area of expertise is the borderland of translation and conversion internal to the Abrahamic religions of the Iberian Peninsula. He is particularly interested in the conditions of religious contact across cultures, always highlighting the tensions and polemics involved in conversion from one religion to another. He has already had a real impact on the field with his articles, participation in conferences and international collaborative projects, and his recently published book shows considerable promise for the future. His second book is based on dialogues with the broad concerns of pre-modern history and religion in Europe, clearly recognizing that translation lies at the heart of all cultural interactions both then and now.

Recent and Significant Publications:

“The Convivencia Wars: Decoding historiography’s polemic with philology,” in A Sea of Languages: Literature and Culture in the Pre-modern Mediterranean, S. Akbari and K. Mallette (eds.), University of Toronto Press, forthcoming.

Conversion and Narrative: Reading and Religious Authority in Medieval Polemic, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013, in press.

“A father’s bequest: Augustinian typology and personal testimony in the conversion narrative of Solomon Halvei/Pablo de Santa María,” The Hebrew Bible in Fifteenth-Century Spain: Exegesis, Literature, Philosophy, and Arts, J. Decker and A. Prats (eds.), Brill, 2012, pp. 177-198.

“The original is unfaithful to the translation: Conversion and authenticity in Abner of Burgos and Anselm Turmeda,” *eHumanista*, 14, 2010, pp. 146-177.

Service – Professor Szpiech’s service to the department and to Judaic Studies has been exceptional. He has made important contributions to the undergraduate and graduate programs in Spanish. He has worked closely with the Frankel Center in their search for a scholar in the Mediterranean cluster. He has also played an active role to the profession at large.

#### External Reviewers:

##### Reviewer (A)

“Szpiech has already earned a commendable international reputation as a scholar of note and influence, and I consider him to be one of the brightest presences in the field of (Mediterranean) medievalism today. He will undoubtedly continue to push the frontiers of knowledge and analysis in his discipline in the decades to come, making significant and original scholarly contributions.”

##### Reviewer (B)

“I know of no one who commands so many valuable tools and possesses so many critical reading skills by which to study these culturally polemical documents. Ryan Spiezch [sic] is an amazing scholar who has already made his mark in the field in exciting ways. He will have a splendid career, and is richly deserving of tenure.”

##### Reviewer (C)

“The University of Michigan is indeed fortunate to count among its faculty a...scholar who has not only established himself as a productive and original literary and cultural historian, but who has such a rare combination of skills and shows such extraordinary promise. It has been a pleasure reviewing his file and reading his work.”

##### Reviewer (D)

“...I had the opportunity to observe Professor Szpiech interacting with students and colleagues and came away impressed with his ability, in his gentle way, to open people up to the ideas of others whose positions they might initially reject out of hand, to challenge them in productive ways, and to validate the contributions of each member of the conversation. These qualities make Professor Szpiech, perhaps not so ironically, the ideal person to study the ever-hardening positions adopted in interfaith dialogue and polemic in the medieval Mediterranean world.”

##### Reviewer (E)

“*Conversion and Narrative: Reading Authority in Medieval Polemic* is an impressive study that bridges the fields of Religious Studies and Comparative Literature in order to produce close and sophisticated readings of (largely) first-person conversion narratives from the later Middle Ages

across a broad array of original languages... There are very few scholars who can move so gracefully among these languages and areas of scholarship while offering insights from the minutiae of philological analysis to high literary theory, reflections on the nature of religion and notions of the self.”

Reviewer (F)

“The candidate's publications are certainly among the most significant produced in his field in recent past years. In his book...and in various other articles he challenges the common assumption that conversion is a universal phenomenon. His reading of conversion is grounded in space and time, it is extraordinarily rich, and sets in motion a good number of critical strategies that lead from the realm of the text to the realm of experience. His work on polemics...[is] among the most significant produced in the field in recent years, both Medieval and Early Modern.”

Reviewer (G)

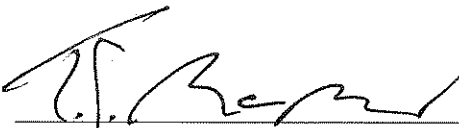
“Prof. Szpiech is a scholar of medieval Iberia of the highest intellectual caliber, with an impressive combination of analytic strengths and complementary fields of expertise that defies easy description. ...Szpiech is an absolute keeper with substantive accomplishments, international salience and the unequivocal promise of continuous growth as a leading authority in Ibero-medieval studies. Unequivocally so.”

Reviewer (H)

“...he has carved out for himself an ambitious, interdisciplinary field of research...that connects to an important set of concerns in contemporary medievalist work at the same time that it moves in new, and very productive, directions.”

Summary of Recommendation:

Professor Szpiech is an outstanding scholar, a highly value and committed teacher, and an excellent citizen. The Executive Committee of the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts and I recommend that Assistant Professor Ryan W. Szpiech be promoted to the rank of associate professor of romance languages and literatures, with tenure, and associate professor of Judaic studies, without tenure, 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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