



HUMAN RIGHTS LAB

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Project title: Human Rights Collaborative and Faculty-Student Human Rights Laboratory to promote equitable civil society by creating bridges between the academic community to public policy and non-governmental actors

Principal Investigators:

Fionnuala Ni Aolain

Regents Professor and Robina Chair in Law, Public Policy, and Society
Faculty Director, Human Rights Center
Walter Mondale Hall, 229 19th Ave South, Minneapolis, MN 55455;
612-624-2318; niaol002@umn.edu

Barbara Frey

Director, Human Rights Program
Senior Lecturer, Institute for Global Studies
214 Social Sciences, 268 19th Ave S, Minneapolis, MN 55455; 612-626-7947;
freyx001@umn.edu

Joachim J. Savelsberg

Ohanessian Chair, Dept. of Sociology
909 Social Sciences; University of Minnesota; Minneapolis, MN 55455;
612-624-0273; 651-644-6971;
savel001@umn.edu;
www.joachimsavelsberg.com

James Ron

Stassen Chair of International Affairs
Humphrey School of Public Affairs and Department of Political Science
Room 264, 301 19th Ave. South, Minneapolis, MN 55455; 612-222-2635;
jamesr@umn.edu; www.jamesron.com

Additional investigators:

Alejandro Baer (Center for Holocaust & Genocide Studies); Cosette Creamer (Political Science); Ana Forcinito (Spanish & Portuguese); Lisa Hilbink (Political Science); Amanda Lyons (Human Rights Center, Law); Patrick McNamara (History); Stephen Meili (Law).

Graduate student researchers

Carolina Anon Suarez (Spanish/Portuguese); Tracey Blasenheim (Political Science); Paula Cuellar (History); Anne Dutton (Law / Social Work); Mary Georgevich (Law); Ami Hutchinson (Law); Maria Jose Gutierrez (Political Science); Georgette Marling (Law); Andrea Martinez (Human Rights); Valentina Salas (Political Science); Michael Soto (Sociology); Brianna Watters (Sociology).

For a full list of faculty, student, and partner collaborators, please see Annexes 1 & 3.

About the University of Minnesota Human Rights Lab

This exploratory research grant for the two-year project period 2016-2018 enabled the Minnesota Human Rights Lab to formalize its process, deepen its intellectual interdisciplinary engagement, advance policy partnerships, and support and manage 12 projects with partners in the field.

Each of the 12 participating faculty identified a human rights challenge and selected a graduate student and an NGO/institutional partner. After the selection of their proposals, the faculty and graduate student presented their project for feedback in an interdisciplinary Lab session with faculty and researchers from across the University. Framed and informed by input from the Lab, each faculty-student team proceeded to test and model their research and outreach strategies with partners on the frontlines of human rights defense and promotion, including nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), inter-governmental organizations (IGOs), and government agencies.

The 12 projects supported by the Grand Challenges Exploratory Research Grant were engaged in: consulting at the International Criminal Court in the Hague; interviewing and training journalists in Mexico; interviewing ex-combatants in Northern Ireland; preserving unique testimony about the El Salvador and Guatemala Truth Commission; assessing reparations programs in Uganda; accompanying family members at morgues in El Salvador; researching in the Library of Congress in Colombia; advising the research arm of the Chilean Supreme Court; engaging with Minnesota Educators on the Lower Sioux reservation; advancing the independence of NGOs in Mexico City; working inside an NGO in South Africa; advising at the Fort Snelling historical site; staying in migrant shelters on the border with Guatemala and Mexico; assessing Laws of War training with the International Committee of the Red Cross; and presenting findings at a human rights commission of the U.S. House of Representatives.

The Lab's interdisciplinary involvement, student support, privileged access to partners, and policy engagement has had a substantial impact on the scholarly work of our faculty. Resoundingly, the faculty have come away with a more intimate knowledge of the human rights challenges they are studying and with sustained mutual relationships with their partners in the field. They have also deepened their interdisciplinary engagement with other UofM faculty. Participating students have benefited from a truly unique mentorship and hands-on training experience that will prepare them to lead in human rights scholarship and practice in this new era of regression and innovation.

Through the Lab experience, we have gained collective insights into: the rollbacks of hard-fought human rights victories on several fronts; the need for innovative, inter-disciplinary, collective, and engaged approaches to address those rollbacks; and the urgent role for the academy to engage in these Grand Challenges, especially given its position as a land-grant university with local and international preeminence. Those insights demonstrate the success of the "Minnesota Model" in achieving engaged human rights research and teaching.

