

2020-2021

Harold J. Plous Award Lecture

UC SANTA BARBARA

Leah Stokes

“What Can I Do? A Guide to Climate Action”

Monday, May 9, 2022 | 4pm | Alumni Hall, Mosher Alumni House



When people hear about climate change, they often ask the same question: What can I do? Faced with an existential threat, people want purpose. They want to know how they can hold back the rising tide. Often, people look to their own lives for change, to try to lower their own pollution. While this is a valuable training ground, changing your behavior is not as powerful as changing the infrastructure and institutions around you. We should think about climate action as a series of circles: starting with yourself, but moving outwards into community, and finally policy change. It's not easy, and you can't do it alone. But each one of us can chip away at the laws and corporate policies that keep us stuck in our current energy system. Working together, we can slowly shape it into a new form. Do not demand that your smallest, personal circle be pure

before you start working on the broader circles of community and policy. Because that day will never come. Let's dig in today to shift the system—and tomorrow and the day after.

Dr. Leah Stokes is an Associate Professor in the Department of Political Science, and she is also affiliated with the Bren School of Environmental Science & Management and the Environmental Studies Department at UC Santa Barbara. Her research focuses on climate policy and politics. Her recent book *Short Circuiting Policy* examines why we are behind on climate action, telling the history of electric utilities promoting climate denial and delay. It was named the Best Energy Book of 2020 by the American Energy Society, winning 3 awards from the American Political Science Association, and listed as a top 5 climate book from 2020 by *The New York Times*. Her academic work is published in top journals and is widely read and cited. She is quoted frequently in national media, has written for top outlets including *The New York Times*, and hosts a popular climate podcast, “A Matter of Degrees.”

The Harold J. Plous Memorial Award was established in 1957 to honor Harold J. Plous, Assistant Professor of Economics. The award is given annually to a faculty member of the rank of Assistant Professor or Instructor who has demonstrated outstanding performance by creative action or contribution to the intellectual life of the college community.