The American Bar Foundation (ABF) is committed to developing the next generation of scholars in the fields of law and social science. Since 1987, the ABF has been offering highly competitive fellowships with the goal of fostering new generations of socio-legal scholars and intellectual leaders. The ABF doctoral fellowships encourage original and significant research and provide access to a professional network of scholars who produce innovative, objective, empirical and interdisciplinary research. In the three decades since the fellowships began, they have expanded the diversity of the organization’s scholarly community and its contributions to the field of socio-legal scholarship.

The ABF offers multiple fellowships each year to support the work of doctoral or postdoctoral scholars pursuing research in the areas of access, affordability and value in legal and higher education, law and inequality, and law, legal processes, and legal institutions.

Working in-residence at the ABF offices in downtown Chicago, doctoral fellows become immersed in the organization’s intellectual and interdisciplinary community. They present and receive feedback on their research findings and engage in substantive conversations with other Fellows, the resident faculty, and mentors outside the organization who help to expand their perspective and influence the direction of their research.

“"The doctoral fellows are an incredible group of colleagues, and I so enjoyed being a part of that community of young scholars.... My cohort and the fellowship were a reflection of the ABF’s core values, as well as proof of its commitment to cultivating scholars, to producing excellent research, and to fostering diversity.”

Christopher J. Ryan
2017-18 ABF Doctoral Fellow

“"These scholars are treated like a faculty member. It’s a great transition for doctoral candidates, when they can figure out how to allocate their time and work on their own.”

Laura Beth Nielsen
ABF Research Professor


Doctoral Fellowships:
ABF/AccessLex Institute Doctoral Fellow in Legal and Higher Education
ABF Doctoral Fellow in Law and Inequality
ABF/Northwestern University Doctoral Fellow

Post-Doctoral Fellowship:
ABF/AccessLex Institute Doctoral Fellow in Legal and Higher Education
Success at the ABF and beyond:
Former ABF Doctoral Fellows

Jamillah Bowman Williams
Doctoral Fellow, 2008-2010

Associate Professor of Law at Georgetown University

Jamillah Bowman Williams was a J.D./Ph.D. at Stanford University when she became a doctoral fellow at the ABF. Her current research focuses on contemporary bias, the effectiveness of antidiscrimination law, and the capacity of law to promote compliance and social change.

Hye Yun Kang
Doctoral Fellow, 2018-2019

Post Doctoral Fellow at Mershon Center for International Security Studies, the Ohio State University

Hye Yun Kang was an ABF doctoral fellow while pursuing her Ph.D. in Political Science at Northwestern University and in Philosophy at the Ecole Normale Superieure in Paris. Her research focuses on the politics of law and security, International Relations, and critical theory.

Ayobami Laniyonu
Doctoral Fellow, 2016-2018

Assistant Professor at the Centre for Criminology and Sociolegal Studies at the University of Toronto

Ayobami Laniyonu was a doctoral candidate in political science at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) when he was awarded a fellowship at the ABF. He is currently working on projects that explore police use of force against the homeless and individuals with serious mental illness, the effect of gentrification on eviction rates in large urban areas, and the effect of police violence on political behavior.

Tom Miles
Doctoral Fellow, 1998-2000

Dean, University of Chicago Law School and Clifton R. Musser Professor of Law and Economics

Tom Miles was a doctoral student at the University of Chicago when he was awarded a doctoral fellowship at the ABF. Today, he is a leading scholar of criminal justice and judicial behavior and is the dean at the University of Chicago.

“Many of these young scholars go on to become professors, and through their teaching shape the next generation of lawyers and how those lawyers think about law.”

Tom Miles
1998-2000 Doctoral Fellow
Shaun Ossei-Owusu
Doctoral Fellow, 2010-2012

*Presidental Assistant Professor of Law, University of Pennsylvania Carey Law School*

Shaun Ossei-Owusu was pursuing his PhD in Africa Diaspora Studies at the University of California, Berkeley when he received the ABF doctoral fellowship. His work sits at the intersection of law, history, and sociology, with a focus on how governments meet their legal obligations to provide services and benefits to poor people and racial minorities.

Matt Shaw
Doctoral Fellow, 2015-2017

*Assistant Professor of Public Policy and Education, Assistant Professor of Law at Vanderbilt University*

Matt Shaw was a Ph.D. candidate in Quantitative Policy Analysis in Education at Harvard University with a J.D. from Columbia University when he was an ABF doctoral fellow. Shaw’s research interests include educational institutions and the dilemma of difference, federal law and educational policy, evidence law in resolution of constitutional questions, and empirical studies in constitutional law.

Kimberly Welch
Doctoral Fellow, 2010-2012

*Assistant Professor of History and Law at Vanderbilt University*

Kimberly Welch was a Ph.D. candidate in history at the University of Maryland when she was awarded an ABF doctoral fellowship. Welch is a historian of the United States with a focus on slavery, race, and the law in the early American South. Her first book – Black Litigants in the Antebellum American South – has won several prizes in the socio-legal and historical fields.

“There are no departments at the ABF, so it is truly an interdisciplinary organization. One of the great things was that I was able to talk to not only historians, but also other social scientists as well, and learn from them. I got a sense of how interdisciplinary research worked on the ground.”

Ajay Mehrotra, ABF Executive Director
2001-2003 Fellow

“The community here has been great. It’s one of the best parts about the fellowship... The ABF is not invested in maintaining disciplinary boundaries. The faculty is serious about helping doctoral fellows to produce high quality, interdisciplinary work. People here understand the kind of work I want to produce. I don’t feel like I have to contort myself or my work to fit into this community.”

Asad Rahim
2017-2019 Fellow
Jessica Lopez Espino
ABF Doctoral Fellow in Law and Inequality
Ph.D. Candidate, New York University
Dissertation: Anxieties of Ethnolinguistic Disorder: Adjudicating the Right to Parent

“We tend to be really isolated in our disciplinary approaches, and the study of law is really strengthened by insights from a range of disciplines.”
Mary Ellen Stitt
2018-20 ABF Doctoral Fellow

Christopher Mathis
ABF AccessLex Doctoral Fellow in Legal and Higher Education, 2020-2021
Ph.D. Candidate, University of Virginia
Dissertation: Papers on reimagining legal education

“The bridge between graduate school and tenure track professorship is a long bridge, and it is not a natural development in the arc of any young scholar... The ABF fellowships professionally assist young scholars by giving them time to work on their research, offering them a network of thinkers, workshops and seminars.”
Paul Baumgardner
2018-20 ABF Doctoral Fellow

The interdisciplinary nature of the ABF is valuable. We tend to be really isolated in our disciplinary approaches, and the study of law is really strengthened by insights from a range of disciplines.”
Mary Ellen Stitt
2018-20 ABF Doctoral Fellow