

PROMOTION RECOMMENDATION
The University of Michigan
Penny W. Stamps School of Art and Design

Stephanie M. Tharp, associate professor of art and design, with tenure, Penny W. Stamps School of Art and Design, is recommended for promotion to professor of art and design, with tenure, Penny W. Stamps School of Art and Design.

Academic Degrees:

M.I.D.	2002	Masters of Industrial Design, Rhode Island School of Art & Design, Providence, RI
B.S.	1994	University of Michigan, Mechanical Engineering, College of Engineering, Ann Arbor, MI

Professional Record:

2014 – present	Associate Professor, with tenure, Stamps School of Art and Design
2008 – 2014	Associate Professor, with tenure, School of Design, Industrial Design, University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago, IL
2002-2008	Assistant Professor, School of Art & Design, Industrial Design, University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago, IL

Summary of Evaluation:

Teaching – Professor Tharp has built a substantial teaching track record at University of Michigan as well as at her previous institution, the University of Illinois at Chicago. Her students in written evaluations, letters and course work articulate Professor Tharp’s commitment to serve as a mentor, a role model and a guide during and after the course. While the bulk of her teaching revolves around Integrated Product Development (IPD), a course co-taught with a faculty member in the Ross School of Business and for both art and design and non-art majors, Professor Tharp’s constituency in her other courses is almost exclusively art and design BFA students. Within the context of IPD, Professor Tharp’s challenge is building the skill set of the art and design students to speak and act across disciplines while enabling access for the other students to a perceptual and cognitive world that is primarily visual and frequently technical. This is no small accomplishment, as the translation from a primarily verbal and cerebral mode of processing information to one of physical and visual phenomena is a challenge akin to learning a new language. Professor Tharp has thrived within this context, evidenced in the engaged atmosphere IPD, and among letters from former students, who cite Professor Tharp’s classes as monumental experiences, and in her TIP in 2019 for the course. Many of these students went on to work in fields explicitly connected to the course content.

In each instance, Professor Tharp is noted as an instructor who places strong emphasis on rigor in material and contextual research, who displays a deep connection to the professional fields, and whose supportive and insightful mentorship provided them with guidance and inspiration far beyond the span of a semester. In the Stamps School, Professor Tharp has been an active faculty member among the MDes and BFA students. Within both programs, Professor Tharp is described as encouraging, serious and thoughtful. Students cite her commitment to skill building and values that inspire their own practice. Student comments also refer to the enormous care and preparation Professor Tharp builds into class projects, individuated assignments and technical knowledge. This care is evident in the student work, which reflects a seriousness of purpose.

Creative Work / Research – As an industrial designer who has chosen to work outside of commerce and industry, Professor Tharp’s creative and scholarly practice expands from the margins of conventional industrial design with a focus on creative and intellectual objectives that are invested in utilizing design as an interrogative through objects and scholarship in context with socio-cultural questions, and the deliberate conceptualization of “a four-field framework”—commercial design, responsible design, experimental design, discursive design. Prior to receiving tenure, Professor Tharp became well known for designed objects in a studio-based practice named Materious, co-founded with Bruce M. Tharp in 2005 with attention to both the object itself and connecting beyond utility to address contemporary psychological, sociological, and ideological concerns. Objects from the Materious studio were disseminated through curated design exhibitions including the International Contemporary Furniture Fair (NYC), Milan Furniture Fair, and Design Within Reach as well as in print and online media such as core77.com, *Wallpaper* magazine, mocoloco, *Good Magazine*, and slate.com.

Professor Tharp’s post-tenure research and the four-field framework led to the production of her major collaborative book project, Discursive Design: Critical, Speculative, and Provocative Things (Tharp, B.M. & Tharp, S.M., MIT Press, 2019). This 600+ page book reframes what has been an undertheorized realm of how industrial designers think about the work that they do. External reviewers cite the book as a seminal work in the fields of design and design education with the potential for long-term impact.

Significant Recent Works and Activities

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| 2019 | Tharp, B.M. & Tharp, S.M. <u>Discursive Design: Critical, Speculative & Provocative Things</u> . MIT Press |
| 2019 | Tharp, Stephanie & Svaan, Eric. Provost’s Teaching Innovation Prize, University of Michigan. Awarded for <i>Design Charrette: Hacking Health Through Community Engagement, Innovation and Entrepreneurship</i> . |
| 2019 | Co-Workshop Facilitator (with Bruce M. Tharp & Deepa Butoliya). “Making Futures: Dissonance & Discrimination” presented at <i>PRIMER19: Futures for All</i> , New York NY (June 2019) |
| 2018 | Tharp, Stephanie (with Bruce M Tharp, Omar Sosa-Tzec). Conversation Facilitator, “Discursive Design and the Question of Impact: Perspective, Pedagogy, Practice,” AIGA Decipher Conference Ann Arbor MI (September 2018) |
| 2015-present | Tharp, Stephanie. Discursive Design Channel Editor, core77.com. [core77.com is an international, web-based community of designers and design enthusiasts seeking news, trends and opportunities.] |
| 2015 | Kotche, M. & Tharp. S. “Interdisciplinary Medical Product Development Senior Capstone Design.” Paper presented at 2015 ASEE Annual Conference & Exposition, Seattle, Washington. 10.18260/p.24350 |
| 2014 | Tharp, Stephanie (with Miiri Kotche). “Interdisciplinary Medical Product Design.” Paper presented at 2014 AIGA National Design Conference, Portland, OR |
| 2014 | Tharp, Bruce M. & Stephanie M. Tharp. “Tools for Thinking: Discursive Design.” <i>Innovation</i> . Spring 2014. Vol. 33 No. 1, pp. 44–49 |

Service – As a highly visible, well-respected and generous member of the University of Michigan faculty as well as the creative community of Michigan, Professor Tharp is a vital model for an active designer-educator-citizen. Her work as formal service and in taking on a number of administrative roles in the school and within the university is complimented by her service work in the wider field.

