

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

Michael P. Lempert, associate professor of anthropology, with tenure, College of Literature, Science, and the Arts, is recommended for promotion to professor of anthropology, with tenure, College of Literature, Science, and the Arts.

Academic Degrees:

Ph.D.	2004	University of Pennsylvania
M. Ed.	1996	University of Virginia
M.A.	1994	University of Virginia
B.A.	1990	Clark University

Professional Record:

2014–present	Associate Professor, Department of Anthropology, University of Michigan
2009–2014	Assistant Professor, Department of Anthropology, University of Michigan

Summary of Evaluation:

Teaching: Professor Lempert’s teaching portfolio consists of courses designed to teach students how to analyze face-to-face interaction, including gesture, at both the graduate and undergraduate level, a core course that introduces students to linguistic anthropology, and graduate courses aimed at professionalization and theoretical rigor. Professor Lempert is a deeply committed educator, as evidenced not only by his teaching evaluations, statement, and syllabi, but also through his recruitment of undergraduate students as research assistants. He provides students with the skills needed to conduct the very detailed kind of analyses that he is known for in his own work, while also offering the opportunity to hone those skills through hands-on research and analysis in his lab. Furthermore, he helps all students hone their writing. Whether through one-on-one conversations with a graduate student about a grant proposal or through small essay assignments in his undergraduate classes, he gives his students the opportunity to refine their own writing styles as well as a deeper understanding of argument structure and an appreciation for the diversity of genres and rhetorical strategies that exist in academic writing.

Research: The core of Professor Lempert’s research is social interaction in the wild, using the analytical technologies and meticulous attention to detail common to the research traditions that center on the study of social interaction. At the same time, he rejects the premises common to its practitioners and critics: that interaction is a circumscribed domain of social process and relations autonomous of “social, historical, and cultural projects” and that it is inherently scaled as small (or “micro-”) relative to overarching (or “macro-”) processes and institutions. Rather, he conceives them as fully entangled (and since they are not autonomous domains, not *mutually* entangled), the gestures of interaction *indexical* of social, cultural, and historical phenomena— often engaging multiple orders of indexicality simultaneously—beyond the interaction, at the same time as social interaction can causally act on those phenomena. He refigures the study of social interaction, depriving it of both its

“micro-ness” and its autonomy. Professor Lempert’s research engages issues of public importance: the nature of political debate, whether among Tibetan Buddhist monks or presidential candidates in the United States, the nature of scale in social analysis, and possibilities of open discussion and debate in the contemporary U.S. university.

Recent and Significant Publications:

From Small Talk to Microaggression: A History of Scale (under review)

Carr, E. Summerson and Lempert, Michael, editors. Scale: Discourse and Dimensions of Social Life. Oakland: University of California Press, 2016.

“What is an Anthropology of Gesture?” *Gesture* 18, no. 2/3 (2019): 173-208.

“On The Pragmatic Poetry of Pose: Gesture, Parallelism, Politics.” Signs and Society 6, no. 1 (2018): 120–146.

“Imitation.” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 43 (2014): 379–395.

Service: Professor Lempert is an outstanding citizen, whose relations with faculty and students are consistently oriented towards moving intellectual and community projects forward. His thoughtful, pragmatic leadership of the linguistic anthropology subfield has been vital in the general reorientation towards creating a more open, accepting, egalitarian, and intellectually lively climate that has involved all subfields of the Department of Anthropology over the past two years. He served as the head of the linguistic subfield in 2014-2015 and in 2019-2021, leading the subfield through reviews of every aspect of its teaching, mentoring practices, and scholarly community life, while handling the myriad challenges of the pandemic year. He has been a central member of the department’s Executive Committee and the Fellowships Committee, serving on both for eight out of the last ten semesters.

External Reviewers:

Reviewer (A): “...a scholar of the first rank—in my view, the leading theoretician in his cohort of mid-career linguistic anthropologists and an influential figure in the field overall, regardless of rank. [Professor Lempert’s] work is distinguished in its focus on important, consequential problems, for linguistic anthropology, for anthropology as a whole, for the social disciplines more generally, and for society at large.”

Reviewer (B): “His body of work is cumulative and deeply engaging, imaginatively taking up important issues that are ubiquitous in our public lives...cutting to the chase: Lempert is already highly respected in our field. With his new book, he will be recognized as one of the two or three most influential leaders of this country's linguistic anthropology.”

Reviewer (C): “[Professor Lempert] has produced an impressive body of work that has provided crucial analytical definitions and concepts that other anthropologists have found invaluable when engaging with their own material. He is the kind of scholar any anthropology department should consider itself fortunate to have on its faculty.”

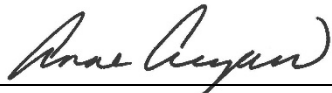
Reviewer (D): “Lempert’s command of the study of small-scale interaction makes his analysis of its origins and earlier phases theoretically telling, and compelling. Lempert’s book will be, I predict, a signal achievement in the study of...mid-century U.S. anthropology and linguistics in their interdisciplinary and political contexts.”

Reviewer (E): “Lempert clearly thinks through each concept and method to its foundations, and more often than not uncovers important assumptions that the field makes without even knowing it. He tends to find blind spots and forgotten dark corners, and then (rather than being content with just pointing this out) he shows the treasure that might be found in those dark corners, and how it can be used to propel the field into new places.”

Reviewer (F): “Professor Lempert’s work takes on some of today’s central topics in anthropological and linguistic research, and does so with a marked freedom from the assumptions that most of [sic] follow without thinking. His work on the ground-level instantiation of liberal and democratic ideals/ideologies, whether in Tibetan Buddhist or American political practice, bring an anthropological ‘view from afar’ to the most intimately held beliefs—dare I say the culture?—of most anthropologists themselves.”

Summary of Recommendation:

Professor Lempert is an exemplary teacher-scholar, bringing his nationally prominent research into the classroom. His leadership and service have been central to furthering the intellectual mission of the Department of Anthropology. The Executive Committee of the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts and I recommend that Associate Professor Michael P. Lempert be promoted to the rank of professor of anthropology, with tenure, College of Literature, Science, and the Arts.



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