

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

David Brick, assistant professor of Asian languages and cultures, College of Literature, Science, and the Arts, is recommended for promotion to associate professor of Asian languages and cultures, with tenure, College of Literature, Science, and the Arts.

Academic Degrees:

Ph.D.	2009	University of Texas, Austin
M.A.	2003	University of Texas, Austin
B.A.	2000	University of Washington

Professional Record:

2018 – present	University of Michigan, Assistant Professor of Sanskrit Literature
2014 – 2018	Yale University, Senior Lector of Sanskrit
2009 – 2014	Yale University, Lector of Sanskrit

Summary of Evaluation:

Teaching: Since arriving at the University of Michigan in 2018, Professor Brick has taught eleven different courses in Asian Languages and Cultures. Six of these are the three levels of courses in Sanskrit: “First Year Sanskrit I” and “First Year Sanskrit II,” “Second Year Sanskrit I” and “Second Year Sanskrit II,” and “Advanced Sanskrit I” and “Advanced Sanskrit II.” The remaining five courses are culture courses: “Introduction to Hinduism,” “Undergraduate Seminar in Asian Studies: Hindu Myth,” “Great Indian Epics,” “Humanities Topics in South Asian Studies: Hindu Law,” and “Seminar in South Asian Studies.” Few faculty members in Asian Languages and Cultures are routinely expected to teach both language and culture courses, so this particular combination represents an unusually high level of effort within its departmental context.

Research: The focus of Professor Brick’s scholarship is *dharmaśāstra*, a term generally, if somewhat misleadingly, translated as “treatises on law.” It is a large and important genre of Hindu literature dating historically from the last centuries before the Common Era and mythologically to many millennia ago, said to be the work of Manu, the first human. Both expanding upon and further focusing this approach, Professor Brick’s work has been among the first to consider in depth the role of women in those social relations, turning in his current work to a dispossessed and sometimes abandoned figure in traditional Hindu society, the widow. In his scholarship, he has also explored other central features of Hindu life, including gift-giving, sin and penance, marriage, kinship, and inheritance. Looking toward future research, Professor Brick’s research statement describes two major projects, both currently underway. One is a translation and critical edition of another foundational text of the Hindu legal tradition, the Yājñavalkya Dharmaśāstra, one of the two canonical sources of law in the Brahmanical tradition. The second is an exploration of the history of vegetarianism in premodern South India, admittedly a vast topic. Given the growing interest in food studies, both in ALC and the university more widely, this project will gain a wide audience on campus.

Recent and Significant Publications:

Widows Under Hindu Law. Rocher Indology Series 1. New York: Oxford University Press, 2023.

Brahmanical Theories of the Gift: A Critical Edition and Annotated Translation of the Dānakānda of the Kṛtyakalpataru. Harvard Oriental Series 77. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2015.

Olivelle, Patrick, ed. with David Brick and Mark McClish, associate eds. A Sanskrit Dictionary of Law and Statecraft. Delhi, India: Primus Books, 2015.

“The Debate on Cross-Cousin Marriage in Classical Hindu Law.” *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 25, no. 1 (2021): 1–54.

“The Incorporation of Devotional Theism into Purāṇic Gifting Rites.” *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 45 (2017): 191-205.

“Bhoḥ as a Linguistic Marker of Brahmanical Identity.” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 136, no. 3 (2016): 567-90.

“The Widow-Ascetic under Hindu Law.” *Indo-Iranian Journal* 57, no. 4 (2014): 352-83.

Service: Professor Brick has provided active and diligent service to his home department and to the wider university community. From 2018-2019, he was member of an ad hoc committee tasked with developing strategies to improve relations between tenure-track faculty and language lecturers. From 2018-2020, he provided service to the Center for South Asian Studies as part of a committee charged with distributing Summer in South Asia Fellowships. In the same time period, he was also part of an ALC committee that oversaw the distribution of funds from a professional development fund for LEO lecturers. Since 2019—apart from one semester in 2020 during which he was on sabbatical—Professor Brick has served on the ALC Curriculum Committee. In 2019 and 2020, he served on two ALC review committees lecturers in Bengali and Indonesian languages, and between 2020 and 2022, he served as an Executive Committee member for the Center for South Asian Studies. In 2022, he served on the department’s DEI committee. In the same year, he was a member of the search committee for the Thai Theravada Buddhism position in ALC. In addition to the above, Professor Brick has played a leadership role in the American Oriental Society, the main professional organization for Sanskritists and Indologists in North America. He has twice served on and chaired the nominations committee and currently serves as its director-at-large on the Board of Directors.

