

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

Benjamin B. Paloff, assistant professor of Slavic languages and literatures, and assistant professor of comparative literature, College of Literature, Science, and the Arts, is recommended for promotion to associate professor of Slavic languages and literatures, with tenure, and associate professor of comparative literature, with tenure, College of Literature, Science, and the Arts.

Academic Degrees:

2007	Ph.D.	Harvard University
2002	M.A.	Harvard University
2001	M.F.A.	University of Michigan
1999	B.A.	Harvard University

Professional Record:

2010 – present	Assistant Professor, Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures and Department of Comparative Literature, University of Michigan
2007 – 2010	Assistant Professor (non-tenure track) and Junior Fellow, Michigan Society of Fellows

Summary of Evaluation:

Teaching – Professor Paloff’s undergraduate courses on Polish literature and comparative literature, as well as his seminars on East European literature and on literary theory, have received excellent ratings from students. He is admirably advanced in using technology to enable detailed one-on-one feedback to students on their essay writing. His contributions to developing Polish literature and critical translation studies curricula in his departments have been substantial. Professor Paloff’s mentoring of graduate students has also been superb in both units, where he has served on or is serving on ten dissertation committees.

Research – Professor Paloff’s erudition, insightful analysis, and elegant writing as a scholar and literary translator from three languages (Polish, Russian, Czech) have gained him recognition as one of the top Slavic comparativists of his generation. His book, Lost in the Shadow of the Word, which has already won a prestigious subvention prize, gives a deeply original assessment of nine major interwar Polish, Czech, and Russian writers’ complex embodiments of relativized and shifting space and time in the wake of post-classical physics. Professor Paloff is also the author of eleven substantial articles, two books of poetry, and nine book-length translations into English of key Polish and Czech authors.

Recent and Significant Publications:

Lost in the Shadow of the Word: Space, Time, and Freedom in Interwar Eastern Europe, Northwestern University Press, in press (winner of the 2015 Helen Tartar First Book Subvention Prize, American Comparative Literature Association).

“East is always further east,” *East European Politics and Societies*, 28(4), 2014, pp. 687-692.

“Denatured spirits: Shame and doubling in Witold Gombrowicz and Richard Weiner,” *New Perspectives on Polish Culture: Personal Encounters, Public Affairs*, T. Trojanowska, et al. (eds.), PIASA Books, 2011, pp. 94-111.

“A loving heresy: The god function in Joseph Brodsky and Ol’ga Sedakova,” *Slavic and East European Journal*, 51(4), 2007, pp. 716-736.

Service – Professor Paloff’s service has been exemplary. In the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures, he has served on the Graduate Admissions and Fellowships Committee and the Executive Committee, where his wise advice has been instrumental in fostering cross-cultural emphasis. In the Department of Comparative Literature, he holds the position of director of graduate studies, and he has become the most proactive, accessible, and rigorously demanding director in recent memory.

External Reviewers:

Reviewer (A)

“So diverse are the accomplishments of [Professor Paloff]...that very few Slavic departments outside your own are qualified to evaluate all of it. ... His projected work on concentration camps and ghettos is a significant departure from his comparative poetic work to date. It is precisely such diversity—one book in press, one new project conceptually mature—that [my institution] prefers for a successful tenure dossier in the humanities.”

Reviewer (B)

“It would be hard to find another super-achiever like him among his peers. I have scanned the field of Central and Eastern European studies for various reasons...and have come to the conclusion that Dr. Paloff’s scholarly, intellectual and artistic activity and presence fulfills all that is required in the field. He is a prolific, mature and full-rounded scholar whose diverse productivity is of sustained high quality. Because of this, among American Slavic comparatists of his generation, he is in my estimation at the very top of the spectrum.”

Reviewer (C)

“I am impressed with the number of external and internal fellowships and grants that Dr. Paloff has been awarded since his hire at Michigan, recognition ranging from NEA support for his creative writing to the PEN/Heim grant for his literary translation. These awards attest to Dr. Paloff’s unusually multifaceted expertise as well as his high visibility as a junior scholar, translator, and poet.”

Reviewer (D)

“...*Lost in the Shadows of the Word* offers a highly original, lucidly argued, and well-evidenced attempt to specify a ‘structure of feeling’ in interwar Central Europe that is undeniably modern(ist) yet differs in crucial emphases from its more familiar western counterparts, challenging us to rethink what we understand by both modernism and modernity. ...[this book] represents a significant contribution to an important emergent research paradigm.”

Reviewer (E)

“Besides being an accomplished scholar working comparatively in at least three Slavic literatures and cultures (Czech, Polish and Russian), professor [sic] Paloff is also a public intellectual,

whose involvement in the issues relevant to the translation of literature from the region carries a significant weight. ... In addition, Ben is a published poet himself, which certainly adds another complex dimension to his publishing output. ... In comparison to other candidates at the same stage of academic career, Professor Paloff has demonstrated a level of excellence that places him above and beyond his peers.”

Reviewer (F)

“It is a remarkable dossier, the likes of which one would be hard-pressed to find elsewhere in the contemporary American academy. It is impressive in its volume but even more so for its range across at least three major cultures (Russian, Polish, and Czech)—a rare example of genuinely comparativist work—and for the multiple genres represented within it...”

Reviewer (G)

“...the grouping of writers that he creates here, which appears natural to me now that I have finished reading the manuscript and I see all the parallels among them, appeared odd to me when I started reading. Making an argument that appears obvious after the fact but did not seem so before is a mark, I think, of scholarship that makes a significant impact.”

Reviewer (H)

“Benjamin Paloff’s academic expertise is extensive, covering multiple areas of literary and cultural studies, comparative literature, literary theory, translation and editing. As a literary scholar, he is at home working with both poetry and prose. As a literary and cultural theoretician, he moves with intellectual dexterity among the most influential currents and figures of the 20th century. As a Slavic comparatist, in turn, he is unique for working on Polish, Czech, and Russian literatures with equal linguistic and cultural ease and competence, and within their broad context of European Modernism, which he knows inside out.”

Summary of Recommendation:

Professor Paloff is an innovative leader in his fields who will continue to produce outstanding research over the course of a long career. His contributions to the teaching and service missions of the college have been substantial. The Executive Committee of the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts and I recommend that Assistant Professor Benjamin B. Paloff be promoted to the rank of associate professor of Slavic languages and literatures, with tenure, and associate professor of comparative literature, with tenure, College of Literature, Science, and the Arts.



Andrew D. Martin, Dean
Professor of Political Science and Statistics
College of Literature, Science, and the Arts

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