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ABF Faculty Fellow Rebecca Sandefur Awarded 2018 MacArthur "Genius" Grant

CHICAGO, Oct. 4, 2018 — The [American Bar Foundation](http://americanbarfoundation.org) (ABF) is proud to announce that [Rebecca Sandefur](#), ABF Faculty Fellow and Associate Professor of Sociology and Law at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, has been selected by the [John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation](#) as a 2018 MacArthur Fellow and recipient of a MacArthur "Genius Grant." The honor recognizes Sandefur for her exceptional creativity, originality and dedication to groundbreaking research on inequality in the field of law, particularly with regards to civil justice problems, and demonstrates belief in her potential for future achievements.

Being named a MacArthur Fellow ranks Professor Sandefur among the most talented and creative individuals in the country working across a broad range of fields with different passions and interests, including writers, artists, scientists, teachers, and entrepreneurs (among others). The [MacArthur Fellowship Program](#) awards each honored Fellow a stipend of \$625,000 over a period of five years, which can be used towards advancing knowledge in their fields, engaging in new, exciting work, or changing fields or the direction of their careers. The Fellowship is "...an investment in a person's originality, insight, and potential," according to the MacArthur Foundation website. Candidates considered for the Fellowship are nominated anonymously by experts in their fields and selected by an independent committee of leaders in the arts, sciences, humanities and for-profit and nonprofit communities.

Sandefur is a prominent scholar whose impactful research has informed the understanding of how ordinary people view the law and legal processes. Sandefur is one of the founders and

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leaders of the ABF's "[Access to Justice](#)" research initiative. Her research has been an important resource for legal providers and policy makers to rely on when responding to the legal needs of the public.

Sandefur's current research project explores the kinds of civil justice problems that ordinary people experience: problems involving basic needs like safety, care and custody of children, environmental conditions and more. She explores how people think about and try to resolve their problems, and what resources are available to assist them. Sandefur also studies how legal services are delivered and how civil legal aid is organized around the country, the role of pro bono legal services, and how new programs implementing non-lawyers (individuals who are not licensed attorneys but are authorized to give legal advice) have helped to expand ordinary people's access to rights and representation under the law.

Sandefur's work has been covered by prominent media outlets such as [The Washington Post](#), [ABA Journal](#) and the [Los Angeles Daily Journal](#) and she has presented her research before state access to justice commissions, bar association groups, the [National Conference of Bar Examiners](#), the [Department of Justice to the White House Legal Aid Interagency Roundtable](#), and the 9th Circuit Judicial Conference. She has received numerous grants for her research from the [Legal Services Corporation](#), the [National Science Foundation](#), and the [Public Welfare Foundation](#). Most recently, she received a grant from the [Open Society Foundations](#), which she will use to explore how recent advancements in technology have developed to help people handle civil justice problems and what makes this technology effective and accessible. In 2015, Sandefur was named Champion of Justice by the [National Center for Access to Justice](#) (the national organization working to assure access to justice for all), and in 2013 served as The Hague Visiting Chair in the Rule of Law (affiliated with the [Hague Institute for the Internationalization of Law](#)).

"We congratulate Becky on this wonderful and well-deserved honor," said ABF Executive Director, Ajay Mehrotra. "Becky Sandefur embodies all the core values that the MacArthur Foundation holds high as their selection criteria for their prestigious fellowship: exceptional creativity, originality, and the promise of future advancement based on her significant track record of

achievement.” He added: “we look forward to her continued significant contributions to the field of access to justice research that will promote a more just society.”

Sandefur has been affiliated with ABF for many years, most notably as a co-author of the landmark volume, [Urban Lawyers, the New Social Structure of the Bar](#) (University of Chicago Press, 2005) with ABF colleagues Jack Heinz and Robert Nelson.

About Rebecca Sandefur

Sandefur is an [Associate Professor of Sociology and Law](#) at the [University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign](#). She is originally from Oklahoma and is a member of the [Chickasaw Nation](#). She earned her B.A. from the [University of Wisconsin](#) and her Ph.D. from the [University of Chicago](#). Before joining the faculty of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, she served on the sociology faculty at [Stanford University](#) for nine years.

About the American Bar Foundation

The [American Bar Foundation](#) (ABF) is among the world’s leading research institutes for the empirical and interdisciplinary study of law. The ABF seeks to expand knowledge and advance justice through innovative, interdisciplinary, and rigorous empirical research on law, legal processes, and legal institutions. To further this mission the ABF will produce 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. The ABF’s primary funding is provided by the [American Bar Endowment](#) and the [Fellows of The American Bar Foundation](#).