We are pleased to present the outcomes and assessments from the Grand Challenges Exploratory Research Grant that supported the creation of the Minnesota Human Rights Lab. Part One describes main outputs and Part Two our reflections on lessons learned.

Part One: Project Information and Outcomes

Accomplishments

The project has accomplished the objectives set out in our 2017 benchmarks.

Objective 1: Academic Achievements

The Lab has strengthened faculty work and leadership in scholarly pursuits aimed at advancing human rights. The benefits to the faculty scholarship stem from the interdisciplinary input to their research aim and design, the intensive graduate fieldwork in support of project, and the knowledge exchange with an external partner in the trenches of human rights defense. Overall, this model has produced exciting, innovative research, pedagogy, and analysis that will be of significant interest to the diverse human rights scholarly community and to the broader university.

Academic highlights include acceptance of articles in the following high-ranking journals:

- Harvard Human Rights Journal (Steve Meili)
- Chicago Journal of International Law (Fionnuala Ni Aolain, with student Anne Dutton)
- Universidad Adolfo Ibanez Law Review (Lisa Hilbink)

Book projects that include Lab findings include:

- An edited volume on “post-dictatorship disappearances” (Payne)
- Acknowledgment, denial and collective memories of mass atrocities (Savelsberg)

Other journal articles based on Lab findings are in progress: Prof. Alejandro Baer and Brianna Watters; Prof. Barbara Frey and Paula Cuellar; Prof. Joachim Savelsberg and Michael Soto; Prof. Lisa Hilbink and Valentina Salas; Prof. Cosette Creamer; and Prof. Patrick McNamara.

Conference presentations include the American Sociological Association Annual Conference (Baer/Watters); International Conference “Bodies out of Place: Mass Violence, Mass Graves and Necropolitics” (Baer/ Watters); “Limits of Transitional Justice: Post-transition disappearances and impunity for business human rights violations” – Oxford University (Payne and Frey); Comparative Historical Social Sciences Conference (Soto); Law & Society (Frey); and Latin American Studies Association (Frey/Cuellar). Additionally, Lab faculty and student leads have presented Lab findings at the UMN Sociology Workshop Series; the Holocaust, Genocide, & Mass Violence Interdisciplinary Graduate Group; UMN Public Engagement conference (March 2018), and the Institutionalizing Accountability conference (October 2018).

Objective 2: Student Opportunities

The Lab has fulfilled its promise to create truly unique training and mentorship opportunities for top Minnesota graduate students across disciplines. Based on feedback from the students, their mentors, and the external partners that worked with them, the graduate student component is among the Lab’s greatest contributions.

82% of project funds went to the 12 graduate student participants in the Human Rights Lab as travel and research stipends

In the first two years of the Lab, twelve graduate students from seven different degree programs participated as project partners. The students were drawn from: Law, Master of Human Rights, Master of Social Work, and PhD programs in History, Political Science, Spanish & Portuguese Studies, and Sociology. The group included male and female students, U.S. and foreign-born. Ten students conducted fieldwork in a total of ten foreign countries; one student focused on rights of Native Americans in Minnesota; and one worked on a digital portal. Two undergraduate students supported the project thanks to grants from UROP in the first year.

Students received the equivalent of a 50% graduate project assistant summer appointment for their research work. Most students reported investing more than 300 hours in their project. Students also participated in Lab-related research with funding from additional sources and in many cases, with unpaid research hours.

Across projects, students expressed their appreciation for the exposure to a variety of theoretical, methodological, and practical challenges. Several cited the importance of the professional contacts made across campus and in the field. Students reported learning new research methods including content analysis, focus groups, primary material collection, and interviewing. Several had their first exposure to ethical dilemmas in research, to the challenges of fieldwork, and to the experience of working directly with marginalized populations. Additional skills developed included conference and workshop presentations, proposal drafting, and academic writing. Students reported positive impacts in their own efforts to seek funding for their continued studies, dissertation work, and professional development. Finally, as can be seen in the number of co-authored articles and presentations above, the academic outputs will also serve students as they move forward in their careers. Two students are 2018-2019 Interdisciplinary Dissertation Fellows. Other fellowship applications are in progress and pending.

External partners*Objective 3: Impact with Partners*

The Lab made meaningful and varied contributions with partners on the frontlines of promoting the rights of marginalized groups in contexts of severe power disparities and inequalities.

The accomplishments under this third objective of the Lab can be categorized into two types of impacts made in collaboration and engagement with diverse partners: (1) the knowledge exchange clearly increased the capacity of partner and (2) the team used the mutual knowledge exchange to seek an external objective in human rights defense and promotion.