#### External Reviewers:

Reviewer (A) “I am greatly impressed with the strength of [Professor Brick’s] scholarship, and I believe he is a worthy candidate for promotion and tenure at a prestigious research university such as yours. I write in support of his promotion. David Brick is, in my view, one of the top Sanskrit philologists in the United States. His scholarship demonstrates the continuing importance of this disciplinary approach.”

Reviewer (B): “I have known Professor Brick for at least twenty years since I first heard him deliver a paper on the development of smṛti literature in early India at the annual meeting of the American Oriental Society in San Diego. Since then, I have heard him deliver papers on a wide range of important issues in the critical study of ancient India’s rich corpus of Dharmaśāstra or ‘traditional law’ as like him, I am regular attendee [sic] and presenter at the Society’ meetings. I have always found his presentations to be extremely scholarly and demonstrative of his deep grounding in this often complex and difficult area of Indology. I have also read with interest and used in my own research writing several of his numerous learned articles in the peer reviewed journal of the Society and various other scholarly journals in the field.”

Reviewer (C): “[Professor Brick’s] most recent book, *Widows under Hindu Law* (2023), builds on work he has been pursuing for some years, particularly his two articles, ‘The Dharmaśāstric Debate on Widow-Burning’ (2010) and ‘The Widow-Ascetic under Hindu Law’ (2014), as well as his 2018

treatment of sati (widowburning [sic]). But it is far from being a superficial repackaging of previously published work (as I often unfortunately find when I'm asked to contribute an outside letter for tenure cases: the 'tenure book' simply duplicating older articles, often word-for-word). It is a comprehensive treatment of all aspects of this fascinating and controversial subject, systematically gathering all relevant treatments from all relevant sources, arranged first by topic and then by chronology, and evaluating continuity and change."

Reviewer (D): "[Professor Brick's] first monograph is a herculean achievement, and a fundamental contribution to knowledge in offering the first truly critical edition of a medieval dharma digest (and a vast improvement over the only earlier printed edition of this text, from 1941), a first translation, and a 60-page introduction that analyzes the digest's topic ('gifting') from various angles, engaging with theories of gift-giving such as Marcel Mauss's 1925 classic essay as well as most recent anthropological and religious-studies interventions on the topic."

Reviewer (E): "Professor Brick has produced a strong, diverse, and ever-expanding body of high-quality scholarship, and seems poised to continue along the lines he has pursued so far. He has come to occupy a quite prominent role in his field of research, and is widely and rightly recognized as one of the preeminent scholars of traditional Indian jurisprudence and legal culture. At least looking at his case from the research side, I think there is no question that he is a more than worthy candidate for tenure, and I recommend his promotion without reservation."

Reviewer (F): "As far as my recommendation about [Professor Brick's] tenure, I should say that by now I have done a lot of promotion reviews for Sanskritists in Europe and the United States. This is a clear case, one of the clearest I have seen. As far as the quantity goes, two major books, a monograph and a 700 page edition of a text with annotation translation and substantial introduction, plus nine independent articles and a welter of useful service publications, among them a full dictionary, is well above the standard at most institutions I have done reviews for."

Summary of Recommendation:

Professor Brick has established an outstanding research and publication record at this point in his career. He is also a committed teacher and mentor and a generous citizen within the department, college, and his professional field. The Executive Committee of the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts and I recommend that Assistant Professor David Brick be promoted to the rank of associate professor of Asian languages and cultures, with tenure, College of Literature, Science, and the Arts.



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Anne Curzan, Dean  
Geneva Smitherman Collegiate Professor of  
English Language and Literature, Linguistics,  
and Education  
Arthur F. Thurnau Professor  
College of Literature, Science, and the Arts

May 2024