

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

Ava S. Purkiss, assistant professor of women's and gender studies, assistant professor of American culture, College of Literature, Science, and the Arts and assistant professor of obstetrics and gynecology, Medical School, is recommended for promotion to associate professor of women's and gender studies, with tenure, associate professor of American culture, with tenure, College of Literature, Science, and the Arts.

Academic Degrees:

Ph.D.	2016	University of Texas at Austin
M.A.	2009	Florida International University
B.A.	2006	Dickinson College

Professional Record:

2021-present	Clinical Assistant Professor, Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, Medical School
2016-present	Assistant Professor, Department of American Culture and Department of Women's and Gender Studies, University of Michigan

Summary of Evaluation:

Teaching: Professor Purkiss is a remarkably effective teacher whose commitment to pedagogical excellence is transformative for her students. Of note, Professor Purkiss has regularly taught WGS/AMCULT 240: Introduction to Women's and Gender Studies; this is no easy task (surveying multiple fields and enrolling 250 students), and yet she does it extremely well. She has co-designed and co-taught another large course (WGS 400: Women's Reproductive Health, 150 students) to be writing intensive, recognizing the value of using large lectures as a springboard for thoughtful, research-based writing. Beyond the formal classroom, Professor Purkiss excels at advising and mentoring: she serves on dissertation committees, mentors GSI's through large courses, and advises first-generation undergraduates as they apply to graduate school.

Research: Professor Purkiss is a social, cultural, and gender historian whose research is making fundamental, field-shaping contributions. Her first book, Fit Citizens: A History of Black Women's Exercise from Post-Reconstruction to Postwar America, represents the finest of historically rigorous scholarship. It brings important new insights to African American history, Black women's history, histories of exercise and sport, histories of public health and health activism, and studies of gender, race, and nation. This work is stunning in its originality and interdisciplinarity. In addition to the monograph, Professor Purkiss has amassed a broad range of publications that concern Black women's embodiment, physicality, fat stigma, and citizenship from the late nineteenth century to the present. With this research record, Professor Purkiss stands out as an innovator and thought leader in multiple fields. She will no doubt continue to make important contributions over the course of a long career.

Recent and Significant Publications:

Fit Citizens: A History of Black Women's Exercise from Post-Reconstruction to Postwar America.

Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, Gender and American Culture series, 2023.

Coccia, Emily, Lisa Harris, Sara McClelland, Cecilia Morales, Ava Purkiss, Catherine Sanok, Eshe Sherley, and Valerie Traub. "Ambivalence as a Feminist Project." *Signs: Journal of Women in*

Culture and Society (accepted for publication, 2023). [all authors contributed equally; names listed in alpha order].

Pleasant, Versha, Ava Purkiss, and Sofia Merajver. "Redefining the 'Crown': Approaching Chemotherapy-Induced Alopecia Among Black Patients with Breast Cancer." *Cancer* 129, no. 11 (June 2023): 1629-33.

"'Beauty Secrets: Fight Fat:' Black Women's Aesthetics, Exercise, and Fat Stigma, 1900-1930s." *Journal of Women's History* 29, no. 2 (Summer 2017): 14-37.

Service: Professor Purkiss is a model citizen, who has an exceptional record of service and leadership to her departments, university, and broader profession. Like her research and teaching, her service takes seriously issues of race, gender, and inequality in the academy. She has been especially committed to service that advances the university's diversity, equity and inclusion mission, and service that enables her to provide mentorship and professional development to a diverse array of students outside of formal teaching spaces. She has also been a generous colleague, mentoring new assistant professors in the Medical School Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology.

External Reviewers

Reviewer (A): "Moreover, fatness and fitness for citizenship have remained an undying issue for Black women even as the Black Mammy stereotypes became less common. Ronald Reagan provided an updated version of fat Black women as undesirable and undeserving when he coined the term 'welfare queen' while running for President in 1976...*Fit Citizens* recovers the fraught history behind this image and reveals that fitness, which many of us are likely to think about as just a matter of health, has long been attached to ideas about national belonging, civic virtue and eligibility for citizenship."

Reviewer (B): "*Fit Citizens* is an absorbing narrative and, at the same time, successfully intervenes in several historiographical conversations. Purkiss tells a story that includes both poor and middle-class women while attending to the complicated class dynamics that drove middle-class women's reform efforts—including some coercive elements. The book also makes a compelling case for a more corporeal history, especially one that exceeds the study of the abject body under slavery and Jim Crow. It highlights the body as a source of pleasure, self-regulation, and political purchase. I found Purkiss's [sic] arguments about embodied citizenship and (literal and figurative) movement politics to be especially original and persuasive. Finally, the book complicates our knowledge of fat stigma, showing that the oft-asserted belief in Black women's fat-acceptance is inaccurate. Fat-stigma, for all its negative consequences for women, was also a way for Black women to counter racist images of indolent and excessive Black bodies and to make positive claims of political and moral fitness."

Reviewer (C): "Dr. Purkiss's [sic] dossier is of the highest quality, and she is a leader among her peers in the field. Her scholarly impact is notable, and her book provides a major contribution to several fields. Her service to the profession and the University are significant and exceed most scholars at her rank in similar fields. She is prepared to take on the additional leadership and administrative roles held by tenured faculty. I highly recommend her promotion to Associate Professor with tenure at the University of Michigan."

Reviewer (D): "The intersectional political framework that guides Dr. Purkiss' community-based pedagogy is best illustrated in the 'Ambivalence as a Feminist Project' article. She has partnered with graduate students, activists, and staffers to co-author a forward-thinking piece that seriously examines the impact of 'ambivalence' as a political tool wielded by feminists. It will be one of the first articles published by a feminist journal that moves the study of affect from the archives and slavery to the lived experiences of contemporary women committed to feminism and feminist politics. Further, the *Signs* article also helps to concretize Dr. Purkiss as one of the nation's few scholars interested in the affect of living Black people and their emotions and thoughts."

Reviewer (E): “Purkiss’s [sic] scholarship fills a major void in American history, African American history, and Women’s History. Her work links what might appear to be disparate concerns (gender, race, class, physical exercise, Jim Crow segregation, social movements, racial up-lift strategies, biography, and feminine longing) into an amazing web of historical writing that names, explains, and analyzes hard questions connected to the structuring of embodied citizenship and the making of a collective political identity that disrupts harmful stereotypes through an unlikely lens, the exercise industry.”

Reviewer (F): “What is particularly striking about Professor Purkiss’ oeuvre is that it deftly incorporates interdisciplinary methods—archival research, analysis of print and visual culture, and an understanding of African American consumer history, to yield fascinating insights and provocative analyses of African American life.”

Summary of Recommendation:

Professor Purkiss stands out as an innovator and a thought leader in multiple fields, who will continue to produce outstanding research over the course of a long career. Her contributions to the teaching and service missions of the college have been exceptional. The Executive Committee of the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts and I recommend that Assistant Professor Ava S. Purkiss be promoted to the rank of associate professor of women’s and gender studies and 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
College of Literature, Science, and the Arts

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