“Opportunities to participate in research that has a larger scope are often beyond the capacity of a single professor. Working with this collaborative team has touched many aspects of my personal and professional life. I am sincerely grateful for this opportunity. Pidamayayapi ye!”

Iyekiyapiwiñ Darlene St. Clair
Associate Professor
St. Cloud State University

For example, the public opinion project in Mexico provided seven advisory reports for NGO partners to inform their fundraising strategies; the agricultural project in Colombia provided five research memos to inform advocacy and litigation; the access to justice project in Chile made improvements to the Supreme Court’s focus-group research plan; the ICC reparations project

provided an extensive advisory report for the Trust Fund for Victims; and the US-Dakota War project is preparing an assessment and recommendations for the Minnesota Historical Society based on their current approaches.

“For Tierra Digna, it is so important to count on the support of people who, from the academy, are interested in supporting and informing our research and legal work, especially with the analysis of legal elements that require time, dedication, and the skills that your students are especially well placed to offer. For that reason, it was significant to have the full-time support of a dedicated person to produce research input documents that will be key for Tierra Digna’s research, advocacy, and litigation related to the new economic zoning for agro-industry in Colombia.”

Viviana Tacha
Tierra Digna

On the other hand, several projects brought the knowledge exchange to important fora to impact human rights policies by those external actors: the disappearances in El Salvador project resulted in expert testimony before US immigration court in asylum proceedings; the findings of the project on Mexico was presented to the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission of the U.S. House of Representatives; the business accountability project informed an amicus brief before the Colombian Constitutional Court; and the US-Dakota War project presented its findings to Dakota teachers and others working with Native students. A more complete list of external partners is in Annex 2.

Objective 4: Sustainability

The Lab has increased our capacity and reputation as a nationally and internationally recognized “Human Rights University,” as seen in the following important outputs.

External funding

Participants in the Lab pilot have submitted or are submitting the following additional funding proposals based on accomplishments in the Grand Challenges seed grant: an ACLS/Mellon Foundation Fellowship; Minnesota Historical Society Legacy Grant; Minnesota Historical & Cultural Heritage Grant; NSF grant (prospective); Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Study residential fellowship; Paris Institute for Advanced Study residential fellowship; Newton Fund; Leverhulme Fellowship; and the Economic and Social Research Council.

Participants have also secured University travel funding to present Lab results at conferences (x2); and one Lab project will be supplemented with a UMN Grant-in-Aid. Additionally, four faculty members received Human Rights Initiatives grants for their research, and two others are applying for 2019 awards. Four faculty leaders are applying on behalf of the collective for a Grand Challenges Phase 3 grant to expand and deepen the research and methodology developed in this successful pilot project.

Public events and outreach activities

Lab contributors have presented their Lab projects in numerous non-academic fora. Moreover, one of the Lab projects was itself an outreach endeavor: Ana Forcinito and graduate student Carolina Anon Suarez led a Lab project to create a digital portal to host the knowledge-creation and testimony from the Truth, Trials, and Memory conference reflecting on the Truth Commissions from El Salvador and Guatemala, which will be an enduring teaching tool at the University.

As a collective, we have presented the Lab results and methodology in three public spaces. A short description of each is included below and additional materials are included as Annex 4.

Minnesota Human Rights Lab: Defending Rights with International Law and Advocacy *Thomson Reuters Civic Engagement Series (December 2017)*

In December 2017, the Lab presented in the Thomson Reuters Civic Engagement Series. We hosted a panel discussion entitled: “Minnesota Human Rights Lab: Defending Fundamental Rights with International Law and Advocacy.” The session was accredited for Continuing Legal Education credits in Wisconsin and Minnesota. In this session, three faculty leads and two graduate student partners shared about the innovative work of the Lab and some of the main findings and outputs to date. Approximately 110 people attended the session.

University of Minnesota Human Rights Lab: Impact & Process *Grand Challenges Expo (April 2018)*

In April, we were pleased to present the project as part of the University’s Grand Challenges Research Expo. For this occasion, we were able to create an interactive representation of the Lab methodology as well as a pop-out map with synopses of each of our 12 Lab projects. Six faculty collaborators, staff and graduate student participants represented the Lab.

Institutionalizing Accountability

University of Minnesota Human Rights Lab Conference (October 2018)

To showcase and reflect on the work of the first two years of the Lab, we hosted a two-day conference featuring one of our external partners (Dr. Karina Ansolabehere, UNAM, Mexico) and an expert in experiential education and engaged research (Prof. Martha F. Davis, Northeastern University). We also heard presentations from 8 of our Lab faculty participants and 2 of our graduate student partners. An estimated 125 persons attended the 5 sessions.

