

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

Devi E. Mays, assistant professor of Judaic studies, and assistant professor of history, College of Literature, Science, and the Arts, is recommended for promotion to associate professor of Judaic studies, with tenure, and associate professor of history, without tenure, College of Literature, Science, and the Arts.

Academic Degrees:

Ph.D.	2013	Indiana University
M.A.	2009	Indiana University
B.A.	2006	University of British Columbia

Professional Record:

2014 – present	Assistant Professor, Frankel Center for Judaic Studies, University of Michigan
2017 – present	Assistant Professor, Department of History, University of Michigan

Summary of Evaluation:

Teaching: Professor Mays is a serious and committed teacher. She has taught six courses for Judaic Studies and Mediterranean Studies. The “Sources of Jewish History” class she developed has emerged as a gateway into the Judaic Studies major. The “Mediterranean” course, which she co-teaches with colleagues in History of Art, Romance Languages and Literatures, and Classical Studies, has helped shape the Mediterranean studies cluster. She has served on two dissertation committees, worked with a UROP student, and offered Ladino language instruction to graduate students. She has played a key role in reshaping the curriculum of Judaic Studies and contributed to rendering the field more accessible to diverse student audiences.

Research: Professor Mays is emerging as a leading scholar of the modern history and culture of Sephardi Jews. She published her first book, Forging Ties, Forging Passports: Migration and the Modern Sephardi Diaspora, in Stanford’s prestigious Jewish History and Culture series, and has published two peer-reviewed articles and two chapters in peer-reviewed edited volumes, as well as eight short translations from Ladino. One of those articles, the subject of her second book project on Sephardi Jews and the global opiate trade, was published in the leading Jewish studies journal, *Jewish Social Studies*. This work points to her continued productivity and ongoing contributions to Jewish Studies and Sephardi studies. Her work on the ways that Sephardi Jews draw upon patronage, familial, and business networks to navigate legal restrictions makes an important contribution not only to Jewish studies and Sephardi studies, but also to migration history and notions of citizenship.

Recent and Significant Publications:

Forging Ties, Forging Passports: Migration and the Modern Sephardi Diaspora. Stanford Studies in Jewish History and Culture, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020.

“Becoming Illegal: Sephardi Jews in the Opiates Trade.” *Jewish Social Studies* 25.3 (Spring/Summer 2020): 1-34.

“‘I Killed Her Because I Loved Her Too Much’: Gender and Violence in the 20th-Century Sephardi Diaspora.” *Mashriq & Mahjar: Journal of Middle Eastern Migration Studies* 3 (2014): 4-28, Special Issue on Gender and Migration.

“A Guide to the Interwar Mediterranean: *Le Guide Sam* and the Shaping of a Sephardi Diaspora.” In *Jews and the Mediterranean*, edited by Matthias Lehmann and Jessica Marglin, 170-189. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2020.

Service: Professor Mays’ service to the unit and the university has been commensurate with expectations of assistant professors. She has served within Judaic Studies as a member of the curriculum committee, a member of the executive committee, and a member of a search committee. Outside of Judaic Studies, she has served as a member of the Mediterranean Studies cluster. She has also served the profession as a member of a book prize committee.

External Reviewers:

Reviewer (A): “Professor Mays’ scholarship ... reflects an abiding interest in transnationalism from a non-statist perspective and consistently draws on archival and rare printed material in multiple languages, including those not commonly mastered by Jewish historians. ... Her sources, approach, and conclusions are consistently fresh and original. ... Professor Mays would eminently qualify for tenure and promotion at my institution. Her scholarship is an asset to the field of Jewish Studies, to transnational history, and to the University of Michigan. Her achievements and works in progress also bode well for a future of continued transformative scholarship.”

Reviewer (B): “If I were to find any fault with the book, it would be that Mays does not toot her own horn often enough: for non-specialists, it may be hard to grasp just how many novel contributions the book makes at almost every turn. These sometimes appear in the most telegraphic of forms—such as in a single, insightful sentence that makes the reader stop to pause—but if I had to summarize their collective effect it would be to say that Mays has a knack for acknowledging the complexity of the history she studies, while also teasing out its particular threads.”

Reviewer (C): “Professor Mays’ scholarship strikes me as outstanding, both in quantity and quality, when compared with her peers working in the field of modern Sephardic studies. ... Her monograph, forthcoming from Stanford University Press in one of the most prestigious series in Jewish Studies, as well her published peer-reviewed articles and book chapters, are the work of a sophisticated historian. Dr. Mays is already emerging as one of the most important and interesting voices in Sephardic studies, pushing the field in new and hitherto unexplored directions.”

Reviewer (D): “Since my first encounter with Dr. Mays’s [sic] work, I have been impressed by her range, her capacity to span fields, and her acute nose for archival research. Her work on Jewish migration to the Americas from the modern Ottoman Empire is pathbreaking [sic]; Dr. Mays has uncovered the traces of communities and worlds of Sephardic Jews that were largely forgotten. Her success is due in part to her aptitude for sniffing out promising archival leads, and her willingness to follow them. It is also thanks to her impressive linguistic abilities: not only does she work in Ladino, the main language used by Ottoman Sephardim themselves, but also in Spanish, Turkish, Ottoman, Hebrew, and French. Her technical skills and her creativity allow Dr. Mays to dig down in topics that few scholars have explored before, and thus to expand the horizons of Sephardic history.”

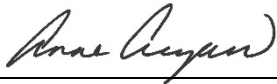
Reviewer (E): “It strikes me that Dr. Mays should be counted unquestionably among the very top up-and-coming scholars not only of Ottoman (Jewish) history, Mexican (Jewish) history, and

Sephardic Studies, but of Jewish studies more broadly (and not just ‘history’). Her historical work is impressive especially given the dexterity with which Dr. Mays can maneuver through different historiographies, types of source materials, and multiple languages, as well as the ways in which she naturally positions her work in a transnational context. But her contributions do not end there: to her historical work, great emphasis should be placed on her unprecedented literary translations.”

Reviewer (F): “The overall quality of Dr. Mays’ scholarship is very high. She writes well and is a natural storyteller, rendering archival and little-known literary works accessible to those who possess little or no familiarity with her subjects. The fact that she has such a firm command of Ladino as well as an ability to work in an array of other languages is also quite impressive; there are simply very few historians who are able to handle the breadth of sources and languages with the ease that she displays. Mays’ work places her at the forefront of a new generation of scholars who are reimagining the nature and boundaries of modern Sephardic history.”

Summary of Recommendation:

Professor Mays’ scholarship on the migration of Sephardi Jews shows the importance of patronage, familial, and business networks in navigating legal restrictions during the modern era when passport and visa regimes emerged. She has published in significant venues and shows evidence of ongoing strong scholarship and scholarly potential. Her teaching has been interdisciplinary, inclusive, and successful. Her service to Judaic Studies and the wider profession has been commensurate with her assistant professor rank. The Executive Committee of the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts and I recommend that Assistant Professor Devi E. Mays be promoted to the rank of associate professor of Judaic studies, with tenure, and associate professor of history, without tenure, College of Literature, Science, and the Arts.



Anne Curzan, Dean
Geneva Smitherman Collegiate Professor of
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