

2020-21 Harold J. Plous Memorial Award

It is with great pleasure that we announce **Dr. Leah Stokes** as the recipient of the 2020-2021 Harold J. Plous Award. This award recognizes outstanding contributions to the intellectual life of the campus community, and is the highest honor that UCSB bestows on an Assistant Professor. Currently an Assistant Professor in the Department of Political Science, and a faculty affiliate in Environmental Studies, and at the Bren School, Dr. Stokes has already achieved a remarkable record of research, public service and teaching.

Dr. Stokes' multidisciplinary approach stems from a broad education across fields. She earned a B.S. in Psychology and East Asian Studies from the University of Toronto, an MPA in Environmental Science & Policy from Columbia, and an MS in Political Science, and Ph.D. in Public Policy from MIT. She arrived at UCSB in 2015, the same year she received her Ph.D.

In that short time, Professor Stokes is already now considered a leading scholar of environmental politics. Her work focuses public understanding of environmental issues, the influence of interest groups on environmental policy, and the negotiation of international agreements on climate and other environmental issues. Her research examines what causes people to have the views that they do about energy, environment, and climate change. She explores why societies have not adequately responded to the consensus science of climate change nor sufficiently invested in alternative technologies for energy extraction. The answer lies in the realm of public support and politics. Understanding what makes people more and less supportive of climate policies is therefore in many ways the crux of the climate problem. Her recent book *Short Circuiting Policy: Interest Groups and the Battle Over Clean Energy and Climate Policy in the American States* (Oxford University Press, 2020) cements these themes and explores why states are not on track to address the climate crisis. She emphasizes how interest groups have derailed clean-energy progress, abetted by utilities promoting climate change denialism. More than a history of renewable energy policy in modern America, *Short Circuiting Policy* offers a bold new argument about how the policy process works, and why seeming victories can turn into losses when the opposition has enough resources to roll back laws.

Professor Stokes's work extends beyond environmental issues of global significance, to those of local importance. She launched a new project on water conservation in California where she compares county-level responses to the state-mandated water conservation rules during the recent drought. Her approach should aid efforts to find best-practices for advancing water conservation. Here, as in other work, she demonstrates skill at finding natural experiments that allow teasing out cause-and-effect, in this case varying local responses to the same state mandate.

In addition to her scholarly work, Professor Stokes sees part of her mission to write and speak publicly about climate change. To that end, Professor Stokes strives to influence public opinion and public policy -- not only by publishing in top science journals and top journals in her field, but by writing timely op-eds in top newspapers like *Washington Post* and *New York Times*. She has given over 200 interviews on climate change or energy policy, and has a massive following of 26,000 Twitter followers. On Twitter, she provided a valuable service by analyzing and communicating every Democratic presidential candidate's climate platform, at a time when public perception was that the differences were trivial. Since she arrived at UCSB, Professor Stokes has given over 60 invited talks at a wide range of venues, including to the Mayor of Los Angeles. She was also a consultant on climate plans for five presidential campaigns. Professor Stokes is leading the way in being a model public intellectual. For her academic and public accolades, she has received a number of prestigious awards. Most recently she was named one of the top 50 "environmental fixers" of 2020 by *Grist* 50.

Dr. Stokes is also a lively and engaging teacher. Her classes consistently receive top marks. This even includes courses outside her main expertise, including an introductory statistics courses that Dr. Stokes volunteered to teach to fill department needs. She has taught graduate methods, and co-designed and taught an extra boot camp to prepare graduate students before their first quarter. She is a co-leader of UCSB's Energy and Environmental Transitions Lab, a weekly collaborative discussion group where undergraduates and graduate students alike work on improving research and skill development. Dr. Stokes has supervised over 50 students in the Lab, many of whom are women and under-represented minorities. Dr. Stokes has also been an avid teacher and mentor in the year-long Psychology, Environment, and Public Policy workshop (PEPP) for graduate students, sponsored by Bren, Psychology and Political Science Departments. This provides an important training forum for those interested in different aspects of environmental politics and policy.

Highly praised by her colleagues as well as her students, Professor Stokes combines all of the attributes we hope to recognize with the Plous Award. As summarized by her Department Chair, Dr. Kathleen Bruhn, Professor Stokes does it all: "cutting edge research that engages publics while advancing the frontier of academic knowledge". With utmost enthusiasm, we honor her with this year's award.

2020-21 Plous Award Committee

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