UC SANTA BARBARA

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Jim Logan

A Megawatt Honor

Leah Stokes, an assistant professor of political science at UC Santa Barbara, has received this year's Harold J. Plous Award.

One of the university's most prestigious faculty honors, the award is given annually to an assistant professor from the humanities, social sciences or natural sciences who has demonstrated exceptional achievement in research, teaching and service.

Presented by the College of Letters and Science, the award was established in 1957 to honor the memory of Harold J. Plous, an assistant professor of economics.

Stokes is the author of "Short Circuiting Policy: Interest Groups and the Battle Over Clean Energy and Climate Policy in the American States" (Oxford University Press, 2020), an acclaimed examination of the role that utilities have played in promoting climate denial and rolling back clean energy laws.

"I am thrilled that Professor Stokes has won this prestigious award," said Charlie Hale, SAGE Sara Miller McCune Dean of Social Sciences. "Her scholarship is as original and rigorous as it is courageous and principled.

"At an early stage of her career, she has earned her place as one of our university's most sought-after public intellectuals. As powerful special interests that block green energy solutions lose their footing in the future, we can feel proud that UC Santa Barbara, through the work of Professor Stokes, contributed to their demise."

A prolific writer on energy, climate and environmental politics, Stokes has published works in a number of top journals and media outlets such as the New York Times, Washington Post, Los Angeles Times and more.

“I am deeply honored to receive this award,” Stokes said. “It shows that our campus values public scholarship and applied work. Many scholars worry that if you focus too much on policy and engagement with the public, you will be penalized. I have never had to worry about that at UC Santa Barbara — they didn't penalize me, they gave me an award!”

Stokes will highlight her research when she delivers the Plous Lecture in the spring.

Kathleen Bruhn, professor and chair of UCSB’s Department of Political Science, said Stokes “is a true public intellectual, designing and placing her research so as to best influence policy debates. She models rigorous scholarship for her students and co-leads an environmental politics research lab (with Professor Matto Mildenberger) that trains undergraduate and graduate students — nearly half of them first-generation or underrepresented minorities — in cutting-edge political science research. Her energy and enthusiasm for her subject is contagious and inspiring.”

Stokes came to UCSB in 2015 after completing her Ph.D. in public policy at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. She worked at the Parliament of Canada and Resources for the Future before entering higher education.

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.