

PROMOTION RECOMMENDATION
The University of Michigan
School of Music, Theatre & Dance

Christina Traister, associate professor of theatre and drama, without tenure, Department of Theatre and Drama, School of Music, Theatre & Dance, is recommended for the granting of tenure to be held with her title of associate professor of theatre and drama, Department of Theatre and Drama, School of Music, Theatre & Dance.

Academic Degrees:

M.F.A. 2002 Alabama Shakespeare Festival/University of Alabama
B.F.A 1994 University of Michigan

Professional Record:

2020 – 2021 Interim Head of Performance, Department of Theatre and Drama
2018 – present Associate Professor of Theatre and Drama (Acting and Stage Combat), without tenure, University of Michigan, School of Music, Theatre & Dance
2016 – 2018 Associate Professor of Acting and Movement, with tenure, Michigan State University
2012 – 2017 Graduate Acting Program Director, Michigan State University
2010 – 2016 Assistant Professor of Acting and Movement, Michigan State University
2007 – 2010 Visiting Assistant Professor of Acting and Voice, Michigan State University
2011 & 2018 Guest Lecturer, University of Michigan
2010 Guest Lecturer, Hillsdale College
2005 Guest Lecturer, Alabama Shakespeare Festival/University of Alabama
2004 – 2005 Guest Lecturer, University of California – Santa Cruz
2003 Guest Lecturer, University of San Diego

Summary of Evaluation:

Teaching: Professor Traister came to SMTD as an experienced and accomplished teacher with a track record of bringing contemporary professional standards to her classroom training to help launch the next generation of actors. Her pedagogy serves as a bridge between the academy and the commercial theatre, and her interpersonal skills and sensitivity to individual needs have quickly made her among the most sought-after teachers in our Department of Theatre and Drama. Professor Traister's track record in preparing students for success in stage combat proficiency exams is exceeded by none. One student reviewer noted the power of her contact with the professional world, writing "Professor Traister models for other faculty an exceptional balance of outside professional work, internal departmental advocacy, and world-class in-classroom instruction." Since coming to SMTD, she has taught courses in acting and stage combat.

Professor Traister has also become an important national voice in the field of intimacy direction, which like stage combat focuses on the illusion of highly emotional and charged stage action in ways that are safe both physically and emotionally for the professionals involved. Since the Harvey Weinstein scandals rallied actors internationally to address sexual harassment in the profession, intimacy direction has become an increasingly vital field. Professor Traister has

received specialized training in this arena and has brought not only current practice to our campus productions but has engaged the entire department in conversations and workshops that extend this work to the realm of pedagogy and research for both students and faculty.

In just two years, Professor Traister has risen to the ranks of the most respected and sought-after instructors and mentors in the Department of Theatre and Drama. She has proven herself a gracious collaborator with faculty colleagues, for example, by visiting voice classes to offer master classes on her work as an audiobook narrator. Her broad knowledge of the field and professional experience as a combat director, actor, and voice performer enables her to be an especially effective model and mentor for our students. Her performance in the classroom and in our productions has proven her reputation as a world-class artist and pedagogue to be well deserved.

Professional Activities: Professor Traister is widely regarded as one of the nation's top professionals in stage combat. She served for four years as the head coordinator of the National Stage Combat Workshop for the Society of American Fight Directors (SAFD) and was elected to serve as president of the society in 2020. She is a pioneer in this heavily male-dominated field as one of four who identify as female ever qualified as fight director and only the second to achieve the rank of fight master. She is the first woman to be elected president of the field's top professional organization.

Professor Traister makes important artistic contributions to theatrical productions as a fight director, and, on stage, as a fight captain and actor combatant. Since 2010, she has served as the fight director for 14 professional productions for the Utah Shakespeare Festival, Purple Rose Theatre, Cleveland Playhouse, Santa Cruz Shakespeare, the American Shakespeare Collective, and for 27 productions at SMTD and Michigan State. Her record of achievement as a pedagogue in the field is extraordinary. Actors who perform stage combat—in the plays of Shakespeare, for example—must pass SAFD Skills Proficiency Tests to work professionally in the American theatre. Professor Traister's students, including those she has trained to date at Michigan, have a 100% pass rate in all eight fight disciplines (unarmed combat, rapier and dagger, single sword, broadsword, smallsword, quarterstaff, sword and shield, and knife). Since 2010, she has presented eight masterclasses and presented workshops at international venues, including The Banff Center for the Arts (Canada), The British Academy of State and Screen Combat, the Irish Dramatic Combat Academy, and the British National Stage Combat Workshop, led the aforementioned SAFD National Stage Combat Workshops and presented 13 other times at national-level workshops, as well.

