At the American Bar Foundation (ABF), we are dedicated to expanding knowledge and advancing justice by fostering a diverse legal profession that in turn promotes a more just society. We aim to understand and break down barriers often experienced by individuals who are diverse and traditionally underrepresented in the fields of law and social science.

The ABF’s Undergraduate Research Diversity Fellowship (URDF) is designed to introduce undergraduate students from underrepresented backgrounds to the rewards and demands of a research-oriented career in the field of law and social science. The program promotes broader inclusion in the legal profession by offering an intellectually rich learning environment for students considering careers in legal research or the practice of law.

Thanks to donors’ vision and generosity, in 2019 the ABF hosted two distinct fellowship opportunities for the first time: the year-long Law School Admission Council (LSAC) Research Diversity Fellowship and the eight-week Summer Research Diversity Fellowship sponsored by Walmart and the Kenneth F. and Harle G. Montgomery Foundation.
All four of the 2019 URDF Fellows have demonstrated excellence throughout their undergraduate careers and were selected from a highly competitive group of over 180 applicants. During their time at the ABF, these bright and promising young scholars had the opportunity to learn about empirical and interdisciplinary research and the career opportunities available in the broader legal profession.

**Law School Admission Council Research Diversity Fellow**

**Lisette Gonzalez-Flores** is the inaugural Law School Admission Council Research Diversity Fellow. She is a rising junior at the University of Chicago majoring in Sociology and Comparative Race & Ethnic Studies as an Odyssey and Questbridge Scholar. Gonzalez-Flores has served on the Executive Boards of El Movimiento Estudiantil Chicanx de Aztlan and Leaders of Color, and she is interested in the intersection of immigration, law, and higher education, seeking to understand the barriers to mobility for Latinx immigrants. She has worked as a legal researcher for an immigration law firm and hopes to pursue a J.D and Ph.D. in Sociology.

**Summer Research Diversity Fellows**

**Mariah Dozé** is a rising fourth-year student at Emory University pursuing a B.A. in Sociology and African American studies as a Robert W. Woodruff Dean’s Achievement Scholar (DAS). She is interested in prison reform and racial and economic justice in the U.S. legal system and has worked at the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) on the Criminal Law Reform Project (CLRP). Dozé’s research explores the intersection between rhetorical studies and social justice, and she hopes to pursue a J.D.

**Nya Hardaway** is a rising senior at Washington University in St. Louis majoring in African and African American studies and Women, Gender, and Sexuality studies. A Mellon Mays Fellow, she researches how racial and gender disparities in discipline and criminalization in educational institutions influence the ways in which Black girls perceive themselves and form relationships with their peers. Nya is interested in the historical impact of the legal system on the lived experiences of marginalized people, and she hopes to pursue a joint J.D. and Ph.D.

**Evan Zhao** is a rising senior at the University of Chicago in a joint degree program pursuing a B.A. in Sociology with a minor in Comparative Race and Ethnic Studies, and an M.A. in the Social Sciences. At the University of Chicago, he has participated in the Center for Leadership and Involvement, served on the Student Advisory Council of the Center for Identity and Inclusion, and worked as a research assistant in the Harris School of Public Policy. Zhao is interested in postcolonial subjectivities, cultural migration, information technology law, political economy, and the history of liberalism. He hopes to pursue a joint J.D. and Ph.D. in political sociology to further his involvement with intercultural diplomacy.
“I learned through a variety of visits how to network and establish connections with people who seem to truly support me and the ABF. I feel like I gained colleagues in my cohort who I am confident will be supportive throughout my career and academic experience. I gained a great experience with a legal historian as a mentor, which opened my mind to that realm of work and how to ask great interdisciplinary research questions. The knowledge I gained was immeasurable and I am extremely grateful for this opportunity. I had 3 other offers for research this summer and I do not regret spending my summer with the ABF. I feel like I have become a better researcher and a more well-connected future scholar because of it.”

Nya Hardaway

Understanding Socio-Legal Research

To learn about the challenges of legal investigation and the rigor of academic scholarship, each Fellow worked closely with a specially designated ABF Research Professor on the design and implementation of a research project. This afforded the Fellows the rare opportunity to learn first-hand how to do socio-legal research with experienced scholars.

The Fellows worked closely with ABF faculty mentors based on research interests, work experience, and career interests. Lisette Gonzalez-Flores worked with Professor Robert Nelson on the Future of Latinos project, focusing on Latinx immigration, education, and employment. Mariah Dozé worked with Professor Laura Beth Nielsen researching sexual violence on college campuses. Nya Hardaway worked with Professor Christopher Schmidt researching civil rights history and the Supreme Court. Evan Zhao worked with ABF Executive Director Ajay K. Mehrotra on the Portrait Project, examining the representation of Asian Americans in the legal profession.

On one of their field visits, the Fellows visited the National Immigrant Justice Center. From left to right: Lisette Gonzalez-Flores, Mariah Dozé, Nya Hardaway, and Evan Zhao.

“[I loved getting to know the faculty members and doctoral fellows. They were so friendly and informative. Their work is impactful and inspiring. I aspire to be as successful as they are.”

Evan Zhao

Learning about the Legal Profession

Many URDF alumni go on to pursue academic careers in the social sciences and law, careers as legal practitioners, or work in government, social policy, or business. To get acquainted with the many facets of the broader legal profession, the URDF Fellows participated in a series of site visits to law firms, social justice-oriented nonprofits, and criminal courtrooms. They also sat in on graduate level classes and met with admissions representatives from local law schools.

This year, Fellows gained an unparalleled insight into a career in law through visits to the law firms Banner Witcoff and Kirkland & Ellis and the Cook County Criminal Court. The also learned about legal aid and advocacy through field visits to the National Immigrant Justice Center, the Bluhm Legal Clinic, and the People's Law Clinic. They even witnessed high-level discussions from legal leaders as they attended the first Legal Summit of the Americas, where Hispanic legal leaders from the United States, Canada and Mexico gathered to discuss international business, environmental, and immigration issues.
“Visiting the Cook County Circuit Court was very interesting. It’s the first time I saw a trial in action, seeing witnesses on the stand, and getting a first-hand view of what public defenders do, and of how the courts affect marginalized communities. I also enjoyed my time at [law firms] because the attorneys were so welcoming and knowledgeable about the legal field. I have never known much about corporate or IP law, but it certainly piqued my interest as a potential career path.”
Lisette Gonzalez-Flores

Mentorship at the ABF

The URDF Fellows were introduced to the intellectually rich community of the American Bar Foundation through in-house seminars, weekly meetings with faculty members, and the close mentorship with their faculty advisor.

With their faculty mentors, the URDF Fellows worked to understand the process of creating research questions, writing a formal research proposal, and navigating the scholarship process at an academic institution. They were also introduced to the world of academia by learning about their mentors’ career experiences and approaches to scholarship.

To better understand the law school and graduate school admissions process, the Fellows had meetings with ABF faculty, Board members, and affiliated scholars. They also met with directors of admissions at Northwestern University Law School and University of Chicago Law School, who provided them incomparable insight into the law school admissions process, financing a legal education, and tips on how to succeed in a graduate career.

Once a week, the four Fellows met as a cohort with a faculty advisor to collaborate and learn as a team. They were given the opportunity to learn from one another and make connections with alumni from the program, which will serve their promising careers well into the future.

About the American Bar Foundation

The American Bar Foundation expands knowledge and advances justice through innovative, interdisciplinary, and rigorous empirical research on law, legal processes, and legal institutions. To further this mission the ABF produces timely, cutting-edge research of the highest quality to inform and guide the legal profession, the academy, and society in the United States and internationally.

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