Haglund Awarded NSF Grant to Support Research on Human Rights
By D. Stephen Voss, Associate Professor and Publicity Coordinator

Few achievements are as elusive for political scientists as winning a major research grant from an organization like the National Science Foundation, which dedicates most of its funding to the natural and mathematical sciences. It’s even rarer for untenured faculty members to score an NSF grant, because usually they must focus on compiling publication records sufficient to earn promotion.

Prof. Jill Haglund, a recent addition to the University of Kentucky Political Science Department, stands out as she begins work this semester on an NSF-funded project called “Examining Compliance with Rights Regimes.” Haglund’s NSF award brings just over $110,000 in research money to UK, some of which will be used to create research-oriented jobs for Political Science majors.

Haglund’s project attempts to understand how national governments respond when they are accused by international organizations of violating women’s rights. Sometimes governments facing criticism will accept it and follow recommendations that they do better, whereas sometimes they are less responsive. Haglund’s work will combine statistical analysis with in-depth interviews in four Western European countries to understand why governments do or do not comply.

According to Prof. Haglund, “Understanding the processes by which political leaders and citizens mobilize around international women’s rights laws and institutions is critical for improving the effectiveness of these institutions, and ultimately improving respect for women’s rights globally.”

To put Haglund’s NSF grant in perspective, the Political Science Department’s publicity director searched NSF data to see how much grant money UK received last year from NSF’s Social, Behavioral, and Economic Sciences (SBE) directorate, the one that supports most social-science research.

“As best I can tell, if you combine all the money UK received from the SBE directorate in 2017, it barely exceeded the total of Jill’s one award,” said Publicity Director Stephen Voss. “Even in earlier years, when UK received more money from that directorate, little of it came from Social & Economic Sciences, for which funding is very limited. I only found one grant of that sort since 2012 that exceeded the size of Jill’s.”

Attracting an NSF grant to UK helps more than just the researcher. Haglund's funding allowed her to hire three UK undergraduates for the 2018-2019 academic year, setting them to work on collecting data about whether countries have complied with recommendations made by international women’s rights institutions. Through that paid work, students will develop important job skills related to coding and processing quantitative data.

Haglund’s grant also helps support the Political Science Department as a whole, especially in its broader mission of attracting and training good students able to participate in cutting-edge research.

“Haglund’s grant foremost speaks to her brilliance as a researcher and as valuable member of our department,” said Political Science Department Chair Clayton Thyne. “Beyond providing valuable insights to improve human rights globally, her efforts will also provide resources for students and other scholars to continue to fine research produced in our department.”

For those interested, the full abstract for Prof. Haglund’s grant project appears on the NSF listing describing the grant award here. Read more about Haglund’s scholarship and teaching here.