

Minnesota Human Rights Lab

A Grand Challenges
Research Initiative of the
University of Minnesota



Year 1 Report
2016-2017



Presentation

We are pleased to present this report on the accomplishments that this innovative and collective initiative has achieved to advance our faculty's scholarship, the training of our students, the impact we make with partners, and the reputation of our University as a leader in human rights.

The report is based on the detailed written feedback that we have collected from student and faculty participants of the five Year 1 Lab projects, as well as assessments from external partners. The report is based on our established Lab benchmarks and organized as follows:

About the Lab: Year 1

1. Academic Accomplishments
 2. Student Involvement
 3. Impact Assessment
 - External Partners
 - International Reach
 - Outreach
 4. Sustainability
 5. Financial Overview
- Annex. List of External Partners

Participants reported that in Year 1 the Lab has been:

- an important boost to scholarly human-rights pursuits,
- a catalyst for deepening productive working relationships with external partners, and
- an opportunity to offer unique training, fieldwork, and networking opportunity for exceptional graduate students.

About the Minnesota Human Rights Lab: Year 1

In Year 1 the Human Rights Lab ran 5 of the 12 projects expected under the initial two-year launch. The projects were selected through a call for proposals put out to the existing network of human rights faculty across disciplines.

The 5 projects selected were provided (1) the opportunity to lead an interdisciplinary workshop with the broader University human rights faculty to receive scholarly and methodological input, (2) a stipend for a graduate student researcher over the summer, (3) travel for the student to and from the site of the field work, and (4) travel for the faculty member related to the project. In some cases, the Lab's call for proposals catalyzed completely new inquiries and endeavors and in others Lab participation served as an added value and impetus for ongoing research projects.

Each of the five projects identified real-world challenges that are under-examined by scholars and practitioners. Most importantly, these projects would jointly produce knowledge and analysis with field partners that had the potential to improve human rights conditions. For the Lab projects in Year 1 these situations were:

- The assistance that the International Criminal Court architecture offers to the victims of the gravest international crimes
- The misinformation and impunity surrounding enforced disappearances in Mexico
- The obstacles keeping human rights organizations from fundraising with their local constituents
- The role of memory in post-conflict associations of combatants and victims
- The complicity of businesses in past human rights abuses

1. Academic Accomplishments

The Lab's first objective is to strengthen existing faculty work and leadership in research intended to advance human rights. Year 1 revealed that the Lab strategy of providing inter-disciplinary input, graduate student support and fieldwork, and knowledge-transfer with partners produces important contributions for our faculty's scholarly work.

Academic outputs made possible by the Human Rights Lab include at least eight academic presentations and two more planned in 2018. Four of the faculty-student teams plan to have a publication based on their joint work in 2018. Additional forthcoming publications related to the Lab include one book, two book chapters, and two articles.

Participants reported diverse positive outcomes from their experience leading an interdisciplinary Lab workshop on their project: it contributed greatly to their understanding and definition of their particular research problem, expanded the research and methodological horizons they considered, offered ideas on how to communicate results to non-specialist audiences, helped identify others at the University with related experiences who could offer tangible support of advice and contacts, and led to ongoing exchanges with colleagues after the Lab session.

A few examples of insights emerging from the Lab sessions include: refining of the Mexico Observatory project on disappearances to a focus on *representations* of disappearances; for the corporate complicity project, concrete advice was received on how to find information on sealed legal settlements; and on the public opinion and local fundraising project the Lab session helped the team identify and come up with solutions for a missing link that kept organizations from being able to use the team's research.

“Our partners have deep local knowledge that we have drawn on in our publications and presentations.”

Because of the ongoing and mutually beneficial relationships established through the Lab model, faculty deepened their connection to actors on the frontlines addressing human rights issues. Faculty and students reported benefiting from the expertise and perspective of partners regarding the true nature of the human-rights challenge, the local context, and the gaps in terms of solutions. This was greatly enhanced by the students' physical presence with partners over the summer as well as the faculty travel support to spend time in the field over the summer.

The funded graduate student participation was major value added to the substantive research outcomes of each Lab project. Uniquely qualified graduate students were selected and faculty leaders reported benefiting from the particular skills and perspective that they brought to the design and implementation of the project. As examples, the graduate student originally from Mexico City brought great familiarity and insight to the public opinion project focused on that city; the social work student was an immense asset for the legal analysis of victim reparation programs, the law student added a valuable legal perspective to the sociological approach to corporate accountability; and the bi-lingual Salvadoran student brought great skills and understanding of the generalized context of violence to the work in Mexico.

