

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

Bruce 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:

Ph.D.	2006	Sociocultural Anthropology, The University of Chicago, Chicago, IL
M.A.	2000	Sociocultural Anthropology, The University of Chicago, Chicago, IL
M.I.D.	1996	Industrial Design, Pratt Institute, Brooklyn, NY
B.S.	1989	Mechanical Engineering, Bucknell University, Lewisburg, PA

Professional Record:

2014 – present	Associate Professor of Art and Design, with tenure, Stamps School of Art and Design, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor
2010 – 2014	Associate Professor, with tenure, School of Design, Industrial Design, University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago, IL
2005 – 2010	Associate Professor (awarded tenure in 2010), Designed Objects, Department of Architecture, Interior Architecture + Design Objects, School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL

Summary of Evaluation:

Teaching – Professor Tharp is a thorough and resourceful instructor who draws from a range of educational and professional experiences, including mechanical engineering, industrial design, and sociocultural anthropology, to expose students to the processes and practice of design and design-thinking. He introduces questions from social situations, business models, and “real world” demands, alongside ethical considerations, ensuring that students understand the complexity of design and its role as “other-focused.” Professor Tharp is an effective instructor and mentor at all levels, from undergraduate to graduate studies, and has served in leadership positions at critical points in the curriculum. Since joining the Stamps faculty, he has taught 18 different graduate and undergraduate courses, ranging from interdisciplinary courses that address both art and design to design-centric courses. Additionally, he created a three-credit seminar for graduate engineering students in the Center for Entrepreneurship, and, over the course of four semesters, advised interdisciplinary teams of graduate and undergraduate students within the Multidisciplinary Design Program.

Professor Tharp is praised by his students as being an outstanding educator, theoretician, practitioner, and a “professional of the type many of us seek to emulate.” Teaching evaluations and feedback from former students confirm the positive impact he has had on students’ academic and professional development. Students cite his encyclopedic knowledge of the emerging field of discursive design; consistently give high marks for respectful treatment, teaching excellence, and preparation; and describe how his diverse background (design, engineering, anthropology)

enables him to introduce varied strategies and perspectives for addressing practical, philosophical, and human aspects of design.

Creative Work / Research – Professor Tharp uses his interdisciplinary background to address his stated goal of helping “to bridge the divide between the social science standards for valid, reliable, and generalizable knowledge and the more tactical, instrumental, and expeditious concerns of design practice.” His ability to span these disciplines makes him an especially versatile designer, an incisive critical theorist, and a valuable force in furthering the interdisciplinary goals of the Stamps School. His work in discursive design challenges the purely commercial role of designers in industry and attempts to expand and contextualize designers’ methods, questions, and applications. He developed the Four Field model of design (commercial, responsible, experimental, discursive), which helped to validate the field of discursive design. His most influential contribution to the discipline is the publication of his 600-page Discursive Design: Critical, Speculative, and Alternative Things (MIT Press, 2019), co-authored with collaborator Professor Stephanie Tharp. This book exemplifies his expertise across the associated topics of material culture, design fiction, critical and speculative design, expounding a new approach through both theory and practice.

Professor Tharp has disseminated his work in peer-reviewed journals and conferences as well as an impressive array of other publications, presentations, interviews, patents, awards, invited lectures, workshops, and exhibitions. Through his writings in influential journals such as *Core 77* and the IDSA’s *Innovation*, his numerous guest lectures, workshops, and exhibitions, and his participation in national and international conferences, Professor Tharp has achieved a respected standing among his academic and professional peers. In the field of design, Professor Tharp’s combined positioning as a practicing product designer and a widely known theorist is unusual and especially significant for his stature in the field of design. He models a future for design research in which practice, cultural theory, and scientific data mutually inform each other. Through the design studio *Materious*, which Professor Tharp co-founded with Professor Stephanie Tharp, conceptually provocative projects have introduced cultural critique to material culture and commercial venues, and have found an expansive audience with clients, such as *Ligne Roset* and *Crate & Barrel*.

