

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

Sarah Oliver, assistant professor of theatre and drama, School of Music, Theatre & Dance, is recommended for promotion to associate professor of theatre and drama, with tenure, School of Music, Theatre & Dance.

Academic Degrees:

M.F.A. 2008 University of Missouri-Kansas City, Kansas City, MO, Costume Design & Technology
B.F.A. 1997 Kansas City Art Institute, Kansas City, MO, Fiber & Weaving

Professional Record:

2020 - present Assistant Professor, Department of Theatre & Drama, School of Music, Theatre & Dance, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI
2014 - 2020 Assistant Teaching Professor of Costume Technology, University of Missouri-Kansas City, Kansas City, MO
2012 - 2014 Senior Lecturer of Costume Technology, The Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts, Hong Kong, China
2008 - 2012 Visiting Assistant Professor of Costume Technology, University of Missouri-Kansas City, Kansas City, MO

Summary of Evaluation:

Teaching: Professor Oliver teaches courses in the Design and Production curriculum within the Department of Theatre and Drama (T&D), with a special emphasis on costume design. She has taught courses in costume technology, costume construction, period techniques, menswear tailoring, global adornment, history of western silhouettes, research methods, and theatrical production, and has initiated several curricular additions, including a course offered to non-majors that explored the history of costume through the lens of vintage clothing from the SMTD collection.

Professor Oliver is a natural mentor, advisor, and leader. She has supervised an undergraduate Mellon Research Scholar Fellow and served on an MFA Dance Thesis committee, along with providing advice as needed to all her own students. Additionally, she co-led a group of UM students on a trip to Mexico to perform at the International Theatre Festival. She has been a dynamic addition to the department, offering creative and well-designed courses for majors and non-majors, and leading efforts to revise the curriculum, and integrate inclusive teaching practices and technology.

Professor Oliver's students have gone on to success in the profession, and have secured academic positions, and roles with prominent professional companies, in television and film, and on Broadway. Through her students, Professor Oliver has had a significant impact on her profession. She is an exemplary teacher.

Professional Activities: Prior to joining the faculty at SMTD, Professor Oliver maintained a high profile as a costume designer and costume constructor, contributing to hundreds of productions at primarily regional theaters. Since joining SMTD the faculty, Professor Oliver has sustained an admirable level of creative and professional activity as a costume designer and constructor for both theatre and opera. She brings an international perspective to her work and has particular expertise in the use of textiles. In addition to her stellar work for SMTD productions (an important component of her creative profile), she has designed for professional companies, including the Kansas City Actors Theatre and the Music Academy in California.

Professor Oliver's constructions of costumes by professional designers have been used by the St. Lawrence Center for the Arts, Theatre Aspen, Des Moines Opera, and the Gulfshore Playhouse. Professor Oliver's work has received national attention and consistent professional affirmation: most recently, her costume construction for the lead in Scott Joplin's *Treemonisha*, presented as part of the Luminato Festival in Toronto, Canada, was featured in the Arts section of the New York Times on July 30, 2023. In summary, since arriving in 2020, Professor Oliver has designed fifteen shows, equally divided between professional productions that she has designed, professional productions that she has constructed, and university productions – an average of five shows annually, and a very high level of productivity.

Service: In service to the department and school, Professor Oliver has served on SMTD's undergraduate curriculum committee, and has been a lead contributor in helping to craft guidelines for courses that fulfill the school's new Race and Ethnicity requirement, as well as designing a course that serves as a model for others to follow. She has taken on a leadership role within T&D as the head of the Design and Production Area, chaired a faculty search committee, and participated in a number of critical searches for staff in University Productions, the theatrical production unit in SMTD. She has also been involved with departmental community engagement efforts, including sessions with Mosaic Youth Theatre of Detroit, and the Detroit School of the Arts. Finally, she has led a task force to look into how SMTD can incorporate sustainable practices in our theatrical productions, and in that role, hosted external consultants, and organized workshops for students, faculty, and staff. Colleagues praise her energy and collegiality, and she is a recognized leader within both her department and the School.

External Reviewers:

Reviewer A: "Professor Oliver's commitment to the improvement and innovation in (and out of) the classroom makes her invaluable as a teacher and a colleague. She should serve as an example to others in her department and in the academic community in which she serves. Her service record is remarkable and her dedication to more sustainable practices in our work is to be commended. Not to mention working to increase the diversity and more mindful and pointed efforts in recruiting, which is one of the most important areas of service for any program."

