

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

Henry Cowles, assistant professor of history, College of Literature, Science, and the Arts, is recommended for promotion to associate professor of history, with tenure, College of Literature, Science, and the Arts.

Academic Degrees:

Ph.D.	2015	Princeton University
M.A.	2010	Princeton University
A.B.	2008	Harvard College

Professional Record:

2017 – present	Assistant Professor, History Department, University of Michigan
2014 – 2017	Assistant Professor, Section of the History of Medicine, Yale University

Summary of Evaluation:

Teaching: Since coming to UM three years ago (with three previous years of teaching and service as an assistant professor at Yale), Professor Cowles has quickly established himself as an innovative and successful classroom teacher. He has helped to anchor the modern U.S. History offerings in the Science, Technology, and Society (STS) Program. His popular lecture courses, “Minds and Brains” (cross-listed with Psychology) and “American Addictions,” have attracted unusually large numbers of science and pre-med students and generated E&E scores at the top of the normative ranges in LSA. Student comments routinely note Professor Cowles’ impressive command of his multi-disciplinary material, as well as his ability to draw powerful connections to national headlines and the students’ own backgrounds (many of which include mental health challenges and addiction histories). Professor Cowles has mentored multiple undergraduate honors theses and has led the “job skills” colloquium for Ph.D. students in the context of shrinking national opportunities.

Research: Professor Cowles is a wide-ranging modern historian whose expertise traverses three major subfields: Anglo-American intellectual history from roughly 1750-1950; the modern history of Western science, medicine, and psychology; and the interdisciplinary formation known as STS (or Science, Technology, and Society studies). Professor Cowles has been highly productive in the five years since his 2015 Ph.D. from Princeton. His major scholarly contribution is his recently published book, The Scientific Method: An Evolution of Thinking from Darwin to Dewey (Harvard University Press, 2020), which has already received a glowing single-book review in the *New York Review of Books* (July 2, 2020). In addition, Professor Cowles has published a number of major articles in top journals (two of which have received national prizes), as well as invited essays, commentaries, and pieces for broader audiences (including an Op-Ed in the *Washington Post* last April). Much of Professor Cowles’ work explores the histories of scientific processes and methodologies in part in order to intervene in current social problems, in particular the erosion of expert authority in an age of “alternative facts.”

Recent and Significant Publications:

The Scientific Method: An Evolution of Thinking from Darwin to Dewey. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2020.

“On the Origin of Theories: Charles Darwin’s Vocabulary of Method.” *American Historical Review* 122(4) (December 2017): 1079-1104.

“The Age of Methods: William Whewell, Charles Peirce, and Scientific Kinds.” *Isis* 107(4) (December 2016): 722-737.

“Hypothesis Bound: Trial and Error in the Nineteenth Century.” *Isis* 106(3) (September 2015): 635-645.

Service: Professor Cowles has already built a strong service record. He has been a member of the graduate committee; served as the director of graduate studies for STS (twice); led the professional development efforts for history graduate students; and performed a major service role in the joint national search run two years ago with women’s studies in the field of gender and health. This year, Professor Cowles added a new leadership role, serving as history’s associate coordinator for public engagement and career diversity.

External Reviewers:

Reviewer (A): “Cowles’ book pulls off a remarkable historical feat. It takes an important but misguided question and transforms it into an original account of something we take for granted...It’s the kind of question anybody who teaches the history of science should be able to answer for their students. Yet it had never been asked before.”

Reviewer (B): “I think that Henry is a brilliant...scholar who is already showing signs of becoming an impressive future leader in the profession.”

Reviewer (C): “I would not hesitate to award the accolade of ‘outstanding’ to Dr. Cowles’ new book. The topic...is among the oldest in the history and philosophy of science, and the thinkers Cowles has chosen for his dramatis personae...are all subjects of mountain ranges of secondary literatures. Yet by framing the question as one of reflexivity...Cowles had succeeded in giving this hoary topic a fresh and fascinating new look.”

Reviewer (D): “Cowles has published four peer-reviewed articles in top journals. One...ranks as a mini-masterpiece, and was recognized as such with two essay prizes...Cowles presents Newton’s interventions into the animal cruelty debate, beautifully excavating the origins of the dichotomy between sentimental animal lovers calling for the protection of individual creatures, versus hard-nosed environmentalists tackling the ‘extermination’ of whole species.”

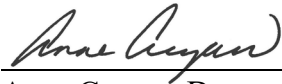
Reviewer (E): “His book is an important intervention in the literatures of (most generally) the history of science, as well as (more specifically) the history of psychology, the history of biology, and British and America intellectual history. I think this is a research program of very great promise, with likely impact across a range of fields. No junior scholar in my field has a

more ambitious research agenda—nor have they already delivered on their promise to the same extent.”

Reviewer (F): “This is the file of a mature scholar, one whose readiness and suitability for promotion is beyond doubt. This is one of the strongest such files I have read in more than thirty years in the profession. I am deeply impressed both by the substance of his work and how much he has achieved since completing his doctorate in 2015.”

Summary of Recommendation:

Professor Cowles’ innovative scholarship has thus far produced an acclaimed first book, an unusually large number of articles (many in the highest profile journals), and two national prizes. His conceptually sophisticated and multi-disciplinary courses have generated high enrollments and student evaluation numbers, and he is an exceptionally generous citizen. The Executive Committee of the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts and I recommend that Assistant Professor Henry Cowles be promoted to the rank of associate professor of history, with tenure, College of Literature, Science, and the Arts.



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