



Steven Usitalo, History and Social Sciences Department Chair
Interim Dean Alyssa Kiesow, College of Arts and Sciences
Northern State University
1200 S. Jay Street
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Dear Dr Usitalo and Dean Kiesow,

I am very happy to review Kristi Brownfield's dossier for tenure and promotion. I was Kristi's dissertation chair and subsequently her colleague in our service work for the Midwest Sociological Society. In this letter I will primarily comment on her scholarly works and her service to the discipline. I was provided a copy of the department/institutional standards used in the promotion review and will clearly articulate that the review is to address the contributions the individual has made to the discipline and/or the impact the individual's work has had on advancing the discipline.

Before discussing her research and service, I will share a few comments on her teaching. First, as I understand it, she has prepared 16 courses while at Northern State University; that is truly impressive. Second, that does not surprise me. At SIU, as a graduate assistant, Kristi was such a good instructor that the department allowed her to solo teach three different upper division courses after starting in lower division courses. I had the pleasure to observe her teach back then and I wrote the following: "Kristi truly loves to teach. Having observed her in the classroom, I can attest to her effective teaching style. Kristi uses media and other visuals as appropriate; she is articulate, demanding, and open. When I observed her, she excellently led discussions and coaxed many students into talking about potentially controversial topics. She is experienced and comfortable when negotiating around and integrating students' comments into the larger narrative of the lesson." Knowing Kristi as well as I do, I would expect that she has further honed her skills since graduate school and that she regularly evaluates and improves her own pedagogy. This hypothesis was confirmed when I read her recent teaching narrative. I understand that the normal load is 4/4 but that Kristi often teaches a load of 5/5.

Kristi's publication record is impressive and especially so for someone who teaches a 5/5 load. Kristi has published 6 products including 3 journal articles, 2 encyclopedia entries, a book review which was published in one of the top two ranked journals in sociology, and she has written numerous conference presentations. To let you know about the importance of Kristi's work, I'll discuss her three journal articles in turn. Kristi's co-authored content analysis of the first wave of prison movies in the U.S. from 1930 to the late 1950's is a well-designed and significant study. Importantly, Kristi and her co-authors' analysis of these movies is connected to the mid-20th century theories of penology and prison life. In fact, the developing theories of prison life (prisonization – becoming a prisoner, resocialization – learning how to live in prison, and deprivation and coping strategies)

formed the basis of the a priori codes that Kristi and her co-authors used to analyze the early films. Content analysis with a priori codes, the method used here, is a well-regarded method in sociology and studies of communication and media. Finding illustrations of the theoretical concepts in the popular movies, suggested to Kristi and her co-authors that the theorists of the day may have been influenced by the movies as they developed their theories, concepts, and methods for studying prison life. All theory is developed in a situational context and scholars, like all societal members, are influenced by the media around them. Kristi's work reminds us to examine the historical, social, and popular media context during which theory is developed as we seek to understand the epistemology of penal theories and prison studies.

Continuing this interest in the influence of media on public (and scholarly) perceptions of social life, Kristi's next project examined contemporary "cop-drama" television shows situated in rural communities. Such shows are likely a major source of information for the public at large and the only source of information on rural crime and policing for those living in suburban and urban communities. Their research found that the shows did not accurately reflect the realities of rural crime or policing and may distort public understanding of the prevalence and nature of rural crime, rural policing including a perception of an excess of resources, the character of masculinity exhibited in actual rural offenders and law enforcement personnel, and how rural policing might need to be reformed.

Kristi's methods are rigorous and appropriate for her topics and her work makes connections between media and both public perceptions of and scholars' attempts to theorize and study important and timely topics. Kristi's dissertation did this too; whereby her extensive content analysis of two long running series examined how fans understand topics such as gender and sexuality. I'm pleased to see that she has a manuscript in progress with a title that suggests it draws upon her comprehensive dissertation research. I am confident that the work she did in her dissertation is publishable and will make an important contribution to our understanding of the social construction of gender and sexuality. While reading her publications I noticed that each effectively situated the study in the larger literature and in fact acted as a resource for people interested in those literatures.

Most recently, Kristi and a co-author conducted a qualitative case study on the experiences of wheelchair-bound students. In this project, the authors utilized a cutting edge method whereby they asked participants to take photos of their lived experiences on campus. Then they interviewed participants using a method called photo-elicitation or photovoice technique to help understand how the photos represented their experiences on campus. By allowing the students to talk about the photos and what they meant, the authors learned much more than they would by just interviewing the students. There is great promise in using this technique to study many topics both on and off campus but clearly using it on campus will improve our understanding of student life and will help make connections between the physical and symbolic aspects of campus and academic and social life.

Kristi has presented in, organized, been a panelist in, or presided over so many conference sessions that she didn't even list them all on her curriculum vita. I counted her involvement in at least 25 conference sessions over her career. An examination of her participation and the titles of her products suggests to me, that Kristi has great passion for scholarly writing, service to professional organizations, and writing about teaching, advising, and other service work. It also suggest to me, that with more time, Kristi will turn many of these presentations into publications. This is extremely impressive and exceeds expectations in my assessment.

Many of her conference engagements also reveal Kristi's service commitment. As such, next, I would like to offer an assessment of Kristi's service to the university and discipline at large. By my count, Kristi is currently involved in 10 university committees and has been a member of many more in prior years. This amount of university service exceeds expectations in my assessment.

She has also presided over several conference sessions and has engaged in sessions that address teaching, professional development, and student advocacy. She has voluntarily organized several sessions as well, a task that involves identify excellent participants and writing an abstract, among other duties. Importantly, from my vantage point, Kristi has served the discipline through her involvement in the Midwest Sociological Society where we have shared experiences. Kristi is in the middle of a three year term on the Women in the Profession Committee and in that capacity agreed to be on two panels, one of which I organized, for the 2020 conference. Both panels would have been wonderful but were unfortunately canceled due to the pandemic. I hope we will resubmit these panels for 2021 as I look forward to continuing to work with Kristi in MSS. Previously, Kristi responded favorably to my request for her help on another panel. Not listed on her "select" list of conference work is a 2018 panel I asked Kristi to be on called "*SO I'M AN ACADEMIC, HUH?!: DEMYSTIFYING THE EXPERIENCE*". Kristi was a great panelist, she offered a presentation of her experiences entering academia after graduate school and engaged with the audience during the question and answer session. She offered great insight and advice for the students and new professors in the audience. Our terms on the Women in the Profession Committee overlapped and she was an excellent member, offering great ideas when we brainstormed sessions and offering her voluntary service when needed. I expect Kristi will stay involved in MSS for years to come and the society will benefit from her service.

In summary, I hope I have made it clear that Kristi's record in teaching, service, and research/scholarship and creative activity has truly been impressive. Her capacity to teach and student advocacy work is above average. I'm not sure how she gets it all done! I would assess her performance as certainly meeting expectations but honestly, I think she should be judged as exceeding expectations in many areas.

Sincerely,

Rachel B. Whaley

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