Reviewer B: "Professor Oliver's professional theatre resume is impressive. She has completed costume designs for multiple productions, both professionally and in educational settings, for the past 15 years. The fact that she has designed costumes for up to seven productions a year along with building costumes for several other productions, in addition to her other responsibilities of teaching and mentoring students, is outstanding. She appears to be a person who is in-demand for her skills, based on her repeat work at a variety of theatres and opera companies over the

years. The sheer pace of her work over the years is remarkable. She is truly a working designer/technician, which gives her valuable real-world insight to share with her classes....I urge you to promote her before she is snapped up by another university.”

Reviewer C: “What I find most interesting in my study of the material is how the candidate’s focus demonstrates laser precision, while working as a multidisciplinary costumes’ artisan. Her work has a present-day impact on the field and will be lasting as her students continue to bring the foundation she teaches to the professional world of costumes, both in execution of a garment and research and detailed view of the written works leading to a design. What the materials have made clear to me is her focus and determination combined with skill garnered recognized excellence...it is clear that Ms. Oliver has a strong trajectory forward in the field of costume design. She has done the work that will allow her to continue to climb in the field and I feel sure her marks of success will be achieved. As a working designer I say that Ms. Oliver has a long career ahead and the advantages of that will be felt by her students and colleagues.”

Reviewer D: “Compared with her peers at similar institutions (undergraduate/graduate programs with shops that include student and professional employees), her teaching obligations are significant. Many of Professor Oliver’s courses demonstrate excellence in teaching, specifically the development of new courses, teaching materials, and teaching techniques and strong commitment to interdisciplinary teaching...Professor Oliver’s teaching philosophy and realized coursework are indicative of an excellent, committed educator. She is cognizant of the ever changing role of the educator, artist, and scholar at this level which includes empathy, transparency, diversity, inclusion, and equity in the coursework, the costume shop, and the classroom. The recurrence of funding to update courses in content and technology straddle the line of teaching and research/creative activity –an accomplishment in the field.”

Reviewer E: “Professor Oliver’s Creative and Professional Activity and Research is quite expansive. In a creative field such as costuming (both design and production), research is quite unique. There are many qualities of a garment that one must know intimately. People not familiar with this likely do not know the extent to which a costume artist must do research. This is a strong suite of Oliver’s. I noted that in all production work of hers, she presented thorough and detailed research. This served her well as she moved forward with a given project. This also reflects her high level of knowledge for her subject. She is active and successful in applying and receiving funding for a range of projects.”

Reviewer F: “Professor Oliver’s research into a new lens of Costume History, that of historical dress and global fashion is a facet of costume history that is new and critically needed in our global world. Professor Oliver’s new course ‘Fashion & Costume: Global Adornment and Attire’ is vital for the field...Professor Oliver’s standing in relation to her peer group in her field is excellent. Her service contributions to the field are her innovative instruction of Global Fashion History and classroom innovations through the lens of recent technology. Her skills in costume technology, incorporating the art of tailoring and advanced knowledge and study of textiles rates her highly.”

Reviewer G: “Oliver’s scholarly work is impressive in its quality and quantity. She demonstrates a dedication to the practice of theatre, theatre making, costume design and creation that is admirable. The number of productions she has worked on is significant and the department has a

powerhouse talent in this professor. The quality of construction she demonstrates, the depth of knowledge in costume history and making is evident in her outputs...Oliver is also a publishing artist and maker with forthcoming credit in a highly reputable press in our discipline (Taylor & Francis/Routledge). Her commitment to publishing at this stage of her career on top of her excellent practice is significant, and demonstrates the new mindset of the contemporary artist/scholar.”

Summary of Recommendation: Professor Oliver is a highly dedicated and innovative teacher, who has made important curricular innovations that will shape the department in the years to come. Her professional and creative work is notable for its overall excellence and breadth, and is at the forefront of the profession with regards to the incorporation of technology and sustainable practices. Finally, her service has been well beyond expectations for an assistant professor, including serving in departmental leadership positions. She has been a dynamic addition to the faculty, and has exceeded all relevant criteria for promotion and tenure. With the support of the school’s Executive Committee, I enthusiastically recommend Sarah Oliver for promotion to the rank of associate professor of theatre and drama, with tenure, School of Music, Theatre & Dance.



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

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