International contributions

The Lab received an international enhancement award and we have been successful in ensuring that the Lab has an expansive and meaningful engagement abroad: both in local contexts and in international spheres of influence.

The Lab sent ten graduate student researchers abroad, carrying out fieldwork in a total of ten different countries (two worked on/from Minnesota). Additionally, Lab partners have presented their findings in important international fora, including: American Society of International Law, International Criminal Court (Closed Expert Group on Reparations), International Journal of Business and Human Rights, Latin American Studies Association, Law & Society Conference, and Open Global Rights.

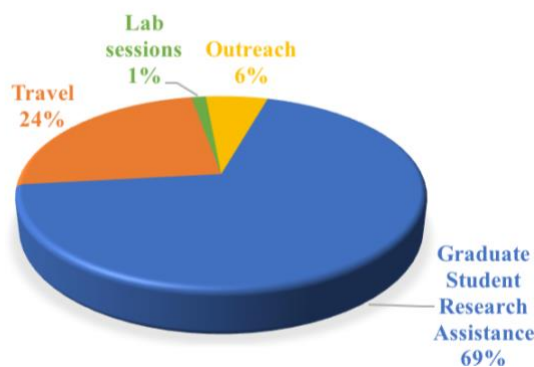
Over two years, the Lab has engaged in local, national, or international spaces in the following foreign countries:

-  Argentina
-  Brazil
-  Canada
-  Chile
-  Colombia
-  El Salvador
-  Guatemala
-  Italy
-  Mexico
-  Netherlands
-  Northern Ireland
-  Spain
-  South Africa
-  Switzerland
-  Uganda

The Human Rights Lab website has had visitors from 40 different countries. The top ten countries after the United States in terms of visits are: United Kingdom, Colombia, Mexico, South Korea, Canada, Australia, Peru, Germany, Spain, and Ireland.

Budget

The full grant award has been executed. Please see detailed budget accounting in Annex 2.



Human Rights Lab (2016-2018) Expenditures by category	
Graduate student research	\$75,690
Graduate student travel	\$15,805
Faculty travel	\$8,235
Partner travel	\$2,285
Inter-disciplinary lab sessions	\$1,490
Outreach	\$6,495
Total	\$110,000

Part Two: Reflections on Interdisciplinary Scholarship

Interdisciplinary team integration

For our project, there are several “teams”: the four PIs and support staff leading the project; the 12 faculty project leads; the 40+ faculty member collective who fuel the inter-disciplinary Lab sessions; and the 12 independent teams of the projects made up of one faculty, one or more graduate students, and one or more external partners.

For the inter-faculty dynamic, we found that the social element of the Lab setting was conducive to frank and collegial sharing of insights, questions, and resources across disciplines. At the mid-point in the project, we convened a meeting with six new University faculty to make a special invitation to join the Lab.

The 12 projects were selected in two rounds. For each we issued a detailed call for proposals based on the criteria that would drive toward lab objectives (scholarship, training, impact, sustainability).

In terms of integration, the relationships that have been forged between faculty and students through the Lab has been consistently reported as a positive from the project. In all cases touching on this, the collaboration was reported as easy and productive based on shared intellectual curiosity in the subject; complementary knowledge between student (often local knowledge) and faculty (theoretical/methodological); a shared commitment to the Lab goals of engaging with partners and modeling effective ways to use research; and lastly, the bond that can be formed from working on difficult contexts of grave and seemingly intractable human rights violations and deprivations.

In several cases, the Lab projects were built up around sporadic contacts from prior faculty or student networks. Several Lab members reported that prior connections were primarily individual-to-individual and the Lab project allowed these relationships to be institutionalized between the researcher and the organization. In sum, the Lab allowed faculty members to expand and solidify positive working relationships with external partners. This was accomplished via the design of a joint research agenda, shared policy impact objectives, and through the graduate student placement.

Interdisciplinary scholarship

Our experience with the Lab shows the value of interdisciplinary research. Participants reported that the interdisciplinary Lab sessions helped the projects deepen, evolve, and reorient in ways that would not have followed from a uni-disciplinary approach.

Value added from the interdisciplinary sessions included: reimagining key concepts, such as accountability, justice or human rights; expanding or altering the object of study; fine-tuning the methodologies; better situating the case study as a human rights problem and in proper historical context; sharing resources, networks and contacts; insights into relevant literature from other disciplines; comparative perspectives; ethical constraints; and strategic considerations.

