

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

Joshua M. Akers, assistant professor of geography and urban and regional studies, Department of Social Sciences, College of Arts, Sciences, and Letters, is recommended for promotion to associate professor of geography and urban and regional studies, with tenure, Department of Social Sciences, College of Arts, Sciences, and Letters.

Academic Degrees:

Ph.D.	2013	University of Toronto, Geography, Toronto, ON, Canada
B.A.	2007	University of New Mexico, American Studies, Albuquerque, NM

Professional Record:

2013 – present	Assistant Professor, University of Michigan-Dearborn
2007 – 2008	Research Scientist, University of New Mexico

Summary of Evaluation:

Teaching: Professor Akers is a vital member of the geography and urban and regional studies disciplines, teaching courses in cultural and urban geography, as well as introductory and capstone courses for urban and regional studies majors. Since becoming an assistant professor, Professor Akers has taught 26 classes requiring seven separate preps. Professor Akers is a highly talented teacher. In the qualitative portion of his student evaluations, students praise his willingness to spend time with individual students to help them work through the material and his active, engaged approach to learning. Both peer observations and the quantitative section of evaluations reinforce this view. From fall 2013 through winter 2019, Professor Akers's mean scores for "evaluation of instructor" and "evaluation of course" were 4.6 and 4.4, respectively. For each of the four remaining evaluation questions used for all University of Michigan-Dearborn instructors—instructor knowledge, communicating course requirements, effective teaching, and high standards for student achievement—Professor Akers's mean score was 4.3 or higher. His mean score across all six core questions for all classes was 4.5.

Research: Professor Akers has published 10 journal articles (three editorially reviewed) and one book chapter since becoming an assistant professor. He argues that urban decline has not emerged simply from capital disinvestment. Rather, it has been accelerated by predatory practices of private capital actors who have capitalized on lax and/or facilitative governmental policies and low acquisition and carrying costs of property in declining cities to extract capital from the cities' most vulnerable populations. He forges his argument by combining painstakingly crafted datasets, digital techniques of geographic analysis, examination of public policy variables, and community-based participatory action research. External reviewers view his work as path breaking and highly impactful. He has been invited to speak in numerous professional and community settings, consulted government policymakers, hosted his own international symposia, secured external research funding, and become a lead figure in a group of international scholars investigating urban decline in new, critical ways.

Recent and Significant Publications:

- Akers, J., Beal, V., and Rosseau, M. (forthcoming). Redefining the city and demolishing the rest: The techno-environmental fix in post-crash Cleveland, *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space* (accepted 4/2019).
- Seymour, E. and Akers, J. (forthcoming). Building the eviction economy: Speculation, precarity, and eviction in Detroit, *Urban Affairs Review* (accepted 4/2019).
- Akers, J., Seymour, E., Butler, D., and Rathke, W. (2019). Liquid tenancy: Post-crisis economies of displacement, community organizing and new forms of resistance, *Radical Housing Journal*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 1-19.
- Seymour, E. and Akers, J. (2019). Portfolio solutions, bulk sales of bank-owned properties, and the reemergence of racially exploitative land contracts, *Cities*, vol. 89, pp. 46-56.
- Akers, J. and Seymour, E. (2018). Instrumental exploitation: Predatory property relations at city's end, *Geoforum*, vol. 91, pp. 127-140.
- Akers, J. (2018). The decline of Detroit in three acts, *Derive: Journal of Urban Research*, no. 70, Jan-March, pp. 6-12 [editorial review].
- Akers, J. (2017). A new urban medicine show: Blight remediation as contemporary cure-all, In B. Doucet (Ed.), *Why Detroit Matters: Decline, Renewal, and Hope in a Divided City*, Bristol, UK: Policy Press, pp. 95-116.
- Akers, J. (2017). The Actually Existing Markets of Shrinking Cities, *Metropolitiques*, <http://www.metropolitiques.eu/The-Actually-Existing-Markets-of.html> [editorial review].
- Akers, J. (2017). Contesting Economies of Displacement and Dispossession, *Metropolitiques*, <http://www.metropolitiques.eu/Contesting-Economies-of.html> [editorial review].
- Akers, J. (2015). Emerging Market City, *Environment and Planning A*, vol. 47, no. 9, pp. 1842-58.
- Akers, J. (2013). Making markets: Think tanks, Legislation, and Private Property in Detroit, *Urban Geography*, vol. 34. no. 8, pp. 1070-95.