2. Student Involvement

The Lab has the second objective of expanding the experiential, intercultural, and interdisciplinary aspects of the training of our human rights students. Consistent with this aim, and as can be seen in our financial accounting below, 92% of the funding from the Grand Challenges grant was allocated directly to student research work and travel.

Five graduate students played lead roles in the Year 1 Lab projects. They were from programs in the Law School, School of Social Work, History Department, Sociology Department, and the CLA-Humphrey Masters of Human Rights Program. Two other graduate students supported the work and attended Lab sessions. Additionally, two undergraduate students were able to participate and contribute through UROP grants.

The inter-disciplinary nature of the Lab is highlighted in the diversity of the faculty-student partnerships:

Faculty	Student
Global Studies/Law	History
Law	Social Work
Public Policy	Human Rights
Sociology	Sociology
Sociology	Law

Exceptional students were selected to participate in the Lab. Some were especially well prepared and nearing graduation as they began their Lab participation. Interestingly our Sociology student, for example, was in the first year of his PhD program and reflected on the major impact the opportunity has in terms of grounding his course work, developing his methodological and intercultural research skills, and advancing his progress toward his own thesis.

The five students who participated in Year 1 Lab projects offered positive assessments of the opportunity and predicted positive, lasting impacts on their professional trajectories. The student Lab participation was a comprehensive training experience that allowed students to participate substantively at several stages including designing the proposal, presenting publically on the aims and results, applying for IRB approval, adapting methods and refining objectives, building relationships, and assessing impact. They were each offered unique fieldwork experiences, benefiting greatly from the faculty and the Lab's network and contacts in the field build over years to begin immediately applying and testing the research with partners. The degree of specialized mentoring offered to students was noted and appreciated by each. They developed a close working relationship with the faculty member given the distinctive role they had in the Lab model, the joint participation in the leading the Lab session, and the shared time in the field.

3. Impact Assessment

“We are very grateful for your valuable work, commitment, and initiative. Without a question, your research has been really helpful for us in thinking about how to implement new strategies within the organization.”

External Partners

The collaboration with external partners is a core component of the Minnesota Human Rights Lab. A list of external partners is included as an Annex to this report. As noted in previous sections, the benefits from the external partnerships to our scholarly work and to the training of our students have been invaluable. As part of the same mutual knowledge-transfer, the Lab aims to encourage and support faculty and students to make meaningful contributions to the work of external partners on the frontlines of promoting the rights of marginalized groups. The results of Year 1 are quite exciting on this front.

The Lab projects provided much-needed strategic information, analysis, and proposals for a wide range of actors that have a key role in promoting the rights of marginalized groups, but who for numerous reasons do not count on the financial, human, technical, or political capacity to generate this knowledge and develop these assessments internally. Often these actors are operating in emergency mode and do not have the ability to systematize the information and look for important patterns or untapped possibilities to solve problems. Much of what was reported focused on the global and comparative insights that the University team could offer to those working at the local and national levels. The team’s contributions were greatly improved by the physical presence of the student in the field over the summer both in terms of the accuracy of the research and the ability of the organization to interpret and incorporate the findings.

Impact outputs of these knowledge-exchanges with actors in the field include:

- one advisory report prepared for the Trust Fund for Victims of the International Criminal Court with assessment and proposals that will support their ongoing litigation and the response was to adjust their programming to better address needs of victims;
- seven individualized advisory documents for organizations to use as a basis for funding proposals, and assessments of two organization’s websites based on communications insights gleaned from public opinion research;
- an amicus curiae brief to the Colombian Constitutional Court;
- a U.S. congressional briefing on disappearances in Mexico;
- findings regarding corporate complicity in past abuses were presented to the UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence;
- numerous workshops with NGOs disseminating research findings.

Eight of the 13 organizations that worked with the Lab’s public opinion and local fundraising project completed the feedback questionnaire regarding the potential impact of the intervention and on a scale of 1 (very unlikely) to 4 (very likely), the organizations reported an average of 3.6 of likelihood of using the data in their mid-term strategies. An additional indication of the value that partners see in the mutually beneficial relationships created through the Lab is that two Lab partners have agreed/sought to come to campus during the next academic year to continue to advance on shared objectives with the University.

Outreach

In addition to the academic presentations, there have been several interesting efforts to expand the outreach of the Lab. The CEMEFI ((Mexican Center for Philanthropy), which has more than 1500 entity members, will include the Lab's public opinion and fundraising results in their national guide to fundraising (*Manual de Procuración de Fondos*).

Each project presented its findings in a variety of settings, reaching many non-specialist audiences. For example, in Cape Town the team presented to representatives of 20 different groups. The corporate complicity findings were also presented with the NGO Pax in The Netherlands to an estimated group of 30 people, including ambassadors, government officials, practitioners, and journalists. The findings of the Observatory on Disappearances in Mexico presented findings with key NGOs and family members of the disappeared.

