

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

Melissa M. Borja, assistant professor of American culture without tenure, College of Literature, Science, and the Arts, is recommended for promotion to associate professor of American culture, with tenure, College of Literature, Science, and the Arts.

Academic Degrees:

Ph.D.	2014	Columbia University
M.A.	2006	University of Chicago
B.A.	2004	Harvard University, magna cum laude

Professional Record:

2017-present	Assistant Professor, Department of American Culture and core faculty in Asian/Pacific Islander American (A/PIA) Studies, University of Michigan
2013-2017	Assistant Professor, Department of History and faculty in Macaulay Honors College, College of Staten Island, City University of New York

Summary of Evaluation:

Teaching: Professor Borja is an outstanding classroom instructor. She has taught courses in her fields of religion, history, migration, and Asian/Pacific Islander American studies, as well as many classes that meet department curricular needs, including a first-year seminar, several senior capstone seminars, and the introductory course for Asian/Pacific Islander American Studies. She has also taught courses with a community component, including American Culture 305 “Asian Pacific American Community Service and Learning” and American Culture 405/Law 626 “Immigrant Justice Lab.” She has taught seminars and small- to medium-sized courses, as well as large lecture courses and courses that meet LSA’s Race and Ethnicity requirement. Virtually all her courses grapple with challenging material related to race, racism, and difference. At the graduate level, Professor Borja has taught seminars in her field (American Culture 601 “Religion in America”) and required graduate courses, as well as independent studies. In the classroom, Professor Borja embraces a thoughtful approach that sets clear goals for students, develops academic skills, demonstrates compassion, and consistently inspires students.

Research: Working at the intersection of American history, religious studies, and Asian American studies, Professor Borja explores how U.S. refugee resettlement policies and migration transformed the religious lives of Hmong refugees. Her book, “Follow the New Way:” American Refugee Resettlement Policy and Hmong Religious Change, offers important insights into religion as an instrument of assimilation, the recent devolution of the separation of church and state, and the spiritual beliefs and practices of Hmong Americans, who carved out a place for themselves in their new home. The centerpiece of her public scholarship is her creation of the Virulent Hate Project. Through research and collaboration this project has led to a website sharing news, reports, analysis, and maps documenting incidents of anti-Asian racism and Asian American activism during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Recent and Significant Publications:

Borja, Melissa. “Follow the New Way:” American Refugee Resettlement Policy and Hmong Religious Change. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2023.

Borja, Melissa and Kayla Zhang. “‘Please Love Our Asian American Neighbors:’ Christian Responses to Anti-Asian Racism during the COVID-19 Pandemic.” *Theology Today* 79, no. 4 (January 2023): 370-389.

Borja, Melissa. “Religion, ‘the Chinese Virus,’ and Perceptions of Asian Americans as a Moral and Medical Menace.” In The Routledge Handbook of Religion, Medicine, and Health, edited by Dorothea Lüddeckens, Philipp Hetmanczyk, Pamela E. Klassen, and Justin B. Stein, 495-501. New York: Routledge, 2022.

Borja, Melissa. “Speaking of Spirits: Oral History, Religious Change, and the Seen and Unseen Worlds of Hmong Americans.” *Oral History Review* 44, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 2017): 1-18.

Service: Professor Borja has made many substantial contributions at the university, community, and national levels. She has made academia accessible to students, junior scholars, and the public, and within the university community and in public spaces, she has been a leader. Her service has often been directly connected to her research and teaching efforts and has promoted inclusion and justice. For the department, she has served on the Graduate Admissions Committee and the Executive Committee. She has mentored A/PIA studies students as they apply to and present at the Association for Asian American Studies (AAAS) and has been selected twice by the United Asian American Organizations (UAAO) as the recipient of the Outstanding Faculty Award. At the university, she serves on the Task Force on AAPI Hate. Nationally, Professor Borja has served on the steering committee of the Asian North American Religion, Culture, and Society (ANARCS) unit, the premier organization on religion in Asian American life, and on the North American Religion Steering Committee of the American Academy of Religion.

External Reviewers:

Reviewer (A): “Her work and mentorship is highly sought after. Dr. Borja’s achievements—the quantity and high-quality of her scholarship, her public engagement, and her service—would exceed the requirements of tenure at my institution. [Follow the New Way] is an exemplary scholarly monograph... [and] makes important and innovative contributions to several distinct fields of study. I believe that *Follow the New Way* will be a core text in graduate seminars in American religion. She is a leading public voice in American religion, changing how we think about religious pluralism, migration, and anti-Asian racism.”

Reviewer (B): “Dr. Borja’s book makes important interventions in two themes with ongoing importance in the field of American religious history... Her new project, a global study of anti-Asian racism in the Covid era, promises to make equally important contributions. Dr. Borja is part of a small group of emerging scholars pushing the field toward something better...to open up new possibilities in the field of American religions. Among the published articles, I want to highlight the article on oral history... I appreciate the ways that Dr. Borja narrates her thinking process, especially as her arguments are transformed by engagement with oral histories in addition to traditional archival sources. The [second] project is vast in scope. I’d describe [Professor Borja’s case file] as exceeding expectations [for tenure at my institution].”

Reviewer (C): “Professor Borja unquestionably merits this promotion... Professor Borja’s inclusion in several major state-of-the-field collections indicates the prominence of her scholarship and recognized expertise. This academic recognition is reinforced with her success in receiving grant funding in support of her second project...working with leading scholars in the areas of religious studies and Asian American studies. Research toward her second book project is well advanced with publications, grants, and research teams already in progress. Professor Borja is an active and

impactful scholar who not only well deserves promotion and tenure but also promises tremendous leadership as a public scholar.”


Reviewer (D): “I consider [Follow the New Way] to be amongst the best—if not the best—scholarly monograph published on the Hmong American experience so far. In addition to Professor Borja’s research and publications on Asian American religious life and refugee resettlement policy, she has also fully developed a major and impactful research agenda on anti-Asian racism and Asian American activism that emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic. Professor Borja’s scholarship record is most impressive for a scholar at her stage and would far surpass the requirements for someone being considered for promotion and tenure at [my institution].”

Reviewer (E): “A clear, evidence-based writer with unusually strong abilities as a historical and anthropological narrator, Borja authors work future scholars can rely on for map [sic] and model of excellence... Borja’s 2017 essay in *Oral History Review* is an elegant, well-evinced argument for oral history as a methodological resource. ...there is no more significant scholar addressing Asian American religion in the United States today. Of singular accomplishment is Borja’s abundant and impactful collaborative public scholarship projects.... She is the most prominent scholar thinking about Asian American religion in the United States today.”

Reviewer (F): “I am happy to say that Professor Borja presents as compelling a case for promotion and tenure as I have ever seen. Professor Borja is both an exemplary scholar and an engaged public intellectual. I was hugely impressed by her energy, breadth of knowledge, and crackling intelligence. [Professor Borja’s Teaching Statement] is a model of thoughtful, engaged, and above all humane pedagogy. If she teaches in practice as well as she promises in that document, then your students are receiving something precious... You have a rock star in the making.”

Summary of Recommendation:

Professor Borja is a recognized innovator and leader in her field who will continue to produce outstanding research and service over the course of a long career. Her contribution to the teaching and service missions of the college is exceptional. The Executive Committee of the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts and I recommend that Assistant Professor Melissa M. Borja be promoted to the rank of associate professor of American culture, with tenure, College of Literature, Science, and the Arts.



Anne Curzan, Dean

Geneva Smitherman Collegiate Professor of
English Language and Literature, Linguistics,
and Education

Arthur F. Thurnau Professor
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