Service: Professor Akers has served the campus in traditional ways – program leadership, course/program assessment, LEO reviews, etc. Some of his more notable contributions have evolved from his community-based participatory action research. He has used it to provide undergraduate students with experience in research and community service and an invaluable education on the challenges and vitality of Detroit neighborhoods. More importantly, he has helped numerous Detroit communities deal effectively with speculative investors and problem landlords. He has also been a prolific contributor to fora, symposia, conferences, and task forces of academics and practitioners seeking to enhance understanding of urban decline and develop public policies to create long-term solutions to decline.

External Reviewers:

Reviewer A: “I can say without reservations that I have rarely been as impressed with reviewing a file at that level of a junior scholar’s career ... Dr. Akers is one of the emerging leaders in his field.”

Reviewer B: “The papers are all excellent, empirically and theoretically. They are deeply scholarly and nicely complement one another to create a wider thesis ... Pursuing public geographies has time and commitment overheads ... Balancing this work with teaching, writing, and university administration can be tricky, but it is clear that Dr. Akers has made this work. His community service, consultation and participatory action research work in Detroit is particularly admirable ... He’s not just studying Detroit, he’s contributing to trying to improve it for its citizens.”

Reviewer C: “I see this as a strong and especially well-rounded case, with evidence of innovative, distinctive, and high-quality research ... His papers have all been placed in leading journals in the field ... Without exception, these are strong papers, marked by an effective combination of original empirical material and creative theorizing ... Josh has a particular knack for theoretically informing empirical research ... As one of the outputs of this work, the propertypraxis.org database and website, represents not only an innovative research tool but also a community resource. It is an exemplary case of integrated research, teaching, and service...”


Reviewer D: “There is strong evidence in his publications of a research trajectory that has moved well beyond his doctoral research to establish a platform for a distinguished career ahead ... In the United Kingdom ... the Research Excellence Framework evaluates the research produced by academics ... If I were to benchmark these articles ... they would all receive the highest 4* mark for meeting the following criteria: ‘agenda-setting,’ ‘research that is leading or at the forefront of the research,’ ‘major influence on a research theme or field.’”

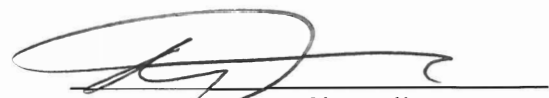
Reviewer E: “... my overall sense is that Dr[.] Akers has a strong portfolio of high-quality publications that have begun to shape how human geographers and planners think about the manufacturing of property markets in post-crisis urban America.”

Reviewer F: “I am impressed by his research productivity, his focus on topical issues in his own backyard, and his commitment to using research to inform his teaching and service commitments ... I think that any major geography or city and regional planning department in the country (including my own) would be delighted to count Akers as one of their own and would promote him to a rank in keeping with his high standing in the field.”

Summary of Recommendation:

Professor Akers is a talented classroom instructor who fosters student growth through challenging, engaging, and enjoyable classes. His community-based research has led scholars internationally to think differently about urban decline. His service greatly benefits our students and campus and has played a key role in helping Detroit communities address decline. We are pleased to recommend, with support of the College of Arts, Sciences, and Letters Executive Committee, Joshua M. Akers for promotion to associate professor of geography and urban studies, with tenure, Department of Social Sciences, College of Arts, Sciences, and Letters.


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


Domenic Grasso, Chancellor
University of Michigan-Dearborn