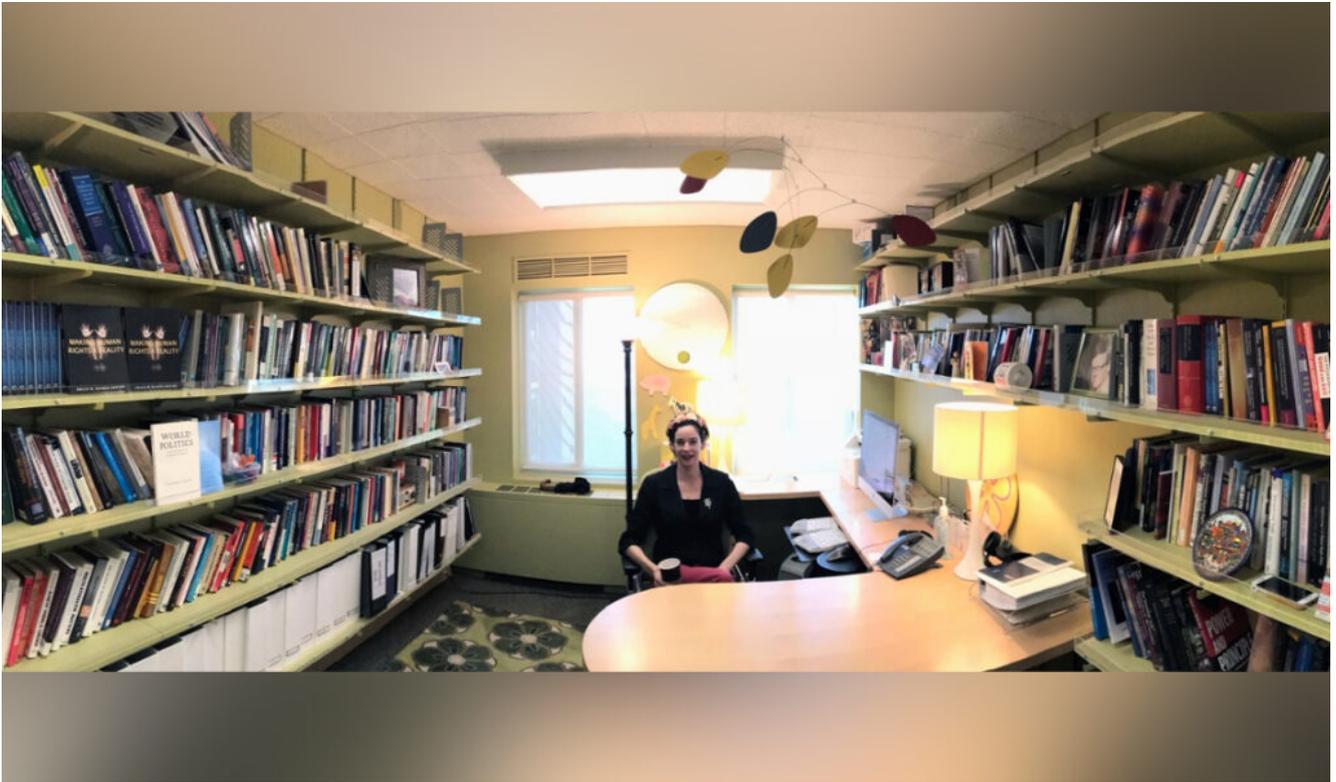


Office hours: Professor Emilie Hafner-Burton



The GPS faculty member opens up about some of the dearest objects that adorn her office, painting a picture of her professional backstory and personal interests

By Rachel Hommel | GPS News



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Recognized by her peers as one of the top scholars in the world working on international politics and human rights, [Emilie Hafner-Burton's](#) office at the UC San Diego School of Global Policy and Strategy (GPS) displays a vibrant background of academic curiosity and color.

Born in France, Hafner-Burton grew up between two different countries, influenced and inspired by the cultures and experiences of her travels. Her office is an academic goldmine, each book telling a story of her impressive career. Author of ["Making Human Rights a Reality,"](#) awarded best book of 2015 by the International Studies Association, she advocates for those who cannot.

Honored at this year's 44th annual Chancellor's Associates Faculty Excellence Awards, she has gone above and beyond to make a positive difference in teaching, and the world, also evident by student gifts that adorn her office bookcases.

Hover over the images above for the big picture on her professional backstory and personal interests.

3 questions with Professor Emilie Hafner-Burton

What is your academic focus?

I study how to design and use international laws to tackle some of the world's most pressing problems, such as human insecurity, climate change and corruption. I'm interested in understanding how you get actors - whether leaders, firms, activists or entire countries - to make and keep commitments that will foster a more secure and healthier planet. In my lab - [the Laboratory on International Law and Regulation \(ILAR\)](#) - we analyze big data and also run survey experiments to try and understand how people think about these issues.

What are the real-world impacts of your research?

My work in the area of human rights has some important implications. We live in a world with an amazing infrastructure intended to promote human rights. We have articulated as a global community a vast array of obligations and procedures. My contribution in this area has been to identify the places and circumstances under which this system is effective - able to bring justice to victims and deter violence and abuse - but also the places where it does not

achieve the goal, and to identify alternatives that can help to further its aspirations to reduce human suffering.

Most important lesson: the current system of laws and policies works well to promote human rights in special circumstances, generally where the worst violations of rights are least likely to occur. What this means is that our current strategy of creating more laws, and getting more states to sign them, is not likely to help. We need to shift strategy now to focus on reform and implementation. Doing that will require devising new strategies for incentivizing states to act to promote human rights, and that's where my research comes in.

What skills or understanding do you hope students leave your class with?

I teach a course on international cooperation and a seminar on human rights. In both cases, I push the students to understand cause and effect - why are people acting the way they do, what are their interests, what types of tools can you leverage to change those interests to solve a particular problem. You can't solve the world's problems until you understand why they are problems in the first place. I also place a lot of emphasis on public speaking, helping each individual student to hone their public presentational skills as well as their ability to articulate complex ideas effectively.