

PROMOTION RECOMMENDATION  
The University of Michigan-Dearborn  
College of Arts, Sciences, and Letters

Approved by the  
Regents  
May 21, 2015

Lara Christine Rusch, assistant professor of political science, Department of Social Sciences, College of Arts, Sciences, and Letters, is recommended for promotion to associate professor of political science, with tenure, Department of Social Sciences, College of Arts, Sciences, and Letters.

Academic Degrees:

Ph.D. 2008 University of Michigan, Ann Arbor  
B.A. 1998 Oberlin College, Oberlin, OH

Professional Record:

2008 – present Assistant Professor of Political Science, Department of Social Sciences, University of Michigan-Dearborn  
2006 – 2008 Pre-Doctoral Research Associate, Kettering Foundation, Dayton, OH  
2006 Adjunct Instructor, Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti, MI

Teaching: Professor Rusch is rated excellent in teaching. Her courses cover core curriculum for Political Science and Urban and Regional Studies. She regularly teaches Introduction to American Government and the upper-level Urban Politics courses. In addition, she has twice led the capstone seminar for Urban and Regional Studies and taught American State Government. Professor Rusch has contributed to political science curriculum development by transforming Social Welfare Policy into an online offering and by creating a new course, Community Organizing and Leadership. She also helped develop a minor in Community Change Studies. Students give Professor Rusch high marks for the enthusiasm she brings to the classroom. Professor Rusch's own interest and curiosity is readily apparent to students. Summary scores in her student evaluations are usually comfortably above 4 (5 being most positive). In open-ended comments, students praise Professor Rusch for her accessibility, willingness to help, and patience in answering questions. When looking at the grade distributions for her classes, it is clear that Professor Rusch sets high standards for her students. It is equally clear that she is willing to go the extra mile to help her students meet those standards. Several Social Sciences faculty members have observed Professor Rusch in the classroom, and they have all come away impressed. Professor Rusch is committed to creating an active learning environment. She mixes standard lectures with video clips, group discussion, and other in-class activities, all with a goal of maximizing student learning and involvement in the class session. Professor Rusch has also dedicated significant time to creating Academic Service Learning courses and other opportunities for students to learn outside of the traditional classroom.

Research: Professor Rusch is rated significantly capable in research. The primary focus of her research has been community organizing and community-based civic engagement. She has been interested in how such activism can address inequalities and power imbalances in community politics. Professor Rusch's research is based largely on participant observation and intensive interviews with community activists, as well as substantial archival research. Her most important research has been conducted in the Detroit area, most specifically with an organization known as MOSES. MOSES is distinctive in its efforts at regional activism that tries to mobilize Detroit and surrounding suburbs. The regional focus of MOSES is unusual and has provided Professor Rusch an opportunity to broaden understanding of how community activism can contribute to political

engagement and empowerment in a fragmented regional environment. Professor Rusch has been working in a field where much of the published research is descriptive. She has made useful contributions by bringing improved theoretical rigor to the study of community activism. She has integrated research and frameworks from sociology and political science in ways that bring the study of community organizing more into the mainstream of political science, and she has moved well beyond description in her study of groups, such as MOSES. She holds great promise for continued productivity in research that expands the theoretical basis of scholarship on community organizing.

#### Recent and Significant Publications:

- Rusch, L., (2010). Rethinking bridging: Challenges for building social capital through community organizing, *Urban Affairs Review* 45(4): 483-506.
- Rusch, L., (2012). Going regional: The evolution of an organizing strategy in Detroit, *City and Community* 11(1): 51-73.
- Olive, A., Rusch, L., and Ayers, A., (2013). Public perceptions of the value of urban trees in the River Rouge Watershed, *Michigan Academician* 41(3): 310-331.
- Rusch, L. and White, E. (2013). New neighbors, old neighborhood: Affordable homeownership and engagement in an East Detroit neighborhood, *Spaces and Flows: An International Journal of Urban and ExtraUrban Studies* 3(3): 127-142.
- Rusch, L. and Swarts, H. (forthcoming). Practices of engagement: Comparing and integrating deliberation and organizing, *Journal of Community Practice* (accepted, anticipated publication date 1/2015 23:1)