The bulk of Professor Traister's work as an actor happened earlier in her career, and included performances with the Alabama Shakespeare Festival, San Francisco Shakespeare Festival, and a variety of local and regional theatres in the Bay Area and Michigan. Since 2010, she has had roles in three Shakespeare productions, two contemporary plays, and one independent film. She has an extensive and award-winning resume as an audiobook narrator and has recorded 9–25 books per year since 2010. Professor Traister brings more than three decades of professional acting and directing credits to her work, and her creative activity shows a trajectory of increasing national and international prominence.

Service: Professor Traister has performed generously in a range of service roles at SMTD, including for the Global Engagement Committee, EXCEL student funding evaluation committee, Ad Hoc Sexual Misconduct Task Force, Costume Best Practices Committee, and the Faculty and Staff Allies Network. She has been at the center of improving protocols for intimacy direction and coordinated a workshop for all students and faculty on the topic. Nationally her service to the Society of American Fight Directors, especially as president of the organization, puts her at the forefront of the profession.

External Reviewers:

Reviewer A: “In comparison to others in her field, she is at the top of her game...I acknowledge that it can be hard to recognize excellence in the field of stage combat...I want to express to you, however, that you are in possession of the best of the best, having Professor Traister in your faculty.”

Reviewer B: “The amount and quality of Christina’s professional work is multi-faceted, and to say the least, quite extraordinary. I don’t think I know of any other individual who continues to stay as active as an Actor, Voice Talent, and as a Fight Director while maintaining and succeeding as a university professor.”

Reviewer C: “I would rank her in the top tier of her peers professionally.”

Reviewer D: “Professor Traister has the rare gift of being not only an extraordinary educator but also she is a professional artist with the highest degree of accomplishments as an actor, fight director, and director.”

Reviewer E: “Ms. Traister is a rising star...she is a well established, respected actor, director, master teacher, fight director and fight master.”

Reviewer F: “Stage Combat appears to be her most outstanding professional accomplishment. Ms. Traister created her own Stage Combat Regional Conference and has taught stage combat workshops regionally, nationally, and internationally.”

Reviewer G: “She has shown a consistent progression of growth and experience in most notably the fight world, but also in her work as a performer both onstage and in audiobook narration, and in her work with the American Shakespeare Theatre Collective. She has not only created a strong presence for herself in these areas of theatrical work and specialties, she has also connected this to her work in the classroom through her instruction and in creating opportunities for her students.”

Reviewer H: “While many academics specialize in a single discipline or methodology, Professor Traister seems quite at home in several areas of expertise. Perhaps more impressively, her materials illuminate her ability to work across these separate disciplines, forging an integrated performer training that addresses the mind, body, and voice of her students.”

Reviewer I: “I consider Ms. Traister to be an innovative practitioner who is constantly seeking to refine and improve her work; in doing so she has become a highly respected artist and one that has much to give back to the community.”

Reviewer J: “Christina has managed to establish herself nationally in three distinct disciplines, stage combat, voice and acting. In stage combat, she has reached the highest rank possible within the most highly recognized and oldest stage combat institute within the country.”

Reviewer K: “It is clear that Professor Traister’s work as Fight Master Choreographer and President of the Society of American Fight Directors is substantive and Impressive.”

Summary of Recommendation:

Professor Traister is a highly respected figure in the field of theatre and drama, an outstanding teacher, and continues to contribute meaningful service to her department and the profession. With the support of the school’s Executive Committee Executive Committee, I recommend and support Christina Traister for the granting of tenure to be held with her title of associate professor of theatre and drama, Department of Theatre and Drama, School of Music, Theatre & Dance.



David Gier
Paul Boylan Collegiate Professor of Music
and Dean, School of Music, Theatre & Dance

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