International Reach of MN Human Rights Lab: Year 1

Engagement in International Fora

- International Criminal Court
- Int'l Journal of Business and Human Rights
- Latin American Studies Association
- Law & Society Conference
- Open Global Rights (online platform)

Engagement Abroad at Local & National Levels

- Argentina
- Brazil
- Colombia
- Mexico
- Netherlands
- Northern Ireland
- South Africa
- Uganda

Additional outreach efforts have been planned for Year 2, for individual Lab projects and for the Lab initiative as a whole. There are academic and practitioner presentations planned for several projects, and the Lab will be presented in November to the legal community in the Twin Cities through a continuing legal education program. Our webpage has had a total of 552 unique visitors since it went live in January 2017. People from 39 countries visited the page and the top 10 countries from which the page was viewed were: United States, United Kingdom, Mexico, Canada, Germany, Australia, Colombia, Denmark, India, and Sweden. We are currently developing a more dynamic website with additional content and optimized to appear in search engines.

4. Sustainability

The Lab is beginning to bear fruit in terms of building our collective and lasting capacity as a nationally and internationally recognized "Human Rights University". We have made advances in solidifying the intercollegiate infrastructure to support faculty and students in breaking new ground in collaborative, interdisciplinary human rights research. We have observed a gradual increase in the number of participants to the Lab session throughout Year 1. Several participants have identified new potential research priorities. For example, as a result of the work in Cape Town, the faculty member is exploring a new project with the NGO. Also, two of the external partners have expressed interest in hosting Minnesota graduate students for internships in the future.

No new sources of external funding have been identified thus far in the project, but the group has it as a priority for Year 2.

5. Financial Reporting

We are happy to provide a detailed financial accounting upon request. Below we have included a summary of Year 1 expenditures and the planned budget for Year 2, fully executing the grant.

Budget Overview	
Amount spent in Year 1	\$44,965.97
Amount remaining for Year 2	\$65,034.03
Total Grand Challenges Grant	\$110,000.00

Two UROP Grants received in Year 1	\$2,800.00
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Year 1 Expenditures Summary	
Student research fellowships and assistance	\$34,966.80
Student travel to field-research sites	\$6,377.57
Faculty travel to field-research sites	\$3,029.82
Inter-disciplinary lab sessions (5)	\$591.78
Year 1 Total	\$44,965.97

Year 2 Projected Expenses	
Student research fellowships and assistance	\$47,740.00
Student travel to field-research sites	\$7,000.00
Faculty travel to field-research sites	\$7,000.00
Inter-disciplinary lab sessions (7)	\$1,260.00
Lab communication and outreach strategy	\$2,000.00
Year 2 Total	\$65,000.00

Annex. List of external partners, with varying degrees of collaboration:

ANDHES/CELS – (Argentina)
AVSI (Uganda)
Bridge of Hope (Northern Ireland)
CEMEFI - Centro Mexicano para la Filantropia (Mexico)
Cencos - National Center of Social Communication (Mexico)
Center for Victims of Torture (St. Paul / Uganda)
Centro Diocesano para los Derechos Humanos Fray Juan de Larios (Mexico)
Centro Prodh - Human Rights Center Miguel Agustín Pro Juárez (Mexico)
Ciudadanos en Apoyo a los Derechos Humanos A. C. (Mexico)
CMPDH - Commission for the Defense and Promotion of Human Rights (Mexico)
DEJUSTICIA (Colombia)
Documenta - Actions and Analysis for Social Justice (Mexico)
Elige - Reproductive and Sexual Rights (Mexico)
Equidad - Gender Equality, Citizenship, Work and Family (Mexico)
Ex-Prisoner Interpretive Center (Northern Ireland)
Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales (Mexico)
Fundar - Center of Analysis and Research (Mexico)
Gulu Women's Economic Development and Globalization (Uganda)
Open Secrets (South Africa)
PAX (The Netherlands)
Queen's University (Northern Ireland)
REDIM - Network for the Rights of Children (Mexico)
Semillas - Society for Women's Rights (Mexico)
Serapaz - Service of Peace and Transformation of social conflicts (Mexico)
Sin Fronteras- Without borders, immigrants' rights (Mexico)
TPO (Uganda)
Trust Fund for Victims of the International Criminal Court (The Netherlands/Uganda)
Ulster Museum (Northern Ireland)
University of Oxford (United Kingdom)
University of Ulster – Transitional Justice Institute (Northern Ireland)
Victim Participation and Reparation Section, International Criminal Court (The Netherlands)