Service: Professor Rusch is rated excellent in service. The political science discipline has benefitted from her efforts to revamp our assessment procedures. She established a campus chapter of the national political science honors society (Pi Sigma Alpha) and serves as its advisor. She has served on two faculty search committees, the public affairs governing faculty, the political science governing faculty, and the Graduate Admissions Review Committee. Outside the discipline, Professor Rusch has served as an assistant director for urban and regional studies and as director of civic literacy programming for the Institute for Local Government. She also serves on the review committee for the Academic Service Learning Faculty Fellow program. Professor Rusch has invested considerably in community outreach. She has developed working relationships with a wide range of organizations in our region, including Henry Ford College, the League of Women Voters, Habitat for Humanity, the Detroit Action Commonwealth, and the Community Learning Partnership. This outreach has benefitted Professor Rusch's research and teaching and has helped UM-Dearborn forge connections with, and serve, its surrounding region.

#### External Reviewers:

Reviewer A: "I cite her contributions and draw from her work regularly ... Rusch's work on regionalism ... places her at the forefront of new research in the field of community organizing ... The field of research on community organizing is still emerging ... Rusch's work is playing an important role in shaping and advancing this research. Rusch's careful ethnographic case study approach is well-designed ... Rusch is able to combine sophisticated theory, systematic methods, and rigorous fieldwork to build findings of the highest quality."

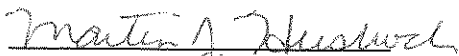
Reviewer B: "Gaining and maintaining access to groups like MOSES and Gamaliel is not easy, so ... her success in this should be acknowledged as a meaningful achievement ... these insights are important to both practitioners and scholars ... Dr. Rusch has established herself as an important voice within the scholarly community."


Reviewer C: "It is not easy to build trust with community organizers, and the fact that she can do such work is impressive. The important contribution this article makes ... is by pointing out that bridging social capital is imbued with power inequalities that can create as many problems as it solves. This contains practical lessons for coalitions and theoretical lessons for academics."

Reviewer D: "...truly important contributions to think about: i) the dynamics of trust, social capital, collective efficacy, and risk in the context of community organizing in multiracial settings (and by extension in other contexts); and, ii) the gains, risks, and trade-offs inherent in social movement/community organizing attempts to project political influence in higher-level political arenas beyond the local neighborhood and city. Both are of very high quality: well framed in strong theoretical terms; empirically grounded; sharply analytic; and written in insightful and accessible prose ... She shows promise of a successful and influential scholar ... on terrain that is of real importance to both society and social theory."

Reviewer E: "She is a first-rate scholar whose published work has already had an impact in the field of urban politics. Her scholarship is superb and in many ways pathbreaking [sic]. By incorporating both theoretical and empirical insights about ... the role of civic and community institutions as players and stakeholders in politics, she has challenged and helped change the prevailing paradigm of urban scholarship ... Professor Rusch demonstrates an ability to weave major theoretical issues with case studies that illuminate big issues ... [her] work enriches the field of political science and elevates the reputation of her employing institution."

Summary of Recommendation: Professor Rusch is a talented and engaged classroom instructor who values active, inclusive learning. Her research addresses critical issues of urban governance and is recognized as contributing significantly to the scholarly field by external reviewers. Her outreach efforts and on-campus service directly contribute to the university's goals to serve the metro Detroit region and provide the highest quality education to its students. We are very pleased to recommend, with strong support of the College of Arts, Sciences, and Letters Executive Committee, Lara Christine Rusch for promotion to associate professor of political science, with tenure, Department of Social Sciences, College of Arts, Sciences, and Letters.

  
Martin J. Herschick, Dean  
College of Arts, Sciences, and Letters

  
Daniel Little, Chancellor  
University of Michigan-Dearborn

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