

April 30, 2018 | By Christine Clark

## Emilie Hafner-Burton Awarded for Going Above and Beyond to Make a Positive Difference in the World

Emilie Hafner-Burton was in her mid-20s, working as volunteer United Nations in Geneva, when she was discovered something that catalyzed her academic career: the very institutions designed to protect human rights were often too dysfunctional to effectively help the world's most vulnerable populations.



“I knew I wanted to study politics and I knew I wanted to do something to save the world,” Hafner-Burton said, reflecting on the early days of her career. “When I left the United Nations, I went to graduate school to try to understand why these institutions are so dysfunctional and what we can do to possibly reform them to do what they are supposed to do, which is to alleviate human suffering.”

In April, UC San Diego recognized Hafner-Burton's passion and dedication to protecting human rights—through teaching and research—as one of six faculty members honored at the 44th annual Chancellor's Associates Faculty Excellence Awards. The recognition celebrates faculty members who go above and beyond to make a positive difference in their teaching, research and service.

As the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Professor of International Justice and Human Rights at UC San Diego's School of Global Policy and Strategy (GPS) and the Department of Political Science, she conducts groundbreaking research on how international law helps protect human rights. Her latest book, “[Making Human Rights a Reality](#),” shows why it has been so difficult for international laws to have an impact in parts of the world where human rights are most at risk. It also offers a playbook for how to make law more effective.



“Professor Hafner-Burton is recognized by her peers in political science as one of the top scholars in the world working on international politics and human rights; she is a foremost scholar on the subject,” said GPS Dean Peter F. Cowhey. “Since receiving her doctorate in 2003, her research has been both prolific and groundbreaking, challenging much of the conventional wisdom in policy debates. For example, she has shown how international trade agreements can strengthen the protection of rights. She truly personifies UC San Diego’s excellence.”

At UC San Diego, Hafner-Burton helped launch the [Laboratory on International Law and Regulation \(ILAR\)](#), and she serves in various capacities to empower female faculty and students as a steadfast advocate of diversity.

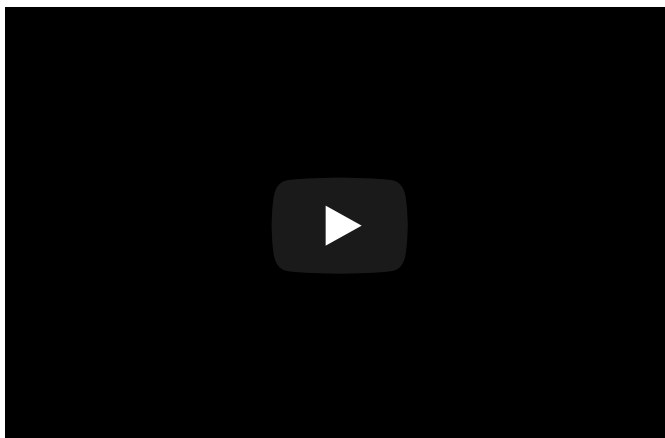
ILAR, and by extension Hafner-Burton herself, studies how international regulation interacts with processes that operate inside countries and firms. From climate change treaties, to human rights accords, the lab aims to have a significant impact on all the players in international relations — those working in the global economy in multinational firms, aid and development as well as nongovernmental organizations.

Looking to the future, Hafner-Burton is expanding to new topics by combining the same passion for focusing on problems that matter with modern social science methods.

Stephan Haggard, the Lawrence and Sallye Krause professor of Korea-Pacific Studies at GPS, and director of the school’s Korea-Pacific Program, reflected on this evolution.

“One of the things that makes Hafner-Burton’s work stand out is the diversity of her interests,” he said. “She started doing human

rights work, but she’s now broadened out to examine why international institutions work and what makes them effective. The application of her work extends to issues of human rights, business law, the environment, and how elections are managed in developing countries.”



Much like the other research at GPS, ILAR leverages, the school's internationally recognized expertise of the Americas and Asia, to develop analytic tools with real-world applications, while training young scholars to be the next generation of global leaders. Hafner-Burton interests and acute understanding of international law and international institutions has led to a multitude of discoveries that can benefit humanity for years to come.

"In most of the places in the world where abuse and violence are the worst, these international institutions are quite weak, if not powerless to do much by themselves," Hafner-Burton said. "This really suggests that we need to change priorities to thinking about how to reform these institution, and to be thinking about alternative strategies for incentivizing change in behavior that might exist within, but also outside these institutions."

When asked about her love of teaching, Hafner-Burton credits the quality of GPS's student body. "What is great is that I get to work with students with diverse experiences outside the classroom," she said. "Our students have worked in NGOs, they've served in the Peace Corps and they are passionate about making change to have a positive effect on the world"

Hafner-Burton accepted her award at the April 11th Chancellor's Associates Faculty Excellence Award ceremony. For more information on the other awardees, click [here](#).

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