

PROMOTION RECOMMENDATION  
The University of Michigan – Flint  
College of Arts and Sciences  
Department of Behavioral Sciences

Daniel A. Birchok, assistant professor of anthropology, Department of Behavioral Sciences, College of Arts and Sciences, is recommended for promotion to associate professor of anthropology, with tenure, Department of Behavioral Sciences, College of Arts and Sciences.

Academic Degrees:

Ph.D.	2013	University of Michigan, Anthropology, Ann Arbor, MI
M.A.	2004	University of Michigan, Southeast Asian Studies, Ann Arbor, MI
B.A.	2002	John Carroll University, History and Education, Cleveland, OH

Professional Record:

2016-Present	Assistant Professor of Anthropology, University of Michigan-Flint, Michigan
2015-2016	William S. Vaughn Visiting Fellow and Visiting Assistant Professor, Vanderbilt University, Tennessee
2014-15	Lecturer and Affiliated Scholar, University of Michigan, Michigan

Summary of Evaluation:

Teaching: Since his arrival at the UM-Flint in 2016, Professor Birchok has taught 11 courses ranging from introductory level to graduate courses that support both the anthropology and sociology degree programs, two of which were new curricular additions. He has also substantially revised five other courses. His teaching also spans courses for the Honors, International and Global Studies, Women and Gender Studies, Master of Liberal Studies (MLS), Master of Social Science (MSS), and the First Year Experience (FYE) programs. His teaching philosophy describes how he integrates his scholarly interests into his teaching, fosters “ethnographic imaginations,” creates an atmosphere of respect and civility in the classroom, and how he promotes “failing” as a learning tool. The average student evaluation score on “Overall, this was an excellent course” across all of his courses is 4.37 on a 5-point scale. Students frequently comment on Professor Birchok’s passion, the clarity of his expectations and concern for their learning in both his syllabi and interactions, and his high standards for their learning. Students also appreciate his deep knowledge and his efforts to connect learning to their lived experiences. He regularly provides formal academic advising to 10-15 students annually and routinely spends a great deal of time outside of class with students as evidenced by the lines of students whom peers report waiting to interact with him during his office hours. Professor Birchok is a curricular innovator. With his colleague Professor Jacob Lederman, Professor Birchok secured a \$600,000 grant from the Mellon Foundation for a first-year experience course and project entitled, “Borders and Crossings,” demonstrating his deep commitment to helping students (as well as colleagues through a workshop series) understand how global processes affect, and are connected to, local ones, through the opportunity to travel.

Research: Professor Birchok is an historical anthropologist of religion whose interdisciplinary research derives from extensive ethnographic field work in the Aceh province of Indonesia as well as months of archival research in both Indonesia and the Netherlands. He has pursued two strands of interdisciplinary research: the first strand involves exploring the nature of genealogical and historical authority within Islam and Islamic societies while the second strand examines how religious ways of framing time and experience inform everyday ethics and politics. Professor Birchok's ethnographic research has required many years of language training, resulting in his fluency in Indonesian and Chinese, as well as a reading knowledge of Dutch and Classical Arabic.

Since arriving at UM-Flint, Professor Birchok has published five peer-reviewed articles in flagship journals in multiple fields of study, a book chapter, two book reviews (with three more in progress), and he has a peer-reviewed article forthcoming in the *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*. He has also contributed six conference papers or presentations. He is the sole author on all of these publications and presentations. His interdisciplinary approaches spanning anthropology, history, religious, islamic, and Indonesian studies are gaining the attention of scholars for bridging new directions in some classical debates in these often disparate fields of study.

Professor Birchok's future research agenda involves developing "in ways that build on my interests in how religious engagements constitute social worlds." He has a book manuscript under development which represents the integration of his current two strands of research, which he plans to complete in the coming year. He is workshopping a chapter of this manuscript with colleagues via an upcoming conference and has begun circulating a proposal for the manuscript to publishers, entitled, The Pasts of Islam: Geneological Authority, Kinship, and Time in an Indonesian Sainly Family.

