

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

Jason P. De León, assistant professor of anthropology, College of Literature, Science, and the Arts, is recommended for promotion to associate professor of anthropology, with tenure, College of Literature, Science, and the Arts.

Academic Degrees:

Ph.D.	2008	Pennsylvania State University
M.A.	2004	Pennsylvania State University
B.A.	2001	University of California, Los Angeles

Professional Record:

2010 – present	Assistant Professor, Department of Anthropology, University of Michigan
2008 – 2010	Lecturer, Department of Anthropology, University of Washington

Summary of Evaluation:

Teaching – Since his arrival at Michigan in 2011, Professor De León has developed an array of innovative courses and pedagogical modes, as well as a truly stellar reputation as a teacher. He has developed large lecture courses and small seminars with the ease of a master teacher. He has innovated new teaching programs through field schools and laboratory classes that focus on the analysis of material culture. Student evaluations of Professor De León’s courses are consistently higher than for comparable courses taught by other faculty, establishing a virtuosic pattern of excellence for teaching in the Department of Anthropology. Professor De León’s pedagogy centers around three poles: 1) his enthusiastic mode of engagement, 2) his innovative vision for materializing culture, and 3) his commitment to closely mentoring students, especially undergraduate students and students of color. Professor De León’s ease in communicating through teaching is also evident in his program of engaged public anthropology, including “State of Exception,” a museum exhibit that has traveled to New York, Michigan, and Arizona, and his television program on the Discovery Channel, “American Treasures,” both of which are accessible, lively, and speak to multiple audiences.

Research – Professor De León’s scholarly work focuses on migration, violence, and materiality. He draws on ethnographic, archaeological, and forensic methods to understand social suffering on the contemporary U.S.-Mexico border. Professor De León has been successful at bridging a broad spectrum of scientific and humanistic approaches in original and exciting ways that make a major contribution to scholarship. His work is a pioneering and lasting contribution to anthropology and to the social sciences. His book, The Land of Open Graves, is being hailed as a masterpiece and is widely assigned in courses. Professor De León has won two prestigious awards for this work: the 2015 Margaret Mead Award, and the 2016 Book Prize from the American Anthropological Society for Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology. He has also received a New Directions Fellowship from the Mellon Foundation to pursue further research in forensic methods, and he is pursuing training in photography to be able to increase his use of photographic methods in his future work. Professor De León has achieved a remarkable status as a public intellectual through his award-winning museum exhibition and his wide-ranging popular

media presence. He has been described as an ambassador for anthropology, and there is every expectation that he will achieve even further recognition in the years ahead.

Recent and Significant Publications:

The Land of Open Graves: Living and Dying on the Sonoran Desert Migrant Trail, University of California Press, Berkeley, 2015.

“By the time I get to Arizona: Citizenship, materiality, and contested identities along the U.S.-Mexico border,” with C. Gokee and A. Shubert, *Anthropological Quarterly*, 88(2), 2015, pp. 445-479.

“Undocumented migration, use-wear, and the materiality of habitual suffering in the Sonoran Desert,” *Journal of Material Culture*, 18(4), 2013, pp. 1-32.

“Better to be hot than caught: Excavating the conflicting roles of migrant material culture,” *American Anthropologist*, 114(3), pp. 477-495.

Service – Professor De León has served on four committees in the Department of Anthropology and on the Museum Studies Program steering committee. He has undertaken reviews for nine journals, two university presses and granting agencies, and has served on major committees of the Society for American Archaeology and the American Anthropological Association (including the editorial board of *American Anthropologist*). Through his many media appearances and museum exhibitions, Professor De León enhances the visibility of the department and the university.

External Reviewers:

Reviewer (A)

“Still so early in his career, he has accepted over forty invitations to present at a wide variety of venues, from Germany to local community colleges. Even more impressive is that these are not in place of but *in addition to* his 50+ presentations (in some cases albeit co-authored) in academic venues. And even this doesn’t cover his professional contributions as he has also co-curated five museum exhibits related to his research production. Combining these professional contributions with his research publications, De León’s national and international profile far exceeds all reasonable expectations for an untenured faculty member at an R1 institution.”

Reviewer (B)

“He has proven himself to be the most impressive scholar of migration, violence, and materiality of his generation... His luminous first book The Land of Open Graves... will be sure to garner many well-deserved accolades, and consolidates Dr. De Leon’s [sic] reputation as one of the most outstanding ethnographers of today. ... The Land of Open Graves is an ethnographic masterpiece.”

Reviewer (C)

“Land of Open Graves [sic] focuses on undocumented migration along a particular stretch of the Mexican border with Texas, especially on the violence and death associated with this migration stream. The book is compulsively readable. The author’s ethnographic descriptions and accounts of his own treks through the desolate desert are of literary note and often reach lyrical heights. ... based on this major publication, I would be extremely proud to have Jason DeLeón [sic] as a colleague in my own department.”

Reviewer (D)

“Without a doubt, Professor De León’s level of productivity and the quality of his research, in addition to his service and teaching, would merit promotion to Associate Professor at my university.”

Reviewer (E)

“His efforts to marry archaeology and ethnography are extraordinary, providing us with a rich vision of how anthropology might transcend the intra-disciplinary divides that have threatened to sunder so many departments in recent years. ... Within the interdisciplinary field of material culture studies—which is where I would place much of his research—Professor De León is a star.”

Reviewer (F)

“To cut to the chase, of some 20 tenure and promotion cases I have been asked to review over the years, this is the easiest. Both in terms of research and writing, Jason De León is one of the finest ethnographers of *any* generation working in the United States today.”

Reviewer (G)

“...[The Land of Open Graves] is not only intellectually astounding but also socially and politically important. Early indications show that this book will be read and discussed widely, and will have a lasting impact.”

Reviewer (H)

“With his multiple awards and national grants under his belt, with his *tour de force* book, and with the multiple journal publications either already in print, in preparation, or under review—all since he started in 2010 at Ann Arbor—and with the highly visible creative work that he has carried out as an *artist* (both socio-political activist and artist + scholar), I strongly recommend with genuine enthusiasm that Dr. De León be promoted to Associate Professor with tenure...”

Summary of Recommendation:

Professor De León’s research has the reach and potential to change the future of the discipline, which is a testimony to the important issues that he addresses and to his effectiveness as a nuanced communicator. He is also a very successful teacher and has provided extraordinary service. The Executive Committee of the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts and I recommend that Assistant Professor Jason P. De León be promoted to the rank of associate professor of anthropology, with tenure, College of Literature, Science, and the Arts.



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

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