

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

Rebecca S. Wollenberg, assistant professor of Judaic studies, College of Literature, Science, and the Arts, is recommended for promotion to associate professor of Judaic studies, with tenure, College of Literature, Science, and the Arts.

Academic Degrees:

Ph.D.	2015	University of Chicago
M.A.	2006	Hebrew University of Jerusalem
B.A.	2002	University of Chicago

Professional Record:

2018-present	Assistant Professor, Frankel Center for Judaic Studies, University of Michigan
2015-2018	Post-doctoral Assistant Professor, Society of Fellows, University of Michigan

Summary of Evaluation:

Teaching: Professor Wollenberg is a committed and innovative instructor of undergraduate and graduate students. She has developed six new undergraduate courses in the fields of biblical studies, Bible reception, and religious studies. She has also revised and enhanced a 200-level core course, “What is Judaism?” and taught the Jewish studies methods course for graduate certificate students. Professor Wollenberg is an engaged and inventive instructor who strives to help students of diverse backgrounds better understand and connect to ancient thought and history. She uses sensory materials and activities to promote religious exchange. Her undergraduate workshop series, “The Abrahamic Sensorium,” has received the Provost Teaching Innovation Prize for 2023. Professor Wollenberg devotes significant time and energy to mentoring undergraduate and graduate students, involving them in her research through the Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program (UROP) and supporting their research projects. She has also organized workshops for faculty in the Frankel Center around DEI issues in the classroom.

Research: Professor Wollenberg is an award-winning scholar of ancient and medieval Jewish literatures and biblical reception. Her interdisciplinary research promotes intellectual dialogue across traditionally distinct fields: biblical and rabbinic studies and Second Temple Judaism. In rabbinic literature, Professor Wollenberg innovatively introduces alternative perspectives from the Christian and Samaritan corpus and seriously grapples with ancient archeology and anthropology of religion. Her first monograph, The Closed Book: How the Rabbis Taught the Jews (Not) to Read the Bible, received the Society of Biblical Literature’s De Gruyter Prize for Biblical Reception History. Her essays are substantial and well-placed in the major journals of her fields. Professor Wollenberg consistently maintains a high productivity level and she appears to be gaining momentum in her career. Her second volume-in-progress, Abrahamic Vernaculars, is intended for a broad readership and she has recently submitted it for review at Cambridge University Press. She has also begun work on a third book (Reading Each Other: Interpreting the Scriptural Practices of Others), in which she plans to reconstruct, drawing on unlikely sources, how women, children, and other less-lettered practitioners engaged with the Hebrew Bible.

### Recent and Significant Publications:

The Closed Book: How the Rabbis Taught the Jews (Not) to Read the Bible. Princeton: Princeton University Press: 2023.

“The Book that Changed: Tales of Ezran Authorship as a Form of Late Antique Biblical Criticism.” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 138, no. 1 (2019): 143-160.

“The Bad Wife Who Was Good: Woman as a Way of Life in Genesis Rabbah 17:3.” *Prooftexts* 37, no. 1 (2018): 56-85.

“The Dangers of Reading as We Know It: Sight Reading as a Source of Heresy in Classical Rabbinic Literature.” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 85, no. 3 (2017): 709-745.

Service: Professor Wollenberg has contributed to service in the Frankel Center as a member of the curriculum committee and she has represented the unit on the executive committee of Medieval and Early Modern Studies and on the Transcultural Studies advisory board. She has also served on the search committee for the Padnos Family Professorship in Jewish Thought. At the university level, she has read applications for both the Michigan Society of Fellows and the Rackham Distinguished Dissertation competition. Recently, colleagues in the Frankel Center have elected her to serve on the executive committee, testament to her collegiality and leadership potential. Professor Wollenberg’s extramural service showcases her capacity to organize and lead. She has convened two interdepartmental and cross-university seminars (“Beyond the Book” and “Remapping Peoples of the Book”) and has served for several years on one of the steering committees of the Society of Biblical Literature; she is slated to chair this committee in 2024.

### External Reviewers:

Reviewer (A): “While aspects of this revision will be debated (as are all great scholarly revisions), [Professor Wollenberg’s] critique and alternative have much to commend them and will have a significant impact on the ‘reception history’ of ancient Jewish Bible ‘reading.’”

Reviewer (B): “One thread that runs through these articles is that insights developed in the modern field of biblical criticism were not unknown or overlooked by ancient rabbinic (and Christian) readers of the Bible, but rather that they, too, grappled with the problems of scripture in deep, meaningful, and often non-dogmatic ways. Taking this dimension of rabbinic ‘biblical reading’ seriously unsettles preconceived notions of rabbinic scriptural piety, for the rabbis did not shy away from their Bible’s problems—they noticed and embraced them.”

Reviewer (C): “When I finished reading Dr. Wollenberg’s book, I actually said, out loud, ‘whoa!’ She has discovered something of tremendous importance not only for scholars of rabbinic literature but for scholars of Jewish thought overall. In one direction, her work directly interfaces with research into the diversity of texts and concepts of the technology of writing that characterized ancient Judaism in earlier eras... But in another direction—one pointing ahead to Medieval and Modern Judaism—her monograph has implications for post-rabbinic concepts of Jewish scripture, from Maimonides to Spinoza to the Wissenschaft des Judentums.”

Reviewer (D): “For [Professor Wollenberg], however, the overlap between Biblical Studies and Rabbinics is unconventional, and her creativity reflects the quintessential strength of her interdisciplinarity: it is not chronologically (e.g., ‘Hellenistic Judaism’ or ‘Second Temple Literature’), but philosophical and intellectual. [Professor Wollenberg] examines the Hebrew Bible as a rabbinic text—and the Rabbis as readers—but in doing so, she discovers ideas about ‘Scripture’

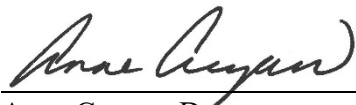
and ‘revelation’ and ‘text’ (among many other essential categories) that turn out to be far less stable and clear-cut than have long been understood. As a result, [her] work promises to shake-up many conventional ways of understanding rabbinic literature and framing how the Rabbis read scriptural texts.”

Reviewer (E): “[Professor Wollenberg’s] most significant and impactful contribution to date is her monograph *The Closed Book: How the Rabbis Taught the Jews (Not) to Read the Bible* (Princeton University Press: 2023). This is nothing less than a brilliant and creative study. The provocative and yet pedagogical questions that Dr. Wollenberg set to her readers are at once profound and essential for thinking about the formation of Judaism.”

Reviewer (F): “Perhaps the highest compliment I can give a book is that I am certain that, long after reading it, I will continue to consider and reconsider its argument. Dr. Wollenberg’s scholarship will have a long-lasting impact on how I, and many of my colleagues, will read rabbinic texts. *The Closed Book* will be a classic in our field. To say that it clears the ‘tenure book’ bar is an understatement; it so far surpasses the bar that it lands in the next zip code.”

Summary of Recommendation:

Professor Wollenberg has played a vital role in advancing the mission of the Frankel Center for Judaic Studies to educate a broad and diverse student body and make the study of ancient Jewish sources accessible and relevant. Her stellar research record and innovative pedagogy situate her as a potential future leader in our unit and enhance the Frankel Center’s standing as an internationally renowned Jewish studies program. The Executive Committee of the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts and I recommend that Assistant Professor Rebecca S. Wollenberg be promoted to the rank of associate professor of Judaic studies, 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

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