



Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowship in Law and Social Science

The Opportunity

The American Bar Foundation (ABF) is accepting applications for the 2026 Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowship (SURF), an eight-week program that offers hands-on experience and exposure to sociolegal research. We are particularly impressed by students who demonstrate a strong intellectual curiosity and take initiative with mentors by asking questions and actively engaging in the research process. This fellowship is intended for students with a keen interest in pursuing postgraduate research and demonstrated motivation to pursue a PhD or research-focused joint JD/PhD in the social sciences. Preference will be given to candidates from groups that are underrepresented in the fields of law and social science, including but not limited to first-generation and low-income students.

This fellowship introduces undergraduate students to the inner workings of a research-oriented career in law and social science, while providing insight into the practical intersections between legal scholarship and careers in the legal profession. Each Fellow will be matched with an ABF Research Professor who will serve as their mentor. Fellows may either contribute to their mentor's research projects or pursue their own research, depending on discussions with their mentor and the mentor's capacity. In previous years, fellows have contributed to faculty research by conducting archival research, preparing literature reviews, and coding qualitative data. Conversely, mentors have also provided valuable support for Fellows working on thesis, capstone, or independent research. In addition to working with their mentor, Fellows will engage with other ABF faculty, staff, and affiliates. The program will culminate in a final research presentation to the greater ABF research community, showcasing the work conducted throughout the summer.

Fellows also participate in a weekly seminar led by an ABF Research Professor, where they engage critically with sociolegal scholarship through discussions and occasional guest speakers who contribute to the seminar's themes. These seminars are complemented by information sessions with legal professionals and scholars, providing Fellows with insights into the various facets of sociolegal research and the legal system, while also offering valuable networking opportunities. Past Fellows have toured the offices of major international law firms, met with admissions representatives from local law schools, met with legal clinics, and connected with nonprofits such as the Uptown People's Law Center.

All Fellows will participate in the program 35 hours a week in our Chicago, IL, office on a hybrid schedule (most days working in the office with some offsite and remote days) from June 8th through July 31st and receive a gross stipend of \$6,000. The ABF will pay for reasonable out-of-state travel and local commuting expenses related to the program.



Eligibility

To be considered for acceptance into SURF, you must:

- Be currently enrolled at an accredited college or university in the United States;
- Have completed at least **two years** of your undergraduate study by the time the fellowship begins;
- Not have earned a bachelor's degree by the time the fellowship begins;
- Demonstrate research interests that align with the work conducted at the American Bar Foundation;
- Have a strong interest in pursuing a doctoral degree (PhD) or a research-focused joint JD/PhD in the social sciences. *Please note that this program is not intended for those planning to pursue professional degrees such as an MBA, JD, or MD.*

All qualified candidates who are authorized to work in the United States for the duration of the fellowship are encouraged to apply. Please note that the ABF is unable to sponsor employment visas for participation in the program.

Application Process

Completed applications must be received by **January 16, 2026, at 11:59 PM CT**. Due to the large volume of applications, late applications cannot be reviewed. A select number of candidates will be invited to interview over Zoom in late February or early March 2026. Final decisions are expected to be announced in March 2026.

Candidates must apply via [the application portal](#) and attach all documents to their online application:

- Résumé or academic CV;
- Unofficial transcript of academic courses completed at the time of application;
- Short responses to the following two prompts in up to 500 words each:

Short Response 1:

The American Bar Foundation (ABF) is a research institute committed to the principle that a deep understanding of the law is vital to a more just, equitable world. The ABF's mission is to expand knowledge and advance justice through innovative, interdisciplinary, and rigorous empirical research on law, legal processes, and legal institutions in the United States and internationally.

How does ABF's mission of expanding knowledge and advancing justice through research resonate with your own intellectual interests and values? How will this particular fellowship in law and social science research help you reach your academic and professional goals?

**Short Response 2:**

This fellowship program gathers undergraduate students from groups who may be underrepresented in the fields of law and social science to learn about research-oriented careers. As a Fellow, how would you contribute to an intellectual community that values equity, inclusion, belonging, and cultural humility? We encourage you to illustrate your response with relevant examples from your past or present experiences, including academic, professional, extracurricular, and/or lived ones.

If you have questions about the application process or the position, please direct inquiries to fellowships@abfn.org with the subject line “Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowship.”

About the ABF

The American Bar Foundation (ABF) is a research institute committed to the principle that a deep understanding of the law is vital to a more just, equitable world. We conduct rigorous, empirical research that explores the intersection of law and society—creating insights that underpin today’s most pressing issues and affect millions of people every day. Many of the ABF’s resident research faculty members hold joint appointments at Chicago-area universities and law schools, including Northwestern University, DePaul University, Chicago-Kent College of Law, and the University of Chicago.