Significant Recent Works and Activities

- | | |
|-------------|--|
| 2020 – 2021 | Fellow, Public Engagement in the Humanities, Program in Public Scholarship, University of Michigan. Andrew W. Mellon Summer Workshop. |
| 2019 | Tharp, B.M. & Tharp, S.M. <u>Discursive Design: Critical, Speculative & Alternative Things</u> . The MIT Press |
| 2019 | Invited Speaker, “Discursive Design: In Service of Industry and Institutions.” Hongik University Lecture Series, Hongik University, Seoul, Korea |
| 2019 | Speaker and 2-day Workshop Lead, <u>Discursive Design: Critical, Speculative, and Alternative Things</u> . California College of the Arts. |
| 2019 | Workshop, <i>Discursive Design: Dissonance and Dissemination</i> . FutureLab, Shanghai, China. |
| 2019 | Mitchell Lecture Series Speaker, School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL |

2018 Invited Conference Speaker, “Dissonance: Leveraging the Strangely Familiar.” PRIMER 18 Speculative Futures Conference, San Francisco, CA
2015 – 2019 Core77, Discursive Design Channel Editor

Service – Professor Tharp has amassed a robust record of academic, professional, and community service. He has actively served on many faculty committees throughout his academic career and has held a number of administrative roles, including most recently coordinator roles with the MDes Program and the undergraduate two-semester Integrative Project capstone course. He regularly serves as a member of university committees such as the MPrOVE Steering Committee; the Center for Socially Engaged Design (UM, College of Engineering); the Stamps Graduate Program Committee; and the Leadership + Design Studio (a collaboration between Stamps and Ross School of Business); and by organizing several Design Summits/Salons that have brought practitioners and theorists to Detroit for workshops and conversation. Nationally, Professor Tharp serves as panel moderator, juror, planner, writer, and design expert providing pro-bono support for product design advice and product licensing. He contributes regularly to the design profession as a highly sought-after peer and portfolio reviewer. He has been the faculty advisor for the student chapter of the Industrial Designers Society of America (IDSA) many of the years he has been teaching.

External Reviewers:

Reviewer A: “That his thinking moves with agility and insight across scientific research, cultural theory, design practice, and pedagogy is desirable—he is one model of what, I believe, future design researchers will be.”

Reviewer B: “His mixed disciplinary expertise from combined degrees in mechanical engineering, fine arts, industrial design, and anthropology exemplify the type of hybrid people that are leading the field of design in both research and practice, while also contributing to successful collaborations based on shared language and empathy across diverse professional boundaries.”

Reviewer C: “Through his aggressive advocacy of ‘discursive design,’ Professor Tharp joins a growing movement within the profession—‘critical design,’ ‘speculative design,’ ‘adversarial design,’ ‘design fiction,’ ‘design thinking’—that is attempting to broaden and contextualize the questions that designers ask and the ways in which they approach their work. That this movement is the subject of fierce debate (both among its advocates and from skeptics and critics) is indication of the timeliness of his work.”

Reviewer D: “Bruce’s scholarly practice has made a significant contribution towards understanding modes of design practice that function outside of a commercial design paradigm – practices used to address a range of complex socio-technical concerns. His design practice and published work informs design research and teaching practice internationally through pioneering critical and methodological approaches to design.”

Reviewer E: “[Discursive Design] is a significant contribution that expounds a new approach to design that the book articulates through both theory and example. I believe it will become a key

textbook for those studying, teaching or practicing in the expanded field of design today and in the future.”

Reviewer F: “[Discursive Design] represents the culmination of many years of design exploration by the authors and critical writing on the topic. They successfully have compiled and categorized many forms of discursive design. I believe this book will become the definitive book on discursive design for the design community.”

Summary of Recommendation:

Professor Tharp is an internationally recognized researcher, an outstanding educator, and a generous and committed citizen of the university. I strongly recommend Bruce 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

May 2021