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**The American Bar Foundation Announces the
2020 Summer Undergraduate Research Fellows**

CHICAGO, June 9, 2020- The American Bar Foundation has awarded four outstanding undergraduate students the [Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowship in Law and Social Science](#) for their exemplary work throughout their undergraduate careers. The 2020 Fellows, selected among a highly competitive group of applicants, are Armando Alvarez, Irmina S. Benson, Hershey Suri, and Natalie Walls.

Also known as the Montgomery Summer Research Diversity Fellowship Program, the ABF Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowship (SURF) allows undergraduate students from underrepresented groups who are considering careers in the field of law and/or social science to partake in a hands-on learning experience for eight weeks during the summer. Each Fellow works closely with an ABF Research Professor on the design and implementation of a research project, affording them the opportunity to be mentored by and take part in socio-legal research with experienced scholars.

While the students work primarily as research assistants, they attend a series of seminars and forums conducted by ABF faculty, program alumni, and legal professionals, who acquaint the students with their research and work. Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the 2020 Fellows will be working virtually throughout the summer.

The SURF program is generously supported by the Kenneth F. and Harle G. Montgomery Foundation, the Law School Admissions Council (LSAC), Walmart, Kirkland & Ellis, LLP, and AT&T.

“We look forward to welcoming a new cohort of Undergraduate Research Fellows to the ABF this summer, though the format for this year’s program will obviously be virtual,” said Ajay K. Mehrotra, ABF Executive Director. “We are deeply grateful to the Montgomery Foundation, LSAC, Walmart, Kirkand & Ellis, and AT&T, as well as other individuals and institutions that have supported this important pipeline program since its inception. It is because of these partners that the ABF is able to continue its mission to foster the next generation of scholars who can be the catalysts for broader diversity, equity, and inclusion in the legal profession.”

Many SURF alumni have gone on to make significant contributions in the fields of law and social science working as legal practitioners, deans, and professors of law as well as in the fields of government, social policy, and business. Notable alumni include Mariano-Florentino Cuellar, California Supreme Court Associate Justice (1992 alum); Erika George, Law Professor at the University of Utah College of Law (1992 alum); Danielle Holley-Walker, Dean at Howard University School of Law (1995 alum); and Grey Mateo-Harris, Partner at Barnes & Thornburg LLP (2004 alum).

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](#).

Meet the 2020 Summer Undergraduate Research Fellows



Armando Alvarez is from Noblesville, Indiana, and a rising senior at Wesleyan University in Middletown, Connecticut, where he is majoring in Government with a concentration in American Politics. As a son of first-generation immigrants, he is the first in his family to attend college. His main academic interests revolve around the processes of judicial decision-making and access to justice, specifically in understanding why marginalized communities are often deprived of it. He plans to explore the first topic in his upcoming senior thesis that purports to analyze the impact that the elimination of the judicial filibuster

in the United States Senate has had on civil rights rulings at the federal appellate level. Regarding access to justice, he is currently working as a research assistant on a National Science Foundation-funded project that looks at the institutional design choices made by state courts in response to COVID-19 and the impact of those choices on implementers and consumers. Outside of academics, he tries to stay as politically engaged as possible. He is deeply interested in one day working on issues that exist at the intersection between his academic and non-academic interests in areas where the deprivation of rights or justice enters the political realm, such as voter disfranchisement efforts. To further those interests, he plans on pursuing a J.D. where he plans to hopefully work for a civil rights or politically oriented firm or in public service to help reform the system from the inside. This summer he will be working with ABF Executive Director and Research Professor Ajay Mehrotra on the Portrait Project 2.0.



Irmina S. Benson is a rising senior at Wesleyan University in Middletown, Connecticut, pursuing a dual degree in English and African American studies and a minor in Social, Critical, and Political Theory. Currently, she plans to pursue a dual JD/Ph.D. program, with the intent of procuring better conditions for those in poverty in the United States. She is passionate about social justice, educational access, and securing healthcare for all. She believes these passions are linked to intersectional socio-economic conflicts and she hopes to one day alleviate these

conflicts and disadvantages in POC communities. One of her primary concerns and motivations to pursue this career are the rising poverty rates and lack of access to healthcare in the Bay Area. She is dedicated to giving back to her community through research, and she is dedicated to being a part of the process that mends and addresses poverty, education, and the Prison Industrial Complex. She is passionate about prison/carceral state abolition and reform. She recognizes that violence and militant police forces have negatively impacted communities who need support, aid, and rehabilitation.



Hershey Suri is a rising senior at Pomona College where she is pursuing a B.A. in Politics and Theatre (with a concentration in Performance). A daughter of Gursikh immigrants from India, she is passionate about how the American Constitution is structured to support and work against minority races, religions, and ethnicities. She is particularly enthusiastic about sexual assault/violence policy and is excited to be working with Professor Laura Beth Nielsen this summer. As the Title IX Advocacy Director, she mitigated conflict between her student body and college administration after her college dramatically repealed the "Advocates for Survivors of Sexual Assault" program. She worked directly with administration as the only student to develop a new program to respond to conflicts related to Title IX on campus entitled C.A.R.E.S (Campus Advocacy Resources Education and Support). She recently presented this work at the NASPA Strategies Conference in New Orleans this past January as this was the fastest successful turnaround to respond to administrative crisis. She was recently elected as her student body's Vice President of Student Affairs and will continue to work on issues surrounding Title IX going into the Fall as well as housing, wellness, and Campus policy. She also is the Artistic Director for the Claremont Colleges' largest student-run theatre production company, "The Green Room."

Aside from producing shows which discuss political themes and bring awareness, she has been performing within her community and professionally since she was fifteen years old. This semester, before COVID-19 resulted in the abrupt end of her study abroad program, she was studying at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts in London in a program which collaborated with NYU Tisch School of the Arts. Following college, she hopes to pursue a J.D. and eventually fight for the rights of those who are constantly marginalized by society: the visible and invisible victims. She would also like to continue auditioning and performing for the stage, film, and TV to bring awareness to the South Asian/Sikh culture.



Natalie Walls, of Centre, Alabama, is a rising junior at Jacksonville State University majoring in Political Science with a minor in Sociology. Adopted from Kazakhstan, Natalie is a proud American who is dedicated to pursuing a career in law and working to further the equality and prosperity of the country she loves. She is interested in constitutional and corporate law and wishes to explore all facets of these areas. In college, Natalie Walls is an honors student and a member of the President's list every year of her college tenure thus far while also making time to serve her community through the Boys and Girls Club in Anniston, Alabama. She has presented

research at Southern Regional Honors Conference in Memphis, Tennessee, as well as lobbied Congress in Washington, D.C., on the issue of gun violence prevention. While lobbying Congress, Natalie published several op-eds, letters to the editor, and has appeared on the radio to advocate for gun violence prevention legislation. Natalie Walls plans on pursuing a J.D. to further study of constitutional and corporate law. She looks forward to working with Professor Christopher Schmidt.