At the school level, she has held instructional leadership positions such as foundation director and undergraduate program co-director; chaired faculty searches and held membership on faculty committees; and was the school's liaison to ArtsEngine. At the university level, Professor Tharp who was an athlete during her undergraduate days at Michigan, has built bridges with the Athletics Department through service on the Athletic Academic Performance Committee and as an appointed member of the Advisory Board on Intercollegiate Athletics. This work is complimented by her service to the wider field, including service as juror for national and international review panels.

External Reviewers:

Reviewer A: "The book is a great contribution to the field of design and, more particularly, design education. In my view, one aspect worth mentioning is that the constructive and design-driven criticism of the book is also self aware of its own limitations, for example, when writing that 'Admittedly, our argumentation is located largely within and American context and our examples are heavily British and European, which reflects another challenge of the field' (2019: 22). This type of statement already opens up for further opportunities for research and the development of education from, for example, a decolonial approach. I have no doubt that Stephanie Tharp's passion for the field will lead to further continue to contribute to the debates on the psychological, social and environmental aspects that overlap in the products that enact our material culture through design."

Reviewer B: "Tharp has developed the idea of 'discursive design' into a critical practice underpinned by theoretical rigor. This is a new way of thinking about design and about designed objects that sets her apart from other designers, educators, and scholars. While most design practice and research revolve around objects designed in mass production paradigms, Professor Tharp's creative/scholarly activity focuses on the idea of discursive design. This intriguing and intellectual form of thinking + making is grounded in cultural, social, and ethical concerns around how design is currently practiced and what can be done to push its boundaries to make it more reflective, relevant, and responsible today. This notion of discursive design has given Professor Tharp an excellent focal point from and around which all her teaching, research and service activities have emerged."

Reviewer C: "I rate Stephanie as a leader in the design field with the highest level of expertise and intellect. She is also an outstanding figure on a global level through relationships with faculty and institutions in Europe and Hong Kong through IDSA. Stephanie's commitment and vast contributions to industrial design fosters legitimacy and respect, excitement and creativity at its very best. I cannot recall a packet constructed to this level of excellence. Without reservation, I highly recommend Stephanie Tharp to full professor."

Reviewer D: "I admire the uncompromising practice-led focus of Professor Tharp's design work, both in terms of teaching practice and her own design portfolio because it seeks to understand design as a thinking process, one beyond the commercial sphere that can problematize and 'show and tell.' Also, beyond utility, what design can mean and do...I think Tharp is one of the key voices in discursive and critical design, who is very well regarded both in the USA and elsewhere."

Reviewer E: "Tharp's creative work have clearly had an impact. They have been curated into regional, national, and international exhibitions have received several commissions and design awards. As a form of scholarly output, these achievements are roughly equivalent to publishing research in peer-reviewed journals and edited volumes. Tharp's record in this regard is quite respectable, and her inclusion in International Contemporary Furniture Fair (NYC), Milan Furniture Fair, and Design Within Reach is particularly noteworthy. Tharp's works have also been featured in

The New York Times, Wallpaper, Good Magazine and on widely read design blogs including core77.com and mocoloco. Attracting such attention from mass media is as commendable as it is unusual for an academic designer.”

Reviewer F: “Professor Tharp's new book, *Discursive Design: Critical, Speculative & Provocative Things*, is nothing short of ground-breaking. In a field that seldom has the time or the ability for self-reflection and analysis Professor Tharp's enormously timely, deeply researched and clearly envisioned book maps out an important but so far unexamined area of design practice. Her rigorous analytical framework fills a big knowledge gap and makes an invaluable contribution to the field, not just in the US but internationally as well. To say that this long-overdue analysis will have a major impact on the teaching and practice of design is an understatement.”

Reviewer G: “Assoc. Prof. Tharp has been able to take her early experiences in industry, leverage them expertly, develop ground breaking conceptual products that question and push the boundaries of the industry, and is now on a path of holistic and focused research. Her recent publication, *Discursive Design: Critical, Speculative, and Provocative Things*, is a treatise that brings a noble and much needed discourse to the broader world of industrial design. Frankly, and honestly, it is one of the most intriguing, deep, and thought-provoking publications our industry has seen in a very long time. She and her team are truly on a path to creating a much needed academic, research based, but design driven focus to the broader discussions in our industry. That she has done this while teaching full-time, actively involved in the service to the institution and department, and continuing to engage in exterior work is impressive.”

Reviewer H: “I have reviewed many industrial design professors for tenure and promotion over the last ten years. Stephanie stands out as the strongest overall candidate because she spans both the creative side and the scholarly side of academia. Some professors have excelled at one or the other of these two areas. However, she has successfully spanned both creating work that is award winning, thought-provoking, and executed beautifully.”

Reviewer I: “Tharp has not only achieved recognition within the field of industrial design, her teaching IPD, and work on the cultural impact of design demonstrates the ability to use her engineering degree and professional experience to work across colleges... Stephanie Tharp is a next generation design educator who is prepared to explore and expand the boundaries of design as a field within a university.”

Summary of Recommendation:

Professor Tharp is an exceptional teacher, artist, and university citizen, one who is deeply engaged with the mission and service of the university. I strongly recommend Stephanie M. Tharp for promotion to professor of art and design, with tenure, Penny W. Stamps School of Art and Design.



Gunalan Nadarajan
Dean and Professor
Penny W. Stamps School of Art and Design

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