Recent and Significant Scholarly Activity:

"Wild Churches' and Chronotropic Tensions: On the Space and Time of Interreligious Relations in Modern Indonesia." *Indonesia* 111

"Ridwan's Conversion: Religious Giving, Interreligious Reciprocity, and Social Boundaries in Aceh, Indonesia." In *Ethics of Giving in Asia*. Special Issue, *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 35(1): 71-91.

"Teungku Sum's Dilemma: Ethical Time, Reflexivity, and the Islamic Everyday." *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 9(2): 269-283

Service: Professor Birchok has amassed a record of impactful, high quality service aligned with his scholarly expertise that can broadly be conceived of as community and institution building. At each level of service, he has made a positive impact. Professor Birchok's service is most extensive at the program and department levels, as is typical of junior faculty members. He contributes to student engagement as the Anthropology Club faculty advisor and has coordinated with that and other student groups to bring in noted guest speakers or performances to campus, which enrich campus life (notably, Dr. Jason DeLeon through the Hostile Terrain Project and two Javanese Dance workshops with the IGS program). He had been a member of and chaired the department scholarship committee, administers the department Facebook page, and actively

participates in student recruitment events. He also insightfully contributes to program assessment and program review/self-study processes in his department.

At the college and university levels, Professor Birchok has served on the LEO Major Review Committee for three years and, through his work with colleagues on the Mellon Foundation and Teagle Foundation grants, pursues CAS strategic priorities, including fostering a culture of trust and leveraging the power of liberal arts through curricular innovation. He is a member of the Allam Muhammed Iqbal Symposium on Islamic Thought and Civilization planning committee, an occasional speaker at the UM-Flint Intercultural Center, and he serves on and now co-chairs the Islamophobia Working Group at the University of Michigan. He has been called upon as a guest lecturer on several occasions to academic units or centers on the Ann Arbor campus. Professionally, Professor Birchok serves as a conference panel organizer, as a committee member with several professional organizations, and as a manuscript reviewer for over 20 peer-reviewed journals and academic presses.

#### External Reviewers:

Reviewer A: "...his articles have appeared in very well regarded, flagship journals underlining the contributions he has made to anthropology (Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute), ethnography (HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory) religious studies (Journal of Contemporary Religion), history (Contemporary Studies in Society and History), and area studies (Indonesia and Asian Studies Review). I am aware of very few scholars at Birchok's stage who have succeeded in placing articles in such a wide range of flagship journals."

Reviewer B: "...he is certainly an upcoming scholar who is a major contributor to the discipline of anthropology and to Islamic studies. His articles and chapters demonstrate both a depth of research and an ongoing ability to frame new questions and topics that suggest a career that will continue to be productive and innovative."

Reviewer C: "Dr. Birchok's research and publications engage, and push in new directions, some of the most important debates in the Anthropology of Religion, Anthropology of Islam, and Anthropology of Ethics."

Reviewer D: "One method Birchok uses to answer his research questions is by taking a deep dive into the life stories of certain individuals and extrapolating broader theoretical implications from the decisions taken by those individuals."

Reviewer E: "His presentation was not just a nuanced analysis of the possible and the impossible in female religious authority, he also posed a range of questions that opened innovative lines of future investigation."

Reviewer F: "Dr. Birchok's theoretical approach brings a new breath to the anthropology of Islam as it seeks to undo the classical division between 'learned' studies, usually the competence of Arab-speaking Islamists, and the study of ordinary ritual practice and enactment, tended to by ethnographers and anthropologists at large."

Summary of Recommendation:

Professor Birchok is a passionate, skillful, and effective teacher who constantly adapts his teaching methods to ensure students are developing critical thinking, communication skills, cultural curiosity, and empathy. He has demonstrated deep analytical thinking through his ethnographic and historical analyses that have resulted in his being recognized and sought out by scholars of Islam in Southeast Asia from around the world. He also has a strong record of impactful service to his department, college, university, and profession. It is with the support of the College of Arts and Sciences Executive Committee that I recommend Daniel A. Birchok for promotion to associate professor of anthropology, with tenure, Department of Behavioral Sciences, College of Arts and Sciences.

Recommended by:



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Susan Gano-Phillips, Dean  
College of Arts and Sciences

Recommendation endorsed by:



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Sonja Feist-Price, Provost and  
Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs



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Debasish Dutta, Chancellor  
University of Michigan – Flint

May 2022