

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

Manan R. Desai, assistant professor of American culture, College of Literature, Science, and the Arts, is recommended for promotion to associate professor of American culture, with tenure, College of Literature, Science, and the Arts.

Academic Degrees:

2011	Ph.D.	University of Michigan
2005	M.A.	University of Michigan
2002	B.S.	University of Michigan

Professional Record:

2014 – present	Assistant Professor, Department of American Culture, University of Michigan
2011 – 2014	Assistant Professor, Department of English, Syracuse University, New York

Summary of Evaluation:

Teaching – Professor Desai is an innovative and dedicated instructor of considerable breadth and accomplishment, who offers an engaged pedagogy in undergraduate and graduate classrooms. Since 2014, he has taught a mix of classes that range from service courses for the American Culture major and the Asian/Pacific Islander American Studies minor (AMCULT 214; AMCULT 275; AMCULT 498); classes that fill the mandate for South Asian American Studies (AMCULT 311); and thematic classes in media (AMCULT 298; AMCULT 601). He is an active member of four doctoral committees, including two outside American Culture (AC), and he is on the preliminary examination committees for two AC graduate students currently in their second year.

Research – Professor Desai pioneers transnational American/South Asian and intersectional African American/South Asian American Studies. His deeply humane forthcoming book, *The United States of India: Anticolonial Literature and Transnational Refraction*, is a model for an American studies approach that grapples openly with and renders comprehensible the flaws and contradictions found in the writings of even the best advocates of social justice. He has revealed the ontological workings of a vivid and consequential conversation about race and empire in India and America during the interwar period. His book is supplemented by articles in top journals that do not duplicate its content, and he has a forthcoming essay that is also new material. A remarkable glimpse of his second book project is already in print.

Recent and Significant Publications:

*The United States of India: Anticolonial Literature and Transnational Refraction*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, forthcoming March 2020.

“‘A congressman from India:’ Dalip Singh Saund in cold war America,” Asian American Literature in Transition, Vol 2., 1965-1995, Cambridge University Press, V. Bascara and J. Park (eds.), forthcoming (accepted by editors August 2019).

“Caste in black and white: Dalit identity and the translation of African American literature,”  
*Comparative Literature*, 66(1), 2015, pp: 94-113.

“Korla Pandit plays America: Exotica, racial performance, and the fantasy of containment in mid-century television,” *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 48(4), 2015, pp: 714-30.

Service – Professor Desai’s service record promises a future of capable and dedicated academic leadership. He has served on all of the major committees in his department, including Undergraduate, Graduate and Graduate Admissions, Salary, and as an elected member of the Executive Committee. He is an active member of the faculty in the program of Asian/Pacific Islander American Studies. He has raised the profile of that program on campus by inviting presentations from engaging speakers from the field. Professor Desai is also a valued resource among student organizations.

#### External Reviewers:

##### Reviewer (A)

“Dr. Desai models truly interdisciplinary scholarship that incorporates the most useful methodologies and insights from literary studies, history, and digital/media studies. *The United States of India: Literature, Form, and Transnational Anticolonialism* stands to influence the growing field of South Asian American Studies in profound ways. ... As a Ph.D. instructor and dissertation advisor, I will certainly be assigning Dr. Desai’s writing to doctoral students researching twentieth-century literary and visual culture in South Asia and the United States. ... Dr. Desai has increased the profile of South Asian American Studies; designed much-needed new courses and built an intellectual community around those courses; and bridged students’ home and school experiences and knowledge bases. I am fully confident that Dr. Desai would be successful in an application for tenure and promotion at my home institution...”

##### Reviewer (B)

“I have used both Manan’s journal article on Korla Pandit and a selection of his TIDES essays in an undergraduate seminar on South Asian American History, Media, and Culture... ...[Desai’s work] is exactly what one hopes for in a colleague’s scholarship: that it builds upon the existing literature, adds original research and new critical perspectives, and in so doing, sparks deeper discussion, raises new questions, and opens doors to future research. ... The importance of Manan’s work at SAADA cannot be underestimated. ...Manan is, in my mind, clearly worthy of promotion to the rank of Associate Professor with Tenure.”

##### Reviewer (C)

“Desai’s publications in notable and top tiered journals as well as his book’s publication in a highly regarded press, Temple University, and within the press’s longstanding and well reputed Asian American series, would earn him tenure at [my institution]. ...Desai’s work with the South Asian American Digital Archives (SAADA) makes him an exemplary candidate as one who is able to bridge excellence in research with public and community scholarship. His teaching statement also reveals that he is an outstanding teacher who has developed new courses at both the undergraduate and graduate level, some of which align with his research, and a broad teaching repertoire. ... He is the type of candidate that a research one university such as University of Michigan ... should promote.”

Reviewer (D)

“...[The United States of India] in particular is of exceptional merit and puts Desai in the ranks of scholars [in his cohort] in American Studies, Postcolonial Studies and Transnational Studies who are shaping the discourses of their fields. The book demonstrates that Professor Desai will continue to make first-rate contributions to scholarship. ... The other peer-reviewed published essays sent for my review are of very high quality, further evidence of Desai’s impressive corpus of work. ‘Caste in Black and White...’ is the best essay yet published on this topic. ... Desai’s essay on Korla Pandit was likewise a minor revelation. The essay is ripe with original historical findings, archival gems, and provocative analysis. The essay provides a hidden chapter—via passing—of Afro-Indian solidarity. The essay also opens up complex and important questions about racialization and the Cold War. He has carved out a unique and important space for research. ... His work is complex, sophisticated and very promising of strong future work.”

Reviewer (E)

“His close reading of Rai and Mukerji’s texts are particularly important, as no one has done this type of close textual analysis of these important writers and their works. Relatedly, Dr. Desai’s focus on the decade between the First World War and the Great Depression fills an important gap in our historical understanding of South Asian American history and anticolonialism. As Dr. Desai asserts, this certainly has been an overlooked period of study. In sum, Dr. Desai’s book provides a much needed textual analysis of some of the seminal texts of early South Asian American history.”

Summary of Recommendation:

Professor Desai is an established leader in his field who will continue to produce outstanding research over the course of a long career. His contribution 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 Manan R. Desai be promoted to the rank of associate professor of American culture, with tenure, College of Literature, Science, and the Arts.



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Anne Curzan, Dean  
Geneva Smitherman Collegiate Professor of  
English Language and Literature, Linguistics  
and Education  
Arthur F. Thurnau Professor  
College of Literature, Science, and the Arts

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