Our project benefitted from a mix of faculty leads and student participants who were traditional disciplinarians, along with those already steeped in interdisciplinary approaches. The students also contributed to the interdisciplinarity. Some students inhabited the approach – Anne Dutton for example was a dual degree Law and Social Work; Georgette Marling had a background in development and commercial law before starting her JD. Additionally, some faculty-student pairs crossed disciplines: History-Political Science in El Salvador; Sociology-Law on business accountability; and Global Studies/Law-History on Observatory in Mexico.

Engagement

The faculty engagement with students and external partners defines the lab methodology and substance. Both dimensions greatly enhanced the project.

The quality of graduate student participation surpassed our initial expectation. The students were exceptionally talented and in each project brought a unique set of skills, experiences, and contacts that, looking back, faculty reports were absolutely pivotal for the success of the engaged research. For example:

- Brianna, the student partner on the US-Dakota War research, worked as a teacher in the Indian schooling system before starting her Ph.D.
- Valentina, on Chilean Justice System, is Chilean
- Paula, from El Salvador with experience as a human rights lawyer
- Majo, from Honduras, studying gang violence
- Andrea, from Mexico, working with Mexican NGOs on sustainability
- Anne, law and social work especially well placed for work
- Ami, legal training and technologically saavy
- Georgette, background in environmental law, development, and law
- Michael, victim of Colombian conflict

“The Lab Session was one of the most exciting academic experiences I have had as a faculty member at the University of Minnesota. ... [T]he interdisciplinary approach to human rights research has taught me the importance of sharing research questions and findings with colleagues throughout the research process. Questions that I would not have asked, legal issues that I would not have considered, potential document sources that I would not have consulted have all informed my research on this human rights topic.”

Internal assessment report
Patrick McNamara
Faculty Participant, Round 2

“Access to such documents and the insight from interviews with these professionals increased our dataset and significantly enhanced our understanding.”

Internal assessment report
Alejandro Baer
Faculty Participant, Round 2

Faculty reported that the student’s physical presence in the field was critical to the success of the working relationship, as were the faculty leaders’ on-site visits. This field presence built trust between partners, as did the sharing of information informally and from more formal research tools such as inquiries and interviews. Students played a major role in cultivating these relationships and opening up points of access. For example, Valentina Salas worked full-time over weeks in residence at the research arm of Chile’s Supreme

Court. She was successful in building a relationship with the team so much so that she could effectively transfer knowledge about focus group methodology and access to justice obstacles to intervene in their research plan. Paula Cuellar presented on her research regarding the press to the families of the disappeared in two different two Mexican states.

Another positive enhancement that came from this level of co-equal engagement between student and the partners was increased access to data and insights. For example, in the project researching narratives on the US-Dakota War, the strong relationship with the Minnesota Historical Society through the Lab expanded the research project both in methodology and scope given the access to a vast amount of primary materials and internal documents related to changes at Fort Snelling since 1984. Also, Cosette Creamer credited the relationships established by student Tracey Blasenheim for ensuring an accurate understanding of the key actors in the transmission of international humanitarian law norms. This understanding ultimately reshaped the research project.

“[Our student] transferred methodological skills for the use, design and implementation of qualitative data collection... After assisting them (the Research Department of the Supreme Court of Chile), they learned how to apply this technique and how to analyze their results efficiently and effectively. Through our collaboration, we moved them to consider also the needs and limitations of the wider population, who may experience harms or want to claim rights, but who lack the legal knowledge and capacities to access institutions.”

Internal assessment report
Lisa Hilbink
Faculty Participant, Round 2

“New avenues have been opened up for collaboration that would not have been possible before.”

Internal assessment report
Cosette Creamer
Faculty Participant, Round 2

A common challenge cited in several Lab project was the difficulty to align academic timelines with those of the partners. The lesson learned was the value of preparing a written memorandum of understanding for the partnership, with consideration of deliverables and timeline that are logical and realistic for partner and the scholar. Flexibility was another key take-away, remaining open to reassess based on new information. In several projects, the student’s relationship actually

raised red flags in the relationships with partners, or directed activists and organizations toward the focal points where partnerships with an academic institution would be most fruitful.

Another challenge reported by participants was how to ensure the relatively limited amount of funding from the Lab for travel and one student placement would contribute to the broader research aims. Many faculty leads are committed to continuing the support and engagement with partners despite varying levels of funding security to ensure continuity.

Several projects reported the importance of presenting findings to non-academic partners – to receive crucial feedback, to appreciate what is necessary, useful, important in the research questions, to see the actual implications and manifestations of the, to continue to turn data and