

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

Robin A. Beck, associate professor of anthropology, with tenure, College of Literature, Science, and the Arts, is recommended for promotion to professor of anthropology, with tenure, College of Literature, Science, and the Arts.

Academic Degrees:

Ph.D.	2004	Northwestern University
M.A.	1997	University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa
B.A.	1991	University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

Professional Record:

2014 – present	Associate Professor, Department of Anthropology, and Associate Curator, Museum of Anthropological Archaeology, University of Michigan
2010 – 2014	Assistant Professor, Department of Anthropology, and Assistant Curator, Museum of Anthropological Archaeology, University of Michigan
2006 – 2009	Assistant Professor, Department of Anthropology, University of Oklahoma

Summary of Evaluation:

Teaching – Professor Beck’s excavations profoundly inform his research and teaching, and vice versa. He admirably combines the mission of the museum (large-scale and long-term excavations) with the mission of the department (outstanding teaching, student development, and job placement). He teaches a range of vital courses, at both the undergraduate and graduate levels, all of which focus on changes in social and political complexity. Students often comment on his strengths as a lecturer (or a “storyteller”) and as a discussion leader. These strengths support his teaching philosophy, which involves helping students to engage enthusiastically with the past as a means of critically addressing seemingly modern problems, such as climate change and inequality. Professor Beck displays a strong interest in pedagogy; for the past three years he has chaired the museum’s Undergraduate Education Committee and has spearheaded efforts to review and update the archaeology undergraduate curriculum. Since arriving at Michigan, he has chaired eleven Ph.D. committees, four to completion, and has served as a member on three additional committees. Of his eleven advisees, seven so far have obtained National Science Foundation doctoral dissertation improvement grants (NSF DDIGs). Professor Beck helps his anthropology graduate students find an appropriate site to excavate and secure external funding; he diligently works with them to complete their dissertation, and then, ultimately, find a job.

Research – Professor Beck has a very strong research and publication record. He has published three books so far, with plans for a fourth, and numerous peer-reviewed articles. Three principal themes unite his work: (1) understanding the formation and dissolution of chiefly societies; (2) showing how Native Americans affected European societies after the latter arrived in the New World; and (3) demonstrating how Native American societies were, in turn, transformed by the French and Spaniards. Professor Beck has won several major awards for his research: the C.B.

Moore Award for “Excellence in Southeastern Archaeology,” given by the Southeastern Archaeological Conference; Michigan’s Henry Russel award; and an award for fieldwork excellence from the Shanghai Archaeology Forum. His work at the Berry site—location of Joara, a Native American village, and the short-lived Spanish Fort San Juan—was funded by the NSF in 2007. Through the creation of a unique non-profit foundation known as the Exploring Joara Foundation, more than \$200,000 has been raised to date. In 2016, with funding from the National Geographic Society, Professor Beck launched a highly ambitious new project, designed to study Native urbanism at the World Heritage Site of Cahokia, Illinois, the largest site in the United States.

Recent and Significant Publications:

*Fort San Juan and the Limits of Empire: Colonialism and Household Practice at the Berry Site*, with R. A. Beck, C. B. Rodning, and D. G. Moore, 2016.

*Chiefdoms, Collapse, and Coalescence in the Early American South*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2013.

“The iron in the posthole: Witchcraft, women’s labor, and Spanish folk ritual at the Berry site,” *American Anthropologist*, 118(3), 2016, pp. 525-40.

“Encountering novelty: Object, assemblage, and mixed material culture,” accepted for publication in *Current Anthropology* with CA\* commentary, accepted 12/11/2018.

Service –Professor Beck’s service to the department, college, profession, and the public, through his various outreach programs, is very strong. He has served as the associate director of the Museum of Anthropological Archaeology since 2017. He was active in seven faculty/curator and staff searches. He served two terms on the department’s Executive Committee and is currently on its Fellowships Committee. He has been the archaeology member on the department’s Responsible Conduct of Research and Scholarship Course for three iterations of the course, and chairs a committee in the archaeology subfield tasked with restructuring the undergraduate curriculum. He served as an elected member of the University Senate assembly and as a member of the Executive Committee of the Interdepartmental Program in Classical Art and Archaeology. He has been similarly active nationally. He is the editor-elect of *Southeastern Archaeology*, the preeminent journal in his field. He has been a member and chair of committees of the Southeastern Archaeological Conference and the Society for American Archaeology. He has been a panel member at the National Endowment for the Humanities and a proposal reviewer for the National Science Foundation and the National Geographic Society. Professor Beck has done substantial public outreach explaining his ongoing excavation at the Berry site, establishing the Catawba Meadows Archaeology Interpretive Center at the site. He runs a field camp for K-12 students at the site, and has discussed his research at local schools and at a retirement community.

External Reviewers:

Reviewer (A)

“...Robin A. Beck is an active and extremely productive scholar involved in significant ongoing research and writing. He has a reputation for getting things done, and getting them done well. I expect his career to be long and increasingly illustrious. He thinks, writes, and analyzes archaeological assemblages at the highest level of scholarship.”

Reviewer (B)

“...his 2016 edited book (*Fort San Juan and the Limits of Empire*) is one of the most important archaeological contributions to the study of Spanish colonialism in eastern North America in years.”

Reviewer (C)

“I have not had the opportunity to see Rob in the classroom, but I am familiar with the work of his graduate students and their devotion to him as their mentor. They are certainly some of the brightest, most interesting, and articulate students out there.”

Reviewer (D)

“In my estimation, Professor Beck is one of the very best scholars working in eastern North America and his research is at the cutting edge of his field, both regionally and in his contributions to global theory.”

Reviewer (E)

“...Dr. Beck has made many important and substantial contributions to the discipline of archaeology. In particular, I rate his ability to link theory and practice to be unusually highly developed, and I can only wish more of us shared that trait...”

Reviewer (F)

“I have no doubt that Dr. Beck ranks among the top 5% of his peer group. Any academic institution would be grateful and proud to have him on their faculty.”

Summary of Recommendation:

Professor Beck is an indefatigable archaeologist focused on large-scale excavations, working to explain the rise and fall of chiefly societies, both before and after Europeans reached the New World. He has already been recognized as a leader in Southeastern U.S. archaeology. The Executive Committee of the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts and I recommend that Associate Professor Robin A. Beck be promoted to the rank of professor of anthropology, with tenure, College of Literature, Science, and the Arts.



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Anne Curzan, Dean  
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