

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

Perrin Selcer, assistant professor of history, College of Literature, Science, and the Arts, and assistant professor of environment, College of Literature, Science, and the Arts and School for Environmental and Sustainability, is recommended for promotion to associate professor of history, with tenure, College of Literature, Science, and the Arts and associate professor of environment, without tenure, College of Literature, Science, and the Arts and School for Environmental and Sustainability.

Academic Degrees:

Ph.D.	2011	University of Pennsylvania
M.A.	2005	University of Pennsylvania
B.A.	1997	Clark Honors College, University of Oregon

Professional Record:

2014 – present	Assistant Professor, Department of History and Program in the Environment, University of Michigan
2013	National Science Foundation Post-doctoral Fellow, University of Texas, Austin
2011 – 2012	Lecturer, University of Texas at Austin

Summary of Evaluation:

Teaching – Professor Selcer has been successful in the classroom during his time at Michigan. His teaching, whether at the undergraduate or graduate level, is marked by thoughtful and innovative pedagogical methods, real commitment to his students, and remarkably consistent evaluations emphasizing the excellence of his instruction. His teaching and research lie in three main areas—environmental history, global history, and science and technology studies (STS)—and in all three he has become one of the central faculty members contributing to these fields. He is a highly valued contributor to the Program in the Environment (PitE); and he has created new and innovative courses in global environmental history for History and PitE. Professor Selcer has been particularly important to the Department of History’s efforts to attract students from outside of the humanities and social sciences. Professor Selcer is also an active mentor of graduate students and has already been asked to serve on eight dissertation committees.

Research – Professor Selcer is a historian of the 20<sup>th</sup> century whose expertise traverses three major field: environmental history, global history, and science and technology studies (STS). All of his research and writing cuts across multiple national boundaries. He approach is deeply inter-disciplinary in the sense that his research regularly includes serious engagement with scientific data and methods. Professor Selcer’s attention to historically shifting forms of scientific measurement, for example, requires a deep understanding of those metrics. Professor Selcer can be described as a historian of ideas and institutional networks—and more specifically, the broader “infrastructure” of knowledge production. His central case study is the rise of an explicitly “global environmental consciousness” during the second half of the twentieth century. His core concerns are the epistemological and institutional conditions of possibility that allowed

scientists and politicians to see, imagine, and debate the emerging tenets of global environmentalism following World War II. His productivity has been impressive. In addition to his recently published monograph, The Postwar Origins of the Global Environment, he has published seven refereed journal articles and book chapters, some of which have contributed to other disciplines (e.g., anthropology) and/or push well beyond his monographic research.

Recent and Significant Publications:

The Postwar Origins of the Global Environment: How the United Nations Built Spaceship Earth, Columbia University Press, International and Global History Series, 2018.

“Sociology,” in Modernism and the Social Sciences: Anglo-American Exchanges, cc. 1918-1980, M. Bevir, ed., Cambridge University Press, 2017.

“Fabricating unity: The FAO-UNESCO soil map of the world,” *Historical Social Research*, 40(2), 2015, pp. 174-201.

“Beyond the Cephalic Index: Negotiating politics to produce UNESCO’s scientific statements on race,” *Current Anthropology*, 53, supplement 5: *The Biological Anthropology of Living Human Populations: World Histories, National Styles, and International Networks*, April 2012. pp. s173-s184.

Service – Professor Selcer’s service and leadership record is excellent. He served two years on History’s Undergraduate Committee (plus one year as an undergraduate advisor) and played a central role in the recent overhaul of the department’s undergraduate curriculum and minors. He served as the lone junior faculty member on the ad hoc “governance committee,” which reviewed all the department’s voting procedures, and he worked as a faculty mentor for underrepresented MICHHERS students over two summers. In the Science and Technology Studies program (STS), he served as the director of undergraduate studies for one year and on the steering committee for three years. At present, he is the director of STS, an unusual position for an untenured colleague, but one suggesting the very high regard with which he is held within that interdisciplinary program. In PitE, he has been a central voice in reviewing their social science and humanities curricula and took part in four of their recent lecturer reviews.

External Reviews:

Reviewer (A)

“He is a brilliant intellectual, political, and cultural historian whose research is remaking the history of the post-World War II world in exciting and innovative ways. Selcer’s ability to open up new avenues of research that other scholars in a variety of different fields will wish to develop is the hallmark of an imaginative scholar of great promise. . . . Selcer writes exceptionally well, often with considerable humor. His manuscript was a pleasure to read.”

Reviewer (B)

“The core of any historian’s tenure/promotion dossier, of course, is the dissertation-cum-first-book, and on this count alone Selcer demonstrates his significant talents as a researcher, a thinker and a writer – in short, as a historian. . . . [The Postwar Origins of the Global Environment] places Selcer at the forefront of a recent move to examine critically the place of science in late twentieth-century international history.”

Reviewer (C)

“...[The Postwar Origins] is an important and challenging book. Although Prof. Selcer’s specialty is history of science and environment, the book is actually more concerned with politics and the ways in which state and non-state actors use science and technology to leverage their views of international polity. ... The book is also important and successful in demonstrating to historians and social scientists how science is really practiced in the world of international negotiation and development. This is not a trivial matter.”

Reviewer (D)


“‘Beyond the Cephalic Index’ offers the best account I have yet read of the varied UNESCO scientific statements on race, a topic that has been treated several times but without the full attention to the *multiple* statements and Professor Selcer’s thorough command of the contemporary biological and anthropological primary sources. I found his presentation of these statements as battlegrounds for scientific knowledge-production illuminating and plan to incorporate the piece into my teaching; I have already recommended that others do so.”

Reviewer (E)

“...his publications do mark him as a specialist in the history of social sciences, and he is very good at showing how his historical actors speak to larger themes. ... It is an intriguing premise that will undoubtedly make its way to many graduate student reading lists. As scholarship, it not only makes such interpretive claims, but it also provides useful primary source analysis of events that have long been in need of serious attention from non-bureaucrats. I was delighted to see Selcer’s deep attention to some of the most overlooked projects of the postwar era...”

Summary of Recommendation:

Professor Selcer’s innovative and interdisciplinary scholarship has produced an exciting book and two prizes from the Forum for the History of Human Science. He was recognized with a highly competitive post-doctoral fellowship from the National Science Foundation. He is an excellent teacher who has contributed successful courses serving multiple units across LSA with different expectations. He is a generous citizen to both of his units. The Executive Committee of the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts and I recommend that Assistant Professor Perrin Selcer be promoted to the rank of associate professor of history, with tenure, College of Literature, Science, and the Arts, and associate professor of environment, without tenure, College of Literature, Science, and the Arts and School for Environment and Sustainability.



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Elizabeth R. Cole, Interim Dean  
Professor of Women’s Studies, Psychology,  
and Afroamerican and African Studies  
College of Literature, Science, and the Arts



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Jonathan T. Overpeck  
Samuel A. Graham Dean  
School for Environment and Sustainability

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